

A Discursive Analysis of Media Representations of Belonging in Australia

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Abstract

In the past decade arguments concerning who can claim belonging in Australia, and fears surrounding border security, have been at the forefront of Australian political and media debates - particularly in relation to unauthorized asylum seekers arriving by boat. Previous literature focusing on these issues has suggested two key reasons for heightened anxieties over claims to belonging: 1) a growing awareness and recognition of the fact of Indigenous sovereignty and its challenge to the sovereignty of the white Australian nation-state and 2) the fact that refugees and asylum seekers seeking asylum in Australia also challenge the sovereignty of the Australian nation-state by highlighting the porous nature of borders and by challenging the ability of the Australian government to maintain control over a supposedly homogenous and 'desirable' population. Thus previous research has indicated that both Indigenous Australians and refugees and asylum seekers present fundamental challenges to the sovereignty of the Australian nation-state. Furthermore, it has been suggested that in response to these challenges the Australian nation has become increasingly invested in ensuring the control, regulation, and possibly exclusion of these two groups of people.

In order to further examine the ways in which control and exclusion are perpetuated by white (i.e., dominant group) institutions in Australia, this thesis employs a critical discursive analytic approach to analyze the representation of Indigenous Australians and asylum seekers and refugees in the mainstream

news media. More specifically, the analysis draws upon the work of Aileen Moreton-Robinson in relation to whiteness studies, and Giorgio Agamben and his conceptualization of the state of exception, to examine the 'techniques of exclusion' available to the nation-state as it attempts to produce a particular concept of (white) belonging, and to justify border security policies.

The analytic chapters examine mainstream news media representations of the claims made by Indigenous Australians to their land through the vehicle of native title, the representation of asylum seekers arriving by boat aboard the *Oceanic Viking* and the *Jaya Lestari 5*, the ongoing criminalization of Indigenous Australians in relation to the 'Aurukun rape case' and the 'gang of 49', and the coverage of refugees and crime in Australia in relation to issues surrounding refugees from Sudan in late 2007. Specifically, the findings indicate:

- A persistent representation of Indigenous Australian claims to land solely in terms of economic discourses rather than as an issue of rights.
- An ongoing representation of asylum seekers arriving by boat as inherently criminal, unlawful, non-genuine, and undesirable – representations that justify their exclusion from the nation.
- A pervasive criminalization of Indigenous Australians and refugees, and a lack of contextual information provided by the mainstream news media in relation to issues of concern to these marginalized groups.

The thesis concludes by examining the similarities and differences between representations of these two groups of people, and considers the implications of

this research for community media forms in a globalized world, as well as for ongoing attempts to recognize Indigenous sovereignty and to advocate for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers.

Author Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution to Clemence Due and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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Publication List

This thesis draws upon work that has been published elsewhere:

Due, C. (2008). 'Lest we forget': Creating an Australian national identity from memories of war. *Melbourne Historical Journal* 36, 23-40.

Due, C. (2008). 'Who are strangers?': 'Absorbing' Sudanese refugees into a white Australia. *ACRAWSA e-journal* 4 (1).

Due, C. (2008). 'Laying claim to country': Native title and ownership in the mainstream Australian media." *M/C Journal* 11 (5).

Due, C. & Riggs, D.W. (2010). Representing 'Australian land': Mainstream media reporting of native title. *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies*, 3(1).

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