



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

“Am I What You See?”
Unaccompanied Afghans in the Swedish media and their
integration prospects

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Abstract

This thesis deals with representation of unaccompanied Afghan immigrants in the Swedish media. In the post-2015 context, unaccompanied Afghans have gained tremendous media attention in Sweden. However, how do unaccompanied Afghans perceive and evaluate these media images of themselves? How do these images impact their integration prospects in Sweden? In answering these questions, ten semi-structured qualitative interviews have been conducted. Using the cultural racism and intersectional perspectives, this thesis shows that unaccompanied Afghans consider media images of themselves highly generalist, monolithic, problem-oriented and deficient. The findings also illustrate that the deficient media images adversely impact unaccompanied Afghans' integration prospects by limiting their access to housing market, standing on the way of their inclusion in school, and worsening their mental health.

Key words: unaccompanied Afghans, migration, integration, media representations, Swedish media, perception of representation.

1. Introduction

Migration and communication studies highlight that one's perception of 'self' and 'others' is of critical importance in the migration and integration debates (Trebbe and Schoenhagen 2011: 411). In the present world, one's perception of self is not only formed through personal interactions and in comparison with 'others' (Bandura 1986; de Franca 2016: 35-36), but is also hugely influenced by mass media (Friedland and McLeod 1999: 222; Gamson and Modigliani 1989: 3). In this sense, mass media both represent immigrants as well as produce their social realities in the new society (Gurevitch and Levy 1985: 19; Lindgren 1993: 42). This study deals with representation of unaccompanied Afghan immigrants in the Swedish media. Unaccompanied Afghans have gained tremendous media attention in the post2015 context in Sweden partly because an unprecedented number of them sought asylum in the country in 2015 (EMN Focussed Study 2017: 15). The notoriety has also been triggered by the sexual assault accusations perpetrated by immigrant men in Cologne, Germany, on New Year Eve, and the rise of similar incidents in Stockholm further polarized the debate (Herz 2017: 1). However, how do unaccompanied Afghans perceive and evaluate these media images of themselves? How do these images impact their integration prospects in Sweden?

While unaccompanied Afghans have been overrepresented in the Swedish media since 2015, there is no research to date studying their perception of these media images and how these media images impact their integration prospects. Thus, this research is empirically significant as it aims to fill this existing research gap. This study is also empirically relevant as migration and integration continue to challenge and divide the Swedish government as well as public thanks partly to media representations of immigrants (EMN Focussed Study 2017: 17). With the ongoing migration and integration debates, it is equally important to pay attention to media representations of immigrants and the implications they have for welfare and migration policies in Sweden.

Below, I start with presenting the background on the problematic, including a definition of unaccompanied Afghans, a historical look at the unaccompanied immigrants in Sweden, and an overview of the Swedish media as well as policy makers' position on unaccompanied Afghans. The background is followed with a terminology clarifying the key terms in this thesis. I then provide the aim and research questions in this thesis. The section is followed by explaining

how unaccompanied Afghans, immigration, and mass media are empirically and theoretically relevant to the themes of Global Studies.

The thesis then includes a section presenting and discussing previous research on unaccompanied immigrants. The section contains an overview of literature on unaccompanied minors, followed by defining self-perception in relation to media, and concludes by presenting the general trends for representation of immigrants in media.

The next part, the theoretical framework, focuses on cultural racism and intersectionality as two lenses to explore this topic and answer the research questions. A transparent account of data collection and analysis and the rationale behind it is presented in the methodology section. The section is followed by a summary of the study's results.

Lastly, using the cultural racism and intersectional perspectives, this thesis shows that unaccompanied Afghans consider media images of themselves highly problematic, monolithic, deficient and problem-oriented. These deficient media images adversely impact unaccompanied Afghans' integration prospects by limiting their access to housing market, standing on the way of their inclusion in school, and worsening their mental health. The conclusion provides that future research could look into job opportunities for unaccompanied Afghans in the coming years since it is unclear in the present.

2. Background

2.1. Definition: unaccompanied minors

The term “unaccompanied minors” or “separated children” refers to a national of a thirdcountry, a country outside Europe, who independently arrived to the European Union territory with the particular aim of seeking asylum and is not accompanied by their parents, an adult or a legal guardian (EMN Focussed Study 2017: 11; Çelikaksoy and Wadensjö 2016: 4; Çelikaksoy and Wadensjö 2017: 103; UNHCR 2014: 3, 29; UNHCR 2017: 48). Unaccompanied minors are below the age of 18 upon arrival and are in need of special care and investment due to their age and legal vulnerability (EMN Focused Study 2017: 11; Çelikaksoy and Wadensjö 2016: 4; UNHCR 2014; UNHCR 2017: 7, 48). Unaccompanied immigrants are not a homogenous group and vary based on age, nationality, ethnicity, religion, and past experiences (Wernesjö 2012: 496, 498).

While unaccompanied child migration has been globally practiced for various purposes as early as 1618 (Hedlund 2016: 21), the group has only been officially recognized as a refugee category by the early 1990s (ibid). The recognition could be explained through the hegemonic promotion of “international human rights” combined with the growth of feminism movements and “NGO politics” (Hedlund 2016: 22).

The population of unaccompanied immigrants is globally on the rise year by year (UNHCR 2017: 3; UNHCR 2013: 3; Çelikaksoy and Wadensjö 2016: 4). As of 2017, 138 700 unaccompanied refugees have sought asylum in 67 countries, while the number has been only 25300 in 2013 (UNHCR 2017: 3; UNHCR 2013: 3). The majority of unaccompanied minors come from war-affected regions, such as Afghanistan, Eritrea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gambia, Somalia, Iraq, Pakistan, and Syria (UNHCR 2017: 49). While the order of these countries varies based on the socio-political and economic condition of each country per year, Afghanistan has consistently managed to maintain its position at the top. The fact that Afghans constitute the biggest number of unaccompanied refugees is no surprise since Afghanistan has been one of the top three refugee producing countries in the world for decades (UNHCR 2013: 3; UNHCR 2017: 3). The mass migration of Afghans has been caused by proxy wars between the Soviet Union and US in the cold war era (Colville 1997). The migrations were later intensified by internal political struggles in 1980s and the Taliban rule in 1996-2001 (Jeong 2016). The deteriorating political, security, and economic situation in the post-Taliban era has triggered another wave of emigration from Afghanistan (Rimmer et al 2017: 9). While majority of Afghans are displaced to the neighboring countries of Iran and Pakistan, the rest make their way through Europe in search of asylum (*Migrationsinfo* 2016; UNHCR 2017: 19).

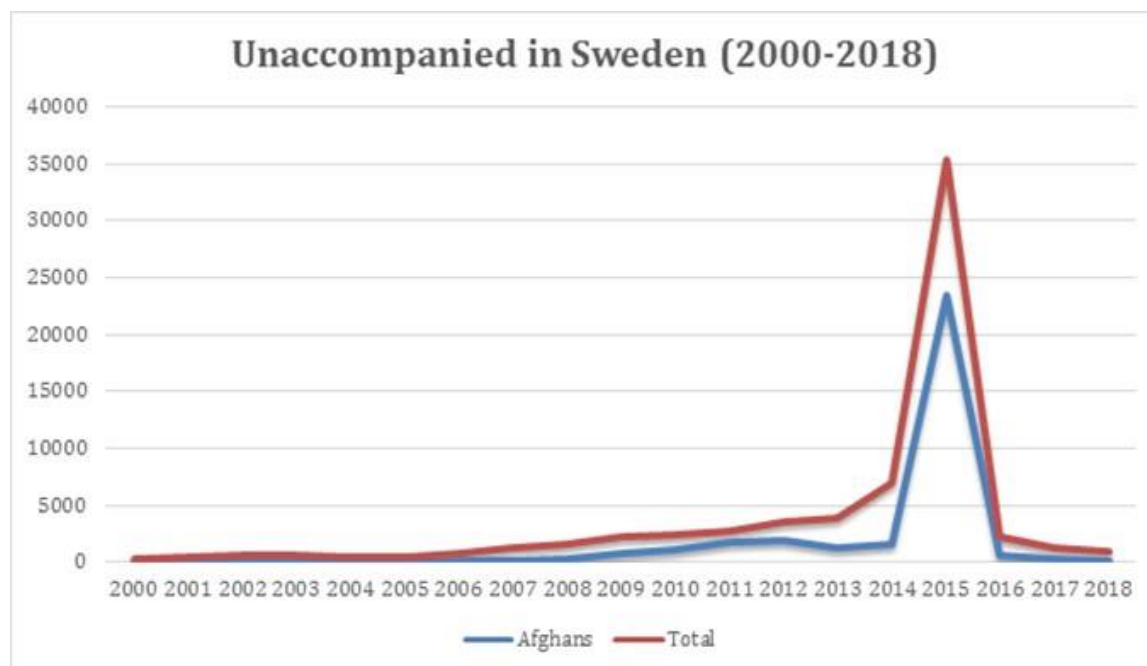
Unaccompanied minors often take the irregular routes, such as the Mediterranean journey, with the help of smugglers and traffickers (O’Donnell and Kanics 2016: 73). Fleeing conflict, war and poverty, the search for better educational and economic opportunities, and family reunification are some of the common reasons unaccompanied minors move to Europe (O’Donnell and Kanics 2016: 73).

For the purpose of this research, I use the term “unaccompanied Afghans” and “unaccompanied” to refer to the participants of this study. This is appropriate since the group is often referred to as *ensamkommande* in the Swedish media, without the suffix of children or minors (Hedlund 2016: 22). In this sense, the use of unaccompanied is well-established on its

own and refers to the same group. Moreover, the unaccompanied Afghans' age and whether or not they are "children" has turned into a controversial public and policy debate in Sweden particularly since 2015 (Wernesjö 2014: 11; FARR in the Asylum Information Database 2018). Unaccompanied Afghans are often blamed for lying about their ages in the asylum process (see Fria Tider 2018) and the Swedish government has instructed the National Board of Forensic Medicine (*Riksmedicinalverket*) to develop methods to investigate the applicants' age (FARR in the Asylum Information Database 2018). Although the topic has inevitably come up during the interviews, it is not of primary interest to this study, and to avoid getting involved in the discussion, it is safe to refer to this group as unaccompanied or unaccompanied Afghans.

2.2. Unaccompanied Afghans in Sweden: a historical review

Compared to the rest of Europe, Sweden has been one of the most desirable destination countries for unaccompanied Afghans over the past decades (Çelikaksoy and Wadensjö 2017: 1, 3). The number of unaccompanied Afghans in Sweden has increased tremendously since 2000, along with the overall number of unaccompanied asylum-seekers from other countries (Çelikaksoy and Wadensjö 2017: 5; Swedish Migration Agency 2019). Accounting for 49.52% (33 645) of the overall unaccompanied population (67 929) in Sweden between 2000 and 2018, Afghans continue to be the largest nationality among this group (Swedish Migration Agency 2019). Within the overall population of Afghan asylum-seekers in Sweden, statistics confirm that more than half are unaccompanied (*Migrationsinfo* 2016). See graph 1.



Graph 1. Number of unaccompanied Afghans who applied for asylum from 2000-2018. Source: Swedish Migration Agency, 2019.

As the graph shows, while the number of unaccompanied Afghans in 2000 was only 20, it peaked to 1940 in 2012. In 2015, the total number of unaccompanied asylum-seekers has reached to 35 369, of which 23 480 were Afghans (Swedish Migration Agency 2019). The sudden peak in applications of unaccompanied Afghans in 2015 has mainly been due to the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan (Rimmer et al 2017: 9). With 4% increase in the number of civilian casualties, 2015 has been one of the deadliest years for Afghanistan since the US occupation in 2001 (ibid).

Sweden has received the second largest number of asylum applications from this group in 2015, after Germany (Çelikaksoy and Wadensjö 2016: 3). Networks and a rather positive, “generous” and less restrictive reception rate for the unaccompanied prior to 2015 could be some of the main reasons which make Sweden a desirable destination for this group (Çelikaksoy and Wadensjö 2017: 105; Traub 2016; Wernesjö 2014: 16). Sweden’s reputation for human rights, a functioning welfare system, and better education opportunities for this group are the other factors motivating their decision (Cerrotti 2017). From 2000-2018, 74% of the overall unaccompanied are boys and 26% are girls (Swedish Migration Agency 2019).

Following the rise, the Swedish government has enforced stricter immigration policies (see the following section), leading to a tremendous decrease of Afghan applicants (665 applications) in 2016. The number continued to reduce to 222 in 2017 and 99 in 2018 (Swedish Migration Agency 2019).

