Refugees on Screen

TERENCE WRIGHT

Introduction

> … it's what they call 'compassion fatigue', the idea that we get so much human suffering thrust in our faces every day from the media that we've become sort of numbed, we've used up all our reserves of pity, anger, outrage … smudgy b/w pictures of starving black babies with limbs like twigs and heads like old men … or stunned-looking refugees, or amputees on crutches. How is one supposed to stem this tide of human misery? (David Lodge, *Therapy*, 1996)

World interest in refugees has perhaps never been so great as it is today. The main responsibility for bringing images of refugees into our homes lies almost entirely with the focus of media attention. While numbers of those forced to migrate increase, we are witnessing a global revolution in mass communications. Owing to the increased speed and accessibility of media technology, a 'visual culture' is emerging that relies more and more upon information provided by pictures. The images we see on our television screen play a crucial role in determining how we construct our reality. One of the consequences of our 'digital era' is a considerable reduction in communication through language, in favour of relying on the visual image to tell the story. As Ignatieff (1998: 26) puts it: 'The entire script content of the CBS nightly half-hour news would fit on three-quarters of the front page of the *New York Times*'. For journalism, the outcome is a more simplistic treatment of current affairs. Yet when we stop to think about how much of our knowledge of the world is derived from pictures, we find that there is also very little general understanding about how visual images communicate this information. Against this background, journalism as a profession has become 'promiscuous', disparate and diffuse; yet Western governments appear to be increasingly responsive to public opinion. It is becoming increasingly important not only to analyse the ability of visual images to create new discourses, but also necessary to examine the social and institutional constraints on their function. The power of the visual image has received little attention in research on the media representation of migration. Yet, with photographs in mind, Malkki (1995: 9) has pointed out that: 'photographic portrayals of refugees are, in our day, extremely abundant. Most readers have probably seen such photographs, and most of us have a strong visual sense of what "a refugee" looks like'. The visual representation of refugees plays an essential, yet neglected, role in forming the stereotype of 'the refugee'.

The consequences for the world's displaced peoples raise the following questions:

– What role do visual images have in constructing our concept of 'the refugee'?
– How do refugees gain public attention?
– Why are some instances of forced migration covered by the media while others are ignored?
– What determines the type of media treatment that refugees receive?
– What moves people to respond to visual images of forced migration?

Many of the pictures that we see of refugees conform to pre-established patterns. For example, in Christian religious painting we find a long tradition in portraying forced migration which can be traced from 'The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden' to 'The Flight into Egypt'; such images have played a central role in the development of Western visual representation. When compared to contemporary images of refugees, there are striking similarities in content and style. Our understanding of humanitarian crises in part may be influenced by these broader cultural traditions. Nonetheless fashions and media have changed. During the last 30 years a generation has grown up unused to seeing images of European refugees (other than as historical documents). And recently the image of the starving displaced African has been supplanted by the victims of 'ethnic cleansing' in Eastern Europe.

This paper examines the representation of refugees in the media, paying special regard to the visual image. It begins by considering some contemporary images of refugees in the press and looks for patterns and common elements in their construction and usage. It then identifies some historical archetypes that are used to portray the subject of forced migration and initially suggests that many 'standard' images of refugees conform to patterns already established in Christian iconography. It suggests that viewers find accord with such images (with which they are already familiar) and that they may evoke a familiar story-line. The paper then considers the ways that the refugee story has been structured in fiction film and proposes that feature film portrayals can conform to the 'Road Movie' film genre. The definition of 'genre' is expanded to include 'institutional discourses'. In this context the structure of television news is considered and the work of the Glasgow Media Group on the news reporting of migration is reviewed. The paper suggests that existing media research on the issue of forced migration has paid scant regard for the visual image. At this point the image's wider context is introduced, followed by outlining some issues arising from recent technological and institutional changes in media practice. The paper concludes with the identification of key topics for future research into media images of refugees.

The Visual Image and the Refugee

> Looking at these images, I know what happened several thousand years ago when the Egyptians built the pyramids. I understand what it must have looked like when the Mayas constructed their extraordinary cities. He's brought something biblical to it, he didn't just do a reportage. (Robert Pledge, Contact Press Images/Europe, discussing Sebastião Salgado's photographs of the Serra Pelada goldmine, *Looking Back at You, Omnibus*, BBC Television, 1993)

In the case of refugee images, it might seem strange to ask 'where do pictures come from?' It seems fairly obvious that they are 'taken' of a particular person in a situation of migration in a specific location. However, as Malkki (1995: 9) has indicated, there exists a 'tendency to universalise "the refugee" as a special "kind" of person, not only in the textual representation, but also in their photographic representation'. For example, in the 1930s, when the photographer Dorothea Lange took her famous photograph *Migrant Mother*, the situation was not quite so straightforward. It seems that Lange was driving through the countryside, looking for an image to satisfy a preconceived idea. This will be discussed in greater detail later. However, with most news images we see, there is a sense of the picture makers not offering an unbiased impression by photographing what is there, but looking for images that conform to their own preconceptions. Indeed it is sometimes difficult for the 'reality' to get through the editorial 'obstacle course'. Although I might shoot pictures that I feel are 'non-stereotypical', as well as some that are (for fear of being chided by those who have commissioned the assignment), it is more likely that the more predictable images will be chosen by those who occupy positions further along the editorial chain.

In taking a 'snapshot' overview of media images of refugees – and in recognition of the biblical origins in forming the prototypes of some of these images (to be discussed in the next section) – I would make a tentative proposal that media images of refugees can be classified in the following categories of 'image types'. First is a possible distinction in the representation of refugees between 'Old Testament' and 'New Testament'. The 'Old Testament' or 'Fall of Man' stereotype, derived from Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, usually features a couple or small group in states of degradation, isolation, rags, etc. In contrast in the 'New Testament' category refugees are depicted in the style of Joseph and Mary's 'Flight into Egypt': people who are displaced but not necessarily destitute. They may be portrayed with a few possessions and sometimes a means of transport. There is a third category: 'Exodus', the mass movement of people, which may suggest the out-of-frame presence of a pursuer. In addition we find the 'Madonna and Child' image a regular occurrence, which may be incorporated in any of the three categories.

