Writing With Light:
An Iconographic-Iconologic Approach to Refugee Photography

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Abstract: Refugee photography is often used to convey situations of precariousness and urgency, as visibility can help raise awareness and elicit empathy. Critical perspectives in relation to photographic representations can provide more nuanced understandings of refugee lived experiences over time. This article uses the iconographic-iconologic image framework as a process to understand how refugee lived experiences were represented in four photographs from a refugee library collection. These photographs depict different refugee situations from some 20 to 35 years ago.

As a refugee studies scholar interested in visual-based research, I wished to analyze how refugee lived experiences were represented through these photographs from another era. The application of the iconographic-iconologic image framework suggests various themes evoked through these photographs, which still have currency in today's highly polemic discourses on the global refugee regime and are still prominent in present-day discourses and contemporary refugee literature. This qualitative analysis shows the potential of photographs to highlight how precarious refugee situations persist *over time* despite intense international efforts in this field.

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1. Introduction: Refugee Photography

"... if a picture is thought to tell a 1000 words, it also masks a multitude of stories" (HAAKEN & O'NEILL, 2014, p.84).

Amidst the largely chaotic circumstances that characterize different stages of refugee-ness[1], photographs are often used to convey precariousness, misery and urgency. Visibility is crucial to denouncing injustices and chaos (SZÖRÉNYI, 2006), and visual means are often "deployed to break through numbing conditions of denial" (HAAKEN & O'NEILL, 2014, p.82). For example, the notorious photograph of Phan Thi Kim Phuc, the nine-year old Vietnamese girl running from her village after being severely burnt in a napalm attack, conveyed the horrors of the Vietnam War in a powerful way (SCHNETTLER & RAAB, 2008) —thus adding to the pressure on political leaders to end the conflict. Closer to our times, photographs of three-year old Syrian Aylan Kurdi, who drowned while crossing the Mediterranean Sea in September 2015, and whose body washed up on a Turkish shore, was instrumental in urging nations to act in the face of the major refugee crisis unfolding. [1]

Photographs can contribute to how viewers imagine refugees with implicit and explicit aims of triggering compassion, fear or empathy (HAAKEN & O'NEILL, 2014; JOHNSON, 2011), since visual depictions of refugee situations are assumed to convey a certain *reality* (JOHNSON, 2011), an assumption that such things exist (SZÖRÉNYI, 2006). It is more accurate, however, to refer to a "photographic reality" (CHRISTMANN, 2008, §6) conveyed in a two-dimensional format as one amongst many ways of considering a person, place or event. The concern of this article is precisely to explore the photographic realities of four refugee photographs taken approximately 20 to 35 years ago, to determine what issues were prominent in refugee discourses at the time, and their relevance today. [2]

It is acknowledged from the outset that despite multiple benefits (see LENETTE & BODDY, 2013), visual analysis is an approach fraught with methodological difficulties but increasingly relevant in this audiovisual era, with "a culture progressively shifting from literacy to visuality" (SCHNETTLER & RAAB, 2008, §26). Importantly, "[a]lthough photography has been historically associated as an art form—an activity one may take up as a recreational activity—the photographs that are produced are always cultural[ly] mediated and reflect the politics of the space/people and the historical period" (SUBEDI, 2013, p.285). However, in a retrospective photographic analysis, researchers use images recorded by others. This means that often the subjective aspect of a particular photograph or information related to context or content may be missing, and the researcher should undertake a process of gathering as much additional information as possible about that photograph (BORCHERT, 1982) to the extent that this is possible given the time lag. [3]

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1 A subjective and unique construct, refugee-ness is defined as "an ongoing, constitutive process of becoming a refugee, with each 'refugee experience' building on the previous and shaping the next" (JACKSON & BAUDER, 2013, p.362).

This article begins with a brief critical discussion on dominant visual representations of refugees. It then applies the iconographic-iconologic image framework to four photographs from a refugee library collection to understand how refugee lived experiences were represented in those depictions. My concluding remarks summarize how the photographs evoke prominent themes from those earlier times of upheaval that are still relevant in present day discourses, and suggest the potential of photographs in documenting how issues linked to refugee-ness remain *over time*. [4]

1.1 What are we "shown"?

The analytical focus of refugee photography currently lies in the field of media and journalism, and explores how photographs can be used to manipulate public perceptions of refugees. For instance, a systematic review of visual patterns associated with refugee photography in two major Australian national newspapers when refugee issues were at the peak of political debate revealed that images were used to reinforce detrimental and fear-mongering public discourses, ultimately depersonalizing and dehumanizing refugees (BLEIKER, CAMPBELL, HUTCHISON & NICHOLSON, 2013). Concurrently, WRIGHT (2002) suggests that depictions of refugees reinforce stereotypes based on Christian iconography, with the aim of stimulating empathy or responses among western viewers using "familiar" imagery. He argues that the theme of "exodus" for instance, is replicated in depictions of mass migration and forced displacement; conversely, the recurring "Madonna and child" pose is increasingly used to convey vulnerability and precariousness through images of starving mothers with young children. Importantly, the abundance of refugee photographs (and other visual representations) can come in sharp contrast with compassion fatigue in western nations (ibid.). In both of these examples of how photographs can shape public perceptions, photographic representations of refugees are largely selective and objectifying. [5]