2.3. Migration policies and unaccompanied Afghans in the Swedish media

The word “unaccompanied” has been initially used by a Swedish newspaper in 1992, and was used only once that entire year (Hedlund 2016: 22). The term has not been used more than three times annually until 1999, but the frequency has increased to 12 times in 2000, indicating further visibility of the group (Hedlund 2016: 22; Wernesjö 2014: 9). The usage of the term in the newspapers has grown to 132 times in 2012 and 5922 in 2014 (Hedlund 2016: 22). While there is no such exact count for the usage of the term in radio and television, the term has got increasing attention within all sorts of media and government policy since 2000 (Wernesjö 2014: 9). This could be explained with the rising number of unaccompanied applicants in Sweden, the debate around “missing children”, the children who voluntarily or involuntarily disappear in the asylum-process, combined with the need to provide them with adequate care and integration opportunities (Wernesjö 2014: 9-10).

Unaccompanied Afghans have further become the spotlight of the Swedish media in 2015, in the aftermath of the so called “refugee crisis”¹. Although the media debates have partly been triggered by the unprecedented number of unaccompanied immigrants in Sweden in 2015 (EMN Focussed Study 2017: 15), the sexual assault accusations perpetrated by immigrant men in Cologne, Germany, on New Year Eve and the rise of similar incidents in Stockholm further polarized the debate (Herz 2017: 1). The number of incoming applications alone is not the triggering factor since Sweden has received even bigger numbers of unaccompanied minors as early as the Second World War, when 70 000 Finnish children were sent to Sweden (Hedlund

¹ The term “refugee crisis” refers to the influx of mainly Syrian, Afghan and Iraqi refugees to Europe in 2015 (Spindler 2015). These refugees have taken the Mediterranean journey with the help of smugglers to escape war and prosecution (ibid). The unprecedented number of refugees reaching to Europe, combined with the growing death of refugees during this journey, has turned the issue into a core agenda for the policy makers in Europe (ibid). Germany and Sweden have been two of the countries which were the most affected by this refugee influx due to the popularity of these two destinations among refugees (ibid).

2016: 21; Herz 2017: 2). The unaccompanied have become the spotlight of media in 2015 because their “culture” and gender perceptions were seen as potential “threats” to “Western values”, thanks to the incidents in Cologne and Stockholm (Herz 2017: 2, 15).

The polarized media debates were soon translated into policies by the Swedish government since media representations influence policies (Freier 2017: 79). On 24 November 2015, the government has introduced a “restrictive immigration package” which directly affected the unaccompanied (Hedlund 2017: 41; *Regeringskansliet* 2015). As part of this package, the unaccompanied applying for asylum after 24 November would only receive temporary residence permits (Hedlund 2017: 41). A temporary residence permit also minimized the scope for family reunifications for this group (Swedish Red Cross 2018: 5). The government has also established age assessment methods to investigate the applicants’ age, something which has not existed in Sweden before (FARR in the Asylum Information Database 2018). Those “detected” to be above 18 were evaluated against the temporary Aliens Acts (2016: 752), an act removing the prospect for permanent residence permit in Sweden and making 13 months, for persons in need of protection, to 3 years permits, for refugee status, the norm in the asylum process (Hedlund 2017: 41; Swedish Red Cross 2018). As a result of these policy developments, an unaccompanied is only entitled to temporary permits in Sweden, if at all.

The debates on unaccompanied immigrants, particularly Afghans due to their size, have become even more heated with the proposal of the so called *gymnasielagen*, another temporary law facilitating 9000 rejected unaccompanied applicants, the majority of whom Afghans, with the opportunity to re-apply for a residence permit on the ground of studies (The Swedish Migration Agency 2018). The law was later approved by the parliament but at the meanwhile has been harshly criticized by the left, center and right parties as well as by public due to its “ambiguity”, “illogicality” and “ineffectiveness” in the long run (*Expressen* 2018).

In 2018, migration and integration, with unaccompanied (Afghans) at the heart of the issue, has turned into the “hottest” topic in both social media and the Swedish news (*Sifo* in Radio Sweden 2018). Against this background, the media representation of unaccompanied Afghans in Sweden is a very recent and critical debate and thus, discussing it is of empirical significance.

3. Terminology

Since this thesis is about unaccompanied Afghans in Sweden, a number of terminologies will be used frequently throughout, and to avoid misinterpretations, it is significant to clarify these concepts.

The Swedish media: refers to the media agencies based in Sweden which primarily produce news about Sweden's internal, as well as foreign, affairs in the Swedish language. In this study, the term covers written, audio and visual news outlets, such as newspapers, TV, radio, and social media. The timeframe for the media content is materials published from 2015 onwards (see appendix 2).

Asylum-seeker: “an asylum seeker is someone whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed” (UNHCR 2019). Similar to Wernsjö (2014: 11-12), this paper uses the term to refer to those waiting for a decision as well as those who are in Sweden after their application has been rejected.

Refugee: the term “refugee” refers to a person with “well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (The Geneva Convention 1951, Article 1: 14).

Migrant: UNHCR (2016) defines migrant as someone who moves across borders for socioeconomic, political, and family reunion purposes. For a migrant, seeking “safety” is not the primary reason for the move (UNHCR 2016). Whether to categorize unaccompanied Afghans as refugees or migrants remains highly debatable due to the complex security and economic situation of the country (Kuschminder et al 2013: 4-5; UNHCR 2015: 1; Hedlund 2016: 41). In this paper, migrant is often used as an umbrella term to refer to refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants. Using it as an inclusive term is appropriate since the reasons unaccompanied Afghans flee their country of origin remain mixed and individualized (UNHCR 2015: 5), making it difficult to distinguish them with either/or categories.

Residence permit: in this context, it is the right to legally stay in Sweden after an asylum application has been approved by the Swedish Migration Agency (Swedish Migration Agency 2017). Permanent residence permit provides refugees with the permanent right to live, work and/or study in Sweden, while temporary residence permit is valid for either 3 years or 13 months, depending on whether one receives the status of ‘refugee’ or ‘person in need of protection’ from the Migration Agency (Swedish Migration Agency 2017).

4. Aim and research question(s)

This study aims to understand how unaccompanied Afghans perceive and evaluate representations of themselves in the Swedish media. It also aims to investigate the relationship between these media images and their integration prospects in Sweden. The main research questions for this study are,

1. How do unaccompanied Afghans perceive and evaluate media images of themselves in the Swedish media?
2. How do these media images impact unaccompanied Afghans' integration prospects in Sweden?

4.1. Delimitation

It is important to mention that the focus of this study is only on representation of unaccompanied Afghans in the news outlets since 2015. This study thus does not focus on representation of unaccompanied Afghans in other forms, such in advertisements, movies, dramas, pictures and so on. Furthermore, this thesis only focuses on the news content in the Swedish media in the post-2015 context and does not take the content before this time period into account. 2015 onwards is an important timeframe to this study since the number of unaccompanied Afghans have reached to a peak in Sweden and the group has gained tremendous media attention (EMN Focussed Study 2017: 15; Herz 2017: 1).

Lastly, this study focuses only on unaccompanied Afghan immigrants in Sweden due to their controversial overrepresentation in the Swedish media in post-2015 context. While some conclusions of the study might be generally applicable to unaccompanied immigrants of other nationalities, the study remains limited and focused on Afghans as their voices are missing in the literature (Wernesjö 2014; Stremto 2014).

5. Relevance to Global Studies

Globalization, migration and mass media constantly intersect with each other and lead to certain people's empowerment or lack thereof (Scholte 2005). As a result of globalization, immigration and the use of mass media have become more accessible, available and frequent across the world (Scholte 2005). According to Thomas Hylland Eriksen, globalization has turned

mobility into every direction, meaning that while people tended to mainly migrate from south to north in search of better life and economic opportunities before, it occurs in both ways in the present era (Eriksen 2014: 99-100). Globalization not only determines mobilities but also draws patterns of immobilities for certain groups of people (Schiller and Salazar 2013: 190; Eriksen 2014: 99; Shamir 2005). Such limitation of movements for certain identities exist to maintain and reinforces global power structures, inequality and homogeneity (Schiller and Salazar 2013: 190; Eriksen 2014: 99; Shamir 2005).

Similarly, the turn of millennium has led to improvement in communication technologies in a way that media has become more accessible, available and affordable in the global scale (Eriksen 2014: 47). Content production and supply of materials through media channels have also become faster and more prevalent (Eriksen 2014: 47). As news consumption and production become globally widespread (Eriksen 2014: 47), it is vital to adopt a critical eye and monitor who produces what, how and for whom, and how these content impact everyone, especially the vulnerable subsets of the world.

The topic of this study is closely connected to global studies because neither immigration nor the use of mass media can be governed in a local or regional scale but needs global governance and cooperation to be handled in a more efficient manner (Scholte 2005). The 2015 refugee “crisis”; moreover, was a byproduct of the global geopolitical dimensions such as the North American and European “interventions” in the Middle East, and the so-called “war on terror” (Kenyon Lischer 2017; Lazaridis et al 2000). Understanding migration in this sense requires an interdisciplinary approach, like that of Global Studies, since it is highly affected by sociological, anthropological and historical processes (Saada 2000), as well as power dimensions surrounding the concept.

6. Previous research

This section is presenting and discussing previous research on unaccompanied immigrants in Sweden and in the world. The section contains an overview of literature on unaccompanied minors, followed by defining self-perception in relation to media, and concludes by presenting the general trends for representation of immigrants in media.

6.1. Overview: literature on unaccompanied immigrants

Similar to their media presence and policy debates, the literature on unaccompanied immigrants has increased globally and in Sweden since 2000 (Wernesjö 2011: 495). There are four main themes dominating the research on unaccompanied immigrants (Wernesjö 2014: 23; Stremto 2014: 31-32).

The first category focuses on unaccompanied asylum-seekers as a distinctly vulnerable group and thus studies their emotional wellbeing, psychiatric challenges and experiences of trauma (Wernesjö 2011; Franco 2018; O'Connell Davidson 2011; Hodes et al 2008; Hultman 2008). Some scholars consider such one-sided psychiatric narratives problematic as they contribute to "othering" of unaccompanied (Kohli 2006, 2007; Stremto 2014; O'Connell Davidson and Farrow 2007). To be clear, the problem-oriented narratives lack unaccompanieds' details of everyday lives and present them as "different", "victims", and not "normal" (O'Connell Davidson and Farrow 2007). Such attributed subordination, or "even stigmatized positioning" of unaccompanied challenges them in their everyday lives, leading to experiences of "exclusion within inclusion", such as inability to make friends in school (Pinson, Arnot and Candappa 2010; Yuval-Davis 2011). The stigmatized positioning of unaccompanied also makes the socio-political, cultural and legal structures impacting their experiences invisible (Wernesjö 2011) as well as ignores the positive changes that migration could make in the lives of unaccompanied (Watters 2000).

The second category looks at the "reception system and care" for unaccompanied minors as well as the factors triggering their migration (Wernesjö 2014; Kohli 2011; Stremto and Medander 2013; Watters 2000; Eastmond 2010). The third category concentrates on policy developments and their implication for unaccompanied children in different contexts (Stremto 2010, 2014; Lundberg 2009, 2011, 2012; Allsopp and Chase 2019; Ascher et al 2010). The main question within both of these categories is whose "best interest" the migration system and policies serve. In the developed countries, "best interest" of the child comes often in tension with regulation of migration leading the policy makers to use the argument as a way to promote "national interests" (Engebritsen 2012 in Wernesjö 2014: 26-27). Identifying the "best interest" of the child becomes further problematic because on the one hand, policy makers and social workers involved in the care and reception system have a western-centric perspective of

childhood and children (Panter-Brick 2000: 10-12). On the other hand, as discussed earlier, social workers and policy makers have a “problem-oriented” understanding of “unaccompanied” (Wernesjö 2014: 27). The combination of these two factors make it difficult to identify the “best interest” of the child since the involved actors frame policies and care system around their western-centric understanding of childhood, how a child “should” be, and adjust it according to the “problem-oriented” understanding of these children. In addition to care and policy within the asylum circle, such perspectives even impact how unaccompanied are treated in schools and their social lives (Stretmo and Melander 2013; Stremto 2014: 37; Bunar 2010). Acknowledging the existence of various forms of childhood and the heterogeneity within unaccompanied; hence, is significant in tackling this challenge (Watters 2008; Kohli 2007; Stremto 2014).

