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A Cosy Consensus on Deviant Discourse:

***How the refugee and asylum seeker meta-narrative has
endorsed an interpretive crisis in relation to the transnational
politics of the world's displaced persons***

A Cosy Consensus on Deviant Discourse: How the refugee and asylum seeker meta-narrative has endorsed an interpretive crisis in relation to the transnational politics of the world's displaced persons.

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Abstract

Immigration is a key feature in late capitalist societies, with some 20,000,000 displaced persons worldwide. This paper reports on coverage of refugees and asylum seekers in English-language newspapers worldwide, drawing on media content between 2003 and 2004. It analyses media discourse on refugees and asylum seekers across the world, with a particular focus on deconstructing negative coverage. Five dominant negative frames in international media discourses are identified. These themes are examined in the context of theories of racism and xenophobia to highlight their negative potential for displaced persons and attitudes towards them in their host countries. Theory is also employed to explore the potential utility of such negative narratives for the media and social elites. The work being presented here is part of a much larger research project being undertaken by the authors at the University of Limerick. (For preliminary findings see Devereux and Breen, 2003 and 2004).

Introduction

The role of the media in perpetuating the 'otherness' of refugees and asylum seekers is the focus of this paper. The concept of the other and our understanding of its construction and function are applied to the empirical example of international press coverage of refugee and asylum seekers. Using this data source, we explore the role of the media in excluding refugees and asylum seekers through the production and reproduction of othering discourses. Specifically, we deconstruct negative media discourses to demonstrate their basis in notions of otherness and threat. We also acknowledge the existence of more positive coverage and the potential of the media to promote inclusion.

This paper begins with a discussion of key concepts in theories of racism and xenophobia, which inform our analysis. In section two, the linkages between these concepts and media theory are outlined. The methodology informing this paper and the wider research project of which it is part are then elaborated. The five key negative frames identified within international media discourse are subsequently outlined; asylum seekers are represented as 'an economic threat'; 'a threat to national and local integrity'; 'a criminal element'; 'social deviants' and as 'illegal aliens'. Finally, our nascent conclusions regarding media constructions of asylum seekers and refugees are presented.

The Social Function of Fear

Fear is a powerful emotion. At a primeval level, fear can draw people together, seeking safety in numbers. The group that faces a common threat often benefits in terms of cohesion. Thus, historically a common fear - of flood, of a hard winter, of wild animals - has often had positive

ramifications for communities, strengthening bonds that might otherwise have been weak, creating interdependence where there might instead have been anomie, establishing a community where instead there would only have been individuals.

Our innate understanding of its binding power, is reflected in manufactured fears emerging from the common consciousness – religion and the paranormal providing many examples - which are experienced in parallel with genuine threats, filling a void should one exist or perhaps providing a more manageable source of fear in place of the too frightening uncontrollability of external and natural forces.

Those in leadership roles have been particularly cognisant of the benefits of a common threat. They have long recognised its potential not only for creating cohesion, but also for preventing dissent and in-fighting – phenomena which not only have a negative impact upon community, but also upon a leader's hold over power. Thus, fears have also been manufactured by elites to generate necessary or desired cohesion.

Closely related to the common threat is scapegoating. Cohesion is maintained through the creation of a scapegoat, which can be blamed for negative happenings. Scapegoats can prevent a group having to face its own flaws – in *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, for example, Angela Bourke (1999) identifies fairies as a device used by the community to apportion blame for socially unacceptable events. A communities' complicit acceptance of a supernatural explanation for a spouse's disappearance could prevent the necessity of addressing the existence of illicit activity in their midst and the flawed nature of their members.

Bourke's (1999) analysis also evokes an understanding of the function of scapegoating for disempowered groups. For the dependent and powerless, blaming the fairies for domestic violence may have been easier than challenging a seemingly immutable patriarchal structure. In contemporary society also, it often seems preferable for the powerless to misapportion blame rather than face an immutable opponent. False class-consciousness is a powerful example of this. Hegemony is achieved and sustained by an ideology that emphasises that everybody can 'make it' in material terms - if they choose to.

