

To: Hon. Malcolm Turnbull

A Report Card on Scapegoating

8 January 2017

<http://www.netipr.org/saorg/node/40>

... bring the goat .. then lay both his hands on its head and over it confess all the guilt...acts of rebellion and all their sins. Having thus laid on goat's head...send it out into the desert ... the goat will bear all their guilt away into some desolate place. LEVITICUS 16:20.



Australian Political Culture of Scapegoating: Report by the Network for International Protection of Refugees

THE GOVERNMENT PROPAGANDA, MEDIA MONOPOLY AND AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL CULTURE OF SCAPEGOATING

PART – I. Conspiracy of Silence

There has been a universal silence from both Labour and LNP on unnecessary death of Faysal Ishak Ahmed on Christmas Eve. ¹ When dealing with issues related to offshore detention, both major parties seems to suffer from the "elephant in the room" syndrome -- simply avoid talking about the sensitive issue. Having said that, the total media/political (non)response on the death of refugee, Faysal Ahmed, detained at Manus Island, on this Christmas Eve has gone beyond this syndrome of "elephant in the room". To my evaluation, the mass media filtering of this tragic news over the Xmas period can be termed as the "conspiracy of silence".

The mass media coverage for the offshore detention issues here in Australia, we've encountered such "conspiracy of silence" much too often. But how ? How this filtering of public media has comes about ? As the activists, we do have some partial knowledge about how such information blackouts may have come about. But, for a properly formed answers, we should consult with the expert's analysts report. Followings short (6-min) video explains about how the Middle-East conflict has been getting a filtered media coverage in United States of America. ² The Israeli

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/dec/24/sudanese-refugee-dies-in-brisbane-hospital-after-medivac-from-manus>

² <https://www.facebook.com/speakforyourselfnow/videos/vb.572725586074439/1257700944243563/>

government in collaboration with the mass media in United States have been, in this way, generating influence on the public opinion, and ultimately on the US Government's policy, regarding with that conflict. Needless to say, the American public had constantly been fed with the filtered coverage on that conflict, favouring Israeli government policy positions.

On media coverage, the situation of offshore detention of refugees in Australia is similar to that of Middle-East conflict in America. We can replace the 'Israeli Government' with that of corporate interest groups, i.e. Transfield/Broadspectrum. Our offshore refugees detention related issues can be replaced with that of Middle-East conflict. The corporate media ownerships and two major party political system etc. in Australia and United States are pretty much the same. We then have a comprehensive picture of how the filtered media coverage has come out as regards offshore detention issues.



The media coverage of Middle East conflict in USA by Prof. Robert Jensen, University of Texas

We can identify the top two layers of the structure (media ownerships + political elite) as the so-called "*Political Establishment*". Within this structure, there've been various institutions that can provide public policy advisory, which are funded by private or the government. For the refugee rights activists, one needs to be aware that the structure is insular and "Establishment" can be non-responsive, especially the issues directly challenging their political legitimacy and threatens its commercial interests. That precisely has been in our case of offshore detention of refugees.

PART – II. Blackout vs. Spotlight

We, the activists in Australia, have also noticed frequent streaming of propaganda by the mass media. In previous section, how the mass media has been controlled by the "Establishment" and created a "blackout" re: the death of refugee Faysal Ahmed in Manus Island. We can now have a look at how the media "spotlight" that may be created by the Establishment. Remember, such mass media spotlight has been utilized to spread certain propaganda, which is to serve specific government's agenda. We can have a look at one of recent media incident as a specific example.

Creation of Terror Bogeyman

Just before Faysal's death on Christmas Eve, there was a reported terrorist attack in Germany. A Tunisian asylum-seeker had reportedly ploughed a truck into the market place in Berlin, killing 9 persons.³ Remember, the involvement of that man in attack, the mean & motives have been still much in speculation. To be noted also, because the media nowadays is globalised so that you can find any where & any time, such instance of violent and terror involving muslim, refugees or migrants. It is as a matter of picking up a news incident that suits for the propaganda purpose. With the Berlin attack, a "Terror Bogeyman" was to be created.⁴

How would an ordinary Australian receive such "Terror Bogeyman" propaganda. I live in Sydney and working full-time. Coming home, my preferred channel is the ABC News 24. Within that certain windows of myself switching on news, I've seen that Berlin terror attack featured prominently -- i.e. more frequency with broader coverage. By taking into account of other commercial channels, including print media and radio shock-jocks' stations, we'll have some idea of

³ <http://www.9news.com.au/world/2016/12/20/06/40/truck-ploughs-into-a-crowded-christmas-market-in-berlin-leaving-several-injured>

⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bogeyman>

public exposure for media spotlighting of that Berlin incident. Remember, most Australians do not have proper time to sit-down and think about any news that come through channels. The public will only receive the news items as the flickering of certain images and some distracted voices.

