

The Third Narrative Space

The Human Interest Story and the Crisis of the Human form

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Abstract

Between the different models of broadcasting and publishing is an interstitial space of countering dominant paradigms. Their existence is both a symbolic and material affirmation of human struggles and narratives. Through a strand of medical humanitarianism, we examine the so-called 'migrant crisis in Europe'. While media reported the 'migrant' through their transgressions of state boundaries and as unnecessary entities in 'civilised Europe,' there has been a quest to reconstitute the human from the third sector. While the conjoining of capital (i.e. the commercialisation of news) and the commodification of the human is a sustained endeavour in private and public models of publishing, the 'third narrative space' seeks to thwart and resist these imperatives by re-humanising refugee struggles as 'human struggles'. This reconstitution of the human works to gain both public attention and funding, and in the process invites both moral and altruistic challenges for these organisations.

Introduction

The representation of the human is a problematic device in Journalism Studies. The issue remains under-examined as an ethical problematic in the field explored through the restrictive frame of the human-interest story. What is recognised is that the human-interest story is a distinct type of genre in reporting; premising the human narrative and storytelling thus igniting a cause in fellow readers. The co-opting of the human as a vantage point in Journalism Studies has not widened the debate to focus on the commodification of the human or raise the moral instabilities of such representations in the modes and regimes of news production. Abstracted from the social context and commodified into an object of human consumption in the guise of

the human-interest story, what is certain is that this genre remains a vital element of news making yet certainly devoid of the wider analysis of why we exploit the human form for ideological purposes. The human both as a subject and object of media gaze is enmeshed into a whole political economy of news making in differing models of publishing both in public broadcasting as well as private establishments.

This paper raises the ethical paradigm of what it means to employ and exploit the human form through the human interest story in the enterprise of news creation and audience engagement. The essay examines the popularity of the human-interest story in mainstream journalism and contrasts it with the depiction of the human in humanitarian communication and third sector narratives. It surveys the inadequacies of the human form when the human dimension is obliterated in news stories on immigration. It argues that despite the altruism of humanitarian communication, the human form remains a conflicted figure of spectacle capable of performing intimacy and distance but often through the political economics of production and representation and in tandem with its ideological imperatives.

The human interest story is a familiar and common frame particularly in the mid and mass market titles that specialize in more sensationalist coverage (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). When the personal is privileged and presented in a way that is accessible and interesting to ordinary readers (Hughes, 1940; Park, 1923, 1938), it ‘brings a human face or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue or problem’ (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 94) encoding a human interest story or frame to the media report. This somewhat expansive description encompasses quaint or comic ‘believe-it-or-not type of stories’, gossip about celebrities as well the triumphs and tragedies of ordinary people presented with extraordinary situations (Stephens, 2007).

This means large scale catastrophes and suffering can be given a ‘human face’ and vignettes can provide insights into how the individual experiences the almost unimaginable trauma sometimes as a consequence of politics and policies (see Harbers & Broersma, 2014; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). The narrative may be dramatized (Park 1938) and evoke archetypical themes of triumphs and tragedies found in romances and myths that are familiar to readers through popular culture (Bent 1927; Fine & White 2002). Inconsequential details of everyday life at a death scene may be graphically recited (Hughes, 1940; Mather, 1934) and ‘atmosphere and symbolic detail’ of momentous political events can be portrayed in such a way that readers can visualize and link affairs of state to the impact on the individual (Harbers & Broersma, 2014, p. 643).

Traditionally, human interest is, after the attribution of responsibility, the second most commonly used frame and story in newspapers particularly in highly competitive media markets such as Britain, where they have the ability to attract and retain readers particularly women (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Neuman, 1992). While commonly associated with celebrities and tabloidization (Conboy 2013) the human-interest story equally has a long history of narrating the suffering of ordinary people. In the 19th century ‘chatty little reports of tragic or comic incidents in the lives of people’ appeared in the *New York Sun* (Hughes 1940, pp.12–3) encompassing the trivial and the banal equally the trauma or life-changing events.