While there are always inherent problems with classificatory systems, they can have the virtue of providing a working model for analysing the problem. In the long

run they may be abandoned, adapted or adopted as their appropriateness only becomes apparent during the research. It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine all three categories in turn, so the 'Fall of Man' category has been discussed initially, followed by an introduction to the 'Madonna and Child' image. These are used to form the basis for discussion of wider media issues.

Expulsion from the Garden

> Th[e] process of coming to see other human beings as 'one of us' rather than as 'them' is a matter for detailed description of what unfamiliar people are like and a redescription of what we ourselves are like. This is a task not for theory but for genres such as ethnography, the journalist's report, the comic book, the docudrama, and … the novel (Rorty 1989: xvi).

Although the media images of refugees that appear in the newspapers and on our television and cinema screens are relatively recent phenomena, the subject of forced migration has a long pictorial tradition. For example, in Masaccio's painting of 'The Expulsion from Paradise' (*c*. 1425-8) (Figure 1), the image of Adam and Eve being expelled from the Garden of Eden by an angel contains many of the same constituent elements as some of today's press photographs. When comparing Masaccio's painting with the photograph by Darren Whiteside, taken in East Timor, that appeared in *The Guardian* (21 September 1999) (Figure 2), both images show a couple in distress escorted by an armed guard(ian). The background of each image is fairly sparse save for a piece of architecture – in the former: the

1. Masaccio *The Expulsion from Paradise* c. 1425-8

> Refugees have cut leaves from palm trees for shelter. They have some rice but the little children are worst off

2. Darren Whiteside *East Timor* in *The Guardian*: 21st September 1999

gates of paradise; in the latter: a ruined abandoned building. Indeed one could further propose that many of today's images of migrants and refugees conform to biblical precedents. Besides its connection with the Masaccio painting, Whiteside's photograph has stylistic similarities to the Christian icon of the Madonna and Child, an image that recurs with predictable regularity.

> Having looked at photographs of refugees over several years, one becomes aware of the perennial resonance of the woman with her child. This is not just any woman; she is composed as an almost madonnalike figure (Malkki 1995: 11).

One difference in Whiteside's photograph, is that the child (though breast-feeding) is holding an empty cup – if this detail were featured in one of Hogarth's paintings, we should be expected to look for the symbolic meaning of 'poverty'. This too may have biblical origins where the cup operates as a symbol of human destiny – signifying the way in which an individual's fate is allotted by God. It may be likened to receiving a cup which may overflow with blessings (Psalm 23: 5), or to having a cup that may contain 'fire and brimstone' (Psalm 11: 6). However, a similar more contemporary appearance of the Madonna and Child icon is Dorothea Lange's classic photograph of the American depression, *Migrant Mother* (1936) (Figure 6).

> Dorothea Lange's famous 'Migrant Mother' is a timeless madonna. The 'holy mother' theme captions the image, placing it so that we apprehend the universal in the guise of the immediate, the sacred incarnate as the humble (Trachtenberg 1988: 70).
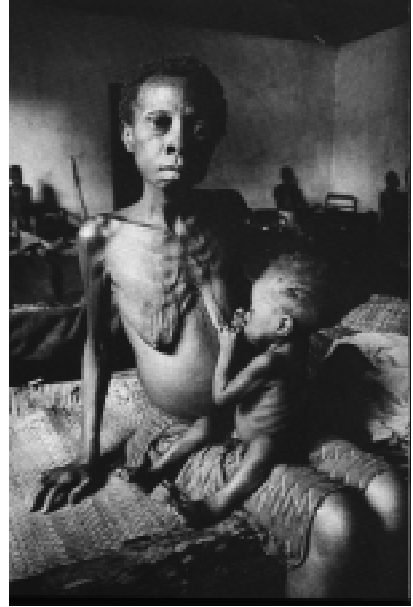
3. Detail of Rogier van der Weyden *St Luke Painting the Virgin*
4. Don McCullin *Biafra*, 1970
5. Gianni Giansanti *Landscape of Death*, Time Magazine, 1992
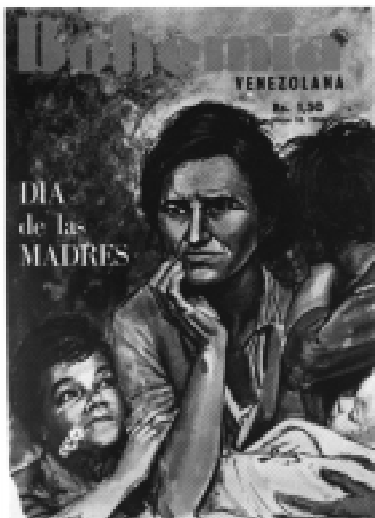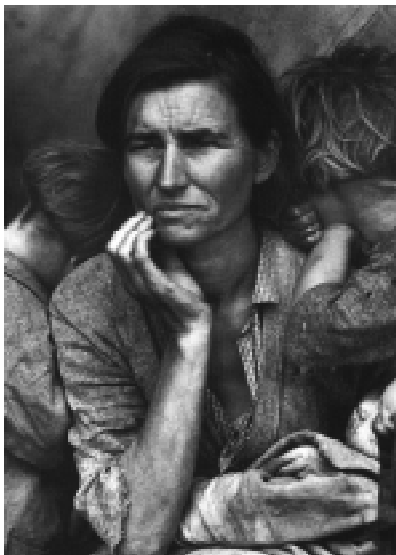
6. Lange's original photograph, 1936
7. Three years later Lange's *Mother* becomes *Spanish Mother: The Terror of 1938*. 1939.
   Lithograph by Diana Thorne
8. The image moves to Venezuela - *Bohemia Venezolana*, 1964
9. The *Mother* changes race for the Black Panthers' newspaper, 1973

