Refugee Representations: 1950s Non-Western/WWII Refugees in American Media with Smaller Circulation

Tova Anderson^{1*}

Abstract

This paper explores refugee representations in 1950s of non-western/World War II in American media, specifically “smaller circulation” media. I define local newspapers, academic studies and governmental documents. as “smaller circulation” because their readership was not as diverse or as large as mass media publications; they were read by people of a town (often small), those in federal governmental, legal positions, and academics. Therefore, this paper will discuss the results of these findings and suggest how the non-western/WWII refugees’ condition was interpreted in these smaller circulation, how this contrasted a large contemporary and importantly local refugee movement and finally, a suggestion of the implications. My findings suggest that during the 1950s, smaller circulation American print publications discussed non-western/WWII refugees in a political and pragmatic manner, and linked refugees to a particular cause (such as Communism) or nationality, and on the whole did not prioritize them: ironically, this is even in light of the World Refugee Year from 1959-1960, discussed by Gatrell. Publications generally depicted refugees without pictures or art or statistics, but instead depended on written descriptions.

Keywords

World War II — Refugees — News Media

¹ Department of Art Education and Art History, University of North Texas

*Faculty Mentor: Dr. Jennifer Way

Contents

Introduction	1
1 Local Newspapers	2
2 Conclusion	3
Author Biography	3

Introduction

At the beginning of this research project, my focus was on refugee representations in 1950s of non-western/World War II in American media. However, upon seeing that academic attention has already been given to mass media representations (for example, the *New York Times*, Washington, DC papers, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Life*, etc.), of non-western/WWII refugees in the 1950s America, I discovered and turned to lesser known pieces of literature: local newspapers, academic studies, and governmental documents (court cases, Department of State Bulletins, Presidential speeches, etc.). I define local newspapers, academic studies and governmental documents. as “smaller circulation” because their readership was not as diverse or as large as mass media publications; they were read by people of a town (often small), those in federal governmental, legal positions, and academics. Therefore, this paper will discuss the results of these findings and suggest how

the non-western/WWII refugees’ condition was interpreted in these smaller circulation, how this contrasted a large contemporary and importantly local refugee movement and finally, a suggestion of the implications. To begin with general statements about these refugees, as noted by Liisa H. Malkki in her review of refugee literature,¹ these 1950s non-Western/non-WWII refugees were among the first refugees to be seen as a people group to be aided internationally because WWII was the beginning of the modern conception of a refugee.²

Peter Gatrell’s book, *Free World? The Campaign to Save the World’s Refugees, 1956-1963* also contextualizes the refugee representation of the era, and will be used later in this paper to discuss a large local refugee movement and its media.³ For general refugee information pertinent to this paper, Gatrell relays that the US government was the “most powerful institutional influence on migration” during the mid-century, particularly with the US Escapee Program (USEP) that helped refugees fleeing from Communism.⁴ The US

¹ Malkki, Liisa H. “Refugees and Exile: From “Refugee Studies” to the National Order of Things.” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 24, 1995, pp. 495-523.

² Malkki, 497-8.

³ Gatrell, Peter. *Free World? The Campaign to Save the World’s Refugees, 1956-1963*. Cambridge: 2011.

⁴ Gatrell, 20-1.

appeared to allow more refugees of different nationalities (with quotas based on these nationalities) than other Western nations.⁵

My findings suggest that during the 1950s, smaller circulation American print publications discussed non-western/WWII refugees in a political and pragmatic manner, and linked refugees to a particular cause (such as Communism) or nationality, and on the whole did not prioritize them: ironically, this is even in light of the World Refugee Year from 1959-1960, discussed by Gatrell (and to be explained later). Publications generally depicted refugees without pictures or art or statistics, but instead depended on written descriptions.

1. Local Newspapers

Regarding the local newspapers, they addressed refugees in a political manner by generally stating: here is what is happening to this group of refugees along with a description of what the country or cause is doing to make these refugees flee. Refugees were never discussed as a part of a “refugee problem”, as they were not addressed as an international dilemma till the mid-late 1940s.⁶ These non-Western/WWII refugees as seen in smaller circulation publications, I define as peoples from Asian, African, or Eastern European countries; the most discussed refugees were Koreans at the beginning of the decade, and Vietnamese, Laotians, Hungarians at the end. They primarily relayed how the United States, not other countries, aided or received these refugee groups.