Beyond the obvious artistic attributes of refugee photography, there is an element of agency as photographs can "speak back" or convey a specific message to the viewer (COLLIER, 2004; SZÖRÉNYI, 2006); in that way, the visual involves an interaction between those who view and the focal point of the photograph. The message conveyed should not, however, be confused with the "voice" of those captured in a photograph (ibid.; see CARVILLE, 2010 for a discussion on "citizenry of photography"). The broader intent of refugee photography is certainly to trigger empathy, but mostly the outcome tends to be that the *distance* between the viewer (usually from western nations) and those depicted in photographs is reinforced (SZÖRÉNYI, 2006). Such photographs tend to "produce spectacle rather than empathy" (p.24) and can contribute to further dehumanizing refugees, and erase their humanity or biographies. In another example, JOHNSON (2011) examines how refugee photography not only shapes viewers' ability to "imagine" refugees, but also supports dominant narratives of particular eras of refugee regimes, and thus, policies that "reproduce public fears and fantasies about outsiders" (HAAKEN & O'NEILL, 2014, p.83). JOHNSON (2011) further argues that collections like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

(UNHCR) photos documenting various refugee situations (most available through an online repository) emphasize a particular "image" of refugees as victimized, depoliticized, and female (see also HAAKEN & O'NEILL, 2014; MALKKI, 1995; 1996). Refugee photography can hence play a major role in constructing the "imagined refugee" as a distant being, while eliciting specific viewer responses that *reinforce*, rather than challenge, conservative political rhetoric on forced migration situations. [6]

For viewers who have never been refugees, it could be a struggle to understand the situations depicted in a photograph, as well as the critical contextual information located outside the photograph. However, as SZTO, FURMAN and LANGER (2005) argue, the similarities between qualitative research and expressive arts, and photography in particular, suggest that visual data can enrich qualitative understandings of lived experiences to effect social change, expose issues, and raise public awareness. Consequently, there is a need to enrich the current state of knowledge on perspectives in refugee photography by offering more thorough and contextual approaches. One such qualitative approach to deriving layered meanings conveyed through photographs is through the use of the iconographic-iconologic image analysis framework. [7]

1.1.1 Context

In May 2014, I traveled to Toronto, Canada, as part of a six-month sabbatical as visiting scholar at the Centre for Refugee Studies (CRS), York University (YU). My key aim was to develop international research collaborative relationships in the area of refugee studies. I participated in a number of activities to develop such networks, and had access to the CRS's expertise and resources for the duration of my sabbatical. One such resource was the Andrew Forbes Refugee Resource Collection (RRC) at YU, which consists of independent documents, primary documents, conference papers, journals, newsletters, audio-visual material and photographs relating to refugees. The aim of the collection is to support research and teaching activities in this field. I examined hundreds of photographs from the collection, taken at different points in time over the past few decades. All items were donated to the RRC by researchers in forced migration and field agencies. The vast majority of photographs were in black and white and available in print only; others were available in photo slide format. [8]

From this collection, I found four particularly striking photographs and sought permission from the CRS Director to reproduce these photographs for the purposes of this article. I intentionally chose these four extant photographs because firstly, they depict distinct refugee situations, that is, seeking asylum in a host country, refugee camp life, travel by sea, and traveling to a new destination (full descriptions of the photographs are provided further). Secondly, from a purely subjective point of view, the photographs stood out from the rest of the collection; I felt that these photographs triggered different emotions compared to the range of refugee photographs I have come across in the past. They draw on different sets of imagery, highlighting different aspects of the social contexts at the time, and as such, these four specific photographs seemed to offer

something else that other photographs from the collection did not. Although I do not feel "desensitized' to any depiction of refugee lived experiences through photography, I am aware that the constant use of images often contributes to such desensitization. I am therefore sensitive to photographs that attempt to evoke different sets of emotions about refugee situations by conveying perspectives and documenting circumstances that can often be left out of the public consciousness about refugee-ness. In 2015, I was reminded of the outrage, sadness and solidarity photographs can evoke when images of Aylan Kurdi's lifeless body emerged in the media, as potentially the most influential photograph depicting the Syrian refugee crisis in Europe. It is therefore timely to highlight the key role visual representations can play in broader refugee discourses. [9]

As a refugee studies scholar interested in visual-based research, my intent is to add to *nuanced* photographic interpretations by applying the iconographic-iconologic image analysis framework as a process for considering refugee photography. In this way, the viewer not only determines which meanings are apparent but also the ways in which such meanings contribute to the development of specific interpretations (CHRISTMANN, 2008). Importantly, the combination of image and text through this process can provide a sense of the social contexts at the time; however, the photographs are records in their own rights, providing engaging depictions—and hence, stark reminders—of issues faced by different groups of refugees across space and time. As photography means "writing with light," this article can shed light on how the themes associated with refugee-ness and represented in visual depictions at the time still have much currency in today's polemic debates linked to the global refugee regime. [10]

