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## **A Tale of Donkeys, Swans and Racism: London Tabloids, Scottish Independence and Refugees**

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*This article explores the nature of immigration and refugee narratives and how they are structured by a constellation of media interests in the specific context of Scottish news agenda. It also looks at the coverage of asylum issues by The Scottish Sun, The Scottish Daily Mail and The Scottish Daily Express between September 2003 and September 2004 as examples of media interventions. This comparative analysis identifies these interventions as distinctive and orchestrated racist efforts that use elements such as culture and national security to legitimize it narratives. It studies the amount of coverage and looks at specific examples in terms of narratives and textual analysis.*

Scotland is a very distinctive place compared to the rest of the United Kingdom. These differences have become even more evident in recent times in light of the electoral success of the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP), which calls for independence. As the then SNP Shadow Justice Minister Kenny MacAskill MSP said last year:

Our economic needs and social wants are different and distinct to the rest of the UK. As a nation of emigrants we wish to see immigrants coming to Scotland dealt with kindness and compassion, not brutality and oppression. (SNP, 2006)

Indeed, when it comes to immigration, Scotland, as the rest of Europe, is a land of paradoxes. On the one hand, it faces a decline in population in terms of numbers and ageing, that is predicted to create a major crisis in the pension system in the next four decades. On the other hand, there is increasing hostility towards immigrants in general, especially against asylum seekers. These attitudes seem even more paradoxical since Scotland has historically been a nation characterized by massive flows of emigration, which remains significant.

Scotland is the least densely populated of the four countries of the United Kingdom. It has 65 people per square kilometre, as opposed to 125 people per square kilometre in Northern Ireland, 142 people in Wales and 383 people in England (Office for National Statistics, 2004). In addition, its population is rapidly ageing with more than 60 per cent of people over 40. John Randall, Registrar General for Scotland says that:

Under these latest projections, which reflect recent demographic trends, the population of Scotland is projected to continue declining slowly. The biggest factor influencing the population change is the falling number of births. Migration flows to and from Scotland are projected to balance out in the future. (Pauling, 2004)

The figures of the Office for National Statistics in the UK predict that the total population of Scotland is projected to decrease from 5.11 million in 2000 to 4.93 million by 2025, and that the number of children under the age of 16 to fall to 78 % of its 2000 level by 2025. Meanwhile, the number of people over 65 is estimated to rise by 15 % to nearly 1.1 million in that same period, which means that, in practical terms, the number of people over retirement age will have increased by 36 % between 2000 and 2025 (Scottish Executive, 2001).

Despite this several surveys and opinion polls indicate that the Scottish public is among the most reticent to welcome immigration. In 2004, a report of the National Centre for Social Research (NCSR) found that the number of people who thought immigration ‘should be reduced’ is now 74 % as opposed to 65 % in 1995 despite significant rises in Scottish family income (Office for National Statistics, 2003). The NCSR research also showed that this increasing anti-immigrant sentiment has been shaped by a growing belief that immigration has “negative consequences for society,” particularly “in relation to crime.” More critical still is the attitude towards asylum seekers. A survey carried out in 2005 in Scotland by the polling company Ipsos-MORI<sup>1</sup> and commissioned by the charity Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (OXFAM), found that over 46 % of people surveyed thought that “the number of asylum seekers living in Scotland is a problem,” while less than 5 % strongly believed that that “they made any positive contribution to life in Scotland.” This survey showed that the terms most commonly associated with asylum seekers are ‘desperate’ (34%), ‘foreigners’ (23%), ‘problem’ (20%) and ‘scroungers’ (12%); which also happens to be terms that are frequently used in the tabloid newspapers in their coverage of asylum seekers.<sup>2</sup>

One of the possible explanations for the paradox of a nation urgently requiring immigrants but whose population is overwhelmingly reluctant to embrace them can be explained by means of underlying narratives regarding immigrants. These are articulated and reinforced by the media which have the ability to construct and dispense social knowledge (Fowler, 1991; Van Dijk, 1991). These narratives are by no means neutral and, as Paul Gilroy<sup>3</sup> has pointed out, they can be understood in relation to racism:

We increasingly face a racism which avoids being recognised as such because it is able to link race with nationhood, patriotism and nationalism. A racism which has taken a necessary distance from crude ideas of biological inferiority and superiority and now seeks to present an imaginary definition of the nation as a unified cultural community. (Bulmer & Solomos, 1999, p. 244)

This article explores the nature of these narratives and how they are structured by a constellation of media interests in the specific context of Scottish news agenda. In order to that, it looks at the coverage of asylum issues by *The Scottish Sun*, *The Scottish Daily Mail* and *The Scottish Daily Express* between September 2003 and September 2004 as examples of media interventions. This comparative analysis identifies these media interventions as distinctive and orchestrated racist efforts that use elements such as culture and national security to legitimize its narratives.

