

# RAM BULLETIN

Refugees, Asylum-seekers and the Media Project

advice  
information  
research  
& training  
on media ethics



Promoting best practice in media representation of refugee and asylum issues

No. 31, Aug 2003

## What difference did a BBC Day make?

Almost 70 percent of a paltry 23,000 voting viewers rejected the asylum claims of the four whose stories were told in the BBC's notorious 'You the Judge' programme on its self-styled Asylum Day, 23 July.

'Results are indicative and may not reflect public opinion' runs the legend under the web versions of the poll results. However the shock results have emboldened some to insist that asylum should be the crucial political issue of the day (after the other forms of fall out from the war against Iraq, of course).

In her article 'Are we all NF racists Mr Blair?' (*Sunday Mirror*, 27 July), columnist Carole Malone felt sufficiently empowered to launch a defence of bigotry by ranting against all immigration. The 'benefit system is being milked', she asserted, 'asylum seekers turn up their noses at £250 000 council houses', and 'this tiny island's resources (are) drained by the 200 000 immigrants and 110 000 asylum seekers who flood into Britain every year.'

The press gave plenty of space to former cabinet minister Stephen Byers who emerged from self-imposed obscurity a week later to declare that 'it is not racist to address the legitimate worries and concerns that people have about asylum and immigration – it would be irresponsible not to do so.'

He wants medical benefits denied to all those who cannot prove they are in the country legitimately.

Veteran reporter John Ware, whose *Panorama* programme gave us little new about the asylum system or the market for illegal workers, used the *Daily Mail* to insist that it is time liberals, cowed for 309 years by the spectre of Enoch Powells 'rivers of blood speech', took on the *Mail's* anti-immigration mantle.

His undercover reporter, self-confessed illegal immigrant Claudia Murg, took a similar line in her piece for the *Sunday Telegraph*.

## Zrinka zaps the BBC

Zrinka Bralo, Executive Director of the Migrant & Refugee Communities Forum in London, and former journalist put her criticisms of the Asylum Day programmes on BBC1 in writing.

In a methodical demolition of the three and half hours of TV programmes on BBC1 she offers a catalogue of facts to counter misinformation.

Acknowledging the current controversy surrounding the BBC, she says: 'I understand that the Corporation is going through a tough time in respect to the scandal of Dr. Kelly's suicide and No 10, but was it really necessary to take it out on asylum seekers?'

Zrinka's letter, entitled: 'A very sad day for journalism, for truth and justice...' can be found on NCADC website <http://www.ncadc.org.uk>

## Exiled journalists join the media fray

Asylum Day saw a plethora of positive programmes featuring refugees, especially in the regions.

A number of journalists associated with the RAM Project took part. Max Kpakio represented asylum-seekers on BBC Radio Wales, Nikola Medic and Nela Milic were among those interviewed on BBC London Live, and Ghias Aljundi appeared on London local TV.

Meanwhile on Radio 5 Live, PressWise Director Mike Jempson debated the merits of 'You the Judge' with Asylum Day producer Paul Woolwich, and battled it out (in a heated debate) with the *Daily Mail's* John Torode on BBCi.

You can catch Mike's head to head online: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/talkin\\_g\\_point/3083917.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/talkin_g_point/3083917.stm)

## Crumbs of comfort

The BBC's proclaimed objective for its Asylum Day was to inform the public about asylum and encourage informed debate. It did result in a highly informative and diverse website which will remain on-line for

the foreseeable future. It contains useful facts and figures, although in places it panders to dubious 'tabloidesque' eg. 'The Big Question: Are we being Swamped?'

Nonetheless the site itself should prove a more enduring legacy than the nasty taste left by the 'You the Judge'. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/asylum\\_day/default.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/asylum_day/default.stm)

## EDITORIAL

### Putting thoughts in people's minds

Before war started in former Yugoslav territories the plight of people commenced from the media.

