



Moving Stories

International Review of How Media Cover Migration



Ethical
Journalism
Network

EDITED BY AIDAN WHITE

Moving Stories

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A group of children, likely refugees, are shown in a camp. In the foreground, a young boy holds a piece of light-colored fabric. Other children are visible in the background, some wearing head coverings. The scene is set outdoors under a clear sky.

FOREWORD

Beyond the headlines

» JAN EGELAND



For years, the Norwegian Refugee Council and other humanitarian actors have called out – too often in vain – to the international community, to the media, the decision makers and the public opinion about the sufferings of millions of civilians fleeing war in Syria.

As the conflict escalated, and the humanitarian disaster with it, creating the biggest refugee crisis in our generation, our appeals for wider media attention, with some notable exceptions, fell on deaf ears with an apparent lack of interest on the part of the vast majority of television and radio companies and major newspapers.

It was arguably only with the tragic death of Aylan Kurdi and the publication of pictures of his body on a beach in Turkey that Western public opinion and global media finally woke up. Immediately, media lenses focused sharply on the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean and both politicians and ordinary people had to respond.

What about the many other humanitarian crises beyond the media's radar? Every two minutes another South Sudanese child becomes severely malnourished. But these stories are seldom told.

But this incident only raised another question. What about the many other humanitarian crises beyond the media's radar? In war-torn South Sudan, for example. This country is rarely in the limelight. In 2011, it gained independence from Sudan ending a generation of war. Two years later, the civil war broke out resulting in massive forced displacement and today the country is one of the world's impoverished places. Every two minutes another South Sudanese child becomes severely malnourished. But these stories are seldom told.

A South Sudanese colleague told me it was strange to see how things can change from one day to the other only because of international media attention.

“In Europe, it was that boy on the beach. Maybe we need a picture of a boy like that in South Sudan,” she said while preparing to go on a new mission to one of the world's hardest-to-reach areas where dropping food from World Food Programme airplanes is the only way to provide hungry people with something to eat.

Too often not even stories about children dying of starvation are enough to make headlines on the nine o'clock news. Humanitarian disasters that deserve our attention often go uncovered because there is no photographer or journalist on the ground to tell the story. Only a couple of conflicts receive our attention at any given time, while most dramas get none at all. Why is that?

The reasons are complex. It is not just a lack of humanity on the news agenda or a matter of luck or a matter of caring more about some people at the expense of others. We need a broader lens to see what really is going on.

In the Norwegian Refugee Council we annually publish a list of the world's 10 most neglected displacement crises. This year the Rohingyas have topped the list. This minority Muslim community under pressure in Myanmar is also found in neighbouring Bangladesh where hundreds of thousands have sought protection.

One criterion to be on the neglected crises list is a lack of media attention. Other factors include lack of funding, little humanitarian presence and difficult access to the victims of the conflict. Often, there is a strong correlation between the different factors: access problems can lead to lack of media attention, which again can lead to lack of donor concern, which again leads to even bigger access issues. This completes a vicious circle that is not easily broken.

But there is an important truth in all of this – decision makers pay attention to the media, and independent journalists reporting with care, humanity and professionalism have enormous power to tell stories that create a new path.

But, as this report reveals, mainstream media is currently under pressure with news companies struggling to adapt to a new reality with plummeting revenues and competition from new media. Often media will simply say they cannot afford to cover these stories.

But this should not be an excuse for adopting a herd mentality – where media follow each other to cover a small cluster of the most obvious stories. Media around the world are now reporting on the disastrous humanitarian consequences of the civil war in Syria and the exodus to Europe and they are going beyond the numbers story which has dominated news coverage so far.

Yet as the poignant human tragedies from Syria takes centre stage, where is the coverage of the second largest humanitarian crisis and war on our watch: in Yemen? Here, around 21 million people are in urgent need of emergency relief. They suffer from external and internal bombardment, blockade and totally inadequate assistance and protection.

Also the journalists themselves need to be protected to be able to report on the atrocities. For journalists reporting from conflict and war 2015 is another deadly year. Like humanitarian workers, journalists are not only at risk of becoming so-called collateral damage during military operations, they are also increasingly targeted.

It is therefore essential that the international community focus on the protection of journalists in armed conflicts to allow for less casualties in the imminent future.

In Europe we talk about a sharing of responsibility in terms of coping with the growing influx of migration. Maybe it is time to talk about a media “burden sharing” where media institutions, rather than chasing the same stories, divide the coverage of the human suffering so that children in grave risk in South Sudan or Gaza do not continue to stay in life-threatening situations without the world knowing.

This EJN report *Moving Stories* is a welcome step to allow journalists get an overview of the problem areas as well as promoting best practices when it comes to reporting on the wider migration story.

