5. Detention attention
Framing a Manus Island riot

Abstract: This article reports on a research project that investigated the framing of asylum seekers in the Australian news publications *The Australian* and *The Guardian Australia Edition*, during their coverage of a riot that occurred in an asylum seeker processing centre on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, in February 2014. Analysis found themes of asylum seekers represented as threats to national identity, State sovereignty, and as victims. The research discusses the potential impacts framing may have on the way asylum seekers are perceived by readers of these publications. Its findings showed that the process of framing in news reports can both privilege and exclude aspects of an event being reported.

Keywords: asylum seekers, critical discourse analysis, framing, national identity, Papua New Guinea, protest, sovereignty

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Introduction

ON the 16 and 17 February 2014, protesting by asylum seekers at the Manus Island processing centre led to riots involving asylum seekers and members of the centre's staff and security. As a result of the riots, 24-year-old Iranian asylum seeker Reza Barati died, and 77 other asylum seekers sustained injuries. This article reports on a research project that investigated how *The Australian* and *The Guardian Australia Edition* (hereafter called *Guardian Aus*) reported on the riot and the immediate aftermath. The research used critical discourse analysis (CDA) to investigate the framing of asylum seekers in the two newspapers. Articles published between February 17, when the riots were first reported, and February 26, when the cause of death of Reza Barati was revealed, were analysed for the research. The two publications were chosen because they are known to have differing political perspectives and levels of influence. Through analysis of news reportage, this research aimed to discover the way each publication framed asylum seekers and the potential influences media framing could have on the way asylum seekers are perceived by readers. Analysis of the data uncovered three main themes: (1) asylum seekers as threatening national identity; (2) asylum seekers as threatening sovereignty; and, (3) asylum seekers as victims of both violence and government policy.

Previous studies into Australia's media discourse on asylum seekers have

investigated balance in media coverage (Every & Augustinos, 2008b; Pickering, 2001), the use of social categorisations, such as refugee, detainee and boat people, to describe asylum seekers (O'Doherty & Leceouteur, 2007; Pickering, 2001), and the use and influence of media coverage on people's opinions of asylum seekers (McKay, Thomas & Kneebone, 2011). The majority of these studies noted that media coverage on asylum seekers is one-sided and reliant upon stereotypes to present asylum seekers as deviant, illegal, or different. Such coverage can amplify negative frames of asylum seekers. This study adds to the current body of literature by performing an in-depth analysis of a specific event that became an important national and international issue.

Human rights groups and international bodies have spoken out against Australia's offshore processing policies, requesting an end to offshore processing following the riot (AFP, 2014) and, as has been outlined by Pickering (2001, p. 173) and Every & Augustinos (2008a, p. 566), the way the media frames issues can be used to justify the continuation or disruption of policy. Therefore, an analysis of news reportage in *The Australian* and *Guardian Aus* during the riot can contribute a greater understanding of the framing of asylum seekers through this event, and how framing may influence a reader's perceptions of both the riot and asylum seekers as a whole.

Coverage of the riot in *The Australian* and *Guardian Aus* detailed conflicting claims over who started the riot, debates over the adequacy of offshore processing policies, and whether the Australian or Papua New Guinean (PNG) governments were responsible for stopping rioting. *The Australian's* coverage of the riot largely presented asylum seekers as threatening both national identity and State sovereignty by framing asylum seekers as violent, threatening Australia's borders and as the social and cultural 'Other'. Images used in *The Australian's* coverage of the riot also framed asylum seekers in a threatening manner as they depicted asylum seekers in large groups, which prevents their humanisation (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Images, although not frequent in coverage of the riot, also showed asylum seekers from a distance, behind fences, and surrounded by authority figures which can connote threat by implying unwanted social relations and criminality (Bleiker, Campbell, Hutchinson & Nicholson, 2013). Sources from the Australian government were the most commonly employed in *The Australian*, and emphasised asylum seekers as violent and to blame for rioting.

Guardian Aus was found to have framed asylum seekers as victims of both local violence and Australian policy, and most often used sources who were refugee advocates and opposed to government policy. However, the images selected in *Guardian Aus* conveyed a similar framing of asylum seekers to *The Australian*—some images were used multiple times in both publications. The scarcity and repetition of images in coverage of the riot, and their divergence from *Guardian Aus's* textual framing of asylum seekers, indicates media organisations were limited

in what material they could use when reporting on the riot. Analysis discovered the Australian government was influential in what was reported by both periodicals in their coverage of the riot, due to a media ban in offshore processing centres maintained by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection.