The immense focus on unaccompanied as “vulnerable” and “passive” receivers of the policies and reception system in all these categories silences their voices and undermines their agency (Wernesjö 2012, 2014). The rise of such critics has led to establishment of a fourth fastgrowing category of literature (Stremto 2014: 32). This category places unaccompanieds’ perspectives at the center of research and interprets them as active agents negotiating migration realities in the new context (Björnberg 2010; Wernesjö 2014; Wernesjö 2011; Bunar 2010; Ascher and Mellander 2010; Watters 2008). This fourth category aims to integrate the missing perspectives of unaccompanied into the debate and is a response to the stereotypical identities of unaccompanied children as voiceless “victims” in the previous three categories of research (Wernesjö 2014: 13).

Nonetheless, a comprehensive research needs to adopt a more holistic approach and involve both these dimensions (Kohli 2007; Wernesjö 2014). To be clear, the life choices that unaccompanied children make cannot be defined through an either/or approach. As Wernesjö elaborates, these children “should not be understood solely as victims, in the same way as they cannot be understood simply as strong and resourceful. Rather, they may be resourceful and strong in some aspects and periods of their lives, whilst being vulnerable in others” (2014: 11).

Having that the participants within this thesis are heterogeneous, and have made conscious choices based on the context and opportunities available to them, this thesis lies within this final category of research. As this study will later explain in detail, the participants embrace as well as resist certain images of themselves depending on the context. To better grasp the complexity in life experiences of unaccompanied and their negotiation strategies, this thesis

distances itself from the either/or lens and focuses on how the participants frame and motivate their experiences and life choices in relation to media images of themselves. In the next section, I will present a definition of self-perception and the role of media in shaping public opinion, perception of ‘others’ and ‘self’.

6.2. Self-perception and media

One’s perception of ‘self’ and ‘other’ is critically important in the immigration and integration debates (Trebbe and Schoenhagen 2011: 411). Marks defines self-perception as individual’s “beliefs, perceptions, and expectations” about oneself (2002: 90). “One’s mental picture, physical appearance, and the integration of one’s experiences, desires, and feelings” are other components of self-image (Bailey 2003: 383). Along the same lines, Bandura (1986) defines self-image, or self-efficacy, as an individual’s perceived competence in performing a task. In this thesis, I use the terms ‘self-image’, ‘self-perception’, and ‘perception of self’ interchangeably due to the close connection between the definitions of these terms.

The perception of ‘self’ is often formed in relation to the similarities and differences with ‘others’, that is one tends to have unique characteristics distinguishing them from ‘others’ as well as similarities to connect to them (de Franca 2016: 35-36). While Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura 1986) shows that understanding oneself starts from birth, this understanding and one’s perception of self deepens overtime through interpersonal communications, understanding ‘others’, “institutions” and “social structures” (de Franca 2016: 36).

In the current digitalized era, public opinion and one’s perception of ‘self’ and ‘other’ is not only shaped by personal interactions but is also influenced by media discourses (Friedland and McLeod 1999: 222; Gamson and Modigliani 1989: 3). Using the central role that media discourses have in “framing issues”, it reflects as well as produces meanings and cultures (Gamson and Modigliani 1989:3). Mass media also legitimize a social issue as a potential “social problem” (Lindgren 1993: 42) or a “social reality” (Gurevitch and Levy 1985: 19).

To sum this section up, perception of ‘self’ refers to how an individual defines her own experiences, identity, and realities. The perception of ‘self’ is formed by the constant comparisons one constantly makes with ‘others’ since childhood. The perception of ‘self’ is also formed in interaction with others as well as through institutions such as society, mass media, and

social structures. In the same manner, media discourses play an important role in shaping perception of immigrants about themselves as well as of “Swedes” and prevalent discourses in the Swedish society (Sjöberg and Rydin 2008: 1). In other words, mass media have become a way to represent immigrants as well as construct their “social reality” (Trebbe and Schoenhagen 2011: 412). In this sense, perception of ‘self’ and ‘other’ in mass media is one way of formulating group identities and reinforcing a sense of belonging or exclusion for immigrants (Viswanath and Arora 2000: 39).

In the next section, I will briefly present the literature on media representation of immigrants in Swedish media.

6.3. Media representation of immigrants

A number of scholars have studied media representation of immigrants in news outlets in Europe from discourse and content analysis perspective (Brune 2002; ter Wal et al 2005; Bennett et al 2015; Sjöberg and Rydin 2008; Nastase 2013; Elsrud 2008; Stremto 2014). An overview of the research on media representation of immigrants indicate that mass media portray immigrants in three ways: immigrants as “threat” or/and “problem” (Brune 2002; ter Wal et al 2005), “us versus them discourse” (Nastase 2013; Lappalainen 2005; Bredström 2003), and “immigrants as resources” (Nastase 2013).

Ter Wal et al argue that one common pattern in media representation of immigrants is their over-representation in “the problem-oriented coverage” whereas “under-representation in the nonproblem-oriented news” (2005: 424). In media, immigrants are constantly portrayed in relation to violence, terrorism, and conflict while underrepresented in terms of their daily lives (Buonfino 2004: 23-24; ter Wal et al 2005: 937-938; Wilson and Gutierrez 1985: 156-158; Trobbe and Schoenhagen 2011: 425). More specifically, in the Swedish context, immigrant men are repetitively presented as potential criminals or “trouble makers” while immigrant women are seen as oppressed victims (Lappalainen 2005: 6; Brune 2002: 378). Lappalainen elaborates that the Swedish media commonly present a domestic violence case perpetuated by an immigrant man as a cultural problem while the same crime committed by a Swede is explained through “individualistic”, “psychological” or similar factors (ibid; Brune 2002: 378-379). In this sense, Swedishness is considered as the “norm” while immigrants are stereotypically singled out as

“problems” and “criminals” (Lappalainen 2005: 6; Brune 2002).

The “us vs them” discourse is the second common framework that immigrants are presented through in Swedish media. Lappalainen argues that this discourse places immigrants in the opposing poles from “Swedes” and attributes negative traits to immigrants while building a positive “Swedish” self-image (Lappalainen 2005: 8). Brune adds that in the Swedish media, the term *invandrare*, or immigrant, is the contrasting term to the “Swede” and connote “different”, and “problem” (2002: 378). Bredström further elaborates that while discussing issues such as suburb segregated areas in the Swedish media, words such as “normal” and “civilized” are constantly associated with Swedishness while the existing problems are blamed on “them”, “the immigrants”, and those “failing to integrate themselves” (2003: 4). By drawing such “us vs them” boundaries between Swedes and non-Swedes, the mainstream media contribute to producing and reinforcing a culture of “otherness” (Bredström 2003).

Immigrants as resources is a third less represented category in the literature. Studying the newspaper contents of two Swedish newspapers, Natase finds out that media refer to youth immigrants as “resources” and potential employees in the job market having the aging population of Sweden and the intense labor shortage in public and private sectors (2003: 30-31). Although this positive image is vital, it is important to adopt a more critical approach to such portrayals as it builds the argument by highlighting the differences between Swedes (“us”, aging, in need of labor) and immigrants (“them”, young, workforce), and thus reinforces “othering”.

Media representation of immigrants are also problematic as journalists produce content corresponding to their own worldviews and often lack immigrants’ socio-cultural background (ter Wal et al 2005: 937-938). Presenting a single member of immigrants as representative of all or maintaining generalist views of the entire community is not uncommon in mass media (ibid). Such deficient media representations are important to address as they alienate immigrants and suppress their integration prospects (Friedland and McLeod 1999: 212; Sreberny 2005: 447-448; ter Wal et al 2005: 937-938). Deficient media images of immigrants also eventually lead to the rise of “minority media”, media by immigrants for immigrant, in the form of press, radio and TV (Trebbe and Schoenhagen 2011: 413; Camauër 2003).

It is important to pay attention to these media representations because it not only determines an immigrant’s level of integration and inclusion in Sweden but also leads to adopting certain policies impacting everyone (Stremto 2014: 19). Constructing these

representations “is an act of power in itself, for representations are fundamentally political and influential” (Johnson 2011 in Frier 2017: 79). These media representations directly influence “how policies are written and, later, interpreted, supported or contested by the public belief” (Freier 2017: 79).

While the literature on representation of immigrants in the Swedish media is not short in number, none has had a clear focus on unaccompanied Afghans’ perceptions of media images of themselves and how they impact their integration prospects. To be clear, there is no research to date studying unaccompanied Afghans’ perceptions of these media images despite their overrepresentation in the Swedish media in the post-2015 context. This research; thus, is empirically significant as it aims to fill this existing research gap. This study is also empirically relevant as migration and integration continue to challenge and divide the Swedish government as well as public thanks partly to media representations of immigrants (EMN Focussed Study 2017: 17). With the ongoing migration and integration debates, it is equally important to pay attention to media representations of immigrants and the implications they have for welfare and migration policies in Sweden.

7. Theoretical framework

In this thesis, I use cultural racism and intersectionality as the main theories to make sense of the results.

A cultural racism analysis would benefit this study because as I demonstrate in the analysis section, the Swedish media tend to adopt a cultural racist lens while presenting unaccompanied Afghans. As the analysis section will show, both Afghanness and Swedishness are portrayed as unchangeable opposing values, and unaccompanied Afghans are monolithically associated with criminality and problem-oriented behaviors. This theory will help the study to explore in detail the continuum of ideas rather than a binary of cultural oppositions and allow participants to explain in detail how they perceive media representations of themselves.

Intersectionality is the second theory which helps to analyze the collected data for this study. Looking at the media discourses through an intersectional perspective enables us to move beyond the racialized media logic and grasp a deeper and more complex understanding of the problematic. In this sense, adopting an intersectional lens adds a new perspective that is neglected while portraying unaccompanied Afghans.

7.1. Cultural racism

To grasp a better understanding of cultural racism phenomenon, it is important to begin with defining the terms ‘racism’ and ‘culture’.

Balibar defines racism as a set of practices, discourses or representations which are performed to “purify the social body, to preserve 'one's own' or 'our' identity from all forms of mixing, interbreeding or invasion and which are articulated around stigmata of otherness (name, skin colour, religious practices)” (Balibar 1991: 17). According to this definition, any act performed to segregate a certain group of a society from the “rest” based on ethnic, religious, physical, or national features contributes to othering and thus is categorized as racism. Racism also involves excluding certain “others” from the society as a way to “preserve” the majority’s norm and “identity”. In other words, prejudice is an “inflexible generalization” or stereotypical formation of certain groups which in turn justify “a pattern of hostility” against them (Allport 1954: 9, 12; Balibar 1991: 18).

A racist performance involves a “victim”, who feels the prejudice, and a “perpetrator”, who expresses the prejudice (Balibar 1991). Prejudices are irreversible, meaning that the “victim” does not have the power to reciprocate the hostile behavior due to dominant power structures (Allport 1954: 9). In deconstructing cultural racist patterns, revolution by its “victims” as well as transforming the perpetrators are equally indispensable (Balibar 1991: 18). As a result of cultural racist performances, minority groups, often the “victims”, are expected to openly embrace the culture of the majority and forget that of their “own” (Scott 2007: 4).

Culture; on the other hand, remains a highly contested yet vague concept (Birukou et al 2014: 2, Smith et al 2008). Examining the existing definitions of culture by various scholars, Birukou et al define culture as a set of learned, agreed, and/or shared traits, practices, behaviors, traditions, beliefs, norms etc. by a group of people (Birukou et al 2014: 3). Although culture is often passed and practiced through generations, it continues to evolve and the experience remains different in each community and generation (Smith et al 2008). Culture also “involves rules and assumptions, often unstated and taken for granted, that are built into (...) institutions and practices” (Ritzer and Atalay 2010: 408). It is important to note that culture is not a set of fixed values or cannot be seen as unchangeable, rather it is a fluid institution which changes constantly (Bedström 2003: 4).

Cultural racism (Bedström 2003), new racism (Barker 1981) or neo-racism (Balibar

1991) is a transnational theory which refers to emergence of “new” forms of racism in the 20th century. The theory has been formulated in response to policies legitimizing exclusion of immigrants in Europe and explains the rise of “racist movements and policies” (Balibar 1991: 17). Cultural racism is produced when the dominant group imposes certain values, beliefs, heritage, language, and culture as the common social norm on other groups (Allport 1954; Balibar 1991). The main difference between cultural racism, or neo-racism, with earlier forms of racism is that the former justifies preference for certain dominant values on the basis of “culture” while the latter on the basis of “biological” or physical attributes (Scott 2007: 4-5).

