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**Our "southern brothers". Photographs of Belgian refugees taken in the Netherlands during the early months of the First World War, 1914-1915.**

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## Our “southern brothers”.

Photographs of Belgian refugees taken in the Netherlands during the early months of the First World War, 1914-1915.



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## Introduction

“It becomes woe to the heart of the beholder when he sees all this misery, which neither ability nor age spares.”<sup>1</sup> This was written by the local newspaper of Middelburg in the Netherlands on September 9 1914. A month earlier Germany had invaded Belgium which led to millions of Belgians fleeing their home. Close to one million found refuge in the Netherlands, which remained neutral during the First World War.<sup>2</sup> Naturally, the arrival of so many refugees, which remains the largest influx of refugees to date in the Netherlands, was unexpected and novel. This sparked a humanitarian campaign and led to large scale government involvement in humanitarian actions. During their stay, many photographs were taken of Belgian refugees. However, the photographs have not yet been used as historical sources but merely as illustrations in scholarly works. This thesis hopes to change this and provide new insights into the views the Dutch held regarding the Belgian refugees. This will be done by analysing photographs taken of Belgian refugees across three cities in the Netherlands. The choice to analyse photographs from three different cities was made to get obtain a general overview of the country. This might show similarities or differences between places. Photographs can provide information on material culture and practical uses.<sup>3</sup> Additionally they can tell something about the social reality of the time period. It shows the ideology, ideas and identities that were present.<sup>4</sup> The mentalities held by the photographers and the message can help us understand how certain subjects were viewed in the past.<sup>5</sup> However, photographs are not reflections of reality and must be placed within their context.<sup>6</sup> They might tell whether the refugees were seen as victims or threats.<sup>7</sup> They are interpretations of the world, which can show different interpretations of the Belgian refugees.<sup>8</sup> Photographs were widely spread through illustrated magazines, as picture postcards or in other ways. They thus had a large audience which they could influence. Lulu Rodriguez, a scholar in communication, and Daniela Dimitrova, a professor of journalism and communication, argue that one advantage photographs have is that they seem closer to reality. They have the power to create strong emotional and immediate signals.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Uit stad en Provincie’, *Middelburgsche Courant* (9 September 1914) page 1, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010681227:mpeg21:p001>.

<sup>2</sup> M. de Waele, ‘België en Nederland in augustus 1914’ in: J. B. C. Kruishoop en Martin Bossenbroek eds., *Vluchten voor de Grootte Oorlog: Belgen in Nederland, 1914-1918* (Amsterdam 1988) 11-21, 16.

<sup>3</sup> Joeri Januarius, ‘Picturing the Everyday Life of Limburg Miners: Photographs as a Historical Source’, *International Review of Social History* 53:2 (2008) 293-312, 294.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The use of Images as Historical Evidence* (London 2005), 36.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, 36.

<sup>6</sup> Judith Keilbach, ‘Photographs: Reading the Image for History’ in: Nany Partners and Sarah R. Foot eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Historical Theory* (London 2013) 439-457, 440 and 443; Jesús Baigorri-Jálon, ‘The Use of Historical Sources, A Case Study’ in: Kayako Takeda and Jesús Baigorri-Jálon eds., *New Insights in the History of Interpreting* (Amsterdam 2016) 167-191, 169.

<sup>7</sup> Keith Greenwood and TJ Thomson, ‘Framing the Migration: A Study of Photographs Showing People Fleeing War and Persecution’, *The International Communication Gazette* 0:0 (2019) 1-24, 2 and 6.

<sup>8</sup> T. de Vries, ‘Geschiedschrijving en fotografie’, *Groniek* 111 (1991) 7-22.

<sup>9</sup> Lulu Rodriguez and Daniela Dimitrova, ‘The Levels of Visual Framing’, *Journal of Visual Literacy* 30:1 (2011) 48-65, 50.

Historian Peter Burke argues that “Images can bear witness to what is not put into words.”<sup>10</sup> They provide information through distinctions, through which they might have tried to distance the refugees from the Dutch public.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, this thesis adds to a more nuanced understanding of how the Dutch public viewed the refugees.

Analysing photographs of Belgian refugees can help us understand how framing of refugees in photographs has changed over time. In recent years photographs have played a prominent role in typifying the refugees as, for example, a threat to European safety.<sup>12</sup> It is interesting to see if this has always been the case. The question this thesis will try to answer is: *What frames were used in photographs taken of Belgian refugees in the Netherlands during the early months of the First World War and why were these frames used?* This will help understand the perception of the Belgian refugees by the Dutch public in this period better. Scholars have already done research on the public perception of the refugees using archival material like newspapers, (local) government documents or reports. However they have not yet used photographs. For example, in 2018 a thesis was written about reactions to the Belgian refugees in the Netherlands during the First World War using national, provincial and local newspapers which concluded that overall there were more sympathetic opinions expressed than critical.<sup>13</sup> This thesis tries to expand upon these findings by analysing the photographs which can uncover ideas that were held at that time.

In order to obtain more of an overview, photographs of three Dutch cities are analysed. Furthermore, the focus is on the earlier months of the war, when the influx of the refugees and the public's attention were at their height and therefore more material was produced.

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<sup>10</sup> Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, 37.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, 164.

<sup>12</sup> Alice Masarri, *Visual Securitisation: Humanitarian Representations and Migration Governance* (Cham 2021) 103.

<sup>13</sup> See Annabel M. Buiten, “Die karavaan van wee en wanhoop.” Reacties of de Belgische vluchtelingen in Nederland tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog.” (Master thesis Sociale Geschiedenis, Radboud Universiteit, Nijmegen 2018).

### *Theory and hypothesis*

This thesis uses the theory of framing. Framing is defined as “the process by which people develop a particular conceptualisation of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue.”<sup>14</sup> Another way to define framing is the way a message or set of messages might repeat or highlight an aspect of reality.<sup>15</sup> This is done by selecting some aspects of a reality and making them more salient in a communication. Framing promotes a particular problem definition, interpretation or recommendation.<sup>16</sup> Viewers are influenced by this framing in their conception of the subject. Visual framing is done by the choices on subject, the angle, perspective or editing made regarding the photograph by the photographer and client.<sup>17</sup> Rodriguez and Dimitrova argue that images are powerful framing tools because they are less intrusive than words and require less cognitive load.<sup>18</sup>

Taking the theory and the fact that the photographs are from the early months of the war into account, this thesis hypothesises that the refugees are portrayed as victims who are in need of help but are also deserving. Furthermore, considering the neutrality stance of the Netherlands, the refugees are not expected to be framed in negatively. This is because the Dutch government was willing to accept the them in order to remain neutral. I have done previous research into the framing of Belgian refugees in three *vluchtoorden*, Gouda, Uden and Nunspeet, using photographs taken in those camps. This allows me to hypothesise that the refugees are framed in a clean and sanitised manner, and no use is made of atrocity photographs.<sup>19</sup> However, as the photographers show the initial reception, I suspect more primitive conditions in the photographs, which could have influenced the perception of the refugees by the viewers. This thesis will differ from my earlier work by focusing on a different, more specific time period, namely the early months of the war. This period saw the majority of the refugees arrive which led to chaotic situations. This was different than when the refugees were in the *vluchtoorden*. Those photographs were taken when refugees had already been in the country for at least a few weeks. The refugees were also more separated from Dutch society in the *vluchtoorden*. Moreover, this thesis uses additional sources more extensively, namely newspapers, to formulate a better understanding of local attitudes towards the refugees.

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<sup>14</sup> Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman, ‘Framing Theory’, *Annual Review of Political Science* 10:1 (2007) 103-126, 104.

<sup>15</sup> Mary Angela Bock, ‘Theorising Visual Framing: Contingency, Materiality and Ideology’, *Visual Studies* 35:1 (2020) 1-12, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Robert M. Entman, ‘Framing: Towards Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm,’ *Journal of Communication* 43:4 (1993) 51-58, 52.

<sup>17</sup> Bock, ‘Theorising Visual Framing’, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Rodriguez and Dimitrova, ‘The Levels of Visual Framing’, 51.

<sup>19</sup> Aysegul Dogan, *Vluchteling in Nederland. Een onderzoek naar de beeldvorming over Belgische vluchtelingen in Nederlandse vluchtoorden tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Seminar paper, Leiden University 2020); Aysegul Dogan, *The Perfect Refugee? A Research on the Framing of Belgian Refugees in Vluchtoord Nunspeet using Photographs, 1914-1918* (course paper, Leiden University 2023).

## Historiography

Research on the Netherlands during the First World War has seen an upsurge in publications in the past two decades. Many standard works have appeared, such as those by historians Paul Moeyes, Maartje Abbenhuis and Conny Kristel.<sup>20</sup> Paul Moeyes provides a standard work on the Netherlands and the First World War and gives an overview of Dutch society during this time. Maartje Abbenhuis looks at the neutrality policy of the country, including how this was impacted and threatened by the presence of refugees. These works all focus on the larger picture but also discuss the presence of the Belgian refugees. When it comes to literature specifically on the Belgian refugees in the Netherlands, the most important work is that of historian Evelyn de Roodt. She has researched both the realities of the stay of the refugees and the sentiments towards the refugees held by the Dutch population and the Dutch government. She has used official reports, newspaper articles, letters and diary entries by Dutch people and refugees.<sup>21</sup> De Roodt argues that, despite great initial willingness to help the refugees, more reluctance took hold among the Dutch population. In his work on the Dutch government policy that was carried out towards the refugees, E. A. van den Heuvel-Strasser writes that the war saw the continuity of the policy of hospitality despite the “soft force” that was used to push the refugees to return or move to a *vluchtoord*.<sup>22</sup> Historian Marij Leenders has shown a development from a lack of government organisation and chaotic private initiatives towards more government influence in humanitarian issues using archival material from the government, municipalities and commissions.<sup>23</sup> In recent years, locally written works, detailing the experiences of the Belgian refugees in the *vluchttoorden* have been published.<sup>24</sup> Other works detail the experiences within specific cities or provinces, such as North-Brabant, Zeeland and Amsterdam.<sup>25</sup> At the initiative of the historical society

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Moeyes, *Buiten Schot: Nederland tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog 1914-1918* (Amsterdam 2001); Maartje Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral. The Netherlands in the First World War, 1914-1918* (Amsterdam 2006); Conny Kristel, *De oorlog van anderen: Nederlanders en oorlogsgeweld, 1914-1918* (Amsterdam 2016).

<sup>21</sup> Evelyn de Roodt, *Oorlogsgasten: vluchtelingen en krijgsgevangenen in Nederland tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Zaltbommel 2000); Evelyn de Roodt ‘Reacties van Nederlanders op vluchtelingen tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog’ in: Hans Binnenveld, Martin Kraaijestein and Marja Roholl eds., *Leven naast de catastrofe: Nederland tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Hilversum 2011) 51-62.

<sup>22</sup> E. A. van den Heuvel-Strasser, ‘Vluchtelingen zorg of vreemdelingenbeleid. De Nederlandse overheid en de Belgische vluchtelingen, 1914-1915’, *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis* 99 (1986) 184-204.

<sup>23</sup> Marij Leenders, *Ongenode gasten: van traditioneel asielrecht naar immigratiebeleid, 1815-1938* (Utrecht 1993).

<sup>24</sup> See Fokke Postema, *Onafzienbare heidevlakken. Belgische vluchttoorden op de Veluwe, 1914-1918* (Barneveld 2008); Henk Hellegers, *Van heidegrond tot vluchtoord Uden: In tien weken tijd heeft Uden een Belgisch dorp* (Uden 2015); Henk Hellegers, *Van vluchtoord Uden terug naar een eenzame kale heide: Na zes jaar is het Belgisch dorp verdwenen* (Barneveld 2008); Gerard van Bruggen, *De hei is groot genoeg: Vluchtoord Ede* (Barneveld 2008); Frans Vandenhende, *Belgische vluchtelingen in Gouda tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog: In het spoor van Emiel de Bruyne* (Gent 2017).

<sup>25</sup> Henk van der Linden, Pauline Onderwater and Tom Sas eds., *Brabant en de Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Soesterberg 2016); Henk van der Linden and Leo van der Vliet eds., *Zeeland en de Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Soesterberg 2015); Drs. C. Nagtegaal, ‘Toevlucht in Amsterdam. Een quaestie van Hollandsch fatsoen’ in: Ron Blom ed., *Amsterdam en de Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Soesterberg 2014) 59-111.

of Bergen op Zoom, a work focusing on the lives of the Belgian refugees in the city was published.<sup>26</sup> Most of the aforementioned works used government or municipal documents, reports, letters or newspapers. Photographs have thus not been used as primary sources.

Other than the Netherlands, the United Kingdom also sheltered many Belgian refugees.<sup>27</sup> Historian Jacqueline Jenkinson has looked at the British response to the Belgian refugees using government documents and newspaper articles. She argues that initially there was great sympathy for the refugees and that they were seen as victims of the German aggression.<sup>28</sup> This, historian Tony Kushner writes, was part of the idea of “Brave Little Belgium”. He argues that the positive reaction was part of a guilt-ridden moral battle against the Germans.<sup>29</sup>

The help given to the refugees was humanitarian aid. Humanitarian aid has utilised photography as a means to generate donations and to raise public awareness for their causes since before the First World War. Recently two volumes were published focusing on the relationship between humanitarianism and photography. Historians Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno have edited a volume on the history of Humanitarian Photography, demonstrating a wide range of humanitarian actions that used photography, starting in the late nineteenth century.<sup>30</sup> Historian Johannes Paulmann provides another overview, focusing on humanitarianism and media from the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>31</sup>

It is important not to forget the element of war. War photography was already established before the start of the First World War. Michael Griffin, a professor in media and cultural studies, states that war photographs serve as symbols for national and mythical narratives.<sup>32</sup> In her work on the cultural history between war and photography, historian Caroline Brothers, also pays special attention to photographs of refugees.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> G.A.A. Daalmans and Cees Vanwesenbeeck, *Een Belgisch dorp in een Brabantse stad: het leven van de Belgische vluchtelingen in de vluchtoorden op Bergen op Zoom 1914-1919* (Bergen op Zoom 1999).

<sup>27</sup> For more information on the experiences of Belgian refugees in other countries or other refugees during the war, see Martine Vermandere, ‘Van geliefde katten tot ongewenste kat: Belgische vluchtelingen in Engeland Tijdens WO1’, *FARO. Steunpunt voor Cultureel Erfgoed* vzw 2 (2016) 34-39; William Buck, ‘Come and find Sanctuary in Eire,’ The Experiences of Ireland’s Belgian Refugees during the First World War’, *Immigrants & Minorities* 34:2 (2016) 192-209; Kieran D. Taylor, ‘The Relief of Belgian Refugees in the Archdiocese of Glasgow during the First World War: ‘A Crusade of Christianity’, *The Innes Review* 69:2 (2018) 147-164; Michaël Amara, ‘Belgian Refugees during the First World War (France, Britain, Netherlands)’ in: Peter Gatrell and Lyubov Zhyanko eds., *Europe on the Move: Refugees in the Era of the Great War* (Manchester 2017) 197-214; Peter Gatrell, ‘Refugees and Forced Migrants during the First World War’, *Immigrants & Minorities* 26:1-2 (2008) 82-110; Peter Purseigle, ‘A Wave on to Our Shores: The Exile and Resettlement of Refugees from the Western Front, 1914-1918’, *Contemporary European History* 16:4 (2007) 427-444.

<sup>28</sup> Jacqueline Jenkinson, ‘Soon Gone, Long Forgotten: Uncovering British Responses to Belgian Refugees during the First World War’, *Immigrants & Minorities* 34:2 (2016) 101-112, 106.

