The Media and Migration in the United Kingdom, 1999 to 2009

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About the Transatlantic Council on Migration

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I.   Executive Summary

The print and broadcast media in the United Kingdom cover only a very narrow range of migration stories, primarily focusing on asylum seekers, refugees, illegal immigrants, and migrant workers. The media use a "template" to frame stories about migration. These frames generally conflate all migration with asylum, make the migrant the victim and the object and show migration as a problem. There is a focus on numbers and statistics (particularly on figures that imply a burden on scarce public resources), on political debates on immigration and on language that evokes the theme of "invasion." Stories on immigration are often unconsciously collocated in the news with reports of "foreign threats" (for instance, war, drugs, crime, or terrorism) — implying a connection between the two.

The media contributes to a perception that immigration is in perpetual crisis, which influences policy monitoring and reform. There is a symbiosis between media and policy: politicians, media, and academics provide the language for talking about immigration and thus set the agenda and frame the stories. A certain policy focus is transmitted from government to media. The stories that the media then produce feed back into policy discourse. In addition to driving policy, "media panics" also influence academic research on media coverage of migration. The result has been research that centers on print coverage of asylum seekers and refugees rather than on research across various media that provides a more comprehensive view of migration coverage in the United Kingdom. Funding for media research even increases during periods of crisis. This in turn gives rise to further policy changes, thus feeding a cycle.

II.   Introduction

There is some evidence — from advocates, politicians, researchers, and journalists themselves — that the media are active agents in developing immigration policy. In addition, a small but growing body of evidence shows that political and policy discourses concerning immigration actually fuel the media discourse, which in turn drives policy.[1] The media[2] are often labeled as responsible for both hostile public attitudes toward migrants and as key players in the United Kingdom's development of more restrictive immigration policies.

Over the last decade, the United Kingdom has seen substantial net immigration from a more diverse set of origins.[3] Between 1997 and 2006, 4.89 million people came to the United Kingdom and 3.27 million left, resulting in a net gain of 1.62 million. This is in contrast to the decades following World

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[1] Increases in the number of immigrants since the early 1990s have prompted an increase in media coverage. This has produced an increase in government statements on the subject. Many of these statements, which journalists have quoted in writing about immigration, have been "negative in tone and content and have served only to exacerbate public anxiety." Heaven Crawley, *Understanding and Changing Public Attitudes* (Swansea: Centre for Migration and Policy Research, Swansea University, 2008).

[2] In this paper, the media includes print and television with some reference to radio. The research that has been done in the period discussed here has focused on the print media with some work on television and hardly any on radio or online media.

[3] Anne E. Green, David Owen, and Duncan Adam, *A Resource Guide on Local Migration Statistics* (Coventry: Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick, 2008), vi.

War II when there was a consistent and substantial net emigration.[4] Certainly some segments of the public perceive immigrants negatively,[5] and some UK policies restrict specific immigration streams. However, the issue that has received the most national media attention and been most thoroughly researched from 1999 to 2009 is asylum migration, which represents only "a small subset of overall immigration."[6] Kyambi analyzed immigration statistics dating from 1983 to 2003 in four main immigration categories: work, family, asylum, and study. Students were the largest category, with more than the other three categories combined (319,000 in 2003), followed by work permits and family. The number of asylum applications peaked in 2002 at about 84,000 and then fell off sharply to become the smallest category of entry in 2003, with just 50,000 applicants.[7]

Yet, the media have covered asylum and refugees using a template or frame, that invokes "floods," "invasion," "criminality," and government loss of control. The same negative frames have come to collocate with "terrorism" in migration stories in the wake of the July 7, 2005, London transit bombings. Both the media and the research focus have tended to be on media coverage of asylum during this period and researchers have not investigated as deeply the coverage of other major immigration developments, such as the movement of hundreds of thousands of workers from Poland and other Eastern European countries that joined the European Union (EU) in May 2004.

This paper examines the United Kingdom's national media landscape, including structural changes that affect news production generally, the migration stories the media cover and how they cover it, the media's influence on immigration policy, and the extent to which its coverage mediates public understanding of immigration. It concludes with an assessment of why the research is limited, the consequences of its limitations and what future research should focus on to produce a truly broad understanding of the relationship between the British media and migration policy.

III.   The UK Media and Migration Reporting

Main Players, Media Consumption and the Setting of the Media Agenda

The British media scene is a complex one at both national and regional levels. The national print media is regularly described in binary terms as consisting of both "quality broadsheets" and "tabloids," originally referring to their respective formats[8] and to the "seriousness" of the former and the "populism" and "sensationalism" of the latter. Traditionally, these labels have also been correlated with left- and right-wing editorial politics, although these characterizations are no longer entirely accurate with tabloids: the *Mirror* and the *Sun* often express views that are diametrically opposed to others like the *Mail* and the *Express*. The broadsheet, the *Telegraph*, leans to the right politically but is nowhere near as conservative as the *Mail* or *Express*. Total newspaper circulation in

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[4] Stephen Glover, Ceri Gott, Anaïs Lozillon, Jonathan Portes, Richard Price, Sarah Spencer, Vasanthi Sinivasan, and Carole Willis, "Migration: An Economic and Social Analysis" (occasional paper no. 67, Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, United Kingdom Home Office, 2001), 8.
[5] Ben Page, "British Attitudes to Immigration in the 21st Century" (working paper, Transatlantic Council on Migration, Bellagio, Italy, May 4-9, 2009).
[6] Sarah Kyambi, *Beyond Black and White: Mapping New Immigrant Communities* (London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 2005).
[7] Ibid., 13.
[8] A number of the broadsheets have now taken on a tabloid format (e.g. the *Guardian* and the *Independent*), so that the term broadsheet is no longer accurate.

the United Kingdom fell by about 25 percent from 1962 to 2002.[9] Four of the tabloids, the *Express* (778,523), the *Mail* (2,227,729), the *Mirror* (1,603,047), the *Sun* (3,115,705) and the broadsheet the *Telegraph* (862,958) maintain the highest circulations.[10] Each is published six days a week and their Sunday versions have similar circulations. The major broadsheet papers have much lower circulations: the *Guardian* (316,585), the *Observer* (Sunday only – 392,916), the *Independent* (217,841), the *Independent on Sunday* (217,841), and the *Times* (559,447). The *Sunday Times* has a circulation of 1,159,200.[11] Circulation figures for local and regional papers vary from 60,000 to 148,000.[12] For example, the *South Wales Echo* has a circulation of 59,000 and the *Glasgow Evening Times* has 92,000. But the *Sunday Mail*, which produces a Scottish edition, has a circulation of 596,000 in Scotland, a typical indication of the considerable influence of the national press.

Loss in audience goes beyond newspapers to television news, which saw its audience decrease 10 percent between 1994 and 2002 although 91 percent of people surveyed said they found television a useful source of news.[13] "It is also the only news medium presently capable of reaching across the whole of British society."[14] Yet fewer people are watching the traditional broadcasters. The UK Broadcasters' Audience Research Board Ltd shows that in 2008, BBC1 and BBC2 accounted for 29.6 percent of all viewers; ITV, the country's largest commercial broadcaster, had 18.4 percent. In contrast, satellite and cable channels together had 38.8 percent of the audience, nearly double the share they had in 2001.[15]

In relation to migration coverage, only television news on the major UK channels and some 24-hour news have actually been researched. The production of new forms of "interactive" news has come a long way since 2002, but there has been very little research to date on its coverage of migration, its readership or its effects on public opinion.

