
Representing Refugees in the Life Cycle: A Social Age Analysis of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Annual Reports and Appeals 1999–2008

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This paper provides a longitudinal quantitative and qualitative analysis of textual and visual references to age in UNHCR's annual appeals and reports published from 1999 to 2008. In contrast to an assumed over-representation of children in refugee imagery, this study reveals that adults are present in the greatest number of photographs across the time period studied. However, children, particularly girls, are mentioned much more frequently than adults in the texts, primarily in reference to 'vulnerability' and protection, education and health. Indeed, efforts towards gender- and age-sensitivity have instead reinforced a discourse that presents 'women, children and the elderly' as problematic 'vulnerable' groups and overlooks the complex power relations of gender and social age. The article concludes with some recommendations for re-presenting refugees.

Keywords: UNHCR, refugee representation, social age analysis

Introduction: Representing Age in 'Forced' Migration

Textual and visual representations of 'forced' migration are present in western media, non-governmental fundraising campaigns, government reports and communications from multilateral organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Scholars have critiqued these dominant representations of 'refugeeness' as homogenizing and dehumanizing (Rajaram 2002; Hyndman 2000; Nyers 2006). Liisa Malkki, in her widely cited book *Purity and Exile*, as well as a related journal article, suggests that dominant discourses present refugees as 'waves of humanity' (1996: 387) and/or 'bare humanity', stripped of culture and identity (1995: 11–12). Malkki argues that the latter is particularly apparent in the use of an

'innocent' figure, often a woman and/or a child, as the 'conventionalized' image of refugees:

This sentimentalized, composite figure—at once feminine and maternal, child-like and innocent—is an image that we use to cut across cultural and political difference, when our intent is to address the very heart of our humanity (1996: 388).

Childhood scholars have also noted the widespread use of children in aid imagery and fundraising campaigns. Erica Burman, for example, suggests that these representations stem from, and reinforce, an 'infantilization' of the South:

Children figure heavily in aid appeals: they plead, they suffer, and their apparent need calls forth help in the form of donations. [...] [T]he use of children in aid appeals repeats the colonial paternalism where the adult-Northerner offers help and knowledge to the infantilized-South (Burman 1994: 241).

Though published in the mid-1990s, since when discourses have changed significantly (as will be demonstrated in this article), these studies are still widely cited today. However, while both Malkki and Burman raise important issues regarding representation of refugees and children in aid iconography, neither undertakes a systematic analysis of documents to support their strong and influential positions. Moreover, authors commenting generally on refugee and disaster iconography tend to conflate a number of different kinds of images and discourses—media coverage, non-governmental fundraising campaigns, documents from multilateral agencies—produced in different contexts and intended for different audiences (Dogra 2007).

The research undertaken for this article therefore empirically tests some of the commonly held assertions about representations of age in UNHCR discourses. While agreeing with the authors above that refugees are too often infantilized and depoliticized, I would like to introduce a new dimension to this discussion by systematically interrogating age-specific visual and textual references in UNHCR documents. Through a longitudinal quantitative and qualitative analysis of UNHCR annual appeals and reports published from 1999 to 2008, I attempt to answer two principal questions: Are children disproportionately represented in UNHCR discourses in comparison to their demographic presence in refugee populations? What are the socially constructed meanings and roles ascribed to different stages of the life cycle in refugee situations? This social age analysis (Clark-Kazak, forthcoming) provides insights into generational specificity within UNHCR discourses.

UNHCR was chosen for this analysis because it is the leading multilateral agency specifically mandated to address refugee issues. Its annual reports and appeals are its 'flagship publications', intended primarily for UNHCR's governmental, non-governmental, UN and private sector donors and partners, but also easily accessible to the general public and media (UNHCR 2008b).

Each publication is distributed to government representatives in Geneva, other donors and to partners in the field through country offices. Annual reports and appeals have two primary purposes: fundraising and public education (UNHCR 2008b). Consequently, these publications have wide readership and the age-specific images and discourses contained therein are thus likely to reach and influence a large number of people involved in refugee issues. Moreover, because the reports are published annually, they provide a good longitudinal source to analyse UNHCR's use of discourse over time. UNHCR began publishing annual appeals and reports in 1998 (UNHCR 2008b). The publication year 1999 was selected as the starting point for this analysis, since it is the first year for which reports are publicly available on UNHCR's website, thus allowing widespread access. One publication—either an annual report or appeal—was then selected for each publication year from 1999 to 2008. The findings presented in this paper pertain only to UNHCR and these specific publications, and are not intended to be extrapolated to other organizations working with people in migratory situations. The term 'refugee' is used broadly to include all people of concern to UNHCR represented in their documents, including internally displaced and stateless people who do not technically fall under legal definitions of 'refugee'.

Conceptual Framework and Methodology

This analysis takes a constructivist approach to representation: 'Things don't mean: we construct meaning, using representational systems—concepts and signs' (Hall 1997: 25). In particular, I am interested in discourse as a system of representation. Discourse refers not simply to language, but rather to a system that 'governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about' (Hall 1997: 44). It encompasses both verbal and visual representation. This study thus examines photographs and text to analyse discourses surrounding age in representations of refugees in UNHCR publications. The discursive approach is explicitly historical and contextual, recognizing that knowledge and meaning are embedded in specific social practices: 'the discursive approach provides us not only with insights on "how" the "other" is represented but also "by whom" and for "what reasons"' (Lamers 2005: 44). This paper specifically analyses the ways in which UNHCR documents socially construct refugees in different stages of the life cycle and the extent to which these discourses are consistent with demographic realities in refugee contexts.