<sup>29</sup> Tony Kushner, ‘Local Heroes: Belgian Refugees in Britain during the First World War’, *Immigrants & Minorities* 18:1 (1999) 1-28, 3 and 7.

<sup>30</sup> Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno eds., *Humanitarian Photography: A History* (Cambridge 2015).

<sup>31</sup> Johannes Paulmann ed., *Humanitarianism and Media. 1900 to the Present* (Oxford; New York 2018).

<sup>32</sup> Michael Griffin, ‘The Great War Photographs: Constructing Myths of History and Photojournalism’ in: Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt eds., *Picturing the Past: Media, history and photography* (Urbana 1999) 122-157.

<sup>33</sup> Caroline Brothers, *War and Photography* (London 1997), 158.



There is a substantial body of works on refugee photography, however there is more to be done.<sup>34</sup> Caroline Lenette, an associate professor of refugee studies, argues that analysing photographs of refugees can shed light on current refugee issues from different perspectives across time. This is because the prominent themes are still relevant today, though with more contradictory refugee regimes.<sup>35</sup> Concerning photographs of earlier groups of refugees, Sonja de Laat, a scholar in visual theory and cultural history, has analysed Lewis Hine's photographs of refugees after the First World War.<sup>36</sup> Fay Anderson, an associate professor in media, film and journalism, has researched Australian press photographs of Jewish refugees before and after the Second World War.<sup>37</sup> More recent refugee photographs have also been analysed by Roland Bleiker, a professor of international relations, David Campbell, a scholar focused on visual culture, Emma Hutchinson, a scholar of interdisciplinary politics and international relations, and Xzarina Nicholson, a scholar of anthropology. They have shown that newspaper images of asylum seekers to Australia predominantly framed them in dehumanising and political ways using photographs that depict large groups or boats. They further state that individual portraits are more likely to create compassion and empathy.<sup>38</sup> Caroline Lenette and Sienna Cleland, a criminologist, argue however that in recent years a shift in the Australian visual representation of Syrian asylum seekers has occurred, moving towards re-humanisation of the refugees.<sup>39</sup>

### *Material and Method*

For this thesis 24 photographs of Belgian refugees have been analysed. The photographs were taken in three different cities across the Netherlands. Photographs from Bergen op Zoom, a small city near the Belgian border, are included. Secondly, photographs from Middelburg, the provincial capital of the border province of Zeeland, located further away from the border, are analysed. Amsterdam, the capital which is farthest away from the border with Belgium, provides the final group of photographs. The photographs are taken from three online, local archives, *West-Brabants*, *Zeeuws Archief* and *Archief Gemeente Amsterdam*. The photographs of Amsterdam and Middelburg form a series, while those of Bergen op Zoom have been selected by the author. There are multiple problems and issues

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<sup>34</sup> See for example Xu Zhang and Leo Hellmueller, 'Visual Framing of the European Refugee Crisis in *Der Spiegel* and *CNN International*: Global Journalism in News Photographs', *The International Communication Gazette* 79:5 (2017) 483-510; Linda Ziberi, Lara Martin Lengel and Artin Limani, 'Visualising Conflict: Analysing Visual Narratives of Photojournalistic Images of Balkan War Refugees', *Studies in media and Communication* 11:6 (2023) 334-346.

<sup>35</sup> Caroline Lenette, 'Writing with Light: An Iconographic-Iconologic Approach to Refugee Photography', *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 17:2 (2016).

<sup>36</sup> Sonya de Laat, 'In Then Out of the Frame: Lewis Hine's Photographs of Refugees for the American Red Cross, 1918-20', *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs* 3:2 (2021) 5-17.

<sup>37</sup> Fay Anderson, 'Desirable Types': Australian Press Photography and Jewish Refugees, 1935-49', *Australian Historical Studies* 54:2 (2023) 221-246.

<sup>38</sup> Roland Bleiker e.a., 'The Visual Dehumanisation of Refugees', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 48:4 (2013) 398-416, 413.

<sup>39</sup> Caroline Lenette and Sienna Cleland, 'Changing Faces. Visual Representation of Asylum Seekers in Times of Crisis', *Creative Approaches to Research* 9:1 (2016) 68-83.

involved when using photographs as sources. First, for Middelburg and Bergen op Zoom the photographer and client are not known. So, the question as to why the photographs were taken is very difficult to answer. Additionally, the identity of those pictured is unknown. Limited information is provided as to where the photographers were published. Some appeared in illustrated magazines and others are listed as picture postcards. For Middelburg and Bergen op Zoom local publishers are provided. A further difficulty is the dating. The photographs used in the thesis are all broadly dated to 1914. Because the photographs used in this thesis are taken from online archives, any additional information present on the backside of the photographs is lost. Lastly, other photographs might have been included in the series, which are now lost.

In analysing the photographs, this thesis will make use of iconography, the interpretation of images through an analysis of the details.<sup>40</sup> This means that the visible contents on the photographs will be described and then it will be ascribed meaning. First, there is the first layer of iconography, the pre-iconographic description. Here the photographic objects are described. From here, we move on to understand the conventional meaning of what is seen, the iconographic interpretation. Lastly there is the intrinsic meaning of what is photographed, the iconological interpretation. Here the underlying norms and values of a period or group are analysed.<sup>41</sup> Besides naming what or who is depicted on the photograph, which is called *denotation*, the analysis moves further to understand what ideas and values are expressed by ascribing meaning to the components, the *connotation*.<sup>42</sup> This is part of semiotics.<sup>43</sup>

Additionally, in order to gain a clearer understanding of the local attitudes, three local newspapers have also been analysed. These are *De Zoom: Dagblad van het Zuiden*, the *Middelburgsche Courant* and *De Amsterdammer: Christelijk Volksdagblad*. The last two newspapers were taken from the online archive Delpher. Delpher is a free, online archive providing access to millions of historical newspapers, books and magazines.<sup>44</sup> The search terms *Belgische vluchtelingen*, *Belgische uitwijkelingen en Belgische uitgewekenen* were used for the period of September 1 1914 to December 31 1918.<sup>45</sup> This period was chosen in order to see if the attitudes towards the refugees changed throughout the duration of the war. Though Delpher allows for searches using specific terms and time periods, the system does have its limits. Therefore, there might be some useful articles that were missed. For the local newspaper of Bergen op Zoom, microfiches of the *West-Brabants Archief* were consulted. Because of time constraints and practical reasons, such as not being able to search with specific terms, the decision was made to look for articles in the period of the September 1 1914 to

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<sup>40</sup> Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, 42.

<sup>41</sup> Januarius, 'Picturing the Everyday Life of Limburg Miners', 299.

<sup>42</sup> Theo van Leeuwen, 'Semiotics and Iconography' in: Theo van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitt eds., *Handbook of Visual Analysis* (London 2011) 92-118, 95.

<sup>43</sup> Januarius, 'Picturing the Everyday Life of Limburg Miners', 300.

<sup>44</sup> See Delpher, <https://www.delpher.nl/> (accessed May 22 2024).

<sup>45</sup> These are all different variations of the term Belgian refugees in Dutch.

May 4 1915, when the last camp in the city was mostly cleared. There are also some issues related to the use of the newspapers. First of all, the writers of the articles are not known. Furthermore, oftentimes the newspapers copied articles from other newspapers. Naturally, the newspapers do not provide a standard view of the refugees in the local areas. However, the articles might reflect some ideas and public sentiments. Furthermore, they can provide us with more practical information.

This thesis will therefore describe the elements that are visible on the photographs and try to ascribe meaning to them and understand what ideas are present. But this can only be done by knowing the context around the photographs. This is vital in using photographs as historical sources, as context allows us to assign meaning to images.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, the analysis of the photographs will be combined with the context, using literary sources, and newspapers. This thesis hopes to understand how the refugees were framed in the early months of the war, when they had just arrived in the Netherlands. It will look at the photographs city by city. This is done in order to see if any differences or similarities between the cities are visible. The first chapter will analyse eight photographs taken in the border city of Bergen op Zoom. The next chapter will analyse a photo series taken in Middelburg. Lastly, the photo series taken of the Belgian refugees in a refugee camp in Amsterdam will be analysed. Together these three chapters will give a relative overview. In this way this thesis contributes to a better understanding of the ideas and opinions held by the Dutch on the Belgian refugees at the start of the First World War.

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<sup>46</sup> Keilbach, 'Photographs', 440.

## Chapter 1– Bergen op Zoom and the Belgian Refugees

The first chapter will analyse the way in which the Belgian refugees were photographed and how they were framed in photographs taken in the city of Bergen op Zoom during the early months of the war. It therefore provides an answer to the question of what frames were used and tries to answer why. The photographs are taken from the online archive *West-Brabants Archief*.<sup>47</sup> Unlike the photographs that will be analysed in the other chapters, these photographs are not part of one series of pictures. Instead, they were selected from the Collection *boz-0478 Foto Archief Bergen op Zoom*. Searching in this collection for the period 1914 to 1918 with the search term *Belgische vluchtelingen* gives 281 results. Naturally, it is not possible to analyse so many photographs in this chapter. Therefore, a selection of eight photographs was made by the author. The selection consists of photographs taken of refugees arriving in the city or taken inside one of the camps set up in the city, dated to 1914. Bergen op Zoom is an interesting city for the analysis because it lies so close to the border with Belgium. Therefore, it was one of the places that received the most refugees.<sup>48</sup> It is an interesting comparison to a larger city like Amsterdam that is much further away from the border, or a small provincial city like Middelburg, further away from the border but nevertheless in a province that housed many refugees in the beginning. The situation in Bergen op Zoom was very chaotic and therefore the experiences of the refugees and of the residents could have been very different to those in other places. This chapter shows that the refugees were photographed as orderly and calm in a sanitised way, that did not show any shocking images of the state they or the camps were in. They appear either waiting for help or posing in front of their places of residence. In addition, newspaper articles of *De Zoom: Dagblad van het Zuiden*, a local newspaper, are analysed.<sup>49</sup> This might support the framing of the refugees or instead show a different local view on the refugees than the photographs. The newspaper too is sympathetic to the refugees, their use of words showing an even more compassionate view. At the same time some criticism is expressed, though this never got the upper hand.

Of the pictures included in this chapter, not one photographer or client is known. They are all listed as anonymous. The pictures are all dated to 1914. Many pictures have a handwritten number in one of the corners. Whether this was done by the archive or earlier by someone else, is not known. This indicates that that the photographs were part of some sort of series or collection before being given to the archive. Many pictures have listed Hasselman van Buyten as the publisher, though it is unclear what is specifically meant by this. No information on the publisher was found. Sometimes the same photograph appears multiple times in the online collection indicating that copies were made. Therefore, some of the photographs might not be the original ones.

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<sup>47</sup> West-Brabants Archief, boz – 0478 Foto Archief Bergen op Zoom. Access via the Image Library on the website of the archive.

<sup>48</sup> Daalmans and Vanwesenbeeck, *Een Belgisch dorp in een Brabantse stad*, 14.

<sup>49</sup> Hereafter the newspaper will be referred to as *De Zoom*.

Bergen op Zoom, which lies close to the border with Belgium, was one of the cities which bore the heaviest brunt when it came to housing the refugees in the Netherlands, after Belgium was invaded on August 4 1914. This was particularly heavy in the earliest months of the war and increased quickly after October 7 when the siege of Antwerp by the German army began.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, the city had a train connection to the Belgian cities of Essen and Antwerp, which meant that many refugees arrived by train. Others came by foot, carriage or tram. The large numbers of refugees led to congestion on the roads.<sup>51</sup> The main priority was providing refugees with food and a place to sleep. The refugees were housed in homes, churches, schools and factories. However, because of the large numbers some were forced to sleep outside. Because of its location, Bergen op Zoom also functioned as a transit place, from which the refugees travelled to other places in the Netherlands.<sup>52</sup> Bergen op Zoom had around 16.625 inhabitants in 1914 and on October 22 1914 it housed around 35.000 to 40.000 refugees.<sup>53</sup> This meant a great disturbance of everyday life and must have made a lasting impact on the inhabitants. Initially, as in the rest of the country, charitable organisations and individuals took charge of the help without the government interfering. This was because charity was not considered a government task.<sup>54</sup> Medical historian Leo van Bergen, argues that the Dutch Red Cross contributed little to the humanitarian effort related to refugees, as refugee aid was not part of its tasks.<sup>55</sup> So, private initiatives were the norm. However, this would prove untenable because of the sheer size of the refugee influx, as around 1 million refugees fled to the Netherlands in this time.<sup>56</sup> All over the country, including in Bergen op Zoom, local committees were set up that were tasked with the care of the refugees. All private initiatives were eventually coordinated by the *Nederlandsch Comité tot steun aan Belgische en andere slachtoffers* (Dutch Committee for Support to Belgian and other victims), which was a private organisation.<sup>57</sup> The government set up the *Centrale Commissie tot behartiging van de belangen der naar Nederland uitgewekenen vluchtelingen* (Central Commission to represent the interests of refugees who have emigrated to the Netherlands) in September in order to take up a more coordinating role.<sup>58</sup> The organisations that were most important in Bergen op Zoom, were the local subdivision of the *Centrale Commissie*, which was chaired by the mayor, the Women's support committee, and the local division of the Red Cross.<sup>59</sup> There was a large role for private

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<sup>50</sup> Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*, 96.

<sup>51</sup> Daalmans and Vanwesenbeeck, *Een Belgisch dorp in een Brabantse stad*, 14-15.

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem, 19.

<sup>53</sup> Ibidem, 14 and 28.

<sup>54</sup> Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*, 97 and Wim Klinkert, 'The Soft Power of Neutrality. Dutch Humanitarianism in World War I 1914-1918', *Qeios* 4.9 (2023) 1-13, 2.

<sup>55</sup> Leo van Bergen, 'Humanitarianism (The Netherlands)' in: Ute Daniel e.a. eds., *1914 1918 International Encyclopedia of the First World War 1* (2017) <http://dx.doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.11114> (March 2024).

<sup>56</sup> de Roodt, *Oorlogsgasten*, 147.

<sup>57</sup> van den Heuvel-Strasser, 'Vluchtelingen zorg of vreemdelingenbeleid, 187-188.

<sup>58</sup> de Roodt, *Oorlogsgasten*, 141.

<sup>59</sup> Daalmans and Vanwesenbeeck, *Een Belgisch dorp in een Brabantse stad*, 69.

initiatives which were supported by the national government, which took on more responsibilities from October on.<sup>60</sup>



Figure 1 – Belgian refugees arriving in the city, Bergen op Zoom, 1914, picture postcard, West-Brabants Archief, collection boz – 0478 Foto Archief Bergen op Zoom (RWEX024).

The presence of the refugees in the city started with their arrival. Photographs showing refugees on the streets, after they just arrived are plentiful in the archive. One such picture shows the arrival of a group of refugees by horse and wagon. The large wheel of the carriage captures the viewers' attention as it is almost perfectly placed in the middle of the picture and mostly unobstructed from view. This immediately emphasises the element of transit to the viewer. The picture shows around 25 refugees, though possibly more as many are (partially) concealed. Around 12 refugees are on the wooden wagon. The wagon itself is open and, as the description states, is drawn by a horse. To the left side of the picture a man is seen helping an older woman getting off the wagon. Others are in the process of getting up to leave as well. Perhaps some of those on the street had already exited the vehicle. The group on the wagon appears to consist of either older people or children. As both the elderly and children are able to walk shorter distances than adults, this was a practical and necessary decision. On the right side of the picture a pram is visible which holds two children. The pram looks to be too small for both of them. This indicates how in these circumstances, practicality was more important than comfort. A man and woman are also helping a child to climb out of the carriage. No one in the picture is looking towards the photographer. As it was an extraordinary event, the photographer perhaps wanted to capture every moment and every aspect of the arrival of the refugees.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibidem, 77.

