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The Reporting of the Tampa Incident in Australian and Norwegian Newspapers

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The Reporting of the Tampa Incident in Australian and Norwegian Newspapers

Lene Sjøbrend
2004
Bachelor of Communications Honours
USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.
The Reporting of the Tampa Incident in Australian and the Norwegian Newspapers

By Lene Sjøbrend

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Bachelor of Communications – Journalism (Honours) Faculty of Communications and Creative Industries Edith Cowan University Mount Lawley, Western Australia.

Date of Submission: November 2004
Abstract

The M/S Tampa in August 2001 was turned by the Australian government into a tool to fight the increasing numbers of boat people heading for Australia. But more importantly, it was a fight to win back votes before the upcoming federal election. Also in Norway an election was imminent, and even though the incident did not become an important part of the Norwegian election campaign, it played a role in Norway's involvement in the case.

The media has a tendency to listen to authoritative voices, which can make the media a victim of political spin. Since the governments in Norway and in Australia strategically used the media as means to get their views across, the question will be explored if journalists failed to see the wider implications of the governments' message by concentrating too much on their government's daily pronouncements. This thesis will examine how the incident was framed differently in Norwegian and Australian newspapers, and how the use of authoritative sources influenced the two respective countries' coverage.

This thesis will specifically look at articles published from the start of the Tampa incident until two days after the Australian federal election, in the two Norwegian newspapers, Tonsberg Blad and Aftenposten, as well as the two Australian newspapers, The West Australian and The Australian.

The aim of this thesis is to identify how the Tampa incident was covered in Australia and Norway - two countries where the two respective governments had totally opposite views of the case - and to figure out why the coverage turned out so different. Specifically the following aspects will be explored: the way the incident was framed, the importance of the two countries' upcoming elections, forms of reporting, the use of authoritative sources, labelling, as well as the creation of bias when the local angle is favoured.
Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

(i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institutions of higher education;

(ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or

(iii) contain any defamatory material

Signed:
Date: 10th Feb, 2005
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The M/S Tampa’s rescue of 438 people in the waters between Australia and Indonesia in August 2001 was the start of a drama, created by the Australian government, which took eight days to be solved. The Tampa incident marked a shift in the Australian government’s politics to the degree that the subsequent Australian federal election in November 2001 has been dubbed the ‘Tampa election’. The Australian media seems to have failed to grasp that the Tampa incident was “part of a carefully calculated Liberal Party strategy to revive flagging electoral stocks ahead of an imminent federal election” (Ward, 2002, p. 22).

Also in Norway an election was close, but the Tampa case was not going to dominate the Norwegian election campaign as neither the media nor the politicians seemed eager to make immigration an important election issue. But this does not mean that the election did not make an impact on how the Norwegian government chose to handle the case. Australian reporters were not the only ones not comprehending their government’s hidden strategies. Norwegian reporters equally failed to see the connection between their government’s reluctance to take the survivors to Norway and the fact that an election was close.

Both the Norwegian and the Australian governments carefully planned their media strategies, and knew how they wanted the case to be portrayed for them to win support for their stand. The media in the two respective countries followed their own government’s rhetoric to a high degree, which meant that two distinctly different frames developed in the coverage of this issue in the two countries. The purpose of this study is to find out how different framing can change a story and add bias to it, as well as to see how two different journalistic cultures operate, namely the Australian and the Norwegian one.

This thesis will look in detail at how two Norwegian and two Australian newspapers covered the Tampa incident and its political aftermath. The Tampa incident will be used as the sample with which to explore different forms of reporting, namely the use of a particular framework, the adoption of different bias, the importance of the local angle, the choice of connotative words, the use of authoritative sources as well as the failure to understand and report on underlying reasons why an incident like this developed into such a big crisis.

The research findings for this thesis will be divided into three sections, and the articles looked at come from two Norwegian newspapers, Tønsberg Blad (local) and Aftenposten (national), and two Australian newspapers, The West Australian (local) and The Australian (national).
This research will indicate to what degree reporters let themselves be used as a tool by authoritative sources, and therefore how good both governments were in manipulating the media. As this is a comparative study, the differences and similarities between two different journalistic cultures will be highlighted. It will also emerge that it was not these differences that led to a significantly different coverage in the two countries.
CHAPTER TWO
BACKGROUND

On 26th August 2001 the Norwegian containership M/S Tampa was on its way to Singapore from Fremantle when it received a MAYDAY message from Rescue Control Centre Australia (RCC). It was told a 35-metre long boat with more than 80 people on board was in trouble. All ships within 10 hours sailing-time of the boat were asked to report back to RCC about whether they could get to the spot and if they were able to assist.

The Tampa changed its course, and more than five hours later the ship's deck was covered by 438 exhausted survivors. The Tampa started its journey towards Merak, Indonesia, but soon after the containership changed its course to Christmas Island after demands from the survivors. The ship's captain, Arne Rinnan, informed the RCC that because of the latest development he did not have any other option fearing for the security of crew and survivors. RCC Australia's reply stated that it was the captain's responsibility to choose where he wanted to go, and Rinnan therefore assumed he was given permission by Australian authorities to go ahead.

RCC Australia informed the Immigration Department about the development, and not long after Neville Nixon from the Immigration Department contacted the captain and informed him that he was not allowed to enter Australian territorial waters, and therefore should continue towards Merak. Rinnan asked to talk to Nixon's chief, and Mr. Javis called back. The message was clear: Tampa was denied access to Australia territorial waters. If the boat came to Christmas Island it would break Australian law and charges would be laid, which could mean prison sentence and fines up to A$ 100, 000.

The captain once again changed course, but not long after the survivors noticed the change. Some of them threatened to jump overboard unless the ship took them to Christmas Island. For the last time the captain ordered a change of course, and was unknowingly sailing into a political storm and an Australian federal election.

The Tampa waited outside the Australian territorial border for instructions from Australian authorities. The media was by now aware of the situation, and they would over the next week be part of an Australian federal election campaign. Howard's message to the captain and the media was clear: The ship would be denied access to Australia, because of the need to send a message to potential people smugglers around the world.

Tampa had by now become an important tool in Howard's political plan to win back votes before the upcoming election. Tampa's situation was not made easier by the opposition leader,
Kim Beazley's decision to support the government. One of the few politicians to go against the decision was the Green's Bob Brown.

The owner of Tampa, Wallenius Wilhelmsen Lines' Emergency Response Team gathered. Australia is an important market for the company, so they early on decided to support Tampa's captain while doing their best to stay out of the developing political discussion. They let Norwegian authorities handle the political aspect of it.

The Norwegian government was clear in its condemnation of Australian authorities' decision to turn the Tampa away. Also in Norway there was an upcoming election, but the Tampa incident did not become as important in the Norwegian federal election as it did in the Australian.

The discussions of different laws became important in the developing crisis. Australian authorities talked about border security and national sovereignty, of having the choice to decide whom they want to accept into their country. The Norwegian government focused on the right of people rescued at sea to be delivered to a place of safety, instead of getting involved in the more complicated refugee- and immigration - laws. UNHCR was now also a part of the discussion.

The Tampa asked for medical assistance from Australia while the discussions between Norway and Australia continued, but no help arrived. Rinnan's next move was to send out a PAN PAN, which is a signal asking for assistance only exceeded by MAYDAY. Four hours went by, and the Tampa got no reply. Rinnan then demanded RCC Australia to give him a written reply, but once again silence.

Rinnan's next step was to send out a MAYDAY asking for immediate medical assistance. He also informed that he would enter Australian territorial waters. 40 minutes went by before RCC Australia replied, saying he has no reason for sending a MAYDAY, and if he entered Australian waters, action would be taken.

WWL and Norwegian authorities stood behind Rinnan when, on the 29th August, he fired up the engine and entered Australian waters. He stoped four nautical miles outside Christmas Island. Not long after soldiers from the SAS boarded the ship, but they did not take control of the ship. The Tampa was ordered to leave Australian territorial waters, but Rinnan refused.

On Monday 3rd September, eight days after the Tampa rescued 438 people; the survivors left the ship to board an Australian navy vessel. Australian authorities had struck a deal with the tiny Pacific Island Nauru and New Zealand. John Howard had kept his promise that none of the
rescued people were to set foot on Australian soil. New Zealand was to take 150 of the survivor!, while the others would be sent to Nauru to get their asylum claims processed there.

Australian lawyers had been fighting the asylum-seekers case in Australian courts while the Tampa crisis had been developing. This fight continued also after the survivors left the Tampa, but they finally lost their case of letting the survivors enter Australia in the High Court.

Howard's Border Protection Bill, which he tried to introduce while the Tampa crisis was unfolding, was not made into law at that stage, but a revised version was later introduced and accepted.

The Tampa incident received media attention for a long time after the Tampa had left Australian waters. Immigration and refugee policy had become an important issue in the upcoming election, and John Howard put even more focus on national security and border control after 9/11.

The Norwegian political landscape

Labour (Det Norske Arbeiderpartiet) has been a dominant force in Norwegian politics, but since losing its majority in parliament in 1981, minority and coalition governments have been the standard. In the 1997 election Labour said they were not willing to form a government if they got less than 36.9% of the votes (Svåsand, 2001, online). They fell beneath this percentage, and a minority coalition government consisting of the Christian Democrats (Kristelig Folkeparti), the Centre Party (Senterpartiet) and the Liberals (Venstre) was formed.

The government resigned in 2000 over the issue of building a gas-fired power station. Labour with Jens Stoltenberg as the leader took over the power in a minority government until the 2001 election. This meant that Labour was in power when the Tampa incident occurred.

Elections for the parliament in Norway are held every four years, and it is optional to vote. “Norway is divided in 19 counties, and each county is a constituency in the election. Each county elects a pre-selected number of seats in the Parliament (Stortinget) based mainly on the population and geographical area of the county.” (wordiiQ.com, n.d, online)

The political parties are often placed on a scale from left towards right, but this scale does not really fit any longer as the lines between the parties are becoming more and more blurred. The electorate are switching more between different parties in these days; they are no longer loyal to one party (Samfunnslære, 2004, online). According to Statistics Norway, “37% of the ones who
voted in 1997 changed over to another party in 2001” (Aardal, Valen, Karlsen, Kleven & Normann, 2003, p. 3) with Labour being the big loser.

The 2001 election was held on the 10th September, two weeks after the Tampa sailed into the Australian federal election. The Norwegian election campaign had been severely interrupted by the Royal wedding on the 25th August, which dominated media coverage.

Labour did not have a good election, and decreased its seats in the parliament (Storting) from 65 to 43, but in spite of the poor result Labour did not resign until a month after the election. The reason for this was the prolonged negotiations between different parties to form a government together. The final result was a minority government consisting of the Conservatives (H), the Christian Democrats (KrF) and the Liberals (V). According to Svåsand it “seems rather unlikely that any one party will win a simple majority in the Storting in the foreseeable future” (Svåsand, 2001, online).

“The result for the individual parties were:
Number of seats per party in 2001 (1997)

- Socialist Left 23 (9)
- Labour Party 43 (65)
- Centre Party 10 (11)
- Liberals 2 (6)
- Christian Democrats 22 (25)
- Conservatives 35 (23)
- Party of Progress 26* (25)
- Coastal Party 1 (1)

*One of the Party of Progress’ representatives was after the election excluded from the party and thereafter functioned as an independent representative” (Svåsand, 2001, online).
CHAPTER THREE
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are several books published specifically about the Tampa incident. Svabø’s *Tampa* (2002), gives a detailed account of the incident seen from a Norwegian point of view, while Marr and Wilkinson’s *Dark Victory* (2003) looks at the political reasons in Australia of why the incident turned into such a crisis. Mares’ *Borderline* (2002) looks at the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers in Australia, where the Tampa case and its political aftermath play an important role. All these books cover the incident in great detail, but they have a political approach to their analysis, while this thesis will look at it from a media perspective.

The Howard government used the Tampa case as a way to make border security a major issue in the upcoming election, and the attention to, and theme of, national security was further intensified with 9/11. Ward’s journal article, “The Tampa, wedge politics and political journalism” (July 2002) looks at how the Australian mainstream media covered the incident, and their failure to understand that the government’s move against the Tampa was part of a carefully planned exercise by the Liberal Party Australia as a way to win back voters before an upcoming election. This article is a great starting point to this thesis, as it uncovers some of the problems in the Australian media coverage of the incident, but this thesis will take the problems of the media coverage of the Tampa incident one step further as it compares two different countries’ coverage of the same case.

The Liberal party’s use of the Tampa affair can be traced in the Australian newspapers, and this study examines the Australian coverage of the Tampa incident, and to what degree it was influenced by Australian government rhetoric. This will be compared to the reporting of the Tampa affair in Norway, where also an election was imminent (10th September 2001).

**Forms of reporting:**

One area in which Norwegian and Australian journalism differs, is forms of reporting. While Australian newspapers favour direct quotes, indirect quotes or paraphrasing are preferred in Norwegian news reports. This prompted the question whether Norwegian reporting adhered less to official sources and thus produced different coverage.

The two classic studies which explore the production of print news are Tuchman’s *Making News* (1978) and Gans’ *Deciding What’s News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time* (1979). Even though these books are somewhat dated, their findings are still relevant today and are therefore used in this analysis. Another important and more
recent book is Bennett’s News: The Politics of Illusion (2003), which examines the processes and decisions that influence the ways in which journalists construct news reports. On the Norwegian side, Østlyngen and Øvrebo’s Journalistik: Metode og fag (1998) trace the formula Norwegian journalists tend to follow in their hunt for today’s news.

Journalists tend to follow guided routines in their news gathering processes. As Bennett points out, “news organizations tend to impose fairly similar constraints on reporters in terms of acceptable story angles, deadlines and news gathering resources” (2003, p.165). Ettema, Whitney and Wackman argue similarly in their chapter “Professional Mass Communication” (1997) that, “Across the news industry scarcity of resources promotes efficiency in news gathering, particularly in ways of conceptualising newsworthiness that make for predictability and economy” (p. 35). This was the case in the Tampa incident, which happened in a remote place, and was further compounded by the fact that the press had no access to the scene. Even in normal times, the beat system tends to make reporters interact with sources in the centres of institutional power (Ettema et al., 1997, p. 35, Fishman, 1997, p. 214, Tuchman, 1978, p. 21). In the case of the Tampa, the press almost entirely had to rely on information provided by the government.

Also journalists often have to rely on information they have not gathered themselves, and as Tiffen points out, news agencies provide a broad reliable coverage where the focus is on immediate stories rather than investigative work (1989, pp. 21-22). A similar point is made by Bennett who emphasizes that news organizations tend to “shy away from complex political stories” (1997, p. 109).

Newspapers in Norway and Australia covered the Tampa incident extensively, but this thesis will examine whether they avoided the full complexity of the issue. According to Tuchman reporters refuse to “present stories in their ongoing situational context – to analyse the relationship among yesterday, today and tomorrow” (1978, p. 192). As will be shown with the Tampa incident, by proceeding this way it is hard for the reader to understand the complexity of the issue and to make up their mind based on all the facts.

**Relationship with/availability of sources**

News and Power (1989) by Tiffen is an Australian in-depth study of the relationship between journalists and sources, and thus has been extensively used for this thesis, as the choice of sources impacted greatly on how the incident was portrayed. Another book of interest is Manning’s, News and News Sources (2001), which also looks in-depth at how the news media use their sources. On the Norwegian side Reinton’s journal article, “Kildenes Tyranni: Om
Joulisten som medium” (1984) still raises some important questions about journalists’ dependency on their sources. He asks if journalists simply act as a tool for authoritative sources, while raising the important question of what relationship reporters have to power? Another Norwegian author worth mentioning in this context is Allern (2001 & n.d, online), who has written much about the conflicted relationship between reporters and their sources. In the article “Kildene og Mediamakten” (2001) he points out that the media send a signal to the society of who and what are important by their choice of sources.

Cunningham, in a recent article on “Objectivity” (2003, online) points out that the tendency to put a story together by relying on official sources from two different sides to create a ‘balanced’ news copy gives an end result where marginalised groups – such as refugees - are ignored, and readers are left with the authorities' views. Schudson backs up this point in saying, “Every social scientific study of the press of the past ten or fifteen years has found that the press over represents the views of government officials” (1995, p. 214).

Reinton (1984, p. 26) further elaborated that much of the power the authoritative sources have comes from journalists’ tendency to play safe by letting officials define the situations. Bennett (2003, p. 48) similarly mentions that the routine of seeking mostly authoritative voices creates biased news. “Many alternative sources of information about complex public decisions seldom appear in press reports” (Bennett, 2000, p. 211).

The literature on journalists’ relationships with sources generally indicates that authoritative voices dominate the coverage. Blumler and Gurevitch argue that “Journalists can turn to many other sources than politicians to keep their stories moving” (2000, p. 164-165) but, as shown in the Tampa incident, often this is not done. According to Hall and his colleagues (as cited in Manning, 2001, p. 14-15) the routine of information gathering most news organizations follow gives the powerful a benefit in the fight to set news agendas. Ettema et al., (1997) make the same point: “Not only do official and institutional sources predominate, but they are given favourable treatment because journalists either consider them legitimate spokespersons or are accustomed to and accept administrative procedures routinely employed by official sources” (p. 38).

The Tampa incident, as will be shown, is a case in point. Its news coverage was heavily dominated by leading politicians, mainly from the government. This meant that the opposition and other interest groups struggled to get their view across. Had a wider source structure been applied the coverage would probably have changed substantially.
Gans claims that reporters prefer authoritative sources because they are looked at as being trustworthy since it is not beneficial for them to lie to the public (1979, p. 130). However, it has been shown that authoritative sources do at times lie, or put a heavy spin on their message, and good investigative reporting is often needed to discover it. Sources that are not looked at as being authoritative must, according to Gans, provide evidence to back up their claims before reporters and editors are willing to accept their claims (1979, p. 274). Allern (n.d, online) draws attention to the fact that there is a debate going on in Norwegian news organizations about using more sources that have experienced the consequences of political decisions.

However, a reporter also has to maintain a good relationship with the source (Tiffen, 1989, p. 37, Bennett, 2003, p. 165). This can make reporters reluctant to challenge sources if they have become too dependent on them (Cunningham, 2003, online, White, 1996, p. 49). Reporters also tend to avoid challenging important authorities since the public do not always appreciate it. Fishman claims, “what routine newswriting systematically excludes from public view are just those occurrences that might challenge the legitimacy of the institutions reporters depend on for news” (1997, p. 210).

**Media management and Public Relations in Politics**

The Tampa incident, as controlled by the Australian government, seems to have created a perfect environment for pack journalism, with its strict control of information and regular media conferences held by the government. The term “pack journalism” refers to reporters covering the same story who tend to emphasize the same angle. This, according to Bennett and Schudson, is due to the specific news gathering process, which mostly consists of a set of routines, and has a tendency to assemble reporters from different news organizations into a collective group (Bennett, 2003, pp. 175-176, Schudson, 2000, p. 188).

According to Allern and Bodahl-Johansen (2000, online) the increased focus on professionalism in Norway, when it comes to an unbiased representation of news, has altered the expectation on the individual journalist away from expressing an opinion of his or her own or to comment, and the result is a press that tends to think as a group. The reporter may avoid analysing the material, because s/he is afraid of being accused of adding bias to the story. But when material is not investigated and analysed other forms of bias can creep in since the ‘whole’ story is not being told.

The media play an important part in election campaigns, which means that public relations consultants have become more important for politicians whose survival depend on how they are portrayed in the media (Iyengar, 1997, p. 143 and Blumler & Gurevitch, 2000, p. 157-158). As
Blumler and Gurevitch write, “leading politicians and media organizations regularly conduct research into ordinary people’s preferences, tastes and images of their own efforts and personalities – to help keep in touch with the public mood and to stand a better chance of winning electoral support or audience share respectively” (2000, p. 162).

Research and public relations were an important part of the Australian government’s success in promoting itself by using the Tampa incident as a well-planned media event. MacCallum says, “If the Tampa had not existed, John Howard would probably have invented it; and to a large extent that is what happened anyway” (2002, p. 47).

The Tampa incident was in Australia created as a ‘quick’ media event, instead of a drawn-out discussion of asylum seekers in the public, which would not have led to the same amount of attention nor would have been wished for by the Australian political parties. “The compression of time in and by the media means that political events are often made to accelerate their velocity in order to accommodate the tempo of the media, giving less time for reflection and planning among decision-makers, and less opportunity for contemplation among audience” (Dahlgren, 2000b, p. 261).

Tiffen does not see anything wrong with staged media events, but points out that a problem arises when the media fail to report on the real purpose of the event (1989, p. 133). A more critical problem is when the media fail to understand that an event is in fact staged, which seemed to have been the case with the Tampa affair.

Both Curran and Dahlgren note that today’s media tend to produce news copy that is occupied with personalized news where the incident in itself is more important than the process of which it is a part (Curran, 2000, p. 129, Dahlgren, 2000a, p. 314). Reporters working on the Tampa case did exactly this by focusing on the incident itself, not the reasons for it happening, and this could be why they failed to recognise the importance of the marketing strategies applied by the government.

In Norway the public relations industry employs many former journalists and politicians; the reason being that they have valuable networks and knowledge useful for the public relations industry’s customers (Allem, 2001, p. 282). The public relations industry has grown in power and professionalism in the last couple of decades, and their work is, according to White, “a mixed blessing” (1996, p. 45). It gives the newsroom plenty of information, often in the form of media releases and press kits, which gives the news organization a chance to deploy their reporters effectively, but the problem is that it takes the initiative away from the reporters, and the result is often a more superficial reporting of events (White, 1996, p. 45).
When information is being restricted by one source, the importance of turning to other types of sources becomes more important, but unfortunately this strategy is not always implemented. According to Tiffen, politicians' strategy of restricting access to information only works when they "are confident that media management will observe partisanship through passivity – not initiating investigations of opponents' allegations, reporting only what is said rather than analysing evasions and silences" (1989, p. 85). This means that if the press had conducted more investigative work into the reasons for the government's action in the Tampa incident, the government probably would have been forced to provide more information. But, as Ward has shown, the Defence Department's tight control over information about the Tampa incident made it hard for reporters to cover the case adequately (2002, p. 28).

