

An International Analysis of Governmental Media Campaigns to Deter Asylum Seekers

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In recent years, the governments of the United States, Australia, and Norway have developed and launched informational multimedia campaigns targeted at dissuading unwanted groups of asylum-seeking migrants and have disseminated these media in strategic international locales. This project investigates the visual and textual facets of these deterrence campaigns using critical narrative analysis. Asylum seekers globally occupy a precarious liminal position; this article interrogates the processes of governmentality at work in this liminal space. Specifically, I analyze the ways that government-funded deterrence campaigns offer material directives that (1) discursively bifurcate the nature of the threats posed when individuals seek asylum, and (2) omit requisite information about migrants' human right to seek asylum, thereby advancing strategic ignorance in their audiences.

Keywords: immigration, media, global communication, governmentality, migration deterrence

There are currently around 3.5 million asylum seekers across the world—the highest number that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has ever recorded. In Europe, the number of individuals seeking asylum has increased nearly 4,000% in the last decade, and the rate of arrivals is accelerating (Eurostat, 2019). Displaced individuals often flee to neighboring areas, and about 85% of displaced people reside in developing regions that are often unable to provide the material resources and long-term social services necessary for a high-functioning asylum system (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2018b). But even in highly developed nations, the human rights of asylum seekers are regularly threatened and violated. Families arriving at the southern border of the United States are routinely separated from each other and held in detention centers with too little food and inadequate medical care (Tyler, 2019). Off the coast of Australia, thousands of migrants in need of protection are being intercepted by Australian government boats before they can reach the nation's shores and diverted

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Date submitted: 2019-04-12

¹ This project was supported with a fellowship from the ZeMKI Center for Media, Communication and Information Research at the University of Bremen and by a grant from the Professional Staff Congress at the City University of New York. Special thanks to the anonymous reviewers and to Nora Lambrecht, whose expert research assistance enriched and expedited the work.

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to island detention centers, where they suffer both physical and psychological trauma (UN General Assembly, 2017). In just one instance of the sexual violence endemic in contexts of forced migration, a Norwegian senior politician was convicted of forcing asylum seekers to have sex with him or else risk deportation (Martyr-Hemphill, 2019). These widespread human rights abuses reveal a rising humanitarian and geopolitical crisis.

The governments of developed countries have employed numerous tactics to dissuade asylum seekers. Existing research has demonstrated how nations' anxieties regarding race, ethnicity, and/or religion have led to exclusionary practices under the guise of national security (see Cisneros, 2008; Ono & Sloop, 2002; Pulitano, 2013). Fastidious border patrol, harsh penalties for immigrants who arrive without permission, and exclusion from legal employment or social benefits all work to discourage some potential migrants. As nations struggle against their international responsibility to noncitizens, some have begun to attempt to dissuade unwanted groups of asylum-seeking migrants through international multimedia deterrence campaigns. In the 22-month span from September 2013 to July 2015, Australia, Norway, and the United States developed and launched public deterrence campaigns and disseminated these media in strategic international locales.² These campaigns caution specific groups that they are unwelcome, and they communicate the hardships that will befall them if they ignore governmental warnings; all three include visual and textual elements that appeared across both digital and print media. Asylum deterrence campaigns constitute a unique convergence of political media, visual rhetoric, and international communication. Analyzing these three contemporary iterations, which span three continents, promises to yield insights about nation-branding and narrative tropes in political migration discourse. Using critical narrative analysis, this project interrogates the Australian, Norwegian, and U.S. campaigns, with a particular focus on visual rhetoric, contextualization, and comparison between cases.

While scholars in the fields of political science and international relations have considered the role of media in the migration process, asylum seekers—a unique, transient population too often conflated with refugees or undocumented immigrants—are consistently underrepresented in this scholarship. For this reason, migration scholars have remarked that “asylum has remained a sort of uncharted territory” (Pulitano, 2013, p. 174) and that asylum seekers are “a large, growing, invisible population” (Caldwell, Jaafari, & Thomson, 2016, para. 6). Some existing research has interrogated a single deterrence campaign—such as Australia’s (Hodge, 2015; van Berlo, 2015) or Norway’s (Beyer, Brekke, & Thorbjørnsrud, 2017). The present project makes use of these nationally centered studies while asserting that only an international perspective can offer comparative conclusions about the potential and limitations of media that national actors use in attempts to extend their governmental reach across international borders.

This project answers Beyer and colleagues’ (2017) call for more comprehensive research about international migration deterrence campaigns; their pilot study examined the Norwegian context and offered a first attempt at combating what they call a “total lack of knowledge about how governments employ social media to reach people of foreign nationalities” (p. 13). To date, there has been no international comparative inquiry into the role of narrative in transmedia deterrence campaigns.

² The Australian and Norwegian campaigns are still active at the time of this writing; the website for the U.S. campaign has been disabled.

The nature of the campaigns analyzed here cannot be understood without first appreciating a key difference between the legal categorization of forced migrants globally. Forced migrants crossing international boundaries include both refugees and asylum seekers fleeing their homes. Refugees, determined to be experiencing a credible threat to their human rights or well-being, receive refugee status in advance of their arrival in the country in which they eventually resettle. They are allocated to a nation by the United Nations (UN) or an affiliate and, by virtue of their status, have the right to receive some support from that nation on arrival. Asylum seekers, however, must first physically arrive in the nation in which they hope to resettle and then request the protection of asylum by making their case that they were forced, by a credible threat to their safety, to flee their homes.