According to Lange's own account of the photo-shoot: 'I saw and approached the hungry and desperate mother, as if drawn by a magnet. I do not remember how I explained my presence or my camera to her, but I do remember she asked me no questions. I made five exposures, working closer and closer from the same direction. I did not ask her name or history … I knew I had recorded the essence of my assignment' (Lange 1960: 42-43). It appears that she had recognised, in the woman's situation, the potential for a cultural/religious icon and had instinctively captured it on film: 'Lange knew she had found precisely the ideal image she was searching for' (Levine 1988: 26). Images such as these have become longstanding cultural icons which can automatically elicit the appropriate emotional response. Some constitute a variation on a theme and some images evoke other images. Just as the *Migrant Mother* had caused Trachtenberg to place the photograph in the tradition of the 'timeless madonna', so Moeller on encountering a photograph of a Somali infant (1992) (Figure 5) reflects back to Lange's *Migrant Mother* (1936):

> Confronted with two images of a mother breastfeeding a child … we react with greater emotion to the photograph of the African child … we know with a fair degree of certainty that the American infant will survive … The African infant, it seems, cannot possibly survive … (Moeller 1999: 39).

Strictly speaking, Lange's *Migrant Mother* photograph does not actually show the activity of breast-feeding as Moeller indicates. One of the six images of Florence Thomson and her children, taken by Lange at a migrant labour camp in Nipomo, California does feature this activity, but this was not the frame finally chosen by Lange. Indeed I find it difficult to make much of Moeller's comparison. However, whether her conjecture is or is not appropriate, the point remains valid that an image has the potential to induce the viewer to relate it to a much older visual tradition. To reinforce this point, I would add to this collection by comparing Don McCullin's photograph of a mother and child from the Biafran famine (1970) (Figure 4) with a detail from Rogier van der Weyden's 15th century painting *St Luke Drawing a Portrait of the Virgin* (Figure 10). Both images show clearly how a contemporary photograph can conform to a pictorial tradition and, in turn, demonstrate the power of the visual image to invoke the viewer's response. Another reason for choosing the van der Weyden painting is the reflexive nature of the image: the painting shows the image-making tradition itself in the making (Figure 10). According to a 6th century legend of Greek origin, St Luke was the first person to make a portrait of the Virgin, thus reputedly initiating the iconography of the Madonna and Child. With regard to another pictorial tradition (mentioned earlier), among other symbolic elements, sculptural figures of Adam and Eve decorate the Virgin's throne, to suggest that Christ will atone for their Original Sin. Although primarily a Christian icon, the image of the Madonna and Child has attained a broad secular appeal. Similarly, as befits a

10. Rogier van der Weyden *St Luke Painting the Virgin*. 15th century

cultural icon, Lange's *Migrant Mother* has appeared in a number of subsequent in-carnations, enhancing its status as a representation of the 'universal mother' (Figures 7-9 and 11-13).

Whether images of migration and starvation tend to be more closely associated with biblical imagery than do other news items, remains to be examined. For the moment we can cite close associations in photographs, film sequences, the written as well as the spoken word:

> Dawn, and as the sun breaks through the piercing chill of night … it lights up a biblical famine, now in the twentieth century. This place, say workers here, is the closest thing to hell on Earth (Michael Buerk, BBC Television News, November 1984; quoted in Fielding 1994: 97).

In returning to the book of *Genesis* and with regard to Adam and Eve's expulsion, Moser (1998) demonstrates how biblical stories provided the model for images of

11. Dorothea Lange's Migrant *Mother* as it appeared in *Midweek Pictorial*. 17 October 1936

The Mirror — Tuesday April 11 2000

SHOCK REPORT

GO ON, LOOK AWAY
After all, he's only another starving Ethiopian kid isn't he? But he has a name, Rashid. He has a mother, Hani. And by the time you read this he'll have a grave too

ANTON ANTONOWICZ IN ETHIOPIA: PAGES 8 & 9

12. *The Mirror*. 11 April 2000

13. Madonna and Child Image from Richard Attenborough's film *Gandhi*

pre-history. While this is not my precise concern, she does examine the extensive influence of the Bible in establishing a narrative framework. Pictures which focused on Adam and Eve inspired illustrators depicting early human life: Adam and Eve next to the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden; their expulsion from Paradise (their original 'homeland'); and their labours in the wilderness. According to Moser, stories from both biblical and classical origins have proved to have a great visual potential. The Bible itself has provided inexhaustible inspiration for visual representation, suggesting that biblical illustrations were significantly responsible for the spread of Christianity. The proliferation of biblical imagery has been of great importance. Artists highlighted key iconographic themes which enabled people to make sense of their past and their own place in the world. Some biblical iconographic features were to become closely associated with secular imagery. At the same time contemporary icons can be endowed with the same power and status as religious icons:

> … what never failed to strike me most of all – and by now I had been in almost every house – were the eyes of the two inseparable guardian angels that looked at me from the wall over the bed. On one side was the black, scowling face, with its large, inhuman eyes, of the Madonna of Viggiano; on the other a coloured print of the sparkling

eyes, behind gleaming glasses, and the hearty grin of President Roosevelt. I never saw other pictures or images than these … they seemed the two faces of power that has divided the universe between them. But here their roles were … reversed. The Madonna appeared to be a fierce, pitiless, mysterious, ancient earth goddess, the Saturnian mistress of this world; the President a sort of all-powerful Zeus, the benevolent and smiling master of a higher sphere. Sometimes a third image formed, along with these two, a trinity: a dollar bill, the last of those brought back from across the sea, or one that had come in a letter of a husband or relative, was tacked up under the Madonna or the President, or else between them, like the Holy Ghost or an ambassador from heaven to the world of the dead (Levi 1947: 120-1).