There has been a debate for some time about the tabloidization of the television news agenda, with claims that the television news agenda was too close to that of the tabloid press and that public service broadcasting should be closer to the broadsheet agenda. Hargreaves and Thomas compared headlines from the tabloid and broadsheet press with the television news and found no great evidence of "tabloidization" in terms of the genres of stories covered.[16]

However, where migration coverage is concerned, the research in the 1999-2009 period tends to show a very close correlation between all of the major newspapers and the television news agenda in terms of the stories covered. Gross et. al (2008) found in interviews with journalists that this was due to several factors: the need to maintain circulation and audience share in an increasingly complex economic situation, the practice whereby television news teams regularly read the major

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[9] Ian Hargreaves and James Thomas, *New News, Old News: An ITC and BSC Research Publication* (London, Independent Television Commission, 2002), 10-11.
[10] Kate Smart, Roger Grimshaw, Christopher McDowell, and Beth Crosland, *Reporting Asylum: The UK Press and the Effectiveness of PCC Guidelines* (London: Information Center about Asylum and Refugees in the UK, City University, 2007), 47.
[11] Ibid., 47-48.
[12] Ibid., 48-49.
[13] Hargreaves and Thomas, *New News, Old News*.
[14] Ibid., 20.
[15] Broadcasters' Audience Research Board Ltd, "Annual % Shares of Viewing (Individuals) 1981-2008," http://www.barb.co.uk/facts/annualShareOfViewing?_s=4.
[16] Hargreaves and Thomas, *New News, Old News,* 89.

national print media in preparing and defining the day's news agenda and anxiety about "what the public want" based on the new technologies of interactivity, polling, and surveys within the industry itself.[17] One senior public service television news editor is quoted in Gross et al (2008) as saying he believed the *Mail* and the *Express* had got the immigration story right and that the public service broadcasters had been "too liberal" for the public. This is a different version of "tabloidization" but a very important one.

To understand British media coverage of migration, one must understand the relationship between media corporations and government and between journalists and their political sources. The policy focus is transmitted to news workers and the stories media organizations produce (with that focus in mind) feed back into policy discourse. Understanding the professional and newsroom cultures in which journalists work — and the commercial, ratings, and marketing cultures that influence them — is a complicated proposition. Given the focus among journalists on holding the government to its targets and stated policy agendas, journalists are dependent on briefings, press releases, and "issues" whose origins are typically the Home Office, political parties, and similarly recognized institutions in this "debate."

The migration story, constructed in these contexts, is both very old and very stable. It is common to the major political parties, the press, broadcasters, and pro- and anti-immigration groups alike.[18] It circulates and finds its way into the media coverage of the issues as part of the normal processes that characterize the industry. This is rarely recognized in recent research on asylum coverage, which tends to focus on the role of journalists alone without exploring or understanding the professional practices that constrain them.[19]

Industry Changes

There have been huge changes in the media industry in the United Kingdom (and globally) over the past ten years that have profoundly affected reporting on migration. Three of these are key to understanding the UK context and each reinforces the other.

First, the Internet and the possibilities of interactive media have changed the structure of the newsroom and caused a "convergence" of formerly disparate branches of media that are now interdependent and that often take place in the same physical space.[20] The process of news-making is now, more than ever, a collaborative process. While journalists often come across as the sole authors of a news item (and are often targeted as the source of "negative" coverage of migration), Gross et al. (2008), in line with other major research in the field, found that a number of other people and the

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[17] Huw Edwards, "Who's Watching the News? A New Relationship with the Audience" (lecture, University of Cardiff, January 25, 2007).

[18] Teun van Dijk, "Semantics of a Press Panic: The Tamil 'Invasion,'" *European Journal of Communication* 3 (1988): 66; Jan Blommaert and Jef Verschueren, *Debating Diversity: Analyzing the Discourse of Tolerance* (London / New York: Routledge, 1998).

[19] An important exception is the D'Onofrio and Munk ICAR report of 2004 that offers a rare argument that national policy must *evaluate* the official political language of immigration affairs. See Lisa D'Onofrio and Karen Munk, *Understanding the Stranger Final Report* (London: Information Centre About Asylum and Refugees, 2004).

[20] Jane B. Singer, "Strange Bedfellows? The Diffusion of Convergence in Four News Organizations" *Journalism Studies* 6, (February 2004): 3-18.

institutional practices and structures of the production process always have a substantial influence on the final output.[21]

Second, the economic difficulties facing the media industry have influenced both the quality and content of reporting. The past ten years have seen major losses in newspaper readership and the closing or downsizing of regional and local newspapers.

Cost-cutting measures have resulted in an increased workload for print journalists, who must deliver more than double the number of stories per day as they were expected to produce in the past.[22] Also, journalists are ambivalently positioned by the commercial contexts in which they work, where maintaining audiences is a serious economic issue. Commercial competition, which mostly affects the London press as opposed to local networks, is also responsible for promoting the "sameness" among migration stories and the narrowness of the national news agenda.

The third factor is the influence of public relations on journalism. Every NGO, charity, community, public- and private-sector organization, and government office has a public affairs office sending press releases and sometimes ready-made video packages to newsrooms. Some materials carry more weight than others. Factors in their usage include time pressures, the contextual rhythms and cycles of news (i.e., what is on the news agenda this week and what is not), and professional factors such as the perception of news value or issues of impartiality.

Given the focus among journalists on holding the government to its targets and stated policy agendas, journalists are dependent on materials released from the institutions involved in the migration debate. Anxious about seeming biased, journalists sometimes overcompensate for seemingly favoring one position — in the case of migration, a "too-soft" approach to the UK asylum system — by citing sources from the other side of the debate to achieve "balance" in their reporting. The whole idea of balance in these contexts is lopsided; there are rarely two sides to any story and two negative sides do not add up to balance.

Other Factors

The UK media has arguably not engaged with the country's ethnic minorities, which can also explain the nature of British reporting of migration in the past ten years. Cottle called this situation "exclusion."[23] He sees it as ranging from the industry's employment and recruitment strategies to "deep-seated news values" to forms of representation. A more "inclusive" and truly diverse UK media may help change or shift media discourses on migration, a conclusion emerging from more recent academic research.[24]

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[21] Bernhard Gross, Kerry Moore, and Terry Threadgold, *Broadcast News Coverage of Asylum April to October 2006: Caught Between Human Rights and Public Safety* (Cardiff: Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, 2008).

[22] Justin Lewis, Bob Franklin, James Thomas, Andrew Williams, and Nick Mosdell, *The Quality and Independence of British Journalism. Cardiff, Cardiff School of Journalism* (Cardiff: Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, 2008).

[23] Simon Cottle, *Ethnic Minorities and the Media: Changing Cultural Boundaries (Issues in Cultural & Media Studies)* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000), 23.

[24] Ibid.

In the most recent study of the journalism profession in the United Kingdom, Hargreaves found that some 96 percent of journalists were white, with small proportions from ethnic minority groups.[25] Given the predominance of the media industry in London, the South East of the country and in other urban areas, this suggests that the industry has not succeeded in reflecting the balance of the populations it serves. The study also found that new entrants to the industry overwhelmingly came from families headed by individuals working in the professional or other high-level, middle-class occupations. Only 3 percent came from families headed by someone in a semi-skilled or unskilled job. This data confirms the suspicion that journalism is increasingly becoming middle and upper class in its composition.

The class and ethnic makeup of the media industry are underresearched in the media coverage of migration. Yet, as a recent report for Channel 4 by **Commission for Equality and Human Rights Chairman** Trevor Phillips sets out, the lack of diversity behind the scenes is crucial to programming and coverage.[26]

IV.   Research Overview

Before looking at the media coverage, it is important to note that most of the research has focused on the print media, usually on a combination of tabloid and broadsheet newspapers.[27] Driving the focus on the print media seems to be two related perceptions. First, the most "negative" and sensationalist coverage was most likely in the tabloid press, which has high circulation figures. Second, more "positive" and/or "good practice" coverage might be found in the broadsheets. The aim of this focus has always been to change media practice by challenging "media myths" and offering alternative ways of telling the story of migration. It is more expensive to monitor and research television coverage, but it also seems that researchers believed public service broadcasting would not need investigating as much as the tabloid press.

The funding of research on media coverage has followed crises, for example, in relation to increased community tensions arising from media-driven panics about migration. These may in turn have been

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[25] Ian Hargreaves, *Journalists at Work: Their Views on Training, Recruitment and Conditions* (London: Journalism Training Forum, 2002), 8.

[26] Trevor Phillips, *Superdiversity: Television's Newest Reality* (Channel 4: London, 2008), http://www.channel4.com/about4/pdf/superdiversity-trevor-philips.pdf.