Barry Glassner (2003), in his seminal text *Culture of Fear*, emphasises that misinformation rather than consciously misplaced blame may, however, be the key to understanding widespread scapegoating. Elites who wish to divert attention from their corruption and errors and beneficiaries of inequality who wish to maintain the *status quo* all benefit from, if not generating, at least leaving unchallenged, misinformation and myths.

Glassner's (2003) text provides clear examples of the reciprocal relationship between the common threat and the scapegoat. The construction of an external threat often employs the device of scapegoating to demonstrate the immediacy and relevance of the danger, or to manufacture a threat where there exist only uncharted waters, while the scapegoat as a source of blame is inherently viewed as threatening. Both require the creation of a narrative, which elaborates to the in-group members whom they should fear and why.

Prejudice, viewed as a social norm to which individuals conform, has been theorised as having its roots not in individual personality disorder, but in a societal need to scapegoat. According to this theory hostility towards minorities is a result of a social system in which:

"the achievement level of large sections of the population falls short of the normatively sanctioned aspiration level." (Hartman and Husband, 1974: 45)

Thus someone who has high ethnic status (i.e. is white) and a high educational status, but has a

low occupational status, may use a minority group as a scapegoat to explain their status inconsistency - for instance they might claim that immigrants were 'taking all the jobs'.

Discrimination, the manifest expression of prejudice, is also not simply a number of isolated actions, which favour one group over another. It is a system of *social relations*, both individual and institutional that places and maintains power in the hands of the majority. Discrimination may mean denial of access to wealth, education, legal and social protection. It can also mean forced assimilation or segregation (Hartmann and Husband, 1974).

In this paper we are focused upon a situation in which the subject of the narrative, the source of the manufactured or artificially inflated threat, the scapegoat, is not a figment of fairytale, but human beings, in this case asylum seekers and refugees. We identify and deconstruct media coverage which create this group as a threat. Our aim is to highlight the congruence between the various elements of these narratives and scapegoating, in order to add to our understanding of how such threats are made palpable and acute for the public. Through this undertaking, we also aim to highlight the enormous negative potential of such discourses for the human beings who are their subject.

Bad News Sells ... General Panics Run and Run

The 'knowledge gap' between host populations and displaced persons is key to understanding the significance of media coverage in formulating public attitudes towards asylum seekers and refugees. In addition to the general climate of social distance, which exists between the majority and minorities, asylum seekers often live lives very distant from those of host populations. Opportunities to interact in the same social space are often limited by restrictions on the right to work, where to live and financial deprivation resulting from limited welfare. In other cases, the opportunity to occupy even the same physical space are limited by detention, placement in remote locations and restriction to communal living centres. In Ireland, for example, it was suggested that asylum seekers be housed on specially converted ships on the river Suir in County Waterford. Foucault's 'Ship of Fools' was to become a 'Ship of Asylum Seekers'. While refugees are not subject to such spatial segregation, they may experience social segregation as a consequences of racial prejudice and discrimination. Whether rooted in spatial or social segregation, the resultant social distance between host populations and asylum seekers and refugees leaves the former with few (respected) routes of learning about the latter, beyond the media. Although the public may not unquestioningly accept the perspective of the media, lacking an alternative, the power of the media's message is indisputable. According to Benjamin D. Singer:

"..it may be argued that the potential for identifiable symbolic content through the media is probably greater than direct contact with the native people (themselves).." (Singer, 1983: 234)

In *Racism and the Mass Media: A study of the role of the mass media in the formation of white beliefs and attitudes in Britain*, Hartmann and Husband (1974) as a prelude to a content analysis of press coverage similar to that elaborated here, examined people's attitudes to and definitions of the racial situation in Britain. They concluded that people's situations, the attitudes prevailing in their local area and the numbers of non-white people living there, determined affective and evaluative attitudes in combination. However, people in all areas, no matter what their evaluative/affective attitudes, defined the racial situation in Britain in the same way - that is, as it was depicted by the media. Firstly, people had been made aware of the discrimination and hostility experienced by coloured people. Secondly, people had simultaneously adopted the view that coloured people were a threat.

