Unmasking deviance: the visual construction of asylum seekers and refugees

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Unmasking Deviance: The Visual Construction of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in English National Newspapers

Abstract

This paper explores the visual representation of asylum seekers and refugees delineating how English newspaper imagery constructs such groups as deviant and dangerous. A qualitative visual analysis of nine of the major national newspapers demonstrates how mediated images of asylum seekers focus upon three distinct 'visual scenarios' in the discovery of deviance, which collectively demonstrate how the social portrayal of the criminal immigrant fuses the otherness of the stranger with the otherness of the deviant. First, the faceless and de-identified stranger enables the construction of a panoply of feared subjects. Second, stigma is implicitly illustrated, deviance obliquely intimated and 'spoiled identities' constructed. Third, the mask is removed, the asylum seeker is identified and their deviant status confirmed. Such a process is reinvented, repeated and reworked in news stories, with deviance becoming increasingly engrained and entrenched in the image of the asylum seeker. This paper details how the repetition of specific visual scenarios in newspaper reporting contribute to the construction of 'noisy' panics by generating public and political anxiety about asylum seekers and asylum seeking. Moreover, it argues that such imagery is key to the construction of asylum as an issue of security, which necessitates a policy approach that is exclusionary in nature.

Introduction

The broad issues of asylum, immigration and race relations have grown in importance since the early 21st century. More specifically, in the UK asylum seekers and refugees have been the subject of considerable media coverage and public and political debate. Despite the closure of the Sangatte refugee camp[1] at Calais in December 2002 and the recent decline in applications for asylum, concerns focusing upon the disappearance of migrants and failure to remove unsuccessful asylum claimants have sustained.

Newspapers both inform and shape the ways in which news audiences respond to asylum and, particularly when readers lack personal experience, news items are likely to fill gaps in knowledge (Green 2009). Moreover, newspapers are unique discursive surfaces through which a society can share its anxieties and fears. In particular, visual images are central to how we represent, communicate and make meaning (Sturken and Cartwright 2001) and the importance of newspaper photographs in contributing to how we explain and understand asylum seekers, asylum seeking and the process of asylum cannot be overstated.

This paper demonstrates how three distinct 'visual scenarios' contribute to the construction of asylum seekers and refugees as dangerous and deviant. First, photographs regularly depict large groups of principally male asylum seekers and

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[1] The Sangatte refugee camp is a reception centre near the Channel Tunnel in north-east France. The facility opened in September 1999 to provide food and shelter to homeless migrants in the region. Because migrants from the centre frequently attempted to travel illegally to the UK where they would claim asylum, the centre became a source of controversy between the two countries. In 2002 the UK's Labour government negotiated the closure the Sangatte refugee camp.

refugees, often in queues or loitering outside. Asylum seekers are faceless and de-identified. The anomalous and ambiguous nature of such strangers makes the designation of deviance impossible, but this unknowing allows for the construction of a panoply of feared subjects. Second, close-up photographs of one or more asylum seekers with their face and/ or body obscured, partly obscured, blurred or hidden are frequent. Such images appear to show telltale signs of asylum seekers' deviant nature. Yet whilst these 'spoiled identities' (Christie 1986), achieved through the identification of 'stigma' (Goffman 1963), hint at deviance, they cannot confirm this. Third, mug shots or images of asylum seekers under apprehension for criminal offences substantiate the true nature of such groups and individuals. The mug shot verifies our stereotypes, prejudices and anxieties, and is depicted as making visible the very essence of the individual. This photographic portraiture is synonymous with the construction of the modern criminal body, providing a mode of representation that imbues the individual with criminal propensity. Here the unmasking of the asylum seeker, the application of an identity and the recognition of deviance is achieved. Allied with newspaper reporting on asylum seekers and refugees, these images operate to justify and support claims for the exclusion of such groups, by suggesting that they routinely threaten the UK and its citizens. It is argued that this 'media template' (Kitzinger 2004) is key to the construction of asylum as an issue of security as opposed to an issue of humanity. Moreover, this paper demonstrates how asylum seekers and refugees do not always need to perpetrate crimes to be identified as criminal and deviant.

Moral Panic as a Theoretical Framework

Moral panic theory offers a suitable theoretical framework through which to examine the visual representation of asylum seekers and refugees in the English national newsprint media. Moral panic theory has been subject to considerable revision since its conception more than 30 years ago and remains highly pertinent today. The term moral panic was first employed by Jock Young (1971) in his study of drug use in bohemian London. However, Stanley Cohen's seminal text *Folk devils and moral panics* (1972), focusing upon the conflict between the subcultures 'Mods' and 'Rockers', brought the term wider prominence. Cohen (1972: 9) used the term to depict a situation wherein:

> A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible.

Cohen identifies how the media (over)reaction to such individuals, amplifies deviance, which in turn leads to increased public anxiety and intensified policing. This results in more arrests so vindicating the original press reporting. Such a symbiotic relationship between news reporting and societal reaction is also evident in Hall et al.'s (1978) analysis of what they describe as a 'false enemy' – 'mugging' depicted as being

committed primarily by young black men. Central to this perspective is the premise that the media do not merely reflect a universal reality, but play an active role in its construction.