[27] There also has been some work on the local press in various contexts; see Nissa Finney, *The Challenge of Reporting Refugees and Asylum Seekers: ICAR Report on Regional Media Events Organized by the Presswise Refugees, Asylum Seekers and the Media (RAM) Project* (Bristol / London: Information Centre About Asylum and Refugees and Presswise, 2003) and Tammy Speers, *Welcome or Overreaction? Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the Welsh Media* (Cardiff: Wales Media Forum, 2001). There also has been some work on the black press in London. The Glasgow Media Group – see Greg Philo, ed., *Message Received* (Edinburgh: Addison Wesley Longman, 1999) – and two more recent studies – see Sara Buchanan, Bethan Grillo, Terry Threadgold, *What's the story? Results from Research into Media Coverage of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK* (London: Article 19, 2003) and Gross et al., *Broadcast News Coverage of Asylum* – have focused on television news. None of the research has focused on radio or Internet coverage of migration, although this is sometimes referred to in passing or as background and context in larger reports – see Gross et al., *Broadcast News Coverage of Asylum*. There are two studies that include minority ethnic/faith newspapers; see Kate Smart, Roger Grimshaw, Christopher McDowell, and Beth Crosland, *Reflecting Asylum in London's Communities: Monitoring London's Press Coverage of Refugees and Asylum Seekers: An Analysis of Press Reporting January-February 2005* (London: Information Center about Asylum and Refugees in the UK, 2005).

prompted by policy changes and, as we have seen above, then give rise to further policy changes — and so the cycle continues

The research itself has often been funded by British nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) like MediaWise, Oxfam, the Institute for Public Policy Research, and Article 19 or by government funders like the Lord Mayor of London and the Home Office. This kind of research has produced findings in line with those of academic research and has often been carried out in partnership with academics.

V.　Media Coverage of Immigration from 1999 to 2009

Which Immigration Stories Make the News?

Thirty years ago, the main migration stories revolved around the threat of nonwhite immigration from Britain's former colonies in the Caribbean, South Asia, and East Africa.[28] Research has shown that British media (both print and broadcast) in the last decade have covered only a very narrow range of migration stories. The topics tend to be *asylum seekers, refugees, illegal immigrants*, and, more recently, *migrant workers.* Driving these stories are changes in government policy, the failure of government policy, crises at the Home Office, or simply the monthly or quarterly release of Home Office statistics on asylum. This section looks very briefly at some of the key events or issues that have prompted peaks of asylum or migration coverage during this period.

Immigration to Britain has of course been constant, if varied, since World War II. During the 1980s, there appears to be no significant research activity on asylum and media coverage, suggesting that asylum coverage was not an issue.[29] Like the earlier postcolonial migrants, refugees and asylum seekers became highly politicized and remain so today. The main reason for the politicization of asylum migration was the government's decision in 1999 to disperse asylum seekers to communities across the country so that the London area would not have to bear too much of the burden. As a result, the issue became local, not just national and both local and national media became increasingly interested in reporting on refugees and asylum seekers. In 2001 and again in 2005, *asylum, refugee, and immigration* issues were politicized around national elections.[30]

Philo and Beattie (1999), one of the few available studies of migration coverage prior to 1999, analyzed BBC, ITN, and Channel 4 (another public broadcaster) news coverage in 1995 of Charles Wardle's resignation as trade minister over "the formation of a European Union without

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[28] Rob Berkeley, Omar Khan, and Mohan Ambikaipaker, *What's New about the New Immigrants in Twenty-first Century Britain?* (York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2006), http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/9781859354469.pdf.

[29] For 1979 to 1987, there are no figures available for the number of people allowed to enter the United Kingdom as asylum seekers; Kyambi, *Beyond Black and White*, 13. However, the United Kingdom did report the number of asylum applications received in this time period. They range from 2,352 in 1980 to 4,389 in 1985 – well below the numbers other European countries (e.g., France, Germany, and Sweden), received in the early to mid-1980s; see UNHCR Statistical Online Population Database, "Applied for asylum in the United Kingdom, 1980 to 2007." http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a013eb06.html.

[30] Speers, *Welcome or Over Reaction?*

frontiers."[31] Wardle saw the European Union as "giving away Britain's right to keep out illegal immigrants."[32] The researchers argue very convincingly that ministers used the resulting context, in which asylum seekers were seen as a threat, to push through the 1995 immigration bill as a tough response.[33] McLaughlin (1999) explored the media coverage of migration around the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, pointing out that right up to the time the Wall opened, the migration was reported "in biblical terms as an 'exodus' of people out of 'political prison.'"[34] But as soon as the Wall opened, migrants became "an embarrassment," "a crisis," and "refugees."[35]

Various events in the years between 2000 and 2009 produced similar peaks of intense media activity in the otherwise regular pattern of *asylum* coverage, especially, but not exclusively, in the tabloid press. These events and issues include, but are not limited to, the death of smuggled Chinese immigrants in a truck at Dover (2000); the closure of the Sangatte refugee camp in nearby Calais, Eurotunnel-bound trains and trucks (2002-2003); the death of the Chinese cockle pickers at Morecambe Bay (2004); the enlargement of the European Union, and increased numbers of migrant workers from the new EU Member States (2004-2007); "crises" at the Home Office around constant changes in Home Secretary and policy and perceived "lack of control" (2002, 2004, 2006); the regular publication throughout the period of Home Office or MigrationWatch UK statistics; and the publication of successive Ipsos Mori poll results on attitudes toward migration.

Asylum and *immigration*, this time in combination with *terrorism* and *Islam*, became more prominent in the UK print and broadcast media leading up to the Iraq war in 2003 and at the time of the London transit bombings on July 7, 2005 and the attempted bombings two weeks later. Print and broadcast media again focused heavily on asylum and terrorism stories in July 2007, when a jury failed to reach a verdict in the trial of three British citizens accused of helping to plan the July 7 bombings.

With the EU enlargement of 2004, the United Kingdom experienced an increase in migration from the new accession countries, particularly from Eastern Europe. The economic and labor impacts of these migrant workers have been a key policy concern and there has been a strategic interest "in monitoring changes over time in numbers, distribution, and characteristics of migrant workers."[36] There was considerable media interest in this migration, focused around the numbers who might come and the fact that the government could not control those numbers because of the "open frontiers" of the European Union. This was reminiscent of the coverage that Philo and Beattie analyzed in 1999. Research has not centered specifically on the coverage of migrant workers, but there has been research on the social and economic issues surrounding their arrival.[37]

Coverage of migration in regional and local print media in particular also tends to produce peaks of activity around particular events or activities. These are often prompted by local activism or partnerships involving coalitions with journalists and aiming to change public opinion about

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[31] Greg Philo and Liza Beattie, "Race, Migration and Media" in *Message Received*, ed. Greg Philo (Edinburgh: Addison Wesley Longman, 1999), 180.

[32] Ibid., 195.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Greg McLaughlin, "Refugees, Migrants and the Fall of the Berlin Wall" in *Message Received*, ed. Greg Philo (Edinburgh: Addison Wesley Longman, 1999), 197.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Green et al., *A Resource Guide on Local Migration Statistics*, 10; Kyambi, *Beyond Black and White*.

[37] Gross et al., *Broadcast News Coverage of Asylum*.

migration by supporting journalists to write "positive" stories, something that has rarely proved possible in the London-based media, print or broadcast.[38]

In one example of this kind of local media work, the Merthyr Tydfil (Wales) council public affairs department used the local press to communicate and lobby for support and understanding for newly arrived migrant workers and to support community cohesion. In February 2005, *The Western Mail* in South Wales covered the arrival of Portuguese and Polish workers in Merthyr Tydfil and Cardiff, but the story focused on the workers' willingness to learn English, their importance to the Welsh economy and the fact that they were doing jobs residents did not want (*Wales On Sunday* February 20, 2005). Later in the year, *The Western Mail* covered the exploitation of these same workers, the formation of a support group (The Migrant Workers Forum in Merthyr Tydfil) and the concern of the Valleys Race Equality Council at what was happening there (October 20, 2005 and October 27, 2005. There is a good deal of evidence that these kinds of coalitions, especially with local media,[39] function very effectively to produce more positive stories and to effect limited change in public attitudes toward migration. However, work on community cohesion in Merthyr after the Portuguese migrants arrived found often extreme prejudice and racism on housing estates and no sign that positive media coverage or the work of these promigrant groups was having any effect.[40]

How Do the Media Report on Migration?