Methodology

The research employed critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyse newspaper coverage of the riot in *The Australian* and *Guardian Aus*. Fairclough (2013) notes that CDA provides both scope and framework for analysis of the relationship between discourse and other elements of the social process. CDA was used in this study to investigate the framing of news reports by focusing on the language used and sources quoted in both news reportage and opinion pieces in the two publications. Framing theory was employed to provide a theoretical perspective to underpin the approach of the research. According to McQuail (2005), framing theory focuses on the way factors such as events, persons, values and ideas are defined. The factors are attributed a value and priority that can affect how an individual constructs reality.

Data was interpreted using lexical analysis, which Machin and Mayr (2012) describe as analysis of the kinds of words used. Analysis looked at whether the lexical choices selected by each publication when describing asylum seekers and their actions during the riot could establish a distinct discourse by signifying a specific identity or value. Lexical analysis was employed because, as Bazeley (2013) notes, how people say things can be as important as what they say. Lexical analysis allowed the research to investigate any underlying beliefs in each publication that may not be specifically asserted, which Machin and Mayr (2012) note is a key purpose of CDA. Similarly, O'Doherty and Lecouteur's (2007) study of the social categorisation of asylum seekers argued the lexical choices made when referring to asylum seekers—whether referring to them as asylum seekers, refugees, detainees or boat people—can legitimise certain perspectives on the asylum seeker debate and establish a field through which meaning is interpreted.

Analysis also considered the use of sources in the data. It noted what sources appeared, their frequency and placement in reportage, and whether they were balanced against sources with opposing viewpoints. Analysis sought to uncover whether the selection of sources by each publication could be used to maximise or minimise certain frames of asylum seekers. As Bazeley (2013) states, lexical choices can minimise certain individuals and perspectives in a debate, therefore, analysing the sources used in media coverage allowed the research to uncover how each publication's selection of sources may influence their framing of asylum seekers. By analysing the sources used and lexical choices made by each publication, the research focused on how media coverage of the riot could construct the events, and asylum seekers, in a particular way and how such construction

may impact readers through legitimising or minimising different perspectives on the debate.

A population of data between February 17 and February 26 was analysed. This data included 38 articles from the online editions of *The Australian* and 28 articles from *Guardian Aus*. The data represented the entirety of editorial and opinion pieces published by *The Australian* and *Guardian Aus* relevant to the riot. The specific time period was chosen for the reasons outlined in the introduction to this article.

The publications analysed were selected due to their varying levels of influence and different political stances. News Corporation owns *The Australian*. The paper was first published in 1964 and its political influence is noted by Robin (2014), who has argued '[t]he *Oz* might have a small readership, but in Canberra, it's undoubtedly the most influential paper'. *The Australian's* former editor-in-chief, Chris Mitchell has stated he does not 'think there's much right-of-centre in the news pages. I would argue that our news pages are rigorously straight'. Mitchell has also noted that 'the editorial and op-ed pages of the newspaper are centre-right' (Mitchell, 2006) and has discussed how *The Australian* is prepared to embark upon campaign journalism (Robin, 2014).

Guardian Aus was first published in Australia in 2013. It is the Australian arm of the United Kingdom newspaper *The Guardian*, which has been labelled a 'mouthpiece of the left' (Marketing Magazine, 2013), and its Australian counterpart has been labelled by other publications, including *The Australian,* as left-leaning (Tabakoff & Owen, 2013). *Guardian Aus* claims to be an independent publication (Sweney, 2013) and is funded by philanthropist Graeme Wood, who made the largest-ever single political donation in Australia's history—A$1.6 million to the Australian Greens (Sweney, 2013).

Analysis and Discussion

As noted earlier, analysis of the publications found three key themes in coverage of the riot: asylum seekers framed as threats to national identity, as threats to State sovereignty, and as victims. Additional discourses on the riot were also found but are not included in this analysis as they are not specific to asylum seekers. Such discourses included: the framing of who was responsible for escalating the protests into violence; whether Australian or PNG service people were responsible for stopping the violence; and whether the Australian or PNG governments were responsible for investigations into the riot. An investigation of these discourses would be of importance to any future research on the riot.