The arrival was chaotic but also a moment of relief. Even though the picture shows the refugees busy, there is no visible panic among the refugees. They appear calm and collected.



Figure 2 – Belgian refugees in front of the cantonal courthouse, Bergen op Zoom, 1914, picture postcard, West-Brabants Archief, collection boz – 0478 Foto Archief Bergen op Zoom (RWEX011).

This air of calmness in the photographs of their arrival is present in other photographs as well. A second picture shows a group of refugees on the street in front of the subdistrict court building, seemingly resting and waiting. There is a clear separation between the building in the back and the refugees through a fence. A group of five people is standing on the street, next to a wagon loaded with items. They appear to rest as they probably pulled the wagon themselves as no horse is visible. The man on the far right, is dressed nicely in a bowler hat, long coat and suit. Perhaps he is not a refugee but a bystander offering help. On the left side a woman, wearing a uniform, is standing holding items under her arms. Perhaps she was a nurse, tasked with helping the refugees. Behind these people, on the pavement a group of four women is seated who look very tired. This communicates that they are obedient persons, waiting for help and not causing problems by demanding anything. Several young boys are standing on the pavement next to them. Perhaps these women were their mothers. As opposed to the photograph before, here most people are looking at the photographer. There is less movement in the picture as it shows refugees that are waiting and resting. The journey here is at its end and now they have to wait to see where they will go next. This focus on the journey's end was also used in photographs by pro-insurgent press of Spanish Civil War refugees. This was done to not credit the refugees with any political consciousness in the war. Furthermore, the focus on the journey being



complete, allowed for the lessening of responsibility when it came to why the refugees had fled.<sup>61</sup> This focus is similar to the pictures taken in Bergen op Zoom. However, the reason for these pictures is probably different. In Bergen op Zoom, the intention was likely more to document the situation, than to lead the focus away from why the refugees had fled. The reason was actually very clear and uncontested. The waiting the refugees have to endure carries negative emotions, material, and physical costs with it. The period of waiting is filled with uncertainty and precarity, which leads to additional suffering.<sup>62</sup> This can lead to identity loss, as May Mzayek, a scholar researching the well-being of Syrian refugees during their experiences with resettlement, argues.<sup>63</sup>



Figure 3 – Belgian refugees in front of the St. Joseph church, Bergen op Zoom, 1914, picture postcard, West-Brabants Archief, collection boz – 0478 Foto Archief Bergen op Zoom (RWEX008).

This portrayal of the refugees while waiting for help and being obedient is ever present in the photographs the archive holds. One picture shows refugees waiting in front of a church. Churches were used as sleeping facilities. The majority of the group is seated on the steps in front of the entrance to the church. The group is mixed, consisting of men, women, and children. They are dressed well and warmly with hats, scarves and thick coats. Most people are facing the camera. They are not actively doing anything but are waiting for something or someone just as in the previous photograph. Though it must have been taken at the beginning of the arrival of the refugees, the scene in the picture is very calm and orderly. They are out on the streets, indicating that the situation was desperate to the

<sup>61</sup> Brothers, *War and Photography*, 151.

<sup>62</sup> Molly Fee, 'Lives Stalled: The Costs of Waiting for Refugee Resettlement', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48:11 (2022) 2649-2677, 2659-2660.

<sup>63</sup> May Mzayek, 'Understanding Waiting and Wellbeing through Liminal Experiences of Syrian Refugees', *Migration Letters* 16:3 (2019) 368-377.



extent that there was not enough indoor space. However, there is no visible chaos, and the refugees are not framed in a way that deemed them as dangerous. Instead, they are calm and collected, dutifully waiting for help. This might have communicated that they were not a threat to Dutch society. This calmness contrasts with the actual situation at the time. The number of refugees arriving was very high which meant that the system of aid set up in the city was not at all sufficient.<sup>64</sup> As stated before, there were so many refugees that some had to sleep on the streets. Historian Gerban Daalmans writes in his work on the refugees in Bergen op Zoom that on October 7 and 8 the city was in complete disorder.<sup>65</sup> Clearly this disorder was not present in the photographs. The photographers might have been disinclined to show the chaos, perhaps trying to avoid damaging the reputation of Bergen op Zoom by not showing the shortcomings and making the city seem more capable. During this initial arrival, the local newspaper *De Zoom*, wrote compassionately about the refugees and took pity on them. It considered the Belgians to be of the same tribe as the Dutch and wrote that “we receive them with love.” It found it “heartbreaking to see the misery of this great migration of people.”<sup>66</sup> The refugees were often called “poor” refugees by the newspaper and the paper asserted that “Everything is done to make their bitter fate as bearable as possible.”<sup>67</sup> This would fit in the “culture de neutralité” as historian Wim Klinkert writes in his work on Dutch humanitarianism during the First World War. He states that the hospitality and the willingness to make sacrifices compensated for the privilege of remaining outside of the war.<sup>68</sup> This was probably further heightened by the fact that Belgium had also declared itself neutral. This led to a fear that the Netherlands might be invaded as well.

Overall *De Zoom* was in favour of the relief given to the Belgian refugees and had a compassionate and positive view of them. Only occasionally did it express any criticism regarding the refugees, such as mentioning that the refugees drink a lot of beer and that even women go to the pub.<sup>69</sup> In the very beginning of the arrival of the refugees, *De Zoom* writes that the “state of the Belgians” was a danger for public health because of the sheer number of refugees and the lack of housing. Furthermore, the Belgian refugees spread ideas that were anti-German and could endanger the neutrality of the Netherlands.<sup>70</sup> This was one of the problems the Dutch military command had with the refugees. After the three border provinces were under military command because a state of war was declared, they wanted the refugees to leave the border provinces to prevent them from endangering the neutrality of the Netherlands.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Daalmans and Vanwesenbeeck, *Een Belgisch dorp in een Brabantse stad*, 26.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*, 18.

<sup>66</sup> ‘Stadsnieuw’, *De Zoom: Dagblad van het Zuiden* (8 October 1914) no. 6433, page 3.

<sup>67</sup> ‘Stadsnieuws’, *De Zoom: Dagblad van het Zuiden* (21 October 1914) no. 6444, page 3.

<sup>68</sup> Klinkert, ‘The Soft Power of Neutrality’, 10.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Stadsnieuws’, *De Zoom: Dagblad van het Zuiden* (19 October 1914) nr. 6442, page 3.

<sup>70</sup> ‘Het vluchtkamp te Oldebroek’, *De Zoom: Dagblad van het Zuiden* (28 August 1914) nr. 6398, front page.

<sup>71</sup> van den Heuvel-Strasser, ‘Vluchtelingen zorg of vreemdelingenbeleid’, 186.



Figure 4 – Belgian refugees housed in the Bredastraat, Bergen op Zoom, 1914, picture postcard, West-Brabants Archief, collection boz – 0478 Foto Archief Bergen op Zoom (RWEU064).

Still this criticism was not enough to deter the Dutch from helping the refugees. Eventually they were housed in many different facilities, some more provisional than others. The next photograph shows a more provisional shelter. A group of refugees, of mixed gender and age, stands outside in front of two wagons of sorts. This picture is mirrored. Two women are standing by a tub wringing out clothes. Many of the women pictured are knitting or doing something similar. So, the women in the group are pictured as active. The group is well dressed in coats, shawls and hats. The only women who are not pictured as active, are a small child and an older woman who are seated. Behind the group, in the middle, some stoves are visible. Between the stoves a washing line with clothes hanging on it to dry can just be made out. One man in uniform, on the left, is part of the group, perhaps to keep an eye on the refugees. This all shows very provisional means of living which were necessary at the beginning. However, at the same time it indicates that the refugees were making the most out of their situation and had not lost their agency. This gives the impression that, at least for that moment, the refugees were relatively content with the situation. Besides commenting sympathetically on the situation the refugees were in, *De Zoom* also wrote positively about the aid provision. It did so by including letters that were sent in by Belgian refugees expressing their gratitude to the city and the country. Already on October 9 the newspaper included a letter that argued that Belgian refugees had “a sacred duty to express out loud their feelings of deep, heartfelt, righteous gratitude for the generous hospitality expressed to them by the Dutch, and especially the inhabitants of Bergen-op-Zoom.”<sup>72</sup> Just a few days later, the newspaper included yet another letter on “The sacred hospitality never before

<sup>72</sup> ‘DANK!’, *De Zoom: Dagblad van het Zuiden* (9 October 1914) no. 6434, front page.

surpassed or equalled by any country.”<sup>73</sup> This could have stimulated people to give (more) to the refugees as they would feel that their help was appreciated. It also shows that the newspaper thought that the Netherlands was an excellent place for the refugees to seek refuge. This trope of a seeker of sanctuary in a benign host country, is also present in news photographs of Jewish refugees to Australia, as Fay Anderson, professor in media history, writes.<sup>74</sup> Still, *De Zoom* feels that the sanctuary should not be taken for granted as “The people of Bergen op Zoom, the Dutch, are doing more than they can to help and comfort the unfortunate refugees and especially the unluckiest among them. However, this should not be abused.”<sup>75</sup> *De Zoom* further reports on how it is safe for the refugees to return home and how this is a necessity: “Many people leave with every train, worried and afraid, but they know that it cannot be otherwise.”<sup>76</sup> The newspaper was not alone in this as the Dutch government was also keen for the refugees to return as soon as possible. It worked together with the municipality of Antwerp to inform the refugees that it was safe to return by late October 1914.<sup>77</sup> Eventually in November 1914 the government decided to assemble all the poorer refugees who were unable to support themselves in government ordained camps, called *vluchtoorden*. The refugees were given the choice to move to a *vluchtoord* or to return to Belgium. In practice this allowed for little free choice.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> ‘Aan de bevolking van Bergen op Zoom’, *De Zoom: Dagblad van het Zuiden* (15 October 1914) no. 6439, front page.

<sup>74</sup> Anderson, ‘Desirable Types’, 225.

<sup>75</sup> ‘Stadsnieuws’, *De Zoom: Dagblad van het Zuiden* (20 October 1914) no. 6443, page 3.

<sup>76</sup> ‘Stadsnieuws’, *De Zoom: Dagblad van het Zuiden* (21 October 1914) no 6444, page 3.

<sup>77</sup> De Roodt, *Oorlogsgasten*, 162.

<sup>78</sup> Amara, ‘Belgian Refugees during the First World War’, 203.



Figure 5 – Belgian refugees in front of a tent in *vluchtoord Kijk in de Pot*, Bergen op Zoom, 1914, photograph, West-Brabants Archief, collection boz – 0478 Foto Archief Bergen op Zoom (RWEU022).

Before moving to one of the *vluchtoorden*, the refugees in Bergen op Zoom were housed mainly in two camps, *Kijk in de Pot* and *Plein 13*. This policy was started on October 17 and by October 28 it was decided that the provision of food and other essentials outside of the camps would be terminated. Therefore, any poor refugees were essentially forced to move in order to receive aid.<sup>79</sup> Military authorities were in charge of the general management of the camps. When looking at the photographs in the archive, it includes many photographs of refugees posing in front of a tent or barrack. In their arrangement, these photographs are reminiscent of family photographs. In these pictures the refugees pose neatly in front of the tent or barrack. The pictures feel like a way to identify which family stayed where and could serve as a memory of their time in the camps. The fact that they connect a certain group to a specific space could have tried to tell the viewers that the refugees do not have to share with others. This could help generate a positive image of the camps. Furthermore, the orderly poses of the refugees communicate that the refugees are well behaved. One such picture shows a group of twelve refugees, consisting of five children, four women and four men in front of a white tent. The description details that the refugees are staying in *Kijk in de Pot*. The tents used for the refugees were often army tents or circus tents.<sup>80</sup> The children are seated and standing in the middle of the picture, in front of the adults and one child is holding a dog. The man on the right appears distracted or disinterested in the photographer and is not looking towards the camera. The persons in the picture appear well dressed. Behind their tent many other similar tents are visible. Despite

<sup>79</sup> Daalmans and Vanwesenbeeck, *Een Belgisch dorp in een Brabantse stad*, 32.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem*, 34.

reminding the viewer of familiar family pictures, the composition of the group deviates from a nuclear family as there are too many adults. Naturally the refugees could still be related to each other or could be friends. It is interesting to see that they then chose or were chosen to pose together for the picture. Clearly the idea of the family or the social was very important. Being (photographed) together in groups emphasises familial and social relations, which might have been extra important in times such as these. Looking at the tent, it is possible that it housed everyone pictured.



Figure 6 – Belgian refugees in camp *Plein 13*, Bergen op Zoom, 1914, photograph, West-Brabants Archief, collection boz – 0478 Foto Archief Bergen op Zoom (RWEX025).

Though the photographs of the refugees in the camps overall show the refugees in large groups, one picture in the archive deviates from this. Here a man, woman and young child are photographed in front of a tent in *Plein 13*. The photograph focuses on a nuclear family and makes it seem as though they are all by themselves. This is enhanced by the fact that the tent is surrounded by trees, which gives a solitary feeling. The tent looks more makeshift and less stable, consisting in the lower half of wooden planks. The man is cooking and is taking no notice of the photographer. Private cooking was eventually forbidden as it was considered a fire hazard.<sup>81</sup> The woman and child are looking at the photographer. Perhaps the photographer took them by surprise. While the woman is warmly dressed in a coat and a scarf, neither the man nor the child is wearing coats. The child is seated behind a makeshift table made of bricks and seems to be waiting for the food. Some items of clothing are hung up on the right side of the tent. Behind the tent, between the trees a wooden building is visible with the writing *mannen* (men) painted on it. This is probably where men were able to wash

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibidem*, 39.

themselves. The photograph shows a harsher reality for the refugees than the other pictures do. It is true that the conditions in the camps were not good. The refugees slept in tents which were poorly isolated and not suitable for the cold and rainy weather.<sup>82</sup> There were not enough latrines, dining tables and the food was not varied enough. *De Zoom* initially reported positively on the resources of the camp: “The poor refugees are more at ease there, they have their activities and don't have to stroll around like that.”<sup>83</sup> However, later it changed its views, instead calling for improvements, such as for wooden barracks to be placed in the camps.<sup>84</sup> It argued that the situation in the camp was untenable.<sup>85</sup> On November 17 1914 government commissioner responsible for the refugees in Noord-Brabant and Limburg Ruys de Beerenbrouck, visited the camp after which improvements were made.<sup>86</sup> Wooden sheds were built and the cooking furnishings were now put underneath a shelter, as were wooden sheds that served as a church and a classroom. *De Zoom* was content with the arrival of wooden barracks: “We have no doubt that these barracks, properly heated and illuminated, will provide a good place to stay for the coming winter if necessary.”<sup>87</sup> Still, *Kijk in de Pot* was cleared on November 18 with its inhabitants either put on transport or moved to *Plein 13*. This was due to the living conditions not being adequate enough and the harsh winter weather. Historian Daalmans writes that it is unknown why *Plein 13* continued to exist, though he offers some possible explanations such as that *Plein 13* was smaller or that it was closer to the station, which was more practical.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ibidem, 41-42.

<sup>83</sup> ‘Stadsnieuws’, *De Zoom: Dagblad van het Zuiden* (21 October 1914) no. 6444, page 3.

<sup>84</sup> ‘Stadsnieuws’, *De Zoom: Dagblad van het Zuiden* (14 November 1914) no. 6465, page 2.

<sup>85</sup> ‘Stadsnieuws’, *De Zoom: Dagblad van het Zuiden* (16 November 1914) no. 6466, page 3.

<sup>86</sup> Daalmans and Vanwesenbeeck, *Een Belgisch dorp in een Brabantse stad*, 41.