I remember very well how it started in 1981 with hidden hate and then in 1987 openly defaming specific ethnic groups. We all know what happened in the 90s: hundred thousands of people killed, tortured, raped and displaced.

I am comparing that experience with the current UK media preoccupation with asylum seekers in particular and foreigners in general.

Constant attacks on asylum seekers by the British tabloids appears to be spontaneous, but to me it seems like a well organized campaign to vilify asylum seekers in order to make their life here impossible.

It is very risky business playing this card, because it could all end in insults, attacks, riots and killings - like the recent clashes in Hull and riots in Wrexham.

Of course, Britain will not end like Yugoslavia because of its liberal past, strong economy and long tradition of dealing with difficult situation calmly and cleverly. But the danger is still there; when thoughts are put in people's minds it is difficult to remove them. Prejudices are easily built up that way and God knows how it all might end.

After all it is not just the tabloids - the mainstream media are quite preoccupied with asylum issues – and are deflected only by wars and scandals. Now the BBC has made the issue its own. Its highly controversial and much-criticised programmes on 23 July convinced some that it is prejudice is acceptable..

Besim Gerguri

Guest Editor

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## Size matters

In the build up to the BBC's Asylum Day (and since) there have been repeated references in the media to 'Britain being a small, over-crowded island', with 'insufficient resources'

How true is this? With a population of more than 126 million Japan, also a group of islands, has a population density of 334 people per sq/km compared to the UK's 240.

The Philippines, at 248 people per sq/km, is also more densely populated - with only 1/20 of UK's GNP.

If anything, UK's population growth has been less than explosive.

Comparing the 2001 census to the one 20 years earlier, the total increase in population was around 2.5 million.

These figures are not difficult to find, and media professionals would promote more informed debate if they relied on the facts instead of speculation and guesswork.

## Hull: increase in racially motivated crime

*Hull's Angel C4's* illuminating study of prejudice and good-humoured grass-roots socialism went out the night before the BBC's Asylum Day.

It told the story of Tina Pir who has been spat at and threatened for marrying a Kurdish asylum-seeker and devoting herself to the welfare of many others.

She and her husband have had to move to Bradford, leaving behind a city of 240 000, including an estimated 3,000 asylum seekers, where media reports indicate there has been a 49% rise in racially motivated crime over the past year.

Recent reports include an Iraqi man being deliberately run over by a car as he walked in the city centre. This incident is believed to have led to a brawl on Sunday 27 July, in which 12 men were arrested.

Previously, an Afghanistani was stabbed and a Kosovan blinded in one eye by a stone. On Thursday 24 July, a Somali man was murdered.

## Spreading the 'burden' or piling the pressure

A new report on the effect of the Government's dispersal policies claims that 'compulsory dispersal has led to the denial of basic rights of asylum seekers and refugees'.

Apart from the human cost of dispersal authors of the report, professors Vaughan Robinson, Roger Andersson and Sako Musterd argue that it is inefficient and driven by the governments' desire to 'appease a fearful white electorate'.

*The report is published by Policy Press, Bristol. [www.policypress.org.uk](http://www.policypress.org.uk)*

## Keep them off our roads and away from legal aid

Police say 'illegal immigrants in unsafe cars have become a menace on our roads,' according to the *Daily Mail* (July 31).

The warning came in the wake of a tragic accident in which a young couple were killed 'by a drunken Pole' on Christmas day. But the only other fatal accident mentioned was the death of three Iraqis when a van driven by another Iraqi was hit by a train earlier in July.

Meanwhile the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC) points out that the Lord Chancellor's Department has issued a consultation document 'Proposed Changes to Publicly Funded Immigration and Asylum Work' which proposes drastic cutbacks in legal aid assistance for those preparing asylum claims or appeals.

## ICAR to monitor local media for London's mayor

The Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees has been commissioned by London's mayor to assess the impact of media and political images of refugees and asylum seekers on community relations in London.