Photographs are particularly interesting to analyse from a discursive perspective because of their ambiguous 'truth value' (Hamilton 1997: 81; Barthes 1977: 19–20; Sontag 2003: 26). On the one hand, photographs can provide *documentary evidence* that a particular event or situation occurred, thus seeming to present an objective representation of the 'facts' (Hamilton 1997: 81; Barthes 1977: 17; Sontag 2003: 26). (This, of course,

assumes that photographs have not been digitally altered or otherwise 'doctored'.) In this way, in later UNHCR documents, researchers have observed many photographs in which UNHCR logos are prominently displayed on clothing, supplies and vehicles, thereby 'proving' that UNHCR was at a particular place, providing assistance. On the other hand, photographic representations are also subjective—depending on the photographer's 'interpretations of events and subjects which he or she chooses to place in front of the camera lens' (Hamilton 1997: 85), as well as the subsequent decisions of editors, who 'select [photographs] out from their original ordering and narrative context, [and...] place [them] alongside textual information and reports in a publication' (Hamilton 1997: 86). In other words, photographs always contain and express particular points of view (Sontag 2003: 26).

Photographs thus have both denotative and connotative meanings (Barthes 1977: 19–20). In this research project, a team of three researchers quantitatively and qualitatively analysed all UNHCR photographs in which human subjects appeared in each appeal or report. For denotative meanings, researchers saved a copy of the image and provided a brief description of the photograph, as if they were attempting to describe it to someone who could not see it. Moreover, the number of human subjects and their sex, race, physical age group and any religious and cultural markings were noted. For physical age, the following definitions were used. An infant is a human being in the early stages of development, who still relies on the care of another person for survival and cannot walk. A child refers to a human being who can walk, but has not yet reached puberty. A young person is someone who is past puberty, but is still physically developing. An adult refers to someone who has reached physical maturity. An elder is a person in the later stages of life, marked by physical signs of age, such as grey hair and wrinkles. Visual analysis relied on physical markers of human development to determine generation. (This was complemented by a social age analysis, as described below.) Where physical characteristics were difficult to discern, or where a subject could not easily be classified into an age group, these ambiguities were noted and the figures were not counted in the quantitative analysis. Rather than enumerating the total number of subjects in each age group per photograph, each image was instead analysed for the absolute presence or absence of each physical age group (infant, child, young person, adult, elder) as principal subjects—those engaging in the primary activity or in the central frame of the photograph—or secondary subjects—those in the background and/or not engaging in the primary activity in the photograph. This approach was taken to give equal weight to each photograph; otherwise, photographs with many human subjects would be over-represented in the results. Moreover, our intention was to discern overall patterns of physical generational representation across time and documents.

In some cases, the same photograph was used more than once in the same report. In the *Global Appeal 2000* (published in 1999), for example,

Figure 1

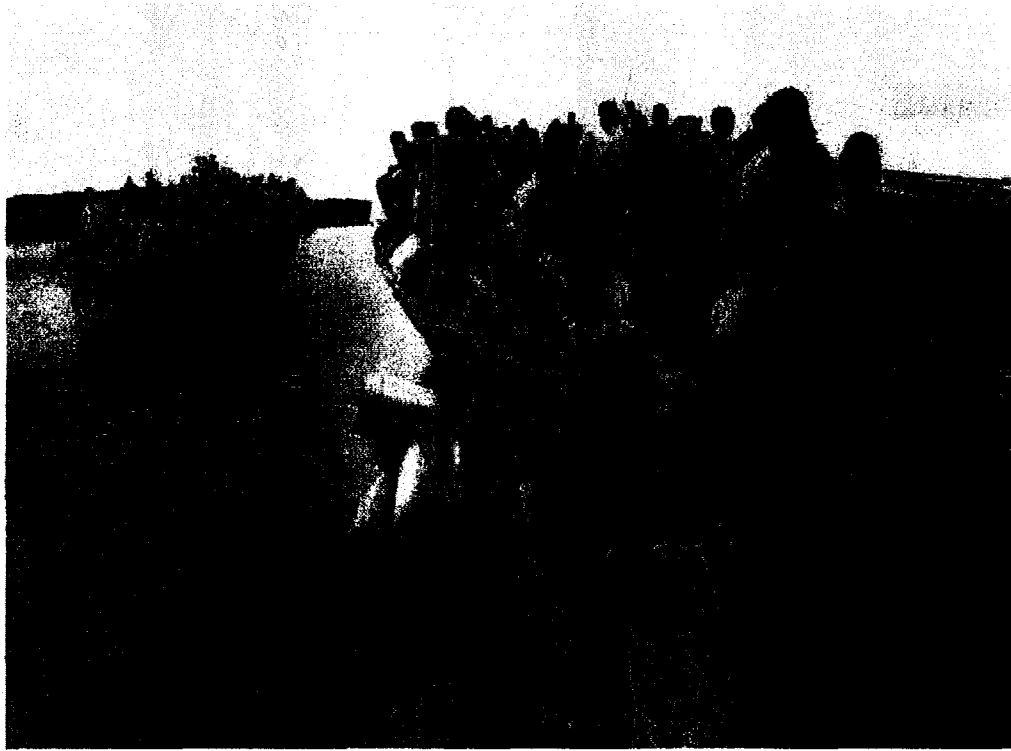
Individual Lifted from Group Photograph



© UNHCR, 1999. *Global Appeal 2000*. UNHCR: Geneva, p. 46. Reproduced with permission.