Without media attention, humanitarian crises, with their horrifying impacts, will continue to be learned by the outside world way too late.

Jan Egeland is the Secretary-general of the Norwegian Refugee Council



Without media attention, humanitarian crises, with their horrifying impacts, will continue to be learned by the outside world way too late.





INTRODUCTION

Moving stories

» KIERAN COOKE AND AIDAN WHITE

Migration is part of the human condition. Ever since humankind emerged out of East Africa it has been on the move – searching for a better climate, looking for supplies of food and water, finding security and safety.

Migration has suddenly jumped to the top of the news agenda. During 2015 journalists reported the biggest mass movement of people around the world in recent history.

Television screens and newspapers have been filled with stories about the appalling loss of life and suffering of thousands of people escaping war in the Middle East or oppression and poverty in Africa and elsewhere.

Every day in 2015 seemed to bring a new migration tragedy: Syrian child refugees perish in the Mediterranean; groups of Rohingyas escaping persecution in Myanmar suffocate on boats in the South China Sea; children fleeing from gang warfare in Central America die of thirst in the desert as they try to enter the US.

In response to this crisis the Ethical Journalism Network commissioned *Moving Stories* – a review of how media in selected countries have reported on refugees and migrants in a tumultuous year. We asked writers and researchers to examine the quality of coverage and to highlight reporting problems as well as good work.



The conclusions from many different parts of the world are remarkably similar: journalism under pressure from a weakening media economy; political bias and opportunism that drives the news agenda; the dangers of hate-speech, stereotyping and social exclusion of refugees and migrants. But at the same time there have been inspiring examples of careful, sensitive and ethical journalism that have shown empathy for the victims.

In most countries the story has been dominated by two themes – numbers and emotions. Most of the time coverage is politically led with media often following an agenda dominated by loose language and talk of invasion and swarms. At other moments the story has been laced with humanity, empathy and a focus on the suffering of those involved.

What is unquestionable is that media everywhere play a vital role in bringing the world's attention to these events. This report, written by journalists from or in the countries concerned, relates how their media cover migration.

They tell very different stories. **Nepal** and the **Gambia** are exporters of labour. Thousands of migrants, mostly young men, flock from the mountain villages of Nepal to work in the heat of the Gulf and Malaysia: often the consequences are disastrous. People from the Gambia make the treacherous trip across the Sahara to Libya and then by boat to Europe: many have perished on the way – either in the desert or drowned in the Mediterranean.

In these countries reporting of the migration of large numbers of the young – in many ways the lifeblood of their nations – is limited and stories about the hardship migrants endure are rare. Censorship or a lack of resources – or a combination of both – are mainly to blame for the inadequacies of coverage. Self-censorship, where reporters do not want to offend either their media employer or the government, is also an issue.

The reports on migration in **China**, **India** and **Brazil** tell another story. Though large numbers of people migrate from each of these countries, the main focus is on internal migration, a global phenomenon often ignored by mainstream media that involves millions and dwarfs the international movement of people.

What's considered to be the biggest movement of people in history has taken place in China over the last 35 years. Cities are undergoing explosive growth, with several approaching 20 million inhabitants. Similar movements are happening in India and, to a lesser extent, in Brazil.

In Africa the headlines focus on people striving to leave the continent and heading north, but there is also migration between countries, with many people from the impoverished central regions heading for **South Africa** – a country where media also deal with problems of xenophobia and governmental pressure.

In Europe migration and refugee issues have shaken the tree of European unity with hundreds of thousands trekking by land and sea to escape war and poverty. The reports here reveal how for almost a year media have missed opportunities to sound the alarm to an imminent migration refugee crisis.

Media struggle to provide balanced coverage when political leaders respond with a mix of bigotry and panic – some announcing they will only take in Christian migrants while others plan to establish walls and razor wire fences. Much of the focus has been on countries in South Eastern Europe which has provide a key route for migrants and refugees on the march. In **Bulgaria**, as in much of the region, media have failed to play a responsible role and sensationalism has dominated news coverage.

In **Italy**, a frontline state where the Mediterranean refugee tragedy first unfolded, the threat of hate-speech is always present, though this is often counterbalanced by an ethical attachment of many in journalism to a purpose-built charter against discrimination. In **Britain** the story has also often been politically-driven and focused, sometimes without a sense of scale or balance: this has been particularly evident in reportage of the plight of refugees in Calais.

In **Turkey**, seen by many European politicians as a key country in stemming the onward rush of migrants, most media are under the thumb of a government that punishes dissident journalists, so the public debate is limited.

Like their Turkish colleagues, journalists in **Lebanon** live with the reality of millions of refugees from war-torn Syria within their borders which makes telling the story more complex and it is not helped by confused mixing of fact and opinion by many media.