However, the image of the expulsion from the Garden of Eden symbolises the struggle to gain salvation and, in this context, artists have created visual icons to emphasise the predicament of humanity. It would appear that an 'iconography of predicament' has emerged. It provides an essential visual resource that can be drawn upon when human catastrophe is to be represented.

'On the Road': Migrants in Fiction Film

the East of my youth and the West of my future (Kerouac 1957: 20).

Kerouac associated his proposed journey across the United States of America with frontiersmanship: the early American pioneers and an indulgence in 'dreams of what I'd do in Chicago, in Denver, and then finally in San Fran' (1957: 15). His semi-autobiographical novel *On the Road*, in which Kerouac's 'heroes' travel around the USA in the quest of new and exciting experiences accompanied by a sense of chaos and despair, can be seen as a forerunner to the 'Road Movie' genre of feature film which gained its ascendancy in the 1960s, for example Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider* (1969). Although 'on the road' movies are not essentially about refugees, they possess striking similarities in structure to those narratives that have attempted to highlight the issues of migration through the medium of fiction film. In contrast to the documentary film, which (arguably) has an ability to promote social change through highlighting (and raising questions about) a specific problem, the fiction film has some distinct disadvantages. The most obvious is that (by nature) it does not offer the viewer an 'actual' portrayal of 'reality'. No matter how well scenes have been recreated, or how closely based upon a 'true story', we know them to be 'acted out'. In this context, the feature film can afford to draw heavily on symbolism: for example, Xavier Koller's film *Journey of Hope* (*Reise der Hoffnung*) in which a family of Turkish farmers sell their possessions with the intention of taking up a new life in Switzerland. On the journey they are exploited by traffickers, they have to negotiate the dangers of crossing the Alps and are finally apprehended by the Swiss police. An

early stage of film features a seemingly casual shot of the protagonists heading down the road (to an uncertain future) while a ploughman, placed on the skyline fulfils a compositional role of enclosing the shot and, at the same time, symbolising the traditional life of toil and hardship that is to be left behind (Figure 14). The husband, as the prime motivator for the couple's migration, leads the way and his wife (somewhat reluctantly) follows. This thematic shot, early on in the movie, encapsulates the plot acting as a visual summary of 'the story so far'. Based upon 'true' episodes from life, *Journey of Hope* is also able to portray scenes that would be difficult to film in actuality. For example, there is a meeting with a trafficker where the would-be migrants hand over the payment for their passage. This is shot convincingly in 'documentary style', though this element of verisimilitude becomes interrupted by music which accompanies his counting the money after the couple have left the room (Figure 15).

The general narrative of *Journey of Hope* is a familiar one. It is reminiscent of the 'Road Movie' genre. Together with other migrant films – *El Norte*, for example – the plots fit conveniently into this genre. In *El Norte* the journey begins for two young Guatemalan Indians following the politically-motivated murder of their parents. They migrate to the USA. On the other side of the border, the brother and sister find that their new reality contrasts strongly with their vision of a promised land. As illegal aliens they are hounded by the immigration authorities and the film results in the tragic consequences of their embarking on the journey. Thus the story-lines of *Journey of Hope* and *El Norte* are similar to such cinema classics as *Midnight Cowboy*, *Easy Rider, Badlands* and *Thelma and Louise*. For example, at the beginning of this genre of film we usually witness a dispensing of objects that symbolise the life to be left behind. In *Journey of Hope* the protagonists take the irreversible step of selling their farm animals; in *Badlands* the childhood home is set on fire; and in *Easy Rider* the protagonists throw away their wrist-watches (Figures 17 and 18). Usually two characters set out on an adventure; they meet various good, bad and ugly characters *en route*; a major set-back is resolved and, although their final goal (end of the journey) is reached (or may be in sight), it is likely to end in disaster. The end of the journey can be a physical, spiritual or psychological destination or may involve aspects of all three. Without making too much of it, a case could be made for finding biblical precedents in the narrative structure of the Road Movie: the character(s) who contest(s) the authorities, is set against accumulating odds, and is finally sacrificed for the cause (of freedom or justice, etc.). The road itself has a special metaphorical meaning, representing freedom or discovery. The Road Movie perpetuates the allegorical tradition derived from the 'Journey of Life' that occurs frequently in Christian literature. Looking further back in literature it can feature the theme of 'the quest', for example similar to the narrative of Homer's *Odyssey*. The film structure is that of an episodic journey through which characters can be involved in the process

14. Road shot from Xavier Koller's film *Journey of Hope* (*Reise der Hoffnung*)

15. The trafficker counting the money - *Journey of Hope*

16. Irreversible step: selling the animals - *Journey of Hope*
17. Irreversible step: burning down the house from Terrence Malick's *Badlands*

of self-discovery or learning about each other along the way; this can be in the form of a life-changing experience. As the Road Movie has its own rules, iconography and conventions, this means that the 'movie migrant' is set on a predestined course from point A to point B. The implications for the narrative are that the end of the journey is finite (and often stated in the early stages of the film) and the drama is acted out sequentially in chronological time.