The right to seek asylum is protected by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which the United Nations General Assembly adopted in 1948. When asylum seekers are deemed to have a credible fear and are successful in their applications for protection in Australia, Norway, or the United States, they receive a status similar or identical to refugees, including work authorization and a path to citizenship. But when applicants are denied, legal protections are terminated, and removal proceedings ensue. Unsuccessful applicants become undocumented—subject to the punishment of law, but in many cases without the right to the law's protections. There is no guarantee that those who seek asylum will receive it; in fact, applications are more likely to be denied.³ Asylum seekers globally occupy a precarious liminal position between legality and illegality while they wait for their cases to be decided. This article interrogates the material apparatuses of governmentality at work in this liminal space.

Theoretical Foundations

Two theoretical principles guide the present analysis: materiality and governmentality. Materiality refers to items of physical matter that inform, limit, and direct life. Ashcraft, Kohn, and Cooren (2009) contend that materiality comprises artifacts/objects, bodies, and sites. This most general interpretation benefits the present analysis because it allows for a demonstration of the means through which places, people, and media may be informed and directed via interacting material forces. Dawna Ballard suggests that "the concept of materiality allows us to consider the communication consequences of material" (Aakhus et al., 2011, p. 560). I submit that the opposite is also true: A lens of critical materiality allows us to see the material objectives of communication.

The material elements of the three deterrence campaigns analyzed next include the posters, billboards, websites, images, videos, and other media that work to influence migration patterns. Inviting a critique of the material aspects governing migration allows for the fusion of media studies and migration studies and opens up a space for considering the potential and limitations of the material contexts in which messages attempting to deter migration appear. To reach its intended audience, deterrence campaign

³ Of the three nations, Norway grants the highest percentage of asylum to applicants; about 51% of the 7,282 applicants in 2017 were accepted (Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, 2017). The same year, the United States had an acceptance rate of 38.2% (Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, 2017). In fiscal year 2016–2017, Australia granted permanent protection visas to just 9.35% of the 18,290 asylum applicants who arrived by plane with valid visas.

material must be drafted and designed, printed and copied; renting advertising space abroad requires international financial arrangements and local knowledge. While the Internet has, in some cases, abated the challenges involved in transferring messages across international boundaries, the potential success of the campaigns analyzed in this project still very much depends on the ability of the campaign material to intercept its intended foreign audience.

Existing research has already begun to point to the intersections of discourse, materiality, and migration. Andrew Flanagin calls on scholars to recognize and interrogate “the fundamental interdependence of discourse and materiality” (Aakhus et al., 2011, p. 563). Ho and Hatfield (2010) suggest that “understanding . . . materiality as part of the experience of migration can help to illuminate migrants’ everyday experiences” (p. 707). A close reading of this prior scholarship makes clear that the material objects that attempt to influence migration patterns must be interrogated critically rather than accepted as neutral or taken-for-granted realities. In my analysis, I regard deterrence campaign media as situated, ideologically constructed materials that attempt to shape the idea of migrants and migration to particular ends.

Because the materials analyzed in this article are funded and disseminated not by individuals or organizations but by national governments, the materials possess and represent governmental authority. I lean on Foucault’s (2007) notion of governmentality to interrogate the means through which these three nations attempt to attain control over the international movement of bodies. According to Fassin’s (2011) interpretation, “governmentality includes the institutions, procedures, actions, and reflections that have population as object. It exceeds the issue of sovereignty and complicates the question of control” (p. 214). Whereas others have employed the notion of governmentality in examinations of the ways governments attempt to control citizens, in this project, I establish how governmentality is implemented when national actors attempt to extend their governmental reach across international borders.

Paring the theoretical tenets of materiality and governmentality allows for an analysis that recognizes deterrence campaign media as the material apparatuses that enforce the governmentality of asylum. As I will demonstrate, material efforts to limit asylum seekers codify the threat that asylum seekers pose and reify the need for policing apparatuses.

Method

Critical narrative analysis is a method of analyzing how stories are told within media artifacts such as texts and images. I follow communication scholar Sonja Foss’s (2009) guidelines for this method, which include identifying the dimensions of the narrative (that is, the setting, characters, causal relations, and so on) and discovering an explanation for the narrative—in other words, illuminating the explanatory value of the artifact through a series of pointed questions. The pursuit of explanatory value interrogates, for instance, the fidelity of a narrative, the cultural tropes it employs, its omissions, and the potential counternarratives it condones or represses. I employ narrative analysis throughout this project to demonstrate how power, images, and language are inextricably linked within the contexts of materiality and governmentality.

The analysis operates on two levels. On the first level, I analyze the stories that the deterrence campaigns tell in their text and images. On the second, I turn to the narratives that the three governments

tell to warrant and rationalize the campaigns themselves. I demonstrate how the U.S., Australian, and Norwegian governments talk about and justify the need for their campaigns and what this talk reveals about how the respective nations view their own cultural values and responsibility to migrants on the one hand, and characterize asylum seekers on the other. I organize my analysis according to the two most prevalent themes of the campaigns: bifurcated discursive constructions of the nature of the risks asylum seekers face or cause, and the omission of requisite information pertaining to migrants' human rights.