Acting out cultural racism can vary in form, intensity and level in various contexts (Allport 1954: 14). To be clear, prejudice in its initial degrees can be seen as “antilocution”, expressing antagonism against certain groups with like-minded people (ibid). The prejudicial attitude can gradually escalate to “avoidance”, “discrimination”, “physical attack”, and even “extermination”, or acts like massacre and lynching as those performed by Hitler (ibid). Hence, cultural racism involves some form of aggression not only in the form of actions but also through words and linguistic expressions (Balibar 1991: 18). Emphasizing the significant role of language and words in exclusion of certain “others” and denying them of their rights, Balibar argues that racism has only moved “from the language of biology into the discourses of culture (...)” while the practices resemble the old acts (ibid). In this sense, neo-racism *per se* is not “new” but has roots in the historical forms (racism based on biological grounds) of racism (ibid).

Balibar further explains that in the postcolonial era, the notion of race, prejudice on biological grounds, is being substituted with a new discourse, immigration (1991: 20). The emergence of this new term in the postcolonial era has been significant because of the “perception of immigration” and “colonial experience” (Balibar 1991: 21). In the French context; for instance, France was both the dominant power, the colonizer, and dealt with immigrants coming from its former colonies, who were supposedly moving to “invade” France (ibid). The immigration discourse, or the reversal of movements between the former colonizer and the formerly colonized, puts France and other European countries into a new political paradigm, in which cultural difference and “incompatibility of life-styles and traditions” constitute the dominant theme (ibid). Prejudicial behavior and attitudes in this context; Balibar argues, stems from “their belonging to historical cultures” (ibid). Cultural racism hence is a new way to establish hegemonic power, “dominate civilization”, and suppress minorities (Balibar 1991: 22).

In this context, culture functions in the same manner as “nature” and creating patterns of exclusion, segregation and oppression (ibid). Cultural racist practices are problematic as they reinforce the idea that “humanity can be divided into two main groups”, the Europeans and those of the third world in this case, the former “assumed to be universalistic and progressive, the other supposed irremediably particularistic and primitive” (Balibar 1991: 25).

To sum this section up, cultural racism refers to production of “racialized notions of cultural difference” by treating culture as a fixed set of foreign values and traditional practices (Bredström 2003: 8). According to Balibar (1991), cultural racism has the same implications in the present day Europe as race on the basis of biological features had in the earlier decades. To be sure, Balibar argues that the same patterns of exclusion, oppression and racial prejudice is practiced against immigrants and minorities in Europe by the hegemonic, superior culture (Balibar 1991). Such practices not only occur in physical form but also through words, justifying “othering” and legitimizing the “us vs them” categories in the current Western world (Bedström 2003).

7.1.1. Media and cultural racism

In the present world, mass media detach culture from the socio-political context it is embedded in and associate it collectively with non-western bodies (Bredström 2003: 8). To be sure, mass media produce a discriminatory image of immigrants by emphasizing cultural differences (Bredström 2003: 8). Similarly, Siebers and Dennissen point out the rise of migranthostility in the Dutch media and politics, particularly against Muslims and non-Westerners, justifying exclusion of immigrants (2014: 474-475). According to Siebers and Dennissen, the hostility is explained in relation to the “incompatibility” between the Dutch culture and (non-Western) immigrants’ cultures (ibid). While Siebers and Dennissen are convinced that cultural racism is practiced in the Dutch media and reinforces exclusion and oppression of immigrants, they remain critical of it being “the same” as racism in its colonial forms, as Balibar (1991) argues (2014: 483).

The issue of young immigrants has gained enormous publicity in the Swedish media in the last years (Bedström 2003: 2). Bedström elaborates the concept by referring to media

coverage of “the Rissne rape”, a rape crime committed by immigrant youth in Rissne, Stockholm in January 2000, and the murder of Fadime, a Kurdish girl killed by her dad in Sweden for committing “honor crime” in January 2002 (2003: 2). In both cases, media discussions have mainly revolved around the “perpetrators’ culture”, “roots”, and “country of origin” (ibid). In the Rissne rape case, the victim’s “Swedish” identity was in some instances presented as the reason the assault occurred at the first place (Bedström 2003: 2). In this sense, the rape case has been presented as a clash of cultures, between that of the immigrants and “Swedish culture”, with the cultural difference being the reason the crime happened (ibid).

In Fadime’s murder case, the Kurdish culture was associated with being “barbaric”, “uncivilized” and “old” (ibid). Honor killing was presented to be a reality of the Kurdish culture and later, has been questioned as a practice applicable to “other immigrants” (Bedström 2003: 3). Bedström (2003) also points out the gendered dimension of cultural difference in media representations in these two cases. To be clear, media too often associate patriarchal values with immigrants while equates gender equality with Swedish identities (Bedström 2003: 8). In Rissne and Fadime’s cases, the perpetrators (immigrant men) were associated with strong patriarchal, masculine and tribal values, and immigrant women, like Fadime, as those oppressed by patriarchal “cultures” (Bedström 2003: 3). Bedström further elaborates that a crime committed by a white Swede male is often explained through frameworks other than “culture” while the connection between culture, sexism and crime is immediately established for “them”, the immigrants (Bedström 2003: 4).

The immigrants have also been blamed for “failing to integrate themselves” in the Swedish society in addressing these two cases (ibid). The Swedishness at the meanwhile, was always spoken of as “normal”, “civilized” and put in contrast to tradition of “others” (ibid). This unequal power structures between “Swedes” and “the immigrants” has further contributed to construction of “us vs them”, Swedes vs immigrants, discourses.

To conclude this section, media discourses have had a one-sided focus on analyzing criminal related cases by immigrants than those of the Swedes in Sweden (Bedström 2003). The immigrants’ crimes are immediately associated with their “backward”, “old”, “patriarchal” culture (ibid). The Swedish media also reinforce stereotypical definitions of immigrant men and women by presenting the former as “the oppressor” and the latter as “the oppressed”. Lastly, the

Swedish media establish “us vs them” discourses between immigrants and Swedes while explaining criminal cases and present the situation as a clash of cultures (ibid).

7.2. Intersectionality

The term intersectionality was coined by the American black feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), when she discussed how race, class and gender interact in shaping exclusion and exploitation for black women’s employment (Yuval-Davis 2011: 4-5; 2006: 195; Crenshaw 1989). More specifically, intersectionality is “the multidimensionality of marginalized subjects’ lived experiences” (Crenshaw 1989 in Yuval-Davis 2011: 8).

Crenshaw (1989) argues that understanding the struggle of women of color is not possible while looking at race, sex, and gender as separate categories. Rather, an intersection of these categories create structural, political and representational inequalities for black women (Crenshaw 1989). Crenshaw elaborates that structural intersectionality refers to interaction of one “burden” with other “pre-existing vulnerabilities” creating “another dimension of disempowerment” (1989: 1249). For black immigrant women experiencing domestic violence in the USA; for instance, the experiences result from a combination of factors such as legal and/or economic dependency on their spouses, housing conditions, language barriers (ibid). In other words, one’s experience of a certain situation; domestic violence in this case, has to do with multiple layers of identity one has, and the social, economic, and political world they are situated in (Crenshaw 1989: 1250).

By political intersectionality, Crenshaw points out at how the already marginalized black women in the US get undermined, ignored, or not taken equally serious by the relevant institutions such as the police (1989: 1257). Such treatments has to do with the stereotypical narratives around black and minority communities as well as that with “othering” patterns (1989: 1260). This discriminatory behavior makes the victims reluctant to report incidents of discrimination, domestic violence, and rape and further silences their voices (ibid).

Representational intersectionality focuses on how the images of minority groups are produced while experiencing discriminatory behaviors, domestic violence in this case (1989: 1282). Crenshaw explains that these discriminatory patterns are often either explained within a “race” or “gender” narrative while “racial and sexual subordination are mutually reinforcing” and that these subordinating categories overlap in shaping the experiences (1989: 1283).

The main critic for Crenshaw's definition; however, is limiting intersectionality to the three categories of race, gender and sex (Yuval-Davis 2011). According to Yuval-Davis rather than focusing on certain "social identities", the theory should focus on "social power axes" so that it includes those who are marginalized in ways other than Crenshaw's three mentioned categories (ibid: 9). Ethnicity, class, disability status, nationality, citizenship, immigration, sexuality, age, and geographical location are some of these power axes to be recognized (YuvalDavis 2011: 9, 2006). In this sense, intersectionality looks at how different power structures interact, shape, construct, and deconstruct each other and lead to certain patterns of inclusion or exclusion for different people (Yuval-Davis 2011).

Furthermore, although intersectionality has been initially used by feminists and holds a great weight within gender studies, it should be used more broadly as a theoretical framework for studying "social stratification" (Yuval-Davis 2011: 8). It is important to note that although intersectional perspective looks at how various patterns, identities, and categories determine one's "social position", the attitudes and behaviors cannot be predicted based on these "intercategories" and can vary even among those of the same family (Yuval-Davis 2011: 7). In other words, although these categories shape certain problematics in intersection with each other, they also function independent of each other (Stremto 2014: 57). Thus, membership within the same category does not directly indicate a homogeneity within it despite all the shared patterns that might exist in the category, and thus attributing the same specific traits to everyone within certain category is misleading (Yuval-Davis 2006: 199).

7.2.1. Intersectionality and unaccompanied immigrants

A number of scholars have studied and analyzed immigration discourses through an intersectional framework (Viruell-Fuentes et al 2012; Grosfoguel et al 2015; Sanitti 2014; Pisani and Grech 2015; Anthias 2013). Few have specifically focused on the issue of unaccompanied immigrants through an intersectional perspective (Stemto 2014; Kaukko and Wernesjö 2016). Stremto argues that unaccompanied immigrant minors in Sweden and Norway are often singled out as a particular group by media and policy makers (2014: 56). The categorization is established on the basis of securitization of migration logic as well as social exclusion (ibid). Securitization of migration here refers to portrayal of unaccompanied minors as a "threat" as well as victims of certain circumstances (Stremto 2014: 65). Such categorization not only reinforces

stereotypical images for this group but also turns them into “a governable space” or “a social problem” (Stremto 2014: 56). Stremto adds that other power structures such as gender, age, ethnicity, class, and background intertwine with this constructed category while problematizing unaccompanied children in Sweden and Norway (ibid). In this sense, an intersectional perspective helps to understand “how different structures of power interconnect in the construction of a subject of knowledge” (ibid 57).

According to Stremto, intersection of age, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and similar structures reproduce “stereotypical ideas of ethnic belonging, gender, sexuality, and age” (ibid). To be clear, since groups or subjects of knowledge are defined in relation to others, unaccompanied immigrants versus “normal” Swedish children in this case, the risk is to generalize and misunderstand people in the way they “are” (ibid). It is; thus, significant to emphasize that subjects of knowledge, unaccompanied minors here, are “fluid”, “context dependent”, and “flexible” (ibid).

An intersectional perspective is critical in studying unaccompanied minors as it challenges stereotypical images and questions “the positions deemed as normal and normative” (Mattson 2010: 92). Such constructions and implications of “normalities” make patterns of exclusion, exploitation, and repression invisible (Stremto 2014: 57). An intersectional perspective, in this sense, is also helpful as it studies inequality within groups and deconstructs homogenous inter-group constructions (ibid). Stremto highlights that although subjects of knowledge are primarily bound to their class, ethnic, and gender categories, they do challenge such stereotypical images of themselves (2014: 58).

Similar to Yuval-Davis (2011), Stremto argues that structures like age and sexuality, besides ethnicity, gender and race, are significant in analyzing unaccompanied immigrants through an intersectional perspective (2014: 58). Age, and whether or not unaccompanied immigrants “are” children has been critical in shaping policies, media portrayals as well as the care and reception system (Stremto 2014: 59). In other words, the formulation of this category matters as it later determines how the group is governed (Stremto 2014: 62). In the Swedish and Norwegian context, “childhood” has been defined as a fixed, non-negotiable state suiting the way a “normal” Swede or Norwegian child is raised (ibid). However, as a historical view shows, the state of childhood is more fluid and diverse based on each individual, time and context, and thus there is the need to see and define it as “childhoods” (Kaukko and Wernesjö 2016: 10). While

studying unaccompanied children in the Swedish context, an unchangeable definition of childhood becomes problematic when it intersects with other power structures and is positioned as the stark opposite to “adulthood”, determining their rights, and sphere of exclusion/inclusion (Stremto 2014: 59).

In short, the position that unaccompanied immigrants hold are not fluid or static, and is rather determined by the factors they are surrounded with and the existing alternatives in that particular situation (Kaukko and Wernesjö 2016: 16-17). To make better sense of a situation and develop policies benefiting everyone, it is vital to understand that belonging to a category, unaccompanied immigrant in this case, does not identify all their characteristics (ibid). As Kaukko and Wernesjö (2016: 16-17) assert, listening to unaccompanied immigrants and integrating their experiences in the policy making as well as research is the key in understanding them. This thesis; thus, is more relevant in the Swedish context at the current timeframe as it starts with listening to these particular experiences and integrates their voices into the discussion.