Notions of asylum seekers as threats were found to link with arguments put forward by Edward Said (2003), particularly the notion of Asian and Middle Eastern cultures being discursively defined in opposition to the West as 'the Other' (Said, 2003). 'Otherness' was emphasised in *The Australian*, which often

framed asylum seekers through binaries, emphasising racial, ethnic and societal differences. Initially, *Guardian Aus* also adopted a similar stance. However, *Guardian Aus* coverage of the riot was typically humanising of asylum seekers and critical of Australian government policy. Analysis found the selection of sources and the structure of news articles are important in establishing a framing of asylum seekers. As Van Dijk (2013) notes, the ordering of information can convey a publication's stance on an issue by revealing what information it considers the most important. Furthermore, analysis also identified that the choices made by each publication with regard to their reportage were limited by a media ban enforced by the Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection, affecting both the sources and images used.

Asylum seekers as a threat to national identity

It has been argued that Australia's migration and immigration policies have been established on the basis of excluding 'the Other' (Rashid, 2007). This approach may be exemplified by *The Migration Act 1958*, which serves to regulate the presence of 'non-citizens' in Australia (Every, 2008, p. 214), and, perhaps most significantly, the White Australia Policy *(Immigration Restriction Act 1901)*, which excluded non-European immigrants from entering Australia through measures such as dictation testing (Rashid, 2007). Additionally, the introduction of controversial mandatory detention and offshore processing policies in 1992 and 2001 respectively, coincided with the arrival of asylum seekers on boats from Asia and the Middle East (Every, 2008; Every & Augustinos, 2008b). In the past 15 years, both the Australian Labor and Coalition governments have supported the exclusion of asylum seekers who have arrived in Australia by boat.

The Australian

The Australian's coverage of the riot largely emphasised the racial and ethnic differences of Australians and asylum seekers. *The Australian* often referred to asylum seekers by their race when talking about the riot, for example, referring to the asylum seeker killed in the riot as an 'Iranian asylum seeker', 'Iranian man', or 'Iranian asylum seeker/man, Reza Barati'. Caldas-Coulthard (2003) argues that descriptions of asylum seekers referencing race or ethnicity draw on socio-political stereotypes, giving asylum seekers a negative classification. According to McKay, Thomas & Kneebone (2011) and Masocha & Simpson (2011), socio-political stereotypes can include associations with terrorism and unwillingness to renounce cultural values. Describing asylum seekers with reference to their race can frame them as a threat to national identity by emphasising their difference and inferring socio-political stereotypes, creating an us/them binary. This may make it more likely for readers to perceive asylum seekers as a threat. Similarly,

McKay, Thomas and Kneebone (2011) detected a link between socio-political stereotypes and public perception, finding that socio-political stereotypes have been influential on the Australian public's attitudes to asylum seekers and have been used to justify support of offshore processing policies.

The Guardian Australian's coverage of the riot also refers to ethnicity in descriptions of asylum seekers as dangerous or violent. This is exemplified in an opinion piece published on February 25:

> Whenever people are held in custody against their will, there is some danger. There is a particular danger in the case of asylum-seekers because among their number is a very tough group, substantially though not entirely Iranian, which is determined to make the centres unworkable and break the government's will … (Sheridan, 2014).

In this example, associations can be drawn between Middle Eastern culture and violence by stating the centres are dangerous due to a 'tough' group of 'substantially … Iranian' asylum seekers (Sheridan, 2014). Associating Middle Eastern culture with violence assists in establishing a binary opposition of asylum seekers and Australian culture, which Pickering (2001) notes can work to establish Australian culture as threatened by 'the Other'. Representations of asylum seekers through 'Otherness' were found in news articles in *The Australian*. For example, an article published on February 20 detailed alleged rape threats made by asylum seekers in the lead up to the rioting. It used quotes from Manus Member of Parliament (MP) Ron Knight, who stated that local detention centre guards were subject to 'foul language and abuse' from asylum seekers who 'made sexual (comments), saying they were going to get out and rape their mothers and their sisters' (Martin, 2014). By detailing these revelations, asylum seekers could be viewed as potential rapists. Said (2003) and Hall (1997) note sexual and violent threat is an aspect of framing the 'Other'. Such framing casts the 'Other' as being incapable of practising 'civilised' restraint in sexual and emotional life (Hall 1997, p. 243) and establishes asylum seekers as a threat.

