Changing the story on asylum seekers:
Positive Peace Journalism images can influence
the way audiences think and feel

By Annabel McGoldrick and Jake Lynch
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Media headlines in recipient countries from the UK to Australia evince "shock", and "horror" that asylum seekers are "begging on the streets of Britain" (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005: 131); "stealing our jobs/our benefits"; our health care and our homes. Inundation metaphors abound: in Australia, "asylum system flooded but deportations slow to a trickle" (Maley & Wilson, 2012); the UK "swamped by asylum-seekers" (Mail Online, 2014). The headline on a sidebar articles, in the latter case, told readers: "Soft-touch Britain: the asylum capital of Europe". Other papers are seldom slow to join in: "Refugees made our lives hell too, say neighbours"; and "DNA test for bogus refugees scrapped as expensive flop" (Thomas, 2012).

Asylum seekers who flee conflicts to head for the UK or Australia, and whose claims are properly assessed, are found, in the vast majority of cases, to be in genuine fear of persecution, thus entitled to refugee status. In their desperate search for sanctuary, they often seek out places where existing diasporic communities of their own people are in a position to help and welcome them. In their stateless predicament, however, they can often find they have few if any enforceable rights, and they have very low levels of visibility in media representations.

This article argues that these twin phenomena are correlatively, perhaps causally linked. Is it the story we tell that determines society's response? We draw on research conducted in Australia, with results from an audience response study suggesting that when presented with real asylum seekers, telling their own story, viewers of television news can respond primarily with hope and empathy. Compassion is not fatigued, but perhaps merely waiting to be 'switched on' by

the right kind of stimulus. The results presented here are part of a larger global study into television news framed as war journalism and peace journalism.

Research Context

The current authors have, for the past 15 years, been developing Peace Journalism (PJ) through professional practice, training, advocacy and scholarly research. PJ is defined as journalism that "creates opportunities for society at large to consider and value nonviolent responses to conflict" (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005: 5). It is not confined merely to war reporting, since conflict is broadly defined as "a relationship between two or more parties who have – or think they have – incompatible goals" (Fisher et al., 2000: 4).

In the model originally developed by Johan Galtung (1998), Peace Journalism offers its readers and audiences backgrounds and contexts of conflict, not just the familiar series of big bangs; a wide range of voices rather than merely a leader on each 'side'; supplies them with the means to challenge dominant accounts, and therefore resist propaganda; highlights peace initiatives, however small, which are always underway in any conflict, perhaps in out-of-the-way places; and shows images of peace as well as those of war.

Shinar produced an overview of published scholarly work in the peace journalism field: the 'state of the art' (2007: 200). In a significant update of Galtung's original dyadic schema, peace journalism, he argues, can be recognized as:

1. Exploring backgrounds and contexts of conflict formation, and presenting causes and options on every side so as to portray conflict in realistic terms, transparent to the audience;
2. Giving voice to the views of all rival parties, not merely leaders from two antagonistic 'sides';
3. Airing creative ideas, from any source, for conflict resolution, development, peacemaking and peacekeeping;
4. Exposing lies, cover-up attempts and culprits on all sides, and revealing excesses committed by, and suffering inflicted on, peoples of all parties;

5. Paying attention to peace stories and post-war developments.

This paper draws on our recent audience study (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2012; Lynch, 2014) gathering qualitative and quantitative data on audience responses to two versions of a set of familiar stories from television news in Australia, the Philippines, South Africa and Mexico. TV news bulletins were produced in professional working newsrooms, coded as war journalism (WJ) and peace journalism (PJ) respectively. In the coding exercise, a 'score' was allotted to each story by operationalizing the peace journalism model under Shinar's five headings, using evaluative criteria particularized in each case to fit distinctions in the stories and the discursive framework.

A story that included material satisfying criteria under any one heading scored one point. One that included all five scored five points. So each individual story was 'marked' initially out of five. Following Maslog, Lee and Kim (2006), three negative indicators of 'passive' peace journalism were then added for the avoidance of emotive language, the 'labeling' of conflict parties as good and bad, and partisan reporting respectively. To recognize the lesser importance of these indicators compared with the main framing characteristics, each was allocated the score of 0.5, to be subtracted from the initial score where such uses of language occurred. So the maximum 'score' for any story was +5.0 and the minimum was −1.5.