8. Methodology

This section provides a transparent account of data collection and analysis process. Below, I will first describe my choice of method for data collection and the reasons behind it, and then explain how my empirical research was carried. I will also describe the material and profile of interviewees in this section. The section is followed by a thorough description of the data analysis method for this study, role of the researcher and ethical considerations.

8. 1. Qualitative semi-structured interviews

In answering the research questions, conducting qualitative research has been the most plausible alternative for two reasons. First, the study’s research questions focus on “understanding” unaccompanied Afghans’ perceptions based on their own “interpretations”. I chose qualitative research method as it provides the study with an epistemological position enabling me to examine and understand the participants’ interpretations (Bryman 2016: 375). Moreover, a qualitative method was applied because I do not intend to test the existing theories. Rather, I am interested in how the participants frame their experiences in the absence of predefined concepts and theories. In this sense, this study has adopted a qualitative approach as it has “an inductive view” of the data and theory (Bryman 2016: 375).

Semi-structured qualitative interview has been the most reasonable method for this study as it is concerned with the interviewees' own perspectives and the research questions are openended (Bryman 2016: 466). Semi-structured interviews were also selected over unstructured interviews to ensure that the respondents provide relevant answers to the broader research question yet have the freedom and flexibility to integrate the patterns and behavior they see as important (Bryman 2016: 469).

The main limitation with semi-structured interviews have been the significant role of the researcher and the impact it puts on the collected data (Bryman 2016: 375-376). To address this challenge and minimize my role as the researcher, I conducted one group interview using the focus group technique. While the focus group has begun with the interview guide and I have had a huge influence in "warming-up" the discussion, it has raised interesting debates among respondents and brought new dimension of the problematic into light.

8.2. Data collection

Prior to the thesis writing and data collection process, I developed a thorough research proposal containing previous research, the research questions, relevant theories, the aim of the study and methodology. The proposal has served as a practical guide throughout the study and helped me to stay focused and concentrated on the research questions.

The next step in getting started for the data collection has been a "narrative review" of the literature, that is situating the research questions in relation to the previous studies and establishing the researcher's potential contributions (Bryman 2016: 91, 94-95). Referring to the existing literatures, including research-based videos and documentaries on the topic, has not only contributed to building credibility during the interviews but also kept the conversation flow reasonably well (Bryman 2016: 96).

An interview guide has been prepared as an important part of any semi-structured interview (see appendix 1). The interview guide was divided into three thematic sections to capture narratives and interpretations of the respondents. The first section, introductory questions, served as a warm-up phase for the respondents and provided me with demographic details. The second part, media-related questions, focused on how the respondents observe, evaluate, and negotiate media images of themselves in the Swedish media and their day to day

lives. This section allowed me to clearly see the tension between “whom they are presented to be” versus “who they are” from the respondents’ perspectives.

The third section, reaction to the visual content, was initially designed for the respondents with no news or media engagement. However, I decided to use the section in all the interviews regardless of the respondents’ engagement, or lack thereof, as it generated productive input and discussions. In this part, the respondent(s) would first watch some minutes of the documentary *Dömda för våldtäkt*, or convicted for rape charges, which was produced by the Swedish Television in 2018. The documentary has mapped those frequently convicted for rape charges in Sweden from 2012 to 2017, and states that young Afghan boys (45 of the 129 convicted) are highly overrepresented in the sample (*Dömda för våldtäkt* 2018). Seeking the “why”, the documentary interviews some Afghan boys in Stockholm, who argue that cultural differences are the main causes of rape (*Dömda för våldtäkt* 2018). I selected this documentary as part of the interviews because it brings controversial dimension of the problematic, such as rape due to cultural reasons versus socio-economic aspects, into light. The documentary is unique of its kind since the Swedish government discourages keeping statistics on criminality and ethnic background due to political and ideological reasons (Rodén 2018). The documentary has also proven to be extremely well-known to majority of the respondents in this study and thus, facilitated an engaging discussion.

In addition to the documentary, the respondent(s) were provided with five news articles as a starting point (see appendix 2 for a list of articles). To minimize bias and remain objective, the selected articles were based on four criteria of diversity of topics, frequency of published articles on the same incident, diversity of sources, and that the article had to be a recent publication (not older than 3 years). The articles covered topics such as criminality among unaccompanied boys, “78% of unaccompanied have lied about their ages”, “my newcomer students consider that Jews are dangerous”, and “more unaccompanied boys have committed suicide” [titles translated by the author]. These news articles are published in Sweden’s most popular news sources such as *Aftonbladet*, *Svenska Dagbladet*, *Fria Tider*, and *Expressen* between 2017 and 2019. The documentary and the news articles are in Swedish and have been used as original during the interviews, while all the conversations and discussions have been mainly in Dari, a dialect of Persian language.

A discussion of the documentary combined with the news articles have allowed me to see how the interviewees react and respond to the ongoing debates about unaccompanied immigrants in Sweden. Although the interview guide has been divided into clear parts, the questions were pretty flexible and the interviews were mainly led by the respondents' answers and narratives (Bryman 2016: 483, 498).

To ensure that the interviewees feel safe to express themselves and their personal experiences, the interviews have taken place at the closed library rooms. One interview has been conducted in a church but the interaction has remained one-on-one. The respondents have been contacted through phone, message, and/or Facebook at least one week prior to the interview and have been thoroughly informed about the study. After getting their oral consent, the interviewee and I have agreed on a suitable time and in-person interaction has only occurred during the interview. I have in all instances started the interview with a description of the project, its aims and purposes, and emphasized the anonymous, flexible and voluntary nature of the interviews. The respondents have approved for the interviews to be audio-recorded, on the condition that it will be removed after transcription.

The transcription process has happened shortly after the interviews to ensure quality (Bryman 2016: 481). In this sense, the transcriptions have made me aware of the emerging themes as well as ways to improve the upcoming interviews (Bryman 2016: 481). The possibility for linguistic errors have been minimized since all the interviews happened in the interviewee and interviewer's native language, Dari.

The transcription process has paid attention to fine details, meaning that it has documented expressions, tone of voice in describing experiences, and emotions. This is particularly important as the way the respondent describes an experience can impact the produced meaning (Bryman 2016: 526-527). However, this study is not interested in the examination of language itself (Bryman 2016: 525) and rather adopts a formal transcription approach, that is it pays attention to details to the extent it impacts the respondents' narratives (Kvale and Brinkmann 2015: 204-210).

The interviews took place in the city of Gothenburg during February 2019, and lasted between 46 to 120 minutes each.

8.3. Interviewees' profiles

The unit of analysis for this study is unaccompanied Afghan boys, who moved to Sweden through the Mediterranean Sea in search of asylum. The respondents have identified themselves below 18 years old upon arrival and were not accompanied by an adult throughout the journey or afterwards. The study solely focuses on boys/men since they are one of the most represented and controversial groups in the Swedish media (Hellberg 2018; Shakra, Wirman, Szalanska and Önver Cetrez 2018: 45).

This study has been produced after interviewing a total of ten unaccompanied Afghans. Six interviews were conducted as one-on-one semi-structured qualitative interviews, and one in the form of focus group with four participants. The participants' age group has varied between 19 and 22 at the time of the interview.

Six of the ten respondents were born and raised in Iran and had never been to Afghanistan prior to moving to Sweden. One was born and raised in Quetta, Pakistan. One was born and raised in Iran but was deported to Afghanistan four years before he moved to Sweden. Only two of the respondents were born and grew up in Afghanistan and moved to Sweden from Afghanistan.

In selecting the participants, purposive sampling strategy has been employed since the respondents had to have relevant experiences to the research questions (Bryman 2016: 408, 410). The initial respondents were introduced to me through my personal network at *Redberg Welcome* and *Sveriges Ensamkommandes Förening (SEF)*, two of the NGOs working with unaccompanied minors in Gothenburg. Some respondents were recommended through my non-Afghan network in other academic and professional settings.

I then combined purposive sampling with snowball sampling, meaning that the initial participants have proposed other respondents with relevant experiences (Bryman 2016: 415). The combination of these strategies have been logical as it enabled me to make use of the participants' network as well as fulfill the intended number of respondents for the study. Even though the interviewees were initially selected through purposive sampling, all the interviewees happened to belong to Hazara² ethnic minority group. To increase ethnic diversity

² Hazaras are Afghanistan's third largest ethnic group (15%), after Pashtuns (40%) and Tajiks (30%). Pashtuns and Tajiks generally belong to the Sunni Muslim denomination, whereas Hazaras generally belong to Shia Muslim denomination and speak Dari. The country has been ruled by Pashtuns since the 18th century. Hazaras, however,

in the sample, I specifically looked for unaccompanied boys with other ethnic backgrounds but could neither reach them through my contacts nor through the aforementioned organizations. I was able to find only one non-Hazara respondent but he canceled his participation in the interview day. The Hazara domination in the sample can be explained through the fact that majority of unaccompanied Afghan boys seeking asylum in Sweden belong to Hazara ethnic group (UNHCR 2017: 15; Hellberg 2018). Reports by UNHCR confirm that three quarter or 74% of unaccompanied Afghan boys identified themselves as Hazara in 2015 (UNHCR 2016: 9; UNHCR 2017: 15). While this study acknowledges lack of ethnic diversity among the respondents, the dominance of Hazara ethnic minorities can be justified as a presentation of their population size in Sweden.

Nine of the respondents are presently in their first or second year of high school. One has graduated high school and was immediately hired as a full-time truck driver, the major he specialized in during his high school. Five out of the ten are doing part-time jobs besides their schools at diverse places such as the elderly care, teaching musical instruments, ambassador in a cultural house, and oil-pump stations. The other four emphasized that they would like to, and have the need to, work but do not have the right because they failed to provide adequate identity documents at the Migration Agency, and their asylum-applications are still being reviewed by the migration agency.

The respondents have been selected regardless of the length of their stay in Sweden because the variable does not directly concern the research questions. The interviewees have lived in Sweden between three and six years at the time of interview.

The participants have also been selected regardless of their current migration status (waiting for a decision, granted residence permit, rejected) as the variable is not of significant interest to the study. Five of the interviewees had a residence permit at the time of the interview, with two having permanent residence permits and three temporary residence permits. The other five received one or two negative decisions from the Migration Agency, but have re-applied for a residence permit through the so called *gymnasielagen*, a temporary law which came into force as of 1 July 2018 and provides temporary permits to those pursuing their high school (The Swedish

have been and continue to be systematically discriminated, oppressed and persecuted over the course of history in Afghanistan (Norwegian Afghanistan Committee 2019). For more details, see Barfield (2011).

Migration Agency 2018). All five have been waiting for a decision from the Migration Agency at the time of the interview.

None of the respondents have had the opportunity to reunite with their families in Sweden. At the time of interview, the respondents lived independently in shared apartments.

8.4. Analysis of materials

8.4.1. Why grounded-theory?

To draw astute analyses of the collected data, this study has taken a grounded-theory approach. Grounded-theory is one of the commonly used methods in qualitative research, and allows the theories and concepts to eventually emerge out of the empirical findings (Charmaz and Mitchell 2008: 160; Bryman 2016: 381, 572). Grounded theory has been the most plausible analytical device because this study has an epistemological approach and is first and foremost interested in understanding the narratives of the respondents. Grounded-theory has been chosen as it takes away the focus from “pre-conceived logically deduced hypotheses” and allows the researcher to learn about “context and content, meaning and action, structures and actors” (Charmaz and Mitchell 2008: 162-163). To be clear, grounded-theory has been selected as the analytical framework as it is the most suitable way to focus on the meanings (Charmaz and Mitchell 2008: 162).

Grounded-theory has also been motivated as it involves simultaneous data collection and analysis (Charmaz and Mitchell 2008: 162). This characteristic is particularly important for this study since qualitative interviews often produce cumbersome, unstructured textual materials which are difficult to analyze (Bryman 2016: 569-570). In this sense, grounded-theory’s tool, simultaneous data collection and analysis, has created a clear direction for this study through helping to avoid unfocused, random and irrelevant data collection, as well as diminishing feelings of being overwhelmed by the data (Charmaz and Mitchell 2008: 162). Going back and forth between the fieldwork and the collected data has made me aware of the emerging themes as well as ways improved the upcoming interviews (Bryman 2016: 481).