1.1.2. Approach

To understand the themes evoked in these photographs in a meaningful way using a systematic process, I draw on the works of Gabriela CHRISTMANN (2008), and Nora RUCK and Thomas SLUNECKO (2008) who applied the iconographic-iconologic image analysis framework to their respective research areas (visual discourse analysis, and artwork analysis). The origins of the iconographic-iconologic image analysis framework lie in art history, namely from Erwin PANOFSKY (1955) for Steps 1, 2 and 3—himself influenced by the social sciences according to BOHNSACK (2008)—and historian Max IMDAHL for Step 4. The framework has been modified for empirical research in the social sciences context in recent times notably by German sociologist BOHNSACK. While it is not possible to outline here the complex set of theories derived by PANOFSKY over many years, the iconographic-iconologic framework nevertheless offers a useful approach to understand the potential of visual representations of refugee lived experiences by documenting issues over time. [11]

Table 1 summarizes the four steps involved in the process of considering visual representations using the iconographic-iconologic image analysis framework as outlined by CHRISTMANN (2008), and RUCK and SLUNECKO (2008). The four

steps are: 1. pre-iconic description; 2. iconographic analysis; 3. iconologic analysis; and 4. iconic interpretation. I then posed one specific question to correspond to each step of the framework based on these authors' explanations, to facilitate the photographic interpretations at the core of this article.

Step 1: Pre-iconic description	Focus on *content*	All details from the photograph are systematically described (people, objects, activities). "What can be seen in the photograph?"
Step 2: Iconographic analysis		Meaning is inferred by drawing on knowledge outside the photograph (social, political, cultural context). Socially constructed meanings are assigned to the photograph. "What can be observed in the photograph?"
Step 3: Iconologic analysis	Focus on *perspective*	The structure and context of the photograph are combined to interpret the meaning of the photograph. "What is the meaning of the photograph?"
Step 4: Iconic interpretation		Assumptions are made about the photographer's intent, logic, and composition of the photograph. "What socio-cultural and historical understandings of 'refugees' was the photographer trying to respond to or influence through this photograph?"

Table 1: The iconographic-iconologic image analysis framework [12]

As seen in Table 1, Step 1 involves describing the content of the photograph in as much detail as possible, to ensure that all possible aspects are considered. Step 2 involves making initial inferences about the context of the photograph; the analysis considers how "representations speak about what is present as well as what is absent" (SUBEDI, 2013, p.282). Going beyond the obvious features of the photograph is therefore necessary to provide a fuller account (SZÖRÉNYI, 2006; WRIGHT, 2002). Unsurprisingly, meanings attributed are dependent on the viewer's culturally prescribed knowledge base (RUCK & SLUNECKO, 2008). [13]

As the analytical focus shifts towards the perspective from which the photograph was taken in Steps 3 and 4, the iconic meaning is sought to identify particular standpoints: the time and place, as well as the photographer's standpoint. The researcher aims to assess "in what ways [the photograph] is representative [of the situation depicted], and in what ways it over-represents some aspects vis-à-vis others" (BORCHERT, 1982, p.36), in line with the earlier critique. I support SUBEDI's claim that the "role of the photographer is never innocent. Photographers are indeed agents of knowledge production and dissemination processes" (2013, p.284). They work within particular professional and socio-cultural parameters that define when, where, why, and how they photograph. WRIGHT (2002, p.64) agrees that:

> "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 that offer a transparent view—a window on the world, they are constrained in their having to conform to cultural and institutional practices." [14]

Understanding photographers' professional and socio-cultural parameters enrich the analytical process by ensuring that the viewer—including the author—remains conscious of the multiple layers of complexity that exist within two-dimensional representations of specific individuals or settings, and within a specific photographic reality as described by CHRISTMANN (2008). [15]

2. The Photographs

Photographs 1 and 2 were dated (from 1994) and cataloged, and assigned to a UNHCR photographer by the name of A. HOLLMANN. The other two photographs were not dated, with no information about the photographer; however, Photograph 3 was cataloged with keywords and a reference at the back (although it remains unclear by whom). Both male and female refugees were represented in these photographs. I attempted to find out more about all four photographs, but no further information was available through the CRS' Andrew Forbes library. I particularly wanted to know more about the UNHCR photographer to assess whether there would be any relevant socio-cultural aspects to consider in thinking through how the photographs were framed, but was unsuccessful in my search. In addition, there was no information about who donated these photographs to the Andrew Forbes collection, so it was not possible to draw on their knowledge about the context of these photographs. This constitutes a weakness in my approach. The CRS Director offered to inquire about the photographs during an upcoming trip to Geneva where she would consult the UNHCR Archives Collection and photo library, but to no avail. I also contacted a Canadian academic with extensive knowledge on Southeast Asian refugees to see if she would recognize Photograph 3. She suggested contacting the Vietnamese Canadian Federation who in turn recommended seeking advice from the Vietnamese Refugees Archives in Australia. The contact person from this group believed that this picture was taken in Cap Anamur in Germany. However, no one was able to confirm the origin of this photograph. [16]