At the same time in the **United States** media have helped make the migrant and refugee issue an explosive topic in debates between Republican Party candidates for the presidency. Media time has focused on heated and often racist exchanges. This has obscured much of the good reporting in some media that provides much-needed context. South of the border, in **Mexico** media also suffer from undue political pressure and self-censorship.



“Open the world more equitably so we all may walk freely. Or close the borders and let each one return to his house and see how much poorer and drearier and darker the world is when we all stay at home.” – Chibundu Onuzo

In **Australia** the media in a country built by migrants struggles to apply well-meaning codes of journalistic practice within a toxic political climate that has seen a rise in racism directed at new arrivals.

These reports cover only a handful of countries, but they are significant. The problems of scant and prejudicial coverage of migration issues exist everywhere. Even reporting of migration in the international media – with a few notable exceptions – tends to be overly simplistic.

Migrants are described as a threat. There is a tendency, both among many politicians and in sections of the mainstream media, to lump migrants together and present them as a seemingly endless tide of people who will steal jobs, become a burden on the state and ultimately threaten the native way of life.

Such reporting is not only wrong; it is also dishonest. Migrants often bring enormous benefits to their adopted countries.

How would California’s agricultural industry or the Texan oil fields survive without the presence of hundreds of thousands of Mexicans and Central

American workers, often labouring on minimal wages? How could the health service in the UK continue without the thousands of migrant nurses and doctors from the developing world? How would cities like Dubai, Doha or Singapore have been built without labourers from Nepal or Bangladesh – or how would they function without the armies of maids and helpers from the Philippines and Indonesia?

These reports underscore why media need to explain and reinforce a wider understanding that migration is a natural process. No amount of razor wire or no matter how high walls are built, desperate migrants will find a way through. People will still flock to the cities, drawn by the hope of a better life.

The migrant crisis is not going to go away: the impact of widespread climate change and growing inequality is likely to exacerbate it in the years ahead.

The inescapable conclusion is that there has never been a greater need for useful and reliable intelligence on the complexities of migration and for media coverage to be informed, accurate and laced with humanity. But if that is to be achieved we must strengthen the craft of journalism.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND USEFUL LINKS

1. Ethical context

Migrants and refugees are a vulnerable minority who can quickly become scapegoats for the ills of society – social and economic decline, crime and unemployment, pressure on health and welfare services and lack of security.

Media can counter this threat and help people better understand the complex migration story by applying ethical principles, avoiding crude stereotypes, developing good newsroom practice and engaging with the audience. In particular, journalists should apply and respect the following five core principles of journalism in their work:

- ▷ Accuracy: fact-based reporting, analysis and commentary;
- ▷ Independence: journalism free from self-censorship and political pressure;
- ▷ Impartiality: fair reporting that tells all sides of the story;
- ▷ Humanity: sensitive and careful journalism that avoids doing undue harm;
- ▷ Accountability: media transparency and commitment to correct errors.

2. Newsroom practice

Media companies and journalists' unions and associations should prepare concise guides to best practices for the reporting on refugees and migrants. In addition, all media should examine their internal structures to make sure they are telling the story in the most effective way.

News organisations can:

- ▷ Appoint specialist reporters with good knowledge of the subject to the migration and refugee beat.
- ▷ Provide detailed information on the background of migrants and refugees and the consequences of migration. It is especially important to note that some major studies reveal how migration can strengthen national economies in the longer term, even where there are short-term challenges.
- ▷ Avoid political bias and challenge deceptive handling of the facts and incitement to hatred particularly by political, religious or other community leaders and public figures.
- ▷ Respect sources of information and grant anonymity to those who require it most, particularly

those who are vulnerable and most at risk.

- ▷ Establish transparent and accessible internal systems for dealing with complaints from the audience over coverage of migrant and refugee issues.
- ▷ Review employment policies to ensure newsroom diversity with reporters and editors from minority communities.
- ▷ Provide training for journalists and editors covering everything from international conventions and law to refugee rights and what terms to use while covering refugee stories.
- ▷ Monitor coverage regularly. Organise internal discussions on how to develop and improve the scope of migration coverage.
- ▷ Manage online comments and engage with the audience to ensure that migration stories are not used as a platform for abuse or intolerance.

Media associations and journalists' unions can also support national structures for independent regulation or self-regulation of journalism, such as press councils. Where there are industry-wide codes of conduct and guidelines dealing with non-discrimination these should cover reporting migration.

3. Engage with the media audience and connect with migrants

Refugee groups, activists and NGOs, many of which provide vital information for media, can be briefed on how best to communicate with journalists and media can explain to the audience their policies and editorial approach which may encourage readers, viewers and listeners to contribute useful additional information.