Lastly, grounded-theory approach has been used for this study because it allows both flexibility and “constant comparisons” through coding (Charmaz and Mitchell 2008: 165; Bryman 2016: 573-574). Since this study is concerned with the “perception of self”, analyzing it

requires a tool which involves flexibility and fluidity within categories. The coding stage in grounded-theory has helped to develop certain categories which exist in the data (Charmaz and Mitchell 2008: 165-166; Bryman 2016: 573). It has also helped to see the relationship between categories, generate hypotheses, and answer the research questions.

In short, I have chosen grounded-theory approach for this study due to its epistemological nature. Although I began theory reading way prior to data collection and have been aware of the existing materials, a formal literature review has been conducted only after an independent analysis of the materials (Charmaz and Mitchell 2008: 162). The data collection, transcription, and data analysis have happened in active interaction with each other for this study.

Upon completion of the fieldwork, a distinctive phase containing thorough re-reading of the transcribed materials have been conducted. During this phase, the frequent patterns, common behaviors, and meanings have been highlighted, based on which the coding process has started. The “neat”, or relevant, data have then been inserted into an excel sheet based on the common emerging themes and have been codified. The codes and themes have later been evaluated against and connected to the existing literature and theories, leading to answers to the research questions for this study, which are presented in the result section.

8.5. Role of the researcher

Situating the researcher’s identity in all stages of a qualitative research is particularly important because knowledge and power are interconnected and “the researcher’s own sociopolitical location” can influence the research and empower or undermine certain groups of people (Rose 1997: 318; Ackerly and True 2010: 36-37). In this case, my identity, as an Afghan Hazara girl residing in Sweden, has created a dual “insider-outsider” role throughout the study. According to Hellowell, an insider is someone who “possesses a *priori* intimate knowledge” of the setting and people being researched while an outsider is the exact opposite (ibid 2006: 484485).

In this thesis, the shared ethnic and national identity between me and the interviewees have established an “insider” identity for me, making it easy to recruit the participants, connect to them and build trust (Hockey 1993: 199; Hellowell 2006: 485). Belonging to the same country has also removed the potential for culture shock and disorientation, making it possible for the respondents to share more intimate, detailed and honest experiences (Hockey 1993: 199).

Furthermore, conducting the interview in the interviewee and my native language, Dari, has made it possible for both parties to engage in an in-depth discussion and enhanced communication (Hockey 1993: 199). While the insider identity has added assets to the study, it might have also influenced it through me taking some meanings and narratives for granted, and not probing enough on them, due to my “overfamiliarity” (Hockey 1993: 199).

Despite the shared ethnic, national and linguistic characteristics, my gender and educational background have constructed me an “outsider” identity during the research process. The gender dimension is critical to this study as the participants have grown up and come from contexts like Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan with sharp gender disparities (World Economic Forum 2018: UNDP 2018). Most of the respondents have expressed that they barely had access to formal schooling in Iran and Pakistan as they lacked identity documents. Nevertheless, I, the researcher, have had privileged educational opportunities both inside and outside Afghanistan, a characteristic yet to become common in Afghanistan, particularly for Afghan girls (Equality for Peace and Democracy 2011: 20, 23; Aturupane et al 2013: 19). My unique academic background combined with my gender alienates me from the respondents and turns me into an “outsider” not belonging to “them” (Hellowell 2008: 486-487).

My “outsider” identity has influenced the research process in a mixed way. In some instances, such as in the focus group, it made the participants to explain their experiences in an elaborate manner, assuming that I, an “outsider”, have no knowledge of the context. However, in some other cases, this “outsider” identity has increased the power-relations between me and the respondent as the respondents have started to look up at me as a “successful example of Afghans” (Respondent 3; Respondent 8; Respondent 9). Such perceptions of the respondents towards me impact the research as it determines the kind of experiences that are (and are not) shared during the interview.

Lastly, the analyses in this study are produced through “inter-subjective experiences”, meaning that it is a result of the interaction between the respondents and me (Charmaz and Mitchell 2008: 163). I have constantly shared relevant personal experiences, but not opinions, as a way to move around the topic during the interviews (Charmaz and Mitchell 2008: 163). Since the interviewees respond to these experiences, the role of the researcher in this study cannot be undermined.

8.6. Ethical considerations

One of the key practices while producing knowledge and doing ethical scholarship is reflexivity (Rose 1997: 305; Ackerly and True 2010: 36; Hellowell 2006). Although selfreflection has been a constant process in all stages of this study, inevitable factors such as the researcher's identity have impacted this research. By providing a transparent account of these factors (see the section on the role of the researcher), this study strives towards producing a more ethical scholarship.

Imbalanced power-relations between the researcher and the respondents is the other factor impacting qualitative research. To be clear, even though the narratives of those being studied is supposed to be the point of orientation in qualitative research (Bryman 2016: 401), the researcher decides what is "significant" throughout the process, and what to include or exclude (Bryman 2016: 398; Kvale and Brinkmann 2009: 3). Since a total removal of these powerstructures within the study is impossible due to the nature of qualitative research, this thesis acknowledges that the imbalances have existed persistently throughout this study. It is also noteworthy that the findings of this study are based on interviews with ten unaccompanied Afghan immigrants in Gothenburg. To avoid generalizations, I acknowledge the limited scope of the study (Bryman 2016: 399). I emphasize that unaccompanied Afghan immigrants are by no means a homogenous group (Wernesjö 2012: 496, 498) and the findings of this study are not representative of the entire group.

This thesis abides by the ethical guidelines by the Swedish Research Council (*Vetenskapsrådet* 2014). Since this research studies a highly vulnerable subset of the Swedish society, I will ensure to protect the integrity of the respondents and maintain confidentiality throughout the process. The raw material and interviews for this study involve sensitive personal narratives. To ensure the respondents' safety, the respondents will be presented anonymously in all the relevant materials (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009: 187).

9. Results

The main findings of this study indicate:

1. Unaccompanied Afghans perceive media images of themselves as generalist (one representing all), monolithic ("one sided", "problem oriented"), and deficient (lacks

adequate reasoning and does not take the socio-economic factors leading to criminality into account).

2. Unaccompanied Afghans are in a constant struggle to prove themselves against the generalist, Eurocentric media portrayals of themselves. The respondents in this study feel undermined to frequently hear “how come you understand this” or “how come you even know about this” at home or among their Swedish friends after accomplishing “simple daily” tasks, like the use of technology or knowing about an ongoing news.
3. The media images negatively impact unaccompanied Afghans’ integration prospects and alienate them in various ways:
 - a. Unaccompanied Afghans have difficulty getting fully included in schools as they cannot establish friendships with non-Afghans. The participants expressed that they tend to often hangout with those of similar nationality in their school, share the same lunch tables, and interact frequently among “themselves”.
 - b. Finding housing is another challenge posed to unaccompanied Afghans due to their media images. The interviewees have expressed that landlords do not trust them anymore because of their constant association with criminality in the news. In other instances, their housing requests have been rejected because of their foreign names or due to an assumed economic inability as an unaccompanied Afghan.
 - c. Although majority of the respondents have expressed concerns regarding finding a job having their media images, it is yet to be studied since 90% of the participants in this study have not actively searched for a full-time job yet. The participants with part-time jobs expressed no difficulty in this regard.
 - d. The one-sided media images impact unaccompanied Afghans’ mental health because as the respondents describe, they are “undermining”, “constantly negative”, and “humiliating”.

10. Analysis and discussion

In this section, I will analyze the results of the study using the theories of intersectionality and cultural racism. I will first present how unaccompanied Afghans describe, perceive and evaluate media images of themselves in the Swedish media and how these media narratives fit the cultural racism theory. I will then explain how these images impact unaccompanied Afghans in their day to day lives and how an intersectional perspective can help in understanding these narratives.

10.1. Unaccompanied Afghans' perceptions of their media representations

Unaccompanied Afghan immigrants are highly critical of their portrayals in the Swedish media, particularly news-related materials. All the ten participants within this study describe media images of themselves as generalist, monolithic and deficient. For instance, when asked how he perceives media images of unaccompanied Afghans in the Swedish media, Respondent 1 answered, "It [media images] is true to some extent but sometimes I feel like they exaggerate it and make it bigger and more negative than it is." In the same way, Respondent 3 adds, "There are both positive and negative images about unaccompanied Afghans but I often hear the negative things because that is the reality. The media however exaggerate the whole incident even if the incident is true." Supporting the previous two respondents, Respondent 4 says,

"I think media is not neutral and is never politically independent. They need to attract people's attention. When you for example write an Afghan rapes a Swedish woman, this becomes really viral and so many millions of people read it but if you write "an Afghan has done a good thing", maybe 10 people would see it and that too the leftists or communists. I personally have a negative attitude towards media. I think it is media's job to exaggerate a small thing in order to attract attention."

In the same pattern, Respondent 5 highlights,

"It might be just a small percentage of unaccompanied Afghans who are selling drugs and are involved in criminality. They (media) only focus on this small portion and exaggerate it to a big extent. They (media) barely focus on the 90% who enter the system, go to school and study."

Respondent 6 adds during the focus group interview,

“I personally see mostly negative images. When there is talk about Afghans, there is talk about Nordstan³ as well. There has never been a situation when people talk about Afghans but do not associate it with Nordstan or talk purely positive about Afghans because media focuses on Nordstan and that is why the Swedes take that image.” Respondent 7 confirms, “The media images do not represent a thorough image of all the unaccompanied Afghans living in Sweden. They just give a negative image that I sometimes even disagree with. Like they just refer to those selling drugs and I feel sorry that a developed country like Sweden would represent an entire nation in that way. They should not just look at those in Femman⁴ but go to high schools and talk to teachers and ask how their Afghan students behave or go to workplaces and ask their supervisors.”

As the quotes highlight, the participants in this study characterize media images of themselves as “exaggerated”, “one-dimensional”, “negative” and “generalized”. Unaccompanied Afghans’ descriptions of these media images confirm Brune (2002) and ter Wal et al’s (2005) research on media representation of immigrants, where immigrants are commonly presented as “problem”. Ter Wal et al (2005) argue that one common pattern in media representations of immigrants is their over-representation in “the problem-oriented coverage” whereas “under-representation in the nonproblem-oriented news” (2005: 424). In this context, unaccompanied Afghans are constantly associated with different types of criminality, “drug dealing”, “rape”, “Nordstan/Femman”. Such uniform and generalized representation of unaccompanied Afghans reduces them to mere “problems”, constructs criminality as their “social reality” (Trebbe and Schoenhagen 2011: 412; Gurevitch and Levy 1985: 19) and legitimizes the issue of unaccompanied Afghans as a “social problem” (Lindgren 1993: 42; Stremto 2014: 56).

As Respondent 7 puts it,

“The radio and news has just spread negative news by focusing on a very small group of [unaccompanied] Afghans, a very small minority. The news impacts the viewers and they think it is the reality. I think you cannot only refer to those in Nordstan and generalize it for all unaccompanied Afghans.”

The respondents emphasize that lack of positive images are not due to non-existence of such narratives among unaccompanied Afghans but because of media’s intention in

³ Nordstan is a central shopping area located in central Gothenburg. The area has become famous for selling drug by unaccompanied minors in the post-2015 context (Dikalow 2018; Dagerlinds 2018; Sjölander 2017).

⁴ Femman is a 3-store building inside Nordstan, housing around 50 shops (rutstore.se). The area is also famous for selling drugs by unaccompanied (Dikalow 2018; Dagerlinds 2018; Sjölander 2017).

“exaggerating” the issue or even “attracting attention”. In Respondent 6’s words, “I personally know so many Afghans who have fought all the problems and moved up the ladder, even compared to Swedes, but have never made it to news and the media, but if someone does something in Nordstan, media focuses on it”. In the same manner, Respondent 6 adds, “There is a boy called Mushtaq, who has won several medals in boxing in the whole Sweden but nobody knows him or talks about him. When we say Mushtaq, they say what a weird name. But if you say Ahmad or Mustafa, everyone recognizes it due to the constant association of these names with criminality”.

Respondent 7 also confirms,

“I cannot judge their lives or give opinion about everyone but you need to see Afghans who go to high schools, enter universities, and [their] success stories as well. There are the ones I know who work really hard and positive. You cannot compare everyone to each other and say such a small population represents all”.

As the respondents indicate, the Swedish media tend to prioritize negative narratives of unaccompanied Afghans over the positive. While “Afghanness” is constantly presented as “problem”, “Swedishness” is presented to be the “norm”, situated in the exact opposite pole from “Afghanness”. To elaborate, Respondent 6 states, “media does not focus on someone who has been so successful, like a successful Afghan, because then the person would become a “normal” person in this society, like the rest”. Similarly, Respondent 4 highlights, “I think negative news about immigrants are too much and it is because they are not normal people and are not part of the social norms in the eyes of media”.