With reference to the British newspaper market, the human interest story remained the distinguishing feature of the *Express* and *Daily Mail* when launched in the early 1900s and they remain so today (Greenslade 2004)

Curran and Douglas (1980) in analysing fifty years of national press coverage, considered both the economic forces which shaped editorial content and assessed the significance of ‘non-current affairs coverage’. They found that the human-interest story especially stories about crime, accidents, divorce, calamities, personal gossip, etc., had ‘universal appeal, transcending differences between class, sex and age’ (Curran & Douglas 1980, p.294). As it increasingly became regarded as ‘common denominator’ content, the amount of space devoted to it rose in interwar years but most distinctly in mass market newspapers such as the *Mirror* which most symbolised this ‘new journalism’. While the nature of content was mediated by the rationing of newsprint between 1936 and 1946, the appetite for the human-interest story remained intact after the periods of austerity. The reading patterns continued to be forged through economic pressures particularly the need to increase circulation and readership in post-war Britain. A 1963 survey showed human-interest content as manifested by letters, horoscopes and cartoons were read significantly above average; international affairs, the city and consumer features significantly below average (Curran and Douglas, 1980 p. 300-301). A substantive decline in coverage of current affairs by at least 50 per cent and an attendant rise of human-interest narratives led to charges of the press dumbing down the public and unleashing a process of ‘tabloidization’ envisaged by less engagement in politics and world affairs and a shrinking of the public sphere. Building circulation was then premised on personalisation and a lack of contextualisation of media reports. Market research by Oldhams, for example, found that a story about a raid by the IRA gained higher readership by focusing upon ‘the guard who only had a stick’ thus suggestive of a trivialisation of real issues.

Helen MacGill Hughes (1940, p. 212-3) in writing about the human-interest story argues that such stories can connect the reader to a ‘universal humanity’ by providing a glimpse into personal emotions and experiences. Nevertheless, the idea of realising a ‘universal humanity’ through the human-interest story and the intimacies it creates remains contentious (See Park, 1923; Hughes 1940; Semetko & Valkenburg 2000; Fine & White 2002; Neuman 1992). On the one hand, it has the ability to transcend time and space to acquire social power in forming affective communities. But this very power hinges on whether the audience recognise the human as one of them or the Other. The Janus-faced construction of the human as one of us or the Other is a device the media often employs depending on its ideological stance and context but it does not negate the fluidity within the construct where the Other can acquire a human face and where the human form can equally be defaced. Here the agency of the audience cannot be downplayed, nevertheless, the human-interest story entails a process of transcendence of either resurrecting a human or defacing it by denying its rights or existence.

The human-interest story or frame used in this way not only constructs proximity, it can also transcend traditional divides and distance more commonly associated with class, race and deviance or criminality. Such distancing can be transformed into proximity where the foreign Other is constructed as a victim of ‘monstrous persecution’; the cause ‘personal and epic’ and

the suffering something ‘that any human being would naturally want to prevent’ (Hughes, 1937, p. 77-8). The human-interest story or frame can be used to challenge dominant portrayals of the accused, the deviant and the enemy other as well. An analysis of the trial of Lizzie Borden accused of hacking her parents to death in 1892 found that some reporting served to ‘remind readers of the human interest in crime and counter the public tendency to demonize the criminal and transform her into monstrosity fit for public consumption’ (Roggenkamp 1998, p.65). While Borden becomes a symbol of the marginalized, vulnerable woman in New England society and the readers of other newspapers ‘who devoured [her] as a dehumanized object’ (Roggenkamp 1998, p.66) the commodification of the human and its relationship with newspaper circulation in invoking the salacious to maximise profit is difficult to dismiss. The human in the human-interest story is an unstable and fluid device, particularly in long running stories such as the Israel-Palestine conflict. The premising of the Habermasean public sphere through rationalist discourses also means that the human form and its pathos is problematic to an enlightened society where the politics of pity associated with the human form can dilute the engagement with politics. The association of the human-interest story with tabloidization and the demise of the public sphere, has stymied debates about the politics of the human form in media narratives and the ethics of its configuration or equally its obliteration in media narratives as a selective tool.