Then, in terms of propaganda, what would be the effects for repetitive news castings of Berlin terror incident (i.e. news spotlighting) ? That's simple: "*Muslim*", "*Terror*", "*Refugees*" & "*Asylum-seekers*", these items have been lumped in together into the mind of public. The thing about propaganda is that it doesn't have to be the "truth". Nowadays with the globalized media, it doesn't have to be "local". Or in extreme cases, a propaganda can even be fictitious episodes, such as "Border Security etc". To this effect, we can check with the Nazi pre-Wartime information minister, Joseph Goebbels ⁵, who said the propaganda news items must be:

- **Selectively biased:** News items had to be selective. Goebbels notes, "*Not every item of news should be published. Rather must those who control news policies endeavor to make every item of news serve a certain purpose.*"
- **Repeated:** Propaganda/news items need to be repeated. He said, "*A lie told once remains a lie, but told thousand times becomes the truth.*" "*... propagandist technique one fundamental principle is it must confine itself to a few points and repeat them over and over.*"
- **Crude and Simple:** Propaganda items must be simple. Goebbels said, "*... arguments must be crude, clear and forcible, and appeal to emotions and instincts..*"

Once, such "Terror Bogeyman" has been constructed out of "Muslims, Asylum-seekers & Refugees" and being planted in public minds, what comes next is quite predictable. Lets check this again with Goebbels:

"The Propaganda must facilitate displacement of aggression by specifying the targets for hatred."

Targets for hatred, of course, is the scapegoat. Isn't that too much of a coincidence don't you think ? On the 23rd of December Christmas Eve, just over a week after Berlin news spotlighting, the AFP and effervescent ASIOs have made a high-profile raid on so-called "terror suspects" in Melbourne. ⁶ For this, I just leave you -- the readers -- for an answer.

The Politics of Scapegoating

An interesting theory of scapegoating: A target scapegoat has been "chosen" because "it is easy to victimise without fear of retaliation". ⁷ The real purpose of scapegoating, theorists argue:

"To polarise the community's aggressive impulses and redirect them toward victims that may be actual or figurative, animate or inanimate, but that are always incapable of propagating further violence."

The targeted scapegoat victims, therefore, must be the weak and marginalised so as to ensure no consequent retaliation would come up against the "Establishment" and broader society. Under current LNP government, there have been numerous examples of the most marginalized are being chosen for scapegoats: refugees and asylum-seekers, (muslim) migrant community, the unemployed, the aged and, indeed, the indigenous people.

⁵ http://www.azquotes.com/author/5626-Joseph_Goebbels

⁶ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-12-23/what-do-we-know-after-melbourne%27s-%27terror%27-arrests/8144480>

⁷ <http://theconversation.com/the-dirty-politics-of-scapegoating-and-why-victims-are-always-the-harmless-easy-targets-66963>



23-Dec-2016: Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull speaking on anti-terror raids in Melbourne

Given the history of LNP scapegoating, these men under question probably are to have been detained on flimsy charges, and are most likely being the harmless.⁸

Having launched the media propaganda and constructed a division in the public, the ideal outcome for such scapegoating exercise, of course, is for the government to come out as protector of the public, the peacemaker and arbitrator. A final outcome of that propaganda exercise is for all of us to see here.⁹

Circumventing Media Monopoly: Human Rights practices

We can observe that, when it comes to getting critical information, the professional human rights organisations, such as AI or HRW, never rely upon the mass media for their analysis reports. These organisations do send their own field researchers, directly contacting primary sources in order to find out what was happening. For a start, we, the activists, should do the same, as practically as possible. Whenever we receive any information, double check whether it would come from reliable sources.

Support for the Victims of Scapegoating

The social impact of media and government scapegoating on minority groups can be varied. However, the impact of scapegoating can be severe on individuals and their families. Within a democratic society, the government must be given room to propagate its propaganda and the freedom of speech must be granted to the mass media. But, as the concerned general public, are we just to sit and do nothing when the "Establishment" is spreading rogue propagandas? As a community, how do we counterbalance such media and government scapegoating? Are there ways to help those scapegoat victims? Do keep pondering.

-- Solidarity. U Ne Oo, Sydney.

⁸ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-20/preventative-detention-orders-explained/6405154>

⁹ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-12-23/malcolm-turnbull-speaks-on-melbourne-anti-terror/8144294>