Cunningham (2003, online) and Ward (2002, p. 35) point out the need for reporters to be aware of, and to develop expertise in, the strategies that are used to influence them in order to give a fair and accurate report. Ward argues that the Tampa incident may have been reported differently had the reporters understood the government's carefully planned strategies (2002, p. 22-23). In Ward's view, the Australian media failed to report that the Tampa incident was "part of a carefully calculated Liberal Party strategy to revive its flagging electoral stocks ahead of an imminent federal election" (Ward, 2002, p. 22).

On the other hand, it is important to note that the PR group working for Wallenius Wilhelmsen Lines, the owner of the Tampa, understood early on that the way the Australian government handled the Tampa incident had much to do with the upcoming federal election. Tregoning, the leader of WWL's PR group writes in the article "Tampa proor• (2004): “With an Australian federal election imminent, there was every possibility that WWL would become a political football..."(p. 14). Also the Norwegian media recognized the significance of the upcoming Australian federal election, although they failed to elaborate upon it. Importantly, though, the Norwegian press at the same time failed to see a connection with its own government's actions in relation to the Tampa incident and Norway's own upcoming election.

When it comes to media management the main author to mention is once again Allern (2001) with his article, "Kildene og Mediamakter", since it looks at authoritative sources use of media training as provided by PR companies, and what impact this has on journalists' work, as well as Blumler and Gurevitch's chapter, "Rethinking the Study of Political Communication" (2000), which discusses politicians use of public relations to control how they and their messages will be portrayed in the media.
Freedom of information – Norway

One major difference between the Australian and the Norwegian press is the legal framework in which it operates. In contrast to Australia there is in Norway a “constitutional right affording public access to government documents. The state has to establish a public interest case not to disclose” (Manning, 2001, p. 128). In theory this gives the opportunity for a more open political debate in Norway than in Australia, which means that the government’s power in managing the media is reduced. It gives journalists the means to obtain information that has not been shaped by spin-doctors.

The Norwegian Freedom of Information Act dates back to 1970. It grants citizens right to access public administrations documents, and “all exceptions from public disclosure must be made by, or pursuant to, law” (Ministry of Labour and Government Administration, 2001, online). The law has several exceptions. Documents that contain information that could damage relations with foreign nations and organizations can be held back (Lindahl, 2003, online).

Good laws about the public right to access government documents is unfortunately not a guarantee for an open government. There are some problematic issues with the use of the Freedom of Information Act as Lindahl (2003, online) shows in her study of the Foreign Affairs Office’s rejection of certain requests to access specific documents. Lindahl followed up on a study done by Øy in 1995, and found that the Foreign Affairs Office is more restrictive than the law intends.

If Australia’s Freedom of Information Act was similar to Norway’s it would have given reporters the means to check the government’s actions, and their hidden strategies in the Tampa incident would most likely have been exposed. However, it remains to be seen whether the liberties granted in the Norwegian Freedom of Information Act really made a difference to the reporting of the Tampa incident in the Norwegian press.

Framing the discussion through labelling

Language, as Hovden (2001, p. 89) points out, is never innocent. The deliberate use of connotative words to describe someone adds bias to news reports. “A writer can easily prejudice his audience with his choice of words, even though the story may report ‘both sides’” (Russel, 1994, p. 17). Journalists, White suggests, “should know enough about words to avoid using connotative words when the judgement they imply cannot be substantiated” (1996, p. 174).

Tregoning, the leader of the PR group working for the Wallenius Wilhelmsen Lines (WWL), the
owner of the Tampa, revealed that they intentionally “persisted in using non-political words – survivors instead of boat people or refugees” (2004, p. 15), though this had – as this study and other studies show – little impact on the reporting. Ward found that The Australian used ‘refugees’, ‘asylum seekers’, ‘boatpeople’ and ‘illegal immigrants’ to describe the people rescued by Tampa interchangeably even though they have different connotations (2002, p. 32).

The study of how connotative words were used in Norwegian and Australian newspapers to describe the people rescued by the Tampa is important, since WWL and both the Norwegian and Australian government chose their words carefully. They were fully aware that the use of connotative words helps create an understanding in the audience. As Tuchman writes, “News stories not only lend occurrences their existence as public events, but also impart character to them, for news reports help to shape the public definition of happenings by selectively attributing to them specific detail or ‘particulars’” (1978, p. 190). In the case of the Tampa crisis, as Duncanson argues, “The government repertoire, repeated by and repeating the conservative media, is familiar. Boat people are queue-jumpers who illegally fill the refugee quotas, thereby denying access to those who wait patiently for their turn to come” (2001, online).

Van Dijk is an influential author in the field of racist discourse, where books and articles like, News Analysis: Case Studies of International and National News in the Press (1987); “Political discourse and racism: Describing others in western parliaments” (1997) and Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach (1998) need mentioning. Van Dijk points out that politicians participate in a “subtle form of elite racism when they present immigration and minority relations as essentially problematic...” (1997, p. 31).

The Howard government labelled the people rescued by Tampa and the ones that came after them “illegal immigrants” and “queue-jumpers” as shown in The Australian and The West Australian’s reporting of the incident. These negative descriptions played in a populist manner on xenophobic feelings, but they produced for Howard the response he desired, which meant a huge step backwards for multicultural Australia. The Norwegian government’s tactic was to call them refugees instead of asylum seekers, to evoke the public’s empathy for those rescued. It also tried to put pressure on the Australian government, so the incident could get a quick solution and Norway could exit this complicated diplomatic matter.

Robert Manne’s Sending Them Home: Refugees and the New Politics of Indifference (2004) also touches on this subject, specifically in the case of the asylum seekers coming to Australia by boat. Manning points out that Ruddock repeatedly referred to the people reaching Australia’s
shores as “queue-jumpers”, while “the situation these people really faced, a refugee lottery or, even better, a refugee heap was a more appropriate metaphor than a refugee queue” (2004, p. 9).

**Local angle**

Conclusive research has shown that the extent of media coverage depends on how close the audience is to the incident. The proximity factor in news is cultural as well as geographical (White, 1996, p. 12). The Tampa case would probably not have got much media coverage in Norway had the ship not been Norwegian, the same way the people rescued by the Tampa probably would not have got much attention in Australia, had not the government made the incident into a national crisis.

The Tampa incident had elements of both domestic and foreign news in it in news coverage both in Australia and in Norway. Foreign news does not differ much from domestic news in the fact that it is mostly concerned with the nation (Gans, 1979, p. 3); Lee, Chan, Pan & So, 2000, p. 295). Lee, Chan, Pan and So argue “the same event may be given distinct media representation by various nations through the prisms of their dominant ideologies as defined by power structures, cultural repertoire and politico-economic interests” (2000, p. 295). Bias can be added to a story by favouring the local angle, something that was extensively done in the coverage of the Tampa incident both in Australia and in Norway. Gans further adds, “Foreign news adheres less strictly to objectivity than domestic news” (1979, p. 38).

Understandably, the Tampa incident was reported differently in the Australian and Norwegian national papers, but there were also differences in each country between the national and local papers. If foreign news in national newspapers gains the local angle by focusing on its own country, the local newspapers focuses on truly local news using the foreign news only as the framework for the local story, as can be seen especially with the Norwegian Tonsberg Blad.

**Framing the news**

The framing of the foreign and local stories has to be provided by the journalists for whom “media frames are principles of selection – codes of emphasis, interpretation and presentation” (O’ Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery & Fiske, 1994, p.122). The frame can determine the light in which the reader sees the story. The less background knowledge the reader has, the more powerful the framing becomes, because “whatever we read, we frame extra-textually by drawing on our accumulated knowledge of the world” (MacLachlan & Reid, 1994, p. 3).

Hasting (1996, p. 109) points out that what is reported and the angle chosen tends to be
influenced by what the journalist thinks the public expect and want of international news relating to Australia. The same probably goes for Norwegian journalists.

Since the Tampe incident was framed in a particular way in Norway, where the nation's way of looking at itself plays a major factor, Johansen's chapter, “Enkeltpersoner og Kollektivpersoner: Journalistikk som bidrag til politisk kultur” (2001) which looks at the Norwegian media's contribution to the nation's mythical conception of itself becomes important. He points out that the Norwegian media tend to pass on their audience's wishful image of themselves, and even more importantly, internal national conflicts tend to disappear when a problem erupts between Norway and someone else.
CHAPTER FOUR  
METHODOLOGY

This thesis will be first and foremost a quantitative study of two Australian newspapers, *The Australian* and *The West Australian* and the two Norwegian newspapers, *Aftenposten* and *Tonsberg Blad*.

*The Australian* and *Aftenposten* were chosen because they are both national papers. *The West Australian* was chosen because of its geographical closeness to the Tampa incident, while *Tonsberg Blad* was chosen because it is published in Tonsberg, the city where the shipping company, Wallenius Wilhelmsen Lines that owns M/S Tampa originated. It is important also that *The West Australian* and *Tonsberg Blad* can both be counted as local papers.

The time span chosen for the qualitative study is the 27th August 2001; the day after the crew of the M/S Tampa rescued the asylum seekers, until Monday 12th November, two days after the Australian Federal election.

**Main research question:**

**Discourse** – How was the Tampa incident framed differently in Norwegian and Australian newspapers, and what was the dominant rhetoric followed by newspapers in the two respective countries?

**Journalistic cultures** – What are the similarities and differences between the Australian and Norwegian forms of reporting, and how did these differences impact on the reporting of the Tampa incident in the respective countries?

**Subsidiary research questions:**

1. In Norway an upcoming federal election was also imminent. Did the Norwegian government use the Tampa for party political purposes, and if it did were the newspaper journalists aware of this at the time? How did the Norwegian government's rhetoric come across in newspaper reports?

2. The media has a tendency to listen to authoritative voices, which can make the media a victim of political spin. How did the Australian and Norwegian press use authoritative sources, and were they conned by the sources' rhetoric?
3. The type of words used to describe the people rescued by the Tampa is important since different words carries different connotations. What words did the respective newspapers use, and what meanings did these words portray to the audience?

4. What types of biases, such as favouring the local angle, operate in the journalistic field, and how did these biases influence the reporting of the Tampa incident in Norway and in Australia?

The qualitative study will focus on four main areas. First, what forms of reporting become evident from the articles covering the Tampa affair; second, to what degree did authoritative voices shape the content of the articles; third, which descriptors were used for the survivors by the governments and newspapers; and fourth, what degree of local bias can be discovered in the articles.

To assess forms of reporting, the theoretical approach proposed by Bennett will be used. Bennett’s thesis that information is “shaped so thoroughly by what elites and elected officials are doing in public” (2003, p. 164) will be tested on the Tampa incident. By looking at the articles it will be established whether this reporting pattern did exist when relating the Tampa incident, and also whether the Australian government skilfully used it for its own ends.

Bennett further contends, “standardized reporting formulas... favour the incorporation of official political messages in the news” (2003, p. 165). The qualitative analysis of the articles will test whether this reporting pattern can indeed be found, and to what degree. Given the difference in Australian and Norwegian reporting – one favouring direct quote, the other indirect quotes – it will be established whether these divergences affect the strength of the political message in the reports.

The importance of the characterization of refugees and their subsequent acceptance or rejection by the Australian public was again recently documented by Robert Manne (2004). Australia has seen several waves of 'boat people', who variously has been called 'refugees', 'asylum seekers', 'queue jumpers', 'illegal immigrants' or 'unauthorized arrivals'. The newspapers’ choice of label will give further indication of the degree to which the official political rhetoric describing the Tampa crisis has influenced the reporting.

According to Masterton, “Proximity ranks second in world acceptance as a criterion for news” (1998, p. 94). In comparing two national and two local Australian and Norwegian papers, the importance of the local angle will be tested. First, with regard to the difference between the
reporting in Australia and Norway and second, with regard to the variation between the national and the local papers.

Limitations

Not having access to the Norwegian newspapers explored, only the text of the articles as provided by the respective newspapers via email and fax, meant that the non-verbal messages that are communicated through photographs, typography and layout therefore could not be looked at.
CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Section One: Qualitative analysis of Norwegian newspapers

How the Tampa incident was played out in Norwegian newspapers

The coverage of the Tampa incident differed between Tonsberg Blad and Aftenposten, as is shown below, but they had one important thing in common. Not surprisingly, they both relied heavily on Norwegian sources. According to Slaatta, “it is argued that although events and news are seen as “international”, it is through a process of “domestication” that foreign and transnational events and news stories are made relevant and meaningful to domestic readers and viewers” (2001b, p. 131-132), and he further points out that one way of achieving this domestication effect is through the use of national sources (2001b, p. 135). It is understandable that Norwegian newspapers would focus on the incident from a Norwegian perspective since the Tampa is a Norwegian ship, but the question is when does domestication of foreign news cross the line and become highly biased news?

Tonsberg Blad’s coverage of the Tampa incident

The coverage of the Tampa incident was not very extensive in Tonsberg Blad, since it is a local paper mainly concerned with Tonsberg’s local issues. The newspaper did not have any reporters in Australia, and therefore depended heavily on the newsagency, Norsk Telegrambyrå (NTB), as well as Norwegian sources. Most of the articles about the incident were provided by the NTB, while the paper supplied some articles themselves concerning more local issues connected to the incident.

The main sources and their rhetoric

The Tampa incident was first covered on the 28th August in Tonsberg Blad, and the main article about the case (“Flyktningene”, 2001) was provided by NTB, while a highly local article (Jamieson, 2001) was written by one of the paper’s own journalists. The NTB article showed the Australian side of the story through John Howard, while the Norwegian side was represented by the Department of Foreign Affairs, Wallenius Wilhelmsen Lines (WWL) and Captain Rinnan. This means that three Norwegian sources are used compared to one Australian.
Howard's reason for his government's actions, as referred to in the paper, was that they needed to send a message to potential people smugglers and that Australia was to decide who entered the country, while the Norwegian Department of Foreign Affairs' argumentation was simply that this is Australia's responsibility.

NTB provided on the 30th August two articles on the issue. The first one ("Fastlåst", 2001) was dominated by the Norwegian Department of Foreign Affairs, and sources that backed up their claim that Australia had to give in and let the Tampa into Australian waters. These sources were UNHCR, the Refugee Council, both in Australia and in Norway, and Amnesty International. The Norwegian Department of Foreign Affairs expressed its disappointment about Australia's handling of the situation, and said that the only way out of this deadlock was for Australia to accept the refugees.

The other article was a discussion by NTB's reporter Nymoen, about who was right, Norway or Australia? "The refugees have ended up in no man's land, where no country so far is willing to put the foot down and take the humanitarian responsibility" (Nymoen, 2001). The article mostly supported the Norwegian government, although it stated that Norway could not disclaim all responsibility. The same day once again the paper ran a more local related story (Mohr, 2001) where WWL's spokesman Bangsmoen expressed his view of the situation while honouring the role of the Tampa's captain, Arne Rinnan.

In an article by NTB on the 3rd of September the immigration problem Australian authorities claimed to have had was briefly explained, while Norway's Foreign Minister, Thorbjørn Jagland pointed out that Norway was no longer involved in the Tampa incident, but that it would have been more humane to let the people disembark on Christmas Island ("Fortsatt", 2001).

The source for a NTB article ("Stoltenberg", 2001) the next day was a letter from Prime Minister Stoltenberg to Captain Rinnan. If this letter was provided to the press by the government, it should be looked at as a PR stunt. The idea behind the letter was to honour Rinnan and his crew, but probably also to show the Norwegian public that Australia was at fault in this incident, and not the Norwegian government. The article argued that, "Their handling of the case has caused the refugees unnecessary harm. Australia's behaviour is in conflict with the law of the sea" ("Stoltenberg", 2001).

From there on the incident slowly disappeared out of the Tonsberg Blad. Thereafter only a few articles, mere notices on organizations that want to honour Arne Rinnan and his crew, and prizes he received in the aftermath of the Tampa incident, showed up. One notice, however, differed. It covered how Australian authorities threatened Rinnan with 20 years in jail if he took
the survivors to Christmas Island ("Truet", 2001). This article was once again provided by NTB, but an in-depth explanation of the threat was not given.

NTB's coverage of the Tampa incident as it appeared in Tonsberg Blad did not show any signs of in-depth reporting, and there was not a big variety in the sources used. The dominant sources would have to be the information-director for WWL, Christian Bangsmoen and the Department of Foreign Affairs' spokesman Karsten Klepsvik, even though they were not given extensive coverage. What this shows is that it was Norwegian sources that dominated. This is understandable since the coverage was directed towards a Norwegian market, but the problem is that it gave the public an incomplete picture of the reasons behind the Australian government's actions.

The Norwegian government's condemnation of the Australian government's actions was the rhetoric that dominated in Tonsberg Blad's coverage of the incident. The news coverage gives the impression that Australia's actions were inhumane and that they should have given in. The reason for this outcome is the use of mostly Norwegian sources, or sources like Amnesty International, UNHCR and the Refugee Council, in both countries that denounced the Australian government's way of handling the situation.

Aftenposten's coverage of the Tampa incident

Aftenposten's coverage was extensive, and much more in-depth than that of the Tonsberg Blad. This is understandable since Aftenposten is a national newspaper with more resources than Tonsberg Blad. Aftenposten relied partly on newsagencies, but produced most of the articles themselves. Tuchman points out that individual news organizations often send a reporter to cover a national event that is already being covered by a news agency, so the news organization can develop a local angle to the story (1978, p. 23). Aftenposten sent a reporter to Christmas Island, as many Australian newspapers did. To what extent this enhanced the reporting is hard to say since most of the action actually took place behind closed doors in Canberra. At least it gave Aftenposten the means to get a feeling of the atmosphere at Christmas Island and among the Australian journalists that were there. It also put them in contact with Norway's ambassador to Australia, Ove Torsheim, who had long talks with the Tampa's captain, Arne Rinnan.

The main sources and their rhetoric

Aftenposten had three articles about the incident on its first day of coverage, 28th August. They were all produced by the newspaper's own journalists but relied on some information provided by newsagencies. A frequent source was the Department of Foreign Affairs' spokesman Karsten
Klepsvik, and his rhetoric along the lines, that this was Australia’s responsibility, but Norway was working to find a humanitarian solution (Helle, Nordstrøm & Elsebutangen, 2001, p. 6), can easily be detected.

Captain Arne Rinnan and the company he worked for, Wallenius Wilhelmsen Lines (WWL), received broad coverage, as they were the only sources that knew what was happening on the ship. WWL expressed its concern that the ship was not equipped to continue its journey with that amount of people onboard, while Rinnan expressed his concern for the wellbeing of the survivors (Gravdal, 2001, p. 19).

Prime Minister Howard was referred to as saying that the Tampa will not be allowed to enter Australian territorial waters, but this was not elaborated upon (Helle, Nordstrøm & Elsebutangen, 2001, p. 6). A spokesman for the Indonesian marine was also referred to as saying that the Tampa would not be allowed to enter their waters (Helle, Nordstrøm & Elsebutangen, 2001, p. 6), and with this Indonesian sources disappeared from the picture.

The next day’s coverage was the only day during the incident that some of the survivors got to express their side of the story ("Flyktningedramaet", 2001, p. 8). Aftenposten did not talk to any of the survivors, but got their information from the newsagency Reuters and Australian radio.

In two articles (Helle, 2001a, p. 8; Nordstrøm, 2001a, p. 8) on the 29th August, the recurring sources were Foreign Minister Thorbjørn Jagland, the Department of Foreign Affairs’ spokesman Karsten Klepsvik and WWL’s spokesman, Christian Bangsmoen. The Norwegian government’s rhetoric was that they found the situation unacceptable and inhumane, and that Australia needed to take responsibility. Jagland openly referred to the content of his phone conversation with Australia’s Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, while Bangsmoen said that Tampa’s crew found the situation difficult and sad, but not threatening, and that WWL was satisfied with the Department of Foreign Affairs’ efforts to solve the situation.

The 30th August was the first time since the drama began that politicians from other parties had the chance to express their views in Aftenposten (Ruud & Magnus, 2001, p. 8). Representatives from the Christian Democrats (KrF), Conservatives (H) and Socialist Left (SV) supported the way the Foreign Minister has handled the incident. In Norway there was no strong oppositional voice to the Norwegian government’s condemnation of the Australian government’s actions against the Tampa, which led to a very restricted political debate around the Tampa incident in Norway.
Australia’s immigration minister, Phillip Ruddock, was referred to for the first time on the 30th August in an article by NTB (Olsen, 2001b, p. 24), which is surprising considering his important role in the incident. Prime Minister Howard was also awarded some space saying that he was open for discussions with the UN, but that none of the survivors would be allowed to enter Christmas Island. By this time New Zealand’s Prime Minister Helen Clark had become involved since New Zealand had offered to take in some of the survivors. She did not openly criticise the Australian government, and her statements were not given much space. This could be due to two reasons. New Zealand’s involvement in the incident might have been considered not to be an important aspect or the story, or it could be because she did not oppose the Australian government.

Other sources in the article were the organization Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, who pleaded with Australia to solve this situation by showing decency. The organization Medicins sans Frontieres (MSF) tend to not get involved in politics, but they encouraged Australia to give the survivors access to Christmas Island on humanitarian basis. They pointed out that their experience from their work in Afghanistan showed that most of the Afghans on the run were fleeing from war and prosecution. All these organizations focused on the Australian government’s tough stand, and Norway therefore slipped under the radar. No help was demanded from Norway by any of these organizations, at least not as seen in Aftenposten’s reporting.