## **Knowing Me, Knowing You**

These referenced narratives are sustained in a non-explicit manner (Bailey & Harindranath, 2005), although they present agency. They use nationhood and culture to determine who is and who is not part of the imaginary nation, arguing for the need to defend 'Britain's embattled culture', as written in a recent headline of *The Scottish Daily Express* (Blacklock, 2005). This is, by all means, a mechanism of exclusion often used to argue monoculturalism (superior, civilized, assimilation, etc.) without mentioning race. Examples of this have been already discussed by Ward (2002, p. 28) who noted the existence of a "dog whistle journalism" which, using a reasonable language, delivers a calculated message to the target audience. The audiences to which Ward refers in his article on the Tampa affair in Australia in 2001 were the undecided voters in that country. According to him the explicit intention in these cases is not necessarily related to attacking refugees as a group, but to achieve an electoral goal. In so doing, the media creates moral panics that facilitate the mobilization of voters towards the right, since –as other authors have pointed out- the electorate tend to choose those candidates with a more conservative platform in these types of situations when there is a perceived threat (Lewis, Inthorn & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2005, p. 129).

This is the case of Britain where similar racist strategies are often used by rightwing groups and some media outlets to achieve political goals. In the case of the UK the evidence suggest that the Conservative tabloid press mobilizes the public towards more conservative views by creating moral panics on immigration and refugees issues in the hope that this translates into votes for the right (Law, 2002). This type of racism articulates the fear of the invading hordes as a *devil folk*, mobilizing voters by fear and defining vote intention by means of panic. This has been a regular xenophobic and racist practice in the past since the fear of difference has been a feature of colonial discourse that recurs today in political discourse (Gale, 2004). This is because the politics of race in Britain is fuelled by conceptions of national belonging and homogeneity; this not only blurs the distinction between race and nation, but relies on that very ambiguity to create moral panics. According to Gilroy (1978) "It specifies who may legitimately belong to the national community and simultaneously advances reasons for the segregation or banishment of those whose origin, sentiment or citizenship assigns them elsewhere" (p. 45).

However, Britain presents a much more complicated scenario since it has created legally, and in terms of media narratives, two categories of people: refugees and asylum seekers. In the first case, the term complies with the Geneva Convention and it mainly refers to those who had been granted political asylum. The second term, asylum seekers, designates those who have arrived to the country but who had not yet been granted legal status of refugees. This second group has become a key element of electoral narratives for which they cause 'public service collapse', 'social tensions' and, more recently, 'terrorism'. Indeed, media coverage of asylum seekers in Britain increases by about 8 % in the build up to general because the concept of race still remains central to political debates in Britain on issues such as immigration, national identity (Law, 2002), and culture and religion (Bulmer & Solomos,1999).

This media coverage is therefore far from neutral; framed instead by colonial narratives and representations which present immigrants as incompatible with Western values and therefore uncivilized. This practice of using culture to denote barbaric behaviour was epitomized by an article in *The Daily Star* under the headline "Asylum Seekers Eat Our Donkeys". The article, published on April 21, 2003, claimed that a group of asylum seekers stole nine donkeys from south-east London:

Asylum seekers have stolen nine donkeys - and police believe they've killed and eaten them. The pets - which gave kids rides at a Royal park - are said to have been stolen by East Africans, who see their meat as a delicacy. The female donkeys vanished after thieves cut through a wire fence at night. They were then led across a golf course and driven off in a lorry. (Nicks, 2003, p. 14)

*The Daily Star*, part of the Express Group (owner also of *The Scottish Daily Express*), presented this story as a factual scoop. However, the only police source cited in the article is an 'insider' who was not identified and who said that they police were "totally baffled over what has happened to the donkeys". Nevertheless, the reporter wrote:

One of our main lines of inquiry is that they may have been taken by immigrants who like eating donkey meat as a delicacy. 'It's no secret that we have a large African immigrant community here.' Donkey meat is a speciality in some East African countries, including Somalia. And two areas near Greenwich - Woolwich and Thamesmead - have large numbers of Somalian asylum seekers. (Gary, 2003. p. 14)

In so doing, the article implies that it had to be the group of Somali asylum seekers living nearby. The reporter emphasizes the credibility of this piece since 'the donkey rustling follows reports of swans being stolen from ponds and lakes in London by immigrants to eat' (Gary, 2003). The story in itself under the front page headline "Asylum Gang had 2 Swans for Roasting" said:

Police swooped on a group of East Europeans -and caught them red-handed about to cook a pair of Royal swans. The asylum seekers were barbecuing a duck in a park in Beckton, East London. But two dead swans were also found -concealed in bags and ready to be roasted. The discovery last weekend confirmed fears that immigrants are regularly scoffing the Queen's birds. (Sullivan, 2003, p. 1)

However, by the time that *The Daily Star* had published the donkey story, the story about the swans published by *The Sun* had largely been discredited as a hoax; leading to a public apology from *The Sun* on December 6, 2003, which confessed that it had been made up (The Sun, 2003).<sup>4</sup> Despite this, the story on the asylum seekers eating donkeys published by *The Daily Star* received wide attention and was later reproduced by a number of radio and television stations all over the country.