Research has consistently identified a certain narrative structure and a range of linguistic and visual characteristics that are typical of the media discourse about migration. Interestingly, the discourse appears to be constant across print (both tabloid and broadsheet) and television (both public service and commercial) media and across time and space.[41] Media coverage has shifted its focus over the past 30 years from "nonwhite" Commonwealth immigration to "anxiety over asylum seekers and migration from the new member states of the European Union and elsewhere."[42] But while the "subjects of immigration debate have ostensibly changed," "much of the negative tone and

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[38] See Ibid.; Buchanan et al., *What's the Story?*

[39] See Finney, *The Challenge of Reporting Refugees and Asylum Seekers*.

[40] Terry Threadgold, Sadie Clifford, Abdi Arwo, Vanessa Powell, Zahera Harb, Xinyi Jiang, and John Jewell, *Immigration and Inclusion in South Wales* (Cardiff: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Cardiff University, 2008).

[41] Holmes reports similar attitudes to different groups of immigrants in the United Kingdom from 1871 to 1971; see Colin Holmes, *John Bull's Island: Immigration and British Society 1871-1971* (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1988). Research on media coverage produces very similar findings, both in the past – see Threadgold et al., *Immigration and Inclusion in South Wales* – and across the globe: in various continental European countries, Australia, and New Zealand. See Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (Annandale: Pluto Press, 1988); Ghassan Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society* (London: Merlin, 2003); Jeff Crisp, "Who has Counted the refugees? UNHCR and the Politics of Numbers" (working paper no. 12, New Issues in Refugee Research, Geneva, Policy Research Unit, UNHCR, 1999; Sharon Pickering, "Common Sense and Original Deviancy: News Discourses and Asylum Seekers in Australia," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 14 (2001): 169-186; Leen d'Haenens and Marliëlle de Lange, "Framing of Asylum Seekers in Dutch Regional Newspapers," *Media, Culture and Society* 23 (2001): 847-859; Karina Horsti, "Global Mobility and the Media: Presenting Asylum Seekers as a Threat," *Nordicom Review: Nordic Research on Media and Communication* 24 (2003): 41-54; Ineke Van der Falk, "Right Wing Parliamentary Discourse on Immigration in France," *Discourse and Society* 14 (2003): 309-347; Nick Lynn and Susan Lea, "'A Phantom Menace and the New Apartheid': The Social Construction of Asylum-Seekers in the United Kingdom," *Discourse and Society* 14 (2003): 425-452; and Paul Statham, "Understanding Anti-Asylum Rhetoric: Restrictive Politics or Racist Publics?" in *The Politics of Migration: Managing Opportunity, Conflict and Change*, ed. Sarah Spencer (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

[42] Berkeley et al., *What's New about the New Immigrants*, 25.

frameworks of discussion have not."[43] Moreover, the debate is always framed in terms of immigration control, in the context of panics about numbers, crime, welfare state crises, and race or cultural difference. Berkeley et al. argue that the migration discourse, like racism, "does not disappear, but *resumes* in new forms and configurations."[44]

Most of the research in the past ten years also produces examples of good practice, usually defined as "positive" coverage. Sometimes, both "positive" and "negative" coverage can appear in the same print or broadcast context on the same day. However, the way the research has been funded and the research focus on asylum migration have tended to mean that none of the research has actually attempted to map or monitor *all* coverage of migration in a given period. This means it is almost impossible to estimate from the research just how much coverage has been negative or positive. A further complication is the difficulty of defining the terms positive/negative in the first place. "Accuracy" was adopted as a better term in the course of the past ten years, but no attempts were made to estimate how much accuracy or inaccuracy there actually was except in the sample analyzed.[45] Indeed, in general, researchers have focused more on inaccurate coverage. The journalistic pressures discussed above, the definition of news, and the relationship between journalists and political sources in London all have meant that only certain aspects of the whole migration story or indeed of the migration policy story, are actually ever covered. Thus, Kyambi's (2005) study of new immigrant communities created a rare moment when both print and broadcast media covered the story of *all* migration, even acknowledging that asylum migration was a very small element of the whole (*Daily Mirror*, September 8, 2005, p. 14).[46] It is worth quoting Smart et al. (ICAR 2006) from a study looking at only print media coverage of asylum:

> *The top six daily nationals accounted for one third of the articles found in the sample period – almost 500 articles in 12 weeks. It should be stressed that these papers are not a homogenous group and standards of reporting differ within the group of six, however, the results for the whole group show that poor practice in reporting asylum is concentrated in these most highly circulating papers. While our study of 50 diverse papers offers examples of informative, contextualized, and representative reporting, the impact of these is limited if they appear in papers with a relatively small readership. This is further reduced if more popular papers repeatedly present reports likely to perpetuate fear and hostility and unlikely to challenge stereotypes and misinformation.[47]*

In the ICAR study, just to give one example, 74 percent of the stories in the six national papers were national in focus and 80 percent about policy; 39 percent described policy as "out of control, untrustworthy, a failure," 15 percent used generalized terms like "hundreds, thousands" in articles that included statistics, 22 percent connected asylum with crime, and 11 percent linked asylum with "scarce resources" and negative impact on the economy; 16 percent used "bogus, fraudulent, false," and 14 percent referred to the British people as "concerned/angry/alarmed" about migration.[48] These terms are considered among the most common and typical of the asylum migration discourse.

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., 28.

[45] See Smart et al., *Reflecting Asylum*; Smart et al., *Reporting Asylum*.

[46] No research I am familiar with has looked at this moment. I kept the *Mirror* story, annotating it at the time with information that television covered this as well. Kyambi, *Beyond Black and White*.

[47] Smart et al., *Reflecting Asylum*, 38.

[48] It is important to note here that these statistics relate to media coverage following an extensive campaign to tighten up the Press Complaints Commission guidelines on the reporting of asylum and in the only national print media study which has attempted to assess the effect of these guidelines. Ibid.

The findings from Buchanan et al. (2003), which reflect coverage a few years earlier, offer an interesting comparison. In the newspapers included in the monitoring, coverage of Sangatte ranged from relative silence (*Daily Telegraph, Mirror*) to intense focus (*Daily Mail, Daily Express*); and from neutral (*Guardian*) to extreme prejudice (*Daily Mail, Daily Express, Sun*). Less than 10 percent of the press coverage was coded as using "predominantly positive or sympathetic language" while 37 percent of headlines and 26 percent of text was coded as "neutral."[49]

The larger theme of such stories generally involves government policies designed to reduce numbers and repel invaders. Often, the reports are about the failure of these policies and thus about government loss of control of "our borders." Dominant sources tend to be the representatives of powerful institutions, such as politicians, Migration Watch UK, officials/experts, refugee NGOs, or the voluntary sector. Rarely do the articles quote asylum seekers themselves and the organizations that work most closely with them are given much less prominence than politicians. If and when migrants are used as sources, their voices tend to be incorporated into the dominant story of policy that is out of control and failing to stop "hordes" of people from getting into Britain.[50] Media failure to properly use the terms for different categories of migrants remained constant refrain in the research from the last decade; as a result, researchers found that the distinction between asylum seekers, refugees, and economic migrants became blurred. The use of unsourced figures or statistics along with alarmist terms like "floods" was also common. Other significant absences from such stories included women and children, information about migration histories, and reasons for migration or about countries of origin and contextual connections (e.g. the link between war or famine and migration).[51]

It is worth noting that two studies on ethnic/faith newspapers found significant differences in coverage. The ethnic press was less likely to represent asylum seekers and refugees in relation to crime, more likely to represent asylum seekers and refugees as skilled contributors to the economy, and more likely to use asylum seekers, refugees, or ethnic minorities as sources.[52]

The position of a migration story on a newspaper page (or across successive pages) or the order in which broadcast stories run in a news bulletin (and across a sequence of days) can link migration stories with reports of other kinds of "foreign threats," such as *conflict*, *infection, or contagion* (for example, war, HIV/AIDS, Muslim fundamentalism, drugs, crime, and terrorism). There is a good deal of evidence that news is put together in such ways and that readers and viewers then begin to see them as related.[53] Furthermore, we also know the news agenda is very narrow at any one time across all media and that the television news follows the print media. TV does not cover all the stories covered by the print media but it rarely covers stories that the print media have not covered.[54] This regular co-occurrence of elements across the whole media scene seems then to produce a common-sense collocation that sometimes leads to elements from separate stories becoming blended. Collocate means more than "co-occur," however. In linguistics, collocate signifies that words, phrases, or narratives will co-occur more often than by chance precisely because they are seen to belong to the same field or subject matter, share meanings, or belong together. Thus,

[49] Buchanan et al., *What's the Story?*
[50] Ibid.; Gross et al., *Broadcast News Coverage of Asylum.*
[51] Ibid.
[52] See Smart et al., *Reflecting Asylum*; Smart et al., *Reporting Asylum*.
[53] Buchanan et al., *What's the Story?*; Gross et al., *Broadcast News Coverage of Asylum*; and Lula Durante, *Deliberative Workshops: Exploring Communications on Asylum Seekers* (London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 2006).
[54] Gross et al., *Broadcast Coverage of Asylum*.

although collocations are neither conscious nor deliberate, the fact that news workers, at whatever level, regularly *do* put them together reveals the unconscious or habitual connections they make as part of their professional practice.