one particular figure from a group photograph was 'lifted' from the latter and produced as a solitary figure on the title page or at the end of the country reports. In these instances, each photograph was analysed as a separate image. This was important because the editors of the publication had chosen to highlight one particular human subject, who was not necessarily the primary focus of the larger photograph. Therefore, the two photographs were qualitatively different from each other. For example, Figure 1 shows a female African young person crouching over, with one leg raised. This image appears beside the title of a section on the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is difficult for the viewer to understand the context of this photograph, until she/he arrives at the end of this section, where this same young person is a secondary subject in a scene of mass mobility in which a large number (50–100) people are crowded into two boats (Figure 2). This second photograph is significantly different: here, the principal focus is on an adult African female lifting a female African child to help her into the boat. In this image, the female young person in Figure 1 is a secondary subject, who blends into the 'sea of humanity' in the background. Therefore, each photograph was analysed separately. However, in later publications, UNHCR used exactly the same photograph as a backdrop or watermark to the title page for regional sections of the report. This photograph was reproduced fully elsewhere. In these cases, because the two images were exactly the same, the photograph

Figure 2
Group Photograph



© UNHCR, 1999. *Global Appeal 2000*. UNHCR: Geneva, p. 49. Reproduced with permission.

was only analysed once, although researchers noted the double location of the photograph and the prominence given to the image as a cover page.

In order to understand the connotative representation in the photograph, Barthes (1977: 16) suggests that the image needs to be read in conjunction with surrounding text: caption, title, article, etc. Moreover, Malkki (1996) has argued that refugee imagery is often taken out of context. For these reasons, researchers recorded: a verbatim transcript of the caption, where available; a verbatim transcript of any other text appearing in the image, such as writing on banners and slogans on t-shirts; the textual location of the image (for example, on a cover page, in an explanatory text box); and, the textual context of the image (i.e. is there a logical thematic link between the image and the text?).

While inter-textual settings are important, so too are the historical, political and social contexts in which photographs are produced, viewed and interpreted (Campbell 2004: 63). As Radley and Kennedy (1997: 438–439) have argued, photographs promoting international aid, including those intended to solicit funds as in the UNHCR appeals, should not be ‘read’ solely ‘as the transmission (or expression) of a pre-existent reality’, but also in terms of the

meaning that is 'constituted in the production of the version of reality that is achieved'. In order to understand the context in which the photographs are taken and subsequent representations constructed, a semi-structured telephone interview was conducted with a representative of the Appeals and Reports Unit at UNHCR headquarters in Geneva. Meaning is further constructed by those who view photographs, as they project their own connotations on the image.

The 'reading' or the process of decoding any given image(s) is done by people in divergent ways often based on their identity and life experiences. While there may be a 'preferred' or 'dominant' or 'hegemonic' reading which is intended by the author or reinforces a prevailing ideology, 'oppositional readings' can be made of the same text which contest the dominant meanings of the image (Dogra 2007: 163).

As Sontag has pointed out, 'No "we" should be taken for granted when the subject is looking at other people's pain' (2003: 7). Each researcher therefore recorded their immediate reaction to the image. This helped us to recognize our own responsibility as viewers of imagery, who, indirectly, contribute to continued production of images and may shape the future choices of photographers and editors (Dauphinée 2007: 129). In other words, we began to reflexively understand our own roles in the production, consumption and re-production of refugee discourses, primarily for a non-refugee audience.

UNHCR documents were then systematically scanned for age-specific textual references. Word searches included: 'child' (including 'children' and 'childhood'), 'minor' (including 'unaccompanied minor'), 'girl', 'boy', 'infant', 'newborn', 'baby', 'babies', 'youth', 'young', 'adolescent', 'teenage', 'adult', 'elder' (including 'elderly'), 'old' (including 'older' and 'year-old' to designate chronological age), 'generation' (only in relation to age—not, for example, 'income generation'), 'parent' (including 'grandparent'), 'father' (including 'grandfather'), 'mother' (including 'grandmother') and 'age'. However, textual analysis was not limited to 'simply' counting words (Roberts 1989; Carley 1993). Rather, the whole sentence was recorded, as well as the textual reference in which the sentence was found. This approach recognized the importance of context to discourse analysis (Harré and van Langenhove 1999: 5).