In the third edition of *Folk devils and moral panics*, Cohen (2002) develops his critique to distinguish between quiet and noisy panics. Quiet constructions occur where claims makers are bureaucrats, professionals or experts who work in an organization that receives little or no public or media exposure. By contrast noisy panics are characterised by significant levels of political, media and public attention. The vast majority of criminological research (Jenkins 1992; Jewkes 2004; Welch 2005) utilising moral panic theory has centred upon noisy panics constructed through alarmist discourse propagated by national newspapers and political elites.

Moral panic theory has received extensive criticism in mainstream criminology. Sparks (1992) has cautioned against simply eliding all anxieties as panics, whilst Watney (1997) questions whether moral panic theory is actually able to distinguish between different degrees of anxiety or explain how social control is applied by a multiplicity of overlapping institutions with competing and contrasting understandings of crime and deviance. For Watney, moral panic theory's 'rational' analysis is not best equipped to explain the 'irrational' panic. Some of these points have informed McRobbie and Thornton's (1995) revamping of the theory to respond to contemporary multi-mediated social worlds that highlights the frequency, contested nature, reflexivity and diversity of panics. Young (1999; 2007), however, disputes McRobbie and Thornton's depiction of a diverse mass media, maintaining that the major media chains continue to focus upon the socially excluded such as immigrants and asylum seekers.

The public denigration and construction of a noisy panic concerning asylum seekers and refugees by the British media has been well documented by academic researchers (Mollard 2001; Barclay et al., 2003; Buchanan et al., 2003). The intense media interest in the subject of asylum is evident in the number of articles printed per month, with many UK newspapers associating asylum seekers with conflict and social unrest (Barclay et al; 2003). Mollard (2001) importantly demonstrates how such a panic has been created through the repetition of a series of myths concerning asylum seekers and asylum issues, which cluster into four topics; the scale of the asylum problem, questions of eligibility, the cost of supporting asylum seekers and the 'social cost' of asylum seekers. Mollard's review suggests that press coverage is characterised by negative imagery and hostility directed towards asylum seekers and refugees. Similarly, Barclay et al., (2003) report that asylum seekers are routinely demonized by the press and identify the consistent use of negative terms such as 'bogus refugees', 'asylum cheats', 'migrants scam', 'crook refugees', 'illegals' and 'bogus asylum seekers' in reporting.

Nevertheless, whilst research has documented the discursive representation of asylum seekers and refugees in the national newsprint media, it has not sought to explore visual imagery as a key component of their construction. As Cohen (2002: 10) recognises, public images of folk devils are 'invariably tied up to a number of highly visual scenarios associated with their appearance'. Moreover, images carry volume and contribute significantly to the 'noisiness' of a panic. Yet academic research has largely ignored how visual imagery can play a central role in the construction of noisy panics.

This paper addresses this failing by examining how British national newspaper photographs construct asylum seekers and refugees as criminal, deviant and dangerous.

The Power of the Image

Newspaper photographs not only support the accuracy and credibility of the medium, but further to this they underwrite its objectivity (Hall 1973). Photographs underpin journalistic claims of objectivity by giving the impression that they allow the reader to see what the photographer sees (Zelizer 1995, 1998). Yet, more often than not, images are regarded as secondary to texts by many media researchers, possessing merely a supportive role in terms of the textual message (Kress and Leeuwen 1996). However, as Barthes (1972: 110) recognises, 'pictures…are more imperative than writing, they impose meaning at one stroke, without analysing or diluting it'.

The power of photographic imagery is situated in its capacity to function upon two levels simultaneously (Barthes 1977; Tagg 1988; Zelizer 1995; 1998). The denotative meaning, what Barthes describes as the 'analogue self', refers to the actual 'thing' being imitated. The connotative message, its ideological meaning, provides an understanding of the manner in which society conveys what it thinks of the object utilising genres, stereotypes and routine stories (Barthes 1977). The photograph signifies by drawing upon a culture's 'lexicon of expressive features', which the reader, as a member of this culture, deciphers (Hall 1973: 227). Such codes depend upon the reader's ability to interpret 'a set of gestural, non-linguistic features…into a specific expressive configuration' (*ibid.*). Read within the dominant ideology, a visual image represents a 'truncated version' of this cultural code; expressing, reinforcing and appearing to inherently connote such ideas (*ibid.*). The visual image is, therefore, key not only because it:

> Can emphasise a point, lend a dramatic or sensational edge to an otherwise 'ordinary' piece of news, add a face to a name or establish the identity of key players in a particular scenario…[b]ut more than this, it can transmit a powerful ideological message about a given situation, set of social conditions or series of events. (Greer 2003: 79)

So whilst the photographic image may appear to speak for itself, such self-evidence serves to conceal the working of ideology which serves to naturalize the cultural (Solomon-Godeau 1991). A photograph, much like the story itself, is subject to criteria of newsworthiness (Hall 1973; Jewkes 2004). Therefore the selection process will be influenced by the uniqueness, drama, controversy or resonance of the signified event (Hall 1973). The newspaper photograph is also an object that is recontextualised by the news process itself (Huxford 2001). The image is chosen, composed, constructed and treated according to professional aesthetic or ideological norms (Barthes 1977). Thus, visual selection is almost always linked to how a story 'will be treated or "angled" – that is, interpretatively coded' (Hall 1973: 232). So the camera is never neutral, instead photographic images and visual representations are highly coded and the influence of the camera is never its own (Tagg 1988). As such it is important that we examine the role played by photography in producing guilt from innocence (Biber 2006).