The media themselves suffer the effects of social distance - their information comes mostly from majority sources, their personnel come mostly from majority groups. As minorities are largely socially distant, and excluded from many institutions, including the media itself, journalists may have as little insight into the lives of ethnic minorities, as the people who read their reports. Lack of access to the media, on the part of minorities, exacerbates the effects of the knowledge gap. This lack of access is even more acute for the non-citizen.

News Values and the Newsworthiness of Negativity

Roger Fowler in *Language in the News* (1991: 12) quotes Stuart Hall as stating:

"The media do not simply and transparently report events which are 'naturally' newsworthy in themselves. News' is the end-product of a complex process which begins with a systematic sorting and selecting of events and topics according to a socially constructed set of categories."

The media report race/ethnic-related stories in the same manner in which all stories are reported, according to a set of criteria called news values, that help them determine what is newsworthy. These criteria are largely implicit, learnt by media personnel from watching others in the news gathering business, thus they are also largely unconscious. The more criteria the event fulfils the more likely it is to be reported. Galtung and Ruge (Fowler, 1991) compiled a comprehensive list of these news values.

Frequency	Unexpectedness
Threshold	Unpredictability
Absolute Intensity	Scarcity
Unambiguity	Continuity
Meaningfulness	Composition
Cultural Proximity	Reference to Elite Nations
Relevance	Reference to Elite People
Consonance	Reference to Elite Persons
Predictability	Reference to Something Negative
Demand	

Briefly, an article which is short in duration, involves high numbers, is simplistic, unexpected, and personalised, involves an elite body/person and is bad news, is more newsworthy than a comprehensive report on a complex national issue

News values also have a number of effects upon the *framing* of news.

"At the most general level, the concept of framing refers to subtle alterations in the statement or presentation of judgement and choice problems, and the term 'framing effects' refers to

changes in decision outcomes resulting from these alterations.” (Iyengar, 1994: 11)

News formats may be divided into episodic and thematic frames. Episodic frames may focus on either a particular event or individual, taking the form of a case-study.

“They depict issues in terms of concrete instances.” (Iyengar, 1994: 14)

They take a microcosmic view. Thematic frames, on the other hand, depict issues in a more generalised way. They give background information, consider the roots of the issue and the situation as a whole. They take the macrocosmic view. A number of studies have concluded that episodic frames are far more common than thematic (Iyengar, 1994). They are short in duration, personalised and easy to understand. Thematic frames require much more preparation and take away from the dramatic content of the story.

The framing of issues is not, however, a simple matter of making the news ‘interesting’, it has significant effects upon our perception of the issue or issues involved. Iyengar (1994: 15) found that:

“the use of either the episodic or thematic news frame affects how individuals assign responsibility for political issues; briefly, episodic framing tends to elicit individualistic rather than societal attributions of responsibility, while thematic framing has the opposite effect.”

So by concentrating on short-duration, personalised, reports the media unconsciously draws attention away from society’s responsibility for social ills and allows us to lay the blame at the feet of the victims.

Combined with the media’s concentration upon episodic framing, news values of unpredictability, brevity and negativity, mean that stories involving race-riots and conflict are more newsworthy, than those depicting the social problems experienced by minorities, and are therefore more frequently published. Ethnic minorities are often defined as a threat, and the situation between minorities and the majority as one of conflict.

News Values and the Use of Stereotypes

Stereotypes are, according to Allport:

“not identical with a category; it is rather a fixed idea that accompanies a category. For example, the category ‘Negro’ can be held in mind simply as a neutral, factual, non-evaluative concept, pertaining merely to a racial stock. Stereotype enters when, and if, the initial category is freighted with ‘pictures’ and judgements of the Negro as musical, lazy, superstitious or what not.” (cited in Hartmann and Husband, 1974: 55.)