This textual analysis, alongside the visual analysis, was important in casting light on social age: the socially constructed meanings and roles ascribed to different stages of the physical life cycle, as well as the relationships within and among generations (Clark-Kazak forthcoming). In addition to the absolute presence or absence of different physical age groups in the documents, we were interested in the ways in which these age groups were portrayed in the photographs and the texts. What kinds of activities are associated with, and deemed appropriate for, different generations? How are different physical age groups portrayed and described—as active, vulnerable, productive, etc? Given the cultural and historical construction of social age, we also analysed the ways in which it was informed by, and intersected with, other social

constructions, particularly gender. Each photograph was thus thematically coded to indicate the principal activity represented in the image, as well as the age, sex and race of those engaged in this activity. (Therefore, for thematic coding purposes, only what we have called 'principal' subjects—see above—were included in this analysis.) Ten activities were used in coding. 'Assistance' indicates a scene in which the subjects are giving and/or receiving aid of some kind. 'Documentation' is used to represent images in which subjects were involved in administering or completing forms, paperwork, registration, etc. 'Education' describes all activities in which formalized instruction was depicted, including schooling, literacy classes or sensitization. 'Health' indicates images depicting the provision of health care. The code 'mobility' is used to describe images in which principal subjects are walking, travelling or moving in some way. Because many images of mobility included a large number of secondary subjects and/or had as their focus modes of transportation (UNHCR convoys, boats, etc.), this analysis, which concentrates on principal human subjects, under-represents the total number of 'mobility' images in the UNHCR documents. In contrast to these active images, 'passivity' is a thematic code used to describe those images in which principal subjects are sitting, waiting or 'not doing anything in particular'. A similar but distinct code is 'portrait', which indicates an image in which the principal subject(s) poses for the camera. This 'portrait' code is also used to describe photographs that are not necessarily 'posed', but in which only the upper body, bust or head of the principal subject(s) are visible and which thus lack contextualizing features. 'Play' is used to code photographs in which the principal subjects are engaged in leisure, sport or recreational activities. 'Production' indicates activities that are undertaken for monetary gain or exchange, while 'reproduction' refers to activities that are undertaken for familial and societal survival and continuity (Yanagisako 1979; Kabeer 1994). Because the objective of the activities is not always apparent from the photographs, the principal researcher coded as 'production' activities such as trading, farming and constructing buildings. Tasks coded as reproductive labour include cooking, fetching water and preparing food. Where images contain more than one activity, the activity on which the image was focused is coded. For example, in many photographs, adults or children appear holding infants or smaller children. While childcare is a reproductive activity, in many cases the primary focus of these images was on other reproductive or productive activities. Codes were used for quantitative analysis to provide a snapshot of the kinds of activities in which different physical age groups were represented. However, they were also complemented with qualitative analysis to provide additional context.

Generational Representation in Historical Context

Recognizing that roles and meanings ascribed to different stages of the life cycle are socially constructed means that these may change over time.

Table 1

Photographic Images by Theme, Sex and Age

Theme	Female*	Male*	Both*	Unknown*	Infant*	Child*	Young Adult*	Elder*
							person*	
Assistance	24	35	39	2	4	33	15	9
Document	21	32	47	0	5	23	18	12
Education	41	18	36	4	3	59	25	5
Health	43	36	21	0	29	7	14	14
Mobility	29	28	39	4	14	52	20	6
Passivity	47	15	32	9	26	70	27	16
Play	41	36	23	0	0	86	41	0
Portrait	51	19	23	7	16	60	13	19
Production	36	51	11	2	1	19	35	3
Reproduction	71	10	17	2	13	38	28	4

*Percentage of total images. Note that the total for each report exceeds 100%, since people in different age groups could be principal subjects in the same photograph.

Moreover, UNHCR has transformed as an institution and the appeals and reports are in a process of re-design and improvement (UNHCR 2008b). As a result, UNHCR reports were analysed over a 10-year period in order to gain longitudinal insights into the changing nature of visual and textual discourses related to different generations. For example, children are depicted undertaking productive and reproductive labour more frequently in earlier than in later reports. In reports published from 1999 to 2004, children appear as principal subjects in 17 to 44 per cent of images involving productive labour and 40 to 63 per cent of images portraying reproductive labour. In contrast, in publications dating from 2005 to 2008, children are principal subjects in only 0 to 20 per cent of productive images and 14 to 50 per cent of reproductive photographs (see Table 1). Similarly, early publications contain few textual and visual references to play compared to later reports. These changes indicate a shift in discourse from children as productive members of society, to an emphasis on childhood as a time of leisure and play.

Despite these and other variations across time, which are also highlighted in the detailed social age analysis below, in *all* documents analysed for this study, adults are present in more photographs as both principal and secondary subjects (see Table 2). Children are the second most represented physical age group in the photographs, while elders, infants and young people are present in much fewer numbers of images. These findings thus empirically contradict the assertion by both Malkki and Burman that children are over-represented in refugee imagery.¹ Indeed, this study corresponds with results from Dogra's (2007) analysis of Christian Aid fundraising images, which reveals fewer photographs of children than expected. Dogra's study and the current research suggest the need to systematically evaluate the widespread

Table 2

Photographic Representation of Age Groups as Principal Subjects

Publication year	Infant*	Child*	Young person*	Adult*	Elder*
1999	6	51	15	52	17
2000	20	38	27	66	7
2001	11	48	21	58	11
2002	6	39	19	73	6
2003	6	28	15	48	9
2004	11	27	16	61	14
2005	11	39	25	74	11
2006	3	39	15	60	1
2007	5	48	22	55	6
2008	14	48	14	52	1
All publications	11	46	23	59	9

*Percentage of total images. Note that the total for each report exceeds 100%, since people in different age groups could be principal subjects in the same photograph.