Malcolm Leader, Australia’s ambassador to Norway, was used as a source in an article on the 30th August, and with WWL’s spokesman and the Department of Foreign Affairs spokesman once again dominating as sources, he was the only one left to defend the Australian government’s actions (Elsebutangen, 2001b, p. 8). Norwegian reporters may have struggled to obtain statements from Australian politicians themselves, so they may have relied on news agencies present at the Australian government’s press conferences to obtain this kind of information. Malcolm Leader was an Australian source that was close to Norway, but, for some reason was not used very often.

The Norwegian government claimed all along that Australia was breaking international law by not accepting the survivors, but in an article on the 31st August a Swedish law expert, Professor Said Mahmoudi, questioned this claim, pointing out that Australia, according to international law, had the right to force the Tampa out to international water since the ship had not entered an Australian harbour (Width, 2001, p. 27). This demonstrates that Aftenposten was not afraid of showing evidence of problems with the government’s argumentation, but once again the focus was on the moral issue and therefore Mahmoudi’s legal argument lost some of its power. The other source in the article was Sweden’s Foreign Minister, who fully supported the Norwegian
government’s stand, which underpinned the Norwegian government’s stance.

Norway’s ambassador in Canberra, Ove Torsheim, entered the picture on the 31st August when he visited the Tampa, and thereafter became an important source for Aftenposten’s reporter on Christmas Island. In an article (Christiansen, 2001c, p. 26) printed on the same day he was the only source and his rhetoric was that this was a humanitarian crisis that needed to be solved quickly, meaning that Australia needed to change its stand.

On the same day an article ("Landet", 2001, p. 7) about Afghanistan’s problems was provided, stating that the country had more people fleeing from it than any other country. The article was supplied by the newsagency Reuters, and the sources were UN and UNHCR. The article was important in providing readers more of an understanding of the conditions from which the people onboard the Tampa were fleeing, but it also helped build upon the incident as a humanitarian crisis where the survivors should have the right to carry the refugee label. The article was angled towards a European market by pointing out that there were not many Afghans that came to Australia the previous year, but that the number of Afghans applying for asylum in the European Union in 1999-2000 was substantial.

An interesting opinion piece appeared on the 31st August. The piece had some legitimacy by the fact that it was pointed out that the writer, Kvam, is a former journalist who had lived in Australia and studied the country’s history. Kvam alluded to the country’s former White Australia policy and claimed that even in present-day Australia some are afforded more equality than others. He argued that this was the reason behind the Australian government’s action in the Tampa incident (Kvam, 2001, p. 13). This may be true, but at the same time it has to be said that Kvam was pointing the finger without referring once to Norway’s own immigration policy, which is quite strict as well.

UN’s High-Commissary for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, was mentioned on 31st August when she honoured Norway’s role in the incident (Helle, 2001b, p. 6). Her statement that the survivors have the right to enter Christmas Island went together with the Norwegian government’s claim that Australia would have to take responsibility for the refugees. At this point the UNHCR was an important source as they had become involved in the incident as a kind of mediator between the different parties involved. The following day an article gave the impression that there was hope for a solution to be found for the Tampa standoff. Foreign Minister Downer was here referred to as saying that the negotiations with Norway were proceeding well, but any further understanding of the Australian government’s point of view was not given (Elsebutangen, 2001c, p. 7).
The Norwegian Prime Minister entered the picture for the first time on the 1st of September in Aftenposten. Until then the Foreign Minister had been the main spokesman for the government together with the Department of Foreign Affairs' spokesman. But when the Prime Minister speaks he gets coverage, and a whole article was devoted to what he had to say (Saure, 2001, p. 7). His rhetoric was that the survivors were shipwrecked refugees and that they needed to be allowed to enter Australian territory before sharing of the refugee burden would be possible. This rhetoric was elaborated upon by the Foreign Minister, who said that it was important for Norway as a maritime nation to make sure it did not do anything that would create uncertainty around the laws concerning the sea (Andenæs, 2001, p. 7). He continued to criticise Australia the next day by claiming that Australia did not respect the Refugee Convention (Elsebutangen, 2001d, p. 8).

The 2nd of September was the first time an article (Nordrum, 2001b, p. 8) about the Australian political climate around the Tampa incident appeared. One Nation party leader Pauline Hanson's support of the government's actions was mentioned, as well as Labor leader Kim Beazley's rejection of Howard's Border Protection Bill. But the process itself was not elaborated upon. In the same article Aftenposten also referred to an article in The Australian, which contested the Australian government's claims that boatpeople are queue-jumpers and that if they were allowed to enter Australia it would trigger a flood of new asylum seekers. Aftenposten, in a backhanded way, agreed with The Australian, pointing to UN statistics from 1999, which showed that Norway has many more refugees per 1000 people than Australia. In addition to using The Australian as a source Aftenposten also referred to The Canberra Times. Here Dr James Jupp, director for the Centre for Immigration and Multicultural Studies at the Australian National University, was mentioned as saying that Australia had not been as open to refugees as the Australian government had been claiming.

The same day, Aftenposten's journalist at Christmas Island provided a relatively long article about the island and its history (Christiansen, 2001d, p. 17). There is nothing wrong with this choice of coverage since the island had been in the spotlight since the incident started, but what is worrying is the space allowed for such an article when the process around the Tampa incident had not been described in great detail. It was not until the next day that such an article was provided, focusing on what would now happen to the survivors (Christiansen, 2001e, p. 8).

On the 3rd of September a Department of Foreign Affairs' spokesman stated that Norway was now no longer involved in the incident. The article stated that Norwegian diplomatic negotiations and protests had not worked, and that Norway did not have any means to stop what Australia's plan to send the survivors to Nauru and New Zealand (Elsebutangen, 2001e, p. 8).
The following day, the focus had moved away from the conflict - that was now solved as far as Norway's involvement was concerned - and directed almost entirely towards the crew of the Tampa, who were relieved that the drama was over (Randsborg, 2001b, p. 8). WWL's spokesman, Bangsmoen, was again the source of this information. A brief description of the ongoing court-case in Australia was given as well as the transfer of the survivors from the Tampa to an Australian marine vessel in an article (Christiansen, 2001g, p. 8) printed on the same day, but even in this article the emphasis was on the Tampa being able to continue its journey. And as Tampa sailed away from Australian territory, the importance of the incident in Aftenposten was scaled down. On the 5th September, for the first time since the drama started, the incident was not covered with an article in the paper.

With the Norwegian ship reaching Singapore and the press having access to the crew, the incident appeared in the paper again on the 6th of September (Christiansen, 2001h, p. 29; Christiansen, 2001i, p. 8). The sources were captain Rinnan and first officer, Christian Maltau. They gave their versions of the story, but were not willing to criticise the Australian government's action. Most likely they were not willing to take part in a political debate since Australia is an important market for WWL. The progress of the survivors was only given a short summary. The following day Tampa's crew was still in the spotlight (Christiansen, 2001j, p. 6), while the survivors' destiny was also accounted for in one article (Nordstrom, 2001d, p. 33) where information chief Jean-Philippe Chauzy in the International Organization for Migration (IOM) was the only source.

The 8th of September Malcom Leader (2001a, p. 10) Australia's ambassador to Norway gave Australia's version of the incident in a letter to the paper. He pointed out that Australia, according to the law, did not have any obligation to care for the survivors, and that the country has a long and honourable history when it comes to refugees, just like Norway has. The problem for Australia, as he saw it, was that the country had become the victim of people smugglers. Leader also provided a letter on the 11th of September, where he criticised Foreign Minister Jagland's wording of the incident (2001b, p. 18). Leader claimed Australia treated the people onboard the Tampa humanely and that their actions were in accordance with international law. Leader probably found it important to get his letters published since the news coverage around the Tampa incident in Norway was extremely critical of the Australian government's handling of the situation, with Foreign Minister Jagland not afraid of using strong words.

An article on Nauru was provided on the 9th of September, and it did not paint a pretty picture (Filseth, 2001, p. 18) as it described the island as a doomed island close to being bankrupt. The Tampa incident was not elaborated upon, and was only the framework for the article. This is
probably since the survivors had been placed under the Australian marine's restriction and there was no access to them. But this was the time when the incident could have been analysed, and the reader could have got a more in-depth understanding of what really took place in those eight dramatic days the survivors were onboard the Tampa, but unfortunately this was not done. By failing to do so, Aftenposten fall down on its role as a medium to the public.

There were in the months after the Tampa incident not a consistent coverage of the political aftermath in Australia, as the articles on the issue were often small and far between. The newsagency, The Associated Press (AP) provided an article ("Australia stenger", 2001, p. 18) on the 18th of September explaining the new Australian Border Protection Bill as well as where the survivors were at this stage. The article did not go deep into the issues, but it provided a better explanation of the on-going situation in Australia than Aftenposten's own journalists were able to provide during the incident. It offered only the facts, and did not paint Australia in a bad light like some of the articles during the incident tended to do by mainly focusing on sources that were highly critical of the Australian government's actions. This could be because Norway was no longer involved in the case, and therefore the need to portray Australia as the bad guy was no longer necessary.

On the 9th of October Aftenposten's former Chief-editor, Kristoffersen, supplied an opinion piece about the incident. He raised important points about the Australian and Norwegian election in connection with the Tampa incident, as will be discussed later in this section. He mentioned that when the refugees were last reported about they were on their way to Nauru, but he did not shed any light on their present situation, even though the headline read, "What happened to the Tampa-people?" (Kristoffersen, 2001, p. 17). Unfortunately this did not trigger an article about the survivors, and the next article related to the Tampa did not focus on them, but on the Wallenius Wilhelmsen Lines and their handling of the situation (Gimmestad, 2001, p. 26).

Sydney Morning Herald's findings that captain Rinnan was threatened with 20 years in jail was mentioned in a tiny article (Olsen, 2001c, p. 4) provided by NTB on the 23rd of October, but this, strangely, was not elaborated upon. While on the 11th November AP provided an article ("Invandringspolitikken", 2001, p. 7) about how the immigration politics determined the election outcome in Australia, but the survivors themselves seemed to have been forgotten.

Shipping organizations as sources

The Norwegian government portrayed the survivors both as shipwrecked and as refugees, but
their argumentation was mostly along the lines of shipwrecked people’s right to be brought to the closest safe harbour. Because of this and the fact that the Tampa is a Norwegian ship with a partly Norwegian crew, different maritime organizations wanted to have their say. Their arguments were not far from the Norwegian government’s stand, and understandably they were highly critical of the Australian government since they made sailors’ life hard as well as creating a situation where others might turn a blind eye on shipwrecked people because they are afraid of ending up in the same situation as the Tampa.

Maritime organizations used as sources in Aftenposten (Helle, Nordstrøm & Elsebutangen, 2001, p. 6; Nordstrøm, 2001c, p. 8; Randsborg, 2001a, p. 7) were Norway’s Shipowner’s Association, the Norwegian Naval Officers’ Association, the Norwegian Directorate of Shipping and Navigation as well as the shipping company that owns the Tampa, Wallenius Wilhelmsen Lines.

**Ordinary Australians’ opinion**

Aftenposten printed many articles about the opinion among Australian people, but even if they acknowledged that the Australian government’s tough stand had widespread support, they tended to only quote people that were opposed to the Australian government’s actions. Christmas Island’s local citizens were used as source on the 29th August (Sandvand, 2001, p. 8), and the quotes the article provided were that people were ashamed of their government. On the 1st of September the people on Christmas Island’s view of the situation was once again reported (Christiansen, 2001b, p. 7). The article informed that many backed their government, but only people who were against the Australian government’s handling of the incident were the ones quoted.

On the 29th August NTB provided an article about the feelings among the Australian population (Olsen, 2001a, p. 8). It was pointed out that the Tampa’s crew had received a lot of sympathy, but that many were against the increasing immigration from Asia and the Middle East. The only two visible sources were the Australian Seamen’s Union’s leader, Paddy Crumlin, and the governor on Christmas Island, Mark Bennett, who were both critical of their government’s handling of the case. On the 30th August letters and phone calls to Aftenposten from ordinary Australians were referred to (Nordstrøm, 2001b, p. 8), which had one thing in common; they condemned the Australian government’s actions. The only problem with this coverage was that the opposite view held by many Australians did not come across, which suggests that these people did not send any letters or call Aftenposten. This selective publishing of letters helped support the newspaper’s position on the issue.
Afienposten also looked at letters from ordinary citizens to *The Australian* as published on their website (Nordrum, 2001a, p. 7; Nordrum, 2001b, p. 8). This showed that the Australian government had a strong support base, but one of *The Australian*'s editorials, with its condemnation of the government's handling of the case, was used as a contrast to the support for the government as expressed in letters from ordinary Australians. What all these articles show was that Afienposten preferred to quote Australian people that disagreed with their own government's actions, instead of showing the true spectre of feelings in the population.

**Summary of Afienposten's choice of sources**

Afienposten applied a wider source net than Tonsberg Blad since their coverage was more extensive, but the dominant sources were much the same. Foreign Minister, Thorbjørn Jagland, the Department of Foreign Affairs' spokesman, Karsten Klepsvik, and ambassador, Ove Torsheim were the dominant sources through the whole incident, with Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg getting extensive coverage when he decided to speak out. WWL’s spokesman Christian Bangsmoen was also an important source as the shipping company had close contact with captain Rinnan. Their joined rhetoric was that this was a humanitarian crisis where Australia was responsible for finding a solution, and the best and most humane end result as the Norwegian government saw it was for the survivors to disembark on Christmas Island.

Australian sources were in a minority. Prime Minister John Howard, Foreign Minister Alexander Downer and Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock were given some attention since they were the one pulling all the strings, but overall not sufficient coverage was afforded to them. Ordinary Australians were also given their chance to express their views of the on-going situation, but they were far more likely to be quoted if they were opposed to their own government's actions. Australian papers such as *The Australian* and *The Canberra Times* were also used as sources, but only when their rhetoric fitted in with the Norwegian government's.

**No Norwegian government's 'guarantee' for the survivors**

The Norwegian government seems to have chosen its words carefully when explaining to the press the amount of help it was willing to provide to resolve the situation that had arisen in the waters outside Christmas Island. The government portrayed itself as the representative of a helpful humanitarian nation outraged over another nation's reluctance to help people in need, but did not offer a quick and humane solution by guaranteeing a home for the survivors.
Tonsberg Blad

*Tonsberg Blad*'s coverage never asked critical questions about the Norwegian government's reluctance to solve the situation by taking responsibility for the survivors. The reason for this could be that most articles were drawn from NTB, and news agencies are not known for their in-depth reporting. NTB only provided broad coverage, and it did not have any signs of deeper investigation, and as will be seen later in this section in that they seem to have failed to detect the possible importance of the incident for Norway's upcoming election.

Aftenposten

The possibility of Norway taking responsibility for the survivors was only explored to a limited degree by *Aftenposten*, while any possible hidden reasons behind the Norwegian government's stand that Australia would have to take the responsibility was only touched on. *Aftenposten* at least acknowledged that the upcoming election could have played a factor in the government's decision-making, as will be seen later, but it was far from given the space and attention it deserved, which must have suited the government well.

The Department of Foreign Affairs spokesman, Klepsvik, made it clear in an article (Helle, Nordstrom & Elsebutangen, 2001, p. 6) on the 28th of August that in no way would Norway resolve the conflict by shipping the survivors to Norway. In the same article Vikøren of the Norwegian Refugee Council said that Norway carried some responsibility since the Tampa is a Norwegian ship, but that this did not mean that the survivors would have to be taken to Norway. Another article (Elsebutangen, 2001a, p. 6) on the same day stated that Norwegian authorities meant that according to international law Norway did not have any responsibility for the survivors. Klepsvik was asked by *Aftenposten* if Norway was considering accepting the refugees, and he answered that all aspects was considered, but he was not willing to elaborate upon it (Gravdal, 2001, p. 19).

*Aftenposten* was not dropping the issue and on the 29th of August stated that, “While the condition for the refugees on the Norwegian ship ‘Tampa’ deteriorates neither Norwegian nor Australian authorities are willing to take responsibility for the 438 people” (“Jagland”, 2001, p. 1). It further asked Foreign Minister Jagland if the conflict could be solved by Norway guaranteeing for the survivors, but Jagland avoided the full complexity of the question by saying that there was only one place the people could go ashore, and that was Christmas Island (Helle, 2001a, p. 8).

Other politicians than those in government only got their say twice in *Aftenposten*'s coverage of
the incident. The Christian Democrats' (KrF) leader, Bondevik, said that Norway should accept the survivors because of humanitarian reasons if Australia refused to accept them (Ruud & Magnus, 2001, p. 8). This is an expected statement from a party like the Christian Democrats, as they focus on Christian values, but they did not make the question an issue in the then ongoing Norwegian election campaign. Socialist Left (SV) is another political party that could be expected to suggest bringing the survivors to Norway, and their politician Djupedal confirmed this by saying they were open for such a solution should the UNHCR be requesting it (Ruud & Magnus, 2001, p. 8). But like the Christian Democrats they chose not to interfere with the government's handling of the case.

A Human Rights Watch spokesperson stated that to “move the responsibility over to Norway and Indonesia was moral cowardice” (Olsen, 2001b, p. 24), which must have sounded good in the Norwegian government's ears. On the 30th August Aftenposten once again pointed out that, “while both Australian and Norwegian authorities disclaim responsibility for the refugees, the conditions onboard the ship is getting worse” (Elsebutangen, 2001f, p. 9). In the editorial ("Australia som bolle", 2001, p. 21) on the same day it was pointed out that Norway might have to accept the survivors on a humanitarian basis if no other country was willing to let them ashore.

Aftenposten’s editor Hegge (2001, p. 9) criticised both Norway and Australia for refusing to accept the survivors, and pointed out that it was concerning that a poor nation like East Timor was willing to take them in, while rich nations like Norway and Australia tried to find any possible solution to avoid taking responsibility. Had critical voices like this one been more apparent in the paper’s reporting throughout, it might have led to a more varied coverage.

On the 1st of September the paper wrote that Norway, according to Klepsvik, were viewing positively the UNHCR’s request for Norway to be part of a plan where several countries would share the responsibility for the survivors (Elsebutangen, 2001c, p. 7). Klepsvik said it was not unlikely that Norway would accept some of the people, but did not specify how many. Prime Minister Stoltenberg said the same day that the survivors must be brought onshore before it would be decided where they were to end up, but he also admitted that the problem with where the survivors were to end up was a part of the discussions with the UNHCR (Saure, 2001, p. 7). Stoltenberg also pointed out that Norway has a yearly quota of refugees that the country accepts on request from the UNHCR, and that the survivors might come to Norway as a part of this quota. By saying this he let the electorate know that if Norway was to accept the Tampa’s guests, it would not mean an increased refugee intake.
Baillet (2001, p. 14), a PhD Student studying refugee law at the University in Oslo, provided an interesting opinion piece on the 4th September where she pointed out that there had not been much debate about Norway’s responsibility in the incident. She gave an extensive insight into the problems surrounding the incident, which the paper so far had not been able to provide. She claimed that, “The Norwegian Refugee Council followed an argument based on Australia’s moral responsibility to help people in need. This argumentation was pursued by the government and sounded good both among Norwegians and Australians”. She further stated that Australia was not breaking international law by rejecting the Tampa as long as it did not put the life of the asylum seekers at risk, even though the humanitarian aspect of the case made it complicated. Her view was that it was only fair that Norway guaranteed settlement for the survivors since it was capable of it, but that Australia and other countries should share the burden to make sure that rescues at sea would continue.

According to Baillet, one should be careful to utter accusations based on own moral superiority, since Norway could only prove its superiority by offering help to the survivors. She also elaborated on Norway’s own practise handling asylum seekers, and pointed to the fact that they are often labelled opportunists or economic refugees and refused entry. *Aftenposten* failed in its coverage of the incident to understand and report on Australia’s immigration problems, and did not attempt to draw Norway’s immigration policies into the debate or to compare the two countries in this area.

On 6th of September Foreign Minister Jagland (2001, p. 22) gave a detailed reply to Baillet where he defended Norway’s argumentation that the survivors were Australia’s responsibility. He based his argument on different international laws. What is interesting is that he did not have a reply to Baillet’s statements that Norway should have promised to take responsibility for at least some of the survivors as well as address Norway’s own treatment of people who come knocking on its door.

Just over a month later researcher Bakken (2001, p. 14) from the Australian National University in Canberra provided an opinion piece about the Tampa case and the upcoming election in Australia. This comment will be discussed later in this section in relation to the coverage of the connection between the Tampa incident and the Australian election, but he mentioned one point that is relevant here. He claimed that the “crisis could have got a quick solution, since Norway and other countries were ready to help with the resettlement of the refugees”. It is known for sure that New Zealand was willing to help, and they also ended up with 141 of the survivors, but it is never clear from what was reported in *Aftenposten* how many asylum seekers Norway was willing to accept. The Norwegian government only said it might be possible that some would be brought to Norway under a UNHCR agreement.
A more interesting coverage would have been possible if the paper's reporters had asked the government more critical questions about their willingness to accept some of the survivors as well as made a connection to Norway's immigration politics. But as Slaatta (2001a, p. 163) points out, the press tends to ignore their principles of being critical to the nation's power structure when an issue falls outside the nation-state's interest.

The coverage of the Tampa incident in Norway was closely linked to their government's action and statements to the media. The newspapers gave the reader an understanding of the case as it developed, but the processes that took place behind the scene were not made transparent or elaborated upon. Therefore the reader is left with a partial understanding of how this incident could develop into such a big drama. Both the Norwegian politicians and the Norwegian media showed great concern for the survivors' well-being as they were on board a Norwegian ship, but the importance of the incident quickly faded as they left the ship and the Tampa continued its journey. The Tampa crisis never became a part of the Norwegian election campaign, but that does not mean that the government's way of handling the incident did not have anything to do with the fact that an upcoming election was close. In fact, the Norwegian government might have been more open to take the survivors to Norway had they not been so close to an upcoming election.