'The project will explore the link between media and political coverage of asylum issues; patterns of racial incidents; and increased community tension relating to asylum seekers and refugees' says ICAR.

In May the organisation produced report for the RAM Project, looking into coverage of asylum and refugee issues in the UK's regional press. RAM will now assist ICAR in their latest research project.

## Media monitoring report for European parliament

A week of media monitoring in November will provide a pan-

European perspective on coverage of refugees and asylum seekers.

RAM is looking for groups willing to take part in the exercise, the results of this monitoring will be released to the European Parliament on 21 March next year.

RAM's Dutch partner, On Line: More Colour in the Media, will coordinate groups involved in the exercise all over Europe.

RAM Communication Manager Nick Medic and regional co-ordinator Terry Williams will be contacting UK media networks to encourage them to take part. There will be briefings about monitoring for those who have little or no experience in media monitoring.

*For more details please contact RAM at [ram@presswise.org.uk](mailto:ram@presswise.org.uk)*

## Eugenics don is a MigrationWatcher

The RAM Project can confirm that David Coleman of MigrationWatch is a member of the Galton Institute, previously known as the Eugenics Society. Since October 2002 he has been Professor in Demography at Oxford University.

Professor Coleman told RAM: 'Yes I was a member - like many other prominent people.' His membership has continued since the Eugenics Society changed its name to the Galton Institute.

Coleman sums up his role at MigrationWatch as that of an 'advisor', yet the website gives him equal billing to founder Sir Andrew Green, without a formal title.

Eugenics is defined by the Collins English Dictionary as 'the study of methods of improving the human race, especially by selective breeding.'

Over the centuries Eugenics has had many followers, but acquired a sinister reputation during WWII when the Nazis employed a variety of methods to create and promote a 'master race'.

## RAM to run Media Day

The RAM Project has taken responsibility for a day of debate with prominent international media speakers at the forthcoming British Council event A Sense of Place, 24-27 November in Cardiff.

Free places have been reserved for refugees and asylum-seekers.

# Cut-out-and keep COMMUNICATOR

**A PressWise guide for those wishing  
to help improve media coverage.**

**Back issues can be found at  
[www.ramproject.org.uk/communicator.php](http://www.ramproject.org.uk/communicator.php)**

## Guest editor Besin Gerguri offers an introduction to web publishing made easy Blogging

No doubt about it - web publishing is the cheapest way to publish today. Even printing the cheapest leaflet in the traditional way costs more than setting up a web page, and that includes hosting and registering a domain name. Furthermore, internet access is enormous - day by day the number of Internet users in the World is increasing exponentially. The other issue is space. On only 50 Mb space one can store thousands of pages and hundreds of images.

There are lots of different ways of setting up a web page. Getting free domain name and free hosting, of course, has limits like: the obligation to include an internet commercial, known as a 'banner' for the free Internet Service Provider or of other companies; lots of technicalities, which can be frustrating; and the varieties of software which don't come cheap.

A wonderful way to bypass this issue is to use blogging. Blogging comes from term blog which itself derives from weblog. Blog is both a noun and a verb. But, you might ask, what exactly is blogging? I have found many definitions, and I think most precise one is: "A blog is defined as a Website with dated entries, usually by a single author, often accompanied by links to other blogs that the site's editor visits on a regular basis. Think of a blog as one person's public diary or suggestion list. Early blogs were started by Web enthusiasts who would post links to cool stuff that they found on the Internet. They added commentary. They began posting daily. They read one other's blogs. A community culture took hold." Jay Cross<sup>1</sup>

### Short History

Blogging has its beginning in 1998 although at that time it was not called blogging but weblogging (weblogs) firstly named by John Barger in December 1997. At that time Jesse James Garret, editor of Infosift<sup>2</sup> began cataloguing a list of similar web sites to its own and he passed this list to Cameron Barret who published it on Camworld<sup>3</sup>. At the beginning of

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.learningcircuits.org/2002/apr2002/ttools.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.jig.net/infosift/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.camworld.com/>

1999, there were only 23 known weblogs<sup>4</sup>. Rapidly a big community emerged. It was quite easy to read all these weblogs on Cameron's list.