claim that children are used to 'sell' particular issues. When compared with the relative proportion of different age groups in refugee populations for which demographic statistics are available (UNHCR 2007b), it appears that different generations are proportionately represented in UNHCR publications' images. In contrast to this visual 'balance', the textual analysis reveals a consistent over-representation of references to children in the UNHCR reports, which greatly outnumber references to 'adults', 'young people' (and its variations, including 'adolescents'), infants and elders. For example, the 2000 Global Appeal (published in 1999) contains 160 references to 'child' or 'children', compared with 5 references to adults, 35 references to young people (including 'adolescents' and 'youth'), 4 references to infants (including 'newborn' and 'baby') and 13 references to elders. While there is some variation in the exact number of age-specific words across the publications, all contain a clearly discernable disproportionate number of references to 'children' in the texts compared to the demographic realities in refugee settings.

This discrepancy between visual and textual representations of children relative to other age groups can be partly attributed to the production process for UNHCR appeals and reports. While this process is overseen by the UNHCR Appeals and Reports Unit at headquarters, thematic and geographic units have substantive input into textual content related to their areas of expertise. Moreover, there is a decentralized approval system, in which the head of each thematic and geographic unit signs off on the final text. In contrast, the selection of photographs is completely overseen by the Appeals and Reports Unit, in collaboration with the UNHCR Public Information Service Library, which maintains a database of images. In the

editorial process, photographs are selected to illustrate the text and in accordance with corporate photograph guidelines, including an attempt to be 'representative' of age, sex, race, etc. (UNHCR 2008b). While the differential management of text and photographs in the production process partly explains the discrepancy between visual and textual references to children, it is also indicative of entrenched vulnerability discourses that are analysed in the following social age analysis.

Social Age Analysis

This social age analysis attempts to uncover the socially constructed roles and meanings ascribed to infants, children, young people, adults and elders in UNHCR documents. It also interrogates intra- and inter-generational relationships, recognizing that individuals do not exist in isolation, but are intimately connected to other people (Clark-Kazak forthcoming).

The social age analysis of the texts first reveals a confusion and conflation of categories amongst infants, children and young people in UNHCR publications. In earlier reports, no definitions were provided. However, UNHCR appears to have been using the term 'children' in the same way as it defines it in later documents:

Persons who are below the legal age of majority and are therefore not legally independent. This term includes adolescents. Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a 'child' is a person who is below the age of eighteen, unless the applicable law sets a lower age (UNHCR 2008a).

While this under-18 chronological definition includes under a single category a wide range of human development (which we in this study have analysed separately as infancy, childhood and youth), UNHCR does not actually apply this definition consistently. A case in point is a policy priority identified in all the reports analysed: 'Refugee children *and* adolescents' (my emphasis). This phraseology indicates that UNHCR recognizes that children and adolescents are distinct groups with different developmental and social circumstances. Such an approach directly contradicts the statement in the glossary that the term children 'includes adolescents'. However, at other points in the reports, the inclusion of adolescents within the category 'children' is explicitly stated. For example, in the *Global Report 2007*, UNHCR identifies as a priority for its global programmes 'the specific situation of children, including adolescents' (UNHCR 2008a: 465). Similarly, while infants are technically included in the definition of children that UNHCR employs, they are often implicitly excluded from discussions surrounding children, such as references to primary education or children's work. Moreover, the documents explicitly identify infants as a particular group in relation to infant mortality, birth registration and immunization. These conceptual inconsistencies surrounding childhood, infancy and youth highlight some of the practical problems of

applying the under-18 definition of children embodied in international law. As I have argued elsewhere (Clark-Kazak forthcoming), the chronological age definition must be supplemented by social age analysis in order to reflect the diversity of lived experiences of people in different stages of the life cycle.

The homogeneity implied by the under-18 definition of children is also undermined by the differential roles portrayed by, and ascribed to, infants, children and young people in the visual and textual references. Photographs in which infants appear as principal subjects and secondary subjects represent 3–14 per cent and 0–3 per cent, respectively, of images in the reports analysed. Infants never appear alone in photographs and are often being carried or acted upon, such as being fed, registered or weighed. This visually implies their dependence on other human beings and the assumption that they are not active agents themselves. Indeed, of all the photographs in which infants appear as primary subjects, the greatest number—36 per cent—are coded as images portraying passivity. This is followed by photographs in which infants are being carried in photographs portraying mobility (16 per cent), reproductive labour (16 per cent) and portraits (15 per cent). In contrast, infants are never portrayed in photographs connoting play and productive images make up only 1 per cent of the total images in which infants figure as primary subjects. Similarly, textual references to infants are much less frequent than for children and adolescents and tend to connote physical vulnerability and dependence. Infants are mentioned in reference to morbidity and mortality rates, supplemental feeding and nutrition, or in regards to their specific needs of documentation, such as birth certificates. The predominant focus is on health, particularly in relation to their perceived vulnerability to mortality and morbidity, with a secondary emphasis on birth registration.