In terms of human psychology, there is usually an underlying theme of self-discovery. Yet, at the same time, the protagonist (usually male) is caught between the two worlds of his past and future. Contrasts are established between home and 'life on the move' – for example in *Journey of Hope* these are characterised in terms of the growing tensions between the heroine and hero respectively. The migrant is also cast as the outlaw – wanting to become part of the new culture, yet having to resort to illicit means to attain this goal. The individual (outlaw – as in the Robin Hood legend) set against the power of the state can come to represent freedom. In addition the elements of frontiersmanship in the protagonist's pursuit of a new and better life suggest that the migrant movie has much in common with the genre of the 'Western'. In *Journey of Hope* the protagonists are portrayed possessing both dignity and courage. They engage the viewer's sympathy and understanding.

Nonetheless, there is a central problem in classifying films in 'genres' in that many do not fit quite so neatly into such categories. So the characteristic of the Road Movie – the disastrous end – needless to say shares characteristics with the 'Disaster Movie'. This film sub-genre usually involves a natural or human-made catastrophe against which a cast of (often quite predictable) human 'types' would be confronted by their personal weaknesses. Earthquakes, fires (e.g. *Towering Inferno*) or plane crashes have become popular subjects for this kind of movie which flourished during the 1970s. To an extent *Journey of Hope* conforms to Yacowar's Disaster Movie basic type, 'The Ship of Fools': 'the dangers of an isolated journey provide the most obviously allegorical disaster films, given the tradition of The Road of Life' (1977: 91). Similarly we find that the migrant feature film *The Boy Who Stopped Talking* (*De Jongen Die Niet Meer Praatte*) shares much with Yacomar's basic 'Disaster' type, 'Survival': 'A respectable variety of disaster films detail the problems of survival after a disastrous journey' (p. 91). This film, set in Holland and eastern Turkey (with Dutch and Kurdish dialogue), follows the boy – Memo – from his Turkish village to join his father, a dock-worker living in Holland. Seriously disturbed by his uprooting to an unfamiliar setting, Memo decides to become silent. With the help of a sympathetic teacher and his making friends with a local boy, Memo gradually adapts to his new situation.

Thus far, the essential point about feature film genres is that they restrict the subject to 'types' of narrative, yet each new narrative has the potential to revise the tradition. For example Ridley Scott's film *Thelma and Louise* revised the genres

'road-movie', gangster film, 'buddy-movie'. The characters Thelma and Louise – in replacing the two male 'buddy' outlaw protagonists (or female/male Bonnie and Clyde) with two women journeying through a male dominated American West – retained aspects of the anti-heroes' alienation and 'frontiersmanship', yet introduced a feminist dimension to a traditionally macho genre through its portrayal of sisterly unity and strength. So genres themselves exist in a state of flux (see W. Wright (1975) for an account of changes in the structure of the Western). One issue to be addressed concerns the nature of genre – whether that of the feature film, the photograph, the documentary or the television news broadcast. In particular the use of the generic structure together with the ability to expand and change the structure will be examined.

> Each new genre film constitutes an addition to an existing generic corpus and involves a selection form the repertoire of generic elements available … each new genre film tends to extend this repertoire, either by adding a new element or by transgressing one of the old ones (Neale 1990: 56).

In general, refugees have been well-served by the feature film. If we take as examples two of the most popular films ever made, we find that the well-to-do von Trapp family become refugees at the end of the *Sound of Music* (1965) and almost every main character in *Casablanca* (1942) is (or becomes) a refugee. In *Casablanca* the message is very positive. In the prologue the city of Casablanca is introduced as a type of transit camp on 'the tortuous, roundabout refugee trail'. Early on in the film as the 'unhappy refugees' (along with other 'usual suspects') are rounded up by the police, a pick-pocket associates them with 'the scum of Europe [that] has gravitated to Casablanca'. But such sentiments are soon left behind. Alongside the Bogart, Bergman, Henreid 'love triangle', the plot follows a re-kindling of Rick Blaine's (Humphrey Bogart) concern for human rights. From his initial cynical standpoint: 'I stick my neck out for nobody' and 'the problems of the world are not in my department', we watch him wrestle with his conscience, emotions and moral obligations to take extreme personal risk and loss in aiding the refugees (his rival and former lover: Henreid and Bergman, respectively) to escape to freedom: 'throughout the picture we see evidence of his humanity, which he does his best to cover up' (Harmetz 1992: 56).

From today's standpoint the *Casablanca* story appears as one of romantic escapism (a characteristic it shares with *The Sound of Music*). Although *The Sound of Music* is based on a 'true story', there is little in *Casablanca* that has a basis in reality. Nonetheless, *Casablanca* is a curious reflection of real life in that many of those involved in the making of the film were European refugees who had escaped from Nazi persecution. Perhaps two of the most relevant examples are, firstly Robert Aisner,

the film's technical advisor, who had actually taken the route described in the film's prologue: 'Paris to Marseilles. Across the Mediterranean to Oran. Then by train or auto or on foot across the rim of Africa to Casablanca in French Morocco', then to Lisbon and America (the intended route of the Bergman and Henreid characters in *Casablanca*). Secondly, the 19-year-old actor Helmut Dantine, who plays the part of the young Bulgarian refugee hoping to win passage for himself and his wife at the roulette wheel. Dantine had served time in a concentration camp for his anti-Nazi activities in Vienna before escaping to the United States.

In the next section we shall consider how genre applies to television news and documentary images. In addition to the film's narrative structure we will expand the definition of genre to include the film's audience expectation as well as its 'institutional discourses'.

> within each period the structure of the myth corresponds to the conceptual needs and
> self understanding required by the dominant social institutions of that period … (W.
> Wright 1975: 14).