Hundreds of complaints were launched against *The Daily Star* at the Press Complaints Commission, a self regulatory body set up by the newspapers in Britain that deals with inaccuracies of the press but that has no way of enforcing decisions. Only one complaint was upheld and later resolved. This complaint came from Nuradin Dirie, Chair of the Somali Coordinating Committee, who complained that the article was inaccurate (therefore in violation of Clause 1 of the PCC Code of Practice)<sup>5</sup> in suggesting that Somali asylum seekers may have stolen donkeys from Greenwich Royal Park to eat them. In the complaint, Dirie explained to the PCC that eating donkey meat was actually prohibited by Islam, since this meat is not *halal*.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the PCC did not uphold the complaints because of misrepresentation nor because no

source had actually said what the headline suggested, but because of a fundamental flaw in the story. Weeks later, the newspaper published an apology, but not in the front page. No disciplinary action or reprimand was taken against any journalist or editor of this newspaper.

This case is by no means an isolated incident, but instead typical of a widespread and common practice among some British tabloids that not only represents asylum seekers as ‘non individuals’, racializing them as a homogenous group in the same way that was done in the past to ‘Blacks’, ‘Jews’, ‘Asians’ and ‘Gypsies’, but that also attaches to these representations the same pejorative values. That is to be a ‘threat’ to the imaginary national identity and unity, which draws simultaneously and differentially upon constructions of the Other and the Self (Lynn & Lea, 2003). This phenomenon has been called by Bailey and Harindranath (2005) the “racialized othering” of asylum seekers (p. 274).

Findings of this researcher and other researchers in Scotland suggest that British tabloids in contraposition to Scottish tabloids are far more focused on the theme of asylum seekers. Indeed, there is a clear distinction that needs to be made between the British tabloids based in London, with a regional ed. for Scotland, and those newspapers with their main headquarters in Scotland. This is manifest in the agenda, angle and approach to all level of news concerning asylum seekers. In some cases, while the Scottish newspapers adopt a favourable or neutral approach to the issue, the British tabloids tend to almost inexorably adopt a negative approach, with the exception of the leftwing *The Scottish Mirror*. Indeed, in the case of most of the British tabloids, this news agenda has become almost a fixation.

Because of this, this coverage should be considered as a public communication campaign in terms of the way asylum seekers are conceived in the context of race. This is, of course a problematic departing point from a traditional methodological point of view. However, as Paul Gilroy suggests, we should pay less attention to the issue of the epistemological relation of race to class and to the status of race as a distinctive order of social phenomena sui generis. Instead, as Gilroy has insisted among academics and activists in Britain, we need to concentrate more on the manner in which racial meaning, solidarity and identities, provide the basis for action (1987, p. 27). This ‘action’, refers in this specific case to the need to deconstruct and contextualize the orchestrated interventions and narratives displayed by tabloid newspapers in Scotland as both manifestations of what Stuart Hall called ‘overt and inferential racism’ (1997, p. 162). This because, categorizing persistent and orchestrated negative media coverage of asylum seekers as an electoral racist practice, which, as some authors have already pointed out, is crucial for anti-racist efforts (Mendelberg, 2001). This is because the implicit racist appeal constructed and conveyed by candidates and the media, “loses its implicitness –and its effectiveness- when it is challenged and rendered explicit” (Mendelberg, p. xii).

This is particularly the case in Britain, where the implementation of anti-racist and anti-hatred legislation in the past few years in the UK, especially those provisions of the law that affect speech against ethnic and religious minorities, has obliged some of these racist narratives and representations to become more subtle, using the ‘dog whistle’ technique. Indeed, media campaigns against asylum seekers are nowadays rarely overtly racist. Instead, in many cases, they seem to be based on what some authors have called legitimate ‘news values’ (Fuller, 1996, p. 6). However, because anti-immigration is one of the few ‘digestible’ terms left in the mainstream media discourse, it is still used to deliver racist narratives and mobilize the electorate politically; a function that has been lately reinforced by the issues of national security and terrorism. Therefore media interventions in the form of public media campaigns are delivered not necessarily to create and reinforce negative attitudes towards asylum seekers, but to undermine

the government (or particular members of the government); creating moral panics to deliver inferential racist narratives, and articulate racist representations.