2.1 Ethics and "positionality"

Distinct ethical concerns inevitably arise with the use of visual representations and methods in research (see LENETTE & BODDY, 2013; PERRY, 2011) and should be acknowledged here. Firstly, as this is a retrospective process, it was not possible to ascertain whether the people depicted in the photographs provided consent at the time, particularly for Photographs 3 and 4. While a large body of literature addresses such ethical concerns in the field of visual-based research, this situation still triggered a degree of concern for me about the use of these photographs in a retrospective analysis. However, I was unable to assess whether ethical standards were upheld at the time these photographs were taken (although I hoped that UNHCR ethical processes were in place for Photographs 1

and 2). The "legitimacy" of these photographs (for lack of a better word) could only be assessed by their presence in the Andrew Forbes collection. Secondly, it is also possible that the people discussed may have never seen the photographs or may no longer be alive today. This meant that it was not feasible to include them in the analysis process, which is contrary to the research approach I would normally adopt. [17]

A third issue linked to the importance of *positionality* (see DEUTSCH, 2004) relates to attributing meaning or making assumptions from my own standpoint as a refugee studies scholar, particularly when little contextual information about the photographs was available. In fact, KNOBLAUCH, BAER, LAURIER, PETSCHKE and SCHNETTLER (2008) emphasize that visual analysis is subjectively fashioned by the photographer and then subjectively examined by researchers. I clearly had to assume a number of aspects in relation to content and social context of the photographs, *even* when captions were included. These assumptions were influenced by my own social-cultural positioning as a woman, migrant, mother, daughter, would-be photographer, writer and academic, raised in a particular context, and now living in a western country. This is not in itself a drawback of the approach but simply needs to be acknowledged as part of the process. I also consulted the CRS Director on some aspects of the photographs, given her extensive experience in refugee camp situations and expertise in refugee issues. This process assisted by providing a perspective informed by more than one standpoint on what is within and beyond the photographs. [18]

Why persevere with the process and write about these photographs when so much information is inaccessible, making the analysis even more fraught with difficulties? My perspective is that these photographs were relegated to a shelf in a library collection, where only a few people are likely to come across them. In that sense, they are in effect "silenced," and their opportunities to "speak" in a context dominated if not saturated by digital photographs are now close to non-existent. However, I felt that they may still had something to "say" and required my full attention Therefore, despite the challenges outlined here, I decided to persevere with the process in the hope that this would not only honor the refugees' biographies but also enrich qualitative refugee research. [19]

2.2 Applying the iconographic-iconologic framework

2.2.1 Photograph 1

Illustration 1: Afghan refugees in Moscow (UN photo by A. HOLLMANN, reproduced with permission from the Centre for Refugee Studies, York University) [20]

Step 1: Pre-iconic description: A woman stands with her hands together, pressed against her lips. She wears a ring on the fourth finger of her left hand. A little girl also stands in the foreground with her hands behind her back. A younger boy stands in the background, in front of the fridge, one hand in his pocket and eating from the other hand. All three are standing in a kitchen, looking towards the photographer. There is a kettle behind the girl, and various objects on top of the fridge. The white wall is made of bricks with a water pipe running along it. A curtain separates this room from the rest of the dwelling. The woman and children all have dark hair and olive skin. The photograph includes a UNHCR logo and a caption (in English and French) that reads: "RUSSIAN FEDERATION/REFUGEES FROM AFGHANISTAN/MOSCOW/CLOSE-UPS. *This family is among the thousands who came to Moscow in the hope of finding safety and a better life, and now suffer bitterly from a lack of protection and assistance*" (no information is available on how and when the photograph was captioned). The UNHCR reference states that the photograph was taken in 1994 by A. HOLLMANN. [21]

Step 2: Iconographic analysis: The caption explains that these are Afghan refugees resettled to Moscow, perhaps a mother/grandmother and her two children/grandchildren. The woman is/was married but there is no indication that her husband lives with them. The facial expressions of the woman and little girl convey a sense of anguish that implies they may be distressed and experiencing difficult and stressful circumstances. The caption states that this family "suffer[s] bitterly from a lack of protection and assistance." A UNHCR article from that year

(CIENSKI, 1994) explains that the collapse of the former Soviet Union generated over a million refugees seeking asylum in Russia, including Afghans hoping to resettle to Western Europe. The Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in the late 1970s during the Cold War, paired with decades of civil unrest in Afghanistan, generated a constant flow of refugees. In September 1994, Russia committed to assessing asylum seeker claims within three months, but processed none of the applicants, forcing Afghan refugees to live illegally in the country. This situation, paired with the fact that Afghans were easily identifiable, made them easy targets for harassment and extortion from the police. People without refugee status could not work, access health care or housing, and children were not allowed to attend school. AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL (1995) also indicated that Afghan refugees were forcibly deported from Russia, allegedly due to the absence of formal refugee claims. [22]