Deterring Asylum Seekers in Australia, Norway, and the United States

Australia's "Operation Sovereign Borders" Campaign

The Australian government's international "Operation Sovereign Borders" (OSB) campaign launched in September 2013. The campaign included a YouTube video directed at would-be migrants and print media disseminated in key international settings, including Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia. In the YouTube video, Lieutenant General Angus Campbell appears in full fatigues bearing his surname across the right breast (Figure 1). He looks directly into the camera with an unwavering frown to tell viewers,

If you travel by boat to Australia, you will *not* make Australia home. The rules apply to everyone: families, children, unaccompanied children, educated, and skilled. There are *no* exceptions. Do not believe the lies of people smugglers. These people will steal your money, and place your life, and the life of your family, at risk for nothing.



Figure 1. Lieutenant General Angus Campbell for Australia's "Operation Sovereign Borders."

Scott Morrison, minister for Immigration and Border Protection, identified the goal of OSB as communicating that “those seeking to come on boats will not be getting what they have come for”; the deterrence campaign would work “to deter, to disrupt, to prevent their entry” (Australian Border Force, 2013, para. 1). Australia typically accepts around 13,750 refugees and asylum seekers through its Humanitarian Program (Phillips, 2015). However, the government has struggled to anticipate and control migrants arriving by boat. When asylum seekers reach Australia, they are placed in mandatory detention while their cases are processed. In the past, Australia has come under scrutiny by the international human rights community for circumventing its responsibility to respect the right to seek asylum by intercepting boats of migrants offshore and redirecting them to islands with poor conditions and little oversight (Taylor, 2013).

Weekly press briefings accompanied the OSB campaign from September 24, 2013, to January 2014. OSB is still in effect, though the briefings now take place on an “as needed” basis. Of the three campaigns analyzed in this project, OSB received the most international coverage in both news and academic discourse, due in part to its predecessor: a taxpayer-funded graphic novel to visually dissuade asylum seekers that drew widespread criticism after it was revealed to have cost \$15 million to produce (Farrell, 2017).

The United States’ “Know the Facts” Campaign

The United States Customs and Border Protection’s (CBP’s) “Know the Facts” campaign, launched in July 2015, employed visual emotional appeals that appeared in 233 billboards, posters, and bus signs disseminated in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico, as well as radio and television public service announcements that aired 6,500 times (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2014a). The campaign cost about \$1.2 million and included a website that provided “links to materials created for each country so you can download them and help us disseminate this important message in a timely manner” (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2015–2017, para. 2).

Figure 2 shows a poster from the campaign. In bold black text, the mournful reflections of a regretful parent are centered: “Creí que sería fácil que mi hijo consiguiera papeles in la USA. . . Me equivoqué.” [“I thought that it would be easy for my child to get papers in the USA. . . I was wrong.”] In the foreground of the image over which the text is laid, shoeprints wander a crooked path through desert sand rippled by wind. The silhouette of a tiny figure—too small to depict any specific demographic characteristics—appears in the distance.



Figure 2. Poster by U.S. Customs and Border Protection disseminated in Central America.

The campaign corresponded with an uptick in the arrival of unaccompanied minors from Central America. In the first five months of 2014, more than 47,000 children were apprehended at the U.S.–Mexico border, a 92% increase over the same period in 2013 (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2014b). While the number of immigrants from Mexico arriving in the United States has been declining for several years, the increasing numbers of migrants from the Northern Triangle—Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador—regularly cross through Mexico, offering an explanation for the CBP’s decision to include Mexican bus stops and radio stations as targeted outlets for the campaign (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2018). According to the most recent available data from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2018), the United States grants asylum to an average of around 23,000 immigrants each year, but that number is expected to drop sharply as President Trump institutes historic low ceilings on refugee admissions (Davis, 2018). Like Australia, the United States has mandatory detention for asylum seekers who enter illegally. In an analysis of U.S. asylum policy, Elvira Pulitano (2013) charges that “the United States simultaneously recognizes the rights of refugees but criminalizes the search for asylum” (p. 173). Though the nation has been lauded in historical discourse as a “nation of immigrants” and is a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention, its policies toward forced migrants are becoming increasingly restrictive.

Norway's "Stricter Asylum Regulations" Campaign

Norwegian State Secretary in the Ministry Jøran Kallmyr announced Norway's "Stricter Asylum Regulations" campaign on national television at the beginning of November 2015 during a peak in arrivals that corresponded with the recent European "refugee crisis." Asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere were entering Norway via the Russian border at a rate above 2,500 per week, adding pressure to an asylum system that had, for several years, already been accepting relatively high numbers of Eritreans fleeing mandatory military service under a dictatorship (Beyer et al., 2017; Roussi, 2018). Because of a Russian law that disallowed foot traffic at the border and a Norwegian policy that fined drivers who transported migrants across, about 500 of these migrants arrived each week by bicycle (Damon & Tuysuz, 2015). The evocative images that appeared in news outlets around the world of dozens of bicycles piled up on the Norwegian side of the border "help[ed] to feed the perception that the Norwegian government, like other governments in Europe, was being overwhelmed by the migrant crisis" (Bazilchuk, 2017, para. 3); this occluded the reality that, compared with countries such as Germany and even neighboring Sweden, Norway's 2015 intake of around 30,000 refugees was fairly modest. By the following year, the number of asylum applications in Norway was only 3,460 (Royal Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2017).

