

Andy Washington

Project report

BCM390, “Media, war and peace”

Autumn session, 2013

University of Wollongong

The project report assignment had two parts. For details of the assignment see http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/BCM390_13outline.pdf

Andy Washington prepared (1) an information pack in the form of slide show (see address on next page) and (2) a fictional dialogue on doing the project, below.

- The link to this document is from http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/mwp_tops.html.

BCM390 – Project Report – 3888186

The MISS representation of asylum seekers in Australian media.

Information pack (prezi link):

http://prezi.com/ndmi_j7dkkiw/untitled-prezi/ or

http://prezi.com/ndmi_j7dkkiw/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy

Dialogue:

Between myself (AW) and a classmate (CM) prior to them reading through my information pack.

CM: Wow, interesting topic here, Andy, what made you choose this area of study?

AW: Well, a few months ago I started to read Robin de Crespigny's book 'The People Smuggler', and as Taylor states, it really does put a 'human face to asylum seekers'¹. I started to see the issue from the other side, from the asylum seeker's perspective, which is something rarely featured in mainstream media. When I started to study 'white-bread media' in my other media subject, I put two and

¹ Taylor C, 2013, 'A voice for asylum seekers', *The Daily Advertiser*, accessed 20/05/2013, <http://www.dailyadvertiser.com.au/story/1501810/voice-for-asylum-seekers/>

two together: the way the Australian media portrays asylum seekers in such a misinformed way really does not give a proper representation of the multicultural Australia we live in today².

CM: Can you explain the 'white-bread media' theory a little more to me? I haven't quite got my head around it.

AW: Of course, well according to scholar Tanja Dreher, 'white-bread media' primarily refers to the way in which the Australian media fails to properly represent our multicultural society². Examples may include the way the media doesn't provide the asylum seekers perspective, or as simple as the way Australian soaps only include 'all-Anglo families'². Instead, those of multicultural background are subject to 'stereotyping, invisibility, sensationalism and racist representation'². This is alarming due to the fact that the 'media are central to both relatively unproblematic experiences of 'everyday multiculturalism' *and* to everyday experiences of racism in Australia'².

CM: Well, why do you think the media portrays such a misinformed view of the issue?

AW: I think a lot of the time it comes down to where the media are sourcing their information. In relation to stories concerning asylum seekers, research shows that the media are quick to adopt the 'propaganda model'. This is seen in their

² Dreher T, (forthcoming 2014), 'White bread media', *The media and communications in Australia*, eds. S Cunningham and S Turnbull, Allen and Unwin

reliance upon 'Government statements and spokespersons'³ for information regarding the situation.

CM: But why is this an issue? Doesn't the Government provide a detailed enough account?

AW: The issue here is that by solely relying upon the Government as an information source, a bias view is developed. As the public, we should have access to a wide range of sources so we can form our own opinion. Also, the 'children overboard affair' is a perfect example of how wrong the Government can sometimes get it. Once that confused message was sent to the immigration minister, the Government was quick to release information stating that the asylum seekers were madly throwing their children overboard and deliberately destroying their own boat to manipulate rescue⁴.

CM: Yeah, I was a bit surprised by the use of that as the case study, I just thought that was true.

AW: Me too, until I did further research into it! The Government and the media worked so well together on that one. This is a perfect example of the affects of 'white-bread media' – because the media was so quick to 'report' on the Government statements, rather than investigating the situation further³, they

³ McKay F, Thomas S & Blood R, 2011, 'Any one of these people could be terrorists for all we know!' Media representations and public perceptions of 'boat people' arrivals in Australia, *Journalism*, vol. 12, no. 5, pp. 607-626

⁴ Dellit A, 2002, 'How the 'children overboard' lie developed', *Green left weekly*, accessed 20/05/2013, <http://www.greenleft.org.au/node/25781>

provide us with only one, bias view, which the public have no choice but to believe. It's any wonder the public is scared of these people; we don't really have a choice!

CM: It's strange that in a multicultural society such as Australia there is still such fear towards people of diverse backgrounds, isn't it?