Step 3: Iconologic analysis: The socio-political situation at the time may explain the anguish conveyed in the woman's expression. Perhaps she feels a sense of powerlessness or despair, which may be caused by their precarious situation in Russia, the likelihood of deportation, and loss of hope about the future. This is supported by the captions used in the photograph. The absence of a father or husband in the picture may suggest that the woman is a sole parent or caregiver. [23]

Step 4: Iconic interpretation: The photographer portrayed the woman and the girl in the foreground. The focus on their body language rather than their living conditions might highlight the embodiment of the precariousness of their situation and the despair that uncertainty or lack of protection and rights can bring. The caption (which may or may not have been written with the photographer's input) juxtaposes the word "bitter" to describe the suffering of Afghan refugees in Russia, with refugees' "hope" for a better future. The words used in the caption help shape our understanding of the precarious situation the people at the center of the photograph were experiencing at the time. [24]
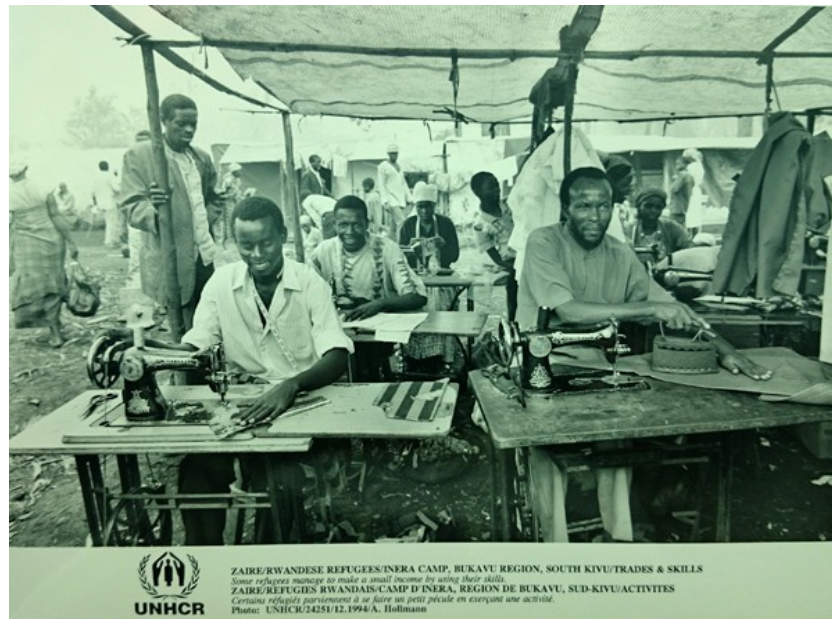
2.2.2 Photograph 2

Illustration 2: Rwandese refugees in Zaire (UN photo by A. HOLLMANN, reproduced with permission from the Centre for Refugee Studies, York University) [25]

Step 1: Pre-iconic description: Sitting under a makeshift tent made of thin wooden posts and tarp, a group of men and women sew garments with "Butterfly" and "Flying Dove" sewing machines on "Singer" sewing tables. The three men at the front are smiling. Two are them are guiding fabric through the machines; a measuring tape hangs around their necks. The other man presses pants with a coal iron, keeping the fabric firmly in place with his hand. Pieces of fabric are strewn on their bags and on the bare ground. A finished garment hangs on an extended rope next to the man ironing. One man wearing a jacket observes them on the far left; he holds on to a post, with the other arm resting on his waist. Three women are sitting at the back at their sewing tables; one of them is not smiling and looks shyly towards the man at the front. Another woman focuses on her task, while the third woman is standing and smiling. The men sit together at the front while the women are grouped at the back. A young boy is leaning sideways behind some fabric hanging above ground. Several men, women, and children can be seen in the background, sitting, standing or walking past the tent. The photograph includes a UNHCR logo and a caption (in English and French) that reads: "ZAIRE/RWANDESE REFUGEES/INERA CAMP, BUKAVU REGION, SOUTH KIVU/ TRADES & SKILLS. *Some refugees manage to make a small income by using their skills*" (no information is available on how and when the photograph was captioned). The UNHCR reference states that the photograph was taken in 1994 by A. HOLLMANN. [26]

Step 2: Iconographic analysis: The caption reveals that some Rwandese refugees could earn money by sewing while living in the Inera camp. Millions of Rwandan refugees fled to Zaire (now Democratic Republic of the Congo)

following the 1994 genocide when the Hutu majority perpetrated mass murder of Tutsis and moderate Hutus during the Rwandan civil war. The Inera camp was set up in July 1994 on the shores of Lake Kivu and grew to accommodate 400,000 inhabitants (STEARNS, 2011; the squalid camp, which became the size of a small city, was destroyed in 1996 according to UMUTESI, 2000). Rwandans with skills and work experience were able to benefit from or organize microcredit schemes within the camp (STEARNS, 2011; UMUTESI, 2000). It is possible that these men and women had sewing or tailoring skills before their arrival to Inera camp; anecdotal evidence suggests that in East Africa at the time, men usually did most of the tailoring as it was a paid activity. Income-generation projects involving sewing or tailoring were widely used in other refugee camps such as Kiziba refugee camp in Rwanda, set up in 1996, and still operating today (UNHCR, 2013). As it is an open space, children and other camp residents can wander in, and workers can observe what is going on around them. The man standing on the side may be waiting his turn to use one of the sewing workstations. [27]