The Non-Human Interest Story and the ‘Migrant’

It is therefore reasonable at first glance to expect human-interest dimensions to be a key feature in ‘immigration stories’ given the heightened public salience, personal trauma and suffering attached to it. They would offer ‘compelling narratives’ of transcending adversity (Fine & White 2002, p. 61), being subjected to trauma and succumbing to tragedy. Human-interest stories constructed in this way would appeal to a sense of a ‘common humanity’ that ‘helps the reader consider how she would feel in the circumstances’ where the suffering is of ‘persons shown to have essentially one’s own nature’ (Hughes 1940, pp.212–5).

On immigration issues newspapers have a choice. Existing research has highlighted such dimensions in stories about refugees who in the process are presented as ‘people’ (Steimel, 2010) ‘suffering violence, torture or physical abuse’ and experienced ‘threats and narrow escapes’ in their home country (Steimel 2010, p.237). These stories provide a ‘human face to a far-away tragedy’ and ‘an important moment of connection with people very different from themselves’ (Robins 2003, pp.29, 44). However, they are also deeply ideological and problematic. While human-interest frames and stories allow the reader to identify with the suffering of refugees they provide ‘surface explanations of complex international situations’ (Robins 2003, p.44) or they may equally ‘direct attention away’ (Fine & White 2002, p.85) from crucial issues. On the other hand, media can use distance framing in ways that parallel the dehumanizing of terrorists in American newspapers. Both the migrant and terrorist are reduced to the ‘animal or aggressor’ Other (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2008) or as the ‘enemy-as-animal’ or the ‘enemy-as-insect’ (Steuter & Wills, 2009).

How we impose a human frame in media narratives is ideological and can manipulate the nature of human suffering. One contentious area of reporting is on the issue of refugees and migrants invoking the question when is the human form denied in a story. Crucially when the human is labelled an illegal migrant rather than a refugee they are further de-personalized and de-humanized through this illegality making their suffering illegitimate thus their accessibility as a human is also diminished. In migration discourses in Fortress Europe migration and refugee stories become the 'non-human interest' story with the central protagonist constructed as a sub-human or non-human. The human form here becomes an inconvenient element in relating the story of vast numbers of people advancing towards fortress Europe. In illuminating the inconvenience of the human form in migration narratives and refugee encounters, we use the case study of the 'Jungle' or what is deemed as an illegal camp settlement of 'migrants' in the liminal space of Calais in France.

The narrative of The Jungle is the latest in long-running tensions and debates about illegal immigration through Calais. In 1999, the former Sangatte Red Cross centre at the entrance of the Channel Tunnel had opened for refugees from the Balkan wars and within three years was housing 1,500 people a day from other wars, looking to leap or sneak onto vehicles headed for the UK. Its closure in 2002 had been justified in discourses of protecting the vulnerable migrants from human traffickers and in the rhetoric of blame about lenient asylum rules in Britain and the existence of a permanent structure such as the Red Cross centre serving as a magnet for migrants. With its closure, most of the refugees were displaced and the flow of migrants into Calais continued unabated.

Immigration Discourses in the UK

Immigration debates in Britain need to be located within an international context where there has been a shift from the discourses of protection and rights to discourses of threat and risk depending on whether the migrant is labelled a refugee, trafficker or terrorist. Dominant discourses of protection and rights emerged after the Second World War in international agreements on how civilians should be treated in war. These sought to protect civilians displaced by conflict by defining who is a refugee and thus granted certain entitlements, including the right to seek sanctuary and claim asylum, and avoid penalties for illegal entry in search of these. The liminal subject, the refugee, was therefore assumed to have the right of initiation into the societies in which she sought sanctuary. However, in Europe these dominant discourses of rights were disrupted by a series of major developments. The first was the political upheaval following the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Eastern bloc and the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s and more recently the turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa after 2010. The massive displacement that followed has been accompanied by a discursive shift away from rights, protection and sanctuary to threats posed by 'unregulated, unaccountable population shifts' to the political stability and cohesion of the states (Bosworth 2008, p. 201). The premise of self-protection over the protection of the liminal Other began to solidify in policy discourses.