<sup>87</sup> ‘Stadsnieuws’, *De Zoom: Dagblad van het Zuiden*, (20 November 1914), no. 6470, page 3.

<sup>88</sup> Daalmans and Vanwesenbeeck, *Een Belgisch dorp in een Brabantse stad*, 42.





Figure 7 – Belgian refugees waiting for the food to be distributed in *Plein 13*, Bergen op Zoom, 1914, photograph, West-Brabants Archief, collection boz – 0478 Foto Archief Bergen op Zoom (RWEV031).

One of these improvements, the placing of the cooking furnishings underneath a shelter, is visible on the next photograph. It shows a large group of people standing close to the shed. Three stoves are visible out in front of the group standing on the muddy terrain. Among the group, multiple officials are visible in their uniforms with one man standing in front of a group of young boys holding a rifle. Most of the people are paying attention to the photographer. The description tells us that the refugees are waiting for the distribution of food. The only women pictured are standing by the stove and none in the group on the right that are waiting for food. Clearly the women were involved in the preparation of the food, but it seems that the men were first to receive it. There are many guards present reminding the viewer of the element of control over the refugees. The refugees had to oblige to certain rules in the camp, such as carrying an ID-card with the number of their sleeping quarters on it with them. Children went to school, men worked on the terrain and women did household chores in order for everyone to stay busy. This was done to avoid disturbances.<sup>89</sup> On the right side of the picture wooden poles are put into the earth and they are connected by barbed wire. This gives off a menacing feeling that the refugees are separated from the photographer as though there is some danger. This is enhanced by the armed guard standing in front of the young boys and the distance between the refugees and the photographer. Overall, the refugees appear to be contained behind the poles and guarded by the soldiers.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibidem, 49.



Figure 8 – Belgian refugees in the wagon camp at *Plein 13* , Bergen op Zoom, 1914, picture postcard, West-Brabants Archief, collection boz – 0478 Foto Archief Bergen op Zoom (RWEW013).

Despite the improvements, *Plein 13* was eventually cleared in April and May of 1915. *De Zoom* wrote positively about how the refugees had behaved during their time in the city and was overall positive about the transfer of the refugees to other government camps: “Certainly, the freedom they enjoyed in this camp cannot be expected elsewhere..., but they must also think about the other side, that what the Dutch Government does completely voluntarily must also entail some sacrifice on their part.”<sup>90</sup> However, *Plein 13* continued to operate until April of 1919 as a camp for caravan dwellers, which it had housed from the very beginning.<sup>91</sup> This meant that not everyone was necessarily Belgian. There were also Dutch travellers who were sent to the camp by the military authorities in Zeeland and Noord-Brabant.<sup>92</sup> This last picture shows a group of refugees in front of a caravan. Behind them other caravans are seen neatly lined up next to each other. This mixed group was probably not a nuclear family but might have consisted of relatives and acquaintances. One woman in the middle of the group appears to be doing her laundry. The persons pictured are well dressed and appear good natured with some of them smiling. The picture gives off a positive impression that the situation was peaceful. Not everyone pictured is a refugee though. Three men in uniform are visible. One of them, on the far right, is also holding a rifle. As the camp was under military command, it is not strange to see these figures. Though it highlights the degree of control over the lives of the refugees, the fact that they are in the middle of the group might indicate that they were on good terms with these refugees. The refugees do not shy away from them but allow them in their group. *De Zoom*

<sup>90</sup> ‘Stadsnieuws’, *De Zoom: Dagblad van het Zuiden* (4 May 1915) no. 6605, page 3.

<sup>91</sup> Daalmans and Vanwesenbeeck, *Een Belgisch dorp in een Brabantse stad*, 34.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibidem*, 61.



wrote that the military personnel enjoyed the trust of the “poor refugees”.<sup>93</sup> It also wrote that disturbances by the refugees in the camp were a rarity and that the refugees behaved in an excellent way overall.<sup>94</sup> As with the other group pictures shown in this chapter, the group is mixed. Most humanitarian campaigns after the First World War focused on women, such as with the Near East Relief programme set up to support the victims of the Armenian genocide, and/or children, which was the focus of the International Committee of the Red Cross in the wake of the rebuilding of Europe or the Save the Children campaign started in 1919.<sup>95</sup> This focus is not present in these photographs. It is therefore interesting that in the case of the humanitarian campaign set up for the Belgian refugees, both adults and children, and men and women were the focus of the pictures and clearly deemed deserving of the help. This shows that women were not deemed more in need of help than men. It further tells us something about the perception of gender (differences) as the men and women were photographed in the same settings, oftentimes in similar positions. There is no great difference between the portrayal of men and women visible in the photographs.

In conclusion, the refugees were framed in a clean, sanitised, calm but compassionate way. From their arrival to their stay in the camps, their stay was well documented through photographs. No refugee appears in shocking conditions, and all appear to obey the rules. They are either waiting patiently for the help they would receive or are pictured obediently before their allocated tents. There are some exceptions to this trend. One picture shows a more negative view of the situation and in another picture the refugees are surrounded by guards. However, overall the photographs of Bergen op Zoom show refugees that are well. Though mostly pictured waiting or posing, not all the refugees are passive, but instead appear busy. The pictures show a point of view in favour of the reception of the refugees and frame them as not dangerous but calm and collected and worthy of the help. This is the case for women and men, and adults and children. There is no focus on just one specific group but instead on mixed groups. The photographs tell us that the refugees retained some agency by showing them active. They further indicate the importance of family or other connections, by photographing the refugees in large groups that go beyond the nuclear family. The lack of shocking images and overall good state of the refugees could be connected to the neutrality stance of the Netherlands. Images of refugees that were very shocking could lead to a rise of anti-German sentiment among the Dutch citizens who saw the pictures. This was something that the Dutch government wanted to prevent to uphold its neutrality. While documenting their experiences in the city, the photographs argue in favour

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<sup>93</sup> ‘Stadsnieuws’, *De Zoom: Dagblad van het Zuiden* (22 October 1914) no. 6445, page 3.

<sup>94</sup> ‘Stadsnieuws’, *De Zoom: Dagblad van het Zuiden* (25 November 1914) no. 6473, page 3.

<sup>95</sup> See Peter Balakian, ‘Photography, Visual Culture, and the Armenian Genocide’ in: Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno eds., *Humanitarian Photography: A History* (Cambridge 2015) 89-114; Francesca Piana, ‘Photography, Cinema and the Quest for Influence. The International Committee of the Red Cross in the Wake of the First World War’ in: Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno eds., *Humanitarian Photography: A History* (Cambridge 2015) 140-164; Heide Fehrenbach, ‘Children and Other Civilians. Photography and the Politics of Humanitarian Image-Making’ in: Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno eds., *Humanitarian Photography: A History* (Cambridge 2015) 165-199.

of the reception of the refugees. These observations cannot be made from the newspapers alone as they focused on compassionate articles of the refugees. It stressed their distress, the excellent help they received by the Dutch and expression of gratitude by the refugees. Some criticism was expressed by the newspaper but overall it was compassionate. It is clear that the refugees were not presented as mere victims, but were considered to be resilient and try their hardest to make the best of the situation.

## Chapter 2 - Middelburg and the Belgian Refugees

This second chapter will answer the question of what frames were used in photographs of Belgian refugees taken in Middelburg in 1914. It does this by analysing eight pictures, a series, of when the refugees first arrived in Middelburg. This way the chapter contributes to the thesis in providing more knowledge on how the Belgian refugees were viewed throughout the Netherlands by including a different city in the analysis. Middelburg was a relatively small city, and though part of Zeeland, a border province, it is situated further away from the border. This provides an interesting setting as overall in the province, many refugees would have arrived, while at the same time, the number of refugees arriving would be far less than that of a city like Bergen op Zoom. As in the previous chapter, articles of a local newspaper, *Middelburgsche Courant*, are analysed in order to gain a better understanding of the attitudes towards the refugees. The chapter will look at whether the images of the refugees presented in the photographs align with those given of them in the newspaper. The purpose of the images seems to have been a wish to document different aspects of the aid provision for the refugees in the city, organised by the local committee. This raises the question whether the photographs were commissioned by the local committee or anyone who worked for it. Unfortunately, this information is unknown. Overall, the photographs emphasise the importance of the work done by the committee while communicating that the refugees are cared for and well provided for by the local committee. The refugees are presented in an orderly and clean way, and not in any distress. The photographs being picture postcards with a written description, indicates that the pictures were meant to be informative about this campaign. The newspaper articles support this view of a willingness to help the refugees, writing mostly compassionately about the refugees.

The photographs were taken from the online archive of the *Zeeuws Archief* and form a series.<sup>96</sup> This is visible from the format, colouring and the use of descriptions underneath the photographs. Because the photographs are part of a series, two pictures that do not show civilian refugees, but soldiers, are included so as to include the whole series. It is unknown whether or not any other pictures were originally part of the series. The photographer is not known. A precise dating is also lacking. However, all the photographs have the same publisher listed, namely F. B. den Boer from Middelburg. Next, a report made in 1915 by the Provincial Committee for assistance to refugees in Zeeland on the assistance given to the refugees between August of 1914 and July 1915, will help provide information on how both the provincial committee and the local committee of Middelburg thought of the refugees. In addition to this, a local newspaper, the *Middelburgsche Courant*, is analysed for the period August 1 1914 to December 31 1918, in order to get a clearer picture of the opinions held in Middelburg. Included in the information segment, provided by the archive, it states that the photographs in this

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<sup>96</sup> Zeeuws Archief, Zelandia Illustrata, Deel III (historie en leven), 16<sup>e</sup>-20<sup>e</sup> eeuw, inv. nr. 296, number 403.

series are part of the historical topographic atlas 'Zelandia Illustrata' of the *Koninklijk Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen* (Royal Zeeland Society of Sciences).<sup>97</sup> 'Zelandia Illustrata' is a historical-topographical atlas, which consists of maps, pictures and drawings of the province of Zeeland. It was started around 1700 and has been digitalised and published online on the website of the *Zeeuws Archief*.<sup>98</sup> However, the photographs were not originally made to be part of this atlas but were later included. Because they were later added, it suggests that the archive finds the photographs of such historical importance that they should be included.

The relief efforts for the Belgian refugees in Middelburg started in August, when a committee consisting of rich ladies was formed and later, on September 10, the Local Housing and Refugee Support Committee was set up. The relief efforts started very early, as Belgium was invaded on August 4 1914 and the province of Limburg initially received most refugees as The German army invaded Belgium in the east.<sup>99</sup> Therefore, the reaction of those in Middleburg was very quick. After October 8 the number of refugees arriving increased rapidly.<sup>100</sup> They were housed in churches, warehouses, schools, and barracks or in homes of local families. The committee had various tasks including arranging travel to Belgium or England, exchanging money, providing food, acquiring clothes and providing education for children.<sup>101</sup> Already in late October 1914 a Belgian school was set up, for both boys and girls.<sup>102</sup> Besides the local committee of Middelburg, the Provincial Committee for assistance to refugees in Zeeland (*Provinciaal Comité tot hulpverlening aan vluchtelingen in Zeeland*) was established. This committee coordinated the care for the Belgian refugees on the provincial level.<sup>103</sup> At most the local committee housed 3400 refugees in the city, though there were a number of refugees housed in the homes of private individuals.<sup>104</sup> Middelburg, together with Vlissingen, received the most refugees on the island of Walcheren. However the situation there was not comparable to Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, the area of the province of Zeeland which borders Belgium. Here, more refugees were housed than in other parts of the province.<sup>105</sup> So, even though it was the capital of a border province, Middelburg did not have as high a number of refugees as Bergen op

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<sup>97</sup> Zeeuws Archief, 'Verslag van het Provinciaal Comité tot hulpverlening aan vluchtelingen in Zeeland: augustus 1914-juli 1915', (Middelburg 1915) inv. nr. 260657, <https://hdl.handle.net/21.12113/1B367448B18C4B15A420E5A25CE193EC>.

<sup>98</sup> Zeeuws Archief, <https://www.zeeuwsarchief.nl/zelandia-illustrata-digitaal/> (accessed April 8 2024).

<sup>99</sup> de Roodt, *Oorlogsgasten*, 137.

<sup>100</sup> Zeeuws Archief, 'Verslag van het Provinciaal Comité tot hulpverlening aan vluchtelingen in Zeeland: augustus 1914-1 juli 1915', (260657) (Middelburg 1915) 248-249, <https://hdl.handle.net/21.12113/1B367448B18C4B15A420E5A25CE193EC>.

<sup>101</sup> Leo van der Vliet, 'De Eerste Wereldoorlog in Middelburg,' in: Henk van der Linden and Leo van der Vliet eds., *Zeeland and de Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Soesterberg 2015) 129-148, 132-134; 136.

<sup>102</sup> Zeeuws Archief, 'Verslag van het Provinciaal Comité tot hulpverlening aan vluchtelingen in Zeeland: augustus 1914-1 juli 1915', (Middelburg 1915) inv. nr. 260657, 252, <https://hdl.handle.net/21.12113/1B367448B18C4B15A420E5A25CE193EC>.

<sup>103</sup> André Bauwens and Miranda Haak, *Bange Jaren. Zeeuws-Vlaanderen en de Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Aardenburg 2014) 53.

<sup>104</sup> Leo van der Vliet, 'De Eerste Wereldoorlog in Middelburg' in: Henk van der Linden and Leo van der Vliet eds., *Zeeland and de Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Soesterberg 2015) 129-148, 135.

<sup>105</sup> Jan Zwemer and Allie Barth, *Zeeland tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Goes 2014), 28.

Zoom. Eventually, the refugees in in the city were moved to the *vluchtoorden* Uden or Ede as ordered by the Dutch government. The military authority did not want any refugees in the border provinces out of fear of them causing problems such as smuggling and espionage.<sup>106</sup> This was the result of a policy of soft force, giving the refugees the restricted choice between returning to Belgium or moving to a government *vluchtoord* if they wanted to continue to receive (financial) help. Some mayors interpreted the vague policy by the Dutch government of soft force as permission to force the refugees to move and kick them out of the municipalities. In a report made by the Provincial Committee for assistance to refugees in Zeeland in 1915, detailing the assistance given to the refugees in the period August 1914 to July 1915, the committee finds that “once again some mayors all too eagerly took this opportunity to get rid of the supported Belgians without apparent necessity, citing the circular they received...”<sup>107</sup> Eventually, the refugees started leaving the city in late April of 1915 and the last refugees left Middelburg on May 28. However, this applied only to those receiving government assistance, which meant that any who were able to provide for themselves and had found work and a house to live in, were able to stay. Others who were excluded were the ill, women with children and women who were alone.<sup>108</sup> The population of Zeeland was apparently not happy to see the refugees go to the *vluchtoorden*.

“This could not be changed, and the emigres reluctantly left the hospitable countries of Zeeland. Our population also saw them go and was sorry that they could not continue their work, in order to achieve the return to a place they so fervently longed for a free homeland.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Leenders, *Ongenode gasten*, 143.

<sup>107</sup> Zeeuws Archief, ‘Verslag van het Provinciaal Comité tot hulpverlening aan vluchtelingen in Zeeland: augustus 1914-1 juli 1915’, (Middelburg 1915) inv. nr. 260657, 24, <https://hdl.handle.net/21.12113/1B367448B18C4B15A420E5A25CE193EC>.

<sup>108</sup> van der Vliet, ‘De Eerste Wereldoorlog in Middelburg’, 132-134 and 136-137.

<sup>109</sup> Zeeuws Archief, ‘Verslag van het Provinciaal Comité tot hulpverlening aan vluchtelingen in Zeeland: augustus 1914-1 juli 1915’, (Middelburg 1915) inv. nr. 260657, 23, <https://hdl.handle.net/21.12113/1B367448B18C4B15A420E5A25CE193EC>.