Step 3: Iconologic analysis: The photograph is different insofar as it does not depict the traditionally haunting images of refugee camps. It conveys a more positive outlook on people's ability to be pragmatic about everyday life (i.e., the need to work and earn an income) and make the most of opportunities afforded while living indefinitely in a refugee camp. The caption indicates a clear intent of portraying this group of refugees from a strengths or resilient perspective, as opposed to a deficit, despairing standpoint (through the use of the word "manage"). [28]

Step 4: Iconic interpretation: The photographer depicted men sewing and ironing as a key focus. The positioning of men at the front while they are using sewing machines—and smiling while doing so—may suggest a disposition to recreate a new sense of identity by undertaking meaningful activities despite the difficult circumstances of camp life. The focus on gender and the roles attributed to men and women in a refugee camp setting is clear. There is a deliberate attempt to show men engaged in sewing (which could be considered in western nations at least as a traditionally female activity) as the focal point. While this situation may not have been unusual for people in the refugee camp, a photographer from a western background may have found this quite unique and significant, and thus wished to share this depiction more broadly. [29]

2.2.3 Photograph 3

Illustration 3: Vietnamese refugees on a boat (reproduced with permission from the Centre for Refugee Studies, York University) [30]

Step 1: Pre-iconic description: A group of men, women and children huddle together on a boat at sea. In the forefront, a middle-aged man wearing a watch has a young child in his arms, and looks at the photographer with a faint smile while holding on to some rope. The child clasps both arms around the man's neck. A young woman at the center of the photograph looks towards the photographer with a startled expression. In the background, two women smile. Others look out to sea; one person re-arranges his/her hair, as all passengers have damp hair. The open-top wooden boat is relatively small in size. The picture is not "straight" as indicated by the angular shape of the horizon. However, the sea looks relatively calm and the boat does not seem overcrowded. This photograph was cataloged by the RRC with the keywords "Vietnamese/boat people/flight by sea/refugees;" however, there is no information on the photographer, the location of the boat, the planned destination, or the year in which this photograph was taken. [31]

Step 2: Iconographic analysis: The keywords assigned by the RCC to this photograph indicate that the passengers are Vietnamese refugees escaping by sea. In 1978 and 1979, following the Vietnam War, close to two million Vietnamese undertook the journey on rickety and dangerously overcrowded boats

unsuitable for open waters, towards unknown destinations. They hoped to be rescued and resettled, although neighboring countries were not viable options for seeking asylum (DeMICHELE, 2012). The first group of Vietnamese refugees to travel by sea consisted of skilled and educated people who could mostly afford their passage on boats. Most Vietnamese refugees were resettled to western countries, namely the United States, Canada, Australia and France, but DeMICHELE estimated that 200,000 more perished at sea. It is possible that this slightly worn out photograph was taken in 1978. Judging by the angle, the person taking the photograph was standing in the boat with the passengers. S/he may have been one of the passengers or a crew member. [32]

Step 3: Iconologic analysis: This group of Vietnamese asylum seekers set sail possibly in the late 1970s to seek refuge in another country. The open top setting indicates that this may not have been a comfortable voyage; the conditions at sea may have bothered the young child in particular. The angular look of the horizon indicates that the boat was rocking; this may be why the photographer had to stand to capture the group sitting at the front of the boat. The smiling women might have turned around to pose for the photographer. The lack of contextual information by way of captions precludes a full understanding of the meaning of this photograph; however, the keywords assigned in the cataloging process allow the viewer to situate this photograph as a story from the Indochinese refugee crisis. [33]

Step 4: Perhaps the photographer was attempting to expose the dangerous conditions under which Vietnamese refugees were willing to travel to live in a safer place, to attract attention or elicit sympathy from viewers in western nations. Clearly, in comparison to Photographs 1 and 2, the lack of captions makes the interpretation stage more difficult. [34]

2.2.4 Photograph 4

Illustration 4: Woman with identity card (reproduced with permission from the Centre for Refugee Studies, York University) [35]