The town of Calais in France has a particular significance in debates about illegal migration.

The EU as a whole has seen surges in irregular migration, especially during or after violent conflicts in Europe or North Africa and the break-up of the USSR and Yugoslavia (Geddes 2005; Thomas 2013). One of the preferred destinations of many refugees and migrants is Britain, and as a result Calais has become the site of cross-border tensions especially after the 1994 opening of the Channel Tunnel and the UK's opt-out of the 1995 Schengen Agreement on the free movement of people and goods across the EU (Thomas 2013). The first has rendered Calais a major point of transit where migrants seek to stowaway on vehicles headed across the Channel, and the second a major point of congregation as border controls attempt to restrict or prevent this. The consequence is that the French authorities are constantly grappling with how to manage migration, the pressure this exerts on local resources and the humanitarian concerns that arise with large numbers of congregating migrants. So acute has the problem become that in 2009 the UN opened its first ever office in Calais to deal with what it sees as a humanitarian crisis. Conversely, in Britain opposition to any increase in migration has hardened, the determination not to allow these migrants in has toughened and successive governments have invested heavily in tighter border controls and surveillance technology to ensure this (Mulvey 2010; Bosworth 2008).

The treatment of the issue as one of illegal immigration by the British government was mirrored by British national newspapers. Their discourses on the migrant camps known as The Jungle can be located within the resumption of a decade-long 'media campaign' against immigration policies (Parliament 2007a). Most of Britain's national newspapers are ideologically conservative (Greenslade 2004), however anti-immigration policy discourses are discernible across the political spectrum of British national newspapers. Even before The Jungle developments a dominant theme across all the newspapers was of immigration policy failure and the need to urgently address this. The most critical, though, were the mid-market titles such as the *Daily Express* and *Daily Mail* which framed this failure in terms of government abdication of moral responsibility to protect Britons and migrants from exploitation by criminal networks.

The newspaper campaign against immigration peaked in 2003, followed by a lull and a subsequent surge with '2500 articles' between early 2006 and early 2007 alone (Parliament 2007a, p. 55). The tone of coverage was 'overwhelmingly hostile', drawing on emotive and pejorative language such as 'flood', 'bogus' and 'fraudulent' (Parliament 2007b, p. 99) and contributing to a 'dehumanizing' of asylum seekers (Parliament 2007b, p. 98) and a 'misleading picture' of immigration which 'fuel[led] political prejudice ... and extremism' in Britain (Parliament 2007b, p. 55). Editors justified their coverage claiming, on the one hand, that their coverage was responsive to the legitimate concerns of readers and that it was the responsibility of the media to hold governments to account for failing to address these (see Parliament 2007b, p. 98). On the other hand, they claimed that the continued presence of '400,000 illegal immigrants' was evidence of policy failure that accrued with '12 years of mismanagement' and the 'breakdown in the asylum system' creating a political space in which this media campaign was rooted and flourished (Parliament 2007b, p. 55).

It was in this context of heightened tensions that Britain's mid-market newspapers reported on

‘The Jungle’ between 2007 and 2010. As a liminal space the Jungle is constantly associated with degradation, barbarism and illegality in newspaper representations. The pseudo-rational discourses of immigration policy failure and the transgression of boundaries was instrumental in enacting the migrant as a deviant, deliberately disentangling them from the human interest dimension of newspaper reporting. Invariably, it became a discursive device to create a distance between the readers and the ‘migrants’ invading their lands. The framing of the migrant as a failure of the immigration policy evoked barriers in understanding the migrant as a human being, or framing media reports in terms of human rights or interests and suffering particularly in mid-market papers (Ibrahim 2011; Howarth, & Ibrahim 2012; Ibrahim & Howarth 2015a; Ibrahim & Howarth 2015b; Ibrahim & Howarth 2015c).