The Political Context of the Study

This study is part of a wider analysis of asylum in the 2005 General Election campaign. ICM[2] research suggests that asylum and immigration was the sixth most important electoral issue and the Conservative party were thought to have the best policies in this area. However, the salience of this issue may be understated in such surveys whereby respondents do not wish to reveal 'undesirable' attitudes (Budge et al., 2005). Anecdotal evidence from political canvassers intimated that immigration and asylum was more important 'on the doorsteps' than in surveys, whilst online pollster Yougov found that immigration was one of the top two issues for their respondents (*ibid.*). Similarly, Jones et al. (2006) report that immigration and asylum was a dominant theme of the electoral campaign, with huge increases in public concern over the preceding years resulting in eight out of ten Conservative voters and six out of ten Labour voters stressing its importance.

Asylum and immigration also preoccupied the papers and was a significant focal point of election stories (*ibid.*). This is unsurprising given that asylum and immigration was the sole issue in which the Conservative party held a double digit lead over its rivals and offered a favourable terrain upon which to attempt to gain political capital (*ibid.*). Adopting a far more rightwing approach than his Conservative predecessor William Hague, Michael Howard engaged in a 'dog whistle' campaign, with the slogan 'Are You Thinking What We're Thinking?', which sought to target anxious groups on the issue of immigration and asylum. Firmly under the influence of John Howard's former campaign director Lynton Crosby, the party's self declared 'Battle for Britain' tapped into the salience of asylum and immigration as an issue of public concern by drawing associations between border control, crime, terrorism, disease and welfare abuse.

Rather than refute such claims, the Labour party coalesced in these depictions, by suggesting that asylum seekers were abusing a system designed for their protection and that diaspora should self-police. The government also employed concerns about the porousness of Britain's borders to forward their crime and security agenda and specifically the need for I.D. cards. Thus, it is evident that asylum was not only significant in newspaper coverage, but also a central theme of electoral campaigning and political and public debate.

Nevertheless, whilst it is acknowledged that the electoral campaign is likely to have shaped the quantity, tone, type and quality of newspaper coverage of asylum, it is difficult to gauge the extent to which reporting has diverged, if at all, from previous treatment(s) of the subject. Sociological research (Mollard 2001; Barclay et al., 2003; Buchanan et al., 2003) demonstrates that the issue of asylum has maintained a prominent role in recent newspaper reporting, has frequently been overtly negative and has drawn upon state officials as principal sources of information. Furthermore, the last fifteen years have witnessed the almost continual passage of legislation – in response to large numbers of individuals seeking asylum – that has sought to deter entry and punish

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[2] Market research company offering polling, focus groups and telephone surveys in various specialist areas.

those arriving on Britain's shores (Huysmans 2006; Bosworth 2008). As such it is suggested that the wider frame of reporting upon asylum has been one of consistency rather than flux driven by party political interest.

Methodology

This paper explores the visual representation of asylum seekers and refugees delineating how English newspaper imagery constructs such groups as deviant and dangerous. It combines a quantitative content analysis with a qualitative visual analysis of photographic images drawn from nine major UK national newspapers[3], thus offering a representative sample – politically/intellectually/audience/style – of the various publications and news market. The nine Sunday edition 'sister' newspapers were also analysed. A continuous sample from the start of January 2005 to the general election on the 5th of May 2005 was selected in order to present an analysis of the newsprint media that was as contemporary and relevant as possible.

The online newspaper database, Lexis/Nexis, was utilised in order to locate units of analysis. A preliminary search for articles, over the period outlined, identified 588 newspaper items containing either the term 'asylum seeker(s)' or 'refugee(s)' in the leader, first two paragraphs, or throughout the main body of text. Whilst it could be suggested that balanced or compassionate stories may be missed through such a sampling technique, I would concur with Mason (2006), who argues in his use of Lexis/Nexis to identify stories focusing upon prison, that whilst it is entirely possible that some stories may not have been identified using these terms it is highly unlikely that very many news items would not have used the terms chosen. The relevant articles and their accompanying images were then collected in microfiche or their original form from the British Library.

Once the units of analysis were detected, categories were designed and operationalised in order to summarise and describe the content. News images were coded according to content, with the primary focus of the photograph recorded and the total number of images in each category calculated. A controversial aspect of content analysis is the manner by which categories to be coded are constructed. Whether standardised procedures may be employed typically depends upon prior knowledge, the subject area and the research goal. Clear theoretical assumptions were drawn through: The review of previous research where content analysis had been employed to analyse media coverage of asylum seekers, refugees or immigrants; personal and researched knowledge of the newsprint media, particularly with regard to format and layout, and; adherence to the research question and it parameters, which ensured that only relevant categories would be coded. This enabled the development of coded categories that recorded manifest content in order to capture a sense of patterns or frequencies across a large sample of material. Ultimately, the purpose of the content analysis was to identify constituents of the newspaper items that might merit a more interpretative analysis. It offered a method through which to characterise the press reportage of asylum systematically, by mapping features that were both present and absent from the material

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[3] The Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, The Independent, and The Times, Daily Express, Daily Mail, Daily Mirror, Daily Star and The Sun.

under analysis. This provided the foundation for the implementation of a more detailed description and interpretation through a qualitative visual analysis.