Figure 9 – Refugees in front of the Dutch bank, Middelburg, 1914, picture postcard, Zeeuws Archief, Zeeuws Genootschap, Zelandia Illustrata Deel III (nr. 403-4).

This enthusiasm in Middelburg for taking care of the refugees, is also illustrated in the series of photographs. These show different aspects of the work done in the city, probably by the committee. A first picture shows a group of refugees in front of the Dutch Bank. The group includes men, women and children, who are forming a line along a road in front of the building. The door of the building is open and people are going inside. Those refugees closest to the camera are turned towards the photographer. Others have their backs turned to the camera and are facing the entrance. The persons are well dressed, and most are wearing hats and coats. They do not appear to be of the highest social classes, as the clothes appear simple. Here it is important to note that members of all different social classes and financial means left Belgium.<sup>110</sup> Those without any money needed financial assistance by the Dutch government in order to acquire food and other essentials. As those pictured here have money to exchange, they are not the poorest refugees. The description on the bottom states “What it looks like every day at the *Nederlandsche Bank* during the stay of the Belgian refugees in Middelburg.” In the report made by the Provincial Committee for assistance to refugees in Zeeland, it is stated that the refugees were able to exchange their Belgian money at the *Nederlandsche Bank*, “which was very heavily used.”<sup>111</sup>

<sup>110</sup> Amara, ‘Belgian refugees during the First World War’, 202.

<sup>111</sup> Zeeuws Archief, ‘Verslag van het Provinciaal Comité tot hulpverlening aan vluchtelingen in Zeeland: augustus 1914-1 juli 1915’ (Middelburg 1915) inv. nr. 260657, 250, <https://hdl.handle.net/21.12113/1B367448B18C4B15A420E5A25CE193EC>.

Helping the refugees was something that was seen as respectable, writes historian Leo van der Vliet. He states that the aid given to the refugees had a strong character of charity. This was because those helping were generally of a higher social class, and those requiring the most help were of lower social class.<sup>112</sup> The *Middelburgsche Courant*, a local newspaper, reported frequently on the situation of the Belgian refugees. It used separate headings for the news such as “Refugees”, “The refugees in the Netherlands”, “The refugee flow” or “Refugee news”. Overall, the newspaper wrote very compassionately about the refugees. For example, on September 9 it states that “It becomes woe to the heart of the beholder when he sees all this misery, which neither ability nor age spares.”<sup>113</sup> It further calls the refugees “wretches who have to spend the night under the open sky at Putten without cover and without food.”<sup>114</sup> The *Middelburgsche Courant* also urges readers to help the refugees and give what they can: “That the question here is not how much each person can separate from his abundance, but how much each person can sacrifice to help his fellow human beings.”<sup>115</sup> These articles are all from the beginning of the war and the time when most refugees arrived and the situation was most dire.

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<sup>112</sup> van der Vliet, ‘De Eerste Wereldoorlog in Middelburg’, 137.

<sup>113</sup> ‘Uit stad en Provincie’, *Middelburgsche Courant* (9 September 1914) page 1, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010681227:mpeg21:p001>.

<sup>114</sup> ‘De vluchtelingen in Nederland’, *Middelburgsche Courant* (12 October 1914) page 2, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010681255:mpeg21:p002>.

<sup>115</sup> ‘Binnenland’, *Middelburgsche Courant* (5 September 1914) page 1, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010681224:mpeg21:p005>.





Figure 10 – Distribution of blankets, clothing etc. to the refugees, Middelburg, 1914, picture postcard, Zeeuws Archief, Zeeuws Genootschap, Zelandia Illustrata deel III (nr. 403-5).

A similar picture shows a group of people, men, women and children, standing in front of a building. Again a mixed group of refugees is photographed. This is the same as in Bergen op Zoom, where no distinctions were made between men and women, or the old and young. In the door opening two men, wearing uniforms, are visible. They appear to manage the situation as the entrance is very crowded. This is indicative of the presence of order and regulations. Compared to the earlier photograph, most of the refugees pictured here are turned towards the building and are not looking at the camera. Perhaps the refugees on the second picture were somewhat ashamed to be in need of clothes, as opposed to those that clearly still had some money. Those in the crowd are waiting to be allowed to go inside. Above the entrance “*Agenschap Karel’s Thee Groningen*” and “*Van der Kleunen Co.*” are printed. This tells us that the building is some sort of shop or warehouse. In the building next to this, one man is hanging out of the window. He is interested in what is happening outside and is looking at the photographer. The description given underneath the pictures, states that the distribution of blankets, clothes and other items to “the poor refugees” is pictured. This description is very compassionate. As the refugees are left alone and some clearly are not at all interested in what the photographer is doing, the photographer seems to have wanted to capture the moment itself and not interfere with the situation. Additionally the refugees are not pictured as fully



passive victims. The help, the clothes, is not merely handed to the refugees, who are passive. Instead, they collect it themselves.

It is clear that the photographs were taken at the beginning of the war, when the help given was very provisional as no one, neither private organisations nor the local or national governments, was prepared for the large numbers of refugees arriving in the country. The arrival of the refugees and the increase in the number of them, is described in the report made on Middelburg by the local committee as “large flows” of refugees. However, despite the use of these stereotypical descriptions, the committee is compassionate and writes that everyone was prepared to help:

“To give a description of all the misery and sorrow that we have experienced during these days and nights is beyond our strength and it is not necessary because every citizen of Middelburg has witnessed it himself and has done his best to alleviate the plight of to relieve these unfortunate ones.”<sup>116</sup>



Figure 11 – The *Schuttershof* set up as a sleeping place for refugees, Middelburg, 1914, picture postcard, Zeeuws Archief, Zeeuws Genootschap, Zelandia Illustrata Deel III (nr. 403-3).

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<sup>116</sup> Zeeuws Archief, ‘Verslag van het Provinciaal Comité tot hulpverlening aan vluchtelingen in Zeeland: augustus 1914-1 juli 1915’, (Middelburg 1915) inv. nr. 260657, 249, <https://hdl.handle.net/21.12113/1B367448B18C4B15A420E5A25CE193EC>.



Figure 12 – The *Schuttershof* set up as a sleeping place for refugees, Middelburg, 1914, picture postcard, Zeeuws Archief, Zeeuws Genootschap, Zelandia Illustrata Deel III (nr. 403-2).

Despite the willingness, as the committee wrote, to help the refugees, the city was unprepared for such large numbers. This meant that much of the initial aid was very provisional. This is visible in two photographs showing the sleeping facilities. A group of around 42 refugees is pictured in the *Schuttershof*, a building complex used for parties, exhibitions and the shelter of Belgian refugees during the First World War.<sup>117</sup> The refugees are sitting and lying on the floor which is covered in straw and blankets. There is no gender divide in the sleeping facilities, as both men and women are sleeping in this same space. This shows that family was deemed important as the men, women and children stayed together and were not separated. This must have been a comfort to the refugees. On the walls, coats and other items are hung up next to a large mirror. In the back on what looks to be a stage, other items are put. The refugees are aware that the picture is taken. Some of them are facing the camera while others are not. There is a second, similar picture, taken from the other side of the room. The description underneath the second picture is the same as under the first. Again there are many refugees, seated on the floor. On the right side of the picture there are windows showing that it is dark outside. The refugees were getting ready to go to bed when the photographs were taken. In both pictures the scene appears very orderly. The refugees are sitting on the makeshift beds, many underneath the blankets and this gives off an air of serenity. This also tells us that the refugees were probably instructed and expected to behave well and were supervised. It communicates to the viewers that the refugees are well behaved and obedient and not troublemakers.

<sup>117</sup> ‘Schuttershofcomplex’, Middelburg Dronk, <https://middelburgdronk.nl/wiki/Categorie:Schuttershofcomplex> (accessed April 8 2024).

A theme becomes apparent in the photographs, one that focuses on the help given to the refugees in Middelburg. It is interesting to note that while great importance is attached to the aid provision, articles of the local newspaper demonstrate that the gratitude felt by the refugees towards the Dutch was also deemed important. Already at the beginning of the arrival of Belgian refugees the *Middelburgsche Courant* describes them as “very touched by the evidence of sympathy shown to them by their Dutch brothers and grateful for the generous and cordial hospitality shown to them....”<sup>118</sup> In Zeeland the refugees also express their gratefulness “for the helpfulness shown by the entire population on behalf of the very numerous Belgian refugees who came there seeking a safe haven.”<sup>119</sup> So, while the local newspaper is sympathetic to the plight of the refugees, it simultaneously praises the efforts of the Dutch through the inclusion of Belgian gratitude. The excellent care given to the refugees by the city is emphasised and the photographs focus on the aid provision. This clearly stresses the importance of the “rescuers”. The framing of the refugees while in the care of foreign rescuers, mostly as passive, was also used in photographs of refugees during the Spanish Civil War and can thus be described as a common theme in refugee photography.<sup>120</sup> This is similar to the way the newspaper articles emphasised the gratitude of the Belgian refugees when it comes to what was done for them by the Dutch.



Figure 13 – Cooking by the refugees, Middelburg, 1914, picture postcard, Zeeuws Archief, Zeeuws Genootschap, Zelandia Illustrata Deel III (nr. 403-1).

<sup>118</sup> ‘Binnenland’, *Middelburgsche Courant* (21 August 1914) page 1, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010681211:mpeg21:p001>.

<sup>119</sup> ‘Uit stad en Provincie’, *Middelburgsche Courant* (18 September 1914) page 2, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010681235:mpeg21:p002>.

<sup>120</sup> Brothers, *War and Photography*, 151 and 155.



Still, not everything was solely done by the rescuers. Instead, the refugees themselves are pictured whilst being active. One picture shows a group of twenty-three people outside, next to a building and a canopy is pictured. The refugees are cooking food. Towards the right side of the picture a woman is taking some food out of a large pan. She is blurred by movement and not paying attention to the photographer. In the middle of the picture two men are seen holding another pan. They are surrounded by other people, and again the group is made up of both men and women with some, possibly three, children. The cooking was thus not solely a women's job, but something men and women did together. On the left side a child is sitting inside a wheelbarrow and next to him a boy is sitting on top of a wooden barrel holding a bucket. Some sort of large pan with a pipe is in the middle of the group. The title suggests that the cooking was done by the refugees themselves. This inclusion of the information that the cooking, which was provisionally done outside, was done by refugees themselves instead of done for them, tells us that the photographs communicated that the refugees were active and doing something in return for the help they received. This frames the refugees as grateful while at the same time allows them to retain agency. But they are only able to be active within the system (of aid) set up by the Dutch committee. Again we see the combination of an active refugee that is a victim. Photography was used during the First World War to inspire public confidence in integrity and support morale.<sup>121</sup> These particular photographs could have been used to inspire the Dutch public to (continue to) support the refugees by making them see that the refugees would not merely take but also work for the help they received. Despite the ways in which the photographs might have stimulated the support for the refugees, at the same time there were already calls made for the refugees to return home. This is present in the *Middelburgsche Courant*. The newspaper agreed early on with the government that it was safe for the Belgian refugees to return home. It published information on who could and who could not return and even wrote a positive view on the German authorities in Belgium, writing that "The attitude of the German government in Antwerp is much more lenient than it was in the other cities in the previous months."<sup>122</sup> Moreover, it believed that the Belgian refugees would soon "realise that a quick return to normal conditions is highly desirable."<sup>123</sup> However, the newspaper does emphasise that the refugees will remain guests. It also provided updates on the return, specifying how many refugees returned and when trains would leave for Belgium or other places. Sometimes, they would include a witness account or a message from a person who had gone back. For example, on October 19 the *Middelburgsche Courant* included an "advice to return" from someone who had gone to Antwerp. He advised the readers that "Those who wish to find what is

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<sup>121</sup> Roberts, Hilary, 'Photography' in: Ute Daniel e.a. eds., *1914-1918 Online International Encyclopedia of the First World War* (2014) <http://dx.doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10142> (March 2024).

<sup>122</sup> 'Naar geheel België', *Middelburgsche Courant* (17 October 1914) page 1, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010681260:mpeg21:p001>.

<sup>123</sup> Ibidem.

left in their house have every interest in returning as soon as possible.’’<sup>124</sup> Other times inspections are mentioned in the newspaper, which provide positive advice to return.<sup>125</sup> All of these accounts can be considered as trying to persuade the Belgian refugees to return home. However, as is recorded in the newspaper, the refugees were reluctant to return and many stayed in the Netherlands despite government officials announcing that it was safe to go.<sup>126</sup> Some refugees refused for reasons of principle while others did not trust the German authorities.<sup>127</sup> Despite being in favour of return, the newspaper did report that soft force should not result in direct or indirect force to leave Dutch territory as “That would be completely contrary to the requirements of our hospitality.’’<sup>128</sup>



Figure 14 – An old Flemish woman is looking for housing, Middelburg, 1914, picture postcard, Zeeuws Archief, Zeeuws Genootschap, Zelandia Illustrata Deel III (nr. 403-6).

<sup>124</sup> ‘Belgische vluchtelingen’, *Middelburgsche Courant* (19 October 1914) page 2, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010681261:mpeg21:p002>.

<sup>125</sup> ‘De vluchtelingenstroom’, *Middelburgsche Courant* (27 October 1914) page 1, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010756775:mpeg21:p001>.

<sup>126</sup> ‘De vluchtelingenstroom’, *Middelburgsche Courant* (20 October 1914) page 1, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010756767:mpeg21:p001>.

<sup>127</sup> Leenders, *Ongenode gasten*, 140.

<sup>128</sup> ‘Laatste berichten. De Vluchtelingen in Nederland’, *Middelburgsche Courant* (29 October 1914) page 2, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010756778:mpeg21:p002>.

The importance placed on hospitality within Dutch society is evident in the next picture. This is a picture of an older woman, the only one in the series of an individual. She is holding two bags, in front of what is said to be the information agency in Middelburg. The picture is taken from the road, with the lady standing on the sidewalk in front of the entrance of the building. Through the entrance more people are visible, though they appear hazy. The Flemish old lady, as she is described, is wearing some form of head covering and a cape. Though described with pity, clearly, she has not let the situation get the better of her and is actively trying to improve her situation. She has not lost her agency. On the side of the building a notice is hung up. Though mostly unreadable, the two first sentences can be made out. It is the same sentence, “The offices are located”, in both Dutch and French. The description given underneath the picture informs us that the lady was “chased from home and hearth” and is seeking housing at the information agency. This description is very compassionate and subjective and appeals to the emotions of the viewers. Oftentimes, photographs of refugees are used in order to trigger empathy with the viewers.<sup>129</sup> Within humanitarian photography, this was often done through atrocity pictures. However, this picture requires the description underneath to communicate to the viewer what sort of situation the woman is in.<sup>130</sup> This influences the emotions of the viewers and could persuade them to donate. As mentioned before, women and children were a common focus in humanitarian photographs during this period. In chapter one it was established that overall this focus is not present in the photographs of Belgian refugees, which instead focus on mixed groups. However, this photograph is an exception as it focuses on an elderly woman. The perception that this is an exception is further stimulated by the policy of this time. As the Netherlands was neutral, the lack of focus on women and children might be explained by the goal of the country to be a place of refuge for everyone. During her speech on Prinsjesdag, the opening of the Dutch parliament, Queen Wilhelmina said that all refugees were welcome.<sup>131</sup>

What this photograph and its subjective description show us, is that photographs could influence the perception of the subject by the viewers. Historian Christian Götter describes the First World War as a media event where picture postcards played an important role in constructing images of the enemy.<sup>132</sup> Here we can see that was also the case for other groups. The refugees were the first and most visible symbol for the Dutch people of the war. Photographs could serve as markers of collective memory of the arrival of the refugees and the help that was given to them. These were socially shared experiences by inhabitants of Middelburg, and other places.<sup>133</sup> The influence of media

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<sup>129</sup> Lenette, ‘Writing with Light’, 3.