Stereotyping arises from categorisation, which is a completely normal mode of thinking. It helps us to organise all that we have encountered in the past and make sense of new experiences. However, we tend to emphasise particular characteristics of whatever was encountered, in order to categorise it. To use the example provided by Hartmann and Husband (1974): Some liquids we categorise as medicines, thus their curative properties are emphasised, not their taste. Some liquids we classify as beverages, so taste is emphasised, not curative properties. In categorising things, we also emphasise the differences between objects in different categories and generalise the similarities within categories. Thus we say a beverage tastes nice, but medicine tastes horrible. This is not necessarily true, but it helps us to categorise. The problem with ethnic stereotyping is of course that we find it difficult to see beyond the generalisation, to the individual. Ethnic stereotyping is therefore concomitant of ethnic prejudice and supports racism.

News-values encourage the use of stereotypes, which are familiar and recognisable to people; they make articles easy to read and relevant. Niall Crowley (1992: 97), director of Ireland's Equality Authority and formerly of the Irish Traveller Movement, laments the media's tendency to adopt conventional prejudices:

"No statistics, no comparisons, ... no analysis of media reporting ... The media is a key institution for the transmission of racist stereotypes consciously or unconsciously".

Conclusion

News values transform fact into story, objective reality into symbolic reality. This symbolic reality tends to focus upon spontaneity, action, superficiality and negativity. It often excludes minority opinion and gives voice to those with wealth and status. The simplification of complex situations is encouraged. Stereotypical perceptions of situations and people are emphasised. It is within this context that the media, however unconsciously, may perpetuate racism.

Methodology

The data and analysis presented in this paper represents the preliminary stages of a larger study in which the three authors are engaged. The study, entitled *'Conflation, Construction and Content'* is a multi-annual project, whose focus is specifically on the manner in which the Irish media industry has responded to the arrival of asylum seekers and refugees. This undertaking is stimulated by our interest in better understanding the significance of the media to rising levels of racism in Irish society and the relationship between this phenomenon and representations of Ireland's relatively new refugee and asylum seeker population.

'Conflation, Construction and Content'

'Conflation, Construction and Content' is innovative in its tri-partite approach to its subject. The study's methodology combines analyses of production, content and reception. It examines dominant discourses within media content, the perspectives of media professionals and the beliefs of audience members. Its data sources include news coverage from one national broadsheet, one national tabloid and one local/regional newspaper as well as content from one private and one public national television station. Data collection methods will include qualitative and quantitative content analysis, semi-structured interviewing with a range of media professionals, audience focus groups and the application of the *Glasgow Media Groups'* 'News Game' exercise to study audience reception. This project is the first within Irish media and communication studies to employ a tri-partite methodology.

'Cosy Consensus'

The emergent categories presented and analysed within this paper were developed following the inductive analysis of headlines referring to asylum seekers and/or refugees over a six month period between the first of August 2003 and the first of February 2004 in English-language newspapers accessible through LexisNexis, an electronic database of print media content. Sources represented a wide range of geographic locations including Europe, Australia, North America and Asia. However, the nature of the database dictated that only middlebrow and broadsheet newspapers, not tabloids, were represented in the sample. The purpose of this undertaking was to consider the representativeness of frames emerging from the Irish data. Although only headlines were analysed for the purpose of this subset of the larger study, it is important to note the value of headline analysis in its own right. Headlines are worthy of dedicated consideration:

"because they are more often read than the text of items, because they have been shown to influence the reader's interpretation of the text, and because they tend to provide a brief and often memorable summary of what the item contains." (Hartmann)

and Husband, 1974: 140)

All five negative frames identified through analysis of Irish media content were represented in the international coverage. We contend, on the basis of the extent of coverage and homogeneity of the frames across different media outlets and geographical locations, that what we document is not a random event; it is, rather, a measure of a societal reaction of the powerful and privileged to the powerless and vulnerable, a demonstration of hegemonic collusion to retain control over resources and opportunities by maintaining clear boundaries between an imagined (often largely fictional) us and the 'other' - a process which feeds off of and into the stereotyping and scapegoating of refugees and asylum seekers.