The Stricter Asylum Regulations campaign foregrounded the message of a reduction of benefits offered to asylum seekers and was made up of print media in Afghan newspapers, including *The Afghanistan Times* and *Hasht-e-sub*, posters in international transit hubs, and a Facebook page specifically designed to prevent immigration from Afghanistan and Eritrea (Stromme, 2015). Posts appeared in English and were repeated in Dari and Pashto. In 2016, the Norwegian campaign launched a new website to accompany the Facebook page.⁴ The site hosts two videos, called "Why Risk Your Life?" and "You Risk Being Returned." The videos include dramatic music and imagery with voice-over about the dangers of seeking asylum in Norway (see Figure 3).⁵

⁴ Ninety percent of non-Norwegian speakers who visit the website are directed there via the Facebook page (Beyer et al., 2017).

⁵ Because the Norwegian campaign rollout was not accompanied by a press briefing like in the U.S. and Australian campaigns, in this article, I rely on secondary research conducted by Beyer et al. (2017) composed of interviews with the Norwegian civil servants directly involved in overseeing the campaign.

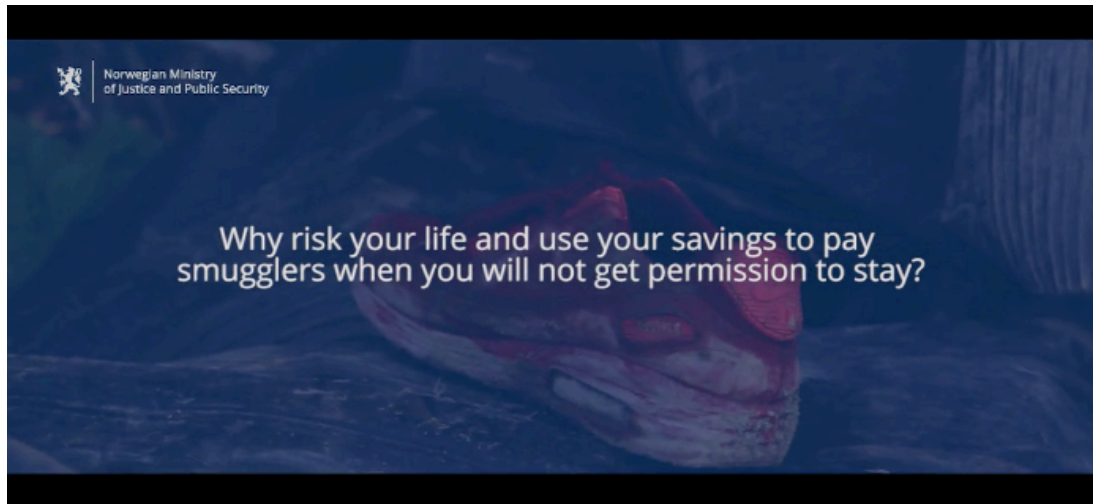


Figure 3. Still from Norway's "Why Risk Your Life" deterrence campaign video.

The Australian, Norwegian, and U.S. campaigns exist within a formidable genealogy of national media diplomacy abroad. The Cold War gave rise to a tradition of nationally produced media strategically disseminated beyond a nation's border in attempts to shape foreign perceptions and manage the public relations of governments. The material arm of governmentality in foreign contexts is clear in such efforts. In 1953, U.S. president Eisenhower established the United States Information Agency (USIA) to "influence foreign publics in promotion of the national interest" (Chodkowski, 2012, p. 2). One of the four goals of the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs' Public Diplomacy Strategy (2014–2016) is to "strengthen Australia's influence in shaping the international political and security architecture in ways which advance our national interests and underpin prosperity and security" (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2016, para. 3). Likewise, Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs outlines its prioritization of "stories, pictures and presentations that can be used to tell others about the Norwegian business sector, Norwegian politics, society and culture" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015, para. 6).

Whereas international public diplomacy efforts have often served an invitational function—advertising a nation's appeal in hopes of attracting desirable visitors and immigrants—the deterrence campaigns serve the opposite goal of deterring undesirable arrivals. Understanding the three asylum deterrence campaigns in light of a broader view of global public diplomacy strategies reveals them as single strains of larger efforts to advance national interests through media deployed abroad.

Compared with countries such as Turkey, Bangladesh, Sudan, and Uganda, which physically neighbor the regions from which most recent asylum seekers have fled, the three nations analyzed in this project accept a relatively low number of asylum seekers. Data from UNHCR (2018b) show that the majority (85%) of displaced people are currently housed in developing countries; these nations are unlikely to have the financial capacity to launch expensive international public diplomacy efforts. Though UNHCR (2017) has worked to encourage highly developed nations to accept their "fair share" of migrants in need of protection, when considered against the backdrop of the global milieu, it is clear that the Australian, Norwegian, and

U.S. campaigns function as attempts by highly developed nations to resettle even fewer asylum seekers than their already comparatively low numbers.

Although these campaigns took place across three continents and targeted different groups of potential immigrants, the three governments sometimes looked to each other for guidance about practices to attempt or avoid. For instance, a civil servant involved in the creation of Norway's campaign revealed that Norway maintained some purposeful differences from Australia:

We had a fact-based message. We know there are messages that would be more effective, that would hit you in the stomach and heart, but we cannot use those. Like Australia did in the No Way campaign. . . . We cannot do that, given the mandate of our ministry. (Beyer et al., 2017, p. 25)

Whereas the U.S. and Australian campaigns were the only ones of their kind on their respective continents during this time, the Norwegian campaign appeared among similar efforts by other European governments, including those of Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Italy, and the Netherlands. The Norwegian campaign is unique in the European context because it was the only campaign that used a social media site as the main platform for information sharing (Beyer et al., 2017).