Despite the dominance of human interest stories, we found a general absence of these in Britain’s mid-market coverage of illegal migrants between 2007 and 2010 (Ibrahim 2011; Howarth, & Ibrahim 2012; Ibrahim & Howarth 2015a; Ibrahim & Howarth 2015b; Ibrahim & Howarth 2015c). Instead they were constructed as sub-human akin to animals or insects in much the same way as terrorists have been post 9/11. Alternatively, they were constructed as non-human; their basic needs denied, their presence rendered invisible by the actions of the authorities, forcing them to occupy a liminal space between life and death. The according of the non-human status meant that the Jungle inhabitants’ basic need for shelter could be de-recognised while supporting repeated demolitions of the jungle (Fagge 2009; Tristem 2007; Finan, & Allen 2010; Samuel 2014). The repeated demolition of visible shelters by the police served to render the migrant presence illegitimate, illegal and intolerable and the labelling of them as ‘illegal migrants’ rather than refugees fleeing persecution legitimized this. Their trauma was obfuscated or reduced to that of the sub-human through animalistic or insect-type discourse, or the withholding of basic needs, rendering them invisible or thrusting them into a liminal space of betwixt and between. What our earlier analysis of camps highlighted was that the press did not draw on typical human interest dimensions that dominate news coverage and have been used to personalize and humanize the suffering of refugees (Ibrahim 2011; Howarth, & Ibrahim 2012; Ibrahim & Howarth 2015a; Ibrahim & Howarth 2015b; Ibrahim & Howarth 2015c).

By 2014 and 2015, the context had changed. The worsening humanitarian situation in Calais has been shaped partly by growing numbers of refugees fleeing conflict and persecution in Syria, Eritrea, Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan and Europe was facing its biggest refugee crisis since World War 2. The situation has also been shaped by the reluctance of Britain and France to acknowledge that many of those in the Calais ‘jungle’ are refugees not migrants and so avoid the moral obligation in international treaties to address the growing crisis in a concerted and co-ordinated way, opting instead for what the UN Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres has called ‘furtive inaction’ (Stephens 2015). In Calais, furtive inaction is manifest in allowing charities to provide the bare minimum support in the form of one meal a day, blankets, some showers and basic medical care but a resistance since the 2002 closure of the Red Cross shelter in Sangatte to allow any semi-permanent shelters on the grounds lest they serve as a ‘magnet’ for migrants. The Nicolas Sarkozy government adopted a hard line on this in the form of a de facto ban on shelters and the repeated demolition of the flimsy tents refugees and

migrants erected for themselves. The Francois Hollande government allowed some toilets and a shelter for women and children to be erected but the reluctance to allow semi-permanent structures can be seen in that it took eight months for the shelter to open and in the under-provision of utilities as the camp grew. The consequence is that a number of women have been forced to live in the camps where gang rape is common; unaccompanied children and orphans are living in ditches; the toilets are overflowing, human excrement and garbage litter areas around the tents in which people live; the water sources are too few and contaminated; and the sand turns to mud when it rains. At the same time as conditions in the camp were deteriorating, the British government invested £12 million in reinforcing ‘command and control’ centres around the Channel Tunnel, making it harder for stowaways to board passing traffic and reducing the disruption to freight (The Express 2014). Thus, governments have subordinated the humanitarian crisis to a security and economic imperative, categorizing human needs into what is legitimate for charities to provide and what is not. Ministerial discourses of ‘swarms’ and ‘marauding migrants’ justified inaction on the humanitarian crisis legitimizing the dispatching of razor wire and sniffer dogs to shore up border defenses (Financial Times 2015). As the situation worsened, a UN representative called the conditions in the camps an ‘indictment on society’ (Taylor 2015; Milmo 2015), an independent report concluded that conditions in the camp were ‘significantly contributing to illness and injury’ (Dhesi, Davies, and Isakjee 2015) and Doctors of the World (DOTW) the only medical charity attending to the refugees in Calais felt compelled to declare the area an ‘emergency’, a response usually reserved for war-zones or areas suffering from the aftermath of a natural disaster (Daynes 2015).