In conclusion, for the refugee cause, we can put forward three key advantages that the fiction film has over the documentary. First, the A to B structure of the physical journey undertaken by the protagonist(s) means that the viewer gets the whole picture in understanding the cause and effect of migration: the situation left behind; how and why decisions are made to migrate; hardships encountered; coming to terms with a new location; etc. In contrast the documentary, more so the news item, tends to deal with foreign stories or home stories, often failing to point out the connection between the two. Second, the familiar narrative of the road movie is one that we are used to seeing played out by people of our own culture, so that viewers are more easily able to identify with the plight of the refugee through their previous knowledge of the story's structure. And thirdly, it is the business of a fiction film to persuade the audience to identify with the protagonist(s). Whether this involves our 'seeing' the points of view of the central character or of a number of characters, our 'sticking with' the plot demands a certain degree of spectator identification. After all, this power to engage the viewer is the movie-maker's business and that of 'storytellers' in general. This notion has been taken to something of a melodramatic extreme by the literary critic Walker Gibson: 'We assume, for the sake of experience, that set of attitudes and qualities which the language asks us to assume . . . and, if we cannot assume then, we throw the book away' (1980:1). Insofar as this might involve the viewer in sharing the decision-making and understanding the world from the refugee's perspective, it is likely to generate a degree of empathy that is seldom present in attempts to provide a factual rendition.

Television Images

> . . . television has become the privileged medium through which moral relations between strangers are mediated in the modern world. Yet the effects of televisual images and the rules and conventions of electronic news-gathering on such moral relations are rarely examined (Ignatieff 1998: 10).

In his essay 'Is Nothing Sacred? The Ethics of Television', Michael Ignatieff addresses two polarised views of television images. On the one hand he considers them as voyeuristic; on the other, promoting the 'internationalisation of conscience'. He proposes that images cannot assert,[1] they can only instantiate something if the viewer is already predisposed in the form of a moral obligation – this obligation has Christian roots. This echoes the view of the philosopher Richard Rorty (1989: xvi) that 'the novel, the movie and the TV program have, gradually but steadily, replaced the sermon and the treatise as the principal vehicles of moral change and progress'. If we return to the notion that refugee images have their roots in Christian iconography, this might suggest that our moral obligation is something of a triggered response. In contrast, members of 'other' cultures, that are not based upon Christian principles, may also feel under moral obligations. At least we may consider the iconography of the visual image in the West as belonging to a wider set of moral codes and conventions. This is a matter to be addressed.

Another point made by Ignatieff, is that he regards television news as a genre. As we saw in the discussion of the feature film migration 'road movie', the standardisation of plot and narrative makes it relatively easy to see the story conforming to a prescribed narrative or pattern. But news, which is primarily concerned with presenting facts with little recourse for a story-line, at first sight appears to sit uncomfortably under the description of a 'genre'. Then again, we often refer to news 'stories'.

> News is a genre as much as fiction or drama: it is a regime of visual authority, a coercive organization of images according to a stopwatch (Ignatieff 1998: 26).

Ignatieff suggests that the genre of television news is determined by the structure and contents of the news. However, a closer look at the use of the term may offer a different insight, suggesting it is not a simple matter of form and contents but also one of audience expectation. For example, Neale (1990: 46) proposes that genre does not simply refer to film 'type', nor is it limited to spectator expectation and hypothesis, but the *institutional discourses*: production, marketing and consumption.

While the News is subject to types of story – Home, Foreign, human interest, etc. – it is strictly controlled by time constraints. Primarily a visual medium (for example the saying 'no pictures, no story' which has been attributed to the Labour Party's key spin-doctor Alastair Campbell), it is packed into 15, 30, or 60 minute time-slots with

fierce competition among stories not only to get into, but to stay in and move up, the running order. At the same time, without being exactly xenophobic, a type of myopia abounds – characterised by an emphasis on the immediate local significance of stories – as Moeller has pointed out with regard to news stories in the USA: 'One dead fireman in Brooklyn is worth five English bobbies, who are worth 50 Arabs, who are worth 500 Africans' (1999: 22). It seems that we, as readers and views, are prepared to accept such reporting even though it runs contrary to our 'instincts': 'we may feel there is something morally dubious about a greater concern for a fellow New Yorker than for someone facing an equally hopeless and barren life in the slums of Manila or Dakar' (Rorty 1989: 191). Furthermore Ignatieff is concerned about the over-dominance of genre when 'the flow of television news reduces all the world's horror to identical commodities' (p. 30). In contrast, he recognises the virtues of television documentaries which 'sometimes achieve the prerequisite of moral vision itself; they force the spectator to see, to shed the carapace of cliché and to encounter alien worlds in all their mystery and complexity' (p. 32).

Some analysis of the television news 'genre' with regard to the subject of migration has been conducted by the Glasgow Media Group (Philo and Beattie 1999). Their approach, that of *thematic analysis*, aims to provide a 'detailed examination of the language and visuals of a series of news reports' (p. 180) of the major TV channels 'and a study of other textual and visual images in press reports'. The news is divided into its constituent elements: 'headlines, interview questions, reported statements and key visual moments'. However, despite the promise of a 'detailed examination of the language and *visuals*'; 'a study of other textual and *visual images* in press reports'; as well as 'key *visual moments*' (my emphases), there is minimal reference to visual images. The study remains very thorough, but extremely logocentric. For instance, in their 'Race, migration and media' (1999), pictures are cited only twice. The first occasion is when: 'the BBC had a report including images of labourers on a farm in Spain, growing courgettes and presumably contributing to the local economy' (p. 191); the second: 'The news … included visuals of Asians entering the UK' (p. 195). Granted Philo and Beattie do analyse the dialogue that accompanies the images, but the nature, structure, exact content and appearance of the visuals are left to the reader's imagination. We may assume that they are referring to what Marash terms 'TV Codes' where the code for 'hurricane' comprises images of 'Palm trees bending to the gale, surf splashing over the humbled shore, missing roofs, homeless people showing up in local gyms. You see it once or twice most years' (quoted in Moeller 1999: 42). The use of such footage, often 'stock-shots' (subtitled 'Library Pictures') has its precedents in the history of art (see Gombrich 1960:121).