As the respondents point out, “Swedishness” is generally considered as the “normal” and “successful” in this context whereas other identities like “immigrants”, “Afghans”, and “unaccompanied” are framed as not “normal”, “unsuccessful”, “different”, “outside social norms”, “them”. Such “inflexible generalization” of identities by mass media draws “us versus them” boundaries between Swedes and non-Swedes and leads to exclusion of “others”, or unaccompanied Afghans in this case (Bedström 2003; Wikforss 2019 i *Forum*). Balibar (1991) considers such acts of “othering” which lead to exclusion and oppression of a certain group as neo-racism. It is neo-racism because such stereotypical formation of certain groups and

“inflexible generalization” in turn leads to hostility against this certain group (Allport 1954: 9, 12; Balibar 1991: 18).

Unaccompanied Afghans also highlight the difference in media coverage between crimes committed by Swedes and Afghans. In their words, when one unaccompanied Afghan in Nordstan commits a crime or sells drugs, it becomes a marker of “culture” and identity for the entire group while if a Swede commits a crime, it is presented on “individual” grounds. After watching parts of *Dömnda för våldtäkt* documentary, Respondent 6 says,

“I agree with the documentary that the culture in Afghanistan is different than here and this environment is appealing and new to the Afghan boys. These boys who have come here have mostly been in countries with different social and sexual regulations, like they would be asked not to interact with women and girls and such. This makes them have a problem in terms of maintaining their relationship with girls and women. They have not had a good education and that is why when they come here they come with their misperceptions which eventually leads to rape and other sexual harassments.”

As the Respondent’s summary of the documentary shows, the documentary puts a lot of focus on “Afghanness”, “cultural difference”, and different gender relations in explaining why unaccompanied Afghans are overrepresented in the crime samples in Sweden (see *Dömnda för våldtäkt* for more). Disagreeing with the previous respondent, Respondent 7 says, “Such documentaries give a wrong impression of Afghan culture to Swedes and makes them afraid and cautious around us [unaccompanied Afghans]”.

Nevertheless, while presenting criminal acts committed by Swedes, media adopts an “individualistic” or “psychological” perspective. As Respondent 1 says, “Swedes and people of other ethnicities commit a lot of crimes too but nobody sees a thing of them in the news. Why is there so much focus on Afghans?” Similarly, Respondent 8 puts it,

“I think in a modern country, like Sweden, there are all sorts of people including good and bad, drug addicts, alcoholics, and all sorts of them. There are Swedes involved in criminality as well but nobody says all Swedes are so, right. It is the same for Afghans and immigrants that both good and bad exist.”

What is common among all these quotes is the double standards in representations of criminality between these groups. To elaborate, the Swedish media tend to explain criminality committed by unaccompanied Afghans based on a “cultural” framework and equate them with

“patriarchal”, “gender unequal”, “not knowledgeable of norms”, and “ignorant”, while the same crime by a Swede will be explained through individualistic frameworks. The insights by unaccompanied Afghans confirm Lappalainen (2005) and Brune’s (2002) studies on media portrayal of immigrants. Both scholars assert that through such biased media coverage between crimes committed by Swedes and non-Swedes, Swedish media constantly build a positive “civilized” image of “Swedes” and attributes negative stereotypical traits to non-Swedes (Lappalainen 2005: 8; Brune 2002: 378-379). According to Balibar (1991) and Allport (1954), cultural racism occurs when the homogenic superior group, the Swedish media in this case, use “culture” as a tool to define others, unaccompanied Afghans here, and impose their own “values” on them.

Unaccompanied Afghans also consider media images of themselves problematic as they lack adequate reasoning and do not take the socio-economic factors leading to criminality of unaccompanied Afghans into account. To be clear, while media constantly associate unaccompanied Afghans with criminality, they do not go in-depth into the problematic. According to Respondent 2,

“I don't think that media show the whole reality because they just focus on someone's actions. Like in news, they say someone has committed a crime but never focus on the reasons, or why they do that. They never look at why someone did it, maybe the person has been rejected by the Migration Agency, maybe they have been depressed, and maybe they had no money and no means of survival. I feel like it is not a realistic image because you need to know the reason why they do what they do.”

Respondent 4 emphasizes the same issue by saying,

“The news shapes an image of you without asking why you did so. Go and talk to unaccompanied Afghans and ask why he did what he did. Nobody looks for reasons. It is easy to blame unaccompanied Afghans. They paint a very black picture of Afghans without addressing the reasons.”

In the same manner, Respondent 1 asks,

“When Afghans commit crimes, or lie about their ages, go ask them ‘why’ first. What would a Swede do if they were instead of an Afghan immigrant, were left with no housing, no money, have had a long illegal journey and are highly indebted, and face deportation?”

As the quotes demonstrate, unaccompanied Afghans consider media representation of themselves problematic as the content lack immigrants’ socio-cultural background (ter Wal et al 2005: 937-938).

Unaccompanied Afghans' media images also become problematic while analyzed in a postcolonial context. According to Balibar, moving from pre- to post-colonial age, the notion of immigration has replaced "race" (1991: 21). To be sure, immigration from third-world contexts to Europe put the European countries into a new paradigm, in which the colonized return to "invade" their former colonizers (ibid). Although the same pattern of "colonized" and "colonizer" does not apply between Swedes and Afghans from a historical perspective, the argument is applicable to the immigration pattern. As Respondent 6 elaborates, "they think we came here to spread the war culture or Islam". Similarly Respondent 1 adds, "they think we are all warriors coming to fight here". In this sense, the "invasion" is supposed to happen through spread of a certain "culture" and religion. This argument in turn turns "incompatibility of lifestyles and traditions" between both the cultures into the dominant theme within immigration discourses in Europe (Balibar 1991: 21).

To conclude this section, the Swedish media often use "culture" as their explanatory framework in portraying unaccompanied Afghans. Unaccompanied Afghans; however, perceive such portrayals as generalist, monolithic, superficial and problem-oriented. Moreover, mass media present both Afghanness and Swedishness as unchangeable opposing values and reinforce "othering" as well as polarized "us vs them" discourses. The deficient media images fit Balibar's (1991) theory of neo-racism or cultural racism (Bedström 2003) as the use of culture leads to patterns of oppression, exclusion and segregation for this group and suppresses their integration prospects in the Swedish society, which I will turn to in the next section.

10.2. Media images and unaccompanieds' integration prospects

In this section, I will explain in detail how deficient media images impact unaccompanied Afghans in their day to day lives and their integration prospects in the Swedish society. I will use an intersectional perspective to explain these narratives. Overall, the respondents within this study assert that the media images negatively impact their integration prospects and alienate them in various ways, in school and society. Difficulty with housing and connecting to nonAfghans in schools, and worsening mental health are some of the commonly mentioned challenges which stem from deficient media images for this group.

While the participants within this study provide a similar account for their experiences, the integration opportunities resulting from these experiences have by no means been

homogenous. Rather, their response and negotiation methods have been based on situations they have particularly been situated in and the alternatives available to them based on their age, ethnicity, gender, nationality, background, network, and other such power structures.

10.2.1. Integration through school

School is one of the main institutions in integrating unaccompanied immigrants into the new host society (Andersson et al 2010; Pinson, Arnot and Candappa 2010; Wernesjö 2014). The importance is due to the fact that unaccompanied minors get an opportunity to establish new relationships, overcome feelings of loneliness and separation in school (Andersson et al 2010; Pinson, Arnot and Candappa 2010; Kohli 2006, 2007; Wernesjö 2014).

For unaccompanied Afghans; however, the experience has been different. Challenged by the media images of themselves, unaccompanied Afghans have difficulty establishing connections with Swedes and established immigrants in schools. According to Respondent 5,

“The negative [media] images create an environment where people can't trust each other. People would not think it was just one person [who committed a crime] but that every Afghan is like “that”. The other thing is finding a friend, when they [media] say all Afghans rape, it causes a fear in the mind of Swedish girls and classmates, and makes them not to become friends with us. Overall it creates a lack of trust in the society and it makes integrating in the society very difficult”.

Respondent 10, who lived his entire life as an immigrant in Iran prior to moving to Sweden, also says,

“In my school, Swedes do not become friends with immigrants and are usually just among themselves. It starts to become like Iran where Afghans and Iranians lived very segregated. It does not become a society where everyone gets integrated together. The country gets divided. Arabs, Iranians, Afghans, all separately. In my school, I see how Swedes are separate in the lunch table and immigrants are separate. Even if a Swede comes to sit in a table with immigrants, they say “you are ‘Svensson’, do not sit with us”.

Respondent 3 adds, “The media images introduce Swedes to Afghan culture and make them afraid. It makes them cautious and scared and that is why they do not interact as much with us”. As the quotes indicate, deficient media images creates boundaries and mistrust between Afghans and non-Afghans, leading to their alienation of unaccompanied Afghans in schools. The participants expressed that they tend to often hangout with those of similar nationality in their school, share the same lunch table, and interact frequently among “themselves”. Pinson, Arnot and Candappa (2010: 151-154) refer to this experience of unaccompanied Afghans in schools as

patterns of “exclusion within inclusion”. The term refers to the fact that unaccompanied Afghans are included in school, yet experience exclusion and miss the sense of “belonging” to school due to their ascribed “subordinate” category (Stremto 2014: 33). To be sure, unaccompanied Afghans’ identities as “immigrant”, “Afghan”, “male”, “child”, “Muslim”, “Hazara”, “nonwhite”, combined with the negatively loaded media content put them in a stigmatized position in the Swedish society, which in turn stands on the way for their integration (Stremto 2014: 56). This sense of “exclusion within inclusion” for unaccompanied Afghans within schools is produced in intersection of various power structures that they are surrounded with (Yuval-Davis 2011).

The combination of these identities also impacts the integration prospects of unaccompanied Afghans in schools as they receive different treatment from teachers. Studies on the schooling patterns for unaccompanied children in Sweden show that the teachers in preparatory schools consider this group as “flawed” and “inadequate”, and thus maintain a very low expectation of these students (Bunar 2010; Wernesjö 2014; Stretmo and Melander 2013; Stremto 2014: 192). Respondent 10’s experiences confirm,

“They [the teachers and classmates] think we do not understand anything. That our country is a desert and we are way behind the world. For example, they think I cannot even use a simple computer or a desktop, and if I go and want to do something very simple, they would ask if I am able to do it. They think the same about all. That we have not seen anything, that I have a small worldview, and cannot do anything. While it is not true”.

Confirming Respondent 10’s position, Respondent 4 adds,

“if there is a heavy psychological, literature, or philosophical discussion and you take part in it, they get shocked and ask, “how come you understand this?” they say they had no idea that I read these books, know about these people or are aware of these things. They think that we Afghans know so little, but after getting to know me they understand that their perception was inaccurate.”

As the quotes by the respondents demonstrate, unaccompanied Afghans are in a constant struggle to prove themselves against the generalist, Eurocentric media portrayals of themselves (Stremto 2014: 58). In this case, a different treatment of these students by the teachers is the established “normal” and “normative” behavior (Mattson 2010: 92) and such “normalities” lead to patterns of invisible exclusion and repression for this group (Stremto 2014: 57). The respondents in this study feel undermined to frequently hear “how come you understand this” or

“how come you even know about this” at school after accomplishing “simple daily” tasks.

Although majority of the participants within this study belong to the same categories, the categories are by no means static or unchangeable (Kaukko and Wernesjö 2016: 16-17). Hence, membership within the same category neither indicates inter-categorical homogeneity nor attributes similar traits to its members (Yuval-Davis 2006: 199). To be sure, unaccompanied Afghans have different levels of integration and experiences despite the shared identities they hold. For instance, in contrary to Respondent 3, 5, 10, Respondent 1 mentions, “negative images kill my courage. It takes away my motivation. But I have not personally faced any troubles in terms of making friends”. This contrary pattern can be explained through the fact that these categories are fluid and independent and interact with other independent categories at the same time, and thus it is misleading to predict the outcome just by “belonging” to a category (YuvalDavis 2011: 7; Stremto 2014: 57).

To sum this section up, generalist images of unaccompanied Afghans in the Swedish media combined with multiple identities they hold impact their integration prospects in schools. Such one-sided media images prevent unaccompanied Afghans from making new friends and socializing with non-Afghans in schools. It also leads to feelings of being undermined as, filled with such media images, the teachers treat them differently and maintain a low expectation of them. Although the experiences are similar in common, it is important not to treat unaccompanied Afghans as homogenous group (Yuval-Davis 2011: 7; Stremto 2014: 57).