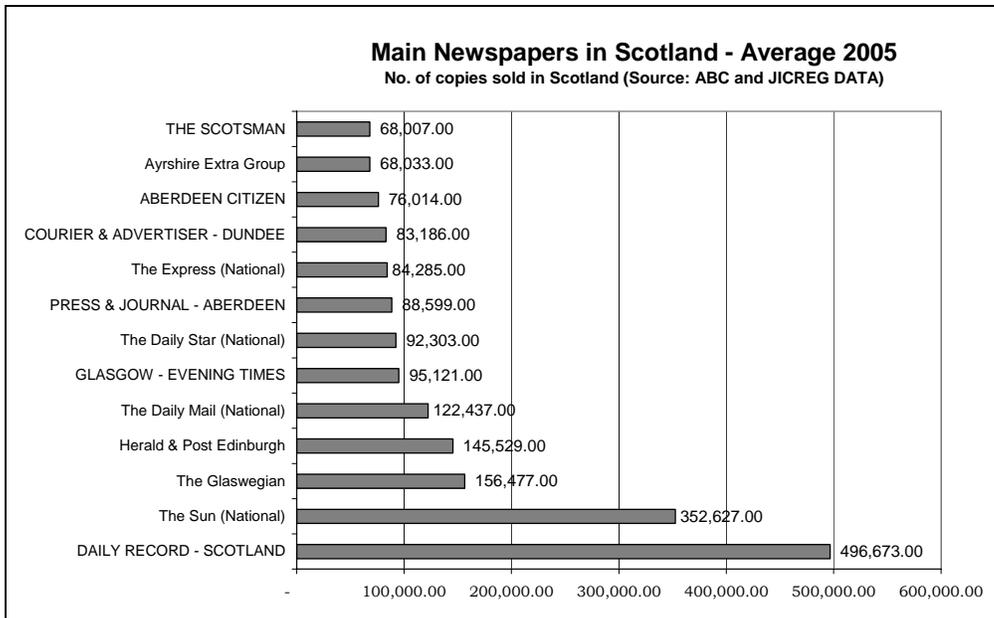
Perhaps it is important to highlight at this point that what traditionally have been called ‘public communication campaigns’ (Rice & Atkin, 1989, p. 37) have been in fact defined as “orchestrated but temporary efforts to promote specific political goals by means of a given media outlet” (Arterton, 1987, p. 82). In some cases, they have been categorized as ‘media advocacy’ (Dearing & Rogers, 1996, p. 61), since their aim is to create awareness, triggering action and ultimately promoting the public good. This is because the understanding of these campaigns departs from an ethical notion of what public relations is about (Lloyd, 1973; Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1994; Sallot, Cameron, & Lariscy, 1998; Theaker, 2001; Lloyd, 1973; Sallot et al., 1998; Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1994). However, intention (that is ethical intention) is not necessarily relevant. Not only because intentionality derives from subjective interpretations, but also because the morality of this definition needs to consider the wider picture of racist practices at least in the way some media outlets cover asylum seekers in Britain. In this alternative framework, some variety of media coverage, including those that undermine groups of people in a systematic way, can then be categorized as media campaigns, even if the main actors deny racist intention.

To deconstruct and contextualize these campaigns as racist, it is important not only to look at the wording often chosen by news editors and journalists but also at the frequency, timing and persistency of representing asylum seekers as a social and political issue. In this case it is reflected in the way in which asylum seekers are constantly portrayed ‘as a source of conflict between identifiable groups over the distribution of resources’ (Cobb & Elder, 1983, p. 27) ‘that deserve to receive mass media coverage’ (Dearing & Rogers, 1996, p. 3). This was one of the main conclusions of Smart, Grimshaw, McDowell, & Crosland in a report carried out for the Information Centre about asylum and refugees in the UK (2007, p. 51).

In other words, by identifying asylum seekers as an ‘issue’ in terms of resources and security the rightwing press reinforces rightwing narratives, pretty much in the same way that ‘Blacks’ who arrived from the West Indies in the 1950s were explicitly represented as a problem by politicians such as Enoch Powell who gave the infamous racist speech ‘Rivers of Blood’ (Jones, 1999, p. 13). Lynn and Lea (2003), in their study of the British press and the coverage of asylum seekers, have identified three discursive or rhetorical strategies: a) the differentiation of the Other; b) the differentiation of the Self; and c) the enemy in our midst. Media campaigns often tend to ride on these rhetorical strategies conveying asylum seekers as ‘different to ‘us’ (Gale, 2004, p. 327).