The research found that, in all four countries, viewers of PJ could successfully decode the distinctions in the peace journalism model, and the vast majority welcomed it. To quote the final comment of the final focus group in Mexico: "If all the news was like this [meaning PJ] I think I could even watch it before I go to bed if I see these kind of things (laughs)."

So how were the PJ distinctions particularised in the story in the study relating directly to asylum seekers in Australia, and how did audiences respond?

Context of asylum coverage in Australia

Australia at the time of the fieldwork for the study, in late 2010, defined itself as a multi-ethnic political community of just over 20 million people. A Labor

Government held a wafer-thin majority formed out of a hung Parliament. A long-established pattern, in which a fear of outsiders is fomented and exploited for political purposes, had assumed a central importance in Australian politics under Prime Minister John Howard since 2001, with supposed 'threats' from both asylum seekers and 'terrorism' being commonly conflated, and presented as evidence for the need to strengthen the country's 'border protection'.

The relations between Australian journalism and public opinion, in the development of meaning in public discourse about asylum issues, can therefore be conceptualized using Edelman's model of political spectacle (1988). This model offers to explain how political control is exerted by triggering "aroused" or "quiescent" responses to mediated dramas in which "psychological distancing" plays a key role. For this effect to work, the 'other' must be an empty signifier: a vessel into which a range of meanings – otherwise capable of being brought to bear on ambivalent socio-economic issues, to the disadvantage of the author of the drama – can therefore be safely decanted. As Edelman states: "To personify an issue by identifying it with an enemy wins support for a political stand while masking the material advantages the perception provides" (1988: 68).

The effect of psychological distancing in news about asylum seekers is to spread an exaggerated view among Australians of the 'threat' posed by the arrival of people seeking asylum, and of the range of responses to this conflict that Australia – its government, chiefly, but also the community at large – should adopt. Crucial in sustaining this view is for media to distance "us" psychologically from "them" by ensuring that the pair never "meet" (Lynch, McGoldrick & Russell, 2012: 275). They can then be represented – explicitly or, more usually, implicitly – as "harbingers of all things dreadful" (Crock, 2010: 26).

Asylum seekers and refugees themselves are virtually absent, at least as speaking subjects, in news about policy responses, which is usually dominated by party politicians (Klocker & Dunn, 2003). Were they to appear more regularly to speak in their own right, then asylum seekers, as signifiers, would begin to 'fill up', with their own meanings, which would squeeze out the space for other meanings, dreadful and otherwise, to be loaded on to them.

The Story: research material

The research material was compiled in September 2010 in the SBS newsroom, Sydney Australia. SBS is a public service broadcaster with a minority remit producing an hour of domestic and international news each evening. The story selected was headlined *Asylum: more staff needed to process claims*. The *WJ version* created for the research was closely modelled on the package, of pictures and interview material, that went to air on the evening programme, *World News Australia*. It took a sensationalised approach, with a script containing inundation metaphors such as "rising tide"; "waves" and "floods" of new arrivals". File pictures used in the piece appeared to 'criminalise' asylum seekers, displaying police surrounding a sit-down protest outside an asylum detention centre. The images were distancing, with no humanising element of asylum seekers speaking for themselves. The highly politicized story was a follow-up to an earlier government announcement that a military base was to be used as a temporary detention facility to process asylum claims. The news of the day was an urgent immigration department request for extra staff, evidence of which came in the form of a leaked memo from within the public service, and released to journalists by the opposition (right-of-centre) Liberal/National Coalition. The story was partisan in tone: "50 million dollars in taxpayers money to provide accommodation for asylum seekers," implying that 'our' money was to be spent on 'them', so the story score was - 1.5. The narrative here closely paralleled a WJ story considered by Lynch and McGoldrick (2005: 131-133) from UK media coverage of asylum issues. Both the example in the book and the research material excluded and dehumanised asylum seekers, and exemplified a case study of the "tension is rising" scenario.