4. Challenge hate-speech

Hate-speech is widespread in the media. Often it can't be prevented when it comes out of the mouths of prominent public figures, but journalists should always remember that just because someone says something outrageous doesn't make it newsworthy. The Ethical Journalism Network has developed a 5-point text for hate-speech as a useful tool for newsrooms. (See below).

5. Demand access to information

Media cannot report without access to reliable information and facts. When access to information is restricted, such as not being allowed to enter

refugee camps, media and civil society groups should press the government both nationally and internationally to be more transparent. Media and journalists' unions should meet regularly with police and state authorities and agencies to ensure journalists have safe conditions in which to work and access to the information they need.

Some Useful Links

Glossaries

International Organization for Migration (IOM Key migration terms)

United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) Media Friendly Glossary for Migration

Statistics

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Statistics and Operational Data

International Organization for Migration (IOM) World Migration Report

Internal Displacement Monitoring Center Global Estimates 2015

Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) Resources Publications

Sources

International Refugee Law – Everything you need to know from the UNHCR

Institute for the Study of International Migration (ISIM)

Refugee Studies Centre (RSC)

International Labour Organization (ILO)

Council of Europe (COE)

European Network Against Racism (ENAR)

European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)

Forced Migration Online

The Journal of International Migration and Integration (JIMI)

The Global Migration Centre (GMC)

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)

Red Cross Global Campaign on Migration

Middle East Migration Issues (Migration Policy Institute)

Resources for journalists

Accountable Journalism Database

Africa's Media Silence over Migration Crisis

BBC: Migration in Figures

Climate News Network

Dart Centre Covering Migration Tips for Journalists

Ethical Journalism Network: Migrants or Refugees?

Ethical Journalism Network Five-Point Test for Hate-speech

Europe: The Migrant Files

Jean Paul Marthoz: "How to cover migration"

Getting the Facts Right: Ethnicity and Religion (ARTICLE 19)

Media Diversity Institute

Statewatch

UK NUJ Migration Reporting Guide for Journalists

Data-Based Study into Characteristics of Migration Coverage in Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States – Summary report and Full presentation

Why Al Jazeera will not say Mediterranean Migrants

David Cameron: "Swarm" of Migrants crossing Mediterranean

Ten myths about migration

Guardian Special Report:

Hardline Australia, confused Scandinavia and tense Russia: The global immigration picture

Generation E – Data Driven Project Report on Youth Migration from Southern Europe

The Med: One final danger in a migrant's odyssey

The Arduous Journey of Colombian Migrants Headed for Chile

What crime have I committed to be held like this? Inside Yarl's Wood

Risking their lives to cross the border: Europe or Die

Jimmy Breslin: "The Short Sweet Dream of Eduardo Gutierrez"

Giovanna dell'Orto/Vicki Birchfield: "Reporting at the Southern Borders Journalism and Public Debates on Immigration in the U.S. and the E.U."

Peter Andreas/Kelly Greenhill: "Sex, Drugs and Body Counts"

Fabrizio Gatti: "Bilal"





AUSTRALIA

In a nation of migrants the media faces its own identity crisis

» CHRISTOPHER WARREN

Australia is a country of migrants, a diverse, multi-cultural society with about 28 per cent born overseas in 200 countries and a further 20 per cent having at least one parent born overseas. Net migration drives up population by about 200,000 a year, with 800,000 arriving in the past four years.

Yet this story is largely absent from the Australian media which, in both news and entertainment, too often acts as though it is telling stories about and often to only one segment of society.

But as mainstream media fractures and social media spreads, political-elite consensus on race is breaking and journalism is being challenged. And as asylum seekers filter in, their use as a political tool demands new understanding and new ways to inform our communities. Yet the usual journalist focus on conflict means the real migration story of a society absorbing and adapting to change is missing

Codes and ethics: A missing link

This absence of the migration story is reflected in the codes of ethics and conduct that define the practice of journalism. At best, they adopt the language of non-discrimination. The Journalist Code of Ethics, developed and monitored by the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance, the journalists' union, says: "Do not place unnecessary emphasis on personal characteristics, including race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, family relationships, religious belief, or physical or intellectual disability."

There were similar words in the general principles of the Australian Press Council (which oversees print and on-line publications), although these were deleted in a 2014 rewrite, relying instead on advisory guidelines on reporting of race. Although the Press Council says it receives a significant number of complaints about reporting on race or ethnicity (often in the context of overseas events), most are resolved through mediation.

The codes of conduct for newspapers in the Fairfax group make no reference to these principles, except to the extent that they incorporate the MEAA code. The News Corporation code says: “Do not make pejorative reference to a person’s race, nationality, colour, religion, marital status, sex, sexual preferences, age, or physical or mental capacity. No details of a person’s race, nationality, colour, religion, marital status, sex, sexual preferences, age, or physical or mental incapacity should be included in a report unless they are relevant.”