The 2001 Storting election in Norway

Almost half of the Norwegian electorate had not made up their mind before the 2001 election campaign and every fifth voter claimed that the media played an important role in their decision making process (Aardal, 2003, p. 241). The Tampa incident had all the elements to create a debate in Norway around immigration issues during the election campaign, but neither the newspapers nor the country's politicians seemed eager for this to happen.

The problem with the 2001 election was that there were so many possibilities of government coalitions, which may have confused the electorate since they found it hard to see the difference between the various alternatives. This problem was further compounded by two out of three voters thinking that there was not much difference between the political parties (Aardal, 2003, p. 245).

According to Narum (2003, online), what stood out in the 2001 election was Labour's drastic loss in voter support, and the Conservatives (H) and the Socialist Left's (SV) increase. The reason was that Labour (AP) did not seem to be the best alternative in any of the issues that arose as important during the election campaign. The Conservatives scored high on education and tax issues, while the Socialist Left also had strong support due to their focus on education.
Statistics show that education and tax issues were ranked most important, with health in third place (Narum, 2003, online). Immigration politics therefore did not play an important part of the 2001 election, and the candidate who probably would have benefited most from making it one, the Party of Progress (FrP), had other problems to deal with because of an internal party struggle. This political party could be said to be a milder version of Australia's One Nation party. The Party of Progress still was a strong party after the 2001 election, but none of the other parties were willing to have them as a coalition partner.

Lars Henic Barstad (2003) has analysed the coverage of the election campaign in four Norwegian newspapers, including Aftenposten, in the three weeks before the 2001 election. He found that there were four main incidents that dominated the news coverage in these three weeks, the Norwegian Royal wedding, the Tampa incident, the Norwegian election campaign and the 9/11. Barstad acknowledge that the Tampa was a dominant story in the newspapers at that time, but he never mentioned the incident as part of the election campaign.

There are several reasons why the Tampa incident never became a dominant part of the Norwegian election campaign, as will be explored later in this section, but one of them could be that representatives from eight political parties signed a declaration in May 2001 promising an election campaign free from racist statements. The Centre against Ethnic Discrimination initiated this, and their goal was an upcoming election where politicians did not use prejudice and stereotyping as a way to win votes (Fundamental, 2001, online). One can only speculate what such a declaration would have done to Australia's 2001 election campaign.

The Norwegian and Australian upcoming elections as covered by the newspapers in relation to the Tampa incident

Undeniably both the Australian and the Norwegian governments' ways of handling the Tampa incident were closely linked to the countries' upcoming elections. According to Baillet (2001, p. 14) both countries were afraid of being portrayed as weak, and the fact that two elections were close increased stress levels.

*Tonsberg Blad*

The *Tonsberg Blad* did not at all mention the Norwegian upcoming election in relation to the Tampa incident and from the coverage of the incident as provided by the paper, there was no way the reader would be able to understand the Australian political climate at that time. The explanation for the Australian government's handling of the Tampa incident was taken straight
from John Howard’s lips, the need to send a message to potential people smugglers (“Flyktningene”, 2001). The importance of the upcoming Australian federal election did not get any attention. This once again shows the lack of analysis of the situation, and the use of news agency material to cover the incident has to take some of the blame for this (Tiffen, 1989, p. 21-21). But it should be mentioned that the importance of the upcoming Australian election for the outcome of the Tampa case was mentioned in articles in Aftenposten that were based on news agency reports.

**Aftenposten**

One of the reasons why the Tampa case never entered the political debate in Norway became clear in an article in Aftenposten on the 30th August (Ruud & Magnus, 2001, p. 8). In it the Conservative (H) leader, Jan Pettersen, said that his party did not want to weaken the government’s handling of the situation by interfering through discussion of other possible solutions to the incident. When politicians from other than the government party are not willing to speak out, it makes for a very restricted debate and the dominant political voice will have to be the government’s. The Christian Democrat’s (KrF) leader, Kjell Magne Bondevik, also stood behind the government’s decision, and thought it was correct of the Foreign Minister to be critical of the Australian government’s handling of the case. Interestingly the paper did not ask the Party of Progress (FrP) for a response, since they would have been the ones with the most critical voice in immigration issues.

The Party of Progress’ leader, Carl I. Hagen, first got to have his say on the issue in Aftenposten’s coverage (Hegtun, 2001, p. 3) of a political debate arranged by the Antiracism Centre. He agreed with the Foreign Minister that Australia was the first country of asylum for the survivors. This statement is not surprising since Hagen want to keep as many asylum seekers out of Norway as possible.

Aftenposten’s editor, Per Egil Hegge (2001, p. 9), pointed out the importance of Norway and Australia’s upcoming elections in his editorial on the 1st of September. He wrote, “...they are literally coming sailing straight into the election campaign for two nations. It is bad timing...” and continued, “One of the world’s poorest and most war torn small nations is willing to accept the refugees on a Norwegian ship. Neither Norway nor Australia where conceit and mineral wealth are competing, have room...It is election campaign time in both countries.” This shows that Aftenposten was aware of a connection between the Norwegian upcoming election and the way the government handled the case, but strangely enough this was not very visible in the paper’s coverage of the incident. The government’s reluctance to take responsibility for the survivors was covered, as has been shown, but this coverage was not very extensive or critical,
and many questions were never asked. The rhetoric that dominated Aftenposten's coverage was that the Australian government needed to take responsibility for the refugees, which was the Norwegian government’s main argument.

Aftenposten’s former editor, Ivan Kristoffersen (2001, p. 17), made a couple of interesting points in his opinion piece about the Tampa case on the 9th of October. He said that the incident disturbed the Norwegian politicians during their election campaign, but that the drama that took place off Christmas Island was too far removed to enter Norwegian political reality and therefore never became a part of the Norwegian election campaign.

Kristoffersen wrote, “The old keyword of international solidarity was never repeated and nor was asked for by the media and the electorate” (2001, p. 17). He went on saying, “Rich countries with fear of foreigners and racism in the population are closing the borders and are handing over the refugees to a well-paid market of people smugglers and owners of unseaworthy vessels”, before raising the question why the Tampa case did not enter the election campaign in Norway. He asked if it could be that the politicians might have been afraid of getting involved in a case that might have exposed the presence of increasing racism in Norway as well. He argued that the Norwegian government had a chance to act differently to Australia by taking the survivors to Norway. That could have “injected some emotion into Norwegian politics that would have got people off the fence and up from the sofa” (Kristoffersen, 2001, p. 17). Such a move would most likely have created a more interesting election campaign in Norway and Labour, with its bad election result, may have scored some political points by showing a much needed sign of compassion in a world where increasingly tougher immigration policies are the standard.

The Tampa case in relation to the Norwegian election campaign was only discussed in opinion pieces and editorials. These are places where the authors are not afraid of uttering their own opinions, and therefore some interesting points were raised. However, the connection between the government’s handling of the Tampa case and the upcoming election campaign was not made in the hard news articles in the paper. Had the importance of the upcoming election been pointed out to the readers, it might have opened up for a more interesting debate among the public as well as between politicians. The media are often an active player in putting cases on the political agenda, but the newspapers examined here, and which are representative of the Norwegian media, did not push for this to happen with the Tampa case.

The Australian upcoming Election

The fact that Australia had an upcoming federal election was mentioned several times in
Aftenposten's coverage of the incident, but again was not raised as an important point. Aftenposten's Asia correspondent, Christiansen (2001k, p. 8), had an opinion piece in the paper on the 29th August about the connection between the Tampa incident and Australia's forthcoming election. "Of the many obstacles the 'Tampa' refugees have met, the last one could be the hardest: It is election year in Australia". He pointed out that the dominant opinion among the public was not to accept more refugees, and that these were the voices both the Howard Government and the opposition were starting to listen to.

NTB's reporter, Olsen, also pointed towards the Australian election the same day, where he said that Howard was using the incident to state an example with regard to illegal immigrants as well as scoring political points at home in the time before the election (2001a, p. 8).

It was not surprising that WWL's spokesman, Bangsmoen, was aware of the importance of the Australian election, since WWL's PR group quickly understood how important that fact was going to be (Tregoning, 2004, p. 14-16). Bangsmoen made it clear that it was important that the Norwegian Foreign Affairs Department pressured Australia hard "in an election situation where politicians and the opinion almost stand together in rejecting the refugees" (Nordstrom, 2001a, p. 8). WWL chose their words carefully when speaking to Australian journalists since Australia is an important market for the shipping company, but they seem to have let their feelings show more clearly when speaking to Norwegian journalists.

Australian people who called Aftenposten to express their dislike with their own government's action mentioned the election as a reason for their government's behaviour. Australian John Shaw, claimed the government would not have acted this way if the election had not been close and they had been in a better position on the opinion polls, while Eddie Jones in Willoughby claimed that they were encumbered with a prime minister that knew he would have to go in a couple of months and therefore had decided to try to impress by showing how tough he could be (Nordstrom, 2001b, p. 8).

Aftenposten's editor, Per Egil Hegge (2001, p. 9) made it clear in his editorial on the 1st of September that the problem was that election campaigns were going on in both countries, while the paper's reporter on Christmas Island said in an article (Christiansen, 2001c, p. 8) that this had been the use of popular politics by the Australian government, and that it had strengthened their position in the upcoming election.

Janne Haaland Matlary (2001, p. 17) from the Institute for Political Science at the University in Oslo said in her opinion piece on the 11th September that the whole world had been witnesses to an argument of who were obliged to what under international law, but that everyone could see
that the biggest factor was the Australian election campaign.

Bakken’s (2001, p. 14) opinion piece was a study of the Tampa case and the Australian election. He said that because the conservative Prime Minister Howard’s chance of winning the upcoming election was in jeopardy, he chose to go against international society with his extremely tough immigration politics. He further stated that Howard took up the One Nations’ immigration politics and by doing that eliminated a threat to the government, and also by increasing the government’s popularity created a problem for Labor that answered by joining in the competition of having the toughest immigration politics. According to Bakken, Australia’s refugee policy now featured a pattern where, “immigrants are held as hostages for a short term political election campaign strategy, and the long-term perspectives disappears” (2001, p. 14). He further stated that, “because the refugee problem will grow, Australia will become an even clearer negative example of a state, which put short-term political interests ahead of the international society”. Bakken made some really good points, but in ignoring his own country’s problems with immigration, his argument lost some of its punch and validity.

The newsagency AP made the final statement, reporting on the 11th November that Howard’s tough stand against illegal immigration and international terrorism gave him yet another election victory (“Innvandringspolitikken”, 2001, p. 7).

Once again it is shown that the most interesting contributions come from opinion pieces and editorials, since the importance of the upcoming Australian federal election was only mentioned sporadically in the hard news articles. This shows newspapers’ tendency to report an incident as it develops without analysing the underlying reasons for it occurring.

The Norwegian government did not draw any attention to the Australian upcoming election, at least not as it was reported in Aftenposten, even if they must have been aware of its importance. The reason for this is probably that they did not want anyone to draw a line between their way of handling the situation and Norway’s close election.

Restriction of information

It could be assumed that as a result of Norway’s Freedom of Information Act that the reporting of the Tampa affair in Norway was varied and in-depth, but this seems to have had little impact. In the Tampa case the Norwegian press tended to follow its own government’s rhetoric and did not question it. The Norwegian government was relatively open with the press. The law in Norway makes it hard for the government to hide their actions, though it is not impossible as Lindahl’s (2003) study shows. But it should also be mentioned that the Norwegian government
did not have any reason to hide information about the Tampa incident, since the Tampa was not a part of a carefully planned political strategy in Norway.

*Afterposten* did not give the impression that the Norwegian government was holding back information. The paper, however, referred to the Prime Minister Stoltenberg’s reluctance to go in-depth into the question if any of the survivors would be brought to Norway (Saure, 2001, p. 7), but this was one of only a few incidents where the paper showed that they were not totally satisfied with the information provided by Norwegian authorities. The newspaper’s tendency to closely follow the Norwegian authorities rhetoric may have resulted in the reporters failing to ask more critical questions. They seem to have joined in the argument with Australia as the bad guy, and therefore failed to look at the reasons behind their own government’s actions. The Norwegian government was reluctant to take any responsibility for the survivors, but none of the reporters drew a line between this stand and the government’s possible fear of being seen as too soft on immigration.

The problem of restriction of information was raised a couple of more times when journalists were dealing with Australian sources. Sandvand (2001, p.8) pointed out on the 29th August that the local authorities on Christmas Island now were forbidden to talk to the media. Two days later *Afterposten*’s reporter on Christmas Island wrote how Norwegian media was denied access to the Tampa even though Norwegian authorities, WWL and captain Rinnan were willing to let them come on board together with Norway’s ambassador to Australia (Christiansen, 2001c, p. 6).

Strangely enough Norwegian reporters with their well-known right of access to information as stated by law in Norway did not show much frustration over the Australian government’s strict control over important information. This may be because they avoided reporting on the full complexity of the situation as it arose in Australia, and instead focused the reporting on Norwegian sources mainly from the government and WWL.

**Local angle**

For some of *Tonsberg Blad*’s Tampa related articles the local connection was the importance of the story. Wallenius Wilhelmsen Lines was almost entirely both focus and source, and the Norwegian government rhetoric therefore did not dominate these articles since the politics of the incident were not the major factor here.

It has to be taken into consideration that *Tonsberg Blad* is a local paper, and foreign news only
plays a minor role. What made the Tampa incident relevant to Tønsberg Blad is the fact that the shipping company that owns the Tampa, Wallenius Wilhelmsen Lines, originates in Tønsberg where the newspaper is produced.

*Tønsberg Blad* did not provide in-depth coverage of the crisis. As a local paper it has only limited resources, and with an international incident such as the Tampa, it would never be able to compete with the bigger papers like *Aftenposten, VG* and *Dagbladet*. The paper therefore ended up with a simple broad coverage as provided by NTB, as well as some articles produced by themselves with a highly local angle.

The national angle in *Aftenposten* was achieved by looking at the incident from a Norwegian point of view, which means that the Norwegian government rhetoric dominated. *Aftenposten* provided a broad coverage of the issue, but there were unfortunately not many signs of in-depth reporting.

A better understanding of the Australian political climate at the time would have added to a less biased reporting, and more space possibly should have been allocated to Australian sources. Australia’s ambassador could have been a beneficial source here. Immigration sources could also have given a better understanding what people who are fleeing from prosecution are going through, but these kind of sources were not included at all. The use of the Refugee Council was positive, but ordinary people with life experiences that could shed light on the situation might have given a more human dimension to the incident, but as Østlyngen and Øvrebø (1998, p. 280) point out, immigrants are seldom used as sources in Norway, even in cases where specific immigration issues are raised they seldom get to have a say in the media.

**News frame**

Framing is important to look at since it plays an important part in how an incident is portrayed, as Østbye points out, “The wrapping is often more important than the content” (1997, p. 223). According to Matlary (2001, p. 17) the global media tend to create news in black and white, where someone is right and others are wrong. News stories have to be framed in one way or another, but it is when balance and fairness suffer that the frame selected becomes a problem.

With the incident in Norway being classed as a humanitarian crisis it was not surprising that the incident was framed as a moral issue and one, to put it crudely, in which Norway was right and Australia was wrong. Though this binary was simplistic, and did not necessarily do justice to the complexity of the issue, both Tønsberg Blad's and Aftenposten's reporting clearly followed this frame, which was initiated by the Norwegian government and immediately taken up and continued by the media.
Tonsberg Blad

Tonsberg Blad’s important frame of Norway as the good humanitarian was to begin with set by statements from Norway’s Department of Foreign Affairs. This frame allocated Norway the high moral ground while decrying Australia’s actions. “Norwegian authorities are dejected over how Australia is handling the ‘Tampa’-case...” (“Fastlåst”, 2001). This was continued in the reporting of the Tampa’s situation, such as the ship not being allowed to continue their journey with that many people onboard, the survivors’ health problems and that they, in their desperation, were threatening the captain. The reason for these problems was the Australian government who was using the ship to set an example on who was allowed to enter the country.

The important frame of Norway as the good humanitarian depicted Captain Rinnan and his crew as good Samaritans fighting an inhumane government. This, of course, was a pleasing frame to use as it fitted well with the way Norwegians like to look at themselves, namely as a humanitarian nation, big in developing aid. Norway has a long and honourable history in humanitarian aid, and according to the Foreign Affairs Department, Norway is only one of four countries which gives more than 0.7 percent of the country’s gross income to humanitarian aid, and the fight for human rights is an important part of the country’s humanitarian work (Utenriksdepartementet, n.d, online).

Tonsberg Blad frequently praised Captain Rinnan, his crew and WWL. WWL’s spokesman said, “Rinnan shows the best in a sailor” (Bangsmoen, as cited in Mohr, 2001), while Prime Minister Stoltenberg stated, “I want to use this occasion to honour you and your crew for the contribution you have showed a whole world” (“Stoltenberg”, 2001). Tonsberg Blad also mentioned on the 8th of September that Wilhelmsen, the owner of WWL “never uttered a word about commercial considerations or money lost” (“Han var aldri”, 2001), which depicted a businessman more concerned for people than money. This celebration of Norwegian virtues could also be seen, according to Slaatta, as a sign of simple patriotism. “The media shows a special form of admiration for the national, the Norwegian and the Norwegians’ achievements” (2001a, p. 162).

Aftenposten

Also in Aftenposten the main frame was Norway as the nation trying to do right in a humanitarian crisis, though this frame was presented a little more complex than in the Tonsberg Blad. As with the Tonsberg Blad the Norwegian government’s rhetoric also played a dominant role in the coverage in Aftenposten, and the government taking the high moral ground in the tussle with Australia slanted most of the articles from the outset of the crisis.
However, also from the beginning Norway being the Good Samaritan was tampered by the fact that Norway refused to take responsibility for the survivors who were now on board the Norwegian vessel. *Aftenposten* reported that the spokesperson of the Department of Foreign Affairs said on the first day of coverage, the 28th August that, according to international law, the Tampa incident was not Norway’s responsibility (Helle, Nordstrøm & Elsebutangen, 2001, p. 6).

The frame, largely drawn from statements by authoritative sources, was helped by the UN’s support of the Norwegian government. UN’s High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, was one of these voices (Helle, 2001b, p. 6), as was UN’s General Secretary Kofi Annan, though Kofi Annan did not praise Norway but condemned Australia (Elsebutangen, 2001d, p. 8).

The frame of Norway as the Good Samaritan, in the Tampa incident, was easily personalized through Captain Arne Rinnan, and also his crew. The exceptional efforts of Tampa’s crew to help the poor shipwrecked people, and the captain’s decision to not give into the pressure put on him by Australian authorities, were given great attention (Nordstrøm, 2001a, p. 8). *Aftenposten* was not shy on reporting how impressed people were of the effort of a Norwegian ship and its crew, and this becomes even clearer when looking at some of the paper’s editorials (“Australia som bolle”, 2001, p. 21; “Skammens”, 2001, p. 13).

*Aftenposten’s* editorial on the 30th August stated straight out that Australia was acting as an international bully, and that Australian authorities’ despicable actions has led to a humanitarian crisis situation (“Australia som bolle”, 2001, p. 21). In the editorial on the 3rd of September the criticism of Australia continued, while Tampa’s crew continued to get praise. The editorial stated that Australia had acted so brutally that shipping companies and sailors all over the world would be afraid of following the fantastic example of seamanship that WWL, captain Rinnan and his crew had showed (“Skammens, 2001”, p. 13).

Captain Rinnan chose his words carefully when talking to the press, since he seem to have been reluctant to take part in a political debate, but *Aftenposten’s* journalist was willing to interpret his words. “In his calm and down to earth statements he still lets it shine through that Australia could have acted in a less critical way” (Christiansen, 2001h, p. 59). Reporter Gimmestad was more forthcoming with his praise of Rinnan and his crew. He wrote on the 20th October how a Norwegian ship defied Australian authorities, and “won a moral victory for humanity and the duty of saving lives on the seven seas” (Gimmestad, 2001, p. 26), with Gustavsen (2001, p. 27) writing a month later that Rinnan and his crew showed immaculate seamanship, while Australian authorities participated in a cynical game about an election victory.
Aftenposten’s praise for Norwegian behaviour was contrasted with the dismay over the Australian government’s position. This was to a large extent done by giving voice to Australian people opposed to their own government’s actions. Aftenposten reported on the 29th August that people on Christmas Island were ashamed over their government (Sandvand, 2001, p. 8), while the next day they wrote about how Australians were calling Aftenposten to tell how embarrassed they were over their government (Nordstøm, 2001b, p. 8).

The flipside of the ‘Norway as the good Samaritan’ was the ‘Australia’s low regard for humanitarian imperatives’ frame — against which Norway could shine. The Naval Officers Association pointed out that compassion had to come first (Nordstøm, 2001c, p. 8) and human rights organizations asked Australia to show decency (Nordstøm, 2001a, p. 8). Aftenposten reported on the 2nd of September, “National shame, unhuman, breach of international law, unmoral attitude — words like these seem to be increasingly directed towards Howard’s government” (Nordrum, 2001b, p. 8). However, the bully won. The next day it was reported that both Norway and UN had been outplayed by Australia (Elsebutangen, 2001e, p. 8).