Step 1: Pre-iconic description: A young woman is pictured by herself as she shows her Identity Card (words typed in capital letters at the center of the document) to the photographer. She is not smiling, but has a composed expression. She holds on to her fabric shoulder bag. The woman has dark skin and her hair is tied back. She is wearing a patterned pleated skirt, a white blouse, a bracelet, earrings, and a teardrop-shaped "bindi" on her forehead. She stands in front of a movable passenger bridge with metal railings, which is connected to a large ship in the background. The name of the ship starts with "AK"; two to three people are standing on the deck, looking on. A man is seen in the background, walking towards her location and away from a vehicle. The Identity Card is relatively large, and looks like a booklet. The other words printed on the white cover are indiscernible. There is no indication of who the young woman is, her ethnic background, country of origin, her location, the year in which this was taken, or who the photographer was. There are no captions or keywords. [36]

Step 2: Iconographic analysis: As she is producing identity papers, the woman may have just disembarked from the ship and awaiting immigration clearance

before leaving the port. Alternatively, she may be in fact embarking for a new country. Her expression might be of nervousness or tiredness. Her distinct features and the teardrop "bindi" may indicate that she is South Asian. It is possible that she escaped Sri Lanka after the political violence of "Black July" in 1983 (HAVILAND, 2013) and sought refuge in Canada, Australia or a European country. This is one possibility; however, the lack of caption or keywords makes it impossible to determine the exact context of this photograph. The only potentially accurate assumption that can be made is that the woman is a refugee, which led to her photograph being included in the Andrew Forbes collection. According to the CRS Director (who has worked extensively with Sri Lankan refugees), it is rather unusual that this woman was photographed alone at this particular location where it can be assumed that others would have been present. [37]

Step 3: Iconologic analysis: The woman looks stoic as she presents her identity card. This may represent the beginning of a new chapter of her life, regardless of whether she is embarking or disembarking from the ship. The identity card is prominent in the photograph, although the woman' stoic expression cannot be missed. [38]

Step 4: Iconic interpretation: The photographer might have been a journalist covering the arrival or departure of this ship. It seems that s/he purposely photographed this young woman by herself in front of the ship and focused on her document. As she is positioned in front of the ship, the photographer might have intended to tell the story of her journey (inbound or outbound). The unusual nature of this depiction—a woman photographed alone—indicates that the photographer was conscious of the uniqueness of this framing and wanted to convey or perhaps even challenge particular gender-prescribed norms through this depiction. [39]

3. Relevance to Current Issues

There were clear challenges in terms of accuracy of interpretation in the visual analysis process when contextual information (through captions and keywords) was available. In addition to the limitations outlined in the first part of this article, researchers' interpretations of extant photographs are partial merely by virtue of the retrospective nature of the analysis. While SUBEDI (2013, p.279) argues that "[u]ltimately, photographs tell stories and (mis)represent what is being photographed," applying the iconographic-iconologic image framework as a process to consider the themes in refugee photography encouraged more nuanced understandings of depictions of refugee-ness through this medium. The diversity of themes conveyed through the four photographs (summarized in Table 2), even when contextual data is missing, suggests that looking back at the history of the global refugee regime can provide a standpoint to gauge current issues in refugee contexts. A photographic account using the iconographic-iconologic approach can thus shed light on current refugee issues from different perspectives *across time*.

Photograph	Key themes
1	Urban refugees; sole caregiver; asylum-seekers; post-flight anguish/mental health issues; regressive asylum claim system; local community harassment; no work rights, health care, education, or housing assistance; fear of deportation
2	Refugee camps; micro-finance program; genocide; strengths perspective; new identity; resilience; livelihood
3	Seeking asylum by boat; overcrowded and unseaworthy boats; faraway destinations; skilled and educated (middle-class) refugees; deaths at sea; documenting boat journey; hope for the future
4	Importance of identity papers; immigration process; resettlement; new opportunities

Table 2: Key themes conveyed by photographs [40]

Perhaps the photographers imagined then that these photographs would document "the past," instead of still having currency in the new century. It is reasonable to argue that the conditions of refugees in diverse contexts across the world should have improved since the late 1970s and 1990s, given the significant international efforts and financial resources devoted to this issue; however, it seems that the opposite is actually true. When considering the content and social context of these four photographs, prominent themes at the time are still relevant nowadays, albeit within more complicated and increasingly contradictory refugee regimes. For example, given for instance the horrors of the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide (ADELMAN, 2000; see also MALKKI, 1995), some fear that the present situation in relation to the Syrian refugee crisis has become a "Genocide of the Modern Age" (MONTGOMERY, 2011). [41]

Sadly, geopolitical contexts continue to exacerbate the human misery caused by refugee situations (see HYNDMAN, 2011); paradoxically, it seems that fewer visas are granted to asylum seekers and refugees across the world each year (HAAKEN & O'NEILL, 2014). Temporary measures such as setting camps at borders, like the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, have become readily accepted as "permanent temporariness" (for example, DRYDEN-PETERSON & GILES, 2010) with little hope of sustainable or relocation options for those affected. Consequently, supporting livelihoods in camp situations remains a key concern (JACOBSEN, 2012). Source countries from which asylum seekers originate may have changed, but precarious means of reaching resettlement countries (particularly by boat on treacherous seas for instance) are similar (see MOUNTZ, 2011), with devastating consequences such as men, women and children drowning at sea (McADAM, 2013). Systems aimed at "processing" refugee claims efficiently have adopted rigid and at times demeaning stances that relay open suspicion of asylum seekers as threats to safety and social cohesion, and have raised additional hurdles to proving "genuineness" and credibility (for example, BISAILLON, 2013; DAVIS, 2014). [42]