It is worth noting that, that headlines commonly utilise the labels 'asylum seeker' and 'refugee' interchangeably. Indeed, we found that one term may be used in the title but the other is used in the main body of an article. This in itself we would argue is another example of a superficial, misleading and arguably irresponsible approach to this subject.

Framing the 'Other'

The inductive content analysis informing this study validated five negative frames initially identified in Irish print media coverage. The common characteristic of the narratives these frames represent is their construction of asylum seekers and refugees as 'other'. The frames represent the system of asylum as inherently lacking in legitimacy; asylum seekers and refugees as a threat to the constructed homogeneity of national and local communities; as socially deviant and a moral and physical contaminant of the imagined body¹-public; as an economic threat to national prosperity; and as a criminal element presenting a threat to the personal safety of the 'legitimate' citizenry. Non-negative frames were also identified. In contrast, these frames act to produce positive, supportive and sympathetic representations of asylum seekers and refugees, forging the possibility of rapprochement between the constructed 'them' and the imagined 'us'. These frames, elaborated elsewhere, are however in the minority.

In the following section, the negative frames validated are presented and discussed. Headlines are quoted to illustrate category development and to enable the reader to independently evaluate their validity. Comparisons are drawn between international and Irish coverage.

Frame One: The Illegitimacy of Asylum Seekers and Seeking

The illegitimacy frame is powerful in its capacity to define 'in' and 'out' group boundaries. It is characterised by a dominant message that asylum seeking as a system is inherently lacking in legitimacy and that all asylum seekers are therefore illegitimately resident in a host nation. This narrative effectively erases over half a century of international co-operation in providing humanitarian aid to persons displaced by war and persecution. It fails to inform readers about the voluntary commitment to asylum seeking which their nation made and retains. It fails to inform the public about the benefits of asylum seeking to the host nation. For example, Ward (1996) notes that Ireland ratified the UN convention on Human Rights (1951) in 1956, spurred by a desire to construct itself as a full participant in international politics. It fails to inform about the, often Spartan, provisions of national immigration policies for asylum seekers. Focusing decisively on negativity and threat - namely the abuse of 'us' perpetrated by 'them', it has all the elements of a profitable news frame. Asylum seeking is represented as something to which host nations are subjected, something that they are, in essence, victims of rather than signatories to. Mullaly (2001: 22) notes that this discourse, reproduced by the media, inherently reflects the prioritisation of control and security over a rights-based approach by political elites - the privileging of 'us' over 'them'.

¹ The conceptualisation of the nation as a body vulnerable to contamination is drawn from Meade (2001).

International coverage categorised under the illegitimacy frame was differentiated from Irish coverage in two key ways. Firstly, the substantial focus in Irish press coverage on the illegitimacy of asylum seekers giving birth to citizens (until 2004 Ireland offered citizenship to all those born within her borders) was specific to that country. In Ireland, such articles represented unchallenged allusions to ‘abuse’ or the attempted ‘abuse’ of this territorial criterion for citizenship by asylum seekers. The issue had not arisen prior to the 1990s when asylum seeking began to increase beyond double figures, despite the fact that asylum seekers represent only a quarter of all immigrants.

Secondly, international coverage was significantly less likely to specifically use the adjective ‘illegal’ in relation to asylum seekers or refugees (a complete misnomer as asylum seeker or refugee is a legal, if not privileged, status). Nonetheless, the illegitimacy frame was clearly identifiable, with the common juxtaposition of a perceived minority of ‘genuine’ asylum seekers versus a majority of system abusers.