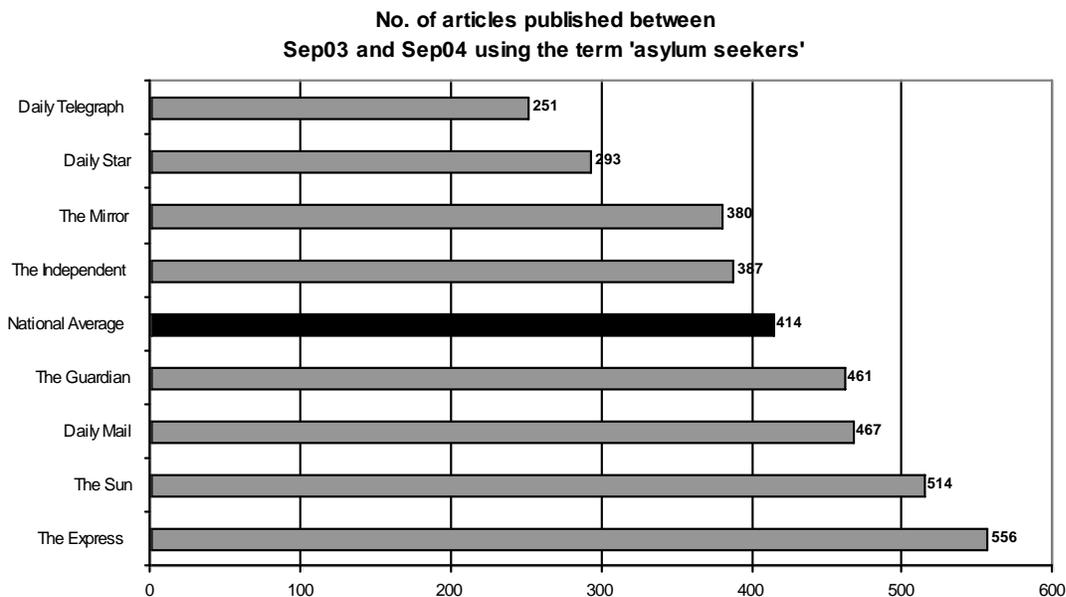
### **Playing Devil’s Advocate**

The pro-refugee camps in Scotland have often singled out a group of national tabloid newspapers as providing the most systematic anti-asylum coverage: *The Scottish Sun*, *The Scottish Daily Mail* and *The Scottish Daily Express* (Smart et al., 2007). These three newspapers are among the ten best-selling titles in Scotland, despite being London-based tabloids re-branded as Scottish ed.s:



(Source: LexisNexis database, 2006)

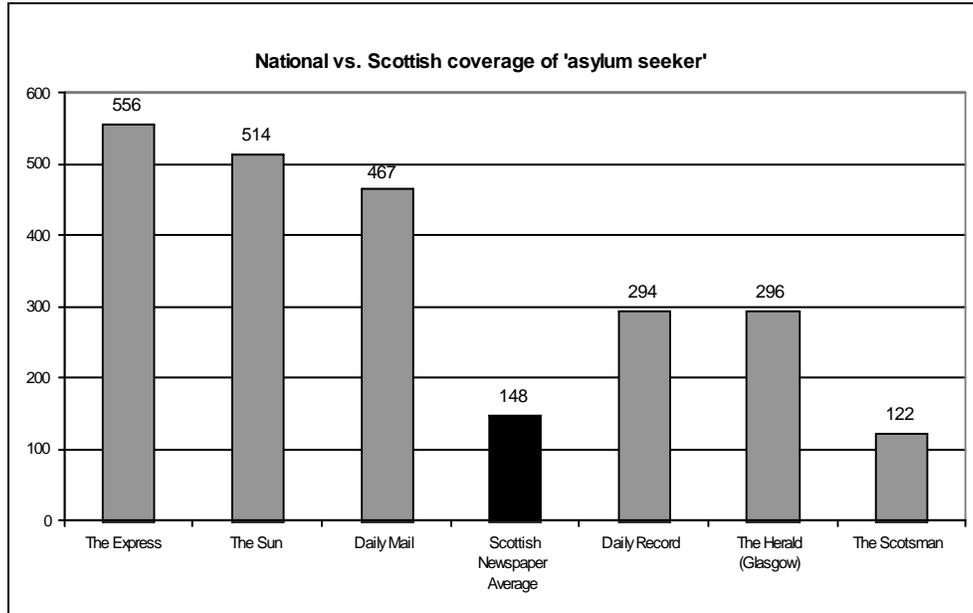
These London-based tabloid newspapers dedicate more articles to asylum seekers matters than any other newspaper in the whole of the United Kingdom:



(Source: LexisNexis database, 2006)

The emphasis on the 'issue' of asylum seekers is even more of a contrast when compared with the number of articles that the Scottish press dedicate to the same subject. In the building of the 2005 general elections this group of national newspapers published, between September 2003

and September 2004, three times more articles on the issue than their Scottish counterparts did on average:

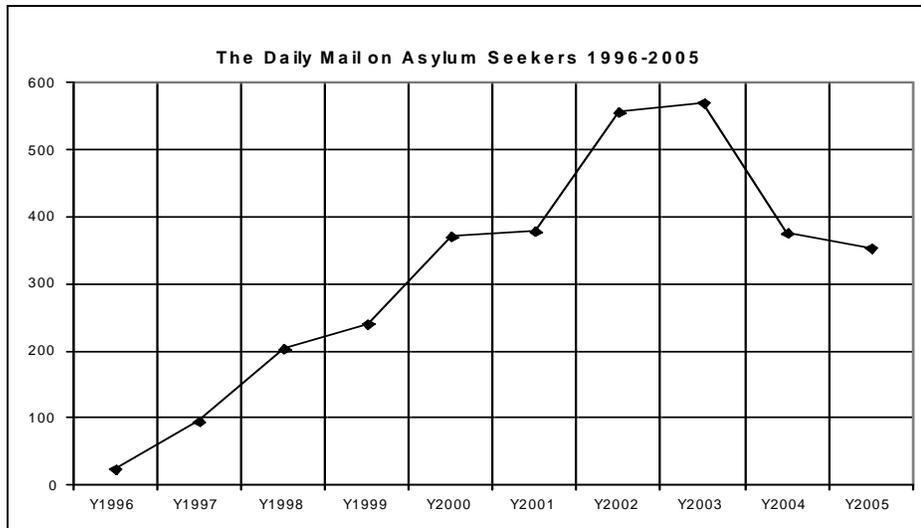


(Source: LexisNexis database, 2006)

