Mystery Ships and Risky Boat People: Tamil Refugee Migration in the Newsprint Media
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Abstract

ABSTRACT On October 17, 2009, seventy-six Tamil refugees arrived off the coast of Victoria, British Columbia. This study examines how the Canadian newsprint media portrayed this event and in which policy context this coverage occurred. We analyze articles published between October 2009 and January 2010 from the Vancouver Sun, the Toronto Star, and the National Post. A discourse analysis addresses issues of framing, representation, and identity to understand how the Tamil refugee migration was represented in media debate. Our results show that there was an overall negative representation of the Tamil refugees as the press emphasized issues of criminality and terrorism, and constructed the refugees as risk. The discussion established security—rather than human rights—as a focal point and portrayed the immigration system as both "failing" and "abused" by "bogus claimants." This security-oriented framework provided a discursive background for the refugee reform Bill C-11 to be ushered through Parliament later that summer.

RÉSUMÉ Le 17 octobre 2009, soixante-seize réfugiés tamouls sont arrivés au large de Victoria, en Colombie-Britannique. Cette étude examine la manière dont la presse canadienne a couvert cet événement et le contexte politique dans lequel cette couverture a eu lieu. Pour ce faire, nous analysons des articles publiés entre octobre 2009 et janvier 2010 dans le Vancouver Sun, le Toronto Star et le National Post. Une analyse de discours porte sur le cadrage, la représentation et l'identité afin de comprendre comme les médias ont dépeint cette migration des réfugiés tamouls. Nos résultats montrent que la couverture tendait à être négative, la presse mettant l'accent sur des questions de criminalité et de terrorisme et décrivant les réfugiés comme posant des risques. La couverture était axée sur la sécurité—plutôt que sur les droits humains—et décrivait le système d'immigration comme étant défaillant et abusé par de faux demandeurs d'asile. Ce cadrage soulignant la sécurité a offert un appui discursif pour la Loi C-11 sur la réforme concernant les réfugiés, passée au Parlement en été 2010.

Keywords

Discourse analysis; Newspapers; Risk communication; Tamil; Refugee

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“People then went home to fetch clothes they didn’t need and handed it to the refugees and ensured they were all fed and watered.” The family was among up to 800,000 Vietnamese “boat people” who fled the country in the two decades after the end of the Vietnam War. The exodus, fuelled by government repression including the use of “re-education camps” and extrajudicial executions, saw many die of drowning, disease and starvation, as well as at the hands of pirates. And two museums are situated in New York City and visitors can enjoy watching rare exhibits on placing a spotlight on people and events in African American history providing different materials in the arts, science and that has been established within the Smithsonian complex that is carried on regularly in each of the museums which allows website visitors to upload their own stories or images. Welcome to the Smithsonian. When you visit any of the Smithsonian’s 19 museums and galleries or the National zoo, you are entering the largest museum complex in the world. This complex holds about 137 m