AW: Yes, and this is related to the moral panic media theory. A moral panic is created about asylum seekers within Australia in two ways. It is firstly initiated by the way in which the Government portrays asylum seekers to be 'violent and criminal with links to terrorism and drug trafficking'⁵. The media then furthers this by 'linking 'boat people' with economic opportunism and dishonesty'³. This really hits home for Australians as it challenges our values and beliefs; ultimately it distinguishing asylum seekers from the "Aussie battlers' who patiently wait their turn and work honestly and hard while other less deserving people get it for nothing'⁵.

CM: I can really see how this moral panic is created by the media – it's all over headlines and news stories how these boat people or illegal immigrants are seeking to take over our economy and land.. If the media is forever limiting us to the one view on asylum seekers, how did you gather information enough to give a proper insight?

AW: Well, fortunately enough I wasn't the first to see what the media are doing. There have been a number of studies done on both the Government and media's

⁵ Clyne M, 2005, 'The use of exclusionary language to manipulate opinion', *Journal of Language and Politics*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 173-196

portrayal of asylum seekers and its affect on society. Apart from academic sources, news stories and opinion pieces relating to the issue are plentiful online. It's really important to know that there is plenty of information out there, giving a unique and refreshing perspective view on the situation, it just requires a bit more looking.

CM: Yeah, it seems you were able to gather information from both sides of the story really, did that bring about any unexpected findings?

AW: It did indeed. Like other Australians would be, I was slightly surprised to come across information regarding the asylum seekers 'positive and grateful' attitude⁶. The Amnesty International website has a plethora of information regarding the situation including a range of case studies on newly settled asylum seekers⁷. Not only is it touching to read their stories of gratitude, it made me proud to be part of a nation who is able to offer this safe and happy lifestyle.

CM: So there is information out their giving a binary view then?

AW: Yes of course, but it's often difficult to come across or offered as a form of alternate media. Whilst the documentary *Leaky Boat* gave a perfectly investigatory 'counterargument to the dominant narrative'⁶, it was featured on the Special Broadcast Service, which is concerned as alternate media within Australia. It's commercial media that is the real problem, the platforms that the everyday Australian rely upon – these are the outlets giving off misinformation.

⁶ Bartlett M, 2012, 'A drop in the ocean: leaky boat and go back to where you came from', *Screen Education*, no. 64, Summer 2012, pp. 8-17

⁷ Pagliaro A, 2013, '3 headlines that tells us something is seriously wrong with our asylum seeker policy', *Amnesty International*, accessed 20/05/2013, <http://www.amnesty.org.au/refugees/comments/31211/>

This is worrying because of the way in which Australians rely on the 'media for our understandings and experiences of diversity and difference'².

CM: Do you think mainstream media will ever truly give a more diverse insight into issues, including that of asylum seekers?

AW: Well there is hope. The new media reforms that are being proposed by the current Government aim to ensure 'fairness, accuracy and diversity' within Australian media by providing a greater width and depth of sources⁸. I think with the emergence of social media and the increased accessibility and usability of the Internet, we've already seen growth in the diversity of views on topics. Now people are able to join online forums, start their own blog or just use social media to get their voice heard, let's hope this is done for good and the mainstream media embraces it for it's own growth as well.

CM: So once you collated all your information, how did you go about putting your information package together?

AW: I've used prezi a number of times and know it's a reliable, as well as modern and interesting way to present information, so I had no trouble deciding to use that as my medium. In regards to structure, whilst I wanted to feature the media theories, I also really wanted to give a better insight into the debate by delving into who is involved; that being the Government, media, asylum seeker community and humanitarian/religious groups. By presenting the roles of each of the key players in

⁸ Taylor L, 2012, 'PM urges media to offer a wide range of opinion', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, accessed 20/05/2013, <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/political-news/pm-urges-media-to-offer-a-wide-range-of-opinion-20120724-22nko.html>

the debate I could then rationalize the ‘where to from here’ section as well as the concluding recommendations.

CM: I think you’ve done a good job with the structure, it was very easy to follow. So if I wanted to look into this further what should I consider?

AW: Thanks, I think it’d be really interesting to read ‘The People Smuggler’ for yourself, and also source out stories of asylum seekers themselves. It’s really interesting to hear the stories behind why they felt they needed to come to Australia in the first place as well as the journey they took. It would also be interesting to look into the proposed media reforms and consider how these may affect the media’s future dealings with stories relating to asylum seekers.