Problems with the newspapers’ choice of frame

Johansen write, “All Norwegian newspapers and television stations flatter Norwegians for being Norwegians. This involves them frequently transmitting the audience’s wishful image of themselves” (2001, p. 192). Captain Arne Rinnan and his crew fitted the Norwegian ideal of themselves perfectly. Tampa’s crew did a great effort in the rescue of the shipwrecked people and Captain Rinnan stood out as a fighter for less fortunate people when he defied the Howard Government, and became a representative for how the Norwegian people like to think of themselves. In this process they might have forgotten to raise some critical questions about Norway’s darker side when it comes to their own immigration politics.

What the frame chosen by the Norwegian newspapers showed was a focus on Norway as the honourable humanitarian nation while Australia had acted contemptibly. The image of Norway as a ‘goodness regime’ has become a national symbol for Norwegians and has become part in the forming of their self-image and national identity (Arbeids – og Administrasjonsdepartementet, 2001, online), and according to Slaatta (2001a, p. 153-154) Norway wish to be profiled in the international society as a country with a reputation in the fight for human rights and international work for peace.

However, it has to be said that this Norwegian infatuation with its self-image may have led to a slightly biased reporting since Australia was continually painted as the bad guy in Norwegian newspapers. The frame, which showed Norway in an extremely good light, and did not ask
embarrassing questions about Norway’s own immigration policy, lived off Australia pinpointed as the offender, which it was. It can be argued that Australia’s representation, as the bully, was justified since this was an incident made into a crisis by the Howard Government, which was willing to go to great lengths to win back votes in front of the upcoming election. But a more varied reporting would have created a more interesting coverage as well as given readers a better understanding of the underlaying reasons for this incident’s development.

A domestication of the Tampa incident had to be expected since the Tampa is a Norwegian ship, but problems arose when the issue was not fully explored, and the reader was left with a far from good enough knowledge base of the other country’s situation. Another problem, and maybe even more pressing, was the failure to question their own government’s rhetoric, and not ask much needed critical questions about the upcoming election and the country’s own immigration politics.

Because people like to read about cases close to them, domestication of foreign news is often implemented. An important part of the domestication process is the strong focus on national sources, but the fact is that a wider source structure would have benefited the Tampa coverage, as it was too heavily dominated by the government’s rhetoric as well as WWL’s one, which fitted neatly in with the government’s argumentation. Some more attention to Australian sources would have been beneficial, especially in creating an understanding of why the Australian government acted as it did as well as why it drew such a big support among the Australian population.
Section Two: Qualitative analysis of Australian newspapers

How the Tampa incident and the political aftermath were played out in Australian newspapers.

The coverage of the Tampa incident in the two Australian newspapers had many commonalities, but The Australian had a more critical approach to the government's tough stand than The West Australian. Unsurprisingly, government officials were important sources in both papers as the government controlled much of what was happening, but the newspapers had a slightly different use of sources.

The West Australian’s coverage

The West Australian’s reporting was far more extensive than the Norwegian newspapers’ coverage, which is expected since the coverage of the incident in Australia had much to do with the country’s changing policy on immigration. The paper’s journalists wrote most of the articles themselves, but relied on some information from news agencies and other newspapers.

The main sources and their rhetoric

The dominant voice of the incident’s first day of coverage in The West Australian, 28th August, was the Prime Minister stating that the refugees were Norway and Indonesia’s problem, and that a message needed to be sent to people smugglers (Barton & Cowan, 2001, p. 1). The paper needs to be recognised for giving room to several different voices on this day, among them Indonesian authorities, WWL, Captain Rinnan, the opposition leader, Kim Beazley, university professors, with the Greens’ Bob Brown, the Refugee council and Norwegian government officials being the highly critical voices.

As the coverage of the incident continued the government kept attracting much attention. This is to be expected as they were main actors in the incident, but it can be argued that too much attention was given to their view of the situation. The main spokesmen here were Prime Minister John Howard, Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock, Foreign Minister Alexander Downer and Defence Minister Peter Reith. The paper also used many different sources during the coverage of the Tampa incident, and was not afraid to report on oppositional voices to the government although they rarely were given extensive coverage.

The problem with too much of a focus on government officials became more of a problem as the survivors left the Tampa, since the government then had better control of what was
happening. The relatively wide source structure applied during the incident then narrowed, and the government was given more voice than ever in the articles dealing with immigration issues.

The government

Prime Minister Howard played his cards smart and, even when constantly focusing on the importance of being tough on people smugglers, he did not fail to mention humanitarian issues. "I hope it send a message to people smugglers around the world that, whilst this is a humanitarian decent country, we are not a soft touch" (Barton & Cowan, 2001a, p. 1).

The prime minister seems to have constantly been on the outlook for a spin to the story, which would make his own stand look good. Early on in the incident he claimed that a doctor had indicated that none of the survivors were in need of urgent medical help (Middleton, Barton & Cowan, 2001, p. 1), and thus indicated that captain Rinnan's judgement of the situation was wrong. Howard's statement made it to the front-page, while WWL's assessment first appeared inside the paper (Rose, 2001, p. 9).

Howard denied throughout the incident that the government's tough stand had damaged Australia's reputation, and on the 1st September was quoted saying, "When you are willing, as we continue to be, to take people on a per capita basis more generously than any other country other than Canada I don't think any charge can be fairly made" (Malpell & Barton, 2001, p. 6). This claim can be disputed, but was not contested by The West Australian at the time. It was even used to make a point in the same day's editorial, "If you take population size into account, Australia can claim to have done more than any other country to accommodate the waves of refugees created by the international upheavals of the past 60 years" ("Refugees not denied", 2001, p. 16). On the 6th September UN was reported as refuting the PM's claim (Middleton, 2001a, p. 12), but this was not elaborated upon even if it proved the prime minister wrong.

The government argumentation was also used in an editorial ("Asylum seekers test", 2001, p. 18) on the 3rd of October. "Australia has international obligations to refugees and it has developed a good reputation for honouring these by accepting more of them than any other nations except Canada, on a population basis". This proves that the government's manipulation was effective, as journalists adopted their rhetoric without questioning it. The government did not only con journalists, as opposition leader Beazley was quoted in an article on the 9th October saying, "It also has to be said that we are the second highest, in the numbers that we take from the United Nations program... We are not ungenerous" (Mallabone, 2001a, p. 5). He thus adopted the government rhetoric, and the paper failed once again to point out that this statement might not be the truth.
On the 17th of September, Defence Minister Reith was reported to have denied that boatpeople arriving at Cocos Island showed that the naval blockade against asylum seekers did not work. Immigration Minister Ruddock and Reith were the main voices in the article, with Beazley playing a minor role stating that Labor would support a stricter definition of a refugee if it conformed to UNHCR rules (Barton, Garvey & Butler, 2001, p. 3). On the 27th of September the government’s new legislation against boat people was reported as being passed in the Senate (Barton, 2001b, p. 17). The article stated that, “Condemning the legislation yesterday, Refugee Action Collective spokesman Ian Rintoul said the crisis in Afghanistan exposed the Government’s lack of humanitarian concern for victims of persecution”, while a spokesman for Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock turned the focus to what he called the government’s focus on helping the refugees in the greatest need, not only the ones who were able to make it to Australian shores.

The paper’s portrayal of the Pacific island of Nauru, where many of the Tampa refugees were sent, seems to be a bit too glorifying on the 11th of September, “The asylum seekers will get the sort of ocean view that tourists dream of”, while pointing out that the units that will accommodate the asylum seekers have air-condition and refrigerators (“$20m”, 2001, p. 10). Looking at the growing resentment towards asylum seekers in Australia at the time, this article does not seem appropriate as it did not point out any of the problems for the asylum seekers sent there. Adding to it was the headline, which read, “$20m buys luxury for boat people”.

As the problem with boat people continued and the government started to ship them to Nauru and other places, the government’s official voices continued to dominate. The government had to deal with the problem that some asylum seekers refused to leave HMAS Manoora to disembark on Nauru, and demanded to be taken to Australia. Ruddock’s answer to this situation was to attack the asylum seekers, claiming that this was proof that they were more interested in coming to Australia, than finding a safe place to live (“Iraqi boat people”, 2001, p. 4). The same article also stated: “Latest Immigration Department intelligence suggested up to 3000 boat people could be preparing to leave from Indonesia and another 4000 from Malaysia and Thailand”. These numbers as supplied by the government served a specific purpose; they kept Australians’ fear of being invaded by asylum seekers alive. All this shows that a problem arises when the newspaper does not follow up on figures presented by officials to see if they give a true picture of the reality, as this permitted the government rhetoric to go unquestioned and to dominate.

Ruddock’s smear campaign against boatpeople continued as on the 5th of October he was quoted, “What has happened is that the number of people [asylum seekers] that we are able to
take lawfully has diminished ... And the reason it's diminished is very simple – it's because the places are being stolen by those people who have come unlawfully" (Mendez, 2001a, p. 7). A spokesman for Ruddock continued the immigration minister's campaign as he informed that the Department of Immigration would expel some asylum seekers, who falsely had claimed to be Afghans (Mallabone, 2001c, p. 9). He further claimed that the Afghan community believed up to 80 per cent of asylum seekers successfully obtaining a protection visa were frauds. This was a major accusation, but was for some reason neither elaborated upon nor further investigated, leaving the impression that Ruddock's argumentation that boatpeople steal places from genuine refugees was a fair claim.

On the following day the paper pointed out that people smugglers earned millions of dollars on the boat people trade to Australia, while Australian taxpayers lost money as the cost per day of keeping one asylum seeker in detention was $125 (Martin, 2001, p. 3). There was no visible source, but one has to wonder if this information had been provided by Ruddock's media minders. In another article that day Howard claimed that the government's tough actions against boat people were paying off (Barton & Cowan, 2001b, p. 17). He pointed out that it was an expensive operation, but that the cost involved would have to be offset against what was saved by fewer people arriving. No other sources got to have their say here.

On the 20th of October Howard bragged about the fact that for the first time a boatload of asylum seekers had been sent back, and pointed out that he was optimistic that the flow of boat people from Indonesia was slowing down even though many were still waiting to set out for Australia (Middleton, Rose & Wilkinson, 2001, p. 1). The opposition immigration spokesman, Con Sciacca, pointed out that they supported the government's attempts to stop boat people from coming, but they did not believe it was working. This could be seen in what was later dubbed 'The children overboard affair' in early October and the incident where more than 350 people drowned when their boat sank off the coast of Indonesia in an attempt to make it to Australia around 24th of October, 2001.

All along, asylum seekers had not been given much room to voice their opinion in The West Australian after the Tampa incident, since recent arrivals were kept away from the media. But after the tragic incident in late October several of the survivors were given the opportunity to give their account of what happened, which finally gave a human face to the boat people issue.

**Labor**

Labor mostly supported the government's stand, even though at times it criticized how the government was handling the Tampa case and its strategy to stop asylum seekers from coming
to Australia by boat. Labor did not support the first Border Protection Bill, which Beazley branded policy on the run (Middleton & Barton, 2001, p. 8). Beazley constantly focused on the importance of Indonesia in a long-term solution, and criticised Howard for not talking to Indonesia's president before he talked to the media (Middleton, 2001d, p. 1; “My actions”, 2001, p. 4). The *West Australian* reported on the 4th of September how the prime minister saw negotiations with Indonesia as necessary for a long-term solution (Middleton, 2001c, p. 9), but even as Beazley had focused on this all along, he still did not get mentioned in the article.

Labor for the first time got the main focus in an article about boatpeople on the 7th of September, where Kim Beazley and Labor's Foreign Affairs spokesman, Laurie Brereton, pointed out their strategy of dealing with the problem (Middleton, 2001b, p. 9). Beazley continued in the months leading up to the election to emphasise the importance of a deal with Indonesia, while claiming that Howard has been unable to create such an agreement. Afraid of being seen as soft on immigration, he stated that Australia's intake of refugees would not be increased under a Labor government (Mallab, 2001a, p. 5). The article was tiny, and *The West Australian*, was as always playing second fiddle to Howard.

**Oppositional voices**

There were plenty of oppositional voices to the government's tough stand on asylum seekers, but *The West Australian*’s coverage could have used them more extensively. The problem was not as much the sources used, but the domination of government officials being so much privileged over other sources.

Mahmoud Saikal, Honorary Consul for Afghanistan, was reported on the 30th of August saying that he urged the Australian government to let the survivors enter Australia so they could be given a chance of proving their refugee claims (Barton, 2001c, p. 8). He gave a voice to the Afghan asylum seekers, but was not used again. A better understanding of boat people would have been beneficial, and refugees now settled in Australia could have provided this, as the government kept the newly arrived people far away from reporters. A letter from the asylum seekers onboard the Tampa published on the 3rd of September was the only representation of their view (“Boat people mercy”, 2001, p. 5).

An article (McGeough, 2001, p. 10), supplied by *Sydney Morning Herald*, about the terrible conditions in Afghanistan was published on the 4th of September. It drew a sad and awful picture of Afghanistan, and if it had appeared earlier it might have created some more understanding for the survivors onboard the Tampa. *The Sydney Morning Herald* was also the source of another article (Baker, 2001, p. 8) on the 7th of September, which dealt with people...
smuggling. It told of the hard journey the asylum seekers went through to get here as well as explaining why so many were choosing to leave their country. It also stated, “the notion of a class of rich queue jumpers misrepresents reality”. On the 12th of September the paper ran an article (Murdoch, 2001, p. 38) supplied by The Age about the desperation that made people leave everything behind to start a new life in a country they did not know, Australia. These three articles became important in creating an understanding of why some asylum seekers went to such a length to come to Australia, and worked as an oppositional voice to the government as they showed the human face of what the government saw as just a problem.

International law was an important aspect of the Tampa incident and was frequently discussed in the paper, where different university lecturer took part in the debate (“Law”, 2001, p. 4; Barton, 2001d, p. 9). However, they did not agree on what implications the laws had for Australia because they were not clear-cut.

As the Tampa incident entered the court system, this process was given much attention (Malpell, 2001a, p. 6; Malpell, 2001b, p. 4; Malpell, 2001c, p. 11; Malpell, 2001d, p. 9; Malpell, 2001e, p. 12; and more). The reporting of the court cases, followed the standard rules for court reporting, and gave a fair and balanced view of the two opposite sides represented. The civil liberties group Liberty Victoria and lawyer Eric Vadarlis fought for the asylum seekers right to be allowed to enter Australia, and in that way gave a much needed voice to the these people. The government appealed the court’s ruling that the ship carrying the Tampa survivors should be brought back to Australia, and in the end won.

The Norwegian government was highly critical of the Australian government’s handling of the situation. They were not rewarded much space, as the Australian government kept focusing on the ship itself and its captain, at the same time as they were critical of Indonesia, avoiding criticising Norway directly. Captain Rinnan and WWL focused on the deteriorating conditions onboard the Tampa, and then mainly on the health of the passengers (Cowan, 2001, p. 5; Rose & Williams, 2001, p. 7). But as the ship left Australian waters after the survivors had disembarked, the Norwegian government and WWL made a quick exit as sources.

The UNHCR was also not rewarded with much space, although in the first days of the incident was able to express concern about what was happening (“End stand-off”, 2001, p. 8; “Norway plans”, 2001, p. 7). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mary Robinson, was reported saying on the 31st of August, “I make an appeal to Australian people to look into their hearts and to have a humanitarian and human rights approach to this” (Alcorn & Taylor, 2001, p. 11), while a couple of days later, Kofi Annan was reported to have said he would preferred that Australia had accepted them (“My actions”, 2001, p. 4).
The UN High Commissioner for Refugees spokesman, Ron Redmond, was quoted on the 6th of September saying about the Australian government’s handling of the Tampa incident, “The poorest nations of the world, who bear most of the burden for the millions of refugees of the world, what lessons are they going to draw from this?” (“Standoff”, 2001, p. 12). This only appeared in a tiny article about UN’s concerns, and was not afforded a reply by the Australian government, at least not in the paper.

*The West Australian* reported on the 21st of September that the UNHCR was critical of the legislation that would exclude some islands from Australia’s immigration zone as well as tough new protection visa criteria (Barton, 2001c, p. 17), but UNHCR was once again not given much attention.

An article on the 25th of September (Barton, 2001f, p. 4) listed concerns of what the Border Protection Bill would lead to. Democrats Senator Andrew Bartlett “linked the asylum seekers crackdown to the White Australia Policy”, while the chairman of the Refugee Council of Australia, Professor Maley, said the legislation was rushed and that it needed to be considered that most Afghans coming to Australia was part of a religious minority persecuted by the Taliban regime.

One Nation leader, Pauline Hanson spoke out in October, claiming the government was using its ideas on immigration (Mallabone, 2001c, p. 9). Her claim was supported by Senator Stott Despoja, who said in the same article that One Nation had lost support, as the government and the opposition had adopted its immigration policies and in that way pacified the party. These claims only made a small article, and were not elaborated upon. Despoja was throughout the Tampa incident and the political aftermath critical of the government’s stand, but was not awarded much attention, and the Green’s Senator Bob Brown was treated much the same way.

A critical voice, however, appeared in the newspaper’s comment section. Columnist Andre Malan (2001a, p. 19) wrote on the 30th of August that Australia should have known that criticizing Indonesia would not make them take responsibility, and that it was not fair to claim this was Norway’s responsibility just because the ship that rescued them happened to be Norwegian. Criticism from the newspaper’s journalists became more evident when referring to the Australian upcoming election, as will be seen later in this section.

*The West Australian*’s Canberra correspondent, Karen Middleton (2001e, p. 24), pointed out an important fact on 21st of September, “In times of crisis, people unite behind the government. The sense of solidarity is essential to stop communities and nations from falling apart”, and she further claimed that opinion polls showed that this was happening in Australia. “There is little
scope for attacking a government’s approach at times like these. The smallest criticism or most reasonable of questions are portrayed as a kind of treason”. This may have been true after the 9/11, but The West Australian’s reporters did not seem to be too critical of the government’s actions in relation to immigration before the 9/11 either. Many of the paper’s editorials showed strong support for the government.

The Australian’s coverage

The Australian coverage of the Tampa incident started one day earlier than the three other newspapers explored, on the 27th of August. The West Australian’s coverage was extensive, but The Australian’s even more so. They relied on some information from news agencies, but provided most of the articles themselves.

The main sources and their rhetoric

The Australian employed a wider source structure than The West Australian, which could have something to do with the paper’s tendency to seem critical of the government’s handling of immigration issues. The editorial (“PM digs”, 2001, p. 18) on the 1st of September stated, “The Australian stands by its condemnation on Thursday of Mr Howard’s indecent bungling over the Tampa and its human cargo”. Although it should be pointed out that it could also be due to the paper’s ability to access sources.

Government officials did not dominate as much as they did in The West Australian during the Tampa incident. The reason for this seems to be the constant contact with Captain Rinnan as well as more extensive use of UN and UNHCR spokespeople. The problem with too much emphasis on government officials became more of a problem in the Tampa’s aftermath, just as it did in The West Australian. But even then The Australian had a more critical approach to the government’s stance on immigration than what was apparent in The West Australian.

The first day of reporting differed from the rest of the coverage as it seems to have been heavily dominated by the government’s influence, as a headline on the front-page read, “New wave of 1000 illegals” (Dore & Carson, 2001, p. 1). The article further stated that, “Their expected arrival will bring to nearly 1000 the numbers of refugees expected to arrive at Christmas Island early today...and would swamp Christmas Island’s facilities”. This article helped the government’s strategy of building a fear in the Australian people that the boat people problem was out of hand.
Interestingly the paper carried an article that day stating that more illegal immigrants were coming by plane, using forged travel documents, than by boat ("Boatpeople second", 2001, p. 4). It stated that intelligence sources told The Dossier investigation that the problem with forged papers were "substantially bigger than the boatpeople problem". Unfortunately this was not pursued further as it could have proved that the government's handling of the boat people issue was mainly a media stunt. Marr and Wilkinson state, "The problem for boat people was always the boat: the symbol of Australia's fear of invasion. People worried far less - indeed, hardly at all - about asylum seekers arriving by air, even though they were jumping the same queue, there were far more of them and they were about half as likely as those who came by sea to be genuine refugees" (2003, p. 38).

The next day, a detailed coverage started where a wide source structure was applied. All the involved parts were represented in the main article (Garran & Carson, 2001, p. 1), through Australia's Prime Minister, a spokesman for Indonesia's Foreign Affairs, the Foreign Affairs Department in Norway and WWL. Kim Beazley also got to show his support of the government, while a professor of international law at Sydney University stated that Australia was obliged to help people in distress. Captain Rinnan also had an outlet for his frustration when he pointed out that urgent medical attention was needed (Carson & O'Brien, 2001a, p. 1). The Australian that day also carried a strong feature article about boat people, which gave readers an understanding of what these people were going through (Saunders, K., 2001, p. 14).

The government

The prime minister said in The Australian on the 29th of August that, "We appear to be losing control of the flow of people coming into this country...we have to take a stand" (Garran, Carson & Sutherland, 2001, p. 1), but as he was only one of many sources, his rhetoric did not dominate. Howard was quoted the next day saying, "Those who enter our territorial waters contrary to an express direction from the government should not be rewarded by being allowed to stay in our waters, or even worse, by having the opportunity to enter our land territory" ("The bill", 2001, p. 2). The government strategy of painting the boat people in a bad light, becomes clear with Howard stating: "What we object to is that people go outside the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, and they bypass an international credible (system) which is fair to all potential refugees" (Henderson, Garran & Carson, 2001, p. 1).

The government deliberately played the numbers-game, and received coverage over it just as they did on the incident's first day of coverage. The paper reported on August 31 that government sources claimed that up to 5000 potential boat people were waiting in Indonesia, with Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock claiming that boat people were delaying their trips
to see the outcome of the Tampa case (Saunders, 2001a, p. 1). The Australian reported on the 3rd of September that according to Indonesian police monitoring people-smuggling that those waiting to go to Australia were more likely to be in the high hundreds than in their thousands (Greenlees, 2001, p. 3). The Indonesian figures contested those given by the Australian government, but that connection was not drawn. MacCallum states that Ruddock’s numbers in 2001, “varied from several hundreds to over 10,000”, but that his “predictions seldom came to pass” (2002, p. 37).