Some additional data also suggests that the ‘issue’ of asylum seekers is a debate that is being brought to Scotland by national papers’ coverage. It also suggest that not only have these three newspapers taken a more proactive role in covering asylum, but they have done so from an anti-asylum perspective as recent research by Anthea Irwin of the University of Glasgow Caledonian reveals (Irwin, 2007). Irwin’s work, which was commissioned by the NGO OXFAM through its Asylum Positive Image Project states that the indigenous Scottish press tends to be far less anti-asylum than their British counterparts:

It is clear that the Scottish papers (as opposed to the Scottish ed.s of British papers) have a neutral to pro-asylum stance and the dominant discourse is that many asylum seekers are refugees who have fled from intolerable situations in their home countries and should be welcomed and treated with respect and dignity in Scotland. (Irwin, 2007, p. 21)

It is important to point out that the coverage of asylum seekers has become even more evident during Labour’s term in office. For example, since the landslide victory of the Labour party in 1997 *The Daily Mail’s* readers have seen a substantial increase in column inches dedicated to asylum-seeker matters:



(Source: LexisNexis database, 2006)

The peaks here correlate with the run-up to general elections in both Scotland and the UK. Furthermore, a comparative analysis of the coverage *The Scottish Sun* and *The Daily Express* show a similar trend. There was however a slight difference in Rupert Murdoch-owned *The Sun* which seems to show a fall in the number of articles published on the subject on 2001 in the run up to the general elections. This apparent anomaly, which differs from the historical patterns of *The Scottish Sun*, can be explained by the fact that since 1997 this newspaper has been supporting Tony Blair's New Labour platform.

However, the persistent negative coverage of asylum seekers should not only be seen simply as a strategy to undermine Labour and mobilize a potential Conservative victory, but also as a technique to strengthen the most right-wing voices inside all the political parties, including Labour. This practice allows those politicians in Britain who adopt a strong stand against asylum seekers and immigrants to increase their media exposure. The biggest beneficiary in recent times of this practice has been David Blunkett, MP for Sheffield Brightside, who as Home Office Secretary (2001-2004) promoted some of the most draconian measures against immigrants and asylum seekers in recent times. Although having to resign twice from the cabinet due to corruption scandals, he was rewarded with a weekly column in *The Sun* for which he earned last year nearly 150,000 pounds, almost US\$ 300,000 (Branigan, 2006).

This media practice has responded to the identification of immigration policy as a key issue to target in the past two general elections. In the 2005 elections, the then Conservative leader, Michael Howard, enlisted the help of the man who advised Australia's Prime Minister, John Howard, in the last four elections. Lynton Crosby as Liberal Party of Australia's chief electoral strategist was responsible the slogan "We decide who comes here" for the 2001 campaign in that country. It is reported that he advised the Conservatives to repeat some of these same tactics in Britain (Watt, 2005), including asking pro-Conservative papers to intensify their coverage of asylum seekers. The Labour government responded by also toughening its immigration policy and discourse.

This strategy now seems to be exhausted, and recently the new leader of the Conservative Party, David Cameron, called upon his followers to embrace 'genuine' asylum seekers fleeing from persecution and promised to review the policy of capping their numbers for the next

manifesto. Cameron criticized former Home Secretary, David Blunkett, who he said got immigration most 'spectacularly wrong':

He was the person who talked about us being swamped: he used irresponsible language at the same time as having a chaotic immigration policy. I want the Conservative party to do the opposite: use moderate, reasonable, sensible language, and to have a policy that actually delivers. (Hinsliff, 2005, p. 1)

This was not, however, a complete departure from the traditional Conservative view of asylum seekers as an issue. In that same interview for the Sunday paper *The Observer*, Cameron praised the cultural and economic benefits of immigration, but added:

We will have a big amount of emigration and immigration, but will also recognise that a responsible government needs to look at the level of net migration in terms of also providing good public services and having good community relations (Hinsliff, 2005, p. 1).

### **Refugees' News on Balance**

The coverage of asylum seekers in tabloid newspapers suggests agency towards weakening liberal sectors in both parties. However, there is no evidence that journalists from these newspapers are directed to take specific stands towards asylum seekers or immigrants in what they write. Interviews with journalists and editors prove to be inconclusive in this respect. Instead, it can be suggested that the organizational culture serves as the framework for the newspaper agenda, defining the way in which stories regarding asylum seekers will be covered. There is awareness among staff in these newsrooms of the angle that they are expected to take and the sources that they need to interview;<sup>7</sup> something that is reinforced by the editorials published by these newspapers during the year previous to the general election. For example, all the editorials referring to the subject published by *The Express* or the *The Daily Mail* in 2004 questioned the immigration policy of the government and portrayed asylum seekers as an 'issue'. It is logical to assume that for any journalist wanting to make a career inside those organizations, this was an unequivocal sign of what to write and what angle to take.