Children, in contrast, are highly represented in both visual and textual representations of refugees. Photographs in which children appear as principal subjects and secondary subjects are 27–48 per cent and 8–27 per cent, respectively, of images in the publications analysed. One of the main discourses surrounding childhood in the publications studied is the fact that they constitute a particularly vulnerable group, often in a list of other categories of people, such as women, elderly and the disabled. Because this 'vulnerable' discourse cuts across different generations, it will be analysed separately below. A second predominant way in which children are portrayed in textual and visual discourses is in relation to education, particularly formal primary schooling. In many cases, emphasis on primary school is explicit, with reference to 'primary school aged children' or children aged 6–12. This is also apparent in visual representations of refugees, where pre-pubescent children are present as principal subjects in 59 per cent of the education photographs analysed in this study, compared with only 25 per cent for young people. In other cases, the documents imply that children are associated with primary school, while adolescents are in secondary school or vocational training. These discourses can pose practical challenges for refugee young people whose schooling has been disrupted by conflict and/or displacement,

or who have not had an opportunity to attend school prior to migration: they are deemed 'not to belong' in primary school, but do not have the formal education necessary to attend secondary school. However, related to the ambiguous conflation of childhood and youth above, there are a few textual references to children accessing 'primary, secondary and tertiary education'. Since tertiary education commonly means formal education at college or university level, it is highly unlikely that people attending these institutions will be under 18, as designated by UNHCR's chronological definition of 'children'.

Health issues in relation to children are also prevalent throughout the documents. There is a concern for vaccination of children, child mortality rates, nutrition and 'child hunger'. Because the physical needs of children vary across the developmental spectrum, references are often implicitly or explicitly (for example, through chronological age designations of 'under 5' or 'under 15') linked to younger children. Older children and young people are more frequently mentioned in terms of reproductive health (particularly for girls) and HIV/AIDS, as discussed below. In contrast, there are very few visual references of children in health contexts. Indeed, a total of only 14 photographs in all documents analysed for this study were coded as containing health images. Of these, children are least represented, appearing as principal subjects in only 7 per cent of health images, compared with 14 per cent for youth and elders, 29 per cent for infants and 86 per cent for adults.

Children are visually and textually associated with play, sport and recreation, particularly in later reports. For example, in the Global Appeal 2000, published in 1999, there is only one photograph in which the main activity is recreation, compared to seven photographs in the Global Report 2007, published in 2008. The increase in attention to play, sports and recreation may be due to the launch of the 'ninemillion campaign', which aims 'to give more than nine million children better access to education, sport and technology by 2010' (UNHCR n.d.). Despite the variation in the relative importance of visual images of play across time, in all reports, children are the most represented in photographs of sport and recreation. They appear as principal figures in 86 per cent of the 'play' images, followed by young people at 41 per cent and adults (usually in a referee or supervisory role) at 9 per cent. Infants and elders are not present in any of the images coded as 'play'.

Representation of children in relation to work is much more ambiguous. First, images of children's productive and reproductive roles are contradicted by textual references to child labour as a protection concern, implying that such work is abnormal and detrimental. Second, as noted above, the prevalence of images portraying children's productive activities declines over time. However, children's reproductive labour is much more consistently portrayed in UNHCR images. Indeed, they are the second most represented generation—after adults—in all reproductive photographs, featured as principal subjects in 38 per cent of all such images. In contrast to these proactive images, of all images in which children figure as principal subjects, they are

most often portrayed in passive ways. Seventy per cent of images coded as passive and 60 per cent of portraits contain children as principal figures. This is followed by 'generic' images of mobility, representing 15 per cent of all images in which children appear as principal subjects. These findings do partly uphold Malkki's and Burman's arguments about the ubiquitous use of images of children as the 'face' of refugees.

However, not all children are equally represented. Particular attention to gender differences in this analysis revealed striking differences between discourses pertaining to boys and girls, particularly in textual references. Our study showed that UNHCR specifically refers to female children much more frequently than boys. In the *Global Report 2007*, for example, there are six references to boys compared with 76 references to girls—a gender differential of more than ten-fold (UNHCR 2008a). In many cases, girls are grouped with older females, with references to 'women and girls' particularly in relation to sexual violence and reproductive health. This implies that boys are not at risk of sexual violence, nor in need of reproductive health services. Girls are also often mentioned in terms of education targets. While this focus is understandable in contexts where females have historically had less chance to undertake formal schooling, at times the text ignores boys altogether. For example, in the same *Global Report 2007* cited above, the following sentence appears in the Tanzania section: 'The closure of secondary education in the camps for Burundians made it difficult to promote girls' education' (UNHCR 2008a: 93). Boys were also presumably affected by the school closure, but there is no mention of this impact. Similarly, in the section on Ethiopia, it is stated: 'The teacher–student ratio was improved in the alternative basic education programme in Somali camps, and 85 per cent of registered girl students graduated' (UNHCR 2008a: 219). The percentage of male students who graduated is also significant for overall education goals, but this information is not provided. As discussed below, 'gender mainstreaming' is too often equated with 'women and girls' in UNHCR publications, losing the important focus on gender relationships and differential experiences within sexes due to other power relations, such as class, ethnicity and social age.