Peter Merholz<sup>5</sup> first invented term blog. He had said he would use term 'wee-blog' but, unavoidably, this was shortened to 'blog', and the weblog editor was referred as a 'blogger'. Today there are thousands of blogs on the internet, from personal diaries to free news and journalism about current world events.

### Some interesting Blogs

Most well known blogger is Iraqi Salam Pax (not his real name) a 29-year-old architect. First thought to be a hoax Salam Pax's blog was almost the only voice writing about war in Iraq from Baghdad by an ordinary Iraqi. Now he writes for *The Guardian* using the same pseudonym<sup>6</sup>, although according to *The Guardian* his given name is Salam. Salam actually is an Arabic expression for the Latin *pax* which means peace.

*"Salam Pax became a cyber celebrity after his pointed and often humorous accounts of everyday life in Baghdad began circulating on the Internet. His diary mocked both Saddam Hussein's repressive regime -- he called the Iraqi leaders "freaks" -- and the U.S. claims of "liberating" Iraq."*<sup>7</sup>

### Success story

Some have succeeded in commercially exploiting their blogs, like journalist Rafat Ali who could earn up to \$80,000 in advertising or sponsorship this alone. *"Rafat Ali is an unusual beast: a laid-off dot-com reporter who's making money online writing about, well, making money online."*<sup>8</sup>

### Technical issues

Setting up a Blog on the internet is easy. There are two ways of doing it. One is use ready-made template for free from <http://new.blogger.com/home.pyra> or using software which helps you to compose the pages and archives offline and than after editing uploading them online.

Very useful free software which can help to make with ease blogs is software called Blog which can be downloaded from <http://www.farook.org/Blog.htm>. It comes with tutorials and examples.

So if you think that blogging suits your journalistic activities, the blog is a right tool for you. Usually free programs soon become commercial and aren't supplied free anymore, so hurry up and download it now while it is free.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.jig.net/portal/tpowl.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.peterme.com/>

<sup>6</sup>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/g2/story/0,3604,979686,00.html>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.wired.com/news/culture/0,1284,59057,00.html>

<sup>8</sup>

<http://www.wired.com/news/business/0,1367,59603,00.html>

# Beware the witch hunt

Guest editor Besim Gerguri tells his story

My experience in UK has been devastating. After almost five years waiting for the Home Office's decision my asylum application was refused. Seven months later my immigration appeal against that decision has been dismissed. Now I am appealing against that decision and I have no idea how things will end.

I am terrified of the idea of being detained like a criminal as happens to a lot of my compatriots and other asylum seekers these days in Britain. I wait fearfully every day in the early morning hours to hear the decisive knock on my door.

It brings back bad memories of Kosova before I had to leave. It was the morning raids, interrogations and arrests that I feared most and which made me leave my beautiful country.

Now I feel the same but I can't run anymore, my life energy is betraying me and I don't have anywhere else to go. Britain has become my second country after so many years living here and despite the all problems that I have I love this place. But I don't feel like a person anymore, I feel like an object which is kicked by governments, bureaucracy and politicians whenever they want and whenever they please.

My family and I have been threatened by organised criminal groups in Kosova, as a result of my investigative journalism, and in particular because of my work in

exposing illegal trafficking of refugees here in UK. Despite being offered substantial facts and the presence of witnesses in court to back-up my case, the adjudicator dismissed my case consequently putting my life in danger if I am deported. His only argument was that Kosova is now safe; ignoring the fact that for people like me who have exposed criminals there is no safety.

During the hearing he told my barrister the bundle of documents I had supplied was too big and that could only harm not help my case!

I think that I am being made a victim of the current hysterical drive to repatriate eastern European asylum seekers in line with government targets.