As with Irish coverage, reference to ‘false claims’ on the part of asylum seekers were common,

TOURISTS GET STATUS: 25 CHINESE CLAIM TO BE REFUGEES

ASYLUM SEEKERS TOLD TO GET FALSE PASSPORTS

VERIFY CLAIMS OF ASYLUM SEEKERS

through this narrative undermining the legitimacy of the asylum seeking system as a process of making determinations and subverting the legitimacy of the status of the asylum seeker as a legal resident awaiting that the outcome of that process.

Also as in Ireland, references to false paperwork and ‘illegal entry’ were common. There was a lack of consideration for the fact that under Article 31 of the UN Refugee Convention asylum seekers may enter a country without the proper documentation:

"Contracting States shall not impose penalties, on account of their illegal entry or presence, on refugees who, coming directly from a territory where their life or freedom was threatened... enter or are present in their territory without authorization, provided they present themselves without delay to the authorities and show good cause for their illegal entry or presence."

Particularly in relation to the British press there was a depiction of asylum seekers as ‘storming the gates’; a clear play upon the saleability of public panic, despite the significant immigrant component of the national population.

The deportation of unsuccessful asylum seekers and reports of applicants going underground were also regarded as highly newsworthy, reinforcing our rejection of the legitimacy of asylum seeking.

20% OF FAILED ASYLUM SEEKERS DEPORTED

FAILED ASYLUM SEEKERS ‘FOUND IN NHS’

Headlines normalising confinement and deportation and depicting unsuccessful asylum seekers as false claimants allow us to confirm our negative stereotypes, our victimhood and the drama of our ‘status of alert’.

There is a lack of recognition that to be an unsuccessful asylum seeker simply means that one’s case was not found to have merit by the officials who made the judgement. It does not mean that there was no case. Indeed, significant numbers of unsuccessful asylum seekers are, on appeal, awarded refugee status or leave to remain on humanitarian grounds. Articles highlighting the numbers of ‘failed’ asylum seekers also often ignore the concerns of some voluntary organisations about the quality of representation that asylum seekers receive or the low acceptance rates of some decision-making systems. Articles on deportation, in classic episodic mode, rarely make reference to the complexities of this process, e.g. to right of non-refoulement

and the welfare of deported asylum seekers; yet, particularly in the British press, there was a significant interest in the re-entry of 'failed' deportees, feeding the sense of 'invasion'.

Frame Two: Threat to National or Local Integrity

While the first frame represents a challenge to the legitimacy of asylum seeking, the second represents fears about its implications. In theorising the meaning of this frame in the Irish context, we draw on Tracy (2001) who conceptualises Irish identity as inherently exclusionary, having being reformulated at independence to represent an imagined homogeneous population of white, heterosexual, sedentary Catholics to the exclusion of other identities². Yet, despite the particularity of Irish identity formation in a first world context, the perception of the 'other' as a threat to an (we would argue) imagined national or local integrity is not unique to Ireland, nor is the racialisation of that imagined us; this frame encompasses narrative which portrays the presence of the 'other' as a cause of racial conflict, even in countries with much more official recognition of their diversity than Ireland. Indeed, the association of the presence of asylum seekers/refugees and an increase in racism (adding a clear racial component to the differentiation of us and them) is as common in the much more multiracial UK as in Ireland. The distinctions between 'us' and 'them' are reinforced by reference to the racialisation of both groups. In Australia, asylum seekers and refugees are also commonly represented as a cause of dysfunction but without the same degree of explicit reference to racial conflict.

The threat of increasing racial conflict and/or social dysfunction represented by asylum seekers/refugees in these narratives is enhanced by the international association of the migration of displaced persons and notions of 'influx', 'flood', 'tide' and 'wave'.

Frame Three: Social Deviancy

Said (1991) theorised the Western construction of the 'other' as degenerate and uncivilised as a political tool of imperialism providing justification for conquest. The contemporary relevance of this theorisation is all too apparent (e.g. the 'War on Terror'). In addition to supporting conquest, the 'other' is also constructed as degenerate to justify their exclusion and thus our retention of privileged access to resources and opportunities. Much more disquieting to the West than the necessity of exporting their 'civilizing influence', is the importation of difference, otherness, 'degeneracy'.