Young people—often referred to as 'adolescents' in the UNHCR literature—are much less present in visual representations (14–25 per cent of principal subjects and 3–12 per cent of secondary subjects across the reports studied) and textual representations than children. While they are technically assumed under the definition of 'children', in some other cases, 'young people' are defined in terms of a different chronological age: 15 to 24 (UNHCR 2008a). This is the standard UN definition (United Nations n.d.), but not embodied in international law, nor explicitly stated in the glossary of UNHCR publications studied. While young people are sometimes related to, or included in, the term 'children', the way in which they are specifically portrayed is qualitatively and quantitatively different. In visual and textual references, young people are often associated with vocational training and work, which contrasts with the ambiguity surrounding these

issues for children (see above). Indeed, 50 per cent of the images in which young people are principal subjects portray them engaging in productive or reproductive work. Moreover, in textual references, young people are more likely to be associated with secondary education or technical training than children.

As with children, there is an important gender distinction. While young women are often singled out as needing special services and attention, young men are very rarely mentioned. Most textual references to female 'adolescents' and 'youth' portray them, alongside adult women, as recipients of reproductive health services, particularly sanitary supplies, or as victims of sexual- and gender-based violence. 'Adolescent girls' are also prominently mentioned with reference to formal education and their barriers to access. The few textual references to young men usually portray them as being the sources of violence, for example as former or potential combatants, or perpetrators of sexual- and gender-based violence.

Adults are visually dominant in all of the documents analysed, present as 48–75 per cent of principal images and 17–35 per cent of secondary images. In contrast, however, there are few textual references to adults in general, although 'women' are often listed as a category of vulnerable groups. Discourses in the UNHCR documents studied thus imply an underlying assumption that adults are the 'norm', particularly in comparison to 'vulnerable' groups, as discussed below. In terms of the social meanings ascribed to adulthood, adults are present in 98 per cent of photos related to documentation, with males outnumbering females by 3:2. The association of adults with formal registration processes is also highlighted by age-specific textual references to identity documents. In most cases, all people over a certain age, usually 15 or 17, are provided with documentation. This reflects the western legal tradition, embodied in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which sets 18 as the age of majority. Adults are also predominantly associated with productive and reproductive labour, together totalling almost 40 per cent of all images in which adults figure as principal subjects and appearing in 82 per cent and 70 per cent, respectively, of all images coded as productive and reproductive labour.

An unexpected finding from our analysis relates to the prevalence of visual and textual associations of adult refugees with education. While adults are sometimes present in 'education' photographs as teachers or instructors, there are also many images in which adults are engaged in learning. Similarly, textual references to 'adult education', often related to literacy, vocational training and language training (sometimes explicitly for women), reinforce the notion that adult refugees require formal training and education. Though this is logical in contexts where refugees migrate to areas where they do not know the language and/or where their previous training is not recognized, it does contribute to an infantilization of adult refugees, especially given the fact that formal schooling is often associated with children or young people.

Quantitative analysis of textual and visual references to 'elder' reveals a reversal of the situation with adults. While elders are amongst the least represented in images (1–17 per cent and 0–5 per cent of principal and secondary subjects, respectively), they appear much more frequently in textual references, particularly in later documents. This is due in large part to 'age, gender and diversity mainstreaming', which is often equated with 'women, children, adolescents and elders'. In addition to the problematic categorization of vulnerability discussed below, the grouping of children, young people and elders together is puzzling, given social age hierarchies that exist in many societies. In groups based on lineage, elders often garner considerable respect and power. UNHCR alludes to this in discussions of its 'policy on older refugees', where positive attributes and the active roles of elderly refugees are highlighted, including 'carers', 'opinion setters' and 'resources in formal and informal learning and education' (UNHCR 2002: 39). Some reports also contain passing reference to elders' 'significant role and contribution to the community' (UNHCR 2005: 79), including in mediation of disputes, as well as the need for a greater understanding and promotion of these capacities (UNHCR 2007a: 35–36). However, this aspect of social age is under-represented in relation to 'vulnerability' and 'needs' discourses in the UNHCR documents studied and requires further research and data.

Indeed, elders, like infants, are disproportionately portrayed in 'passive' and 'portrait' images, together totalling 50 per cent of all images in which elders appear as principal figures. In contrast, only 12 per cent of these images portray elders undertaking productive and reproductive labour. While elders are sometimes engaged in active roles in images of mobility or documentation, they are more likely portrayed as recipients of general assistance or social services such as health or education. These images, coupled with dominant textual references to 'vulnerability' of elders, reinforce discourses surrounding their need for care and assistance.

This discussion of inter-generational relationships also begs the question of how families are represented in the UNHCR publications. Textual analysis reveals an underlying assumption of the nuclear, heterosexual family based on patrilineage. This norm is not explicitly stated, but is implied by the fact that 'single-parent' (particularly 'female-headed'), elder-headed and child/adolescent-headed households, as well as separated or unaccompanied children, are portrayed as anomalies and particularly vulnerable groups. It is also implied by the 'solution' offered by UNHCR to children without their parents: foster care or family reunification. This assumes that the normal and natural place for children is with their biological parents (or, where this is impossible, foster parents) and overlooks the fact that children may have deliberately left their families or intergenerational networks (Clark 2006). Moreover, this presumption of care within families is inconsistent with the very few textual references to parental roles. Fathers are very rarely mentioned, while references to mothers are usually related to their physical needs, particularly in pregnancy, childbirth and while lactating. Grandparents are

also notably absent from discourses in the UNHCR documents analysed, despite their important childcare and social roles in many contexts, except as perceived 'vulnerable' groups—such as 'grandparent-headed households'.