However, for Philo and Beattie the issue becomes rather confused by their use of the term 'image' to describe the spoken or written 'metaphor'. For example, their analysis of the use of the metaphor 'flood' to describe the potential arrival of immigrants in news reports:

> The frequent repetition of images such as this constructs a very specific view of the migration process. It is presented in the terminology of a natural disaster, in persistent reported statements which go unchallenged by journalists (p. 183).

Moeller (1999:47) also indicates the inherent problems of generalisation and formulaic language that accompanies images and metaphors. However, she also refers to the economy of the visual images and metaphorical expressions (which 'can more succinctly describe a face or a moment in time than can paragraphs of narrative'). Moreover she makes a clear distinction between 'image' and 'metaphor':

> Words may give meaning, but in our visual era, images are essential to effective communication – especially in the telling of the news. Images have authority over the imagination (Moeller 1999:47).

In another paper: 'The media and Africa: images of disaster and rebellion' (Beattie, Miller, Miller and Philo 1999) which examines the press and television coverage of the Rwanda/Zaire crisis of 1996/1997, the term 'dominant image of Africa' is loosely referred to (p. 233). Although the claim is made that the 'language and visuals of these news reports create a vivid and pervasive image of Africa' (p. 233), at best, visual sequences are described but not analysed. For example, a television report is accompanied by:

> . . . an image of the emaciated frame of a young child, lying on the ground where he has collapsed from exhaustion or disease with his aid biscuits lying on the ground beside him, just beyond his outstretched hand. An older child stops, looks down and walks past (p. 238).

Here there is no attempt to consider how the visual image and the narration work together to contribute to the report, nor how the film sequence has been composed. Similarly, in their analysis of the tabloid press, they describe the launch of an appeal by *The Mirror*:

> 'Please Save Me' read the headline under a photo taking up most of the front page of a refugee child captioned 'the frightened eyes of a child beg for help' (p. 255).

Granted there may exist a sentiment that this may be more acceptable in the printed press, where photographs might be considered to have a more simple illustrative function, but certainly this should not be the case with television. Television is primarily a visual medium and much of its meaning is to be gained from the 'language' of the visual image. For the study of television news the balance between 'textual' and 'visual' analysis needs to be re-examined.

The Broader Picture

> Within minutes he was totally lost, as the programme – a love story, he surmised – elided confusingly with the commercials every two minutes, it seemed … Eventually he saw the credits roll and he knew that it was over, whatever it had been (William Boyd, *Stars and Bars* 1984: 116).

The context of the image is another matter that can seemingly go unnoticed. And the extended definition of genre takes into account the broader picture (beyond the immediate newspaper setting). The shock tactics employed by *The Mirror* (11th April 2000) with its 'Go On, Look Away' headline (Figure 11) appeared in stark contrast to the images in the paper's accompanying colour supplement which featured a fashion shoot of a European model posing amongst the huts and inhabitants of an African village.

The semiotician Roland Barthes (1977:15), describes the press photograph as a 'message'. Yet it is not one that is self-contained, it is integrally bound into the 'source of emission', 'the channel of transmission' and 'point of reception'. In order to understand the mechanisms determining the 'photographic message', we must also take into account the 'staff of the newspaper': the group of technicians who choose and compose, treat (title and caption) the image. The newspaper's readership is the 'point of reception' – the public who read the paper, who have different expectations of their chosen publication and a different regard for the same photograph in different papers. In our reading of *The Daily Telegraph,* for example, our perception of the photograph will be influenced by our prior knowledge. In common parlance people often refer to themselves as 'a Telegraph reader' or 'a Guardian reader', not only suggesting a preconceived allegiance to the paper but also anticipating certain expectations to be fulfilled during reading. It is the whole institution of the newspaper that operates as a vehicle of communication, that transmits a series of 'lateral' messages which contribute to the understanding of any photograph that may appear in it. In addition the circumstances in which the image appears may also direct the spectator towards meaning. In the wider context, if a photograph appears on an advertisement hoarding, newspaper, gallery wall or family album, the viewer's response may be predetermined, as certain expectations will be required to be fulfilled.

The recent changes in the media institutions and working practices have been brought about by the increased speed and availability of media technologies (Neuman 1996). One consequence is an emerging 'visual culture' that places a new emphasis on the communicative power of visual images. Another is a demand for more simplistic presentation of news items. Journalism has become more 'promiscuous', disparate and diffuse (Alter 1997); yet Western governments appear more responsive to public opinion. There has been a global increase in the number of displaced persons, while the foreign stories in the media have been subjected to budgetary cut-backs.

In addition to the ways that the image of the refugee is constructed through media representation, there is a need to address the reception of these images. In this context not only is the relationship of the image to the text or spoken word paramount, but also the wider editorial and institutional constraints on reporting incidents of forced migration, as well as the wider social and political agendas (Adams 1986; Chang and Lee 1992). This raises questions regarding the social function of refugee images and if, through the process of categorisation, they act as a way of coping with a social 'problem' to provide a sense of absolution of responsibility, or to stimulate empathy and to motivate a public response (Dyck and Coldevin 1992; Benthall 1993).

Conclusions

> . . . the inclusion among 'us' of the family in the next cave, then of the tribe across the river, then of the tribal confederation across the mountains, then of the unbelievers across the seas (and, perhaps last of all, of the menials who, all this time have been doing our dirty work). This is a process we should try to keep going. We should stay on the lookout for marginalized people – people whom we still instinctively think of as 'they' rather than 'us'. We should try to notice our similarities with them (Rorty 1989: 196).