Thus, in the coverage of the July 7 transit bombings, asylum migration became collocated with terrorism in complex ways. Clearly, July 7 was an instance of terrorism, but the link with asylum migration and refugees came through the blending of stories that had been collocated for some time. There had been an ongoing debate across all media about human-rights legislation and whether the judiciary was too "soft" on asylum applicants. The examples that follow illustrate how the collocations were formed on a much larger scale. On July 27, 2005, the *Express* carried a headline, "Bombers are all sponging asylum seekers."[55] On August 1, the *Express* carried the front-page headline, "The Human Rights Act was the first thing on the minds of the cowardly terror suspects as they were rounded up. This law must be scrapped now before our national security is put at any further risk."[56] On August 4, the *Mirror* published a story about a Tory MP who had called for "a mass exodus of Muslims from Britain."[57] Gross et al. (2008) have explored in detail for a period in 2006 how these co-occurrences and then collocations developed so that *asylum, Muslim, terror*, and *human rights* were all implicated and human rights came to be seen (like asylum seekers) as a threat to public safety.[58]

Images and graphics play as important a role as words. In the case of television news, the images used often substitute for language found in print. Thus, there is no need to say someone is "bogus" or that there are "thousands" if the image tells that story. We also know, in relation to the print media and its large-font, front-page headlines, that in a culture of what Hargreaves and Thomas (2002) called "ambient" news, people may only read the headlines.[59]

The images in Figure 1 are from the Buchanan et al. (2003) study of the coverage of the closure of Sangatte. During the research period, these images were only used to refer to the content of stories in two tabloid papers in 45 percent of the cases. When television news picked them up, they often contradicted the more accurate and contextualized account the anchor in the newsroom gave.

[55] "Bombers are all sponging asylum seekers," *Daily Express*, July 27, 2007.
[56] "The Human Rights Act was the first thing on the minds of the cowardly terror suspects as they were rounded up. This law must be scrapped now before our national security is put at any further risk," *The Daily Express*, August 1, 2007.
[57] Bob Roberts, "MP in 'Get Out' Storm," *Mirror*, April 4, 2005.
[58] Gross et al., *Broadcast Coverage of Asylum*.
[59] Hargreaves and Thomas, *New News, Old News*.

Figure 1. News Images Used in Covering the Sangatte Refugee Camp in France, 2002

Clockwise from left: *Daily Express*, November 29, 2002; *Daily Express*, November 7, 2002; *Daily Mail*, December 3, 2002.
Source: Buchanan et al., *What's the Story?*

The image of men running toward the Channel Tunnel is an archival television image shown on all major channels, often as the studio background to the asylum/Sangatte story.[60] It in particular had the effect of reproducing the discourse and narrative of loss of control of borders, hordes of invading migrants and illegal/bogus immigration, even when the story was actually about something very different. The image shows the danger of using archival footage. Although the image preceded the Sangatte period, it came to represent the entire nine months of the Sangatte story. On the other hand, the regular diet of images of groups of unidentified shabbily dressed men, often with their faces covered, serves across the coverage to convey the message that asylum seekers are "dangerous young men threatening our communities."[61]

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[60] See Figure 2.

[61] Buchanan et al., *What's the Story?* 24.

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Figure 2. Archival Image Shown on All Major UK Broadcast Channels, 2002

Source: Buchanan et al., *What's the Story?*

VI.   Does the Media Drive Policy?

The brief overview of what the media reports and how they report it leads to the causal question of whether the media drive immigration policy or indeed, as suggested above, are actually also driven by immigration policy and their political sources. There is certainly some evidence that at particular moments in the history of migration coverage, a frenzy of press activity has affected policy development or that politicians have used it to push policy in particular directions.

A report by Rob Berkeley and colleagues at the Runnymede Trust, a nonprofit research organization that promotes a multiethnic Britain, finds that the media always frame the immigration debate in terms of immigration control and that the control frame drives policy monitoring and reform. The authors "suppose some kind of relationship" between the media and immigration policy "would seem reasonable."[62] It is certainly also true that in interviews with journalists reported in several different studies since 1999, there has been a strong feeling that immigration policy is about "controlling a problem," and so, when asylum immigration statistics show increases, journalists feel it is their job to hold government to the task of control.[63] On occasion, this pressure has been documented as having produced policy change. There is also a clear circuit of communication or feedback loop, whereby politicians and journalists in London mutually influence one another.

Statham (2003) looks at the debates about and understandings of asylum issues from the perspective of a pro-immigrant group and from what he calls the "racist public" thesis, which sees anti-

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[62] Berkeley et al., *What's New about the New Immigrants*, 26.
[63] See Buchanan et al., *What's the Story?*; Gross et al., *Broadcast News Coverage of Asylum*.

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immigrant sentiments, such as those expressed in the media, as driving restrictive politics and policies.[64] Because of the circuit of communication referred to above, Statham sees political leadership as crucial to and actually well positioned to, leading the media agenda and changing the dominant media story.

Somerville (2007) explores several concrete examples of media influence on policy while acknowledging the numerous "influences, inputs, and transformational processes that have operated upon the construction of UK immigration policy."[65] He concludes that in the context of asylum migration, the media have affected policy development as part of feedback loops involving political leadership and public attitudes.

Philo and Beattie, as discussed above, after dealing at length with the global and British contexts of migration, explored UK television coverage in 1995 and concluded: "A media context in which migration is seen as a threat provides a rationale for changes in asylum law."[66]

The UK Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights was concerned enough about the relationship between the media and politicians that in January 2007, it conducted a hearing on the media's treatment of asylum seekers and refugees. The testimony of editors from tabloid and traditional newspapers showed interesting parallels to the themes that often dominate their newspapers' coverage of asylum and refugee issues.[67] Robin Esser (*Daily Mail*) described the issues involved as "probably the greatest demographic change in this nation since the Norman invasion,"[68] a "shambles,"[69] and an embarrassment for the government. In contrast, Alan Travis (*Guardian*) focused on the treatment of asylum seekers in the media and by society, referring to the "misleading picture" that had been painted.[70]

The committee acknowledged the freedom of the press and the media's duty to report what politicians say. But in a nod to the media's influence, it also recommended ministers to "recognize their responsibility to use measured language so as not to give ammunition to those who seek to build up resentment against asylum seekers, nor to give the media the excuse to write inflammatory or misleading articles."[71] In this, of course, it echoes Statham's belief that political leadership is what is required for change.

To properly investigate the relationship between media coverage of migration and policy development would require some very complex historical and ethnographic research looking at not just the media, but also government, especially Home Office practice. A careful mapping of their

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[64] Statham, "Understanding Anti-Asylum Rhetoric."

[65] Will Somerville, *Immigration under New Labour* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2007), 147.

[66] Philo and Beattie, "Race, Migration and Media," 195.

[67] *The Treatment of Asylum Seekers: Tenth Report of Session 2006-07* (London: UK Parliament, Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2007), http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt200607/jtselect/jtrights/81/81i.pdf.

[68] Uncorrected transcript with statement of Robin Esser, Managing Editor, *The Daily Mail*, in a January 22, 2007 appearance before the Joint Committee on Human Rights regarding the coverage by the media of asylum seekers, http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt200607/jtselect/jtrights/uc60-iv/uc6002.htm.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Uncorrected transcript with statement of Alan Travis, Home Affairs Editor, *The Guardian,* in a January 22, 2007 appearance before the Joint Committee on Human Rights regarding media coverage of asylum seekers, http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt200607/jtselect/jtrights/uc60-iv/uc6002.htm.