<sup>130</sup> Christina Twomey, ‘Framing Atrocity. Photography and Humanitarianism’ in: Heide Fehrenbach and David Rodogno eds., *Humanitarian Photography: A History* (Cambridge 2015) 47-63, 58.

<sup>131</sup> M., Hendrickx-van der Avert, ‘Vlucht en opvang van de burgerbevolking’ in: J.B.C. Kruishoop and Martin Bossenbroek eds., *Vluchten voor de Groote Oorlog: Belgen in Nederland 1914-1918*, 23; Leenders, *Ongenode gasten*, 137.

<sup>132</sup> Christian Götter, ‘The First World War as a Media Event’ in: *European History Online*, Leibniz-Institut für Europäische Geschichte (2021) <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/goetterc-2020-en> (March 2024).

<sup>133</sup> Griffin, ‘The Great War Photographs’, 147.

on the formation of opinions on the refugees, is visible in the local newspaper. Despite overall being compassionate and positive about the refugees, there were some more critical articles on the refugees published that might influence how the Dutch public viewed them. One article writes about “female refugees with loose morals” who are considered a danger to public health and morality.<sup>134</sup> In February the *Middelburgsche Courant* reported on the ungratefulness of the Belgian refugees when it comes to bread they received. “We hear there is a good chance that the ungrateful will be transferred to one of the refugee villages. Stricter supervision can be exercised there.”<sup>135</sup> Clearly the newspaper does not shy away from criticising the refugees, however this never got the upper hand.



Figure 15 – A group of injured Belgian soldiers at the (military) hospital, Middelburg, 1914, picture postcard, Zeeuws Archief, Zeeuws Genootschap, Zelandia Illustrata Deel III (nr. 403-8).

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<sup>134</sup> ‘De vluchtelingen’, *Middelburgsche Courant* (8 January 1915) page 1, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010681267:mpeg21:p001>.

<sup>135</sup> ‘De vluchtelingen’, *Middelburgsche Courant* (16 February 1915) page 1, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010681300:mpeg21:p001>.



Besides civilian refugees, Belgian soldiers are also included in the series. The photographer wanted to capture all elements of help, not limited to civilians. The picture above shows a group of fifteen soldiers, both standing and seated, in front of a building. The picture is taken at a hospital in Middelburg. The description indicates that all the soldiers pictured are injured. But they do not appear to be too ill. Only some are visibly injured so the men must be well enough to be able to pose for the photograph. At the same time some men appear unprepared and uncomfortable. Many do not look at the camera and their facial expressions are sombre. In the middle, one man is more occupied with a piece of paper than with the photographer. Perhaps some did not want to be included in the photograph. The picture is very sanitised and no very gruesome injuries are visible. Occasionally during the war, photographs depicting injuries were used as anti-German propaganda.<sup>136</sup> Though this was probably less so in the Netherlands, because of its neutrality. The photograph is clearly staged in that the soldiers were instructed to pose for it. It is expected that when the soldiers had recovered, they were sent to a camp where they would be interned, in one of the many camps for interned foreign soldiers.<sup>137</sup>



Figure 16 – An injured Belgian soldier reading a newspaper, Middelburg, 1914, picture postcard, Zeeuws Archief, Zeeuws Genootschap, Zelandia Illustrata Deel III (nr. 403-7).

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<sup>136</sup> de Waele, 'België en Nederland in augustus 1914', 17.

<sup>137</sup> Moeyes, *Buiten Schot*, 105.



Lastly, a single injured Belgian soldier is pictured reading the local newspaper, the *Middelburgsche Courant*. He is shown wearing a warm uniform, a scarf and a hat on top of the bandages to his head. This indicates that he is well cared for and has all the clothes he requires for the colder weather. He seems to be pictured in the same spot as the men in the previous photograph. The soldier is not looking at the camera, but instead his attention is focused on the newspaper in his hands. The description states that he is reading the “latest war messages”. He is presented as engaged with the war and his fellow soldiers. Furthermore, this also shows that he is somewhat integrated because he is reading the local newspaper. His injuries are not visible, and his wound is neatly dressed in clean bandages. The decision not to show soldiers that were too visibly injured could have been done to indicate that the soldiers were receiving good care from the Dutch hospitals or because the photographer did not want to include too shocking injuries for the viewers.

In conclusion, the series of picture postcards of the refugees in Middelburg supports a sanitised, neat and orderly presentation of the Belgian refugees or Belgian soldiers present in the city. The circumstances do not appear very dire for the refugees, at least not visibly. They are well cared for and are receiving the help they require. Furthermore, there are no crying refugees included, no one with any very obvious or extreme physical injuries or torn clothes, and interestingly enough no focus has been put on women and children in particular. Instead the refugees are mostly photographed in groups of mixed gender. No differentiation is made between men or women. The refugees are not pictured suffering explicitly. This stands in stark contrast to a development just a few years later, in the 1920s, when in raising awareness for humanitarian work, shocking photographs were used, often of children.<sup>138</sup> Instead, the series focuses on groups of refugees consisting of men, women and children, in the setting of them receiving help. Here similarities with Bergen op Zoom are visible. This suggests that there was a lot of overlap in different places. As historian Heide Fehrenbach writes, it is important to remember that images have a certain rhetoric that is politically and morally charged. Here, the rhetoric is that the refugees received excellent care from the city, which is understood as the humanitarian campaign of helping the refugees.<sup>139</sup> This is communicated through the inclusion of various aspects such as the giving of clothes, providing places for the refugees to sleep or providing them with food they can use to cook. This is seen as something positive for the refugees. The goal of the photographs seems to have been the documentation of the aid provision to the Belgian refugees. Within this goal the Belgian refugees are deemed deserving of the help as they are not presented in a negative way and are readily given help. Though framed as victims, the refugees are not presented as passive, but instead are often pictured doing chores or actively trying to receive help. They are active

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<sup>138</sup> Rose Holmes, ‘Making the Situation Real to us without Stressing the Horrors. Children, Photography and Humanitarianism in the Spanish Civil War’ in: Johannes Paulmann ed., *Humanitarianism and Media. 1900 to the Present* (New York; Oxford 2019) 67-89, 69.

<sup>139</sup> Heide Fehrenbach and David Rodogno, ‘Introduction: The Morality of Sight: Humanitarian Photography in History’ in: Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno eds., *Humanitarian Photography: A History* (Cambridge 2015) 1-21.

within the confines of the aid system. The photographs are marked as picture postcards. Picture postcards were very affordable during this period, and they were often used as a means of correspondence.<sup>140</sup> This makes clear that the photographs were meant to be distributed to and spread by ordinary citizens.

Despite the newspaper writing early on about the possibility of return, there is more emphasis in the newspaper articles on the harsh conditions the refugees had to endure. Furthermore, the use of words invokes compassion which allows for a more emotional understanding of the refugees than the photographs provide. The report made by the Commission was also very compassionate towards the refugees. Even though the emphasis and goal of the photo series was on the aid provision for the refugees, the refugees are able to keep their agency despite their victimhood being stressed.

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<sup>140</sup> Andrés Mario Zervignón, *John Heartfield and the Agitated Image: Photography, Persuasion, and the Rise of Avant-Garde Photomontage* (Chicago 2012) 45; 49.

### Chapter 3 – Amsterdam and the Belgian Refugees

This last chapter looks at a series of eight photographs of Belgian refugees taken at the IJkade in Amsterdam in order to answer the question of what frames were used. Amsterdam, as the capital and largest city of the Netherlands, was one of the places the refugees were sent to stay. Though not close to the border, many refugees were sent to the city in October once the influx increased. This meant that the refugees that arrived in the city had already been in the Netherlands for a few days at least. The photo series was made by photographer Bernard F. Eilers and is part of the archive of the *Tijdelijke Afdeling en Centrale Commissie voor de Belgische Uitgewekenen*.<sup>141</sup> This is housed on the website of the *Gemeente Amsterdam Stadsarchief*.<sup>142</sup> This was a local commission tasked with helping the Belgian refugees in Amsterdam. Therefore, the photographs will provide us with an understanding of how the refugees were seen and framed by the local commission. In order to form a better understanding of the opinions held of the refugees in the city, the archive of the local commission dedicated to helping the refugees, the Temporary Department and Central Commission for Belgian Refugees, is used. This is important since the photographs are part of the archive of the commission. Furthermore, articles of the local newspaper *De Amsterdammer: Christelijk Volksdagblad*.<sup>143</sup> from the period August 1 to 1914 to December 31 1918 are analysed to gain a better understanding of how the refugees were viewed locally. The photographs of the refugees in Amsterdam document the “camp” set up at the IJkade and the different facilities. As the photographs are part of the commission’s archive, it is clear that the photographs were taken at its request and tried to communicate a positive assessment. This is communicated by documenting various aspects of the camp and thereby indicates that the refugees are not lacking anything. Furthermore, the photographs frame the refugees in a positive way by showing them active while under the care of the Dutch. They are not presented as merely passive victims. The overall goal seems to have been to change public opinion on the warehouse while framing the refugees in a positive and non-threatening manner.

All the photographs in the series are made by Bernard F. Eilers, an Amsterdam-born photographer. He worked with many different genres, such as cityscape, architectural photography and advertising photography.<sup>144</sup> On the website of the archive, it states that the photographs are part of the archive of the Temporary Department and Central Commission for Belgian Refugees, a commission

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<sup>141</sup> English translation: Temporary Department and Central Commission for Belgian Refugees.

<sup>142</sup> Gemeente Amsterdam Stadsarchief, Archief van de Tijdelijke Afdeling en Centrale Commissie voor de Belgische Uitgewekenen, inv. nr. 470 (1914-1920), <https://archieff.amsterdam/inventarissen/details/470/> (accessed March 21 2024).

<sup>143</sup> Hereafter the newspaper will be referred to as *The Amsterdammer*.

<sup>144</sup> ‘Kleurseparatiebeelden van Bernard F. Eilers’, Het geheugen, <https://geheugen.delpher.nl/nl/geheugen/pages/collectie/Kleurseparatiebeelden+van+Bernard+F.+Eilers/Fotograaf+Bernard+Eilers> (accessed March 20 2024); Nederlands Fotomuseum, <https://collectie.nederlandsfotomuseum.nl/fotografen/detail/fc117ed3-a7d7-8a16-2594-75f028859a4b/media/c2544b9e-827e-16bb-0091-e3adb7834f0> (accessed March 20 2024).

set up on October 15 to provide aid to the Belgian refugees in the city.<sup>145</sup> Though there is no information in the archive as to why the photographs were taken, because they are included in the archive, it is clear that the commission ordered the photographs. They might have served to illustrate the work that the commission did for the refugees and how the refugees were living in the warehouses. Almost all the pictures have the same description: “*Eerste opvang en verzorging aan de Sumatrakade*” (“Initial reception and care at the Sumatrakade”).<sup>146</sup> The title of the pictures is also the same “*Belgische oorlogsvluchtelingen in Nederland*” (“Belgian war refugees in the Netherlands”) as are the date (1914) and the geographical indication (Sumatrakade). It is unsure if the description was included at the time the pictures were taken or was later given by the archive. The document type listed is a photograph. The refugees that were housed at the Sumatrakade were refugees who were unable to provide for themselves, also called needy refugees (*behoefte vluchtelingen*) or the less desirable elements. These refugees were one of the categories in which the refugees were divided by the Dutch government. The others were unwanted or dangerous elements and the decent needy (*pauvres honteaux*).<sup>147</sup>

The biggest pressure of providing shelter and care for the refugees was put, especially in the beginning of the war, on the shoulders of the three border provinces of the Netherlands, Zeeland, Noord-Brabant and Limburg. The government wanted to spread the refugees across the country in order to alleviate the pressure on the border towns and to ensure that the border could be well protected.<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, there was fear that the refugees could influence the Dutch public opinion with stories of atrocities committed by the German army and fear of smuggling and espionage.<sup>149</sup> Overall, it was believed the refugees posed a threat to the safety. Since the border areas could no longer manage the influx, the refugees were taken by train to other cities such as Amsterdam.<sup>150</sup> Amsterdam only started receiving refugees in early October, though this increased rapidly. On October 12 the mayor of Amsterdam declared that the city was full as there were around 14.000 refugees in the city.<sup>151</sup> This meant that private initiatives, which up until then were in charge of the care and reception of the refugees just as in the rest of the country, were no longer able to coordinate the situation. On October 15 the *Centrale Commissie voor Belgische Uitgewekenen naar Amsterdam* (CCA) was set up.<sup>152</sup> The commission organised the housing of the refugees in Amsterdam, provided financial care to refugees that stayed in the city and was tasked with registering all the refugees in Amsterdam.<sup>153</sup> Starting from October 20 the *havenloodsen*, warehouses, at the IJkade were used as housing facilities

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<sup>145</sup> Nagtegaal, ‘Toevlucht in Amsterdam’, 66.

<sup>146</sup> English translation: First reception and care at the Sumatrakade.

<sup>147</sup> de Roodt, *Oorlogsgasten*, 173.

<sup>148</sup> Ibidem, 149.

<sup>149</sup> Ibidem, 166; Leenders, *Ongenode gasten*, 143.

<sup>150</sup> Ibidem, 139.

<sup>151</sup> Nagtegaal, ‘Toevlucht in Amsterdam’, 65; Leenders, *Ongenode gasten*, 144.

<sup>152</sup> English translation: Central Commission for Belgian Refugees to Amsterdam.

<sup>153</sup> Nagtegaal, ‘Toevlucht in Amsterdam’, 67.

for the refugees.<sup>154</sup> It is important to note that this was only for poor refugees, who were unable to provide for themselves.<sup>155</sup> As a general rule the Dutch government did not interfere with those refugees who were able to provide for themselves for the duration of the war.<sup>156</sup> In total around 4000 refugees were housed in the warehouses.<sup>157</sup> The warehouses were the property of the city of Amsterdam but were rented out to third parties for use. Before the warehouses, the refugees that did not have any means of their own or had any relatives or friends in the city with whom they could stay, were housed in different buildings such as schools, empty houses, the stock exchange building or a diamond cutting factory.<sup>158</sup>



Figure 17 – A group of refugees arriving at the Central Station, Bernard F. Eilers, Amsterdam, 1914, photograph, Gemeente Amsterdam Stadsarchief, Archief van de Tijdelijke Afdeling en Centrale Commissie voor de Belgische Uitgewekenen (010003002618).

When looking at the photographs made by Eilers there is one picture that is not taken at the IJkade but instead illustrates the beginning of the experience of the refugees in the city. It shows a group of refugees arriving per train at the Central Station of Amsterdam. The background is dark, indicating that it is night. There are around 18 refugees, standing in front of a train and posing for the photograph. The refugees are warmly and neatly dressed in hats and with coats on. The group is mixed, with both men and women, and adults and children present. Here we can already see a

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<sup>154</sup> Ibidem, 66 and 68.

<sup>155</sup> Ibidem, 69.

<sup>156</sup> van den Heuvel-Strasser, 'Vluchtelingenverzorging of vreemdelingenbeleid', 197.

<sup>157</sup> de Roodt, *Oorlogsgasten*, 146.