Commercial electronic media are governed by codes of practice overseen by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). These provide a higher test: “[...] likely to incite hatred against, or serious contempt for, or severe ridicule of people on the grounds of, among other things, race or religion.”

The code of editorial practice for the national public broadcaster, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), says: “Avoid the unjustified use of stereotypes or discriminatory content that could reasonably be interpreted as condoning or encouraging prejudice.” It also imposes a positive obligation to seek out and encourage reporting of diversity of views and experiences.

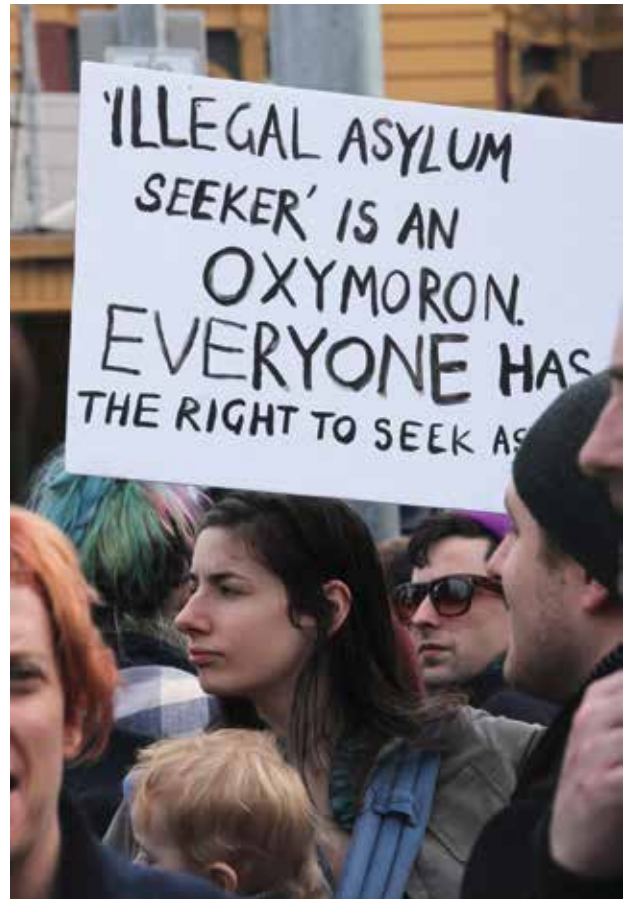
Other than this ABC reference to diversity, these ethical principles reflect the absence of reporting on migration. To the extent they have been discussed by ethics or conduct panels, it has been in the context of indigenous Australians or the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Similarly, the only major case against a journalist under Australia’s racial vilification laws involved questioning the Aboriginality of indigenous activists.

Sometimes it seems journalism lacks an accepted word to describe third-generation Australians – half the population – or a word to capture all the diversity of first- or second-generation Australians, or even those of multiple generations from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

Even “Australian” can mean different things in different contexts: from third-generation people of British or Irish descent through to native-born Australians of all backgrounds and on to all residents. Because the different usages are so sensitive, most journalists use the term only in its broadest sense.

Journalistic style and practice has not adopted the use of the word “migrant” to mean first- or second-generation Australians. It is usually only used in referring to those involved in the act of migration



Despite attempts by some politicians to tag asylum seekers as “illegals” or “illegal migrants” this has not been adopted. The Australian Press Council has said use of these words could breach their principles and should be avoided.

itself. Once resident, there is no journalistically accepted word that captures the diversity of the once-were-migrants.

There have been some attempts by Australians from non-English-speaking backgrounds to appropriate the abusive word “wog” as a collective noun for themselves, but it is too freighted for general or journalistic use.

As a general principle, journalists are more careful in using “asylum seeker” or “refugee” so that usage generally accords with legal status. Despite attempts by some politicians to tag asylum seekers as “illegals” or “illegal migrants” this has not been adopted. The Australian Press Council has said use

of these words could breach their principles and should be avoided.

The media workforce itself often seems a modernised pastiche of pre-1945 Australia, talking to and about itself. How does it change to more effectively represent the wider society? Failure to do so over decades means lack of coverage is a system flaw.

As Filipino-born Australian writer Fatima Measham wrote recently: “To put it bluntly, lack of diversity is not a symptom of exclusivity in Australian media; it is the disease. The status quo essentially reflects a form of denialism.”

Australia lacks clear statistics about its media community. Industry mapping by MEAA in 2005 indicated that about 9,000 people earned a living as journalists, most in or for newspapers and other print media. MEAA estimates there are now about 6,500.