Thematic Narrative Analysis

Who Is at Risk? Humanitarian Versus Nationalist Ends

Norway's Stricter Asylum Regulations campaign launched on Facebook on Friday, November 6, 2015, with a post that explained seven ways "the government is going to reduce benefits for asylum seekers and introduce tighter rules for asylum," including new limitations on family reunification rights and available benefits. The response that followed the launch reveals that although the campaign was designed to reach potential migrants, it provoked messages of fear and alarmism in in-nation citizen audiences. Within two days, individuals started leaving comments on the site that "became increasingly negative toward immigration, immigrants, and asylum seekers" (Beyer et al., 2017, p. 16). By Monday, a full-throttle "storm of racist comments" transpired on the page, including hate speech, variations of "fuck Islam," and direct threats to the lives of migrants (Beyer et al., 2017, pp. 16–17). The prime minister's office demanded that all comments be deleted and disabled, and on November 9, 2015, a post appeared in English and Norwegian alerting readers, "COMMENTS WILL BE DELETED/Due to inappropriate comments on this page, all comments will be deleted."

The campaign needed a fresh start. A decision was made to revert to what one member of the communications team described as "good old fashioned one-way communication" (Beyer et al., 2017, pp. 16–17). The team had considered, but underestimated, citizens' desire to voice their fears about asylum seekers; the material structure of Facebook had offered these citizens a practical and visible means by which to share their displeasure.

In a news article linked from the Facebook site three weeks after the campaign's launch, Norwegian ambassador Tore Nedrebø explained the need for Norway's Stricter Asylum Regulations campaign. The problem, he described, is that "few are entitled to protection and they are putting an unnecessary burden on the Norwegian system" (Junaidi, 2015, para. 5). In both the ambassador's explanation and the digital comments that followed the launch of the Facebook page, the heart of the threat posed by the search for asylum appears to be the problems that asylum seekers could cause for Norway, rather than the humanitarian crises that have resulted in the migrants' need for international governmental protection.

In addition to their impact on asylum seekers, deterrence campaigns about the risks of asylum seeking have a significant secondary task: to introduce the threat migrants pose to citizens and other noninvolved parties. This is especially the case because asylum populations in all three countries under analysis here are so small that the majority of citizens are unlikely to encounter them firsthand. As Hodge (2015) contends in an in-depth analysis of the press releases that accompanied Australia's campaign,

for many Australian citizens who will never know an asylum seeker beyond the frame furnished by OSB, the camera works to solicit and recruit "vulnerable publics" structuring the visual and discursive field of human mobility flows as "security threats" and "national emergencies." (p. 129)

The effect of such a structuring is not merely psychological. Hodge argues, "By reconstituting the plight and bodies of asylum seekers as security issues, clandestine practices and acts of degradations *become* necessary and defensible" (Hodge, 2015, p. 125, emphasis in original). In other words, a communicative ideological framing of asylum seekers works to establish and justify the need for protection against the threat that asylum seekers pose. Once the threat is clearly established, apparatuses of government control can then appear on the scene as a welcome protective force against harm.

A 2015 report from UNHCR suggested that "high levels of public anxiety about immigration and asylum across Europe" are "partly due to an increase in the numbers and visibility of migrants in recent years" (Berry, Garcia-Blanco, & Moore, 2015, p. 4). The report provided a content analysis of press coverage of refugees and migrants across five nations in the European Union and found that although humanitarian themes that focused on the problems asylum seekers themselves face were more likely in some outlets, threat themes that focused on the problems asylum seekers could cause were most common in Britain, Spain, and Italy. The report cited humanitarian organizations arguing that "this approach fails migrants by predominantly focusing on the challenges posed to the EU, rather than on those faced by the human beings whose lives continue to be lost" (Berry et al., 2015, p. 4). Following this report and Hodge's findings, I interrogate the way the deterrence campaigns depict and define who is at risk when individuals seek asylum according to either (1) humanitarian threats to asylum seekers' well-being or (2) threats to the nation's well-being posed by asylum seekers' arrival.

Asylum seekers occupy an unusual social position; they may be represented in public discourse either as victims of the crimes that spurred their migration or as criminals themselves for migrating.

Many clues pointing to the characterization of asylum seekers' perceived innocence/victimhood or guilt/criminality appear in the ways the three respective governments framed the need for their deterrence campaigns. In communicating a justification for their campaigns, they discursively establish the need for apparatuses of governmentality to protect against the harms that result when individuals seek asylum. In these messages, the ways the governments define the nature of the harms reveal clearly who they believe is at risk.