<sup>158</sup> 'Stadsnieuws', *De Amsterdammer* (9 October 1914) page 1-2,

<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB19:000059194:mpeg21:p00002>.

similarity with the earlier chapters, with the emphasis put on both men and women. The group is turned towards the photographer as are multiple people visible from within the train. These passengers, on the left side of the picture, are visible through the windows of the train. One lady hangs out of a window. Most of the refugees do not show any emotion. This could be because they were tired of their journey. On the right side of the picture a staircase is partially visible. Behind the group either the train conductor or train driver is standing. On the doors of the train compartments the number III is visible. Perhaps indicating that the train coach is third class. Trains proved to be very important for the movement of and by the Belgian refugees during the First World War. They were one of the ways by which the refugees entered the Netherlands and how they were often transported throughout the country.<sup>159</sup> The photographer could have wanted to include the arrival of the refugees to mark the beginning of their time spent in the city. The picture is not a snapshot, taken while the refugees were busy getting off the train. Instead it shows an orderly scene with the group posing for the picture. The arrival is not depicted as chaotic even though, in the newspaper and literature, the masses of refugees entering the country is emphasised. *De Amsterdammer* often wrote about a “stream of refugees” and chaotic situations throughout the country.<sup>160</sup> On October 10 it wrote that “Yesterday our country was flooded with Belgian refugees for the third time....”<sup>161</sup> However, here the refugees are presented as calm and collected. Perhaps showing the ideal way for them to arrive. This is similar to the photographs showing the arrival of the refugees in Bergen op Zoom in chapter one, even though the situation there was chaotic as well. Documenting the arrival means that the refugees were considered welcome, at least at that moment. This hospitable attitude is also present in the local press, as *De Amsterdammer* uses compassionate terms such as “*verstrooiden*” (“the scattered”), “*arme mensen*” (“poor people”) and “*ongelukkigen*” (“the unfortunate”) to describe the refugees.<sup>162</sup> In early October, when the influx was at its height, it wrote that “It was moving to watch the people and hear them talk about their concerns.” In December it wrote that “the Dutch people have to care for their fellow

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<sup>159</sup> Kristel, *De oorlog van anderen*, 83.

<sup>160</sup> ‘De Binnenlandsche Toestand’, *De Amsterdammer* (9 October 1914) page 2, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB19:000059194:mpeg21:p00002>.

; ‘De Binnenlandsche Toestand’, *De Amsterdammer* (7 October 1914) page 2, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB19:000059192:mpeg21:p00002>.

<sup>161</sup> ‘De Binnenlandsche Toestand’, *De Amsterdammer* (10 October 1914) page 2, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB19:000059195:mpeg21:p00002>.

<sup>162</sup> ‘De Binnenlandsche Toestand’, *De Amsterdammer* (8 October 1914) page 2, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB19:000059193:mpeg21:p00002>.

; ‘De Binnenlandsche Toestand’, *De Amsterdammer* (5 October 1914) p. 2, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB19:000059190:mpeg21:p00002>; ‘De Binnenlandsche Toestand’, *De Amsterdammer* (9 October 1914) page 2, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB19:000059194:mpeg21:p00002>.



tribesmen, refugees, and the Southern Brothers, who lost so much or everything.”<sup>163</sup> Clearly, in the eyes of the newspaper the refugees were welcome and deserving of the help they would receive.



Figure 18 – Refugees in a dining hall, Bernard F. Eilers, Amsterdam, 1914, photograph, Gemeente Amsterdam Stadsarchief, Archief van de Tijdelijke Afdeling en Centrale Commissie voor de Belgische Uitgewekenen (010003002620).

There are only two pictures in the series that show something of the large number of refugees that were present. These are two pictures of different dining halls in large warehouses. The first is taken of a very large group of refugees in a dining hall furnished with six long tables. Most of the persons are seated along these tables that are lined with plates. In the rows between the tables others are standing. These persons are working as one woman towards the front is holding a large pot with a spoon and another man is wearing a light coloured jacket, indicating him as a member of staff. The persons seated at the tables are both men and women, young and old. There is no food yet served on the plates and everyone is paying attention to the photographer. This might be because the photographer called out for everyone to look towards him for the picture. Behind the tables, in the middle, more people are present. The majority of the people are facing the photographer, who is taking the photograph from a higher angle, indicating that he is standing on a higher ground. As the group of people is so large, this was necessary. In the middle of the picture, on a small piece of ceiling the words “*verboden te rooken*” (“smoking prohibited”) are put up. This is indicative of the former use

<sup>163</sup> ‘De Binnenlandsche Toestand’, *De Amsterdammer* (8 October 1914) page 2, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB19:000059193:mpeg21:p00002>; ‘Stadsnieuws’, *De Amsterdammer* (7 December 1914) page 2, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB19:000059243:mpeg21:p00002>.

of the space, as a warehouse. But at the same time, it shows that the rules were also applied to the refugees. To both sides of the tables lines with clothing hanging on them are visible. The fact that the clothes are hung up to dry in the same room that the refugees have their meals in, indicates the provisional conditions of the warehouses. The decision to place the refugees in the warehouses was an emergency measure and not a long-term solution. The decision to transfer the refugees to the IJkade was made quite hastily and therefore the spaces in which the refugees would stay in were unsuitable.<sup>164</sup> Complaints were made about the lack of proper facilities and calls were made for improvements.<sup>165</sup> The situation was even discussed in the city council, with questions asked as to why the refugees were housed in the warehouses before they were properly prepared; if there were any measures that could be taken to improve the quality of the lodgings; and if any measures were taken by the committee or the municipal government to ease the return of the refugees.<sup>166</sup> One alderman is quoted in the newspaper saying that it is very much desired that the refugees return to their hometowns, but that it is also the duty of the municipality to provide that the hospitality for those unable or unwilling to leave, should not diminish.<sup>167</sup> At least some force was applied in encouraging the refugees to move to the warehouses, as the sub commission for food declared on October 22 it would no longer provide food to refugees who did not stay in the warehouses.<sup>168</sup> The archive of the commission holds documents from the middle of October and early November where it is already communicated to the municipalities that it is desired that the refugees should return. As early as October 17 it was communicated to the mayors that soft force should and can be used on advice of the minister of Internal Affairs to have the refugees return.<sup>169</sup> This explicitly did not apply to those refugees “who provide entirely for their own maintenance.” Historian Marij Leenders agrees that there was most likely a discouragement policy present regarding the warehouses.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Nagtegaal, ‘Toevlucht in Amsterdam’, 72.

<sup>165</sup> Ibidem, 73-75.

<sup>166</sup> ‘Amsterdamsche Gemeenteraad’, *De Amsterdammer* (29 October 1914) page 2, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB19:000059210:mpeg21:p00002>.

<sup>167</sup> ‘Van ’t Prinsenhof’, *De Amsterdammer* (30 October 1914) page 1, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB19:000059211:mpeg21:p00001>.

<sup>168</sup> de Roodt, *Oorlogsgasten*, 166.

<sup>169</sup> Gemeente Amsterdam Stadsarchief, Archief van de Tijdelijke Afdeling en Centrale Commissie voor de Belgische Uitgewekenen, inv. nr. 470.1.1.1., scan 131, Letter from the queen’s commissioner to the mayor of Amsterdam, October 17 1914, <https://archieff.amsterdam/inventarissen/scans/470/1.1.1/start/130/limit/10/highlight/1>.

<sup>170</sup> Leenders, *Ongenode gasten*, 151.



Figure 19 – Refugees in a dining hall, Bernard F. Eilers, Amsterdam, 1914, photograph, Gemeente Amsterdam Stadsarchief, Archief van de Tijdelijke Afdeling en Centrale Commissie voor de Belgische Uitgewekenen (010003002621).

A similar photograph shows Belgian refugees seated along long tables. Again, the plates are empty and the attention of those seated is focused on the photographer. The two dining halls are not the same and the second picture shows a more organised space. Those seated consist again of a mixed group of people. Some of the people appear hazy. In between the rows of tables there are members of staff, dressed in light coloured jackets and standing next to pans, ready to serve the food. Again almost everyone's attention is directed at the photographer, indicating that the photographer likely told the refugees that he was taking the photograph. Even though both pictures show large groups of people, the pictures illustrate a sense of order. The refugees are seated orderly, photographed patiently waiting for their meal. They appear clean and careful in their use of the facilities which could indicate their gratitude for the help they received. *De Amsterdammer*, just as the other two newspapers did, often wrote about the hard work done by the Dutch people and nation in providing care and helping the refugees. Even though it describes the provision of care as a “duty” that the country has, the newspaper emphasises the hospitable nature and tradition of the Netherlands, for example by copying articles from foreign newspapers praising the hospitality and helpfulness of the Netherlands: “note should be taken of the gratitude of the Belgians and of the praise that is being showered on our people in the foreign press.”<sup>171</sup> The self-assessment made by the newspaper of the quality of help that is given throughout the country is extremely positive: “It is difficult to imagine the suffering of these thousands

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<sup>171</sup> ‘Een dubbele taak’, *De Amsterdammer* (14 October 1914) page 1, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB19:000059198:mpeg21:p00001>.

who are allowed to enjoy hospitality in our good Holland.”<sup>172</sup> Therefore, these orderly and well-furnished spaces could also emphasise the idea of the great quality of care.



Figure 20 – Sleeping quarters of the refugees, Bernard F. Eilers, Amsterdam, 1914, photograph, Gemeente Amsterdam Stadsarchief, Archief van de Tijdelijke Afdeling en Centrale Commissie voor de Belgische Uitgewekenen (010003002619).

Because of the sparse information provided by the description of the photographs, it is sometimes difficult to know exactly what is photographed. One picture where this is more difficult most likely shows the sleeping quarters. It shows a large group of people standing on the left side of the picture. The group consists of many children as they stand to look at the photographer. From the middle to the right side of the picture a group of five people is seated in a makeshift booth. They appear content and are seated neatly on their space. On the walls various items of clothing are hung up. This is probably the sleeping quarters of a specific family inside a larger warehouse acting as a dormitory. There is a clear separation between the large group and those seated which proposes a particular connection between those seated and the booth. Perhaps Eilers used this separation and placement as a way to indicate that this particular spot was that of the family. This, just as in chapter one, stresses the importance of the family and how many refugees fled together as a family. The separation could also indicate that there was not enough space for the rest of the refugees, as the large group is not inside their own booth. Perhaps this could be a push to show the needs of the refugees and demand better help. Overall, it is clear that there was little privacy in the warehouse as the sleeping quarters are not fully separated from one another.

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<sup>172</sup> ‘Stadsnieuws’, *De Amsterdammer* (9 October 1914) page 2-3, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB19:000059194:mpeg21:p00003>.





Figure 21 – Refugees doing chores outside, Bernard F. Eilers, Amsterdam, 1914, photograph, Gemeente Amsterdam Stadsarchief, Archief van de Tijdelijke Afdeling en Centrale Commissie voor de Belgische Uitgewekenen (0470FO000003).

The photographs analysed until now have shown refugees patiently and orderly seated or waiting without actively doing anything. This gives off the idea that they are taken care of. However, other photographs in the series show a different side, with refugees actively working. One such photograph shows a man and three women standing outside with buckets, in which they are cleaning something. They are bent over and busy with their work. Around them more people are standing, who are looking at the photographer. Perhaps they were washing clothes or washing dishes. The fact that they were doing the chore outside, might indicate to us that there was not enough space inside to do everything. The picture also shows a relaxed atmosphere and feels informal as several persons are smiling. This stimulates the idea that the IJkade was not a bad place for the refugees to stay as they were enjoying it there. It is interesting to note that both women and a man are doing the same job together. The placing of men and women together, and no gender divide being visible in the photographs is similar to the photographs of chapters one and two. There too, men and women are always pictured together and thus are framed as equals. Clearly whatever they were doing was not considered as something just for men or women. Contrary to the previous photographs, the refugees are pictured here as active, and not passively receiving or using the help. Keith Greenwood, a scholar in media history and photojournalism, and TJ Thomson, a visual communication and media scholar, write that refugees are either seen as threats, where they can be active, or as victims, where they are portrayed as passive.<sup>173</sup> However, here we see a situation in which the refugees are not depicted as

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<sup>173</sup> Greenwood and Thomson, 'Framing the migration', 7.

threats but are still active while clearly seen as victims. This is similar to their depiction in Middelburg, where they pictured as victims deserving of aid while at the same time waiting outside to receive it or making their own food. It becomes clear that the perception of the refugees across the Netherlands did not differ greatly.



Figure 22 – Female refugees working, Bernard F. Eilers, Amsterdam, 1914, photograph, Gemeente Amsterdam Stadsarchief, Archief van de Tijdelijke Afdeling en Centrale Commissie voor de Belgische Uitgewekenen (0470FO000004).

Another photograph of active refugees, shows ten women standing next to a large wooden sink. Most of the women are looking at each other as opposed to the photographer. The buckets might be used to hold food, and this is where all the dishes were washed. The floor is wet, clearly telling us that this was an area for cleaning. As the picture is a little bit hazy and the women are not lined up in a group nor mostly looking at the camera, the picture gives an impromptu and lively impression of the activities. The atmosphere appears good as several women are smiling. Here, as opposed to the previous picture, only women are at work. This tells us that there was some degree of gender division among the work. The fact that the refugees were pictured being active inside the refugee camps, contrasts with the framing of refugees during the recent refugee crisis. Jari Martikainen and Inari Sakki, both scholar in social psychology, argue that photographs of refugees inside refugee camps helped stimulate a discourse of refugees as victims because they were deprived of agency.<sup>174</sup> Clearly this is not always true as we have seen now over the course of these three chapters. The emphasis on

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<sup>174</sup> Jari Martikainen and Inari Sakki, 'Visual (de)Humanisation: Construction of Otherness in Newspaper Photographs of the Refugee Crisis', *Ethical and Racial Studies* 44:6 (2021) 236-266, 260.



agency might have been particularly strong when it comes to photographs of the Belgian refugees because the Dutch were scared of unruly masses as the numbers entering were emphasised heavily, especially in the beginning of the war. Therefore, picturing the refugees as active while they stayed in the Netherlands, might have taken away fears among the Dutch population of them causing trouble. Furthermore, in the case of Amsterdam, it might have contributed further to a positive assessment of the IJkade.

By picturing the refugees working, the photographer could have tried to create an idea of the refugees doing something in return for their stay or at least showing that they did not sit lazily by. So, the idea was that even though the country was very happy to help and saw it as their duty, the refugees were expected to be grateful. The mayor of Amsterdam described the attitudes of the local population towards the refugees on November 7 stating that “Initially it showed extraordinary generosity and rapprochement” but gradually a change towards “a less benevolent attitude.”<sup>175</sup> Still, *De Amsterdammer*, similar to the two other newspapers, reported on different expressions of gratitude by the Belgian refugees. It wrote about “grateful refugees” expressing their gratitude for the “excellent treatment and hospitality”.<sup>176</sup> Belgian refugees in Amsterdam specifically thanked the citizens of Amsterdam for the “full and truly warm welcome” that they received which they would never forget and always remain faithfully grateful for.<sup>177</sup> Perhaps it was thought that these articles could boost the morale of the Dutch citizens and get them to help even more.

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<sup>175</sup> Gemeente Amsterdam Stadsarchief, Archief van de Tijdelijke Afdeling en Centrale Commissie voor de Belgische Uitgewekenen, inv. nr. 470.1.1.1., scan 14, Questionnaire regarding the Belgian refugees in Amsterdam, November 7 1914,

<https://archieff.amsterdam/inventarissen/scans/470/1.1.1/start/10/limit/10/highlight/4>.

<sup>176</sup> ‘Plaatselijke Berichten’, *De Amsterdammer* (12 November 1914) page 3,

<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB19:000059222:mpeg21:p00003>.

<sup>177</sup> ‘Stadsnieuws’, *De Amsterdammer* (13 October 1914) page 3,

<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB19:000059197:mpeg21:p00003>.