In the next section, I explain how these media images impact their integration prospects in terms of finding a job and housing for unaccompanied Afghans.

10.2.2. Finding housing and job

Access to housing and labor market are two main keys in integrating into a new society and getting accepted as “normal” active citizens (Rogova 2014: 19, 46). In Sweden, the antidiscrimination law articulates equal access to housing for everyone, regardless of their background (SFS 2008:567). However, discrimination in the housing and renting market for those with immigrant background is a prevalent challenge throughout the country (Rogova 2014: 46).

Before turning 18, unaccompanied Afghans are categorized as children and thus are entitled to housing by the Swedish Board of Health and Welfare (*socialstyrelsen*) (Stremto 2014:

20). Nevertheless, access to free “guaranteed” housing is no longer available once they become 18 and are categorized as adults. The participants in this study continuously mention that they struggle in finding housing once they turn 18 mainly because of their identities and the media images associated with them. According to Respondent 3,

“Identity is a huge issue both in the work and housing market due to its association to criminality. When I was looking for a house, everyone was after my name and where I come from. As soon as they heard my name, they would say it resembles some kind of criminal and would not rent their house to me. Same in the job market. People are not open to Afghans and Arabs, and thus these identities have a higher risk of entering the black market than blonds. The media images prevents Afghans from being accepted into the society. It causes serious problems in the job and housing market.”

Respondent 8 adds,

“The news is just creating a negative image for those living in Sweden so that they believe this thing is common. It caused problem for me when I was looking for housing for the first time. I have been looking for a house for one year and every time I find a landlord on *Blocket* website and introduce myself and tell that I am an unaccompanied from Afghanistan, they tell me we cannot trust you and do not know if you have a permanent job, and become really cold. They tell me we cannot trust unaccompanied Afghans at the present time.”

As the above quotes demonstrate, their identities as unaccompanied Afghans combined with the one-sided media images limit their access to the housing market and thus suppress their integration prospects. According to Crenshaw the housing struggle that the unaccompanied Afghans experience is an example of structural intersectionality, where one “burden” intersects with other “pre-existing vulnerabilities” creating “another dimension of disempowerment” (1989: 1249). In this case, “adulthood” and lack of housing, a new “burden” for unaccompanied, intersects with their previous vulnerabilities, such as economic dependency on the government, language barrier, their “culture”, religion, “Afghanness”, “masculinity” and their media images. In other words, their limited access to housing has to do with multiple layers of identity they have, and the social, economic, and political world they are situated in (Crenshaw 1989: 1250). Nevertheless, while Crenshaw (1981) limits structural intersectionality to categories of race, gender and sex, more power axes, such as ethnicity, class, nationality, citizenship, immigration, sexuality, age, and geographical location within Sweden, are involved in shaping the experiences of unaccompanied Afghans in terms of housing (Yuval-Davis 2011: 9, 2006).

Similarly, respondents express their worry regarding their access to labor market in Sweden. Respondent 5; for instance, says, “one of the ways to integrate in the society is to get a job and right now, employers do not easily trust Afghans and won't give them a job”. Along the same lines, Respondent 10 highlights, “the images have 100% negative impact and makes it even more difficult for the boys to find a job”. Despite all the mentioned concerns, the participants with part-time jobs expressed no difficulty in finding a job. At the time of the interview, 5 out of ten respondents were doing part-time jobs besides their schools at diverse places such as the elderly care, teaching musical instruments, ambassador in a cultural house, and oil-pump stations. The other four emphasized that they would like to, and have the need to, work but do not have the right because they failed to provide adequate identity documents at the Migration Agency. Only one had a full-time job. Since 90% of the participants in this study have not actively searched for a full-time job yet, access to job market and how media images impact the job search for this group is yet to be studied.

In short, finding housing is another challenge posed to unaccompanied Afghans due to their media images and multiple identities they associate with. The interviewees have expressed that landlords do not trust them anymore because of their frequent association with criminality, or that their requests have been rejected because of other aspects of their identity, like their foreign “names” or the assumed economic inabilities.

10.2.3. Integration and mental health

Promoting mental health and well-being is an important factor for the establishment and integration of immigrants in the new society (Priebe and Giacco 2018). Migration experiences for immigrants taking the hazardous Mediterranean journey are usually complex, stressful and traumatic (ibid :1). These mental traumas can further escalate in the asylum process, due to the waiting periods, and while adapting to the new host country (Priebe and Giacco 2018: vi). For unaccompanied Afghans in Sweden, beside these factors, their mental health is negatively impacted by the prevalent negative media images.

The respondents within this study consider news on unaccompanied Afghans utterly “undermining” and “humiliating”. As Respondent 2 explains, “the news does not encourage you but undermines you, makes you feel less of a person constantly”. Respondent 1 agrees, “the news negatively impacts my mood and frustrates me. They just give statistics of who did what crime.

Gives me such negative feelings every day.” Similarly,

Respondent 7 asserts,

“When an immigrant commits a crime, it creates such negativity in your mind. The news makes me frustrated and sad inside. I keep thinking with myself that maybe my friends and classmates see me the same as the person in the news or maybe they think that all immigrants are the same. That every Afghan or even everyone, whose hair is black, is criminal.”

As the quotes by the respondents elaborate, the frequent negative media images about unaccompanied impact their “mood” and trigger feelings of “humiliation”, being “undermined” and “frustration”. Looking at these experiences from an intersectional perspective, the mental health of unaccompanied is impacted by “the structural conditions” under which they find themselves (Wernesjö 2011 in Stremto 2014: 33). To be clear, unaccompanied Afghans carry feelings of trauma due to their experiences back at home and the journey they take while reaching to Europe (Priebe and Giacco 2018). These mental health challenges are further escalated due to the multiple identities they own and the situations surrounding them. As an “Afghan”, “male”, “unaccompanied”, “Hazara”, “immigrant” in Sweden, the respondents have to constantly deal with the media images of themselves not only while interacting with people but also inside. With mental health being a key factor to integration, such feelings worsen their mental health and thus suppress their integration opportunities. These feelings, triggered by negative news on unaccompanied Afghans, also further marginalize this group in terms of access to information about Sweden. When asked how they deal with the feelings resulted by the media images, 7 out of 10 respondents have said that they tremendously reduced the hours they spend reading and/or watching news or totally disconnected from news.

This section has shown that integration (or lack thereof) does not function on its own but is produced in intersection of multiple identities that unaccompanied Afghans own and the situations in which they find themselves. For unaccompanied Afghans in this study, a combination of their identities as “Afghan”, “unaccompanied”, “male”, “immigrant”, “Hazara”, “their age” and the deficient media images associated with them suppress their integration prospects. The intersection of these identities limits their access to housing, stands on the way of their inclusion in schools, and impacts their mental health.

11. Conclusion and future research

The purpose of this thesis was to study unaccompanied Afghans' perceptions of media images of themselves in Sweden, and the impact of these media images on their integration in the Swedish society. The first part of the thesis has looked at how unaccompanied Afghans perceive and evaluate media images of themselves in the Swedish media using a cultural racism perspective. As explained in the results and analysis sections, unaccompanied Afghans perceive media images of themselves as highly generalist, monolithic, problem-oriented and deficient. According to the respondents, the Swedish media tend to associate unaccompanied Afghans with criminality and portray them as "problems". The respondents add that the Swedish media often fail to provide adequate reasoning in explaining unaccompanied Afghans, and do not take socioeconomic factors leading to their performances into account. Such monolithic representation of unaccompanied Afghans is a form of cultural racism because "culture" is used by the dominant group, Swedish media, to define a minority group as a way to further alienate them in the society.

In the second part, I have used an intersectional perspective to investigate the relationship between media images of unaccompanied Afghans and their integration prospects in Sweden. I have shown that these deficient media images negatively impact unaccompanied Afghans' integration prospects and alienate them in school and society. Unaccompanied Afghans; for instance, have difficulty establishing connections with non-Afghans, particularly Swedes and established immigrants, in schools thanks to these deficient media images. The participants expressed that they tend to hang out with those of similar nationality in their schools, share the same lunch tables, and interact frequently among "themselves" because "Swedes" cannot trust or are "afraid" and "cautious" around Afghans.

Access to housing, another key factor in integration into the new society, is the next challenge posed to unaccompanied Afghans due to their media images. The interviewees have expressed that landlords do not trust them anymore due to "their" constant association with criminality. In other instances, their requests have been rejected due to their foreign names or an assumed economic inability associated with the group. Using an intersectional perspective, this section has shown that integration (or lack thereof) does not function on its own but is produced in intersection of multiple identities that unaccompanied Afghans own and the situations in which they find themselves. For unaccompanied Afghans in this study, a combination of their

identities as “Afghan”, “unaccompanied”, “male”, “immigrant”, “Hazara”, “their age” and the deficient media images associated with them suppresses their integration prospects. The intersection of these identities limits their access to housing, stands on the way of their inclusion in schools, and impacts their mental health.

By focusing on the narratives of unaccompanied Afghans, this study has not only shown the relationship between media images and their integration but also contributed to integrating their voices into the literature. However, access to labor market for unaccompanied Afghans is another understudied area which needs to be explored using the narratives of this group. In spite of the significance, this study could not generate any results in relation to unaccompanied Afghans’ access to labor market since 90% of the participants in this study have not actively searched for a full-time job yet. As the issue of immigration and integration continue to challenge the Swedish government in the present time, it is empirically relevant to study unaccompanied Afghans’ access to the job market. It is also an empirically significant area to be studied as the voices, narratives and stories of unaccompanied are undermined in the literature and such a study could contribute tremendously to the research on unaccompanied Afghans.

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Appendix 1

Interview date:

Length of the interview:

Introduced by:

Introduction

1. Name:
2. Duration of stay in Sweden:
3. Status (residence permit or asylum seeker):
4. Age:
5. How did you come to Sweden:
6. Occupation:
7. Do you live in a refugee camp or with family? Moved between the two?

Warm-up questions

1. What were your expectations before moving here? Were they challenged after you came here? In what ways?
2. What are some of your proudest achievements since you moved to Sweden?

Media related questions

1. Do you watch or read news on the Swedish media? How often? Which channels do you use the most? If you do not use/read/watch Swedish media, why not?
2. What other sources do you use to get news about Sweden?
3. What do you think about the representation of Afghan unaccompanied in the Swedish media? Do you agree or disagree with them? Are they painting a fair picture of you and your life? Why or why not?
4. Have you faced a situation when someone in real life challenged you because of what they read or saw on TV about Afghans? How have you reacted? (How do you negotiate these media images in your daily life?)
5. On 22 August 2018, SVT's uppdrag granskning has published a documentary called *dömda för våldtäkt* (convicted for rape) which maps the recorded crimes in Sweden based on ethnicity. The documentary highlights that Afghan youth men are one of the most highlighted groups in the sample. Have you watched it? What do you think about it? Do you find it problematic, why or why not? (Watch minutes of documentary and look through the printed news articles).
6. Do you feel represented enough in the Swedish mass media? Do they talk enough about you as an Afghan unaccompanied immigrant? Is it too little/too much, why?
7. Do these media images help you/prevent you from integrating in Sweden? Does it create problems in terms of finding friends in school or connecting to people at your workplace? Or finding a job?
8. Do these media images prevent/encourage you to use/watch/read Swedish media?

Concluding remarks

1. Do you know others I could contact to interview?
2. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix 2

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The screenshot shows a news website with several headlines and articles. The main headline is 'Granska brottsligheten hos de ensamkommande' (Check the criminality of unaccompanied minors) from Stockholm, published on December 4, 2017. Other headlines include 'Minst 78 procent av de 9.000 afghanerna har ljugit om sin ålder' (At least 78% of the 9,000 Afghans have lied about their age) and 'Fler självmord bland ensamkommande' (More suicides among unaccompanied minors). The website also features a navigation bar with categories like 'Nyheter', 'Sport', 'TV', 'Hälsa', 'Mat & Dryck', 'Kultur', 'Ledare', 'DN Debatt', and 'DN Åsikt'. A sidebar on the left has a sub-headline 'Många ensamkommande afghaner mår dåligt' (Many unaccompanied Afghan minors are doing poorly). The main content area includes a photo of a person and a text snippet: 'Nya lagförslaget ger dem rätt att stanna • Expressen har undersökt: Vad vet vi om de 9000 afghanerna?' (The new proposal gives them the right to stay • Expressen has investigated: What do we know about the 9,000 Afghans?).