In contrast, the *PJ version* used less demonising and more humanising images of the refugees by including shots of women and children. The language was neutral in tone even from the politicians who themselves were less polarized, showing some concern for quicker processing of asylum claims. The most significant new material was an interview with Ali Jafaari, an Afghan Hazara man. Fleeing the Taliban in fear of his life, he arrived in Sydney by boat and

subsequently carved out a successful life for himself, informing viewers: "I would like Australia to be proud of me." This post-conflict image of peace scored 1. Crucial background embedded in the script described how "out of seven-thousand arrivals over the past two years only about 250 have been - or will be - be sent back". In other words factually dismissing the myth and challenging the propaganda that asylum seekers are illegal immigrants. The range of views and challenges to propaganda was expanded further in the story by stating that 52% of Australians[1] were supportive of asylum seekers this was validated by pictures of a Sydney demonstration in favour of welcoming asylum seekers. By lacking specific ideas for solutions the story score remained at 4. This version, too, drew on the distinctions highlighted by Lynch and McGoldrick (2005: 136-138), in their PJ rendition of the asylum seeker story where asylum seekers were also given a voice – the opportunity to speak for themselves - to resist the dehumanisation of the original.

Participants

112 students studying a diverse range of degrees at the University of Sydney comprised of 66 women and 46 men, with an average age of 25, ranging from 18 to 53 years. The majority (68) were born in Australia, 37 described themselves as not feeling Australian. Politically 48 held no political preference; 25 voted Green; 17 Labor and 15 were Coalition voters. Religiously 45 defined themselves as Christians; 5 Muslims; 3 Jews; 8 Buddhists and 47 believing in other religions.

Procedure

Recruitment took place through University advertisements for paid participants to watch TV news bulletins. The bulletins were screened three times over a one-month period, in October 2010. Arriving participants were randomly allocated to

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[1] Figures quoted by Michele Levine, Roy Morgan Research a commercial opinion pollsters.

watch either the war bulletin or the peace bulletin. At no stage was any participant made aware that a second, different bulletin existed.

Asylum more staff needed to process claims: Statistics and TLPs

The Differential Emotion Scale (DES; Izard, 1977) was employed to test for differences between the groups before and after viewing, similar – in form, if not content – to the method used by Unz, Schwab and Winterhoff-Spurk (2008). The DES is a 30-item questionnaire, consisting of 10 fundamental emotions, each assessed by three items. The 10 fundamental emotions in this scale are: interest, enjoyment, surprise, distress, anger, disgust, contempt, fear, empathy and guilt. Each of these 30 items is rated on a five-point Likert scale, yielding a score out of five.

Before watching the bulletin, participants filled in the DES to measure baseline levels on each of the 10 subscales, which revealed no statistically significant pre-existing differences between the two groups. During the bulletin, the video was paused at the end of each story for participants to fill out another DES, along with a Thought-Listing Protocol (TLP), inviting them to simply write down any notes about thoughts or feelings prompted by what they were watching (Coleman & Thorson, 2002).

After watching the asylum seekers story, members of the WJ group felt significantly more hopeless than they had been before viewing, whereas PJ viewers' feelings of hopelessness decreased significantly. War journalism viewers showed significantly higher increases in feelings of astonishment, revulsion, contempt, distaste, anger, disdain, scorn and downheartedness than the PJ viewers, compared with their pre-test scores.

The WJ group showed higher levels of anger, hopelessness, distaste, revulsion, scorn, contempt, sadness (downhearted), surprise and astonishment compared with their baseline measures than peace journalism viewers'.

Two main sets of qualitative data were gathered: Thought-Listing Protocols (TLPs) (Coleman & Thorson, 2002), inviting participants to write down notes of any thoughts or feelings prompted by their viewing, alongside their self-

reporting questionnaires; and the recordings made from a separate process of focus group discussions, involving a smaller number of participants drawn from different socio-economic backgrounds (following Philo & Berry, 2011).