The search for diversity

The only comprehensive study of ethnicity and migrant background in the media was conducted over 20 years ago. John Henningham of the University of Queensland found that mainstream journalists were overwhelmingly Australian-born with the remainder usually native to New Zealand or Britain. About 85 per cent said they were of either British or Irish descent

Anecdotal and personal observations indicate that there has been some shift in this pattern as second- or third-generation descendants of post-war migration from continental Europe (Italy, Greece, the former Yugoslavia etc.), or Asia, that began with Vietnamese migration in the 1970s, washed into journalism. Journalists have become younger, more female and, perhaps to a limited extent, more diverse. New employment has virtually collapsed



since 2008 and, as a result there has been little renewal within the traditional mainstream.

There is no evidence of deliberate discrimination by employers, although Henningham did find that about half of all journalists thought being from an ethnic or racial minority made it hard to get ahead.

In 2012, the ABC announced a commitment to greater cultural diversity in its news operations and seems to have succeeded. As a government authority, it is required to provide regular figures on employment. Its most recent report shows that among “content makers” (overwhelmingly journalists) 8.3 per cent were from non-English-speaking backgrounds, significantly lower than elsewhere in the corporation.

The report confirms that ABC International was one of the major employment areas for people from non-English-speaking backgrounds, including off-shore local hires. The closure of its international television service, *Australia Network*, in 2014 means this percentage has probably dropped.

Other than within the ABC, the decline in media employment has meant an even greater decline in opportunities to enter the mainstream business. It is unlikely that we will see a more diverse media emerge from some sort of affirmative action plan. Nonetheless, publishers and broadcasters need to follow the model of the public broadcasters in developing diversity policies and publicly reporting their progress.

New media – particularly those unaligned with traditional Australian or global media – are showing the greatest diversity, with people building their own opportunities and distribution networks. Journalism institutions need to examine how to support emerging media that encourage creative opportunities for a diverse Australia.

There is already significant evidence that changing the diversity of the journalist community changes what journalists consider news and changes how societies are reported. The feminisation of journalism since the 1960s has changed the reporting of gender, although there remains a long way to go.

Anti-migration racism

Australia is not constant and both assimilates and is assimilated by the successive generations of migrants. Racism is not absent and is usually directed at the most recent arrivals. Although almost all migrant communities can trace roots back to the earliest days of European settlement,



the composition of the Australian community has been shaped by successive waves – European and Chinese migration in the gold rushes of the 1850s and 1860s; the largely British and Irish migration (coupled with active exclusion and expulsion of Asian migration) from the 1880s to World War One; southern and eastern European immigration in the 1950s and 1960s; Vietnamese migration in the 1970s; Chinese and other East Asian migration in the 1990s, now joined by people from the Middle East and South Asia.

The media has largely ignored the cultural and social impact of these events, unless they break into the political discussion of the day such as when a group is seen as (or is portrayed as) an existential threat to Australian society. Chinese migration and communities in the late 19th century were targeted by mobs and the law and largely excluded. Sectarianism directed at Irish Catholic communities was taken so much for granted that it was not reported.

Until the 1970s, Asian migration was largely blocked through the so-called White Australia policy which sought to restrict immigration to Europeans. This was abandoned by successive governments between 1965 and 1975 and then smashed by the large-scale Vietnamese migration. Since then, Asian migration has dominated. Other than Britain and New Zealand, four of the top five other

birthplaces of Australians are Asian – China, India, Vietnam and the Philippines.

In the major cities where most media are based this change is even more obvious, with Asian-born Australians making a larger proportion of the population.

More recently there has been a shift in migration to Muslims from the Middle East and South Asia, coupled with the growth of asylum seekers. There has also been a degree of soft racism directed at most recent arrivals but the debate over Muslim migration has taken a new, decidedly harsher, edge.

In the Firing Line: Muslim and Middle East Migrants

As Australia opened up in the 1970s, Muslim and Middle East migration increased. As a result, the five-yearly census shows the number of Muslims has more than tripled over 20 years, from about 148,000 in 1991 to about 476,000 in 2011 – about 2.2 per cent of the total population. Although Muslims are a significant component, this percentage is not expected to rise above 3 per cent.

This community reflects the broad regional, national and religious diversity of Islam, although the largest groups are from Lebanon, Turkey and, more

recently, Iraq and Afghanistan. As in much of the developed world, the September 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington affected approaches to the Muslim community. In Australia, this fed into a climate of antagonism against the latest arrivals.

This continues as part of the discourse on Islam, and shapes a key area of continuing debate: the right to religious freedom and the rights of women. The media continue to struggle with this as most journalists prioritise the rights of women. Some – largely but not exclusively on the right – continue to focus on women’s rights both within Islamic communities and in writing about the impact of Islam on women’s rights generally.