Reference list for dialogue:

- Bartlett M, 2012, ‘A drop in the ocean: leaky boat and go back to where you came from’, *Screen Education*, no. 64, Summer 2012, pp. 8-17
- Clyne M, 2005, ‘The use of exclusionary language to manipulate opinion’, *Journal of Language and Politics*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 173-196
- Dellit A, 2002, ‘How the ‘children overboard’ lie developed’, *Green left weekly*, accessed 20/05/2013, <http://www.greenleft.org.au/node/25781>
- Dreher T, (forthcoming 2014), ‘White bread media’, *The media and communications in Australia*, eds. S Cunningham and S Turnbull, Allen and Unwin
- McKay F, Thomas S & Blood R, 2011, ‘‘Any one of these people could be terrorists for all we know!’ Media representations and public perceptions of ‘boat people’ arrivals in Australia, *Journalism*, vol. 12, no. 5, pp. 607-626
- Pagliaro A, 2013, ‘3 headlines that tells us something is seriously wrong with our asylum seeker policy’, *Amnesty International*, accessed 20/05/2013, <http://www.amnesty.org.au/refugees/comments/31211/>
- Taylor C, 2013, ‘A voice for asylum seekers’, *The Daily Advertiser*, accessed 20/05/2013, <http://www.dailyadvertiser.com.au/story/1501810/voice-for-asylum-seekers/>

- Taylor L, 2012, 'PM urges media to offer a wide range of opinion', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, accessed 20/05/2013, <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/political-news/pm-urges-media-to-offer-a-wide-range-of-opinion-20120724-22nko.html>

Reference list for prezi information package:

- Bartlett M, 2012, 'A drop in the ocean: leaky boat and go back to where you came from', *Screen Education*, no. 64, Summer 2012, pp. 8-17
- Clyne M, 2005, 'The use of exclusionary language to manipulate opinion', *Journal of Language and Politics*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 173-196
- Dellit A, 2002, 'How the 'children overboard' lie developed', *Green left weekly*, accessed 20/05/2013, <http://www.greenleft.org.au/node/25781>
- Dreher T, (forthcoming 2014), 'White bread media', *The media and communications in Australia*, eds. S Cunningham and S Turnbull, Allen and Unwin
- Elston R, 2012, 'Public view of asylum seekers 'getting worse'', *SBS world news Australia*, accessed 20/05/2013, <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/1719105/Public-view-of-asylum-seekers-getting-worse>
- Klocker N & Dunn K M, 2003, 'Who's driving the asylum debate? Newspaper and government representations of asylum seekers', *Media international Australia incorporating culture and policy*, no. 109, pp. 71-92
- McKay F, Thomas S & Blood R, 2011, "'Any one of these people could be terrorists for all we know!' Media representations and public perceptions of 'boat people' arrivals in Australia", *Journalism*, vol. 12, no. 5, pp. 607-626
- Pagliaro A, 2013, '3 headlines that tells us something is seriously wrong with our asylum seeker policy', *Amnesty International*, accessed 20/05/2013, <http://www.amnesty.org.au/refugees/comments/31211/>
- Preece G, 2012, 'We're all boat people: a biblical view of refugees', accessed 20/05/2013, <http://www.ea.org.au/ethos/faithcommunity/we-re-all-boat-people.aspx>

- Pugh M, 2004, 'Drowning not waving: boat people and humanitarianism at sea', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 50-69
- Taylor C, 2013, 'A voice for asylum seekers', *The Daily Advertiser*, accessed 20/05/2013, <http://www.dailyadvertiser.com.au/story/1501810/voice-for-asylum-seekers/>
- Taylor L, 2012, 'PM urges media to offer a wide range of opinion', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, accessed 20/05/2013, <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/political-news/pm-urges-media-to-offer-a-wide-range-of-opinion-20120724-22nko.html>
- Triggs G, 2013, 'Time for rethink on asylum seeker treatment', *Australian human rights commission*, accessed 20/05/2013, <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/news/opinions/time-rethink-asylum-seeker-treatment>