Data from the TLPs were themed according to a slightly simplified version of Entman's four functions of framing (2003):

- Moral Evaluation;

- Problem Definition (also including Entman's category of Causal Interpretation);

- Treatment Recommendation.

Viewers of the WJ version of the Australian asylum story, for example, were more angry – according to their self-reporting questionnaires – than those who watched the PJ version, while the latter were more hopeful. The WJ viewers also expressed significantly more scorn and disdain, and the TLP data gathered under the Moral Evaluation heading make it clear these feelings were directed towards the party politicians whose voices dominated the WJ version. Anger among PJ viewers still rose significantly compared with baseline, but the TLP data indicate a much greater degree of anger towards the asylum processing system that, in the words of one respondent, 'shames Australia'.

MORAL EVALUATION	War Journalism	Peace Journalism
Anger towards politicians	52	11
Empathy towards asylum seekers	31	72
Antipathy towards asylum seekers	9	12
Neutral	26	21
Opinion on the news	29	19
Disconnected	2	3

Table 1 Moral evaluations in viewer responses to the Asylum story

The stronger anger and contempt was apparent as directed by WJ viewers towards politicians. There were almost five times as many sentiments of this nature expressed by WJ watchers than written by PJ viewers. The war journalism group comments also contained some strong language and indicated evidence of the disgust and contempt some felt towards the politicians, "furious ➜bastards"; "fuck off Tony Abbott"; "I personally found the repetitive use of "boat people" in news and politician words offensive"; "Disgusted about political lies ". Peace journalism viewers were much less antagonistic towards the politicians, instead demonstrating much more concern about the asylum seekers themselves with more than double the number of empathic comments, "feel sorry for those asylum seekers"; "compassionate over the situation of the asylum seekers"; "empathy for arrivals seeking our support". A small number from both groups showed antipathy towards asylum seekers and neutral comments were also similar in number.

WJ watchers expressed slightly more views about the news itself, with a significant number concerned about several specific war journalism elements like the use of military imagery with one stating this was "not an issue of security." Also, that the story focussed "majorly on the fiscal aspects of the issue but not the side of the asylum seekers." Others noticed the inundation metaphors: "Interesting words!: flows of people, floods of people,"; "where are the a/seekers in this report?" and that the story was "biased because only reported from settled Australian's perspective." There was only one positive comment "this story is interesting."

One PJ viewer also thought that framing was "biased but I totally agree. Right wing racists didn't get a look-in with this story which suits my stance!" There were some opposing views with one writing, "exploitative segment – one sided."

PROBLEM DEFINITION	War Journalism	Peace Journalism
Asylum seekers	6	0
Racism	6	10
Bureaucracy	2	1
Politicization	28	14

Table 2 Problem definitions in viewer responses to the Asylum story

The problem definition showed some group distinctions in the naming of polarization as the problem. This differed from the moral evaluation in that the WJ comments about politicians were less emotional and more analytical, "fearmongering"; "politicians using helpless people for their own benefit to get votes."; "drama in politics", wrote twice as many war watchers. PJ viewers were similar but less of them, "politicisation of issue"; "politicising immigrants".

SOLUTIONS	War Journalism	Peace Journalism
Total	24	36
Help them	11	20
More security	15	6
More staff	0	9

Table 3 Treatment recommendations in viewer responses to the Asylum story

Whilst the number of solutions offered was not radically different, there was a sense that the PJ viewers favoured cooperative, non-violent treatment recommendations as denoted by double the number of comments from the peace journalism group involving helping the asylum seekers. Examples: "immigrants should be made to live in rural areas & spread out" and "greater tolerance & compassion needed". WJ watchers sort double the number of security measures, "there should be stricter policies"; "Australians should send seekers back." So whilst these treatment recommendations do not involve direct violence, such punitive suggestions would, if implemented, constitute "an insult to human

needs" (Galtung, 1990: 9) or a denial of "human… potential" (Galtung, 1969: 167) of the asylum seekers and in that sense can be regarded as violent action.

