

Greg Philo, Emma Briant and Pauline Donald. *Bad News for Refugees*, Pluto Press: London, 2013; 203 pp.: £15.00

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This book is a successful antidote to much of the populist discourse and ideological myth that circulates on refugees in contemporary Western society. Greg Philo, Emma Briant and Pauline Donald, of the Glasgow Media Group, have produced a clearly written book derived from an empirical study of the media treatment of refugees in the United Kingdom. This is a text that should be accessible to all interested in the subject. It would certainly be useful for an undergraduate, postgraduate or academic readership.

The book offers a thematic analysis of the news reporting on refugees in periods of 2006 and 2011, and uses both quantitative and qualitative methods. The aim is to document the existing descriptions of refugees in public discourse. The discourses of television and news print from 2006 and 2011 are interrogated and compared, with key themes identified. The book also presents the wider context through a comprehensive literature review and recent history of refugees in the United Kingdom, where key legislative changes are outlined. In addition, and perhaps most interestingly, the study includes interviews with journalists and focus groups with ethnic minority groups, refugees and those working with refugees. The 'Guide to the Asylum Process' in Appendix 1 is also an insightful reference tool. The strength of the book is its ability to unpack a number of popular myths on refugees generated in UK media. One example is the deconstruction of a 2003 story in the British tabloid the *Sun*, which reported how Eastern Europeans were guilty eating British swans. The story is shown to be a fiction. The authors report how the Press Complaints Commission could find no evidence in support of the story and instructed the *Sun* to clarify its falsity (p. 5). The study repeatedly explains how false reporting enters popular discourse and that corrections, if they happen at all, do not gain the attention given to the original stories.

The central findings are significant and, although not out of step with other social science research on the topic, are all worrying for those concerned with the negative influence of stigmatisation, stereotyping and immigration racism on the lives of the disadvantaged. Turning to these results, first, the authors record the dominance of negative reportage on refugees and those seeking asylum (p. 165). There are shocking findings – for example, one journalist interviewed in the study explains how reporters at an unnamed British tabloid are *required* to write negative stories on refugees, those seeking asylum and other immigrants (p. 8). They are instructed by editors to 'monster' or stigmatise these groups or face sanction. It is also shown that many of the numerical figures used by the press to conceptualise the 'problem' of 'illegals' are exaggerated and thus false (p. 9). Likewise, politicians from across the political spectrum discuss the topic in inaccurate, insensitive and irresponsible ways and key 'think-tanks', such as 'Migration Watch', make a significant contribution towards media bias. In deconstructing this negativity, the text explains how the numbers who gain refugee status in the United Kingdom are actually quite low and that the asylum system is punitive and draconian. In its second finding, the book highlights an absence of the term 'refugee' from news coverage (p. 165). The misnomer 'illegal immigrant' has all but replaced the use of 'refugee' in much reportage and terms such as 'refugee', 'asylum seeker' and 'migrant' are conflated rather than clarified in

media. These semantics have real consequences, as popular discourse mobilises a set of pejorative connotations to describe refugees. This discourse is also recorded in the focus groups, showing the movement of ideas from media to commonsense discourse. Third, the authors highlight the lack of voice for, or erasure of the experiences of, refugees in media coverage (p. 165). The experiences of refugees are ignored in print media and on television in an ideological trick that allows suffering to go unrecorded and lies, false statistics and negativity to form the majority of media content. The fourth finding appears in the focus group material, where press coverage is shown to impact on UK communities negatively, especially those suffering economic deprivation, through an undermining of social cohesion. Last of all, the stigmatising of refugees is evidenced. Although not employed directly by the authors, this stigmatisation can be separated into examples of enacted and felt stigma, that is, material instances of discrimination and violence and the internalisation of stigma that has a negative impact on mental health, through feelings of isolation and hopelessness.

Although this is a perceptive book, there are a number of criticisms to render. For much of the text, television newscasters responsible for the vocalisation of the stigma of refugees are not referred to by name. I would have preferred the authors to 'name and shame', as they do with politicians and lobbyists. This style of presentation does not necessarily add to the critique of news organisations as a whole, while also denying newscaster agency. A more important issue is the lack of theoretical or conceptual application in the text. Theory is mentioned in passing – the analysis of ideological interest is mentioned (p. 30), and moral panic theory is also signposted in the conclusion (p. 166). Aside from these references, there is no attempt to develop a detailed analysis of the ideological processes at work (the occasional mention of neo-liberalism, the Washington consensus and World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) policy do not do this). Neither is there an attempt to apply the stages of any moral panic approach to the data. Moreover, there exists no rigorous application or development of concepts of stereotyping, prejudice, immigration racism or stigma, which seem to be fundamental to the critique presented. Although more theory would have been satisfying for this reader, the lack of academic or theoretical terminology does render the text highly accessible. The book will be of use to professionals working in the field and should be understandable to policymakers. One last criticism concerns the interview and focus group sample. This might have been added to through the inclusion on white Britons as a focus group. This population may have allowed the study to record the existence of a majoritarian discourse that mirrors media coverage of refugees.

Overall, this text is a good example of what social science can add to our understanding of the social world. It takes the dominant ideological myths created on some of the most vulnerable, stigmatised people in society and begins to illuminate the structures that encourage these myths.