One of the hallmark images from Australia's OSB campaign is visible on a banner hung in the largest international airport in Pakistan to reach Shiite Hazaras from Afghanistan; many had fled to Pakistan after being targeted by militant groups, including Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. "NO WAY: YOU WILL NOT MAKE AUSTRALIA HOME," the banner reads in bold red text. In the center, under a circled image of Australia with a red line running through it, a small boat is thrashed about in a stormy sea. Surrounded by whitecaps and under a sky filled with menacing clouds, the boat points toward the viewer, precariously navigating the storm (Figure 4). Assuming the boat is meant to portray the kinds of maritime arrivals the deterrence campaign is working to prevent, the image connotes that the journey poses dangers for migrants. But in the language and supporting media surrounding this banner, the risk falls on others. Bleiker et al. (2013) have argued that the predominant representation in Australian newspapers of asylum seekers in large, faceless groups—representations characterized precisely by "the visual prominence of boats" (p. 403)—frames the arrival of refugees "not as a humanitarian disaster that requires a compassionate public response, but rather as a potential threat that sets in place mechanisms of security and border control" (p. 399). Indeed, in describing OSB during a weekly press briefing, Australia's minister for Immigration and Border Protection, Scott Morrison, stated, "This is a serious military-led border security operation where we have Australians who are putting themselves at risk" (Australian Border Force, 2013, para. 3). In this single statement, two complementary realities come into focus. Morrison suggests, first, that arrivals of migrants necessitates a militarized response, and second, that this response is imperative because of the threats migrants pose to Australians. This "Australia First" message operates in some contradiction to the original tenets of asylum, which calls on nations to see their humanitarian responsibilities as extending beyond their borders to those who have been forced to flee their homes.



Figure 4. Australian deterrence campaign signage in Jinnah International Airport, Pakistan.

A warning about the harms of smugglers or traffickers appears in both the Australian (“Do not believe the lies of people smugglers”) and Norwegian (“Why risk your life and use your savings to pay smugglers. . . ?”) campaigns. The exclusive focus on dangers that occur after migrants leave their homes rather than before acts as a smokescreen that occludes the reality that asylum seekers may be forced to seek protection by credible threats.

At the press conference that took place beside the Rio Grande River to announce the launch of the U.S. campaign, CBP commissioner Kerlikowske made repeated, unambiguous references to the harm that may befall migrants in search of asylum. The visible physical context of the river served as a place-based, material reinforcement of a message of the dangers facing migrants that incorporates all three of Ashcraft and colleagues’ (2009) categories of materiality: artifacts/objects, bodies, and sites. Kerlikowske stood at the site where migrants enter the United States, both literally and symbolically replacing their own bodies with his own, to speak publicly about the objects/artifacts that will be made available in print and digital media to deter asylum seekers. “We chose this location because we wanted to highlight the dangers to get across not only this river, but as you can see from some of our other posters, getting across the desert,” he began. Kerlikowske announced that the number of migrant lives lost in the process of attempting to cross the border had been “significant,” and he emphasized the likelihood that women would be raped during the journey.⁶ Like in the Norwegian and Australian campaigns, this focus on the dangers Central Americans face

⁶ This likelihood is substantiated by a report from Amnesty International suggesting that as many as 60% of migrant women from Central America are raped during their migration to the U.S. (Amnesty International, 2010).

during their migration to the United States serves a diversionary purpose and obscures the threats that cause migrants to leave their homes in the first place.

Later in Kerlikowske's speech, what appears at first to be a description of humanitarian threat resolves into a threat to the nation:

When these children arrive, they are not only malnourished, as I said, they're also oftentimes, uh, are, uh, have a disease, have something that needs to be treated by a physician. The Centers for Disease Control, the public health service that is represented and the coast guard corpsmen that are all here are tremendously helpful in helping us to deal with this disease issue. (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2014a)

Here, the commissioner begins with a humanitarian concern: children arrive malnourished from their long journey. But his ambiguous reference to the "disease issue" connotes the danger of migrants spreading a sickness to citizens who may encounter them. In fact, the affiliation of migrants with disease is widespread in U.S. public discourse (Cisneros, 2008; Ono & Sloop, 2002). But the commissioner never identifies which disease the migrants have contracted or offers any evidence of its existence.

All three campaigns foreground the material harms that asylum seekers cause the nations in which they arrive—in Norway, a lack of resources; in Australia, by putting Australian lives in danger at sea; and in the United States, the risk of disease. This characteristic of the campaigns solidifies that the role they are meant to play is, first and foremost, to protect the nations that created them.

"No Megaphone Diplomacy": Strategic Omissions, Strategic Ignorance

At the first weekly press briefing following the launch of Australia's campaign, Scott Morrison and Angus Campbell faced condemnatory questions from journalists about the amount of information being kept from the public about OSB. One unnamed journalist asked Morrison to state clearly which types of asylum seekers might be allowed to stay in Australia. Morrison responded, "For operational reasons I'm not about to telecast what sort of issues might prevent someone from being immediately transferred." A journalist pushed back, "How is that not hiding the process?," to which Morrison replied,

You would expect me as Minister to ensure the safety of our people that reengaged in difficult and sensitive operations, I'm sure you would. And that's what I will do. And the careful management of this information, as is the case with any other serious operations. . . [is] subject to those sorts of constraints.

Here, Morrison calls on the authority of his title to lend legitimacy to his decision to withhold information. Governmentality and opacity work hand in hand—reinforcing the authority of the government to conduct the operation justifies the opacity of its specifics. Morrison is firm: "There will be no megaphone diplomacy from Australia."