Because these local newspapers emphasized who was helping the refugees, their stories for the most part came across as pragmatic, or delineating the nations aiding refugees, the refugees aiding themselves, and occasionally, the reader aiding the refugees (food can drives, etc.) Though refugees were described at times with emotion-provoking language, the articles in these newspapers did not often leave the reader with pitiful and helpless images, except to blame an offending nation or cause. Instead, the United States and occasionally the UN were listed as taking in refugees or aiding them, but the details of how they went about it were not listed. These newspaper articles only used such details when discussing smaller events. For example, in a Montanan newspaper in 1957, American and Norwegian students in a private American organization attempted to help Hungarian refugees across the border.⁷ Refugees, though victims, were generally shown as trying to escape or work against the country or cause of their distress. Finally, advertisements in the newspapers occasionally discuss what a local organization or religious group was collecting for refugees and where the donations could be left. Other than the sympathetic descriptions and chastising politicians for not supporting refugees, local newspapers portrayed how refugees’ situations had been or would be changed without prodding their plausibility. Malkki suggests that refugee

camp in Europe after the WWII “depended heavily on improvisation”, and thus weren’t questioned because of the state of emergency and novelty of the problem.⁸ Perhaps the US worked from improvisation and so did not believe there were time constraints.

What was not reported in these local papers were the American governmental decisions and logistics on how to help refugees. For example, in 1953-5, none of the newspapers that I found mentioned the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 that was passed to aid more than WWII refugees, and then was amended in 1954 and changed by Eisenhower in 1955. Neither this Act, its amendment and changes, or the plethora of related court cases were queried. The academic studies on the other hand, discussed how refugees in a very particular circumstance (such as such American city with refugees of this nationality/ethnicity, etc.) were or were not being helped with statistics in a sociological manner. None of these however categorized themselves as “refugee studies” because as Malkki argues, “refugee studies” did not appear in a systematic way till the 1970s and 80s”, and these “studies”, as stated above, were very narrow in focus, often collecting information for a particular charity organization.⁹ Thus, academic studies were as pragmatic as government documents and newspapers.

How, besides a political and pragmatic way, else were refugees represented in local or governmental or academic publications? Though there were a few ethnic and religious causes cited in academic studies, non-Western/WWII refugees were generally presented as victims of Communist rule, particularly in the local newspapers. Federal court cases and Department of State Bulletins did prioritize refugees from Communist countries, while academic studies hardly favored or negated this promoted causation. Newspaper articles were a completely different story. For example, one incident of Vietnamese and Laotian refugees was greatly talked about amongst several newspapers in 1959. With the Northern Vietnamese, they were said to have fled to Thailand and then decided to return. With the Laotians, the UN was debating if it had been the North Vietnamese to have attacked Laotians, and one newspaper notes that the US believed it was the North Vietnamese’s fault¹⁰ and another newspaper asserts this by calling its article “Reds Stage Laos Terror War”.¹¹ Concerning refugees that had entered the United States, another newspaper relays that refugees received emotion-appealing mail from their Soviet homelands to try to get them to return.¹² What I found the most surprising is that despite the “Red Scare”, only one incident of this scare amongst these smaller circulation sources was connected to refugees: Vice President Nixon calmed people’s fears of Communists being among the Hungarian refugees arriving in the US.¹³

With mainly written representations, refugees were hardly

⁸Malkki, 499.

⁹Malkki, 507.

¹⁰*Findlay Republican Courier*, Friday, September 18, 1959, Findlay, Ohio.

¹¹*Corsicana Daily Sun*, Tuesday, August 25, 1959, Corsicana, Texas.

¹²*El Paso Herald Post*, Monday, June 4, 1956, El Paso, Texas.

¹³*Lowell Sun*, Sunday, January 13, 1957, Lowell Massachusetts.

⁵Gatrell, 44.

⁶Malkki, 497-8.

⁷*Butte Montana Standard*: Sunday, January 13, 1957, Butte Montana.

prioritized in smaller circulation publications. First, there is the matter of quantity; many of databases I searched gave few or unrelated sources (that were not mass media). Even among the secondary sources (academic), finding material was difficult. While searching in Newspaper Archives, where I found most of my newspaper sources, I had great difficulty finding the reference to refugees: the articles were almost always short and positioned off to one side. I found only two examples of refugees receiving more than an aside article, neither of which were on the front page. One cartoon relates to Soviets writing to American refugees to return home.¹⁴ In another, the headline included the word “refugee.”¹⁵ However, these “refugees”, five Venezuelan men, were fleeing to Mexico for admitting to trying to attack the Venezuelan President and government. With other printed media, I attempted to utilize secondary sources, since primary sources were not giving pictures, or other forms of media: only one secondary (academic) article included a picture, two movie posters; and two US government propaganda posters¹⁶ and one other mentioned a painting on refugees¹⁷ that I could not locate. By these local newspapers not centralizing refugee stories or representing them without pictures, their stories can seem sterile. By not even reporting one’s government’s legislation or academic studies to aid this legislation on refugees’ behalf, the US’ aid appears mysterious. Finally, no secondary source material except Gatrell studies these refugees’ representation.