Media coverage of Calais in 2014 and 2015 is different from earlier portrayals in that it is more fragmented in terms of the narratives; there has been a proliferation of human-interest stories, a demand for photo-essays with images capturing scenes from inside the camps, the faces of migrants and the private spaces where they live and worship (Perring 2015; Snelle 2015; Cox 2015). The BBC controversially filmed an episode of its flagship religious programme, *Songs of Praise*, from the Jungle. There were mixed reactions to the episode which was broadcast to millions around the world with some saying they found it ‘inspirational’, others complained that the broadcaster was politicizing the migrant crisis and the priest of the Orthodox Church featured in the programme indicated that he and members of his congregation did not want to ‘speak on video’ in case it endangered his family in Eritrea where Christians are being persecuted (Thompson 2015; Gander 2015; Samuel 2015; Rothwell 2015). Along with this there has been an increase in ‘voluntourism’ where disparate groups of people arrive in Calais to observe and provide assistance. Calais is inevitably associated with a human curiosity about this illegitimate settlement. However, in the ‘rush to cover one of the year’s largest humanitarian stories’, to narrate it through personal stories of suffering there are concerns that journalists may be acting unethically particularly where they fail to ensure that the people whose stories they record understand what it means to be captured, have given consent, and whether they fear shame or repercussions back home (Rothwell 2015; Marc 2015).

Humanitarian communication and Media

The human form and its experiences of suffering is centric to the third sector in raising awareness of human plight in crisis situations. Not driven by profit as in the case of the privately-owned media, in the notion of public interest or the quest for the story, the third sector has a problematic relationship with the human form. On the one hand, the need to counter mainstream unfair portrayals of the human in crisis situations is an ongoing endeavour. At the same time, they also need to appropriate human suffering as an affective device to involve greater engagement among people who may be saturated and numbed by various appeals raised by the third sector. The counter-discourses of the third sector organisations are important as symbolic forms and the ethical challenges for these organisations is to be reflexive in their treatment of suffering while wanting a distance from media's commodification of the human form primarily as a human-interest story. Yet audiences' socialisation into the human-interest frames becomes an important element to moot interventions about human suffering. The distinction of the third sector narratives of the human form is that their showcasing of suffering is as part of a wider cause which seeks to invoke a humanitarian gaze to compel more than affect. The humanitarian endeavour seeks to expand the politics of pity to afford agency from a wider public both in terms of material aid and in sustaining favourable public opinion towards a cause mediated by its ideological objectives. Rather than the device of story-telling through the human-interest story, DOTW for example employ the notion of bearing witness to trauma on the ground. The narration of suffering is through the physiological and psychological state of the human body.

Nevertheless, the human form remains a contentious device even in the third sector saturated by aid agencies, charities and NGOs. The funding for third sector organisations is often dependent on trust funds, public and government donations. In view of this, the engagement of the public and the invitation to gaze and to be intimate with the sufferings of the affected and afflicted is a vital construct of such entities. As such the human form is of critical importance where its sufferings and vantage points are equally subjected to the ideological stance of third sector organisations. In the past, press and advertising through text and images remained a dominant aspect of engaging the audience. With the advent of television and moving images which brought the suffering of the Other into the living room, there was a need to cultivate a more systematic relationship with the media to 'communicate their indignation to a lethargic public' which remained key to raising funding (Taithe 2004, p.149). With the proliferation of platforms and humanitarian NGOs, such organisations have become even more dependent on media to 'publicize and pursue their humanitarian objectives' (Cottle & Nolan 2007, p.874), to communicate information from the field, to witness human rights abuses, recruit volunteers and raise funds to support their activities.