Additionally, *The Australian's* use of Manus MP Ron Knight as a source provides both power and authority to his account of asylum seekers as violent or deviant by drawing credibility from Knight's official position (McQuail, 1994). The article provides no other sources or reports of any investigations into the legitimacy of the claims made by Knight. The non-contested statements of Knight may further lead readers to see asylum seekers as a threat by limiting the information on the riot that is made available to them (Hallahan, 1999). This selection of sources was typical of the approach used in *The Australian's* coverage of the riot. *The Australian* often employed few sources in its reporting and alternate sources were more likely to be positioned toward the end of articles, which, as

Van Dijk (2013) states, can minimise a source's contribution to the discourse. Van Dijk's (2013) work on news schemata identified that news reports are organised hierarchically, in accordance with the perceived importance of information.

The Guardian Australia Edition

Unlike *The Australian*, *Guardian Aus* rarely mentioned race or ethnicity in its reportage. For example, the man who died during the rioting was referred to primarily by name or as a man, and not by nationality. Furthermore, while both publications included Australian government officials as sources, the *Guardian Aus* treated these sources differently to *The Australian*. While in both publications, government officials were the most common proponents of the threatening frame of asylum seekers, the *Guardian Aus* more often positioned government sources toward the end of articles, and included alternate sources. For example, in an article published in the *Guardian Aus* on 19 February 2014, then Minister for Immigration and Border Protection Scott Morrison described the riot as 'a very dangerous situation where people decided to protest in a very violent way …' and stated that 'if you behave in an unruly and disorderly way then you subject yourself to the response of law enforcement' (Davidson, 2014a). While this comment by minister Morrison in *Guardian Aus* may be seen as framing asylum seekers as threats, the use of opposing voices could be seen to lessen the impact of such framing. *Guardian Aus* frequently included sources such as the Refugee Action Coalition and UN Human Rights Commission officials and positioned accounts of the riot by these sources above those by government figures. This structuring placed refugee advocates' accounts of the riot in a position of power because they are placed toward the top of articles, giving the first description of the events and placing alternate frames in a prime position. The structuring of information and sources in *Guardian Aus* may be considered to reveal the information or persons perceived as most important to the story by the publication (Van Dijk, 2013). For example, in the extract cited above, minister Morrison's implication of asylum seekers in the violence was situated toward the end of the article, with refugee advocates giving the first account of the violence.

The *Guardian Aus*'s coverage of the riot also differed from *The Australian* in regard to the information on the riot it prioritised. *Guardian Aus* focused more on the asylum seekers injured in the riot, whereas *The Australian* placed more emphasis on revelations of asylum seekers being arrested. *Guardian Aus*'s use of asylum seeker accounts and sources such as the Refugee Action Coalition demonstrate this focus. In articles published on February 18 and 19, the Refugee Action Coalition stated that locals and PNG police carried out 'systematic and brutal' attacks on asylum seekers (Davidson & Laughland, 2014a; Davidson & Laughland, 2014b). These sources describe asylum seekers as victims of violence

and living in unsafe conditions. These reports are privileged by being positioned above alternate accounts by government sources. *Guardian Aus's* emphasis on asylum seekers being injured during rioting could minimise notions of asylum seekers as a threat to national identity. This framing portrays asylum seekers as victims and may increase readers' sympathy toward them.

Comparison of results

Framing of asylum seekers as a threat to national identity was more prominent in *The Australian* than *Guardian Aus*. *The Australian's* coverage of asylum seekers highlighted racial and ethnic differences between asylum seekers and Australians, which could obfuscate views of asylum seekers as people seeking humanitarian aid. This focus on nationality and ethnicity also invokes socio-political stereotypes. It emphasises the 'Otherness' of asylum seekers, framing them as unwilling to adopt Australian values and as possessing societally undesirable personality traits. On the other hand, *Guardian Aus* largely did not convey a threatening frame of asylum seekers. Coverage focused on asylum seekers' safety within the centre, which could have a humanising effect. Cultural, ethnic and racial differences were not points of focus in *Guardian Aus's* coverage, which could minimise frames of asylum seekers as threatening national identity and instead position them as victims.