Things have reached the lowest point since I came to Britain, especially when even the BBC is making 'Big Brother-style' programmes that defame us. On the BBC's 'Asylum Day', 66% of British viewers voted against asylum-seekers staying in this country whatever their reason for claiming asylum!

Imagine what that feels like for real asylum-seekers.

Also omitted from most press coverage are positive asylum-seeker stories. I don't remember seeing any documentary which portrays asylum-seekers in a positive manner. I have lots of friends who have come to this country from Kosova and managed very well. There are asylum seekers who are professionals: programmers, architects, accountants, even millionaires. They work very hard, pay taxes, and contribute to the society and don't wear 'leather jackets', but no one mentions them!

The fact that I have skills which would allow me to be employed directly into the media industry and thus contribute to British society, was ignored by the Home Office. They didn't give me the smallest chance!

I want to say to the reporters who write bad things against asylum seekers and to the officials who decide about our fate: "Don't play God, we're all human beings and nobody knows what's going to happen in the future. Maybe you or your children will be tomorrow's refugees, so please THINK!"

No one could have predicted what happened in New York. Who knows when British people might need someone's help. It is not unthinkable that the people who write anti-asylum-seeker stories could themselves be seeking asylum some day.

I left everything in my country. I had a job, a house and a garden. I had a nice life. But the most important thing was my freedom for which I am waiting so long, and which I still don't have!

It wasn't easy for me to leave everything and come over here – I have been through a lot.

*Besim Gerguri is an investigative journalist from Kosova living in London. His expertise is in electronic publishing. He has an MA on Digital Moving Image. His story is one of many featured in the RAM Project's Directory of Exiled Journalists. [www.ramproject.org.uk/directory](http://www.ramproject.org.uk/directory)*

## 'PEG' BOARD

**Keep your ears and eyes open for events which can provide you, and the media with a 'peg' on which to hang positive stories about refugees or asylum seekers.**

**Help to set the media agenda by generating stories rather than having to react to theirs.**

**Keep your media contacts informed about what is happening and why it is relevant for them.**

Tuesday 22 July to Sunday 10 August 8.00pm

### THE PEN IS..

A play by Ed Cottrell, inspired by a mailing from Amnesty highlighting the pen as a method of torture as well as a weapon of change. Taking up the theme of inhumanity and need for change in the world, the play explores the possibilities of revolution with women to the fore. The play is on every day except for Mondays. Tickets £10/7

Venue: Barons Court Theatre, 28a Comeragh Road, London W14  
For more info, call the booking office on 020 8932 4747 or visit <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/members/events/pen.shtml>

Sunday 17 August 12 midnight

### STAND UP FOR FREEDOM

Amnesty's annual comedy event Stand Up for Freedom at the Edinburgh Fringe is this year compered by Radio 4 comedian Boothby Graffoe. This year the event highlights the case of U Win Tin, a Burmese writer and journalist, who has 14 years in prison for exercising his right to freedom of expression. Bill Bailey will head the line-up with Daniel Kitson, Adam Hills, Nina Conti, Ed Byrne and Dara O'Briain.

Tickets £13/11, starts at 12 midnight.

Venue: The Assembly Rooms, George Street, Edinburgh EH2 2LE  
For more info and to book, contact the box office on 0131 226 2428 or visit [www.assemblyrooms.com](http://www.assemblyrooms.com)

Thursday 21 to Sunday 24 August

### REMEMBERING ENSLAVEMENT

August 23 is UNESCO's International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its abolition. Anti-Slavery International, in partnership with African heritage community groups, is organising a four day programme of events in remembrance of Britain's role in the transatlantic slave trade including live music and dance, Capoeira international film, food and historical trails.

