A Discursive Analysis of Media Representations of Belonging in Australia

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Table of Contents

Abstract.......................................................................................................................................................... 6
Author declaration....................................................................................................................................... 9
Publication list........................................................................................................................................... 10
Acknowledgements.....................................................................................................................................11
Preface.......................................................................................................................................................12

Chapter 1: Introduction and background.........................................................................................15
  1.1 Historical context.................................................................................................................................16
    1.1.1 Terra nullius, colonization and Indigenous sovereignty............................................................17
    1.1.2 Immigration and asylum seekers in Australia:
        Historical context...............................................................................................................................21
  1.2 Issues of terminology...........................................................................................................................24
  1.3 Thesis overview...................................................................................................................................29

Chapter 2: Theoretical background and literature review...................................................................32
  2.1 Whiteness and belonging.....................................................................................................................36
    2.1.1 Whiteness theory...........................................................................................................................36
    2.1.2 Imagined communities: Nationalism and the white nation.......................................................39
  2.2 Whiteness and ‘Others’........................................................................................................................45
    2.2.1 Whiteness and Indigenous sovereignty.......................................................................................46
    2.2.2 Whiteness, and refugees and asylum seekers............................................................................50
  2.3 Borders................................................................................................................................................53
    2.3.1 Borders and refugees.....................................................................................................................55
    2.3.2 The case of Australian borders...................................................................................................57
  2.4 Practices of Exclusion...........................................................................................................................63
    2.4.1 Homo Sacer, the state of exception, and ‘the camp’.................................................................63
    2.4.2 Criminalization.............................................................................................................................72
  2.5 Chapter summary.................................................................................................................................75
Chapter 3: **Methodology**

3.1 Discourse analysis

3.1.1 Analytic concepts: Interpretive repertoires, ideology, subject positions and argumentation

3.1.2 Discourse analysis and power relations

3.2 Discourse and the media

3.2.1 The relationship between the media and the public: Who influences whom?

3.2.2 Identities and the media

3.2.3 ‘Hard’ news

3.2.4 Resistances

3.3 Data collection

Chapter 4: **Native title and Indigenous Australians**

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Native title legislation: Historical context

4.1.2 Native title legislation: Definitions

4.1.2 Native title legislation: Critiques

4.2 Previous analyses of media representations of native title

4.3 Data and analysis

4.3.1 Claiming rights and interests in land: Media coverage of native title cases

4.3.2 The use of native title land: Business and Indigenous land use agreements

4.3.3 Politics and native title: Economics and the use of land

4.4 Conclusion
Chapter 5: ‘Boat people ’and the voice of asylum seekers…………………145

5.1 Introduction........................................................................................................145

5.1.1 Historical context of ‘boat people’ in Australia..........................147

5.2 Previous analyses of media representations of asylum seekers
and ‘boat people’........................................................................................................150

5.3 ‘Boat people’ back on the media horizon: The Oceanic Viking
and the Jaya Lestari incidents.................................................................................156

5.4 Data and analysis................................................................................................158

5.4.1 Reporting on asylum seekers: People smuggling and
border security........................................................................................................160

5.4.2 The politics of ‘boat people’: Unlawfulness and the
state of exception..................................................................................................176

5.4.3 Representing asylum seekers.........................................................................188

5.5 Conclusion..........................................................................................................195

Chapter 6: Indigenous Australians and criminalization.......................199

6.1 Introduction and background.................................................................199

6.1.1 The Northern Territory intervention....................................................200

6.2 Previous analyses of media representations of Indigenous
Australians and crime............................................................................................204

6.3 Indigenous Australians and crime: Background to the
‘Aurukun rape case’ and the ‘gang of 49’.........................................................209

6.4 Data and analysis............................................................................................211

6.4.1 The politics of voice................................................................................213

6.4.2 Indigenous Australians and crime.........................................................214

6.4.3 Calls for tougher penalties.................................................................224

6.4.4 Sexual abuse and violence as ‘everybody’s business’........238

6.5 Conclusion......................................................................................................246
Chapter 7: **Refugees from Sudan and criminalization**

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 Sudan and Sudanese refugees:
    Background and experiences

7.2 Violence in 2007 and restrictions on the refugee intake from Africa

7.3 Previous analyses of media representations of refugees from Africa

7.4 Data and analysis

7.4.1 Sudanese refugees and crime

7.4.2 Integration and absorption: Kevin Andrews and the restriction of refugees from Africa

7.5 Conclusion

Chapter 8: **Conclusion**

8.1 Summary of analytic chapters

8.2 Implications of this research

8.2.1 For research on belonging and borders and media representations of marginalized people

8.2.2 For the recognition of Indigenous sovereignty and for refugee advocacy

8.3 Concluding thoughts

Reference list

Appendices
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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This thesis draws upon work that has been published elsewhere:


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