What became apparent through the application of the iconographic-iconologic framework as a qualitative analysis approach is that contemporary refugee literature critically discusses the same key themes (Table 2) conveyed in the four photographs dating back to several decades, showing the on-going relevance of these themes to present times. This is significant because despite the increasing and intense efforts to address the precarious situations of refugees globally, photographs taken some 20 to 35 years ago captured themes that are as relevant to the contemporary context—hence acting as stark reminders of the pervasive and on-going nature of the issues facing refugees over time. This trend echoes MacRAILD and MAYALL's assertion that despite shifts in geopolitical contexts since the 1970s, "the issues [linked to migration and minorities] seem hardly less important" and "remain as starkly revealed in the current ... international discourses" (2014, p.1). [43]

These themes, outlined in Table 2, appear in recent literature in refugee research and include (but are not limited to):

- Photograph 1: urban refugees (FÀBOS & KIBREAB, 2007), mental health of asylum-seekers (NEWMAN, PROCTOR & DUDLEY, 2013), refugee women as sole parents (LENETTE, BROUGH & COX, 2013), or fear of deportation (SOURANDER, 2003);
- Photograph 2: refugee camps (HYNDMAN, 2011), resilience (LENETTE et al., 2013), or genocide (WIELENGA, 2012);
- Photograph 3: seeking asylum by boat (MOUNTZ, 2011), deaths at sea (KLUG, 2014), or skilled and educated (middle-class) refugees (KOYAMA, 2013); and
- Photograph 4: resettlement (CORREA-VELEZ, SPAAJJ & UPHAM, 2012), or importance of identity papers (RUGUNANAN & SMIT, 2011). [44]

Thus, given the on-going and current relevance of such themes, it is possible that these will continue to have currency within refugee discourses in the near future at the very least. Moreover, refugee photography will likely continue to play a critical role as a marker of the (non)changing geopolitical circumstances affecting them. We have seen in 2015 how photographs documenting the Syrian refugee crisis can capture precarious situations and tragic outcomes in a way that textual media reporting alone cannot. Despite *knowledge* that such situations exist, visual depictions widely disseminated across the globe can have much more impact on how the world conceptualizes refugee-ness and responds to crisis situations. Qualitative analyses as presented here can therefore broaden our understandings of socio-cultural and geopolitical contexts over time. It is possible that in 30 years' time, researchers will be looking back on how we visually documented refugee situations in present times, wondering what themes were conveyed, and more importantly, whether any shifts have occurred over time. [45]

4. Conclusion

During the process, a few additional key questions arose: 1. Should we discard themes from visual representations solely because of lack of contextual information (as in Photograph 4) and thus "silence" the experience of those depicted? 2. If that is the case, will dominant representations convey the full complexity of the situations explored? In relation to the first question, there is no doubt that visual analysis is made easier when more information is available; for instance, BELL (2004) notes that visual analysis must include an investigation of context as well as question the framing, bias and agenda setting for a full understanding. However, there is also a "gut feeling," a reaction to visual representations of themes such as suffering, death, love or happiness that comes from the core of our being; while they may be hard to articulate in such an analysis, such reactions should not be totally discarded. For example, this feeling was palpable when photographs of the Syrian refugee crisis emerged in 2015, despite the fact that arguably, few people had a clear understanding of the context. In relation to the second question, narratives prominent in famous photographs (like those of Phan Thi Kim Phuc or The Afghan Girl) can overshadow those in unknown, unpublicized images like the ones explored here. Referring back to photographs documenting Aylan Kurdi's tragic death, the same issue is pertinent; despite making front-page news in that instance, the drowning of over 3000 asylum seekers (women, men and children alike) in similarly precarious situations in 2015 did not receive the same attention or trigger the same outrage. These questions deserve further consideration in future research involving refugee photography, particularly when the analysis is retrospective. [46]

It seems that refugee photography has remained at the periphery of qualitative refugee research as a mere artistic add-on. The potential of photographs in highlighting how issues remain *over time* became apparent in this case through the process of applying the iconographic-iconologic framework. The approach used in this article also highlights that, although refugee photography can enrich understandings of lived experiences, this medium is fraught with interpretive difficulties, particularly given the highly polemic discourses that surround refugee issues worldwide, at stages of conflict, liminality, and resettlement. Nevertheless, "[a]rtists and qualitative researchers both strive for authentic relationships with the external world based upon the commitment to portray the experiences of others in an honest, accurate manner" (SZTO et al., 2005, p.138). Analyzing such photographs can thus encourage audiences to adopt a more critical standpoint when interpreting images conveyed through photography, to create a shift towards nuanced understandings of refugee lived experiences through visual representations. [47]

Acknowledgments

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