Focus Group responses to Asylum seekers

To control for socio-economic background, the Australia WJ and PJ bulletins were displayed to 'matching pairs' of focus groups, with between 5 and 8 participants in each group, drawn from:

- Staff at the city office of a major merchant bank;
- Researchers (staff and PGR students) in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Sydney;
- Muslim professionals and community workers from the Auburn area of western Sydney;
- Building attendants at the University of Sydney;
- Clerical workers at the University of Sydney.

Background: There was a great deal of frustration amongst *war journalism* viewers at the lack of context in this story: "I felt there were a lot of assumptions that were not explored". One Muslim woman spoke extensively about her own experience of detention centres: "The picture we get on television is these people have recreation and food, have comfortable accommodation… I've seen the centres and I know it's a prison not a recreation centre and sometimes men are separated from their families in another section." She described this lack of background as "distressing… they don't go to the roots of it, why is it happening?"

But for some *peace journalism* viewers too there was something missing: "I would have liked it to have gone more into the exploitation of the UN with local workers", said a research student. A Muslim woman made a similar comment: "There's more conflict in Afghanistan because Sri Lanka still isn't sorted out. *Why* (emphasized) are they coming? Because there's a genuine need and no-one talks about that."

Another researcher however felt she saw uniquely new material in the story:

> Some of that footage like I say is the first time I've seen... like a lot of the time when it was really politicised there wasn't any media access to any of those refugees, so there was no footage of people being transported or anything because they weren't even in the country and people couldn't fly there to interview them.

As a result of watching, she said, she wanted to find out more. There was a plethora of other comments reflecting a sense of engagement, interest and compassion with asylum seekers, as reflected in the following two statements from female bankers:

> I was imagining myself living in a country where I'm required to flee because of where I was born or how I speak or my religion or whatever which makes it more personal, which improves empathy.

"For the most part these are people who are fleeing from horrible circumstances so I was very empathic", another added, but she was "shocked when she said 52% of Australians support it [the integration of asylum-seekers into Australian society as refugees] and I was kind of a little bit ashamed of that number," because in her view the number was too low. However several of the clerical workers were delighted to hear this: "I thought the stat. by Roy Morgan, a majority of Australians actually support immigrants, that blew me away" and this from another: "To hear that, that the majority are actually quite supportive of it really surprised me. It was a feel good story to a certain degree." A researcher described that fact as "reassuring**.**

Asylum Views: Research students, bankers and clerical workers felt the *war journalism* story was overly political and missing the human perspective of those at the other end of asylum policy. "We didn't really see the asylum seekers, they were noticeably absent," said a research student. One of the female bankers said she was "bored... it jumped to Chris Bowen's view what's his two cents' worth? What's Scott Morrison, what's his two cents' worth? It was just like a bit of a barrage of thoughts." Another commented that "you didn't see the sadness, you

didn't see the desperation, you didn't see the poverty, you didn't see the mental illness, you didn't see the sense of absolute loss and fear."

It was mainly the bankers, clerical workers and research students who discussed the alternative views in the *peace journalism* version, again particularly for an empathic human connection, noted a male banker:

> A lot more sympathy was evoked for that story compared to the second story when you actually heard some tangible reasons why this person was a refugee and you could relate to it you could understand it you had a lot more sympathy for it.

A male colleague agreed with him: "When you hear... an asylum seeker speaking you do relate to them and you are just much more empathic about it."

And very similar from a research student: "The story about the refugee, the asylum seeker, is very positive in the sense that it enables the viewer to empathise, so you feel you do feel sad and you feel engaged with that person." Another banker said it made her more interested in the story:

> If we're trying to build a multicultural, tolerant society here in Australia then you do personalize those stories and give the broader community an exposure to what the lives of these people actually might be and to bring to life why they come to this country in boats... So when the refugee story came on I was kind of like ok well here we go again will this be interesting I wonder? I was intellectually engaged and interested to see whether my view could be influenced in one way or another.