Patrick van Berlo (2015) conducted an in-depth critical discourse analysis of the weekly briefings that accompanied the Australian campaign and argued that they functioned as a means for the government to maintain control of the narrative—to manage “which and how discourses are distributed and consumed” (p. 107). I extend van Berlo’s analysis by charging that strategic omissions in the media surrounding the deterrence campaign served to obfuscate the reality that Australia is legally obliged to provide a means for successful asylum cases and in fact approves the asylum cases of thousands of migrants every year. A close reading of OSB, and its weekly briefings in particular, reveals that although the campaign offers an illusion of transparency through frequent updates, in fact, the weekly briefings serve to obscure the reality of how much information is withheld from public view.

Shannon Sullivan (2007) contends that ignorance, rather than functioning as the opposite of knowledge, is in fact “an active production of particular kinds of knowledges for various social or cultural purposes” (p. 154). Pairing her definition with Foucault’s notion of governmentality to critically interrogate the deterrence campaigns underscores that omission is one apparatus through which governments work to direct public knowledge about migration. Cultivating ignorance through omission of discussion about the rights of asylum seekers—both within the electorate and abroad—paves the way for governments’ attempts to deter even migrants with credible claims.

Australia, Norway, and the United States all voted in favor of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Article 14 of the Declaration grants that “everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.” The three nations are also all signatories on the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, which extended protections originally established in the 1951 Refugee Convention by stipulating that nations should not penalize forced migrants for illegal entry or stay, regardless of where and when the migrants were forcibly displaced. Although the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1967 Protocol are clear in this regard, the omission of information regarding the right to seek asylum in the Australian and U.S. deterrence campaigns obscures the reality that both nations approve and grant status to thousands of asylum seekers each year. Instead, they imply that this right does not exist. For instance, the Australian poster pictured in Figure 4 states clearly that it is impossible to remain permanently in Australia after arriving without permission by boat. And while it is the case that the Migration and Maritime Powers Legislation Amendment Act of 2014 determined that individuals who arrive by boat are no longer eligible to receive permanent Protection Visas, a closer look at this act shows that maritime arrivals can in fact still be determined to be refugees, after which they receive a temporary Protection Visa (Refugee Council of Australia, 2015). Once this visa expires, the migrants may reapply for protection, after which time they may be eligible to receive permanent Protection Visas. Reading the Australian poster alongside this migration policy reveals that the poster misleads its reader with inaccurate information that omits any indication of the ways maritime arrivals may indeed make Australia their permanent home.

At its kickoff in July 2014, Kerlikowske stated the intention of the U.S. campaign plainly, clarifying, “If you cross the border illegally, no matter what your age is, you are not going to get legal papers. There is no—so there is no permission to stay.” In fact, during this time, the United States was granting permission to more than 20,000 asylum seekers every year, many of whom crossed the border without legal immigration status. Granted asylum seekers receive a Green Card and become eligible for a path to

citizenship. As the CBP commissioner, Kerlikowske is no doubt familiar with the nation's practice of granting asylum. But his statement is not an unintended error; he reaffirms it several times: "If you cross illegally into the United States, you're not eligible to earn a path to citizenship . . . no legal papers or path to citizenship awaits anyone who crossed illegally." Later, he underscores that "whatever has caused some of this messaging to believe that once you come to this country you'll actually be allowed to stay, has been totally false." With the help of strategic omissions, Kerlikowske's statements advance particular kinds of knowledge to discursively fashion a reality in which the right to seek asylum does not exist.

Norway's deterrence campaign is the only one of the three that acknowledges a system in place for successfully seeking asylum. Norway's Stricter Asylum Regulations website states, "*If you do not need protection you risk being returned by force. . . . Persons who do not qualify for asylum or other permits in Norway, and whose applications are denied, must return to their country of origin or country of habitual residence*" [emphasis added]. Norway's campaign both articulates that an asylum process exists and emphasizes that if individuals are not eligible for asylum, they will be returned. These inclusions are more in line with the UN's directives because they state plainly that asylum seekers in need of protection may be allowed to stay and that a system exists to determine their eligibility and support them if they are approved.

However, Norway's transparency about its asylum process does not preclude it from attempting to relieve itself of the responsibility that the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol demand. This became most clear in 2016, after Norway deported to Russia several asylum seekers deemed ineligible for protection. The Norwegian immigration minister explained, "We consider Russia a safe place to return to" (Crouch, 2016b, para. 10), but the UN and other humanitarian organizations disagreed. The regional coordinator in Europe for the UNHCR warned Norway that its decision may put the nation in danger of violating the Refugee Convention and suggested that asylum seekers deported to Russia arrive in "no man's land where they risk freezing to death" (Crouch, 2016a, para. 7). This similarity across the three continents where the campaigns appear demonstrates that the Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol, while useful for establishing international cooperation regarding the global responsibility that the signatories share in theory, cannot ensure humanitarian follow-through on the tenets of the Convention. Whereas charges about failure to comply with the UN's directives have often been made against singular nations, as in the example of Norway, the present analysis reveals that nations across continents and in receipt of diverse ethnicities of asylum seekers fleeing for disparate reasons employ similar strategies for avoiding responsibility of the burden of asylum seekers.

Conclusion

Deterrence campaigns operate as apparatuses through which governments attempt to control migration via the dissemination of material communications. The migrant characters in the three campaigns maintain a kind of nondescript anonymity—they are counted in numbers and referred to and addressed en masse, without backstories, motivations, or voice.