The visual analysis undertaken in this study is underpinned by three assumptions outlined by Jones and Wardle (2008) who suggest that an image's meaning in newspaper discourse is constructed through (a) the contents, framing colour, quality and composition of the image itself; (b) the image's relation to other images; (c) the image's relation to text. Like many cultural artefacts, the newsprint media is open to multiple interpretations that may differ to the analysis and explanation presented within this paper. Most importantly, this study does not lay claim to uncovering manifest truths about newspaper reporting upon asylum seekers and refugees. My reading is informed by my identity and experience as a UK citizen, as a white man, as a criminologist and, ultimately, by political concerns over what I perceive to be the increasingly punitive 'development' of immigration and refugee policy within Britain.

However, as Huxford (2001) rightly recognises, the potential polysemy of such imagery is limited by a number of factors. In particular, the headline and image captions interplay directly with images and are significant in contextualising them and helping to shape readers understanding and judgement (*ibid.*). The image alone can also impart a preferred meaning. So regularly are we addressed by photographs that they are seen not as constructed or contested, but rather as a 'naturally produced artefacts' grounded in metaphorical relationships that are largely invisible and which limit the likelihood of oppositional reading (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Goldman and Beeker 1985; Kennedy 1990). Moreover, producers and readers of specific newspapers may hold a 'shared competence' (Fowler 1991) of interpretation that has developed over the years and which automates the preferred meaning intrinsic to a particular image (Huxford 2001). Newspapers evaluate, repeatedly frame and represent with remarkable uniformity asylum seekers and asylum seeking, constructing and positioning such groups as deviant and threatening (Mollard 2001; Barclay et al., 2003; Buchanan et al., 2003). Through such homogeneity in reporting an assumed significance about asylum is constructed and sustained, contributing to the 'epistemological path' that an image is created to project (Huxford 2001).

It would be expected that a paper concerned with the power of the image would be replete with newspaper photographs. However, obtaining copyright to reproduce the material discussed in this paper proved to be problematic. Newspaper pages often contain a number of components - stories, photographs, letters and advertisements - with the copyright for such material distributed amongst the newspaper and various third parties. This makes the reproduction of newspaper pages a complicated and, more problematically, a costly endeavour. It may also explain, in part, the notable absence of such material from criminological journal articles and, to a lesser extent, books that examine the newsprint media. Nevertheless, visualising the photographs discussed in this paper is essential if readers are to judge the strength of this analysis and make their own interpretations. Readers are, therefore, encouraged to contact the author directly for scanned reproductions of the images discussed in this article.[4]

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[4] Email address.

Visualising Asylum Seekers

Of the total number of news articles sampled, 37 per cent (220 units) contain one or more images, with a total of 332 photographs identified. Table 1 details the primary focus of these images.

Table 1 Primary focus of newspaper photographs

Image	Frequency	Percentage
Asylum Seeker(s)/ Refugees	120	38
Conservative Leader	45	14
Home Secretary	21	6
British Citizen	21	6
Prime Minister	19	6
Conservative Minister	16	5
Police Officers	12	4
Labour Minister	10	3
Charity Worker(s)	9	3
Detention Centre	9	3
Asylum Housing	8	2
Border Controls	7	2
Shadow Home Secretary	5	2
Jeremy Paxman	4	1
Military Personnel	4	1
Muslim Cleric	4	1
Prison	4	1
Calais	2	1
Judge	2	1

Asylum seekers and refugees are the focus of a significant proportion of photographs in the news stories under analysis, accounting for 38 per cent of all newspaper images. Politicians and state officials also appear prominently in reporting. In particular, Michael Howard features significantly in the newspaper stories under analysis, accounting for 14 per cent of all photographs. This may, in part, be because Howard's comments were often the catalyst for debate on asylum and immigration and a number of stories centred upon his proclamations. Images of police officers, border controls, detention centres and military personnel also feature and may be significant in shaping asylum as an issue of security as opposed to an issue of humanity.

Nevertheless, distinct representations of asylum seekers and refugees were the most prominent visual image accompanying newspaper reporting. Images of asylum seekers take three principal forms: First, photographs of large groups of predominantly male asylum seekers and refugees, often in queues or loitering outdoors; second, photographs of one or more asylum seeker with their face and/ or body obscured, partly obscured, blurred or hidden, and; third, mug shots or images of asylum seekers under apprehension for criminal offences. Collectively, such photographs construct a distinct image of asylum seekers, refugees and the wider immigrant population. Allied with

newspaper stories focusing upon terrorism, criminality, welfare abuse and disease, it is clear how these representations coalesce and contribute to an image of asylum seekers as threatening outcasts, fearsome strangers, excluded and embittered by such exclusion (Garland 1996). It is to this discussion we now turn.

Many images focus upon large groups of unidentifiable male asylum seekers awaiting entry, arriving, or having arrived on UK shores. Such pictures are often utilised by newspapers seeking to illustrate the failings of the UK's asylum policy. This is exemplified by the *Daily Mail's* story: 'Queue here for open-door UK' (14 April 2005), which aims to highlight the inadequacies of the Labour government's approach to asylum and immigration.

The report is accompanied by three images that reinforce the story's central theme by identifying that (a) border controls are weak; (b) the scale of asylum seeking is large, and; (c) most seeking asylum are unworthy of refugee status. The first image focuses upon three French police officers who appear to be idly watching a queue of asylum seekers. This view is reinforced by the caption: 'Not our problem: Calais police take scant interest in dealing with would-be immigrants, watching as they queue for food'. The image is juxtaposed against the story's by-line: 'Labour says it has the immigration crisis under control. This week, the Mail returned to Calais and found a very different picture'. Thus, the photograph clearly undermines the Labour government's claim to control and reinforces the *Daily Mail's* suggestion that current asylum policy is inadequate.