This observation is of particular interest for this study because this women identified in her questionnaire that she was a Coalition voter, in other words someone with right wing politics admitting how interested she was in hearing from an asylum seeker: "So when they actually started talking to him I was interested in his story."

Several researchers appreciated the novelty effect of hearing different voices: "How it actually changes the story when there are views from asylum seekers and I thought that's possibly the first time I've seen footage of asylum seekers

like that before". Another said: "I was very, very happy to hear the opinions of the Afghans in Oz, I've never heard that before on TV".

But one of the clerical workers felt that the story was "very biased and manipulative", and suspicious because the asylum seeker was portrayed as "successful". He seemed:

> A perfectly reasonable, normal nice guy but there are a lot of them who are not and we never get to see them, so it was obvious he was put in there, and I don't doubt he was genuine but he was put in there to persuade to make people change their minds about asylum seekers.

To her most asylum seekers are "horribly bigoted, who keep their wives under wraps at home and demand that." She offered a rare insight into how resistant people can be to having their minds changed. However her demographics revealed she had no political preference, a Christian high income earning administrator and herself an immigrant from Sweden. One of the bankers also felt concerned that the story was biased: "I'm actually pro-asylum seekers myself but I thought they had a polarized opinion… they could have taken another opinion of a more right wing Australian." And one of the building attendants said, "it doesn't really get my sympathy".

Asylum Ideas: Bankers and research students watching *war journalism* complained about a lack of solutions to the asylum issue. "It was very problem orientated rather than solution driven," said a young researcher who found the story "very depressing". One of the bankers described being "left with a sense of hopelessness… where is our compassion and our humanity and commitment to genuinely resolving these things?

The comments from *peace journalism* viewers about solutions were fairly similar to those already quoted in background and views, the sense of being interested and connected to the Afghan man who wanted to make Australia proud of him. "There were some tears in my eyes like 'finally there's one person'. The way he said 'I want Australia to realise that it did not do a mistake,' that looked really touching like they want a chance," said a research student.

Asylum Propaganda: All groups of *war journalism* viewers detected the propaganda in this story. The strongest comments came from Muslims: "No they are sending this message more illusion more disinformation to the average person." He said if he did know better then:

> I would have been confused and I would have thought these asylum seekers should not be here. If I'm watching it for me, my personal, I'm angry because I think it's a brainwashing agenda… and to mislead the community… and to create hatred amongst our community.

One of the building attendants signalled resistance to what he identified as a dominant form of framing: "Every night you're fed these perspectives, I form my own opinions on it, no doubt everybody's vulnerable to some form of manipulation but I'm aware this is what they're doing and its always the same every night." A woman banker said: "I just saw it as a military story almost and you don't actually understand how many people are coming in, like what the impact is, where do they come?" Another added that the political spin left her with a feeling of "hopelessness"; "I think they use the issue mainly in the election time so they use this to play with the vote," said a clerical worker. But a Muslim peace journalism viewer also thought the alternative version propagandistic: "it's all spin and hypocrisy and straight out lies and he (Scott Morrison) hasn't even bothered to find out the truth of the situation."

Asylum peace: One of the bankers watching *war journalism* discussed her own ideas for peace, an idea remarkably redolent of the PJ version: "These people want a better life so much that they would do anything they would do all those jobs that most Australians that are not working." She added that her parents were immigrants "20 years ago, they're a doctor and an engineer and they were cleaning toilets, they would do anything to be given that second chance."

In many ways Ali Jafaari's story belongs in four categories: background, ideas, views and peace. One banker implied that for him the story was an image of peace: "He's been there, come out of it and actually expressing that he really wants to stay in this country and wants you to feel he has the right, he's a good citizen."

Asylum Emotive: There were some strong comments from all the WJ groups relating to emotive words: "All the inflammatory language, I just switch off after a while and think ok what's the actual reality, oh I don't know I'll move on," said one of the bankers. A clerical worker was angry at the use of individual words: "I was being manipulated, I mean they're talking about the 'flood' and the 'wave' and 'overwhelming'". One of the Muslim women laughed, "there was a 'flood of arrivals'. Where is a flood of arrivals (laughter)?" And similarly from a research student: "I felt really riled by a lot of the descriptions of the asylum seekers, like the 'waves of new arrivals'… 'the flood'…'the sudden pressure on our system' that sort of thing that I felt wasn't quantified." There were no comments about emotive words from any of the peace journalism groups.