As the government applied resources to stop boat people from coming, their tactic seems to have changed, as a spokesman for Ruddock on the 18th of October was reported to have said that the numbers of asylum-seekers heading for Australia had slowed down (Toohey, 2001a, p. 3). “Australian authorities believe there are 1000 to 1500 Middle-Eastern asylum-seekers in Indonesia seeking passage south. This differs with the Indonesian view, which suggests at least 4000 people – mostly Afghans – are trying to reach Australia”. The Australian continued to spar with the government over immigration numbers (Megalogenis, 2001, p. 1; Saunders, Gilchrist & O’Brien, 2001, p. 4).

In an article (Saunders, 2001k, p. 7) on the 1st of September about the refugee problem around the world, Howard was quoted saying, “Apart from Canada, we take more refugees per capita than any country in the world”. The article did not contest his claim, but put it in perspective by pointing out that in raw figures the US accepted far more people than Australia. Five days later Greg Sheridan (2001a, p. 11), The Australian’s foreign editor, stated in his opinion piece that Howard’s claim was false, as it did not take into account all the countries that accept people over their borders, “by far the vast majority of refugee resettlement”. But it was not elaborated upon in the paper’s news articles.

The attention then turned to the so-called ‘Pacific solution’, in the reporting of which government voices – those of the prime minister, the minister for immigration, the minister for defence and the foreign minister – dominated the reporting (Saunders, Garran & Crawford, 2001, p. 1; Saunders, 2001e, p. 3; Garran & Woodley, 2001, p. 4; Henderson, 2001a, p. 5; Henderson & Harvey, 2001, p. 5; Saunders, 2001d, p. 5; Saunders, 2001b, p. 5; Saunders, 2001c, p. 3).

Supporters

Jupp states that One Nation created, “a block of a million voters strategically placed between Labor, the Nationals and the Liberals”, which “tempted the parties to pander its prejudices”
(2002, p. 139), but this does not seem to have been an important point for any of the newspapers, as the government denied to have been influenced by One Nation.

One Nation did not receive much attention in the coverage of immigration issues, even though it claimed the government had stolen its immigration politics (Henderson, 2001b, p. 1). As it supported the government’s tough stand, it did not have much input into the very restricted ongoing debate on immigration policy.

**Labor**

Opposition leader Beazley and Labor were not awarded much more attention in *The Australian* than in *The West Australian*. They tended to wander in the coalition’s shadow. Beazley rightfully pointed out, as reported on the 30th of August, that the boat people issue was not a national catastrophe, but a serious problem (“The bill”, 2001, p. 2). He also later described the Pacific solution as a “logistic nightmare” (Saunders, Garran & Crawford, 2001, p. 1). As in *The West Australian*, Beazley’s focus on an agreement with Indonesia was highlighted. An article (Garran, 2001a, p. 2) on the 7th of September covered Labor’s plan of an Asia summit to combat people-smuggling, with Beazley stating more than a month later that a team of ALP MPs would go to Indonesia to seek co-operation against people-smuggling if they won the election (Garran & Kerin, 2001, p. 5). As the election was coming close Labor made a last desperate attempt to turn the focus onto something other than immigration and national security but as *The Australian* reported, did not succeed (Henderson, 2001c, p. 2).

**The Opposition**

International law regarding the Tampa situation and the problems it raised were given much attention in *The Australian*. The coverage was similar of that of *The West Australian*, and also the court cases received much attention, which gave a balanced representation of two opposite sides argumentation (Yallop, 2001, p. 7; Saunders, Garran & Crawford, 2001, p. 1; Crawford, 2001a, p. 2; Crawford, 2001b, p. 6; Crawford, 2001c, p. 6; Crawford, 2001d, p. 4; Saunders & Crawford, 2001, p. 8 and more).

*The Australian* had a small section during the Tampa incident, which looked at Afghani’s view of what was happening. The Australian-based Afghan community leader, Mahmoud Saikal, stated that Afghans, who went through the proper channels described their chances of coming to Australia as winning in the lottery, as well as pointing out that the majority of those leaving Afghanistan were genuine refugees (Saunders, 2001f, p. 3), while another article stated that Afghanistan was one of the most oppressive regimes in the world (Saunders, 2001g, p. 3).
The Australian published the letter ("We have no way", 2001, p. 2) from the survivors onboard the Tampa just like The West Australia did. The paper on the 3rd of September also gave an asylum seeker the chance to tell his story of how he tried to reach Australia (Greenlees, 2001, p. 3). On the 25th of September a feature article (Chulov, 2001a, p. 11) about Islamic immigrants in Australia appeared. This was a much-needed article as it stated, "Muslims form one of the largest but most misunderstood communities in Australia".

The paper carried a feature article (Zubrzycki, 2001a, p. 11) about Afghan people on the run on the 22nd October. The article talked in depth about why there were so many Afghan refugees, their hardship and why the 'queue-jumping' phrase should not be used. In the article an Afghan claimed that no one had ever got out of his village by joining the nearest UNHCR protection office 800 km away, while a senior FIA official stated: "These people are not going to be deterred by the Australian navy firing over the bows of boats when they face firing squads at home".

The Greens and the Democrats spoke out against the government and Labor's stand, but were not awarded much attention. While most coverage was continuos, most was minor. On the 25th of September an article (Saunders, 2001h, p. 6) contested this pattern, as The Australian wrote, "Angry Democrats and Greens Senators, as well as refugee advocates, yesterday blasted a legislative migration package restricting asylum seekers' rights as "unworkable", "abominable" and potentially unconstitutional". Democrats' leader Natasha Stott Despoja said it was "unworkable" and "discriminatory", while the Greens accused the Coalition and Labor of taking side with One Nation. The major parties were not represented with a voice.

The Liberals and Labor were mostly successful in keeping their own MPs from speaking out against their joint immigration stand, but not entirely. However, most of the criticism came close to election time, and gave voters little time to contemplate what they were saying. The Australian wrote on the 8th of November that, "Former prominent Liberals John Hewson and Fred Chaney have attacked Australia's refugee policy as morally wrong, ineffective and seriously damaging to the country's reputation" (Steketee, 2001, p. 5). The article pointed out that to this list of critics names like former defence department secretary Paul Barratt, former prime ministers Malcolm Fraser and Gough Whitlam, former NSW premier Neville Wran, former Liberal immigration department secretary John Menadue and former senior diplomat Richard Woolcott could be added.

Captain Rimmal and WWL received a considerable amount of attention and were more extensively used in The Australian than in The West Australian. The reason for this seem to be as explained in an article (Carson, 2001a, p. 4) on the 7th of September, how journalist Vanda
Carson was ably to establish such a good relationship with Captain Rinnan that he was willing to talk to her Norwegian translator even when he would not take other calls. Carson described Rinnan as a warm man willing to help, and stated, "When it became obvious the federal Government was keeping Captain Rinnan in the dark, we let him know what was happening on the island, and told him of the debate raging around Australia. In return, he told us what was happening on the ship." Also in The Australian Rinnan's focus was on the survivors' health.

Captain Rinnan was shown in a very good light, which could be compared to the way he was portrayed in the Norwegian newspapers. One example of this is the headline, "Captain 'Fantastic' to stay calm in the middle of the storm" (Sutherland, 2001, p. 8) of an article which portrayed him in a good way. Another example is the headline, "Nice-guy captain rocks into Singapore, his star on rise" (Ellis, 2001, p. 4).

Norwegian government officials did not receive much coverage, but their rhetoric was clear as they saw the incident as Australia's problem. They insisted that the survivors should be allowed to disembark on Christmas Island (Henderson, Garran & Carson, 2001, p. 1). The Norwegian foreign minister was reported on the 30th of August saying that Norway would report the case to the International Maritime Organization, the UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross (Shanahan, Garran & Saunders, 2001, p. 1).

In The Australian, the UN and UNHCR were extensively used as sources during the Tampa incident and in the political aftermath as they showed their disapproval of the Australian government's immigration policy (Shanahan, Garran & Saunders, 2001, p. 1; Henderson, Garran & Carson, 2001, p. 1). On the 1st of September UN and its demands were the focal point of the front-page's article, as their plan for the asylum seekers to disembark on Christmas Island, be processed and then resettled in other countries was disclosed ("UN demands", 2001, p. 1). When the Australian government revealed its plan of sending the survivors to Nauru and New Zealand, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan was quoted, "This is not the way to handle a refugee situation", with a spokesman for UNHCR saying that UN would have preferred the survivors to have gone ashore on Christmas Island (Saunders, Garran & Crawford, 2001, p. 1).

On the 19th of September The Australian reported that the UN High Commissioner for Refugees said the arrangement of processing asylum seekers at Nauru set a "damaging precedent" (Powell, 2001b, p. 14). A month later it was reported that, "Senior UN and Pakistani government officials have condemned the Howard Government's handling of the Afghan refugee crisis, saying Australia had failed to meet resettlement commitments and was not doing enough to combat people-smuggling", while also attacking the queue-jumper phrase (Zubrzycki, 2001b, p. 8).
Indonesia was also given more attention in *The Australian* than in *The West Australian*. Indonesia’s ambassador to Australia expressed his view in the paper on the 29th of August, saying the issue should have been discussed with them from the beginning (Garran, Carson & Sutherland, 2001, p. 1), while consistently stating that Indonesia would not accept the survivors (Henderson, Garran & Carson, 2001, p. 1).

Paul Kelly (2001a, p. 15), the paper’s international editor, pointed out a couple of days before the election that, “The Tampa policy was founded in a blatant and patronising lack of respect for Indonesia that is now ingrained in our culture”. This was an important point, as Howard did not seem too concerned about how his media statements impacted on the relationship between Australia and Indonesia, as long as the Australian electorate liked his message. The next day, the 8th of November, it was reported that Indonesia’s ambassador to Australia strongly advised politicians to stop exploiting the asylum-seeker issue as it could end up damaging the relations between Indonesia and Australia (Henderson & Gilchrist, 2001, p. 1).

The Refugee Council of Australia also received some coverage, with one of its members, Bill Maley, as an active voice (Saunders, 2001h, p. 6; Saunders, 2001i, p. 6). His view was that “it’s a sad and pathetic irony that at the very time the attention of the world is being focused on the evils which have been spawned by (the Taliban) regime, an Australian government is looking for additional ways in which to harass its innocent victims” (Saunders, 2001i, p. 6).

Because of the government’s strict control over information coming from the navy, the people who were closest to the boat people were not allowed to express themselves. But in early November, *The Australian* could report that senior navy consultant psychiatrist, Dr Duncan Wallace, had broken ranks to express his view that military actions against boat people was morally wrong (Toohey, 2001b, p. 1). He stated, “The hard-hearted who speak loudly about the need for stern deterrent actions to solve this problem, have not seen the faces of the boatpeople in their miserable conditions imploring us for help”, which was part of the problem as the government had been very successful in keeping pictures and people away from the press, which could show a human picture of the asylum seekers heading for Australia.

*The Australian*’s editorials were highly critical of the government’s tough stand on boatpeople. On the 30th of August the paper wrote that the government’s approach “betrays an unwillingness to accept the reality of the global refugee problem” (“PM’s refugee”, 2001, p. 10), while singing out how Ruddock’s stance that the Tampa people should not be called refugees did not make sense since government figures showed that three out of four asylum seekers to reach Australia were found to be refugees. A couple of days before the election the editorial (“Foreign policy”, 2001, p. 14) stated how a sensible discussion of Australia’s foreign policy had been
replaced by the fight between the Liberals and Labor on who was toughest on border protection, while further claiming that the boat people issue, "has little to do with national security because these people are potential refugees, not a threat to our security".

Opinion pieces by staff writers also showed evidence of a highly critical view to the government's approach to immigration. Greg Sheridan (2001a, p. 11), foreign editor, stated that the government deliberately tried to dehumanise the refugees, while stating that to characterize "Afghani boat-people as wealthy queue-jumpers is utterly dishonest".

The Australian upcoming election as covered by the newspapers in relation to the Tampa incident and the political aftermath

A serious problem with the Australian newspapers' coverage of the Tampa incident was the failure to understand the impact the upcoming federal election had on the government's handling of the situation.

The West Australian

The election issue in connection to the Tampa case and immigration politics came up quite frequently in The West Australian's editorials. On the 28th of August, it read, "It has become evident that illegal entrants and what should be done about them will be a key issue in the Federal election campaign towards the end of the year" ("Refugees a Key", 2001, p. 14), but it did not consider that the government's handling of the Tampa had become a cornerstone in their strategy of attracting back voters. The closest The West Australian came to making this link was its editorial three days later, stating, "With an election just months away, Mr Howard had a transparent political incentive to take a tough line, and the opposition to support it" ("Politics behind", 2001, p. 16).

The editorial ("Asylum seekers test", 2001, p. 18) on the 3rd of October admitted that the government might have a political motif for keeping asylum seekers away from Australia, but claimed that, "anyone who argues this line must concede that it has validity only because the Government's actions are in tune with the will of the people, a reality that is reinforced by Labor's general support".

An important point was raised in the editorial on the 7th of November, pointing out that Labor's support for the government's actions against asylum seekers created a problem, as it almost extinguished a political debate on immigration, which was an important issue for many Australians ("Party machines", 2001, p. 18). "Election campaigns should be forums for vigorous
debate. However, the leaders and political strategists of the major parties are running tightly controlled campaigns, with no room for individual voices – particularly those of dissent from the party line”. As there were not a lack of oppositional voices, the media could have created such a debate, but since they tend to prefer authoritative sources, the problem was that many of the oppositional voices could not compete with Howard and Beazley when it came to status.

The West Australian's Canberra correspondent Karen Middleton (2001f, p. 19) commented on the 31st of August that the coalition was jubilant, as they finally had found an issue that would make them popular, while raising concerns that decisions made on different sides of politics could have been influenced by the "pressure-cocker election climate". She further commented (2001g, p. 17) on the 7th of September that Howard had sent the country's naval forces out to sea, in an effort to keep the immigration issue on the agenda. “It's as if we are at war”.

Mark Mallabone (2001d, p. 8), Chief of Staff, wrote that the Tampa incident transferred Howard into a “loyal defender of Australia’s sovereignty,” and that his status was further improved with 9/11 as it rendered "the role of Opposition leaders everywhere strangely irrelevant". Andre Malan, (2001b, p. 18) columnist, pointed to the same fact, as he predicted that the fears of international terrorism and a flood of asylum seekers washing up on Australia’s shores, would make voters go for the “conservative, low-risks options”; namely the Coalition, when going to cast their vote.

The day before the election Middleton (2001h, p. 2) claimed that, “The Liberals are more ruthless than Labor in the dirty tricks department.” But even being aware of that, as well as claiming that the politicians used asylum seekers as “bait”, she still did not clearly point to the Liberal’s strategy of using asylum seekers to turn around their chances of winning the upcoming election. Middleton further stated that Howard was always uncomfortable in arguing against the immigration view of One Nation’s Pauline Hanson, but that in this election campaign he had found a way to use her arguments while making them seem less racist. Middleton’s comment raised issues, which were barely touched upon in the news articles. Her comment might have added to people’s understanding of the immigration issue in the election campaign had it appeared earlier.

The link of the immigration issue to the election did not make it very often into the news articles. Secretary of the Union of Christmas Island workers, Gordon Thompson, might have been one of the few to pick up on the importance of the upcoming election for how the Australian government handled the Tampa case, early on in the incident. An article (Mendez, 2001b, p. 7) on the 1st of September stated, “He described the armed forces’ presence as a shameful political activity to aid the re-election of the Howard Government...” This was only a
tiny article about protests among Christmas Island’s residents for the right to go out and catch fish, and the importance of Thompson’s observation was not recognised.

The 5th of September *The West Australian* reported that Howard denied that domestic politics made him stop the Tampa and its passengers from coming to Australia. “He said it was ludicrous to claim he has orchestrated the arrival and handling of the boatload of asylum seekers to curry favour with voters” (Burns & Middleton, 2001, p. 9). This was a clever use of words by the prime minister, since he of course could not have orchestrated the arrival of the Tampa, although he could have planned for what actions to take against the continuing arrival of boat people. In the same article Beazley claimed they acted on principle on immigration issues, and that the upcoming election did not influence their view. This is interesting since Labor seemed not to have had a specific policy on immigration at the time of the arrival of the Tampa, but decided to support the government when it understood how strong public support was for the government’s move.

The following day Indonesia’s Foreign Minister, Hasan Wirayuda, pointed out that the boat people issue was connected to Howard’s wish of gaining domestic support, while PNG’s former Prime Minister, Sir Michael Somare, was quoted: “I think he’s [Mr Howard] got an election coming up in two months time and it’s very difficult to reconcile if you bring Afghans in, people like that” (Middleton, 2001a, p. 12). Another one to pick up on the importance of the upcoming election was Independent Council of Refugee Advocacy president Marion Le, who said the plan to exclude Christmas Island and Ashmore Reef from Australia’s migration zone was a cynical exercise to play the polls (Capp, Middleton & Pearce, 2001, p. 4).

Two days after the election Middleton (2001i, p. 3) wrote, “Prime Minister John Howard has stormed back into office claiming vindication for his tough stance on boat people”. Another article that day stated, “Full-page newspaper advertisements and polling booth placards were evidence of the coalition’s emphasis on border protection before the poll. But yesterday Mr Howard claimed it was wrong to suggest he rode to victory on that issue alone” (Barton, 2001g, p. 3). Howard had won the election, but even with a victory in his hands, he was not willing to admit to his party’s carefully calculated strategy of using the fate of asylum seekers as a bait to lure back voters.
The importance of the upcoming federal election and the government’s strategy of keeping the boat people issue in the spotlight were frequently referred to in *The Australian*, but not really explored and elaborated upon.

The editorial ("PM digs", 2001, p. 18) on the 1st of September stated that, “Despite Mr Howard’s denial, most of this week’s regrettable episode has been done with an eye to the election”, while pointing out that Howard’s depiction of the Tampa incident as a crisis was false as Australia’s problem compared to Europe did not deserve this label. It also attacked the influence of talkback radio on politicians, as it stated, “Decency and compassion should set the standard for dealing with human tragedy, not the prevailing opinion on talkback radio”.

Two days later the editorial ("Short-term", 2001, p. 12) came close to pointing out the Howard Government’s strategy as it stated, “It is becoming more difficult to see all this as necessary to protect the national interest and harder to avoid the conclusion that it is instead designed to protect the political security of the Prime Minister”. As the revised Border Protection Bill was introduced an editorial ("Costly refugee", 2001, p. 12) stated, “They [proposed laws] are aimed as much at voters before an election as they are at people-smugglers”.

Two days before the election the editorial (“Back to first”, 2001, p. 10) said that the election campaign seemed to be ending on the same “dangerous agenda” as it started – boat people – while the next day stating that, “The cynical poll-driven approach has perverted the election” (“Renewal lies”, 2001, p. 12). But in spite of all this criticism, *The Australian* still claimed that the re-election of the coalition was the best alternative for Australia.

Dennis Shanahan (2001a, p. 2), *The Australian’s* political editor, pointed to Howard’s strategic use of the media on the 31st of August stating, “It would appear that inside Howard’s brain there are more synapses connecting the “crisis” and “media” lobes than any others”, while the paper’s foreign editor, Greg Sheridan (2001b, p. 12), acknowledged on the 1st September that the government deliberately tried to “inflame public opinion against Muslims and refugees from the Middle East and Afghanistan” in an attempt to win the election.

Journalist Matt Price (2001a, p. 6) looked at the issue in a humorous way writing that Foreign Minister Alexander Downer had admitted that an upcoming election did have an impact on the Tampa incident, namely the Norwegian one. Price wrote, “It’s comforting to know that while grubby Scandinavians play politics...our MPs desist”.

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According to the chief political correspondent for the Seven network, Glenn Milne (2001, p. 13), the boat people issue was used by Howard to win back voters who had gone over to One Nation, describing the government's election campaign as "ruthlessly brilliant". Paul Kelly (2001b, p. 24), international editor, also pointed to how One Nation seemed to have been weakened as the government's policy on boat people had undermined their party.

Kelly (2001c, p. 29) came close to acknowledging the government's carefully calculated strategy on the 22nd of September, pointing out that even if Howard and Ruddock made policy as they went along, they knew what they were aiming for. He further argued that even though Beazley had supported the government's stand, he was left with a dilemma, as "Labor cannot claim Howard manipulated the entire affair as a vote-winning stunt since a responsible Opposition would reveal and oppose any such policy corruption". Kelly (2001b, p. 21) took this argument further a week later, stating: "Howard has not just exploited the situation. Let's recognise his skill – Howard was pivotal in creating some of these circumstances; witness the Tampa decision and turning back boats. Howard knows he has a unifying theme in the dramas of terror, war, bust and boat people that have dominated our news coverage...".

The day before the election The Australian finally elaborated that the boat people issue had been a political issue long before the Tampa incident, although largely unspoken of. Shanahan (2001b, p. 13), political editor, pointed this out while further claiming that both Labor and Liberals pollsters and researchers had known that this could be an effective issue, but he fell short of stating that the boat people issue was part of a government plan to reinvent themselves.

After the coalition had been re-elected, Shanahan (2001c, p. 14) continued his insightful thoughts, stating that the government had known for a long time that the boat people problem needed to be addressed. To turn back a leaky boat with asylum-seekers raised concerns of death and injury, but the Tampa as a seaworthy vessel gave the government this opportunity. "The Coalition galvanised public opinion by turning back the Norwegian vessel as the first implementation of its, so far, impotent policy", and Labor was taken by surprise. Shanahan claimed that it was neither the Tampa nor 9/11, which gave Howard the election victory, but his ability to adapt.