The migrants in these stories are homogenized, characterized only by their mode of travel and their intended destinations. Few mentions are made of the possibility that a credible threat might be driving migrants to flee their homes; the likely presence of traumatic push factors in asylum seekers' decisions to

migrate is verbally and visually erased. In the U.S., Australian, and Norwegian deterrence campaigns, asylum seekers become difficult to imagine as individuals; they appear more clearly as a group, stripped of individualism or motivation—and especially of credible fears.

This anonymity exists in contrast to the reality of the lived experiences of foreign-born individuals in new cultural contexts where they are regularly called out and discriminated against according to identifiable characteristics that render them “other.” The National Human Rights Institution of Norway reports that immigrants from a visible minority background are often disadvantaged when looking for a job in Norway (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2018); Australia has a well-documented history of denying visas to individuals with disabilities (Gibbs, 2019). In the United States, President Trump’s call for a ban against immigrants who are Muslim fueled nationalist sentiment that corresponded with hate crimes against those perceived to be Arab rising to their highest levels since 9/11 (Lichtblau, 2016). Nations’ anxieties about particular religious, racial, and ethnic groups have regularly led to exclusionary practices and policies (see Cisneros, 2008; Ono & Sloop, 2002; Pulitano, 2013).

Because the three campaigns analyzed here attempt to predict and stop an action before it occurs, and because they operate in conjunction with other security and punitive tactics that similarly threaten the rights of asylum seekers, it is difficult, if not impossible, to accurately measure their effects. The rise of the current global migration crisis is pushing application statistics higher rather than depressing them, masking the effects of these campaigns even further. In some instances, government personnel offered stories of anecdotal evidence to suggest success. At a 2013 press conference, just two months after Australia’s campaign launched, Morrison told the story of a man who, in the process of being returned to Sri Lanka from Australia, asked the OSB team for leaflets and a poster. “He wanted these materials to ensure his friends and family did not make the same mistake,” Morrison explained. Here, Morrison uses anecdotal evidence as a stand-in for empirical proof of the campaign’s effect. At the launch of the U.S. campaign, Commissioner Kerlikowske emphasized, “We need to make sure that these messages are appropriate, that they’re effective, and that they’ve been tested.” When pressed by a journalist to predict how just effective the media campaign was expected to be, Kerlikowske backpedaled: “If I was able to predict, I’d be a highly paid consultant instead of the Customs and Border Protection.”

Although the governments could not accurately predict the effects of their campaigns, in some cases, they were able to glean digital insights about the numbers of individuals reached via social media platforms. Facebook analytics show that around 11.5 million people encountered the Norwegian campaign’s Facebook page, and the YouTube videos for the same campaign were viewed more than 21 million times (Bazilchuk, 2017). In Norway, arrivals began decreasing just one month after the campaign launched, but it is impossible to know to what extent the campaign was responsible for this decrease (Beyer et al., 2017). As one civil servant explained, “What we know is that the Facebook page reached a lot of people. But we do not know whether we thereby influenced their actions” (Beyer et al., 2017, p. 28). Future research could benefit this area of inquiry by offering further insight into the impact of the campaign media on international audiences. Only through direct inquiry with the audiences who encountered the campaigns is it possible to know whether they influenced migrants’ decisions about whether, where, and/or how to migrate.

The media analyzed here represent only a fraction of messages migrants receive about possible destinations. Stories of migration, such as those that appear in these campaigns, do not occur in a vacuum, but rather within the context and as a result of other stories that came before them—a chronology of overlapping and sometimes conflicting narratives. This project offers a partial view, chosen for breadth of perspective and medium across three continents, but its close focus on governmental campaigns has left several stones unturned. Outside the scope of, but directly relevant to, the current project is the emergence of several grassroots countercampaigns that arose in the wake of the deterrence campaigns examined here to communicate support for asylum seekers and refugees. Some of these used a copycat design and style to disseminate a narrative that counters the national campaigns and welcomes migrants. These campaigns are fertile terrain for those who wish to continue this line of analysis.

Attempts at deterring asylum seekers are not specific to these three governments. Across the globe, asylum seekers often appear as both victims and suspects (Danticat, 2005). The titles that characterize immigration status and fashion the seemingly stark lines between legal/illegal and regular/irregular migration are porous and politically constructed. As Fassin (2011) notes, "One can say that the state creates illegal immigrants by making and enforcing the laws whose infraction constitutes illegality of residence" (p. 217). Migrations are always characterized and defined according to, and in terms of, nations' anxieties and aspirations.

Additional research might further the work done here by examining similar campaigns produced by the governments of other nations and by providing a more detailed view into the political economy of deterrence campaigns and other public diplomacy messages directed at immigrants. Although my own efforts have centered a narrative analysis of the ways these messages speak to and about migrants, more understanding about the financial agreements and international media markets that make these campaigns possible—especially in offline contexts—would provide insight into the international complexity of production and the political economy of dissemination.

Each year, around 1,000,000 people globally flee their homes and seek asylum (UNHCR, 2018a). Asylum seekers constitute a liminal and vulnerable population whose right to seek protection may be compromised through the dissemination of materials that characterize them as faceless crowds of wrongdoers who threaten the security of nations. When these materials simultaneously obscure the possibility of successful asylum claims, the nations that create them risk failing to fulfill the responsibilities determined by international refugee law. I offer my critique of these deterrence campaigns to reveal the potential severity of their impact and to push back against nations' attempts at exonerating themselves from the obligation of concern for forced migrants.

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