These findings show how the selection of sources and structure of news reportage can restrict the information readers have to draw upon when making sense of reportage. *The Australian's* emphasis on the cultural 'Other' may lead readers to object to asylum seekers and could increase support for offshore processing policies based on perceived differences between asylum seekers and Australians. By comparison, *Guardian Aus's* humanisation of asylum seekers and framing of asylum seekers as victims may evoke reader sympathy toward asylum seekers and encourage challenges to Australian government policy based on humanitarian grounds.

Asylum seekers as a threat to State sovereignty

State sovereignty concerns the power of the State to do what is necessary to self-govern, such as make laws encompassing citizens, groups and institutions (Heywood, 2007). Notions that asylum seekers are a threat to State sovereignty primarily emphasise asylum seekers, especially those arriving by boat, as threatening borders via invasion (Babacan & Babacan, 2008; Every & Augustinos, 2008a; Price, 2014; Rowe & O'Brien, 2013). Vas Dev (2009) argues that notions of asylum seekers threatening sovereignty have been a fundamental premise of Australia's immigration policy. This can be demonstrated by the way offshore processing policy is described on the Australian government's Customs and Border Protection Service website as a 'military-led border se-

curity initiative to stop the boats' (Australian Customs and Border Protection Service, 2014, n.p). By coupling the military and border protection, asylum seekers are positioned as threatening sovereignty and warranting military intervention.

Similar to the framing of asylum seekers as threatening national identity, the selection of sources and structure of reportage was crucial in conveying a publication's framing. *The Australian* predominantly framed asylum seekers as threatening State sovereignty, whereas *Guardian Aus* countered this, positioning asylum seekers as victims. The Department of Immigration and Border Protection's media ban was found to be most influential regarding framing of asylum seekers as a threat to State sovereignty, particularly with regard to reportage in *Guardian Aus*.

The Australian

Throughout reportage on the riot, *The Australian* presented asylum seekers as instigating the event. This was achieved primarily through the structuring of reportage, which positioned asylum seekers as actively instigating the violence. For example, *The Australian's* coverage of the riot describes asylum seekers as breaking down fences and damaging the centre, making weapons from everyday objects, and insulting and fighting with security guards. Alternate accounts of the riot, which argued that Manus locals and Papua New Guinean police played a role in escalating violence, were diminished by their positioning toward the end of articles, and a rejection of such claims by official sources. As McQuail (1994) outlines, sources such as government officials have more power and credibility when quoted in the media because of their status. Through positioning asylum seekers as being at fault for the riot, they can be framed as having a violent nature. Offshore processing policy may, therefore, be justified as preventing this threat to sovereignty from materialising. Pickering (2001) also notes this, arguing that representations of asylum seekers as threatening national security contribute to the invocation and validation of repressive State policies.

Structural opposition was also used in *The Australian* to convey asylum seekers as inherently violent and dangerous. An example of this can be found in an article published on February 20, where Manus MP Ron Knight states:

> The insinuation that Manus is a lawless society of machete wielding cannibals is insulting and not worth trying to defend.
> Manus has the reputation of the friendliest place in PNG, with among the most compassionate people on earth. Our police reacted under PNG law to protect lives and property with reasonable force … (Callick, 2014a)

This use of structural opposition establishes a binary representation of the 'people

of Manus', who are presented as compassionate and friendly, and asylum seekers in the centre, who necessitated a response from law enforcement. This immediately presents a dichotomy in the values upheld by each group and potentially allows for asylum seekers to be framed as threatening State sovereignty by representing them as inherently violent, threatening law and order, and as incapable of behaving in a civilised manner.

Similarly, the use of war-like terms in *The Australian* can also construct asylum seekers as threatening sovereignty. *The Australian* often referred to asylum seeker policies as border protection policies, which can establish asylum seekers as threatening State sovereignty through invasion. Additionally, minister Morrison, in an article published on February 18, refers to the Australian government's 'absolute resolve' to stick to its policy in the face of asylum seekers who wish to 'take down' asylum seeker policies and processing centres, and 'destroy the regime we have put in place' (Owens, 2014). By stating asylum seekers wish to stop current policy and 'destroy the regime', asylum seekers can be seen as opposed to the Australian government, which is standing up to threats to its laws. This can further establish difference in us/them binaries, and may lead to justifications of policy and tough measures on asylum seekers based on notions of threat. Pickering (2001) has drawn similar conclusions, noting a prominence of military terminology in her analysis of media discourses on asylum seekers and arguing that the use of war terms can be employed as a justification of violence by the established threatened party.