The importance of the upcoming election on the government's tough stand did not come up often in the hard news articles. Interestingly the first time the point was raised, was when The Australian referred to Aftenposten in an article on the 31st of August about the Norwegian media's disbelief over how the Australian government had handled the incident. The article stated, "The Aftenposten nominated the pre-election mood in Australia as the key driver behind
the Australian Government's anti-immigration stand" (Sutherland & Harvey, 2001, p. 3), but *The Australian* did not take the issue any further that day.

The paper reported on the 7th of September that Howard denied having "exploited the Tampa case for electoral purposes" (Price, 2001b, p. 2), but this was not elaborated upon. An article about how polls showed greater support for the coalition than the ALP on the 11th of September said that privately Liberal and Labor strategists agreed that the government's strategy of keeping the asylum seeker issue in the media "has been to deny the ALP any coverage of the issues on which it wants to fight the election: the GST, public health, public education and aged care" (Henderson, 2001d, p. 2).

The cover story on the 1st of November looked at spin-doctors and how they were managing the election campaign, stating that the Australian federal election "has been dominated by religious war and refugees, and the spin doctors have been working feverishly" (Rintoul, 2001, p. 6).

The closest any article came to point to a planned strategy by the government was an article on the 7th of November saying, "John Howard yesterday attempted to woo the migrant vote with a pledge for diversity and racial harmony - in contrast to his efforts to use the boatpeople crackdown to win votes for most of the campaign" (Saunders, Gilchrist & O'Brien, 2001, p. 4).

**Restriction of information**

Another problem with the coverage of the Tampa and the political aftermath grew out of the government's strict control of information, and *The West Australian* and *The Australian* dealt differently with this aspect of the coverage.

**The West Australian**

*The West Australian* for some unknown reason chose not to comment much on the government's restriction, as there were few evidences of these restrictions in the paper's coverage. They were only small statements few and far between. On the 30th of August, the paper reported that, "The Tampa crew has been banned from speaking to the media. A crewman told The West Australian last night he could not comment on whether the SAS had issued the ban" (Cowan & Munro, 2001, p. 7). Two days later it was reported that The Royal Australian Navy and the office of Defence Minister, Peter Reith, declined to answer questions about HMAS Arunta's role (Pratley, 2001, p. 5), while in an article on the 17th of October about a lunch Beazley had with navy personnel, the paper wrote: "The media was on strict orders not to question defence personnel" (Barton, 2001h, p. 7).
It could be assumed that the problem with restriction of information would have been raised more frequently in editorials and comments, but this was not so. Once again it was Canberra Correspondent, Middleton (2001g, p. 17) raising a critical voice, stating on the 7th of September: “We aren’t allowed to know what power our forces have to act against incoming boats. We also aren’t allowed to know how much taxpayers’ money is being spent on the exercise, which appears to be largely one of grand bluff. Ministers refuse point-blank to answer questions on either subject”. She further acknowledged that people might be happy with the way the government had handled the immigration issue, and that they trusted in the government to spend their money wisely, but argued, “even a Government with lots of support is not excused from having to explain”.

Had the readers been informed about the government’s strict control over information, they might have been able to understand that the government carried out a carefully calculated plan. Reporters live off the information they can get their hands on. So the question why *The West Australian*’s journalists so easily let the government get away with their hidden agenda, where restriction of information and media manipulation played an important role, has to be asked. Could it have been their own biases creeping in, as supporters of the government’s tough stand or were they afraid to raise this highly critical issue at a time when so many seemed to stand behind the government? The 9/11 definitely made it harder to criticise the government, but this should not really be an excuse as *The West Australian* did not show much of a critical voice before that time either.

*The Australian*

*The Australian*’s defence writer, Robert Garran, made the public aware of the government’s strict control over information on a regularly basis. As *The Australian* seems to have more specialised reporters than *The West Australian*, it might have been in a better position to raise a critical voice, as specialist reporters would be better informed on the strategies implemented by politicians.

The issue was not an important point in the editorials, but did get mentioned in the opinion pieces. Greg Sheridan (2001a, p. 11), foreign editor, wrote on the 6th of September that the government had developed a culture of “misrepresentation and unwillingness to let the public have any useful information” about foreign affairs and defence operations, while Paul Kelly (2001d, p. 13), international editor, stated that the public had not been informed much about what the navy was doing to deter boats with asylum seekers from coming to Australia.
The issue of restriction of information appeared quite often in hard news articles. In an article on the 30th of August about the Special Air Service (SAS) boarding of the Tampa, it was pointed out, “A communication blackout was imposed on the ship and the harbour area”, and that “Military personnel have been instructed not to comment on any aspect of the operation” (Carson & O’Brien, 2001b, p. 3).

The 4th of September the paper could report that Labor defence spokesman Stephen Martin claimed that Defence Minister Peter Reith’s strict control over information around the Tampa case showed that he used Defence PR resources like a dictator (Garran, 2001c, p. 6). The article further stated that Reith had strict control over information and that he had restrained the Australian Defence Force, including their media-liaison unit.

Journalists on Christmas Island had to obtain information from Canberra, where all inquires were directed to Reith’s press secretary, “who is under instructions to give out only specified information to the press, often no more than a repetition of comments by John Howard” (Garran, 2001c, p. 6). The article also stated that the government’s restriction of information to the media was tighter now than during the “time Australia led the international Force in East Timor two years ago“, which was an incident that will have to be described as much more dangerous than the Tampa crisis. But it might not have been as important for an election outcome as the Tampa incident proved to be.

Two days later it was reported that the government’s strict control of information was still in place even as the SAS commando no longer played a central role (Garran, 2001b, p. 4). The article further pointed to an important issue in this ordeal, stating, “Along with the restriction on access to the ship, one consequence of this media management was to minimise coverage that emphasised the human dimension of the story, helping bolster support for the Government’s critical line.”

A good investigative article showed up on 13th of September, covering the government’s information blackout during the Tampa incident, saying that, “the level of control was something even key elements of the bureaucracies felt disconcerted by” (Chulov, 2001b, p. 7).

Journalists at Christmas Island were in a way disadvantaged by being there, but at least they were able to send back much needed pictures, but a “no-fly zone near the ship meant any coverage that gave a human dimension to the story was minimised” (Chulov, 2001b, p. 7). A Fairfax journalist, who covered the Tampa case, pointed to the government’s strategy saying, “Faceless people are far easier for readers and viewers to remain dispassionate about” (Chulov, 2001b, p. 7).
This thesis does not explore the importance of photographs in the Tampa incident and its political aftermath, but it has to be mentioned that an important aspect of the government’s strategy was to avoid pictures who would give a human face to the boat people issue, as that could have derailed their plan. As Marr and Wilkinson point out, “No cameraman would get close enough to the *Tampa* to put a human face on this story” (2003, p. 80). They also stress the importance of the pictures of more than four hundred asylum seekers huddled together on the Tampa’s deck released by WWL, and argue that had it not been for these photographs the government might have succeeded in preventing the public from seeing what was happening on the ship (2003, p. 70). Had these photographs not been released, there might have been even less focus on humanitarian issues by the media.

The government deliberately used the words ‘national security’ to achieve their desired outcome. *The Australian* (Chulov, 2001b, p. 7) pointed out that, “They are words that any journalist reporting in the field of security, defence or intelligence know make officials drop any pretense of cooperation. And they are also likely to ensure that Howard and his Government enjoy a polling spike out of their Tampa experience – due in no small part to how they stage-management the event and regulated the information flow.”

Reporters tried to make government officials disclose the cost involved in the many different operations around boatpeople, but without much luck (Saunders, 2001, p. 14; Saunders & O’Brien, 2001, p. 8). Most of the information about this issue was in fact disclosed during the court cases involving the Tampa people.

Anthony Bergin, head of the Australian Defence Studies Centre at the Australian Defence Force Academy in Canberra, was quoted on the 27th of October stating, “The restrictions are ridiculously draconian”, with the paper writing that, “The public affairs directive and the controls over Tampa information were clearly politically driven” (Garran, 2001d, p. 4). And at the day of the election an article (Toohey & Garran, 2001, p. 4) claimed that the government’s enforced code of secrecy had denied the public any insight into what was going on at the navy ships.

*The Australian*, as can be seen, tried to highlight the problem of the government’s strict media management, but the government still seem to have got away with it.

**Local angle**

*The Australian* gave more coverage to how the rest of the world looked at Australia in light of what happened with the Tampa case than what *The West Australian* did, although it was not a
major focus. Being a national paper, *The Australian* is expected to have more foreign news than *The West Australian*, which resulted in more attention given to Indonesia. It also led to the coverage being more extensive and in-depth than *The West Australian*’s coverage. *The Australian* showed more signs of analysis, even though it failed to report on certain important issues connected to the upcoming election, where staged media events and hidden political strategies were important.

Mares (2002, p. 30) claims that the Australian media seldom put the Tampa crisis into an international context. Being too focused on their own government’s alleged ‘crisis’, led to a failure to compare Australia’s immigration problems thoroughly with that of other Western countries. Mares also states, “We seem to be fixated by the pull factors – the attraction that brings people to Australia – rather than the push factors that force them to leave their homes in the first place” (Mares, 2002, p. 30). Both the two Australian newspapers examined here looked at the difficulties the asylum seekers faced in their home countries, but it was not given extensive and on-going coverage. The main focus was on the problem these people created for Australia, and not what made them so desperate to set out on a boat-trip so dangerous they might not make it.

**News frame**

Ward states, “It is difficult to describe succinctly the ways in which the mainstream media framed and covered the Tampa story. Not only was the story complex but, of course, print and broadcast media operate with different audiences, formats, and priorities” (2002, p. 25). The coverage was much more complex and in-depth in Australia than in Norway as the Australian government tightly managed it and made it into an event designed to create extensive media coverage around immigration policies. Because of the extensive coverage and the complexity of the issue in Australia the framing is not as clear-cut and no one overall frame can be found as in the Norwegian newspapers.

**The West Australian**

*The West Australian* seems to have tried to report the incident in a non-biased way by giving space to different sources of contradicting opinions while giving a detailed account of the incident as it unfolded, but since the government’s rhetoric tended to dominate the coverage it also influenced the framing. *The West Australian* headline on its first day of coverage, 28th of August, read: “Keep out, Boat people not our problem: PM” (Barton & Cowan, 2001a, p. 1), repeating the PM’s words that the Tampa’s human cargo was not Australia’s problem. Even
though the paper gave oppositional voices space to express their view, Howard got the headline and the front-page.

The next day the front-page read, “Aid sent to stranded freighter, All at sea” (Barton & Cowan, 2001c, p. 1), which simply reported on the unfolding incident. In the article, it said: “Fearing 900 more boat people were on their way on three boats as 2000 others were ready to leave Indonesia, the Government stood firm and refused to let the Tampa into Australian waters”. This information was exactly what the government wanted the papers to report; to create a feeling in the Australian population that a wave of asylum seekers would wash over the country if a tough stand were not taken.

Other articles that day covered the unfolding incident, and gave room for different views. Articles like “Death Sentence fears” (Barton, 2001i, p. 8), which raised concerns that vessels may not rescue people in peril at sea, scared of ending up in the same situation as the Tampa, and the article “In world terms, a minor crisis” (Hedge, 2001, p. 7), where Australia's problem was compared to other countries’ immigration problems, acted as voices against the government's stand.

As the days went by the newspaper went on reporting the incident as it developed, with headlines to match: “Ship seized” (Middleton, Barton & Cowan, 2001, p. 1), “Afghanistan consul in asylum plea to Australia” (Barton, 2001c, p. 8), “PM turns to UN in boat crisis, Call for help” (Middleton, 2001d, p. 1), “Tampa will defy any deal: owner” (Rose & Cowan, 2001, p. 9).

The government’s rhetoric did not appear in the majority of the headlines, although it did in some. “Ship seizure ‘delays’ people flow” (“Ship seizure”, 2001, p. 9) was the headline of a small article where Ruddock informed that people smugglers had delayed trips awaiting the outcome of the Tampa case. Another one was, “My actions correct: PM” (“My actions”, 2001, p. 4), where Howard denied that the incident would damage Australia’s reputation. Interestingly, unlike in Norway the humanitarian issue hardly showed up in the headlines, which implies that the government’s intent of dehumanising the asylum seekers had some impact.

*The West Australian* went quite far in the direction of obtaining an unbiased coverage by simply covering what was unfolding before their eyes. However, by giving too much coverage to government officials as well as failing to understand and report on the hidden political reasons behind the government’s actions, it can be argued that *The West Australian* largely ended up with the news frame provided by the government.
This frame, ‘playing the populist card’, was based on people’s resentment to asylum seekers coming to Australia, and was meant to create a fear in people that Australia was being flooded by asylum seekers. First by creating this fear in the population could the government benefit from taking a tough stand on the issue. *The West Australian* joined the government in its scare technics against migrants in letting the government’s rhetoric dominate over oppositional voices.

On 31st of August *The West Australian* wrote how Howard had turned to UN for help to solve the case, but the paper did not portray the incident as out of control. Howard was quoted as saying, “We don’t retreat in any way from what we’ve done. It was the right thing to do, it was the legal thing to do, it was the thing to do in Australia’s national interest” (Middleton, 2001d, p. 1). The paper continued to be similarly supportive of the government’s line on the 1st of September. “There is no suggestion that the Australian Government is in breach of international law for not allowing those on board the Tampa to land” (Rozenberg, 2001, p. 57).

As the survivors left the Tampa, government voices dominated even more as the government had full control of the handling of the boat people issue. They controlled the information on what would happen to these people, as well as getting on-going attention for their tough new legislations.

*The Australian*

Ward (2002, p. 25) undertook a study of how *The Australian* reported the Tampa crisis, and pointed out that the paper on its first day of coverage seem to have been influenced by the immigration minister’s media minders. This was because the front-page’s headline read, “New wave of 1000 illegals” (Dore & Carson, 2001, p. 1), continuing inside the paper with the headline “Island awaits human flood” (Carson, 2001b, p. 3), as it reported that Christmas Island awaited “the biggest single influx of refugees to Australian soil”, which went neatly together with the way the government seemed to want the issue portrayed. To establish a fear in the public that Australia might have a crisis on its hands was necessary for the government to win back votes by going for a hardline approach to immigration.

But as Ward (2002, p. 26) points out the coverage changed the next day, and the Tampa incident was from thereon framed as an unfolding crisis. *The Australian* seem to have been more critical of the government’s actions than *The West Australian*, in portraying the incident as more of a humanitarian crisis, though *The Australian* did not take it as far as the Norwegian newspapers. There was no clear condemnation of the government, although there were several signs of a critical voice. The headline on the front-page on the 28th of August read, “Canberra sends
troops, but the doors stay shut for boatload of sick, starving illegals: Refugees trapped at sea” (Garran & Carson, 2001, p. 1), with the following day’s main headline reading, “Cargo of human misery” (Garran, Carson & Sutherland, 2001, p. 1).

The 30th of August, the front-page headline read, “Refugee crisis”, with the PM’s statement written in bold letters: “It is in the national interest we have the power to prevent, beyond any argument, people infringing the sovereignty of this country” (Shanahan, Garran & Saunders, 2001, p. 1), which could be interpreted in different ways. It could be that the refugee crisis was how the paper labelled the incident, with Howard’s statement portrayed as the Australian opinion, or the refugee crisis headline could be a comment on Howard’s statement, indicating that this was a refugee problem not a national security problem.

The following day the front-page carried three articles on the incident. The main article dealt with Howard asking the UN for assistance, with the simple headline, “Howard calls in UN” (Henderson, Garran & Carson, 2001, p. 1). The other one was about Captain Rinnan, who claimed to be in full control of the ship. As there were not many other journalists at this stage who were able to get hold of Rinnan, as mentioned earlier, the exclusivity of the story probably brought it to the front page, with the headline, “Exclusive: I am 100 per cent in control here, says Tampa’s captain” (Carson, 2001c, p. 1). The third article seems to have been influenced by the same government voices, who had an impact on the first day of coverage, as the headline read “5000 new illegals on the way” (Saunders, 2001a, p. 1). This made for an inconsistent frame of the incident, as the focus on the humanitarian issues clashed with how the government wanted it to be portrayed. The Australian’s frame was ‘torn between an understanding for boatpeople and the government’s hard line’.

The coverage of the following days continued to frame the incident as an unfolding crisis with the main article on the 1st of September carrying the headline, “UN demands deal from a desperate Howard: Let the refugees land” (“UN demands”, 2001, p. 1), with a more humanitarian focus following with headlines like, “Boatpeople to Howard: ‘Why have we been deprived of refugee rights? Pacific Solution on hold’” (Saunders, Garran & Crawford, 2001, p. 1) and “Please PM, have mercy on us” (Carson & Walker, 2001, p. 1). As the survivors had left the Tampa, The Australian reported that the survivors were now in the hands of the Australian army; a move the polls showed was backed by the public (Shanahan & Saunders, 2001, p. 1).

The problem was that the source-network shrunk as many sources exited the situation as the Tampa incident was solved. The coverage of the political aftermath was more dominated by government officials than the Tampa incident itself, but as The Australian seem to have been
critical of the government’s policy, they gave more coverage to oppositional voices than *The West Australian*.

The government, all the same, was given an outlet for their hardline politics as the paper covered the government’s implementation of their new border security strategy. It can be argued that *The Australian*’s coverage of the political aftermath was more balanced than *The West Australian*’s coverage, but the problem was a very restricted political debate as Labor was reluctant to criticise the new policy and the Democrats and the Greens were given little attention.

Even if *The Australian* should be applauded for its better balanced news than *The West Australian* was able to provide, it still failed to comment upon the government’s hidden strategies and instead reported on the events that unfolded without giving much thought to analysing the on-going situation. Ward states that *The Australian*’s coverage of the Tampa incident shows that “journalists failed to grasp its [the government’s] politics” (2002, p. 27). So even if *The Australian* provided a more balanced news account than *The West Australian*, in that the government voices did not dominate as heavily as they did in *The West Australian*, the paper still let the government’s rhetoric be the most weighty voice on immigration policy. Government officials constantly were referred to without their political strategies being sufficiently probed and discussed.

Even if the coverage of the government’s stance on immigration mostly was not positive, it kept the issue in the spotlight with the government being able to use *The Australian* as a means to get their viewpoint across. Their policies might have been questioned, but their politically planned strategy of winning back votes was not reported on, which meant the government benefited from the coverage in the end.

**Problems with the newspapers’ choice of frame**

As the newspapers reported on the Tampa incident as an unfolding crisis, they failed to analyse the government’s strategy. *The Australian*’s approach, being critical to the government’s stand helped give the electorate a more balanced picture, while government officials and their rhetoric overpowered much of *The West Australian*’s coverage. But as neither of the papers uncovered the true intentions of the government, readers did not get a complete understanding of what was going on.
Section Three: Labelling - Media blinded by government rhetoric

This is a study of the choice of connotative words used to describe the people rescued by the Tampa, and those people heading for Australia by boat to apply for asylum in the weeks from the Tampa rescue until the Australian federal election. This study attempts to shed light on how these words helped to form the public’s perception of these people in the important timespan of the election campaign. The owner of the Tampa, Wallenius Wilhelmsen Lines (WWL), and both the Norwegian and Australian governments chose their words carefully while the newspapers played these word games differently.

The labels used by Norwegian and Australian politicians as well as WWL will be explored as they are quoted in the newspapers. The newspapers choice of terminology will also be looked at, as this will give an indication of the degree to which the official political rhetoric describing the Tampa incident influenced the reporting. This study opts to call the people rescued by the Tampa survivors.

The basic descriptive terms used by the different newspapers, politicians and other sources are ‘asylum seekers’, ‘boatpeople’, ‘refugees’ and ‘illegal immigrants’. These words carry different connotations, and can therefore influence the way the newspaper’s audience look at this group of people. “Numerous studies have demonstrated the power of the media to shape public perceptions and political preference” (Gilens, 1999, p. 134). The deliberate use of connotative words to describe someone adds bias to the news report. According to White, “Reporters should know enough about words to avoid using connotative words when the judgement they imply cannot be substantiated” (1996, p. 174). But reporters both in Norway and in Australia seem to have chosen strongly connotative words at times in their coverage of the Tampa incident where they could have opted for more neutral terms.

‘Asylum seeker’ is the most politically correct term out of the four, for people planning to apply for asylum. Asylum seekers need to have their application processed and approved before they can be called refugees, unless there is a clear indication that they are most likely to be genuine refugees.

The term ‘boatpeople’ is a bit more complicated, especially when comparing Australia and Norway since Australia has a long history of people arriving by boat to apply for asylum while in Norway most asylum seekers come by train or plane. The translation from English to Norwegian is more like ‘boat refugees’. When consulting a dictionary, boatpeople are described as refugees. The term seems to be looked at as a more neutral one in Australia where politicians use it constantly so to avoid giving these arrivals refugee status.
The last term, 'illegal immigrants', is far from being neutral and carries a whole set of negative connotations. From 2001 the Australian government constantly labelled the people heading for Australia by boat illegal immigrants, and the opposition leader, Kim Beazley, was quick to take up the same usage.

It was reasonable to speak of the people who reached Australian territory as "asylum seekers" and as "unauthorised arrivals" before their refugee claims had been assessed. But to describe them routinely as "illegal immigrants", or simply as "illegals", both defied the spirit of the UN Convention and encouraged popular misunderstanding and hostility — as was, no doubt, the government's intent. (Manne, 2004, p. 10).

The reporting in Norway

The Norwegian newspapers did not have many direct quotes, since direct speech is seldom used in the Norwegian press (Vestad, 2001, online). This created a problem when trying to assess exactly what different sources said, especially since the newspaper did not seem to always stay true to the descriptive words used by their sources.