Nothing in the local or smaller circulation American publications that I found suggested that the US would be among the top two world financial supporters among the ninety-seven participating countries for the World Refugee Year (WRY), as Gatrell delineates.¹⁸ To give some background, WRY was spurred from the needs of the Hungarian refugee crisis (from the Hungarian Revolt of 1956),¹⁹ and emerged from the Conservative Party in Britain.²⁰ Their goal was to form a grass-roots movement that “provided important opportunities for institutional and personal networking at a local, national, and international level”²¹ that was not bound by political systems or agendas: in other words, though Soviet countries did not participate, the organization did not focus on the Cold War.²² Gatrell writes that through aligning the UN, NGOs, many world governments, the World Council of Churches, the Catholic Church, and private individuals and organizations, WRY hoped to not only raise funds, but also demonstrate “community solidarity”,²³ especially on behalf of refugees

from the Far and Middle East.²⁴ As stated before, it lasted from 1959-1960. Thus, it was one of the first grass-root movements of the 20th Century.

Importantly, for this discussion, there was supposed to have been a great deal of media on WRY: “numerous photos and films and graphic art”.²⁵ There were even WRY stamps published by several countries, including the US.²⁶ The first question that would emerge from comparing the WRY paraphernalia to American local or smaller circulation publication is, why there is no overlap? If WRY was a grass-roots movement, where is the local media and advertisements for it? Unfortunately, though Gatrell speaks of the US’ financial contributions, he displays little of American WRY media or if media prompted most of the giving, or if it was truly personal testimonies or through other organizations’ media (United Nations, non-governmental organizations, etc.)

2. Conclusion

To close, smaller circulation print publications in 1950s America portrayed non-Western/WWII refugees as needing help from Communism or other forces and this help taking a political, positive (pro-refugee), and pragmatic form, but not seen as pressing issues because of a lack of quantity, length, photographic media or positioning in these smaller circulation publications. For further research, since there is a scarcity of secondary source material regarding representations of these refugees in any kind of media, a comprehensive and comparative study of these refugees in all media (mass and smaller circulation).

Author Biography

Tova Anderson hails from Highland Village, Texas. She will be graduating with honors this December (2017) with Integrative Studies in Art History, English, French, and a minor in Music. Tova has been in the Honors College since her freshman year at UNT. In her sophomore year, she presented a research proposal at Scholar’s Day. Tova was also awarded an Undergraduate Research Fellowship in 2016 and presented her findings at the 2017 Scholar’s Day. She plans to pursue a Masters in English in 2018 and will seek a career in elementary through high school education or editorial work for non-profits.

¹⁴ *El Paso Herald Post*, June 4, 1956.

¹⁵ *Odessa American*, December 8, 1959.

¹⁶ Carruthers, Susan L. 2005. “Between Camps: Eastern Bloc “Escapees” and Cold War Borderlands” *American Quarterly* 57 (3): 911-942.

¹⁷ Eldredge, C. (2006). “Irving Norman, Redwoods, and ‘Refugees’.” *American Art*, 20(2), 26-28.

¹⁸ Gatrell, 206.

¹⁹ Gatrell, 47.

²⁰ Gatrell, 82.

²¹ Gatrell 138.

²² Gatrell, 137.

²³ Gatrell, 138.

²⁴ Gatrell, 49.

²⁵ Gatrell, 168.

²⁶ Gatrell, 185.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8, 1950

THE ODESSA AMERICAN

PAGE TWENTY-ONE

SANTA SLIPS — Santa Claus got caught in a coffee break in Boston yesterday. Little Jay DiGree, 4, registers surprise as he catches Santa with his whiskers up during a coffee break in his private room. After a short chat explaining about

Santa, the boy is waiting eagerly for the real Santa to arrive Christmas morning. (United Press International Telephoto)

Demos Can't Tell If Political Rocket Will Reach Its Target

By JAMES MARLOW
Associated Press News Analyst
WASHINGTON (AP) — The Democrats' manifesto, blasted off at their New York meeting, is like a rocket shot at the election moon of 1960.

It's a 22-point blueprint of programs, put together by the party's bigwigs on the Democratic Advisory Council, for their platform in next year's elections.