Many journalists avoid the issue of Islam to prevent being seen as encouraging attacks on Muslims.

Social media have played some role in filling this gap. Muslims – particularly women wearing the hijab – reported increased harassment on public transport after a siege in a Sydney cafe by an Iranian-born gunman claiming affiliation with ISIS in December 2014. This spawned the #illridewithyou hashtag on Twitter and other social media. Using this hashtag, about 150,000 people offered to travel with Muslims fearful of harassment.

But social media have also played a less constructive role. As tensions between the local community and mainly Lebanese groups escalated into riots at Cronulla beach in southern Sydney in 2005, text messaging promised “Leb and wog bashing” and also that “Aussies will feel the full force of the Arabs”.

Traditional media also contributed. In the week before the riots, talkback radio host Alan Jones fed the hysteria, saying to one caller: “We don’t have Anglo-Saxon kids out there raping women in Western Sydney”. While cautioning against people taking the law into their own hands, he read one of the text messages encouraging people to go to Cronulla for “Leb and wog bashing” on air and claimed credit for the building pressure in Cronulla.

Jones was subsequently censured by the ACMA for breaching the Code of Conduct with comments that were “likely to encourage violence or brutality and to vilify people of Lebanese and Middle-Eastern backgrounds on the basis of ethnicity”.

The riots suited all morality tales in the migration debate. For those hostile to migration, or Islamic migration in particular, it fed a narrative of the collapse of social cohesion. To others, it fed entrenched racism.

In fact, since the riots – perhaps as a result – public anti-migrant displays have eased and become more marginalised. There remains ongoing low-level commentary in some right-wing political circles and media and, of course, on social media, about Islam.

Here, concerns rumble on about halal and the wearing of the headscarf, without often breaking into the mainstream media which, generally, have ignored these debates.

The riots suited all morality tales ... For those hostile to migration, or Islamic migration in particular, it fed a narrative of the collapse of social cohesion. To others, it fed entrenched racism.

There has been some serious reporting of the political groups behind these views. *The Australian*, News Corp’s national newspaper, has reported on and analysed fringe political groups such as Reclaim Australia, and the ABC’s *4 Corners* devoted a programme to the anti-halal movement.

It is difficult to gauge how deep social antagonism is, but it does appear, with some caveats, that in the decade since the Cronulla riots, Muslim migrants have become incorporated into the Australian diversity. The most recent social cohesion survey by Monash University found that 58 per cent of Australians found the immigration intake – already at its highest levels – as about right or too low and 85 per cent said they believed multiculturalism was good for the country.

At the same time, about one in four said they had negative attitudes about Islam, though this may be more hostility to religion than to Muslim migrants.

Rise of ISIS and national security

The emergence of Islamic state and its recruitment of foreign fighters has provided a further opportunity for demonising the Muslim community. Government briefings suggest that about 150 Australians have sought to fight, although there is no clear evidence of this, and there have been reports that a number have been killed.

Information is largely based on briefings by security agencies and government, although the use of

social media by ISIS and some individual fighters has also fed into media reporting.

Notoriously, Khaled Sharrouf, who had been convicted of domestic terrorist offences, fled with his family to Raqqa in Syria. From there, he tweeted a photo of his seven-year-old son holding the head of a murdered Syrian soldier.

Coming shortly after the videoed murders of US journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff, this shocking image raised the issue of whether the media should repeat or link to these images. Most carried pictures of the child with the face obscured. Most videos have not been carried or linked.

This incident was used by the government to justify increasing national security laws, including criminalising visits to designated areas (including northern Iraq and Syria) without good cause, and the administrative power to strip citizenship from dual nationals considered to be supporting terrorism.

However, integration of national security and Muslim migration has not always been a winning issue for governments. In 2007, *The Australian* newspaper's Hedley Thomas won the country's most prestigious journalism award for his reports

on the security forces' handling of the detention of Dr Mohamed Haneef for suspected terrorism. His reporting resulted in Haneef being released and cleared of all suspicion. It also undermined much of the government's stance on the threat of terrorism.

Over the past two years the government has ramped up the rhetoric, raising the risk of terrorism to high and continually referring to ISIS as the "Daesh death cult". In August, it was reported that the cabinet had directed that weekly announcements on national security would be rolled out between then and elections due in September 2016.

The first of these again sought to link migration and national security when the new militarised Border Force announced it would be cooperating in Operation Fortitude with the Victorian police in checking papers to identify "visa fraud" in Melbourne.

A social media campaign under the hashtag #Borderfarce threatened civil disobedience (Australians are not required to carry papers or to produce them on request) and resulted in a demonstration outside the press conference to promote the operation. The police withdrew cooperation and the operation was cancelled. This fed into a general media questioning of government competence.