The second image emphasises the scale of asylum seeking, by providing a visual of the large numbers of, principally male, asylum seekers queuing for food, which is paralleled with entry to Britain. The caption reads: 'Next stop England: The migrants enjoy food and drink courtesy of Calais charity workers – but soon they will be helping themselves to Britain's hospitality'. This suggestion that asylum seekers and refugees will simply exploit Britain's generosity, and its welfare system, is reinforced by the image of large number of males lunching: 'A picnic in the sun: as the weather gets warmer, more are expected to congregate by the channel – and then it's an easy hop for them to get to England'. The recognition that 'more are expected' also seeks to emphasise and exaggerate the scale of the problem. Collectively, the images serve to illustrate the undeserving nature of asylum seekers, the scale of the problem and the lack of state protection available to UK citizens, by offering dehumanised depictions that play a significant role in structuring the national imagination (Tyler 2006).

Collectively, such newspaper coverage repeatedly presents images that suggest that the UK is subject to an invasion of the poor, who are seeking to escape economic misery and avail themselves of welfare benefits that will be re-routed away from citizens. This dehumanised visual image of asylum seekers, that illustrates the problem of numbers, is routine. Inflammatory rhetoric of individuals cheating their way into Britain, alongside "undeniable" visual evidence that such claims are true, emphasises the influx of a populace whose aims and allegiances are ambiguous. Yet it is through such images of dehumanised and indistinct groups of males that a more sinister meaning exudes.

The Strangers

Asylum seekers and refugees are very rarely identified, individualised and personified in newspaper reporting. More often than not, they are simply portrayed as shadowy strangers. And, as Bauman (1991: 53) rightly notes, 'there are friends and enemies…[a]nd [then] there are strangers'.

George Simmel's (1908/1972) *The Stranger* suggests of a person who is simultaneously marked by spatial proximity and social distance, such as immigrants and other marginalized groups much explored by criminologists (Becker 1963; Erikson 1966; Cohen 1972). To follow Simmel (1908/1972: 143), 'the stranger is thus being discussed here, not in the sense often touched upon in the past, as the wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow, but rather as the person who comes today and stays tomorrow'. Moreover, as Aas (2007: 78) rightly recognises, the immigrant/ asylum seeker may be seen as the prototypical embodiment of Simmel's stranger: 'The classical sociological theme of fear of the stranger gains particular salience when applied to the problem of the deviant immigrant' who comes today and *attempts to stay* tomorrow. The asylum seeker synthesises nearness and remoteness both morally and topographically. Consequently:

> There is hardly anything more anomalous than the stranger. He stands *between* order and chaos, the inside and the outside. He stands *for* the treacherousness of friends, for the cunning disguise of the enemies, for fallibility of order, vulnerability of the inside. (Bauman 1991: 61, emphasis in original)

Thus, as Douglas (2002) illustrates with her concept of 'the slimy', such individuals are anomalous and ambiguous entities that blur boundaries, order and assumptions. It is this anomaly, this stranger, that is repeatedly and routinely constructed by a large proportion of images focusing upon asylum seekers and refugees. Two images taken from the *Daily Express* (24 January 2005) and *The Times* (7 April 2005) exemplify this representation (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

In the first image in the *Express*, the silhouette of three male asylum seekers provides little information about their origin, circumstance or character. The caption, 'Stemming the tide: Conservatives plan to curb asylum seekers such as those waiting in France this week to sneak over the Channel', may suggest that such groups are problematic, but this is not supported by photographic evidence. Similarly, the second image in *The Times* carries the caption: 'Immigrants on the promenade near Dover docks enjoy the warm winter sun yesterday as they await news of their fate: the Home Secretary has promised to clamp down on abuses of the system'. Once again, whilst the caption intimates that the individual claimants may be abusing the UK's asylum system, the image would appear to tell us little about the nature of the four individuals photographed as they appear as silhouettes.

Yet it is through such faceless and de-identified representations of asylum seekers and refugees that the images' power lies. Asylum seekers are presented as:

> Neither/ nor; which is to say that they militate against the either/ or. Their undetermination is their potency: because they are nothing, they must be all. They put paid to the ordering of power of the opposition. Oppositions enable

knowledge and action; undecidables paralyse them. Undecidables brutally expose the artifice, the fragility, the sham of the most vital of separations. They bring the outside into the inside, and poison the comfort of order with the suspicion of chaos.

This is exactly what the strangers do. (Bauman 1991: 56)

So the asylum seeker inhabits the 'grey area' of '*unfamiliars*; by the not-yet classified, or – rather – classified by criteria similar to ours, but as yet unknown to us' (Bauman 1991: 57, emphasis in original). The asylum seeker is, as yet, unknown to us and as such cannot be identified and, therefore, cannot be assigned the category of friend or enemy. The stranger may be someone, we welcome into our home, we shelter and we help, but may also be someone we treat with distrust, scepticism and suspicion. Incorporated in the status of the asylum seeker, the stranger, these incomparable normative expectations generate ambivalence (Merton 1976). However, it is because of this inability to classify asylum seekers and refugees that fears can easily be projected onto them. This 'epistemological path' (Huxford 2001) is more likely, given that the last decade has witnessed newspaper reporting that has typically depicted asylum seekers and refugees arriving in the UK as both deviant and threatening (Mollard 2001; Barclay et al., 2003; Buchanan et al., 2003).