But what the Democrats can't tell is whether this heavy document will reach its target or burn up or wither in the political atmosphere of 1960. They can't force one what the public mood will be during next year's campaign.

The public mood will be the most important factor.

If it's complacent and contented, as it seems to be now, the voters may be indifferent to calls for changes or vigorous action and make their decision more on the candidates' personalities than on party programs.

Democrats and Republicans past and present are easily identifiable as separate parties during periods of national stress. They tend to coalesce and look like twins in periods of public contentment.

There was a real separation during President Wilson's fight with the Republicans over the League of Nations after World War I. This was a fight between internationalism and isolationism.

The public, fed up on conflict elected Republicans three times in a row in the 1920s. That was

a complacent time, the period of so-called normalcy. There wasn't much difference between the parties.

Then came the depression and the end of complacency. The public, desperately needing a change and vigorous action, chose Franklin D. Roosevelt. It was a time of intense stress and the question of how to deal with it split the parties.

The Democrats were New Dealers, the Republicans anti-New Dealers. The New Deal, for all practical purposes, ended in 1937 but the Republicans didn't seem to know it.

World War II pulled them together, but after the war they split again in the period of readjustment. Some of the Republicans were still isolationist and the Democrats were still internationalist.

But the country moved into the 1950s. The public, tired of 20 years of the Democrats and the conflicts of the Truman administration, switched to the Republicans.

By 1953, when President Eisenhower took office the Republicans were no longer anti-New Dealers or isolationist. The parties began to lose their visible differences.

This blurring of the Democratic and Republican images went hand in hand with the fact that the country, rocking along on prosperity, was pretty complacent again.

Nothing illustrates better the present melting away of differences between the parties than the Democratic Party's platform for 1960.

The Democrats had overwhelming majorities in both houses of Congress this year, thanks to the 1950 elections. With their majorities, they might have tried to turn into reality some of the programs the Democratic Advisory

Accused Slayer Is Back In Jail
PENDELTON, Ore. (AP) — An economic charged with slaying a policeman was back in jail here today less than 24 hours after he escaped.

Wilford H. Ogden, 25, surrendered without resistance to four policemen who found him on a sagebrush-covered hillside some 300 yards from an eastern Oregon ranch house.

Ogden and Walter Wicken, 25, also of Paxon, Wash., are charged with the killing of Ronald Kilby, Hermiston, Ore., officer last Oct. 8.

Farmers Planning Missouri Strike
ST. JOSEPH, Mo. (AP) — The National Farmers Organization is planning a general strike in a campaign for higher prices for their products.

Oren Lee Staley of Rea, Mo., outlined the plan Monday to about 1,000 delegates at the NFOT's annual convention.

The NFOT recently asked farmers to hold off the market until prices jumped. However, prices dropped at some markets but the NFOT called off its demonstration after a few days.

Staley told the delegates: "We will have numerous holding actions of short duration, involving other commodities. When everything is ready, we will enter an all-out holding action and continue until we accomplish our purpose — fair prices for farm produce."

All For Sport
TOLEDO, Ohio (AP) — When five boys appeared before him on charges of repeatedly breaking into a National Guard armory, Judge Court Referee Joseph D. Langley heard their explanation and gave them this order: Fight it out.

The public, fed up on conflict elected Republicans three times in a row in the 1920s. That was

Daniel Doesn't Want Texas Judicial Post
AUSTIN (UPI) — Gov. Price Daniel said Monday he is not ready at the present time to seek a judicial post because he's not interested in the executive and legislative battles that are of such vital importance to the people of Texas.

He added, however, it would be a "mistake" for anyone to interpret his statement as any indication of a decision to run for reelection as governor.

"I could not enjoy sitting quietly on a judicial bench while the people of Texas are being sold down the river by the propaganda and pressure of selfish interests of the Texas Supreme Court," Daniel said.

He said that as a judge he would be removed from "active interest in the executive and legislative battles that are of such vital importance to the people of Texas."

He confirmed that he has been asked about a federal judgeship, but said he replied that he could not accept it as the appointment would be a "mistake."

Daniel has also been mentioned as a candidate for chief justice of the Texas Supreme Court.

Mexico Admits Five Venezuela Refugees Jailed

MEXICO CITY (UPI) — Mexican authorities admitted Monday night that they have arrested five Venezuelan refugees and questioned a sixth in connection with an alleged plot to overthrow that country's government.

The five prisoners were said to have confessed that they were preparing for a Christmas Eve attack on the leftist government of Venezuela's President Romulo Betancourt.