The challenge of covering asylum seekers

The enduring challenge is of asylum seekers arriving by boat, which has become a high-level media and political issue. Over the past 10 years, about 50,000 have arrived by boat; according to the Australian Parliamentary Library, most were legitimate refugees. Within the largest group, from Afghanistan, between 96 and 100 per cent were found to be legitimate refugees and were granted citizenship.

Yet it is on such asylum seekers (known as Irregular Maritime Arrivals) that politics and media are fixed. This dates back to the October 2001 national election, when the then conservative government launched a major campaign against what it saw as the escalation of boat arrivals (then about 2,500 a year).

When a Norwegian cargo ship, MS Tampa, rescued 438 mainly Afghan asylum seekers from a sinking boat and attempted to offload them on an Australian island, the Federal Government refused to allow them to enter territorial waters and subsequently seized the ship. The asylum seekers were then transferred to offshore detention centres on Papua New Guinea and Nauru as part of what became known as “the Pacific solution”.

Under the slogan “We will decide who enters this country and the circumstances in which they come”, the government, which was thought to be facing defeat in light of unpopular domestic policies, was comfortably re-elected.

The media generally took a sceptical approach to the rhetoric and the policy. In the run-up to the election, *The Australian* reported that government claims of asylum seekers deliberately throwing their children overboard to force the Australian Navy to rescue them were false and were known to government ministers to be false.

More disturbingly for journalists, community opposition to asylum seekers seemed to fracture their confidence that media opposition to racism and support for an open Australia reflected the views of society.

After the election of the Labour Government in 2007, the Pacific solution was abandoned. However, two years later there was an increase in asylum seekers, peaking at 18,000 in 2012-2013. It also raised concerns about deaths in the crossing from Indonesia, with about 600 drowning. Reporting on the deaths may have raised empathy for migrants

while also acting as a deterrent to others wanting to travel.

The conservative opposition campaigned strongly under the slogan “Stop the Boats”. The re-introduction of offshore processing in the last days of the Labour Government and an increase in boats being turned back under the Liberal Government elected in 2013 seemed to close the ocean route.

However, the policies of the new government raised new challenges for journalists.

First, the process of maritime interception was militarised under the title Operation Sovereign Borders. As such, the government refused to reveal any details of “water matters”, saying any information would only assist people smugglers.

So media have had to seek information from asylum seekers themselves, including those still in or returned to Indonesia, to get any details on the actions of the Australian forces. As a result, such reporting is attacked by the government and its supporters as undermining the military.

Second, there remain about 150 asylum seekers (many now officially recognised as refugees) who arrived by boat and who continue to be detained on Papua New Guinea and Nauru. While journalists have sought to expose the deplorable conditions they are held in, they have generally been unable to get to them. Visas have become difficult to obtain and access to detainees is largely blocked.

Although it does not have an unblemished record, the Australian media has played a key role in building and sustaining social cohesion faced with this latest wave of migration. Social media have increasingly played a role in mobilising support for migrant communities. Despite government attempts to create a sense of fear and panic over the threat of domestic terrorism, the media has not played along.

However, the fracturing of the mainstream media has provided space for anti-migrant and, specifically, anti-Muslim voices. And again, social media has enabled these voices to be amplified.

It may be too early to tell if Australia has now absorbed the Muslim migration as it has earlier migrations. However, increasing diversity within the media, coupled with opportunities for new voices in new and social media, mean journalists will be better placed to manage the inevitable tensions of a diverse, multi-cultural society.



Migration: It's the same old story

'The enormous change in human conditions to which nearly all our present stresses are due, the abolition of distance and the stupendous increase in power, have flung together the population of the world so that a new way of living has become imperative ...

'The elaboration of methods and material has necessitated a vast development and refinement of espionage, and in addition the increasing difficulty of understanding what the warfare is really about has produced new submersive and demoralising activities of rumour-spreading, propaganda and the like, that complicate and lose contact at last with any rational objective ...

'The uprooting of millions of people who are driven into exile among strangers, who are forced to seek new homes, produces a peculiar exacerbation of the mental strain. Never have there been such crowds of migrating depressing people.

'They talk languages we do not understand ... they stimulate xenophobia without intention ... Their necessary discordance with the new populations they invade releases and intensifies the natural distrust and hostility of man for man – which it is the aim of all moral and social training to eliminate ...

'For the restoration and modernisation of human civilisation, this exaggerated outlawing of the fellow citizen who we see fit to suspect as a traitor or revolutionary and also of the stranger within our gates, has to be restrained and brought back within the scheme of human rights.

– H. G. Wells, *The Rights of Man* (1940)



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