Venues: Various around Greenwich and Brixton  
For more info, visit [www.antislavery.org/homepage/rendezvous/index.htm](http://www.antislavery.org/homepage/rendezvous/index.htm)

Wednesday 3 September 9.30 - 4.45pm

### ROMA AND ASYLUM IN BRITAIN

A one day conference to examine the global issues and local concerns of Roma who have had to leave their home countries and enter Britain to claim asylum. With recent changes in asylum and immigration legislation, people originating from European Union accession countries (such as Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia) who are seeking asylum in Britain can now be deported without appeal. Conference fee £50, or £20 concessions.

Venue: The Fenwick Room, Castle Leazes Halls of Residence, Spital Tongues, Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 4NY

For more info or to book, contact Colin Clark on 0191 222 7497 or [Colin.Clark@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:Colin.Clark@ncl.ac.uk)

Friday 5 September  
**BEYOND LABELS**

'Beyond Labels: Working towards Equality and Diversity through ICT' is a one day event organised by the University of Huddersfield. The conference will focus on

ways of supporting the use of ICT for overcoming poverty and social exclusion within the framework of four commonly agreed objectives: to facilitate participation in employment, prevent the risks of exclusion, help the most vulnerable, and mobilise all relevant bodies.

Venue: University of Huddersfield, Queensgate, Huddersfield, HD1 3DH  
For more info, contact *Rehana Ansari* on 01484 472 640 or [info@beyondlabels.org.uk](mailto:info@beyondlabels.org.uk) or visit [www.beyondlabels.org.uk](http://www.beyondlabels.org.uk)

Sunday 14 September  
**FLORA LIGHT CHALLENGE**

Asylum Aid are organising a team to join the Flora Light Challenge for Women 5km funrun, and will provide sponsorship forms, t-shirt, publicity materials and a goody bag at the finish. £12 registration fee.

Venues: Hyde Park, London and Birmingham City Centre.

For more info, contact *Disha Sughand* on 020 7377 5123

Thursday 30 October to Saturday 1 November

### BLACK BOOKS EXPO

A cultural fair and festival including book signings and readings, films and exhibitions.

Venue: Assembly Rooms, Hackney Town Hall, London E8

For more info, contact *Buzz Johnson* on 020 8986 4143 or 07949 750 811

Monday 24 to Thursday 27 November

### A SENSE OF PLACE

Organised by the British Council, a four day international event to investigate, question and shed light on 'displacement' and 'integration' in Europe, through the intellectual focus of the role of arts, culture and media. PressWise and the RAM Project are co-ordinating day two on media - confirmed speakers so far are Gary Younge (journalist), Daniel Meadows (BBC) and Terry Threadgold (University of Cardiff).

For more info, contact [info@asenseofplace.org.uk](mailto:info@asenseofplace.org.uk) or 01280 821 292 or visit [www.asenseofplace.org.uk](http://www.asenseofplace.org.uk)

Saturday 30 November  
**RE-IMAGINING DIASPORAS**

A one-day symposium organised by the School of Media, Critical and Creative Arts at Liverpool University. The aim is to establish as research network, facilitate collaborative research, pave the way for larger international work and encourage publishing initiative that promote further research.

Registration £25 waged, £15 unwaged

Venue: Liverpool John Moores University, Dean Walters Building, MCCA, St James Road, Liverpool L1 7BR.

For more info, contact *Clare Horrocks* on [clhorrocks@aol.com](mailto:clhorrocks@aol.com) or 0151 424 6170

## USEFUL WEBSITES

**Journalists should always check their sources – and so should you. When quoting facts and figures always indicate your source.**

Authoritative information is vital if you want to be taken seriously by the media. Here are some websites you might like to check out.

NCADC  
[www.ncadc.org.uk](http://www.ncadc.org.uk)

Policy Press  
[www.policypress.org.uk](http://www.policypress.org.uk)

RAM Directory of Exiled Journalists  
[www.ramproject.org.uk/directory](http://www.ramproject.org.uk/directory)

Visit the RAM Project website for information, contacts, news and views  
[www.ramproject.org.uk](http://www.ramproject.org.uk)