The objective is clear although not explicit; to undermine the government by criticizing its immigration policy. For example, between 2004 and 2005, not only did *The Express* have 238 articles that associated the term 'asylum seeker' with 'problem' but also 123 articles associating 'immigration policy' with 'problem' in the same paragraph. This same newspaper published 175 articles that associated the term 'asylum seeker' with the word 'terrorism'. During this same period there were 28 editorials and 104 headlines with the term 'asylum seekers', with overwhelmingly negative connotations. The numbers in the cases of *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* are similar and also significantly higher than the average number dedicated by the Scottish press. In that same period, *The Sun*, published 45 opinion pieces and editorials criticising asylum seekers and immigration policy with little or no balance (that is, without a source contradicting the main assertion of the article), while *The Daily Mail* had 53 editorials and opinion pieces on this subject, equally excluding alternative points of view.

These newspapers also tend to link the 'issue' of asylum seekers with Labour in government, but they are careful not to present it as an explicit attack coming from the

Conservative party, since once explicitly presented as a political message it loses its power to mobilize. *The Daily Mail* dedicated 244 articles to asylum seekers that questioned the ability of the Labour government, but of these only 81 included a Conservative party source, when this would be in other cases a matter of course when questioning government policy (since they are the main opposition party). Particularly interesting is the way in which certain news pieces are orchestrated to reinforce criticism to government policy in other areas. For example, *The Sunday Express* published a feature article with the headline 'Got AIDS? Welcome to Britain'. The article argues that asylum seekers with AIDS, tuberculosis and other killer diseases were gaining permanent entry to Britain by exploiting what the article called 'a dangerous loophole in the law' created by the European Convention of Human Rights.

Asylum-seekers with AIDS, TB and other killer diseases are gaining permanent entry to Britain by exploiting a dangerous loophole in the law. 'The loophole, discovered by a Tanzanian woman and her lawyers, relates to an article in the European Convention of Human Rights. All that needs to be proven is that the asylum-seeker is suffering from a life-threatening disease and that health care in their country of origin is not up to first world standards. (McMullan, 2002, p. 10)

The feature article published by *The Sunday Express* on April 7, 2002 addresses the case of Hindu Mwakitosi, a Tanzanian woman, who successfully managed to appeal under article three of the Human Rights Act against the decision of the British government of denying her asylum claim on "medical grounds" (McMullan, 2002). A very similar story was also published by *The Daily Mail* in a two page feature next day about the Ugandan born George Muwanga, who came to Britain being HIV positive:

For now, under the provisions of the Human Rights Act, he will almost certainly be able to remain here for the rest of his life --receiving an expensive cocktail of drugs designed to keep Aids at bay for years. The cost, of more than GBP 11,000 a year, will be met by the British taxpayers....immigrants from Africa have over-taken homosexual men as the largest single group newly-diagnosed as HIV-positive in Britain. (Craven, 2002, p. 32)

The articles were published at the time that Labour's record investing and modernizing the National Health System (NHS) was being questioned and also at the time that the Euro was introduced. The first article suggests that it would cost the tax payers some UK£ 15.000 (US\$ 26.413.45) a year to treat this woman and other similarly 'infected' asylum seekers (the amount varies in *The Daily Mail* that claims it will be UK£ 11.000 per year).

This campaign had a very clear objective: to dispel fears of not receiving medical attention. Instead of exposing the fact that the 'new' resources made available to the NHS since 1997 were having a minimal impact because it was a historical correction after decades of under funding by previous Conservative governments, the agenda became (by extension) that the asylum seekers were responsible for draining NHS resources. This piece was also published to address tangentially the anti-European Union position of the newspapers in the year that the Euro had been introduced as a single currency. The article attributes the loophole not to international law, but emphasizes that this is a European matter, despite the fact that the European Convention

of Human Rights is not European Union legislation (something that was not explained to the reader). The corollary to this episode was that, a year later, the Labour government proposed to deny AIDS/HIV treatment to asylum seekers, something that was rejected by all medical bodies in the UK but that is still pretty much in the agenda. This same approach was mirrored in Australia more recently when the John Howard called to ban all entries of HIV positive persons in that country, including refugees (BBC, 2007).

### **Local Against National**

It is widely recognized that national newspapers tend to set the agenda for local newspapers (Herman & Chomsky, 1994). The case of Scotland is no different. Once this type of campaign is launched other local newspapers tend to follow, because of the nature and dynamics of the news agenda. On August 29, 2004 *Scotland on Sunday* published on its front page an article entitled “Asylum Seekers to Get IVF on the NHS before Childless Scots” (Barns, 2004). It must be said, however, that this newspaper published a series of letters of complaints from its readers and that since then it not only has lowered its tone on the matter, but it has also made an effort to pursue a more responsible pro-refugee agenda.