The Guardian Australia Edition

Guardian Aus framing of asylum seekers as a threat to State sovereignty changes over the course of its reportage. When the riot was first reported on February 17, asylum seekers were described as 'agitated', 'chanting', and as having 'damaged light stands, glass panels, fences and bunk beds' (Davidson & Cordell, 2014). In a similar way to *The Australian*, this framing can establish asylum seekers as threatening State sovereignty by depicting them as potentially violent, capable of wilful damage to property, and behaving in a manner that would be unacceptable in Australia. Klocker and Dunn (2003) drew similar conclusions in their content analysis of asylum seeker discourses in the post September 11 and Tampa Incident period, finding that descriptions of asylum seekers using weapons frame them as inherently bad in character and behaviour, and as a physical and cultural threat. While this framing of asylum seekers is evident when *Guardian Aus* first published news of the riot, its framing of asylum seekers changed as coverage developed. *Guardian Aus* altered its framing of asylum seekers, prioritising information of asylum seekers injured in the riot over framing of asylum seekers as threatening, and using sources who described the riot in a manner that humanised asylum seekers, placing other sources,

including minister Morrison, in a responding position down lower in articles.

An example of the change in *Guardian Aus's* coverage of the riot can be found in an article published on February 18, which detailed claims by 'sources inside the centre', that:

> PNG police and locals were the ones who breached fences, coming inside the compound and attacking asylum seekers. They were armed with machetes, pipes, stones and at least one firearm (Davidson, 2014a).

Following this description of the events leading up to the riot, it is detailed that minister Morrison rejected the reports, saying that there had been a 'rolling series of protests orchestrated by people within the centre' (Davidson, 2014a). Positioning accounts of the riot by unnamed sources above government sources could be seen to limit the Australian Government's power over the discourse. Descriptions of the weapons used by PNG police and locals established them as the aggressors and initiators of the attack that preceded the riot. *Guardian Aus's* transition toward a more sympathetic coverage of asylum seekers may lead readers to be sceptical of accounts of the riot framing asylum seekers as threatening State sovereignty. Readers may see asylum seekers as victims due to *Guardian Aus's* structure of reportage and prioritisation of sources.

In a manner similar to *The Australian*, structural opposition was present in reportage on the riot by *Guardian Aus*. However, it was employed in a different way. In an article published on February 20, for example, Manus MP Ron Knight described the riot being caused by a 'continually aggressive' minority of asylum seekers who were only stopped by PNG mobile police units (Davidson, 2014b). Knight's description of asylum seekers could establish a divide between asylum seekers and PNG police, and frame them as a threat to State sovereignty by referring to them as violent, and needing to be stopped by police. However, this depiction of asylum seekers is structurally opposed within the article by including a description of the mobile police unit by alternate sources as 'thuggish parliamentary type forces, allegedly responsible for beatings, rapes and murders over decades' (Davidson, 2014b). Structurally opposing descriptions of asylum seekers as threatening with claims against the mobile police unit can delegitimise the threatening framing of asylum seekers and reframe them as victims of violence rather than the instigators of rioting.

Comparison of results

In *The Australian*, asylum seekers were structurally represented as at fault for the riot. They were described as an inherently violent 'Other', and the events of the riot were discussed through the use of terminology commonly associated with the discourse of war. This framing can be viewed as positioning

asylum seekers as threatening State sovereignty by emphasising characteristics eschewing violence, difference and lawlessness that are not tolerated in Western societies. Due to these frames, readers may see asylum seekers as posing a threat to State sovereignty and justify offshore processing policy as stopping the violent and illegal 'Other' entering the country. *Guardian Aus*, on the other hand, contrasted notions of asylum seekers as threatening sovereignty through its descriptions of asylum seekers, structure of articles and selection of sources. Structural opposition lessened the impact of threatening frames of asylum seekers by sources such as the Australian Government, and implicated the Australian Government as having some level of responsibility for the riot. The contrast between the representation of asylum seekers by Government sources and *Guardian Aus* shows the potential influence the Department of Immigration and Border Protection media ban has over the way asylum seekers can be represented. Due to the less threatening framing of asylum seekers in *Guardian Aus*, readers may be more likely to sympathise with asylum seekers on a humanitarian level and be sceptical of justifications of offshore processing policy based on notions of asylum seekers threatening State sovereignty.