Figure 23 – Refugees in a storage space, Bernard F. Eilers, Amsterdam, 1914, photograph, Gemeente Amsterdam Stadsarchief, Archief van de Tijdelijke Afdeling en Centrale Commissie voor de Belgische Uitgewekenen (0470FO000002).

The work done by the refugees is further documented. One picture shows eight persons inside the room, all but one looking at the photographer. Above the shelves in the middle of the picture two more men are visible. On the left side stands a large container filled with bread. Next to it there are shelves lined with pots or plates. On these shelves small buckets are hung up. One woman appears to be serving up some food into a bowl. There is one man who wears more formal clothing, as he is wearing a hat and a blazer, which indicates some uniform. He could have been in an authoritative position and could have been in charge of the group pictured. The storage room is very well packed with items and products. This indicates that there is enough produce for all.



Figure 24 – Refugees receiving a haircut, Bernard F. Eilers, Amsterdam, 1914, photograph, Gemeente Amsterdam Stadsarchief, Archief van de Tijdelijke Afdeling en Centrale Commissie voor de Belgische Uitgewekenen (0470F0000001).

The final photograph in the collection, shows two refugees at the hairdresser, a facility clearly deemed vital enough in order to be included in the warehouses. An adult man is shaved while a child has their hair cut. On the left side a table is visible where items are scattered on. A bottle, two brushes and a packet with writing on it are visible. Behind the men, along the walls, clothes are lined up. This again reminds us of the rather rudimentary set up of the facilities inside the warehouses. The “barber shop” is not in a separate room since everything was located inside the large halls. Most probably those working in the picture, were refugees themselves. There was quite some discussion about refugees and the work they would be able to do in the Netherlands. Some people thought that the refugees took jobs from Dutch workers or that they were chosen above the Dutch because many refugees were willing to work for lower wages.<sup>178</sup> Later in the *vluchtoorden*, work inside the camps was encouraged so as not to put the Dutch workers at a disadvantage.<sup>179</sup> This would further counteract any “laziness” that could cause disturbances in the camps.<sup>180</sup> Therefore, showing the refugees at work could also reduce fears that they would take away jobs or cause disturbances

As the photo series tries to give a positive impression of the IJkade, it is interesting to look at an article written by *De Amsterdammer* about a visit in late November 1914. It writes about this visit

<sup>178</sup> de Roodt ‘Reacties van Nederlanders op vluchtelingen tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog’, 58.

<sup>179</sup> de Roodt, *Oorlogsgasten*, 179.

<sup>180</sup> Hendrickx-van der Avert, ‘Het dagelijks leven in de kampen: de vluchtoorden’ in: J.B.C. Kruishoop and Martin Bossenbroek eds., *Vluchten voor de Grootte Oorlog: Belgen in Nederland 1914-1918* (Amsterdam 1988) 35-4, 41.

in an extremely positive way. It is important to note that this was not the first visit made to the IJkade, though I have not been able to find any information on the first visit. The newspaper remarks that the conditions have improved since their previous visit: “What a contrast to previous visits”.<sup>181</sup> It seems to have improved a lot as the newspaper describes the warehouses as an excellent location for the purpose of housing refugees. The writer of the article states that he saw no sombre faces during the visit and did not hear anyone complain. It is especially mentioned that the elderly are satisfied, and they urge the reporters to write that “people would much rather stay here” than move to one of the *vluchtoorden*. Overall the writer of the article states that “there is a general impression that no one has the right to complain anymore and that what can be done has been done.”<sup>182</sup> This fits within the narrative reported on by the newspaper as soon as October 1914, that it is safe to return to Belgium and shows us that the newspaper had a positive view on the care that was provided to the refugees. Though the newspaper expressed a desire for the refugees to return home it never wrote about them in an overly negative way.

The photograph of the dining hall and the photograph of the refugees seated in the sleeping area, were included in an edition of the *Nederlandsche Illustratie*, an illustrated magazine, in late November 1914.<sup>183</sup> Included underneath the picture of the dining hall, is a description stating that English delegates have visited the IJkade and were very positive in their assessment. The word “*kiekje*” (snapshot) is used, making the picture feel informal. Underneath the other picture of the sleeping quarters, the viewers are informed that every family has their own sleeping quarter, which is a closed off space. This is a positive assessment against any negative commentary that the refugees were put together in one large space without privacy. Other photographs from Amsterdam were also printed in illustrated magazines. In November 1915 the pictures of the women at the sinks, the storage room, the sleeping quarters and a cropped version of the boy at the barber shop, are included in *Panorama* under the title “In the much-discussed refugee warehouse in Amsterdam.”<sup>184</sup> The descriptions do not mention any of the criticism that was expressed. However, the title indicates location was much debated. Though most descriptions only offer a simple description, the photograph of the women at the sink is more subjective. It praises the women for their work: “The female talent never denies itself anywhere.” The first photograph of the dining hall, was included in the *Katholieke Illustratie*.<sup>185</sup> It was accompanied by a description: “In the warehouse on the IJkade in Amsterdam, where the Belgian immigrants are ‘concentrated’: The lunch of the Belgian guests: a nice snapshot of the large crowd.” This description provides a positive judgement by calling the refugees guests. Again the term snapshot

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<sup>181</sup> The newspaper opens the article with the following sentence: “Yesterday the press was again invited to take a look at the warehouses on the IJkade.” ‘Stadsnieuws’, *De Amsterdammer* (25 November 1914) page 2, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB19:000059233:mpeg21:p00002>.

<sup>182</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>183</sup> *Nederlandsche Illustratie* (November 29 1914) jaargang 25, No. 9, page 510.

<sup>184</sup> *Panorama* (November 25 1914) jaargang 2, No. 22b.

<sup>185</sup> *De Katholieke Illustratie: zondags-lektuur voor het Katholieke Nederlandsche volk* (December 5 1914) jaargang 49, page 138, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKDC09:017317009:00001>.

gives off an air of informality. These photographs on the Belgian refugees were often included with other news on the war such as battles or important figures. Other times they were surrounded by stories that had nothing to do with the pictures without having a description included.

Eventually, the warehouses were cleared. This began on November 27 and was completed in December.<sup>186</sup> The refugees were mostly transported to *vluchtoord* Nunspeet, travelled to London or returned to Belgium.<sup>187</sup> When the clearing was started the refugees were given the (forced) choice of either going to *vluchtoord* Nunspeet or to return to Belgium as they would no longer receive financial aid otherwise.<sup>188</sup> De Roodt writes that the willingness in Amsterdam to take in refugees remained limited for the duration of the war. The mayor of Amsterdam provided three reasons for this: taking in refugees would cause disturbances among the population; the police was already heavily burdened; and there were no more resources left in the city as they had been sent to *vluchtoord* Nunspeet.<sup>189</sup> Some of this criticism and reluctance in providing more care in Amsterdam, is present in *De Amsterdammer*. Already on October 19, just nine days after the capture of Antwerp, *De Amsterdammer* questioned whether the threat or fear of the Germans really was so big that the refugees could make use of the Dutch hospitality for a longer period of time.<sup>190</sup> Furthermore, the newspaper agreed with an alderman, in late October, that it was desirable for the refugees to return home, but that the hospitality should not diminish.<sup>191</sup> Reports on visits which concluded that it was safe to return published in late October and early November.<sup>192</sup> The minister of Interior Affairs, Cort van der Linden, communicated in his instructions to the mayors of municipalities that soft force was allowed to be used. The government was concerned about the maintenance costs for poor refugees that received government support.<sup>193</sup> *De Amsterdammer* also included positive accounts of the *vluchttoorden*.<sup>194</sup> However, the refugees themselves were not keen on moving to the vluchttoorden, as the chief of police in Amsterdam wrote that some refugees refused to leave for Nunspeet because of

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<sup>186</sup> Leenders, *Ongenode gasten*, 150.

<sup>187</sup> Nagtegaal, 'Toevlucht in Amsterdam', 84.

<sup>188</sup> de Roodt, *Oorlogsgasten*, 174.

<sup>189</sup> Ibidem, 167-168.

<sup>190</sup> 'De Binnenlandsche Toestand', *De Amsterdammer* (19 October 1914) page 2, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB19:000059201:mpeg21:p00002>.

<sup>191</sup> 'Van 't Prinsenhof', *De Amsterdammer* (30 October 1914) page 1, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB19:000059211:mpeg21:p00001>.

<sup>192</sup> 'De Binnenlandsche Toestand', *De Amsterdammer* (27 October 1914) page 2, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB19:000059208:mpeg21:p00002>; 'De Binnenlandsche Toestand', *De Amsterdammer* (5 November 1914) page 2, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB19:000059216:mpeg21:p00002>.

<sup>193</sup> de Roodt, *Oorlogsgasten*, 164.

<sup>194</sup> 'Uit de pers', *De Amsterdammer* (8 April 1915) page 2, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB19:002140082:mpeg21:p00002>; 'De Binnenlandsche Toestand', *De Amsterdammer* (15 February 1915) page 2, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB19:002140038:mpeg21:p00002>.

the stories they had heard of that camp.<sup>195</sup> Positive reporting on the camps might have been used to stimulate refugees to move there.

To conclude, the photographs taken of the Belgian refugees by Eilers for the Temporary Department and Central Commission for Belgian Refugees during the early months of the war in 1914 frame the refugees, and the assistance and shelters, in a positive and orderly way. The photographs document different parts of the warehouses in which the refugees stayed. They do not match the criticism that was expressed in the press on the quality of the facilities. Rather, they provide an account of an orderly shelter where aspects of daily life continue. However, it is unknown if the photographs were made before or after the improvements. The refugees are framed as active and working inside the warehouses contributing to the workings of daily life there instead of being merely passive recipients of help. This solely in group settings, with no focus put on any individual refugees. The groups consist of both men and women. This is all similar to the portrayal of the refugees in Chapters one and two. Clearly these ideas were the same across the Netherlands. By portraying the refugees in settings where they receive aid, it tells us that they were deemed as deserving of it. It is clear that Eilers and the commission wanted to show a positive side to the IJkade and the aid provision. This is understandable as the commission had been criticised on the conditions at the IJkade. Therefore, they would have wanted to counteract this view and show that the refugees were well taken care of and enjoying their stay. This could have also helped to receive more donations. The newspaper supports a positive and compassionate view of the refugees though it allowed room for some criticism. More detailed descriptions of the realities of the situation were present in the articles than in the photographs. Overall the refugees are not deprived of their agency though they are deemed victims. This is similar to the earlier two chapters, which indicates great similarities between different places in the Netherlands.

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<sup>195</sup> Gemeente Amsterdam Stadsarchief, Archief van de Tijdelijke Afdeling en Centrale Commissie voor de Belgische Uitgewekenen, inv. nr. 470.1.1.2, scan 201, A message from the chief commissioner of the Amsterdam police to the mayor of Amsterdam, December 14 1914, <https://archieff.amsterdam/inventarissen/scans/470/1.1.1/start/200/limit/50/highlight/1>.



## Conclusion

This thesis has tried to answer the question of *What frames were used in photographs taken of Belgian refugees in the Netherlands during the early months of the First World War and why were these frames used?* Photographs taken in three different Dutch cities were analysed, supported by local newspaper articles, in order to form an understanding of the framing of the refugees. The choice to look at three Dutch cities was done in order to get some overview across the country and see if there were any differences or similarities.

The analysis of the photographs has shown that across the three different cities there are great similarities in how the refugees were framed. They were mostly framed as victims deserving of the help they received. Across the country this frame was highlighted and chosen above other aspects of the refugees' experience.<sup>196</sup> There is a division between photographs depicting the refugees obediently waiting and photographs showing the refugees while active, not having lost their agency. Overall, they appear clean and obedient and in sanitised settings with a large emphasis on order. The refugees are almost exclusively photographed in groups and these groups are mixed, consisting of men and women, and adults and children. It is interesting that there is no specific focus on women and/or children and that men are deemed, in this way, equally deserving of the aid. Oftentimes women were singled out together with children because of their innocent and apolitical nature. But in this case, women and men are all photographed equally as much. This was probably so because the Netherlands did not want to pick a side because of its neutrality. Therefore, it viewed all the refugees equally. The emphasis on groups stresses the familial and communal connections existing between the refugees. Clearly these were not lonesome refugees, but instead whole families had come to find refuge in the Netherlands. This emphasises the scale of the situation and how many refugees were present in the country.

Some differences in relation to the purpose or goal of the images between the cities are clear. In Bergen op Zoom, the purpose of the images is more difficult to discern as the photographs were chosen out of hundreds of pictures held by the archive, taken by different photographers. However, it is clear that the photographers wanted to document the presence of the refugees in the city, from their initial arrival to their stay in one of the camps. The disorder the city was in at the beginning, is not reflected in the photographs, which instead show calm scenes of refugees waiting for help.

In Middelburg the photo series aimed to capture the different aspects of the aid provision given to the Belgian refugees by the charities. This could have been done to document and remember the presence of the refugees, while at the same time, the positive depictions of the situation could have stimulated a positive assessment of the committees working in Middelburg. The refugees do not appear in bad conditions and are both photographed while active and while waiting. They are deemed deserving of the help they receive.

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<sup>196</sup> Entman, 'Framing', 53.

The series of photographs taken of the refugees at the IJkade in Amsterdam, frames the refugees in a similar, positive, and deserving way. Here as well, the refugees are both depicted as either passively seated or actively working to make the best of their situation. Furthermore, the goal of the photographs seems to have been a wish to counteract the criticism that was expressed on housing the refugees in the warehouses. Despite these minor differences, it is clear that there are overwhelming similarities between the cities, thus indicating that there was a general frame of the Belgian refugees in the Netherlands in the early months of the war.

These similarities are also present in the newspapers. They wrote very alike, so much so that the articles appear indistinguishable. All the newspapers wrote compassionately about the refugees while they were also positive in their judgement of the aid provision across the country. Sentiments of gratitude expressed by the refugees were eagerly printed. However, simultaneously the newspapers began to write articles informing refugees that it was safe, and good, to return to Belgium. This provides us with some counterview to the compassionate newspapers. Clearly there were no big differences across these places.

Overall the refugees were framed as deserving and welcome without the use of any shocking images. This is in line with earlier research. The refugees were welcome in the Netherlands, especially in those early months of the war. The task of housing so many refugees was deemed necessary in order to stay neutral during the war, which was the highest goal of the Dutch government. However, the government did not want to cause too much anti-German sentiment amongst the population. This might explain why the photographs of the refugees are so clean, sanitised and do not show refugees in any great distress. Perhaps authorities were scared that shocking photographs could stir up anti-German sentiment which could endanger the neutrality.

This thesis has further illustrated the importance of using photographs as primary sources in their own right and not as mere illustrations for historical research. They can tell us about ideas and sentiments held on a subject. In this case the photographs have shown that the refugees were seen as victims. This is also visible in the analysis of the newspapers. However, the photographs have gone further to show that the refugees had not completely lost their agency. Additionally, they emphasised the importance of familial and social connections by capturing the refugees exclusively in group settings. Lastly these group settings have made clear that there was little gender divide between men and women, who were almost exclusively pictured together. All of this was not present in the newspaper articles that were analysed.

It is interesting to see if the change towards more reluctance in public sentiment concerning the refugees, as de Roodt writes, is visible in photographs. However, the dating of photographs is very inconsistent. So an analysis of a chronological change during the war, might be difficult to execute. Future research might be done on photographs of the Belgian refugees in other places, such as the United Kingdom or France or photographs of other refugees during the First World War. This can help

broaden our understanding of how the framing of refugees and public sentiment towards refugees has changed over time and how it differs across places.

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