Media imagery, beginning in mid-19th century till today's multimedia platforms have become pivotal in increasing public awareness (Barnett 2011, p.127). In the late 19th missionaries used the Kodak camera to publicize King Leopold's savagery in the Congo Free state. The 'new humanitarianism' of the 1970s recognized the power of emotion to mobilize volunteers and public (Ticktin 2006), most clearly encapsulated in the *Ile-de-Lumiere* hospital ship launched in 1979 to save the boat people of Vietnam and which signified a critical and controversial

turning point in the use of the media for medical humanitarianism. As global humanitarian organizations embraced the 'media logic' of evocative and images human interest stories (Cottle & Nolan 2007) and they developed marketing capacity, using 'heart-stopping, graphic pictures of human suffering and catchy slogans that communicate both urgency and confidence that money would make a difference (Barnett 2011, p. 36).

However, the use of these images and narratives attracted controversy particularly where the agency ignited a spectacle without initiating changes in policies or public opinion (Taithe 2004). The challenges, then, for third space organizations are considerable even more so as images of the 2015 migration crisis have proliferated on an unprecedented level across Europe. One organisation which is intimately involved in the refugee crisis in Calais is the DOTW. It is the only medical charity operating in Calais and has built a close relationship with the refugees. The DOTW is part of the medical humanitarian movement which views the human form through a universalist vision of medicine (i.e. that illness, disease and injury do not respect borders), belief in the universal right to health care for anyone who needs it without regards to their social backgrounds, life histories or values and in the moral obligation of medical personnel to intervene to alleviate suffering wherever need is found (Evans 2015; Fox 1995b).

The preoccupation in medical humanitarianism with the human form is primarily through its physiological condition and its right to health provisions as enshrined in its principles. With such a vantage point DOTW is dedicated to providing what is needed to sustain life. Such an imperative presupposes an altruistic concern for the Other rather than a commodification of suffering. The origins of the medical humanitarian movement in the second half of the 1800s have been traced to the mobilizing of public anger at wounded soldiers left to suffer and die on the battlefield. In the 1930s, Catholic medical missions broadened this imperative to include poor and marginalized people in Africa and Asia. In the 1940s, the Red Cross delivered food parcels to the Nazi concentration camps and from the 1970s and 1980s new organizations including DOTW emerged to provide support for refugees from war and conflict (see Barnett 2011). Not only has the scope of medical humanitarianism expanded, its principles have been enshrined in UN resolutions about the human rights of those displaced by war, conflict and natural disasters and the right of medical personnel to intervene to alleviate suffering (Fox 1995). Refugee struggles have thus been reconstituted as human struggles in international agreements but not necessarily in the camps of Calais where the human form is treated as an illegal migrant.

The core concept of DOTW, first articulated by founder Bernard Kouchner who was involved in the Ile-de-Lumiere initiative, is the 'right to interfere' which evolved into 'the duty to interfere' (Fox 1995b, p.1689). It premises a moral obligation to act to alleviate the suffering of people in need of medical care, wherever it exists and particularly when it is a 'consequence of violence, torture, persecution, warfare, disenfranchisement, oppression, abandonment, exile or exodus' (Fox 1995b, p.1689). DOTW is distinctive in the medical humanitarian movement in that it is the only organization operating field hospitals in Calais since 2005 and its understanding of action is shaped, not only by the requirement to provide healthcare where it

is needed, but a particular interpretation of its founding principle of *témoignage* or ‘bearing witness’ as a form of action. Bearing witness is taken to mean speaking out publically about violations of human rights and dignity they encounter in the field and against the barriers that exist between vulnerable people and ‘desperately needed healthcare’ whether they be in high income countries like France or war-torn Syria (Evans 2015; Fox 1995b). This fundamental principle governing DOTW’s interactions grew out of an ideological distinction made with the International Committee of the Red Cross which, controversially during World War 2, delivered food and medicines to those in the concentration camps but did not speak out against the atrocities it witnessed. The Red Cross then and now maintains its established policy of silence to protect what they define as their neutrality and the permission to continue doing relief work (Fox 1995b). From its inception, DOTW has been ideologically opposed to the ‘rule of silence’ because such a position can represent an accommodation of abuses; the physical and psychological consequences of which their medical personnel treat and witness. They are therefore not only committed to ‘rupturing the silence’ but also informing the global public of the ‘human rights abuses they encounter to evoking public indignation and making sophisticated use of the mass media to do so’ (Fox 1995, p.1609).