Asylum seekers as victim

The establishment of us/them binaries in *The Australian* and *Guardian Aus* framing of asylum seekers necessarily creates a victim and an 'Other', but each publication approached the notion of the victim differently. Reportage on the riot by *The Australian* depicted a binary where threatening asylum seekers are positioned against the victimised Australian public, a binary that has been noted in other research (Babacan, 2008; Pickering, 2001). However, as the research analysis has revealed, *Guardian Aus* typically challenged notions of threat by framing asylum seekers as victims, embodying a binary noted by McKay, Thomas and Blood (2011) and Price (2014), where asylum seekers are presented as a threat, victim, or both.

The Australian

As previous sections have noted, *The Australian* largely depicted asylum seekers as threatening and violent 'Others' in its reportage on the riot on Manus Island. This was mainly achieved through source selection and story structure. Notions of threat featured heavily in the framing of asylum seekers by officials from the PNG and Australian governments. Government officials gave the first account of the violence in 21 of the 31 news articles in *The Australian's* coverage of the riot (the seven remaining articles were opinion pieces and did not contain sources). Alternate sources that framed asylum seekers as victims, such as those from the Refugee Action Coalition or UN Human Rights Commission, featured in the first half of two articles and were omitted entirely from 11.

The Australian, did, however, depict asylum seekers as victims at sea, by quantifying the results of offshore processing policy. *The Australian* noted an absence of asylum seeker boat arrivals, a drop in asylum applications in Indonesia, and fewer asylum seekers in Indonesian refugee camps as successes of policy, because asylum seekers were no longer risking their lives to come to Australia. Furthermore, offshore processing policy was framed as humanitarian because it stops asylum seekers endangering themselves by boarding 'rickety boats' in an attempt to get to Australia (Callick, 2014b). An opinion piece published on February 26 also contained this quantification. It compared the number of asylum seekers who arrived by boat during the previous Labor government (50,000 on 800 boats) and the lives lost in the process (1200), to the one life lost in the riot (Albrechtsen, 2014). By comparing the number of lives lost at sea to those lost in the riot, asylum seekers were framed as victims at sea under the former Labor government.

The Australian's framing of asylum seekers as victims at sea may influence readers' opinions on asylum seekers and asylum seeker policy. Readers could consider offshore processing policy as the most appropriate method to process asylum seekers as it stops them putting themselves in danger by boarding boats, whilst simultaneously stopping the threat asylum seekers pose to State sovereignty and national identity.

The Guardian Australia Edition

As noted previously, *Guardian Aus* largely framed asylum seekers as victims, especially in countering notions of threat. *Guardian Aus's* source selection and article structure played a large role in conveying this framing. Accounts of the riot by refugee advocates were most often positioned above government sources, which can give them more power over the discourse. Descriptions of the riot by refugee advocates focused on the injuries sustained by asylum seekers, and positioned asylum seekers as attempting to avoid confrontation by hiding from PNG police and Manus locals who were wielding weapons. One asylum seeker is quoted in an article, saying:

> 'We tried to hide under the containers, but they dragged us out and beat us. We couldn't get away.' (Laughland, 2014a)

An article published on February 21 contained humanised descriptions of Reza Barati, the asylum seeker killed in the riot. In the article, Barati is described as a 'joker' and 'gentle giant', whom centre staff were teaching English to by reading children's books (Laughland, 2014b). This framing infers child-like qualities on Barati by referring to children's books. It also counters socio-political stereotypes surrounding cultural values by depicting Barati as eager to learn English. The framing of asylum seekers achieved through *Guardian*

*Aus'*s structuring and selection of sources may lead readers to sympathise with asylum seekers and their circumstances; it may also influence readers to see asylum seekers as victims of violence by humanising their actions during the riot and shift notions of threat onto Papua New Guinean police or Manus locals.