[71] Joint Committee on Human Rights, *The Treatment of Asylum Seekers: Tenth Report of Session 2006-0*7, 106.

interactions would be required of a kind that to date has really only happened in this field incidentally. That is, in most cases, the links have been picked up by astute researchers when they have actually been looking for something else.

VII. A Chronology of Research Reports

The constant research focus on asylum migration over the last decade has shown a clear pattern of trends and interests. Speers (2001) was launched in the month that asylum seekers were first dispersed to Wales. The evidence in this report is that factual, local-authority press releases do help in producing factual reports, as do good relations with journalists. But despite the report's conclusions that the Welsh press was doing a reasonably good job of covering the issues, all the elements regarded as negative elsewhere are present. What seems to be happening here is something reported later by D'Onofrio and Kemp (ICAR 2004): local papers are more concerned about providing balanced reports and not causing local tensions. What the report saw as "positive" was the willingness of the press to work with the group that produced it, even though much of the same language and imagery appears to be present as in the national media, which of course is also influential in Wales.[72] Certainly, attitudes toward asylum migration in Wales have been particularly hostile.[73]

Mollard (2001) was produced immediately post-asylum dispersal out of concern about an atmosphere of fear and hostility toward asylum seekers in Scotland. This was seen as the direct result of "adverse treatment in sections of the press."[74] Its media-monitoring findings were similar to the Welsh and other reports. The Scottish report does recommend that the Press Complaints Commission (PCC), an independent self-regulatory body that deals with complaints about the editorial content of newspapers and magazines, should "establish guidelines to encourage the media not to produce coverage that relies on asylum myths or overtly negative language."[75] Buchanan et al. (2003) was the first of those discussed here to point to the narrow nature of the news agenda, the very small number of actual news items in circulation at any one time and the very close relationship between print and television news discussed above.

Tait et al. (ICAR 2004) researched both national and local print media to assess the effect of media coverage on crime against refugees and asylum seekers and on racist attitudes, finding strong evidence of correlation. As in Wales, local newspapers are found to be more likely to provide a balanced picture of issues that affect local people.[76] The Cookson and Jempson RAM report (2005) summarized and corroborated the findings of the earlier work and noted the difficulty of raising

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[72] D'Onofrio and Munk, *Understanding the Stranger Final Report*.

[73] Miranda Lewis, *Public Attitudes Towards Asylum Seekers in Wales: Final Report to the National Assembly for Wales* (London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 2004).

[74] Ceri Molland, *Asylum: The Truth Behind the Headlines* (Oxford: Oxfam UK Poverty Program, Scotland, 2001), 3.

[75] Ibid., 26.

[76] Kirsteen Tait, Roger Grimshaw, Kate Smart, and Barbara Nea, *Media Image, Community Impact: Assessing the Impact of Media and Political Images of Refugees and Asylum Seekers on Community Relations in London* (London: Information Centre About Asylum and Refugees in the UK, 2004), 98.

formal objections to that coverage, despite the existence of various pieces of legislation, the newspaper industry's code of practice and PCC guidelines.[77]

In Smart et al. (ICAR 2006), the methodology was content analysis with a coding schema based on D'Onofrio and Kemp (ICAR 2004) and an added set of codes to explore adherence to the PCC guidance on accuracy in reporting asylum and to the Editor's Code of Practice. A major part of this research was to explore the effectiveness of these guidelines. They found that local London papers do a much better job of covering asylum than do national papers. Also, the London papers are generally models of good practice in that the PCC guidance and code of practice has had a real impact in these contexts.[78] On all elements of the by now familiar coding schema and the typical asylum narrative discussed above, these papers look different.[79] The report gives examples and characteristics of good practice from these contexts.

These themes are picked up and developed in the two reports discussed in more detail below.

VIII. Research Highlights

2007
Kate Smart et al., *Reporting Asylum: the UK Press and the Effectiveness of PCC Guidelines*
(ICAR)

From January to March 2005, MediaWise, together with the Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees (ICAR), undertook further research on media coverage of asylum as well as on the adequacy and effect of the then PCC guidelines on the reporting of these issues. This research, funded by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate, the Home Office, was finally published in January 2007.

It is worth commenting briefly here on the PCC guidelines themselves. PCC has regularly attended events about the "negative" coverage of *asylum*.[80] But it remains the case that its own rules about what can constitute a complaint and the nature of its guidelines restrict the possibility of any real change. The guidelines tend to focus on words that should not be used rather than on the more complex issue of the kinds of narrative structures supported by professional journalism practice or the conceptual field in which journalism practice around the coverage of *asylum* operates. PCC also lacks group discrimination rules, a major barrier to achieving fairness toward groups like asylum seekers. At the Joint Committee on Human Rights meeting with editors in January 2007 referred to above, the editors made it clear they respect PCC rules and follow them. This only demonstrates how ineffective the rules actually are.

This report focuses the debate on the symbiotic relationship between politicians and the press. It acknowledges at the outset that media coverage on *asylum* may have more to do with "the priorities of politicians than intentional media bias."[81] The PCC guidelines on *asylum* are found to have worked

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[77] Rich Cookson and Mike Jempson, *The Ram Report: A Review of the MediaWise Refugees, Asylum Seekers and the Media (RAM) Project, 1999-2005* (Bristol: MediaWise, 2005).
[78] Smart et al., *Reflecting Asylum*, 67.
[79] Ibid., 66.
[80] See Cookson and Jempson, *The Ram Report*.
[81] See Introduction. Smart et al., *Reporting Asylum.*

in general, although, significantly, *not* where the most widely circulating national press publications are concerned.

This was the first *national* media monitoring study on asylum seekers. A sample of newspapers was selected across three categories: all 20 of the UK national newspapers and their Sunday equivalents were included, as were 22 regional papers and nine ethnic minority/faith papers. The codebook for this research was developed using the codebook developed for the Buchanan et al. (2003) Article 19 research above, with an added category to do with the PCC guidance and editor's code as in ICAR (2006).[82]

This is very detailed research that tells us much more than earlier work because it does not depend on content analysis. It uses this as a guide and then does extensive qualitative work on language and accuracy, presenting a number of very useful case studies and indeed finding much more confusion and inaccuracy in the use of terminology than had been found before. Nonetheless, interviews with newspaper editors indicated that most journalists had a copy of the PCC guidance.[83] Almost two-thirds of the news reports analyzed were about policy (the Conservative Party's proposals for reform of the asylum system); the subset of the top six national papers was more interested in policy than the sample as a whole (80 percent of their reports were on policy); and the faith/minority papers discussed the impact of policy on the economy/welfare most often.

The top six dailies in terms of circulation (*Express, Mail, Mirror, Sun ,Telegraph,* and the *Times*)[84] reported mainly (74 percent) on national issues and rarely reported local issues or indeed made any attempt to link local, national, and international perspectives.[85] Crime/community safety was discussed most often in regionals and the six major nationals. There was a much wider range of sources in this sample than in others.

The research also found four new themes that had not emerged from earlier research: artistic voices, jokes, the voice of the reader (polls and letters), and media voices.[86] The pattern of media voices involved the media itself being used as sources and discussions on the role of the press.[87] Here the research finds, for example, *The Independent, the Financial Times*, and others writing against tabloid representations of asylum and all papers quoting one another or critiquing other papers. Letters to the editor differed in different kinds of papers; those in the national tabloids were more hostile. Artistic voices and jokes were often found to be critical of asylum policy and politics as were the media voices.

There are suggestions here of the limits of the Buchanan et al. (2003) coding schema used consistently in a number of these research reports. A different, more qualitative approach, as here, does seem to find different categories of coverage. There are also indications here of the limits of the PCC guidelines in effecting change. The real issues in challenging the way the media does things tend to come down to understanding the narrative structures and conceptual fields in which journalists operate and to very complex arguments about "freedom of speech" versus "censorship," or "impartiality" versus "partiality." Here the debate founders because to address these things

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[82] Smart et al., *Reporting Asylum*, 49.
[83] Ibid., 74.
[84] Ibid., 45.
[85] Ibid., 80.
[86] Ibid., 105.
[87] Specifically based on its findings from the six major dailies. Ibid., 115, 118-119.

directly would involve imagining quite new forms of journalism and press function and behavior. In the end, a critique of the complex ways in which stories are determined through the normal business of everyday journalism practice is not a story that fits conventional news values and requirements and so it literally cannot be told or heard in many of the contexts where people try to tell it.