In Calais, this has taken a number of forms including working with academics to compile a report on the environmental health conditions in the camps and which DOTW asserts as exposing ‘the awful truth about the Calais refugee crisis: that it is a humanitarian emergency of the first order in one of the world’s most thriving nations. It confirms that we can no longer turn a blind eye to the dreadful humanitarian disaster on our doorstep’ (Isakjee et al. 2015). In terms of its technique of bearing witness, DOTW diverged from the media logic of personal stories and capturing the images of the faces of refugees or their private living spaces. Instead, they have used their blog, newspaper articles and interviews with journalists to detail what their medical experts have witnessed of the ‘diabolical [living] conditions’ in the camps and health consequences in scabies, gangrene, breathing difficulties and severe cases of diarrhoea. In a very powerful discourse they have linked the effects of tightened security at Channel Tunnel to the damage inflicted on the refugees’ physical and psychological conditions in terms of health risk as evidenced in the increase in patients with ‘shattered bones after falling from trucks, or those slashed by razor wires climbing fences and others who are have been assaulted by or by police, gangs or traffickers (Daynes 2015). DOTW psychologist Lou Einhorn recounts how the ‘precarious living conditions, police brutality and ... racism ... is destroying people and the state is doing nothing to support those who are suffering’, how, after a death on the highway psychological assistance is offered to the driver but not to the friends and family of the victim (Lewis 2015). They have thus sought to reconstitute the human in ways that highlight the plight of the refugees while respecting their dignity and privacy.

Part of DOTW’s endeavours to re-constitute refugee struggles as human struggles has been an assertion of the primacy of the ‘humanitarian imperative’ and the ‘right to receive, and to

provide, assistance and protection. Even in Western Europe (Daynes 2015). In tandem, they have sought to hold governments to account in public for ignoring this imperative, manifest in a ‘dominant discourse’ which privileges of security, immigration and economics over humanitarian needs and which continues to ‘dehumanize the Calais migrants’ (Daynes 2015). For DOTW, the neglect of human needs is materialised in living conditions in Calais that would not be tolerated in ‘any refugee camp in any other part of the world where globally agreed standards for aid are upheld’ (Topping 2015) in particular public utilities where fewer than one-third of the number of toilets recommended by (Dhesi et al. 2015). In October, 2015, DOTW and other organizations working with the Calais migrants appealed to the French court to require the authorities to respect humanitarian law and ‘end serious human rights violations’ of the migrants living in the camp (AFP 2015). The court ordered the state to implement emergency measures within eight days that would bring amenities up to international standards and to identify unaccompanied children within 48 hours of their arrival in the camp.

The DOTW’s public discourse through the notion of bearing witness can be a daunting undertaking. The Red Cross argues that such a technique can alienate governments and jeopardise access to those most in need of medical help. DOTW’s argument is that not speaking out about the abuses can ultimately favour perpetrators. While acknowledging that they cannot be the moral conscience of mankind, they see the technique of ‘bearing witness’ as crucial in negotiating the barriers between victims and health care and to highlight gross violations of human rights’ (Evans 2014). The notion of speaking about abuses presents a counter to the human-interest narratives where the story is not just personalised through an individual or commodified for the market but seeks to enable some introspection to the sufferings of humanity as a whole but through their physiological and psychological needs.

Conclusion

The human form in media depictions in the guise of the human-interest story from its historical evolution to its present manifestations highlights the commodification of the human form. The extreme interest in the human-interest story in the media led to charges of simplifying complex issues and collapsing them through narratives of the human form. The human interest story produces both distance and proximity in media frames and is often used in immigration stories to gain both intimacy or to establish Otherness. The human form is still pivotal for third space narratives of NGOs, charities and civil society organisations which work within an interstitial space beyond market economics. DOTW’s notion of bearing witness puts the emphasis on human testimonies rather than in the commodification of the human story. The human form in engendering a politics of pity is still vital for engagement and funding. As such it will remain a contentious and unstable device.

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