Asylum Labelling: Many of the *war journalism* viewers were concerned about asylum seekers being demonised: "I couldn't believe the play on fear, it's just this big, 'oh my goodness, your tax dollars, your country' and it was just so dehumanised," said a research student. One of the bankers reported being "kind of left with this impression that all these people are evil and are out to get us." And she was annoyed by how they were labelled: "They call them 'boat people', it's just a nothing term its invented by the media to sell more papers. It's just really frustrating." And this from another banker: "I thought it just goes back to that whole us versus them and all the language about floods of asylum seekers and this and that. I just thought it's an example of journalists choosing what language they think is going to rile people." A clerical worker was frustrated by the pictures: "The images of them waiting on the boat, it looks like they are criminals."

One Muslim went as far as deconstructing the narrative:

> The media constructs that in a way that distances you from those nameless faceless what we call refugees and asylum seekers. You see them in the backdrop and there's a strong distancing that they are just like human fodder and they actually are an unwanted entity and there's a sense of disdain towards them… I was thinking wow they're real people

they're not just a virus or threat to society which is the way they are depicted, they are real people but you never get to see that or hear that.

One of the Muslim *peace journalism* viewers still felt the asylum seekers were demonised, "but its always boat people from the point of view of fear (several speak at once)."

Asylum Partisan: A researcher watching WJ noticed how partisan the asylum story was: "Just all about 'me and Australians', and there's no sense of 'who are these people, what are they running from'?" Again, she was unwittingly pre-empting an element encoded in the PJ version. One of the bankers described a feeling of "switch-off" because she objected to the partisan approach: "I thought it just goes back to that whole us versus them**.** They start talking about the cost of having asylum seekers… they don't ever talk about the cost to Australia of sending troops out to Afghanistan".

There were no comments about partisanship in the language of the item from *peace journalism* viewers.

Role of hope and empathy

Looking back over the transcripts of the focus groups as a complete subset of the data for the present study, what is most convincing as to the research value of testimony by participants is the widely shared and often fervently expressed feeling of *hope* triggered by the experience of watching the PJ bulletins. This would often come in people's initial responses, when asked to make any comments that came to mind on the bulletin they had just watched, as a whole. The social pressure – perhaps a demand characteristic, in a study that participants clearly realise is placing some lens of critical scrutiny on news content – to adopt a critical stance, rapidly gave way, in several groups, to this hopeful response. A group of bankers in Sydney, for example, were about two minutes into their initial critical comments when one interjected, unprompted by the researchers, to switch the course and character of the discussion: "I did think a lot of those stories actually had hope attached to them". Sydney research

students likewise began to recall specific hope-inducing content when one said, again in this early, unstructured part of the discussion:

> There would be this little kind of window that would open where you could see maybe if the story went on in that direction it might be suggestions for change… but I want to hear more about, well, what do they suggest can be done?

In the case of this particular episode, of a running story that has played a prominent role in the media representation of political contestation between would-be governing parties in Australia over many years, the presentation of one successful case study made all the difference. For Ali Jafaari to appear in the item as a speaker in his own right dissolved some of the psychological distancing required to make political spectacle take effect. He 'filled up' with his 'own' meanings, thus leaving less room for other meanings to be 'decanted' into him. And his story won viewer attention for contrapuntal perspectives frequently obscured in mainstream media discourse on the subject: most 'boat people' are fleeing genuine fears of persecution, and most Australians are ready to welcome them. As Gamson and Modigliani observe:

> Media discourse is part of the process by which individuals construct meaning, and public opinion is part of the process by which journalists… develop and crystallize meaning in public discourse (1989: 2).

It means any attempt to transform the political discourse in Australia, on this issue of close concern to diasporic communities, would be well advised to seek opportunities to intervene in journalism.

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