There is moreover now a good deal of evidence that the change in, or censorship of, terminology, apparently driven by the general and longstanding debate about coverage[88] and imposed by the PCC guidelines, does not actually change the way the issues are viewed by those who hold anti-*asylum* views. Changing and legislating about words is no more use than changing individual images. It is the complex network of discourses and narratives with which *asylum* collocates that needs to be explored, understood, and changed, if we are to see real differences in the effects of coverage. The next report addresses these issues.

2008
Bernhard Gross, Kerry Moore, and Terry Threadgold. *Caught Between Human Rights and Public Safety*. Funded by Oxfam Cymru.

This study of the news coverage of asylum and refugee issues focused on broadcast news media. The study combined analysis of content and a production study. As well as carrying out both a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the media content, the research team conducted a series of interviews with journalists and editors from the BBC and ITN, the company providing news to ITV and Channel 4. In order to analyze the coverage of asylum and refugee-related news items, the research team recorded and monitored four daily news programs between April 24 and October 24, 2006: BBC 1 News at 10 p.m., ITV1 News at 10:30 p.m., Channel 4 News at 7 p.m., and a half hour of Sky News at 10 p.m. These programs were selected to provide a comprehensive overview of late-evening news content across UK terrestrial channels, with a point of comparison provided by the segment of rolling news on the Sky News channel.

Between April 24 and July 31, each of these programs was closely monitored; all news items referring to asylum and/or refugees or to immigration issues more widely were identified. Complete running orders for each news program were also compiled. The "quantitative content analysis corpus" was compiled of every news item that mentioned the words asylum or refugee and that featured a British or clear European dimension. This excluded items about displaced persons and refugee camps in the Sudan, for example or about climate-change refugees in Alaska. These items remained in the wider corpus, however, and were analyzed qualitatively in case studies. Contextual material was also collected from BBC 2's *Newsnight* and Radio 4's *Today* and *World at One* programs. The coding schema was adapted from that used in research conducted by Article 19 in 2002-2003.[89] The data was then analyzed using the computer program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

In 2006, as in 2002-2003, much of the coverage was linked to stories about the government's success or failure in controlling immigration and to the "failure" of government policy. However, by 2006, where asylum is mentioned specifically, the dominant concern, in quantitative terms, is deportation. The focus on deportation is related to the fact that policy had changed by 2006-2007.

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[88] See Finney, *The Challenge of Reporting Refugees and Asylum Seekers*; Cookson and Jempson, *The Ram Report*; and JCHR, *10th Report: The Treatment of Asylum Seekers* (London: Joint Committee for Human Rights, 2007).
[89] Buchanan et al., *What's the Story?*

While there was still an emphasis on numbers entering the country, policy was now focused more on "removal" or "enforcing deportation."[90]

The analysis of running orders confirms the typical overall narrowness of the news agenda and the way *asylum* is embedded within that narrow network. The case study examples in this research also confirm the fragmented and disconnected nature of asylum narratives that can go on episodically for years, giving readers and viewers little context with which to make sense of them. The themes with which *asylum* regularly collocates are, for example, *crisis*, *chaos*, *lack of control*, *crime*, *terrorism*, *foreigners* (*black* and *Muslim*), and *threats to social cohesion*. The latter appears to be a new element in this sample. The simple mention of the word *asylum* now seems to be enough to connote this entire network.

There is considerable confusion in all contexts monitored about the difference between *criminal-justice* and *human-rights* issues. One case study about Afghan hijackers who sought asylum makes very clear the now common links between *crime*, *terrorism*, and a *risk to public safety caused by human-rights law*.[91] The question of "Britishness" and the different standards we apply to ourselves and others are also made very clear in the language of the coverage of the Israel/Lebanon conflict. The idea of *British refugees* is clearly not something we are comfortable with. In this context they become *evacuees* or *returnees* but never *refugees*.

The term *economic migrant* seemed to have fallen out of use to be replaced by *migrant worker*. Over the course of 2005-2006, the issue of migrant workers from recent EU accession states became a part of a more general migration story. This research did not analyze the coverage of migrant workers in detail, but it is clear these incomers are not treated in the same way as asylum seekers. The reasons for the differences would be worth further exploration. The fact that they are European and that they have the right to work seemed important factors.

It should be noted however, that in 2009, in a recession, we are seeing the same stories typically associated with asylum seekers and refugees beginning to be attached in less welcoming ways to stories of *foreign* rather than *migrant workers*.

This coverage was different in a number of ways to that found in previous reports. The content analysis showed that the use of particular, stigmatizing words or inaccurate labels was not prevalent. However, this did not mean asylum seekers and refugees were now being represented in a "positive" light. The coverage still appeared to be generating negative meanings associated with *asylum* as an issue. To investigate these meanings in a more complex way, the research team selected three case studies for close, textual, and conceptual analysis and developed a set of concept maps, one of which is reproduced below.[92] The concept map here represents the discursive framework or web within which *asylum* and *refugee* issues are positioned in this sample.

By visually mapping this web and the structures of meaning through which *asylum* was woven into the coverage, the maps show how *asylum* can still be negatively articulated, regardless of whether the coverage has used accurate terminology or largely eliminated particularly "loaded" words. This absence appears to be related to the research in earlier reports (discussed above), which focused on implementing the PCC guidance, which focused on censoring certain words. The research argues
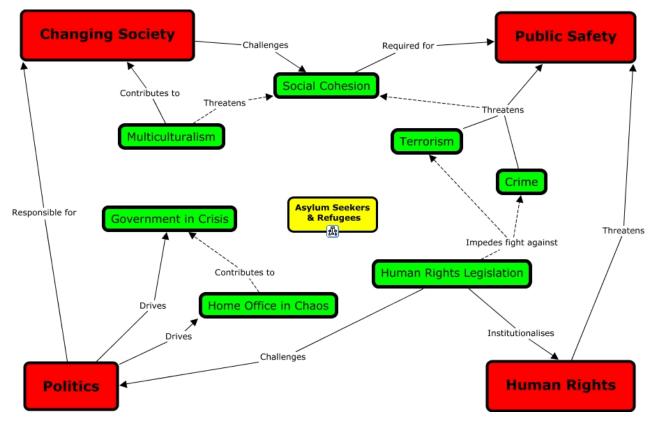
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[90] Smart et al., *Reporting Asylum*.
[91] In 2002-2003, this collocation was emerging in the sample found in Buchanan et al., *What's the Story?*
[92] See Figure 3.

that the focus should be not on words but on the more complex issue of the kinds of narrative structures and networks supported by professional journalism practice.

This is why the interviews with journalists in this research focused on the newsroom production process, not on asylum or immigration per se. The research found that the themes that dominate the coverage are driven by political and institutional sources, as well as by public policy and public affairs machines; the Home Office is a good example in this context. This happens because journalists rely on a very small number of regularly used sources. Journalists do indeed seem to be "captured by their sources."[93] Like Lewis et al. (2006) when they commented on the Iraq war coverage by embedded journalists, this research concludes that the coverage of asylum migration is "not because of any *failure* of normal media practices, but precisely because *professional journalists were carrying on with business as usual.*"[94]

Figure 3. Concept Map Showing How "Asylum Seekers and Refugees" Were Positioned in a Sample of Broadcast Media Coverage, 2006

Source: Gross et al., *Broadcast News Coverage of Asylum*.