The sixth refugee, Gen. Oscar Masael, has been cleared of suspicion.

Federal security director Manuel R. Escamilla said the five prisoners will be expelled from Mexico. He did not say where they will be sent, except to indicate that their request to be exiled to the Dominican Republic probably will not be granted.

The five alleged conspirators were all army officers—Lt. Col. Juan D. Moncada Vidal and Maj. Luis A. Vivas Ramirez, Rafael M. Pacheco Garcia, Jose I. Gutierrez Rodriguez and Edgar E. Trullio Echevarria.

Informed sources said they were arrested while returning from the resort city of Cuernavaca, where they held their meetings.

Previous reports had said that at least two of the refugees were taken from their homes at gunpoint last week, by men who neither identified themselves nor offered any explanation. Until Monday night, Mexican authorities had denied any knowledge of the matter.

Space Monkey Offered Home

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP)—Sam, the space monkey, was offered today a permanent home in what his week-end-contractor claim is the finest monkey house in the world.

"The city of Portland would be happy and proud to afford a home for the remaining years of the intrepid space explorer," declared Clifford B. Alterman, Portland Zoological Society president.

Officials of the new four-million-dollar zoo sent the invitation to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration in Washington, D.C.

Sam gained fame Friday when he was carried 35 miles above the Pacific Ocean in a Little Joe rocket.

Texas Grass Fire Is Under Control

AUSTIN (AP)—A hundred men, aided by bulldozers and firefighting equipment from Austin and Bergstrom Air Force Base, brought a grass and brush fire under control southwest of here late Monday night.

About 400 acres of heavily timbered pastureland on both sides of Highway 290 were charred by the fire which for a while threatened homes and buildings in a small community 12 miles south of here. There were no injuries.

Mexico Reports Favorable Balance

MEXICO CITY (AP) — The Bank of Mexico reported Monday that this country had a favorable balance of payments of \$20,861,000 for the first nine months, an almost unprecedented situation.

The balance, usually in unfavorable for that period. The country was in the red by \$62,710,000 through September of last year.

OUR BOARDING HOUSE—

Johnson Questions Republican Ability

HUTCHINSON, Kan. (AP) — In an obvious reference to Vice President Richard Nixon's trip to Russia in which he discussed world issues with men on the Republican Party ticket, Johnson said: "Is there another in that party who is so undernourished by other men that he does not have to debate in the streets?"

Johnson devoted most of his address to a Democratic rally crowd to an attack on Republican Party farm policies. It was his first speech outside Texas since Congress adjourned. He is on what many call a pause-feeling speaking tour of the Midwest.

He charged the GOP abandoned the Middle West, its birthplace, and the Republican administration is dedicated to "clearing the farmer off the land."

"THAT'S RIGHT, NO BITE!"

Say WINSTON DENNIS, confidant and brother of champion cutting horses at Abilene, Texas.

Mellowest, lightest Bourbon you've ever sipped—because the MELLOW-MASH Process (exclusive with Yellowstone) selects for you only the lightest, mellowest whiskey, leaving the heavier, biting vapors behind.

MELLOW-MASH

Yellowstone

The Greatest American Whiskey

all-new agility!

Faster than ever, Ford for '60 brings you spirited T-bird V-8 response, smooth as cream, in every driving range. Just try it!

all-new style!

Look at those lines! Swift, smooth, unbroken, from sloping hood to raked tailgate. New flow-through design blends "inside" and "outside" into one beautifully proportioned unit.

for 1960 **FORD...the wagon champ** has done it again!

all-new space!

Nearly five inches more shoulder room, more hip and leg room, too. And look at that loadspace—the deck is almost ten inches longer.

FROM ANY POINT OF VIEW—FROM EVERY POINT OF VIEW—Ford's again the Wagon Master, with 5 new husky, handsome beauties. There's a new "limousine" ride with new 5-foot-long rear springs. Wide-Tread Design with nonsquare, soft-tread tires. Built for people as never before—with wider doors (easier to enter with the "dogleg" eliminated)—greater visibility than you ever enjoyed—55% more sky-to-road vision from front seat alone. Come in and see all our Wonderful New World of Fords—models for every purse and purpose.

all-new savings!

Now there are three Ford engines, Mileage Maker Six, Thunderbird 292 V-8 and Thunderbird 352 V-8, that thrive on low-cost regular gas, saving you up to a dollar a tankful. And you stretch out oil changes to 4,000 miles apart.

COME SEE THE WONDERFUL NEW WORLD OF FORD WAGONS AT YOUR ODESSA FORD DEALER'S

SEE YOUR FORD DEALER