A key device in the construction of asylum seekers and refugees as socially deviant is their exoticisation. The exotic otherness of the asylum seeker or refugee is regarded as particularly newsworthy; their diseases, propensity for extremism and sexual deviancy are all cited in headlines – the source of physical and moral contaminant clearly demarked as asylum seekers and refugees.

Despite the non-inclusion of tabloids in the sample on which this paper is based, all of the elements of the social deviancy frame developed from analysis of Irish coverage (which included tabloid press) were present in the international sample. The exotic nature of the health threat represented by asylum seekers and refugees was particularly in evidence.

FIJIAN FLU SCARE

Headlines also specifically identified asylum seekers and refugees as HIV threats

² To which, able-bodied and male could arguably be added.

WOMEN CAUGHT HIV 'AFTER SEX WITH REFUGEE' ASYLUM SEEKER ON HIV CHARGES

As in Ireland, asylum seekers and refugees mental state was also regarded as suspect and potentially threatening. Headlines coded under this frame fed into the portrayal of asylum seekers and refugees as an amorphous risk, which must be monitored to protect a sanitised national public-body, vulnerable to infection by foreign bodies.

CUSTOMS OFFICERS EYE UNSCREENED REFUGEES

This threat is again dramatised by the co-occurrence in headlines of escalating devices:

'...INFECT...', '...DISEASE...', '...EPIDEMIC...'

In an addition, not present in Irish coverage analysed, international coverage introduces the representation of the asylum seeking/refugee population as a specific sources of addicts. Both hard drugs and gambling are referenced.

The deviant sexuality of asylum seekers and refugees was internationally newsworthy. Australia was however unusual in the degree of coverage dedicated to developments in the legality of homosexuality as grounds for asylum. Ireland, in turn, stood out as the only country in which asylum seekers abortions were a point of interest.

In both the UK and Ireland, stories about the consumption of exotic meats and 'barbaric' foods were held to be of interest to the public. Even those who wish to counter misrepresentations propagated by the media found that they had to further disseminate those myths in order to challenge them.

DEAD MEAT?: STORIES OF ASYLUM SEEKERS STEALING
DONKEYS – AND SWANS – TO EAT HAVE TURNED OUT TO BE FALSE. SO
WHY HAVE THE NEWSPAPERS NOT APOLOGISED? ..

Extremism, particularly in relation to self-harm as a reaction to and protest against deportation, was cited internationally. The details of the extremism, rather than the reasons for the desperate act tended to make headlines.

NORWAY: ASYLUM SEEKER SETS HIMSELF ON FIRE
ASYLUM SEEKERS' THREATEN TO SEW EYES
HUNGER STRIKE REFUGEES IN HOSPITAL

Such headlines feed into dichotomies of barbaric and civilised, pure and dirty, rational and emotional that typify racist discourses.

Frame Four: Asylum Seekers as a Criminal Element

The framing of asylum seekers and refugees as a direct threat to the physical safety of legitimate members of society and the security of their property by linking individual's immigration status

directly to crime was the most prolific, widespread and overtly negative frame.

Repeated studies of immigrant groups' representations in the press have found that stories about crime and conflict feature heavily in print media coverage (Hartman and Husband, 1974; Scanlon, 1977). In international print media coverage of alleged or proven criminal acts, there was a common disregard for the ethical issues associated with making a link between a person's social or ethnic group and criminality. We found that subeditors and journalists continue to draw upon both immigration status and nationality as newsworthy details in stories about crime. In international coverage, asylum seeker and refugee status were explicitly linked through co-occurrence in headlines to terrorism, war crimes, riots and street violence.