As Shapland and Vagg (1988) recognise, questions of fear of crime do not usually evoke images of the typical or known, but rather the unusual and unknown. Such an understanding is reaffirmed by others (Bauman 1993; Young 1999) who suggest that it is the 'shadowy stranger' that people are most fearful of, as he symbolizes the unknown and unpredictable criminal who chooses his victims at random. But whilst any suggestion that powerful news images are simply mainlined subconsciously into societal member's perceptions of crime and criminality is rejected, it is clear that 'news photographs can trigger a complex set of cognitive and affective processes, and that these intertwine closely throughout people's mental frameworks to shape information processing and decision making' (Domke et al., 2002: 149). So what a visual image connotes is dependent upon the mental framework through which it is interpreted. The uniqueness of the de-identified and faceless stranger is that the reader is invited to apply to this image the face they wish, and such faces can change through space and time (Lee 2007).

This unknowing allows for the construction of a panoply of feared subjects that are constantly and easily created. The most recent embodiment of the fearful stranger is the terrorist. Terrorism has become fixed as a major social problem that is underwritten by a rhetoric that centres upon a fear of foreigners, highlights the need for exclusion, intensification of border controls and restrictions on the movement of people (Huysmans 2006). The UK media have conflated asylum seekers, economic migrants and illegal immigrants, suggesting that any and all may include, or be a breeding ground for, terrorists (Mythen and Walklate 2006). Such imagery has significant implications for those suspect communities as the war on terror, amplified by a fear of strangers, has led to a series of repressive measures targeted at minority groups, including asylum seekers, illegal immigrants and certain ethnic and religious minorities (Welch and Schuster 2005).

Greer and Jewkes (2005) suggest that otherness exists on a continuum separated by two polar extremes – 'stigmatised others' and 'absolute others'– that are not fixed, but relative to levels of tolerance and concern exhibited by society. It is argued here that the exceptionality of the asylum seeker, as the de-identified stranger, is that he is at once positioned at any and all points of the spectrum. He may be a welfare cheat or scrounger, a 'stigmatised other', who is routinely rebuked, or positioned as a child killer, a sexual predator or terrorist, an 'absolute other'. As such, there is no position from which one can maintain a safe distance from dangerous representations of crime and criminality (Valier 2000).

However, whilst a deviant, dangerous and criminal asylum seeking population may be suspected and feared it cannot be confirmed.

Identifying Stigma, Hinting at Deviance

It is only through the confirmation of deviance that the asylum seeker's incongruence, his sliminess, be neutralised. This may be achieved through 'discrediting the stranger; by representing the outward, visible and easy to spot traits of the stranger as signs of concealed, yet for this reason even more abominable and dangerous, qualities' (Bauman 1991: 67). Through stigmatisation (Goffman 1963), the bodily identification of madness, badness or wickedness, difference may be recognised and emphasised. According to Goffman (1963: 1) stigma are those:

> Bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier. The signs were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal or a traitor – a blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places.

Such spoiled identities are easily recognisable through deeply discrediting attributes that become apparent within a particular social interaction (*ibid.*). Many of the images utilised by the newsprint media appear to show telltale signs of asylum seekers' deviance. The signification of the deviant and undeserving nature of asylum seekers is demonstrated in an image taken from *The Times* (25 January 2005) that is positioned between two articles focusing on asylum.

The first: 'Tories vow to pull out of refugee convention', reports upon the United Nations refugee agency's criticism of the Conservative party for declaring that they would abandon the 1951 Geneva Convention and prohibit asylum seekers from claiming refuge at Britain's borders. The second, a political sketch, entitled: 'It's scary, bleak and confusing – bull's-eye!', satirises the Conservative's policy approach to asylum. Both stories offer a 'neutral' portrayal of asylum seekers and refugees, yet the photograph appears to be imbued with stigma.

The image of two male asylum seekers – one black and one Asian – peering from the shadows betrays any ambiguity as to their nature. The black individual's attire highlights his lack of worthiness for asylum and, possibly, the 'bogus' nature of his claim. Dressed in a designer jacket, with visored beanie and distinctive iPod headphones, coupled with the sporting of designer stubble, the individual looks more like a model of urban cool than a needy asylum seeker. Not only may we question how

he has obtained such items, but to many his clothing may also serve to signify an involvement in crime and deviance (Fenwick and Hayward 2000; Hayward 2004; Hall et al., 2008).

Transgression has emerged as a desirable consumer decision with crime sold as a fashionable cultural symbol (Ferrell et al. 2008). The re-branding of crime has created a product that is immediately seductive to youth audiences by fusing designer chic with images of criminality and street gang iconography (Hayward 2004). However, such imagery can also signify danger and deviance and evoke fear in others. As Hayward and Yar (2006) recognise, labels and motifs which are valorised by young people also operate as overt signifiers of deviance. The asylum seeker's hooded jacket and visored beanie are associated with street crime, anti-social behaviour and why such individuals are to be avoided, especially in public places. Thus, the consumption choices of the asylum seeker in this image are significant because:

> Individuals not only recognise themselves, but are crucially *recognised by others*, through their publicly visible consumption choices. Shared consumption practices thus furnish a basis upon which class and hierarchical boundaries are drawn between 'us' and 'them', defining those who are included and those who are excluded from social group membership. (Hayward and Yar 2006: 14, emphasis in original)