Indeed, across the time period studied, discourses surrounding the vulnerability of particular groups—especially women, children, young people and elders—have been remarkably tenacious despite some change in language, such as the shift from 'needs' to 'rights', and 'vulnerables' to 'age, gender and diversity mainstreaming' (AGD). However, this vulnerability discourse is problematic for a number of reasons. First, as I have argued elsewhere (Clark 2007), essentialist categories implied by this discourse do not reflect the more complex reality of dynamic vulnerability in shifting relationships and contexts. Moreover, the notion that these groups are *by definition* vulnerable conceptually and practically rules out a change of circumstances. Second, the ever-expanding list of groups deemed the target of 'mainstreaming'—for example, 'women, children, older people, those with disabilities and other diverse groups' (UNHCR 2007a: 30)—means that they are likely to make up a significant majority in many refugee populations. This creates cognitive dissonance and practical challenges to the notion that these groups then require specialized interventions. Third, these human groups are identified as 'priorities' alongside inanimate issues, such as the environment and HIV/AIDS. For example, in UNHCR's most recent publication, it is stated: 'Functional units supported programmes covering registration, resettlement, HIV and AIDS prevention, public health, staff safety, supply chain management and *women and children*' (UNHCR 2008a: 214, my emphasis). Discursively and practically, this contributes to a dehumanization of people as simply 'priorities' or 'issues', without attention to the underlying power relations based on gender, social age, class, etc.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, singling out these groups for special attention and assistance may actually run counter to the goals of 'mainstreaming' because it implicitly reinforces dominant norms. Conceptually, feminist and post-colonial scholars have long argued that categorization such as 'vulnerables' and 'AGD' contributes to 'Othering' processes that undermine the legitimacy of those who do not conform to dominant ideas (Slater 1997; Zetter 1991; Said 1995; Fabian 2002; Ferguson 1997; James 1993). More practically, vulnerability and AGD discourses may result in a change of 'language' without affecting the reality on the ground. In a review of gender and age mainstreaming sponsored by UNHCR, for example, Groves (2005) argues that gender and age are often perceived in terms of specific projects for 'women' and 'children', rather than as a requirement for over-arching organizational change:

The wider context of power relations caused by societally defined age and gender roles and their impact on women and children are therefore being missed, as are issues of discrimination faced, e.g. by young or elderly men, for example (2005: 7).

Re-presenting Age in UNHCR Discourses? Conclusions and Recommendations²

If AGD mainstreaming is to lead to real changes in UNHCR discourses and practices, reports need to more effectively represent the complexities of refugees' diverse experiences within the life cycle. One step in this direction would be to move away from language that implicitly and explicitly equates 'age, gender and diversity' with 'children, women, elderly and disabled'. Rather, even within the length, time and format constraints imposed by the annual reporting cycle, documents could be injected with many more tangible examples of what 'age, gender and diversity' actually means. Indeed, after systematically analysing 10 reports over a 10-year period, researchers in this study were struck by the repetition of key discourses, but also by the fact that we were still unclear as to the tangible implications for UNHCR's programming. We suggest that, to demonstrate the complexity of age mainstreaming, and the ways in which UNHCR responds, more concrete examples are given. Moreover, we would recommend more explicit textual references to males and adults, particularly to illuminate the ways in which dominant perceptions of masculinity and adulthood may negatively impact not only females and children, but also males and adults themselves. Visually, more images of human subjects in non-traditional gender and social age roles—such as females clearing mines (UNHCR 2006: 121), males caring for children and young people teaching adults—could also more effectively convey complex inter-generational relationships in contexts of displacement.

A second way to inject more life into AGD discourses is to integrate refugees' perspectives from across the life cycle more systematically into UNHCR annual reports and appeals. For example, in the *Global Report 2007*, UNHCR reported on a photography project entitled 'Do you see what I see?' 'through which refugee children could document their daily lives in Osire camp' (UNHCR 2008a: 111). However, none of the children's photographs were used in the report, including in the textbox profiling the project. Images taken from different refugees' perspectives, as well as life stories (Powles 2004; Eastmond 2007; Clark-Kazak in progress), would provide more insight into the complexities of gender and social age relationships, than current AGD discourses.

Finally, readers and viewers of these discourses, including the researchers involved in this study, should take more responsibility for our roles in the production and reproduction of age-specific representations of 'refugeeness'. As with anti-slavery iconography in the nineteenth century, refugee discourses in the twenty-first century are primarily consumed by 'a privileged community of people' who see refugees as different from ourselves (Savage 1997: 60–61), but also project our own socially constructed notions of what is 'appropriate' for different generations.³ We need to reflect more self-consciously on images that do and do not uphold our preconceived notions and ask ourselves why we hold these views. Researchers have a responsibility to ensure that the claims we make are supported by empirical evidence.

Rather than erroneously stating that children are over-represented in refugee imagery, the theoretical argument against the infantilization of refugees could be better supported through social age analysis that interrogates age-specific discourses.

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1. While this research shows that, empirically, images of children do not predominate, it does not necessarily contradict Malkki and Burman's theoretical argument about the infantilization of refugees, as will be discussed below.
2. I am indebted to Tanya Zayed and Alison Marshall for their contributions to this section.
3. I am grateful to Leah Clark for drawing my attention to this point.

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