Guardian Aus framed asylum seekers as the victims of offshore processing policy. In opinion pieces, offshore processing policy is referred to as a policy of deterrence, where the injuries and death that took place in the riot add to the mentality of the policy. An opinion piece published on February 18 referred to the policy as a 'nasty little comic book' funded by the Australian government, and intended to 'deter those seeking asylum from making the journey to Australia' (Sparrow, 2014). Offshore processing policy was similarly framed in news articles, particularly in an article published on February 26, which detailed whistle-blower accounts of rioting. In the article, a whistleblower stated that Manus Island was 'designed as an experiment in the active creation of horror to secure deterrence' (Farrell, 2014), and stated that the death of Reza Barati provides an opportunity for this logic to be extended. This description of offshore processing policy framed asylum seekers as victims, by inferring that the policy capitalises on uncertainty and violence, and that Reza Barati's death strengthens this mentality. *Guardian Aus'*s framing of asylum seekers as victims largely adopted a position emphasising Australia's collective duty to assist asylum seekers by stopping offshore processing. Every (2008) notes that this element has been lacking in media coverage of asylum seekers, indicating that *Guardian Aus* could add a new element to the discourse on asylum seekers in Australia's media landscape.

Comparison of results

The Australian and *Guardian Aus* had contrasting frames of 'the victim' in their coverage of the riot. *The Australian* largely represented the Australian people, government, and government processes as victims of asylum seeker violence. *The Australian* did, however, frame asylum seekers as victims at sea, which allowed for the image of the threatening asylum seeker to be maintained, whilst presenting Australia as both humanitarian and protecting its borders from threat. The framing of 'the victim' in *The Australian* may influence readers' opinions on asylum seekers by making the frame of the threatening asylum seeker dominant. *Guardian Aus*, on the other hand, predominantly portrayed asylum seekers as victims of a violent 'Other', such as PNG mobile police units, Manus locals and security staff at the processing centre. *Guardian Aus* conveyed this framing through its selection of sources and structure of articles, which minimised accounts of the riot by government officials who largely framed asylum seekers as threatening. The prominence of accounts by alternative sources humanised asylum seekers and placed accountability for the violence onto Australian policy.

This framing may encourage readers to view asylum seekers as victims of local violence and policy.

Conclusion

The continued presence of asylum seekers, and ongoing controversy over asylum seeker policy in the Australian media, make an understanding of the media's role in informing readers' constructions of asylum seekers critical. Data analysis of media coverage in *The Australian* and *Guardian Aus* regarding the riot on Manus Island in February 2014 discovered three main discourses: asylum seekers as a threat to national identity; asylum seekers as a threat to State sovereignty; and, asylum seekers as victim. The findings presented in this analysis demonstrate how the selection of sources, structuring of information and use of descriptions can minimise or emphasise certain elements of a discourse. Thus, the selection of sources and structure of news reportage by each publication can affect the framing of asylum seekers and may lead readers to view asylum seekers in a certain way.

Analysis found the framing of asylum seekers as a threat to national identity and State sovereignty more prominent in *The Australian* than *Guardian Aus*. *The Australian*'s use of sources, binary opposition and lexical choices largely represented asylum seekers as inherently violent or criminal, opposing the Australian government or Australian values. *The Australian* also focused more on cultural differences, inferring socio-political stereotypes, and representing asylum seekers as 'the Other'. Framing of asylum seekers as victims was largely absent from reportage. Readers may be influenced by this framing to perceive asylum seekers as threats, and offshore processing policy as the best approach to stop threatening asylum seekers entering Australia.

By comparison, *Guardian Aus*'s reportage largely contrasted that of *The Australian*. Cultural difference and socio-political stereotypes were not discovered in *Guardian Aus,* with asylum seekers depicted through what Every (2008) terms a humanitarian frame—presenting asylum seekers as victims rather than emphasising threats to national identity and sovereignty. It should also be noted that the *Guardian Aus*'s approach to framing asylum seekers was not noted in the literature examined as part of the research, indicating that *Guardian Aus* may add a new element to the media discourse on asylum seekers in Australia.

However, the analysis also found that a media ban maintained by the Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection denying journalists access to offshore processing centres was influential in reporting. This was evidenced by the prominence of government officials in reportage, despite the different framing of asylum seekers by each publication, which indicates that the Australian government still maintains some level of influence over the way asylum seekers may be framed in the media.

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