The image also readily blurs asylum seekers with other 'suitable enemies' (Christie 1986) by drawing upon fears of both youth and race. Fear of youth has endured throughout time (Pearson 1983) and the association between age and crime is, of course, 'one of the brute facts of criminology' (Hirschi and Gottfredson 1983: 552). Nevertheless, the young continue to be the subject of 'irrational responses' by politicians and the media, which serves to criminalise large sections of the youth population (Ferrell et al., 2008). Coupled with the individual's ethnicity, such an image may also evoke suggestions of involvement in 'mugging' or 'steaming'[5], racially distinct and therefore more deplorable activities, 'black crimes', which could be the method through which the individual obtained the iPod. This racialisation, the association of criminality with phenotypical characteristics, is inherent in a number of stories focusing upon asylum seekers.

Hall et al. (1978) identify how in the past the image of 'mugging' served as an articulator and ideological conductor of a crisis by drawing together themes of race, crime and youth. Hall et al.'s *Policing the Crisis*, identifies how the 'discovered' image of the mugger's form and shape personified all the positive social images in reverse: black on white. So much like the asylum seeker, the mugger is a 'shadowy creature' (Lee 2007) with no specific embodiment. Nevertheless, whilst he is unknown and unplaceable, he inverts the image of the responsible, law-abiding citizen. Here we see how standard labelling practices have been reinterpreted utilising the glossary of racial difference in which the terms black and criminal have been conflated (Keith 1995).

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[5] Steaming is a slang term used in the UK typically for robbery performed on public transport by a gang or large group and often involving some level of violence. The victim is surrounded by the group who use intimidation and violence to commit theft.

Similarly, the photograph's image of the second person, partially hidden behind the first, also suggests a 'fearful stranger' (Furedi 2002). We can see little more than the face of an Asian male peering out from the shadows. Yet the reassigned 'subject position' (Keith 1995) of the Asian male, from being categorised as primarily law abiding and often the victim of crime, especially racial violence, to being associated with criminality, drugs, violence, disorder and, more recently, terrorism is significant (Webster 1997; Goodey 2001: Alexander 2004). This has seen the image of the passive and uncomplaining Asian replaced by the militant (Brake 1990).

Other images suggest that asylum seekers endeavour to hide their self, to remain unidentified and faceless, and thus conceal their 'spoiled identities' (Christie 1986). The image accompanying the story: 'How to beat the system' (*Daily Express*, 1 April 2005) clearly illustrates asylum seekers attempts to cover up their faces and, thus, their deviance. The image depicts six asylum seekers, five of whom have chosen to cover their faces with the hood of their jackets and hide their identity from the photographer and, in turn, the reader. In popular folklore it is claimed that the eyes are privileged windows to the soul (Sullivan 1954). Thus, the covering of the face may be seen to signify the masking of the soul, the masking of deviance, the refusal to be classified. It is an attempt to avoid stigma symbols, signs that reveal or highlight the asylum seeker's debased or deviant condition (Goffman 1963). This gives credence to the suggestion that such individuals are dangerous, as they seek to hide such stigma, maintain ambivalence and maximise the threat they pose to the British public. Yet, ironically, such an act instead nourishes an image of a fearful shadowy stranger. As Bauman (1991: 68) recognises, whilst the 'outward signs may be masked…[they]…cannot be eradicated. The bond between signs and inner truth may be denied, but cannot be broken'. Nevertheless, whilst the deviance of the asylum seeker, the stranger, the slimy, is hinted at, stigma subtly demonstrated, and thus deviance implied, it is never confirmed.

Unmasking the Enemy

Not until a criminal or deviant act has been committed can our worst fears be substantiated: the asylum seeker, as we expected, is not a friend but an enemy and our failure to act has resulted in the victimisation of Britain and/ or its citizens. As Bauman (2000: 106) identifies:

> The danger presented by the company of strangers is a classic self-fulfilling prophecy. It becomes ever easier to blend the sight of strangers with the diffuse fears of insecurity; what has been merely surmised in the beginning turns into a truth many times over, and in the end self-evident.

Newspaper reporting on asylum seekers and refugees has associated such groups and individuals with deviance – disease, criminality and terror – and here we see how such reporting is often combined with visual evidence. The unveiling of the asylum seeker, the recognition of deviance and the application of an identity – face, name, age and country of origin – is often fulfilled, in part, through a mug shot of the individual.

Images of arrested and incarcerated criminals, in the form of mug shots, have a

long history (Finn 2009: Rafter 2009). First utilised in the 19th century to document the identity of criminals brought into police custody, the mug shot has developed to become an iconic image in contemporary visual culture (Finn 2009). Today, police mug shots are often shared with the news media, who convey them to the public in a much stylised manner (Websdale 1999).

This is demonstrated by the story of Barian Baluchi, sentenced to ten years for pretending to be a doctor. The *Daily Mail*'s story, headlined: 'Ten years for migrant who posed as doctor' (27 January 2005), is indicative of the newspaper coverage of the apprehended criminal. The visual representation of the offender continues to be a central aspect of newspaper reporting (Schlesinger and Tumber 1993) offering 'a universal mythic sign – the face of all the 'hard men' in history, the portrait of everyman as a 'dangerous wanted criminal' (Hall 1973: 190). The offender, rarely smiling, stares out at the reader and confirms, and justifies, our stereotypes, prejudices and anxieties. So whether or not the individual has been found guilty and convicted of the offence is likely to matter little as the emotionally loaded mug shot is typically associated with someone who has already been determined guilty (Barry 1997).