TERROR SUSPECTS CLAIM REFUGEE STATUS REFUGEE FACES NAZI WAR TRIAL

This frame, in particular, lacks any subtlety in the manner in which the readership's perceived fear of the 'other' is played upon and reinforced for the sake of profit.

Frame Five: Asylum Seekers as an Economic Threat

This frame reinforces the legitimacy of exclusionary control and security oriented immigration policy through scapegoating asylum seekers and refugees.

A minority of the headlines coded under this frame focus on benefits fraud and compensation cases. A clear subtext refers us to the ingratitude of asylum seekers as further evidence of their degeneracy.

Headlines coded under this frame are dominated, however, by reference to the cost of the asylum system itself. The costs associated with housing asylum seekers are a particular focus, but costs of health care provision and other basic services are also considered newsworthy.

FIVE-STAR BILL FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS ON ISLAND
ASYLUM SEEKER COSTS TAXPAYER \$7000 A NIGHT
LETWIN PLEDGES TO SEND ASYLUM SEEKERS FAR, FAR AWAY: PROPOSAL
WOULD SAVE POUNDS 1.4BN A YEAR
"BURDEN ON RESOURCES"

Headlines coded under this frame accept unquestioningly the legitimacy of exclusionary citizenship. Beyond the fact that such headlines place the blame for the inefficiencies of a system over which they have no control squarely on the shoulders of asylum seekers, the incongruence of complaints about funding a system in which we volunteered to participate with the self-congratulation in which we engage regarding the size of our Aid budget or contributions to charity per capita, is not recognised.

Conclusion: The Limits of Xenophobia

Analysis of negative representations of displaced persons in the English-speaking press

internationally, supports the existence of five key frames. Each frame has been found to consist of a variety of related narratives and devices. However, all of these negative frames share in common their contribution to the 'othering' of asylum seekers and refugees. They maintain, rather than reduce, the social distance between the national readership and displaced persons.

Asylum seekers and refugees are constructed as 'other' through their representation as a threat - fraudsters, con-artists, drug-dealers, sexual deviants, barbarians, carriers of disease and extremists in the dominant negative discourses. The homogenised in-group is, in turn, unified by the common threat of cultural, social and economic annihilation by the invading 'other' and through the provision of a powerless scapegoat for a range of economic and social ills.

Despite the enormous diversity of the group in question, we would argue that the stereotyping and scapegoating of asylum seekers and refugees does represent their racialisation; racist stereotypes commonly invoke "fantasies related to dirt, danger, deviance, and crime" (O'Connell, 1997). Certainly, xenophobia - if we are to define it in terms of fear of the unknown - is an insufficient basis for interpreting the public's increasing racism towards asylum seekers and refugees. It is clear that the public are provided with very definite characterisations of displaced persons.

Negative frames heighten the newsworthiness of the topic by facilitating narratives which meet a wide range of news values - an egocentric focus on we the elite nations, the comforting familiarity of stereotypical depictions of and unambiguous positions on the divisions between occident and orient, the negativity of the threat itself, the completeness of this threat given its relevance to cultural, social and economic scarcity, and the intensity of the imminent danger - its immutability reflected in references to flood, tides, and waves.

The otherness of asylum seekers/refugees is emphasised through the reinforcement of a homogenous national identity. Appeals to a sense of unity based on the shared legal protection of citizenship and an unquestioned entitlement to resources and opportunities are bolstered through reference to assumed social and cultural homogeneity - arguably evidence that our own racialisation and the suppression of diversity within the in-group, is also part of this 'othering' process.

In summary, it is our contention that dominant negative discourses regarding asylum seekers and refugees act to perpetuate and advance the social distance between 'us' and 'them'. Moreover, we view this 'othering' process as rooted in the devices of stereotyping and scapegoating. These feed a sense of common threat, which in its creation of a sense of both tantalising danger and comforting unity is perceived as highly saleable. We argue that such constructions embody many key news values, producing profitable negativity. Moreover, the highly excluded and powerless position of the subjects facilitate the lazy journalism of stereotypes and myths.

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