As explained earlier, although there is no evidence of racist intention in this coverage, the degree of orchestration and direction set towards specific political objectives, nevertheless, suggests a constellation of interests in which asylum seekers are caught up. Since 1997 this agency has been defined by Conservative electoral needs and the promotion of right-wing voices across the political spectrum, including the Labour party. It is a media campaign that, while not necessarily designed as such nor formulated in an office by public relations specialists, nevertheless, delivers similar outcomes. It is worth remembering the front page headline of *The Observer* after Labour’s landslide victory of 1997: ‘Goodbye Xenophobia’ (Hutton and Wintour, 1997). Ten years later, not only has Labour gone ahead with some of the most draconian legislation against asylum seekers and immigrants, but *The Observer* itself has dropped some of its original editorial views and has become much more conservative in these matters.

### **Conclusions**

Recent tensions and violence against refugees in Scotland cannot solely be blamed on the tabloid orchestration of a particular news agenda. Instead they are a manifestation of a deeper and much more complicated set of problems linked to racism as an ideology, which is both institutionalized in the State and spread across vast segments of society. Nevertheless, these campaigns bear some responsibility; either because they have failed to deliver understanding or because they have exacerbated existing tensions among people. The situation in Britain has worsened since the London bombings of July 7, 2005, pretty much in the same way that 9/11 has worsened the situation of some communities in the U.S. The binary distinctions that sustain racist narratives in the media have become more legitimized even among traditionally liberal newspapers. These narratives have found their way into Scotland through the channels opened by the national press. In the case of Scotland, they set an endogenous agenda that responds to interests and motivations derived from London, while strengthening a rightwing agenda that otherwise would have difficulty finding a niche audience in Scotland because of specific historical circumstances.<sup>8</sup> This is a process, orchestrated and systematic, that has clear objectives

and target-audiences, and that delivers racist messages and narratives under the pretext of security.

This is the real challenge of anti-racist campaigns in Scotland: to compete against powerful racist media campaigns that are presented as non-racist and legitimate media coverage. This is not something that other campaigns have had to confront in the past. Campaigns against drunk driving, disability awareness and domestic violence developed in Scotland, and often compared to anti-racist campaigns in academic and professional analysis, had no contradictory narrative coming from the mainstream media to neutralize their message; at least not on this scale.

Scotland, however, lives a particularly historical moment in which the independence movement has secured power for the first time. The recent poll results show the composition of a Scottish Parliament made up of progressive groups in terms of an immigration agenda with a strong presence of voices that have been traditionally in favour of refugees' matters. In fact, the latest elections in Scotland on May 2007 saw the arrival Bashir Ahmad as a Member of the Scottish Parliament for the SNP, the first ever from an ethnic minority to be elected. This is indeed a completely different ball game; one in which the priorities and real needs of Scotland could become the main news agenda for all newspapers.

### Notes

1. Ipsos MORI is the second largest survey research organisation in the UK, formed by two of the UK's leading companies in October 2005. MORI (Market & Opinion Research International), was originally founded in 1969 by Robert Worcester, and was the largest independent research organisation in the United Kingdom. Ipsos is one of the largest survey research organisations in the world, with offices in dozens of countries, founded in the mid 1970s in France by Didier Truchot and Jean Marc Lech. Ipsos MORI is a member of the British Polling Council.
2. The widespread use of these words to refer to asylum seekers has of course its own historical baggage. This is apparent in Enoch Powell's words when he asked: what kind of people are we? Only to answer to himself: "We are not muggers, we are not illegal immigrants, we are not criminals, Rastafarians, aliens or purveyors of arranged marriages" (cited by Gilroy, 1987: 48).
3. Paul Gilroy's theories of race, racism and culture have been among the most influential in shaping the cultural and political movement of black British people. He is the author among other books of *Ain't no Black in the Union Jack* (1987), *Small Acts* (1993), *The Black Atlantic* (1993), *Between Camps* (2000) (also published as "Against Race" in the United States), and "After Empire" (2004). He has taught at Yale University where he was the chair of the Department of African American Studies and Charlotte Marian Saden Professor of Sociology. He now holds the Anthony Giddens Professorship in Social Theory at the London School of Economics.
4. However, no disciplinary action was taken against any reporter or editor in the newspaper for this blunder.
5. This clause relates to accuracy and it states that "the Press must take care not to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted information, including pictures". It also says that "a significant inaccuracy, mis-leading statement or distortion once recognised must be corrected, promptly and with due prominence, and - where appropriate - an apology

- published" and that "the Press, whilst free to be partisan, must distinguish clearly between comment, conjecture and fact (PCC, 2007).
6. The term "Halal" is used in Arabic-speaking countries to describe anything permissible under Islamic law, in contrast to haraam, that which is forbidden. The term is most commonly used in the narrower context of just Muslim dietary laws. This dichotomy of usage is similar to the Hebrew term "kosher".
  7. Interview with journalists of The Sun and The Daily Mail in Scotland carried out between September 2005 and October 2006. Anonymity was granted.
  8. The Conservative party in Scotland has indeed a difficult time finding support in Scotland; this because Scottish industry and economy were hardly hit during previous Conservative governments. There is also the perception that Conservatives tend to limit Scottish autonomy. For example, in the 1970s Margaret Thatcher reversed Heath's support for devolved government for Scotland. She also implemented the poll tax first in Scotland, a year before than in England. This tax brought down her government in 1990, when her own party replaced her with John Major.

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