The oldest theoretical proposition of personality causation is physiognomic (Corsini 1959) with a number of early works drawing associations between bodily structure and character and criminal behaviour (Lombroso 1911; Blackford 1918; Hooton 1937). Similarly, the photographic image of the criminal and deviant asylum seeker is depicted as capturing the very essence of the individual. Much like the sex offender, the asylum seeker is depicted as 'dirty' with 'staring eyes…when you see a photo you think, oh, yeah, I can tell' (Kitzinger and Skidmore 1995: 9). Such imagery of 'dishevelled and wild-eyed' offenders epitomises popular stereotypes (Jenkins 1992). Yet as the inventor of anthropometry, Bertillon, rightly recognises: 'The eye sees in each thing only what it is looking for, and it only looks for what is already an idea in the mind' (cited in Matsuda 1996: 136).

The death of DC Stephen Oake, a police officer killed in a counter terrorism operation in Manchester, has also been employed to strengthen the argument of asylum as a terrorist threat. The suspects are believed to have entered the United Kingdom as asylum seekers. The conviction of one of the party, Kamel Bourgass, for the murder of DC Oake and the planning of terrorist activities within Britain, has underpinned much argument for the toughening of asylum legislation.

The images of Bourgass and DC Stephen Oake accentuate the difference between the criminal and victim, terrorist and terrorised, deviant and innocent, between the asylum seeker and the British citizen. Three images were utilised by all national newspapers reporting upon the case. The mug shot of Bourgass is emblematic of all that is deviant, meeting the criteria of the dishevelled and wild-eyed criminal. Other stories carry the same graphic of Bourgass but focus upon the eyes, implicitly suggesting they provide the reader with a unique glimpse of his evil soul. The image is often juxtaposed with the 'mug shot' of 'tragic victim' (Jewkes 2004) DC Stephen Oake, whose beaming smile, which radiates warmth, is in stark contrast to the cold, hard grimace of Bourgass. Repeatedly employed to accentuate the tragedy of the incident is the picture of a smiling and happy Oake family, which has been 'torn apart' by this asylum seeker. As Garland (2001: 143) identifies, 'the sanctified persona of the suffering victim has become a valued commodity in the circuits of political and media exchange'. Allied with stories

detailing the horrific events that unfolded, it appears that such imagery is subtly employed by the newsprint media in order to authorise vengefulness and vigilance.

Such media images are also important because they emphasise that:

> The boundary lines between conforming and deviant, good and bad, healthy and sick are still valid ones. The boundary line must continually be reasserted: we can know what it is to be saintly only by being told what the shape of the devil is. (Cohen 1988: 35-6)

Here we see how the visual image plays an important role in delineating and emphasising the 'us' and 'them' divisions within society, which serves to crystallise the limits of community both symbolically and culturally (Aas 2007). And positivist binaries of innocent/ guilty, normal/ deviant, true/ false, real/ imagined are also necessary in order for the criminal justice system and a restrictive asylum process to maintain its legitimacy (Biber 2006).

Conclusion: Imagining Asylum Seekers

Photographic images and visual representations play an important role in imposing meaning on asylum seekers and the process of asylum seeking. Manufactured images are powerful ideological messages that contribute to the depiction of such groups and individuals as criminal, deviant and dangerous. Allied with newspaper reporting on asylum seekers and refugees, these images operate to justify and support claims for the exclusion of such groups by suggesting that they routinely threaten the UK and its citizens. This has usefully reinforced political calls for tighter immigration control, I.D. cards and restrictions on movement.

In the UK, moral panic over asylum seekers and refugees arriving in the country is a noisy construction, whereby claims making is highly visible, loud and public. The importance of news photographs, in contributing to the construction of a criminal and deviant image of asylum seekers and refugees, cannot be overstated. Newspapers and newspaper imagery is widely disseminated and often the sole source of information about events beyond most individual's personal experience. Newspapers are, therefore, significant conduits of knowledge concerning asylum seekers and refugees and important surfaces upon which anxieties can be identified, generated and driven.
It is argued that the repetition of specific 'visual scenarios' detailed in this paper contribute significantly to the visibility, noisiness and public nature of the panic. Newspaper photographs of asylum seekers appear to 'speak for themselves', providing readers with 'objective', visual answers to the scale of the asylum problem, questions of eligibility and the 'social cost' of asylum seekers.

Mediated images of asylum seekers focus upon three distinct 'visual scenarios' in the discovery of deviance that collectively demonstrate how 'the otherness of the stranger and the otherness of the deviant are collapsed in the social portrayal of the criminal immigrant' (Melossi 2003: 376). First, the shadowy stranger is identified and fears are allowed to percolate; second, stigma is implicitly illustrated and deviance obliquely suggested, and; third, the mask is unveiled, the asylum seeker is identified and a deviant status is assigned. Such a process is reworked and repeated, throughout

newspaper reporting but rarely in a linear fashion. Images of asylum seekers within the national newsprint media often take any, or all, of the above forms, but collectively they maintain an image of a deviant and criminal asylum seeking population. This paper has sought to demonstrate how such imagery can play an important role in shaping understandings of guilt and innocence, deviance, crime and its control and how newspaper photographs are significant in the shaping of asylum as an issue of security as opposed to an issue of humanity.

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