Media representations predominate in determining how we see refugees. While there is a marked tendency to categorise them as human types, the selective nature of the visual image frequently objectifies them, dismissing their historical, cultural and political circumstances. The media representation of refugees has received little direct attention. Within the area of refugee studies, media related issues have been discussed (Gibney 1999), but no comprehensive study has yet been undertaken. The most closely related work has dealt with media representations of war (Neuman 1991, Minear *et al.* 1996, Allen and Seaton 1999) while others have examined the media response to more general human catastrophes and disasters (Sanger *et al.* 1991, Benthall 1993, Moeller 1999). Others have considered ethical issues in media representation (e.g. Winston 1988). In addition other related areas of study on representations of culture and ethnicity have taken place within visual anthropology (e.g. Alexander 1998, Banks and Morphy 1997, Lutz and Collins 1993, Marcus 1995) and media and journalism studies (e.g. Gillespie 1995, Hawk 1992, Hess 1996, Shaheen 1988, Skovmand and Schrøder 1992).

The purpose of this paper has been to provide the foundations for research into the specific problem of the media representation of refugees. Yet in doing so, it has made some general observations on the nature of representation by means of visual images. Although it may be the intention of journalists (using the term in the broadest sense to include editors, camera operators, etc.) to provide 'realistic' images which offer a transparent view – a window on the world; they are constrained in their hav-

ing to conform to cultural and institutional practices. This should not only be taken to include the long and rich tradition of making visual images – and here I proposed an 'iconography of predicament' which draws upon images derived from the Christian iconographic tradition – but also the 'invisible' political and social constraints on the media. While media representation may result in objectifying 'the refugee' in the role of the 'illegal alien', the feature film image of the refugee as protagonist presents a role that is immediately recognisable to the audience, and one that has a high potential of gaining their sympathy. In this context the whole story is played through from cause to effect. The 'A to B' structure of the road movie genre means that we see the conditions that initiate the migration, the hardships of the road and what is to be found at the journey's end. As such they contrast with documentary films (and news footage) where the whole story either remains set in a remote location, or begins at Dover. In future, this point will be examined in detail. In the meantime I propose that this reflects the ways our society deals with the issue of migration not only from the media perspective but by government and the aid agencies themselves. While part of this may be caused by the media division between 'Home News' and 'Foreign News', it mirrors the government ways of dealing with refugee (as opposed to asylum seeker) issues – the Foreign Office and the Home Office respectively. It also appears that the many NGOs deal either with crises abroad or with 'home-based' crises in the UK.

A central problem of the feature film is that it is a work of fiction and as such does not have the power of conviction of the news report or documentary. In addition, the genre can result in simplistic portrayals – easily identified heroes and villains (for example, the man who counts the money in *Journey of Hope* and the rather implausible element of a murder mystery that acts as a sub-plot to *The Boy Who Stopped Talking*). On the positive side, the notion of genre does not suggest that representations remain fixed, but can be modified by subsequent representations. Finally, any complete account of the media representation of refugees must include factors that exist beyond the immediate setting of the visual image. The wider context of the image (accompanying stories, advertisements etc.) must be taken into account.

Notes

1. In an earlier paper (Wright 1992: 275) I had referred to the Ancient Greek philosopher Cratylus who considered that, as he could not be certain about anything in the world, he could not pronounce on it, only point to things with his finger. Similarly pointing the camera produces a visual image that is non-assertive, unless qualified by a caption or commentary.

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Filmography

Badlands 1973 (95 minutes) colour. Director: Terrence Malick. Feature. USA.

Casablanca 1942 (102 minutes). Director: Michael Curtiz. Feature. USA.

De Jongen Die Niet Meer Praatte (The Boy Who Stopped Talking – English title) 1997 (110 minutes) colour. Director: Ben Sombogaart. Feature. Netherlands.

Easy Rider 1969 (94 minutes) colour. Director: Dennis Hopper. Feature. USA.

El Norte (The North – English title) 1983 (141 minutes) colour. Director: Gregory Nava.
    Feature. USA/Mexico.

Gandhi 1982 (195 minutes) colour. Director: Richard Attenborough. Feature. UK/India.

Midnight Cowboy 1969 (113 minutes) colour. Director: John Schlesinger. Feature. USA.

Reise der Hoffnung (Journey of Hope – English title; Umud'a Yolculuk – Turkish title)
    1990 (111 minutes) colour. Director: Xavier Koller. Feature. Switzerland.

*Thelma and Louise*1991 (130 minutes) colour. Director: Ridley Scott. Feature. USA.

The Sound of Music 1965 (174 minutes) colour. Director: Robert Wise. Feature. USA.

Figures

1. Masaccio *The Expulsion from Paradis*e c. 1425-8
2. Darren Whiteside *East Timor* in *The Guardian* 21 September 1999
3. Detail of Rogier van der Weyden *St Luke Painting the Virgin.* 15th century
4. Don McCullin *Biafra*, 1970
5. Gianni Giansanti *Landscape of Death*, Time magazine, 1992
6. Lange's original photograph *Migrant Mother*, 1936
7. Three years later Lange's *Mother* becomes *Spanish Mother: The Terror of 1938*. 1939.
    Lithograph by Diana Thorne.
8. The image moves to Venezuela – *Bohemia Venezolana*, 1964
9. The *Mother* changes race for the Black Panthers' newspaper, 1973
10. Rogier van der Weyden *St Luke Painting the Virgin.* 15th century
11. Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother* as it appeared in *Midweek Pictorial.* 17 October 1936
12. *The Mirror*, 11 April 2000
13. Madonna and Child image from Richard Attenborough's film *Gandhi*
14. 'Road shot' from Xavier Koller's film *Journey of Hope* (*Reise der Hoffnung*)
15. The trafficker counting the money, *Journey of Hope*
16. Irreversible step: selling the animals, *Journey of Hope*
17. Irreversible step: burning down the house, from Terrence Malick's *Badlands*