Media Impact on Migrant Communities

Media coverage does not simply mediate public understanding; it also mediates the lived experience of immigrants and their children. Threadgold et al. (2008) found those who seemed most concerned about, and best understood, the UK media's typical approach toward migration were those who felt it misrepresented them.[95]

The issue was raised consistently in interviews and focus group with participants from minority ethnic groups (who represent a wide range of categories of migrants in the United Kingdom) even when the researchers did not ask about media representation. Members of ethnic and religious minority communities and their leaders knew that "public opinion" identified them as "scroungers,'" "bogus," and a drain on scarce resources.[96] They also knew they were unwelcome and tended to be associated with acts of crime and terrorism. Muslims immigrants and British-born Muslims in particular felt they were vulnerable to media and political misrepresentation after the July 7 bombings and the terrorist threats of summer 2006. They were also clearly at risk of actual harassment and attack in these contexts and believed the media were to blame.[97] Buchanan et al. (2003) give a similar account of the way refugees and asylum seekers in Britain worried about the potential effects of media representation and felt unwelcome because of it. In a 2004 study commissioned by the Mayor of London, the Information Center about Asylum and Refugees found that the links between hostile media coverage and harassment or violence toward asylum seekers were clearer when media coverage coincided with local strains on resources like housing and health care.[98]

It is significant that in each of these studies, minority groups — which sometimes included asylum seekers and refugees but often second- and third-generation British — saw *the media narrative about asylum seekers and refugees* negatively affecting them. In other words, the harmful impact of media representation seems to be made worse by the media's lack of any distinction between asylum migration and other flows and by its automatic identification of all kinds of difference (long-term residents and new arrivals) with *asylum migration.*

Threadgold et al. (2008) report instances in Cardiff where community tensions were resolved once police had explained that the groups to which people were taking exception were not asylum seekers but migrant workers from the 2004 EU accession states. Migrant workers themselves had the same anxieties about the possible effects of media representation as did other groups of new immigrants.[99]

IX. Conclusion

All the evidence gathered here shows that the national media in the United Kingdom — through the regularity with which they reproduce the dominant asylum narrative and discourse about loss of control and dangerous invasion — have produced a very negative view of what immigration is and might be. Media panics have succeeded in raising awareness of this problem and channeling funding

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[95] Threadgold et al., *Immigration and Inclusion in South Wales.*
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Buchanan et al., *What's the Story?*
[99] Threadgold et al., *Immigration and Inclusion in South Wales.*

into media research. The national media have made some changes in the way it covers asylum, but there is little evidence of any willingness to engage with the wider aspects of the immigration story. And change related to the PCC guidelines appears to have had few effects. Although no one knows how much the media shape immigration policy, most researchers agree it has some effect. Ethnic communities (composed of more than just asylum seekers) know too well how the media portrays them and how the public perceives their presence.

The value of the research that has made such conclusions possible is not in doubt. However, the research thus far has not adequately explored all migration coverage: almost all of it has centered on asylum and refugee migration and most of it dealt with positive-versus-negative or accurate/inaccurate and balanced/unbalanced issues in news articles in tabloid and traditional newspapers. There are reasons for the dominance of these trends.

First, researchers have pursued the most obvious migration issue, which stands out because of the way London-based national media workers do their jobs. They base their reporting on political briefings and materials they receive from government institutions and other organizations. With so much official attention paid in the last decade to asylum migration, it is no surprise that news reports reflect government concerns. Since no report should be one-sided or too promigration, the pursuit of balance in the form of opposite views can give voice to anti-immigration positions and can make asylum stories appear more negative. In addition, research has shown that competition among national media, all pursuing the same set of stories, means different outlets rely on similar, known frames in their reporting, even on different issues.[100] Arguably, a more diverse set of news stories on migration would mean research that reflects that diversity: but there is also more diversity than the research has picked up.[101]

Second, researchers, like journalists, belong to communities of interest and they tend to go back to the same sources. For instance, many other researchers have used the same coding schema developed by one organization, usually with additions and changes.[102] The outcome: a research agenda that looks for and finds asylum migration news. This coding schema uses *migrant/immigrant/migration* and so should have turned up other migration stories in the news (as it did with "migrant workers" in Smart et al. 2007 and in Gross et al. 2008), but the focus on asylum has tended to put these issues aside. When researchers use other more qualitative methods, they discover much more politically critical coverage in genres beyond news.

Third, the political panics that drive media panics tend to drive the research agenda, hence the peaks of coverage and consequent research on asylum. Media panics also capture the attention of those who underwrite research (e.g., Oxfam, IPPR, the Home Office, the Wellcome Trust, and very recently the Economic and Social Research Council), making funding streams a related cause. Charities and NGOs have been major funders of this work although they do not have the same resources as government offices or research councils. Television news is also underresearched due to the high cost of such analysis.

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[100] Berkeley et al., *What's New about the New Immigrants*?

[101] See Smart et al., *Reporting Asylum*.

[102] Buchanan et al., *What's the Story?,* developed a coding scheme with Threadgold of Cardiff University based on Speers, *Welcome or Over Reaction?* All of the ICAR studies since then have used this same scheme, which was adapted and used again in Gross et al., *Broadcast News Coverage of Asylum*.

Media researchers' focus on positive and negative stories has actually trapped them into seeing coverage through the media's dominant frame and offering solutions that do not fundamentally change the media's approach. For instance, the media sometimes turn the invasion/foreign conspiracy story or the closely linked "government has lost control of borders" story (both negative) into a human-interest story (considered positive). But even if the words remain unspoken or censored, *asylum* now means *illegal immigrant*, *bogus*, *scrounger*, *criminal*, *terrorist*. This is made very clear in Gross et al (2008). The Institute for Public Policy Research, a progressive think tank based in London, used what it believed to be "positive" data to assess audience responses to broadcast and print coverage.[103] Yet the results revealed it is impossible to predict what a "positive" asylum story might be given entrenched public opinions. In other words, the migrant remains the victim and the object in both "negative" and "positive" coverage and the focus on migration as a problem is not shifted in any way.[104]

Furthermore, the emphasis on asylum has left a gaping hole in our general understanding of migration coverage — especially of labor flows from new EU Member States, the new Points-Based System and its possible effects on the British economy or the fact that most migration to Britain is "invisible" to most people because white or middle-class migration is never imagined in those terms.[105] We also have limited understandings of the way coverage works across different types of media, particularly radio and online media such as news Web sites, blogs, and social networking sites.[106] Anecdotally, we believe talk-back radio often produces very negative accounts and perpetuates myths about migration. Also, blogs may host anti-immigrant discussions, but the research has not been done. While television documentary and radio are occasionally mentioned, there is almost no research on some of the very good investigative journalism that has looked at migration through these and other visual forms. They do not of course have the impact that news has, nor the audience, but they are an important part of what researchers need to examine.

Existing research also has not systematically explored the work of the proasylum (myth-busting) industry that has developed over the past ten years. Groups like the Refugees, Asylum Seekers and the Media Project (RAM), the Refugee Media Group in Wales, and others[107] have promoted alternative stories and set up alternative "news" Web sites, among other activities that seek to change media practices and public opinion.

Future work should thus monitor output across all media and carry out newsroom ethnographies, but the focus needs to be as much on politics/policy, regulatory mechanisms, education, and journalism education as on the media.

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[103] Durante, *Deliberative Workshops*. See also Catherine Lido, Alain Samson, and Rupert Brown, *Effects of the Media Priming Positive and Negative Asylum-Seeker Stereotypes on Thoughts and Behaviors* (Swindon: ESRC, 2006).
[104] Lido et al., *Effects of the Media Priming Positive*.
[105] Kyambi, *Beyond Black and White*; Threadgold et al., *What's the Story?*
[106] A quick check as part of writing this paper shows that the BBC web site now covers migration and even asylum in an often fully contextualized, interactive way, incorporating stories by migrants themselves, histories and accounts of why people seek asylum or migrate. We know nothing about who accesses these sites or what impact they have.
[107] See Finney, *The Challenge of Reporting Refugees and Asylum Seekers*.

X. About the Author

Terry Threadgold is Pro Vice Chancellor and Professor of Communication and Cultural Studies at Cardiff University's School of Journalism, Media, and Cultural Studies. As Pro Vice Chancellor, Dr. Threadgold works closely with the six Humanities Schools at Cardiff University, acting as a link between their heads and the University Board and Vice Chancellor. She is Chair of the University's Equal Opportunities and Diversity Committee, Chair of the Positive Working Environment Steering Committee, and Vice Chair of the University Promotions Committee and the Human Resources Committee. Dr. Threadgold has published widely in the areas of poststructuralist feminist discourse analysis, performance studies, and feminist legal studies. She also has written on race, identity, and nation in contexts of globalization. She has worked and published in the areas of postgraduate pedagogy and literacy and has a continuing interest in the training of journalists, journalism studies, and media studies. Her current research interests include: media, representation and asylum; journalism and conflict and migration and social cohesion.

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