An example of questionable translation is the article ‘The captain won’t turn around’ (Olsen, 2001b, p. 24) in Aftenposten. Australian Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock was used as a source, and the term ‘refugees’ was used in his statement. It is unlikely that Ruddock used this term as he deliberately tried to paint asylum seekers coming to Australia by boat in a bad light. He frequently called them ‘queue-jumpers’ and ‘illegals’, and the word ‘refugee’ did not appear in any of his direct quotes in the two Australian newspaper examined. Aftenposten’s statement from Mr Ruddock was not a direct quote so the newspaper probably paraphrased what he said without paying attention to the importance of connotative descriptive words.

Tonsberg Blad mostly referred to the survivors as refugees even though at times they called them asylum seekers, boatpeople, passengers and shipwrecked refugees. According to this newspaper, the Norwegian politicians used as sources labelled the survivors as refugees. Aftenposten also mostly referred to them as refugees. Asylum seekers and shipwrecked were also used occasionally. Norwegian politicians and other Norwegian authorities referred to the survivors most of the time as refugees, while the terms ‘asylum-seeker’ and ‘shipwrecked’ were used to a far lesser extent.

What is interesting is that the newspapers constantly referred to the survivors mostly as refugees much the same way the Norwegian government did, which can indicate that the newspapers adopted the Norwegian government’s rhetoric. The news-reporters mostly focused on
Norwegian sources, and the government was the main source. This meant that the reporters were mostly exposed to the Norwegian government's rhetoric of labelling and therefore echoed the politicians' terms.

The first and only time the term 'illegal refugees' came up in *Tonsberg Blad* was when Channel 7's reporter, Mark Symon was used as a source, which is interesting since he may have been influenced by the Australian government's rhetoric. *Tonsberg Blad*’s article covered how journalists from all over the world were waiting in Singapore for a chance to talk to captain Rinnan and his crew when they arrived there, and Symon gave an insight into how Australians felt about the Tampa case. “Australians understand their frustration [Tampa's crew], but at the same time there is a growing belief in Australia that we cannot accept more illegal refugees, say the TV-reporter” (“Verdenspressen”, 2001).

The ‘illegal immigrant’ term did not appear often in *Aftenposten*’s reporting either, but it showed up a couple of times. The terms ‘economic refugees’ and ‘illegal boat people’ were used in the article ‘Asylum seeker drama in the Pacific ocean’ (Elsebutangen, 2001g, p. 13), but the term ‘refugees’ was used more extensively than the other labelling in this article. In the article “Shameful and embarrassing” for Australia* Aftenposten* pointed out that most of the arguments in Australia that supported the Australian prime minister were concerned with the survivors as ‘illegal immigrants’ (Nordrum, 2001a, p. 7), but *Aftenposten* failed to point out that this was also the Australian government’s rhetoric.

The illegal ‘immigration’ term showed up in two more article, which are interestingly both provided by the newsagency AP. The terms ‘asylum seekers’, ‘boatpeople’ and ‘refugees’ were also used in these articles. The first article (“Australia stenger”, 2001, p. 18) dealt with the Australian government’s reworked Border Protection Bill. The article stated: “The Senate will soon strengthen efforts against illegal immigrants and people smugglers”. The proposed bill was explained, and it was pointed out that more than 4100 asylum seekers had come to Australia the year before. This information was probably provided by the Australian immigration minister, which was one of only two visible sources in the article, as he was eager to focus on the number of asylum seekers coming to Australia. The second article (“Innvandringspolitikken”, 2001, p. 7) reported about the outcome of the Australian federal election, and stated that a “tough stand against illegal immigration and international terrorism brought John Howard his third election victory in a row”. Prime Minister Howard and Opposition leader Beazley were the only visible sources. This means that AP probably was influenced by their sources in choice of words, much the same way the two Norwegian newspapers were.

In her opinion column, published in *Aftenposten*, PhD scholar Cecilia M. Baillet pointed out that
the Norwegian government and the media had identified the survivors as refugees (Baillet, 2001, p. 14). She argued that Norway should have a good look at itself since the people who arrive at the Norwegian border to apply for asylum often are labelled ‘opportunists helped by people smugglers’ or ‘economic refugees,’ and denied access and sent to other countries. Baillet constantly used the term ‘asylum seekers’ in her column, which positioned her in a neutral context. But Aftenposten did not take notice of the content of the article, since the introduction, which was written by editorial staff at the paper, used the term ‘refugees’.

This is an indication of how important labelling of asylum seekers is in politics, and that this is a strategy Norwegian politicians use much the same way Australian politicians do. The Norwegian government chose to label the people rescued by the Tampa refugees since it suited their strategy of creating support for the survivors plea to be let ashore in Australia, so the Norwegian containership could continue its journey.

However, although Jagland, Norway’s Foreign Affairs Minister at the time, in his reply (Jagland, 2001, p. 22) to Baillet, published two days later in the newspaper, failed to comment on how both the Norwegian government and the media had been quick to label the survivors ‘refugees’, it is interesting to notice that Jagland now used the terms ‘asylum seekers’ and ‘shipwrecked’, thus using Baillet’s terminology.

The coverage of the Tampa incident in Norway quickly died down when the survivors left the Norwegian containership. Much of the interesting political debate surrounding asylum seekers took place after this happened, but this was not reported at all in Tonsberg Blad and only sporadically in Aftenposten, since they were seen as internal Australian matters and therefore not of relevance to the Norwegian public.

The Norwegian government’s labelling was not questioned by other politicians, at least not as reported in the two newspapers researched, and neither was it questioned by the newspapers as they mostly adopted their government’s rhetoric.

The reporting in Australia

*The West Australian* mainly used the words ‘boatpeople’ and ‘asylum seekers’ to describe the survivors, which can be seen as a preferable choice since these are the two most neutral terms. *The Australian* uses the same two terms, but complicates the issue by also using the term ‘refugees’.

The terms ‘illegal entrants’, ‘illegal arrivals’, and ‘illegal immigrants’ were not often used in the
articles by any of the two newspapers when looking at the newspapers’ own wording. The terms were probably not used more than 15-20 times in each paper, which is not often compared to the number of articles published on the Tampa incident and its political aftermath. This is not perfect, but not bad enough to heavily criticise the two newspapers. The problem arises with the headlines and with the tendency to mostly cover authoritative sources, which will be discussed later in this section.

The Australian government and the coalition MPs consistently referred to the survivors as illegal immigrants, with Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock and Defence Minister Peter Reith together with Prime Minister John Howard making most of the comments. The PM further framed the survivors in a negative way by claiming that “they bypass an international credible (system) which is fair to all potential refugees” (Henderson, Garran & Carson, 2001, p. 1) and by stressing border protection. Ruddock was fond of his ‘queue-jumping’ phrase claiming that the refugee places in Australia “are being stolen by those people who have come unlawfully” (Mendez, 2001a, p. 7).

The Labor Party, and its leader, Kim Beazley, were not afraid of using the term ‘illegals’, which restricted the debate about the country’s immigration politics. The fight between the two main political parties to have the toughest immigration politics did not help the asylum seekers trying to gain entry to Australia, nor did it instigate a much needed discussion about the labelling of asylum seekers as illegal immigrants by leading politicians. This was a rare instance of the opposition reaffirming the government’s stance on an issue.

Media analyst Van Dijk does not find it “surprising that the most pervasive adjective in official discourse about immigrants is that they are ‘illegal’. By thus portraying immigrants as people who break the law, the strategy at the same time implies that they are criminals, and places themselves outside of the civil society, so that immigration restriction, expulsion and withholding social services to immigrants become legitimate” (van Dijk, 1998, p. 259). Gilens points out that the creation of stereotypes is a way for powerful groups to “justify its treatment of, or advantage over, an outgroup” (1999, p. 162). The Howard government’s casting of asylum seekers as illegal immigrants helped to justify the harsh treatment they received when trying to enter Australian territory as well as creating support among the Australian people for the government’s policy.

The dominant norms and existing laws in today’s Western society that exist to prevent discrimination and racial discourse mean that most politicians will stay away from “overt, blatant expressions of prejudice”, and negative representation of immigrants therefore is expressed in a more subtle way (van Dijk, 1997, p. 36). According to Riggings the “preferred
terms are those that can save face if the speaker or writer unexpectedly discover that their statements are not appreciated by an audience" (1997, p. 8). The problem was that not many questioned the use of negative labelling, and the ones who did received little or no attention by the media.

The Tampa incident’s news coverage was as already seen heavily dominated by leading politicians, mainly from the government. “Every social scientific study of the press of the past ten or fifteen years has found that the press overrepresents the view of government officials” (Schudson, 1995, p. 214). This meant that the opposition and other interest groups struggled to get their view across.

Since the opposition was on the same line as the government when it came to immigration politics, even fewer voices were left to criticise the tough restrictions implemented to keep asylum seekers out and the carefully planned strategy of dehumanising them by labelling them illegal immigrants. Sources that are not looked at as being authoritative must, according to Gans, provide evidence to back up their claims before reporters and editors are willing to accept them (1979, p. 274). This is unfortunate since a coverage where a wider source structure had been applied would most likely have changed the angle of the coverage in a positive way. As a result it would have introduced a needed debate on the government’s carefully planned strategy to win back voters before the upcoming election by sacrificing the asylum seekers arriving at Australian shores.

Discussion of racist accusations in Australian newspapers

According to van Dijk racism does not receive much attention by the media. “One of the reasons is that racism is still often understood as an ideology or white supremacy, or as that kind of practices of the extreme right, any qualification of everyday discriminatory practices as ‘racism’ is resolutely rejected” (van Dijk, 1999, p. 547). An example of Australian newspapers’ reluctance to discuss the racist angle was when, on the 30th of August, The Australian reported that Beazley accused the government of using wedge politics after they had introduced their Border Protection Bill (Shanahan, Garran & Saunders, 2001, p. 1), but the issue was not given much attention.

The West Australian did not do any better when they on the 3rd of September reported that Howard had denied that he was playing wedge politics against the opposition as well as him being motivated by racism (“My actions correct: PM”, 2001, p. 4). It only made a tiny section of an article where the main focus was on Howard’s claim that the Tampa incident would not damage Australia’s good international reputation.
Another example is when *The West Australian* on the 3rd of November reported that former Liberal leader John Hewson accused Howard of playing the race card (Mallabone, 2001b, p. 9). Howard denied Hewson’s accusations while Beazley did not want to comment. The topic only made a tiny article, and *The Australian* also offered little on the subject.

The newspapers stood behind the prime minister by not investigating the claims further as well as not giving much coverage to the topic. “The denial of racism in the press, therefore, presupposes that the journalist or columnist believes that his or her own group or country is essentially ‘tolerant’ towards minorities or immigrants” (van Dijk, 1999, p. 549).

**Connection implied between boatpeople and terrorists**

Immigration is hardly ever portrayed with a balance between the negative and positive sides, neither by politicians nor the media. The negative side to immigration will always be highlighted, as well as the tendency to portray it as a threat.

After September 11, 2001, a new strategy was implemented by the Australian government to make sure a majority of voters supported the Liberal party with its tough immigration policy in the upcoming federal election. *The West Australian* reported on the 20th of September that Howard had made a connection between boatpeople and terrorists (Barton, 2001a, p. 4). The prime minister’s comments were criticised by the federal opposition and Australian Democrats who blamed the government of playing the race card. But the topic of racism once again did not get much attention.

On the 24th of September in *The Australian*, Defence Minister Peter Reith linked boatpeople to terrorists by claiming that securing territorials waters was a part of the defence strategy against possible terrorist attacks (Powell, 2001a, p. 11), but it only made a tiny section of an article about the Nauru stand-off.

*The West Australian* again reported on 8th of November (Capp, 2001, p. 4) that the prime minister had made a link between boatpeople and terrorism by saying he could not guarantee that such a link did not exist. Fortunately the newspaper took a stand by taking some of the power out of Howard’s statement by commenting that he played on terrorism fears. *The Australian* should be commended as well since they also took a stand while covering the same topic on that day. Howard was quoted in *The Australian* as saying, “There is a possibility some people having links with organizations that we don’t want in this country might use the path of an asylum seeker in order to get here” (Henderson & Gilchrist, 2001, p. 1), but the headline, “PM plays boat fear card”, made Howard’s statement seem less threatening.
International legal terminology

In *Tonsberg Blad* Wallenius Wilhelmsen Lines (WWL), the owner of the Tampa was referred to as labelling the survivors ‘boatpeople’, ‘asylum seekers’, ‘shipwrecked’ and ‘refugees’ interchangeably. This is interesting since on the 28th of August Tore Fossum at the International Maritime Organization informed WWL that the survivors should be referred to as shipwrecked instead of refugees since the laws concerning shipwrecked people gives the survivors the right to be set ashore in a safe harbour, while the laws concerning refugees or asylum seekers are much more complicated (Svabo, 2002, p. 85). Tregoning, the leader of the PR group working for WWL, points out that they intentionally “persisted in using non-political words – survivor instead of boatpeople or refugees – and in turning the focus to the humanitarian aspects of the rescue and the health of the survivors” (2004, p. 15).

Maybe WWL were more concerned with this when speaking to Australian reporters since these were the ones that needed to be convinced, or another reason for the inconsistent labelling by WWL in *Tonsberg Blad* could be that the reporters changed the words when writing their articles.

WWL was referred to as using the term ‘boatpeople’ and ‘survivors’ in *The West Australian* before the 29th of August. After this date they were reported using the terms ‘passengers’ and ‘survivors’. In *The Australian* WWL was consistently referred to as using the term ‘survivors’. Both newspapers reported on the captain of the Tampa’s labelling, he simply referred to the survivors as his guests - if only it could have been that simple.

Headlines

Van Dijk indicates the importance of headlines since “headlines and leads are often the only information read or memorized, they play an important role in further information processing and possible effects of news about ethnic minority groups” (van Dijk, 1987, pp. 188-189).

In *The West Australian*’s headlines the ‘asylum seeker’ and ‘the boat people’ terms once again dominated. The term ‘illegal(s)’ when referring to asylum seekers was used four times, but what is more interesting is that the word ‘illegals’ was only used in one of the articles. *The West Australian*’s main headline where their coverage was structured underneath was the phrase, ‘Entry denied’, which could connote government power.

The big problem with labelling and *The Australian* showed in its headlines. The term ‘illegals’ was often used in the headlines, but the term was on most of the occasions not mentioned in the
text underneath. The term ‘refugees’; was used at least as often as the term ‘illegals’ in the headlines. Even if ‘refugees’ is not a neutral term it cannot be said to promote a negative outlook on asylum seekers the way the term ‘illegals’ does.

The two Norwegian newspapers consistently used the term ‘refugees’ when the people rescued by the Tampa were referred to in the headlines. Much of Aftenposten’s coverage of the incident was structured under the main headlines ‘The refugee crisis on the Tampa’ and ‘The Tampa crisis’, while Tonsberg Blad’s coverage was not extensive enough to have main headlines. A reason for the consistency between headlines and articles in the Norwegian newspapers could be because Norwegians journalists mostly write the headline to go with their article themselves, while this is not the common practice in Australia, where sub-editors are usually responsible for creating headlines.

Editorials


The editorials talked about avoiding racism while choosing racist words themselves. On the 28th of August the editorial said, “Australians generally could be expected to sympathise with the people on the Tampa, even though their plight is largely self-inflicted” (“Refugees a key”, 2001, p. 14). This framed the survivors in a bad light, since the editorial argued that they themselves were to blame for the situation they had ended up in. At no time did the editorial mention the conditions from which these people had fled.

The editorials in the West Australian mostly supported the government’s immigration policies even if at times aspects of it were criticised. But the more interesting point is to what the degree the government’s rhetoric had been adopted. The editorials followed this rhetoric to a much higher degree than the articles in the paper itself, since the news coverage of the Tampa incident mostly used the more neutral terms ‘boatpeople’ and ‘asylum seekers’ both in the headlines and in the articles themselves instead of the negative term ‘illegal immigrants’.

The editorials of The Australian, on the other hand, were mostly critical of the Howard
Government’s immigration politics. The editorial on the 30th of August attacked the ‘queue-jumpers’ phrase while pointing out that asylum seekers should not be labelled ‘economic refugees’ only because they are able to pay people smugglers (“PM’s refugee”, 2001, p. 10). And on the 7th of November the editorial stated, “Howard has given us the bogus battle against boatpeople” (“Foreign policy”, 2001, p. 14). The editorials used neutral terms like ‘asylum seekers’ and ‘boat people’ to describe the survivors, something the news articles, interestingly, in the newspapers did not do.

Conclusion

Tougher immigration laws, which only used to be supported by racist parties, have in today’s society become the standard policy for governments all over the world, and this type of policy is almost always guaranteed support from a large part of the white population (van Dijk, 1998, p. 189). The Howard government knew this when they set out to turn the Tampa incident into a media event where tougher immigration policies were to be the theme.

The tendency of the press to focus on authoritative voices with a high emphasis on government officials created biased news (Bennett, 2003, p. 48) and meant that the Australian government’s negative labelling of asylum seekers dominated the news coverage of the Tampa incident and the political aftermath.

All the newspapers except the Tonsberg Blad wrote about the conditions from which the Afghani asylum seekers fled and the asylum seekers’ struggle to get to Australia, although it was not a major focus. Interestingly, according to Manne, the prime minister and his government did not once between 1999 and 2001 explain to the Australian public the difficult conditions the asylum seekers were running away from in Iraq and Afghanistan, while he in 2003 went to great length to explain the brutality of the regime of Saddam Hussein to prepare the country for the US-led invasion (2004, p. 8).

“No one ought to pretend that the unanticipated arrival of Iraqis, Afghans and Iranians did not pose real legal, administrative, political and ethical problems for Australia. However these problems arose not because these people were not genuine refugees. They arose, rather, precisely because the overwhelming majority of them were” (Manne, 2004, p. 7). The Howard Government therefore set out to paint a picture of these people as illegal immigrants to avoid having to accept them. The newspapers never explored the Australian government’s strategy of labelling asylum seekers as ‘illegal immigrants’. Instead the government’s rhetoric was to a certain extent adopted by the two Australian newspapers, especially in the headlines, where The Australian was the biggest offender.
What this study also found was the inconsistency at several levels inside the two Australian newspapers. *The West Australian*’s editorials had adopted the government’s rhetoric of negative labelling of asylum seekers to a high degree, while the articles in the paper itself mostly had opted for neutral terms. In *The Australian* it was the other way around. Here the editorial stuck to neutral terms while the articles used different terms interchangeably. Another inconsistency observed was the difference between labelling in the headline and the article. The term ‘illegal’ was in both papers used in the headlines while most of the time not in the articles underneath. This really came to show in *The Australian*.

Since the Norwegian news audience was hardly exposed to the Australian government’s rhetoric they did not fully understand why the Howard’s Government’s hard line against asylum seekers gained such popularity among the Australian people. The Norwegian newspapers adopted their government’s use of the label ‘refugees’. This label cannot be claimed to be racist, but it is not a neutral label, and asylum seekers would have been a better choice. This once again shows how government rhetoric tends to dominate the media, but it is less worrying in the Norwegian case since the refugee label is not a racist one.

Political strategies become more effective when the media fail to recognise them, and therefore cannot be questioned and commented upon. As Ward points out, “...journalists who cover political stories need be especially conscious of the political strategies used to influence the ways they frame and report the news” (2002, p. 34). The coverage of the Tampa incident should be looked at as a lesson in successful media manipulation by the Howard government where negative labelling of asylum seekers played a crucial role. Reporters need to be aware of the use of labelling as a tool to form public opinion “given that power relations work increasingly at an implicit level through language, and given that language practices are increasingly targets for intervention and control, a critical awareness of language is a prerequisite for effective citizenship, and a democratic entitlement” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 222).

If the newspapers were aware of their sources’ explicit use of labelling, and made a conscious choice to go with their own government’s rhetoric or failed to recognise the importance of these connotative words are hard to prove. According to Paul Murray (personal communication, September 21, 2004), former editor of *The West Australian*, “most of the media have adopted the term asylum seekers because it avoids the emotions and potential error of refugees (who might be found not to be refugees) and the pejorative of boat people”. It is likely that the journalists reporting on the Tampa case made a conscious choice of which label(s) to use since writing is their profession. If this was the case, it means that the journalist’s own bias sneak into the article when neutral terms were not opted for. It also means that they let their writing be manipulated by government sources, instead of opening up for a more insightful reporting by
commenting on the importance of the use of different labels by various sources.
CHAPTER SIX
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The Tampa incident could be argued to be a politically created media event, designed by an Australian government eager to reinvent itself as a way to win back votes before the upcoming election. According to Russel, “Sometimes it is difficult to detect that the event has been manufactured specifically for the media” (1994, p. 79), and one of the greatest problems with the coverage of the Tampa case is exactly this. With the media failing to understand and comment upon the government’s carefully planned strategies, the Australian electorate took part in a political game without knowing it, and the media, to a high degree, was used as a tool for the government’s benefit.

A combination of factors determined the way the Tampa incident was reported both in Norway and in Australia. The coverage was significantly different in the two countries. Interestingly, this was not because of differences in their journalistic cultures but due to their similarities in their forms of reporting. The routines journalists follow seem to have played an important part in how the case was covered. The beat system tends to locate reporters in official institutions where they rely on authoritative sources, official documents and press releases, and the main source used by both countries’ newspapers were their own country’s government officials. Mencher points out that, “the higher on the scale the authority is, the more believable he or she is thought to be”, and “When the journalist surrenders to this tendency, he or she allows those in power to define events and situations” (1991, p. 284-285).

Too strong a focus on government officials created a serious problem in the two Norwegian newspapers and in The West Australian as it created a one-sided coverage, which lacked balance. It created what Cunningham describes as news “with too much of the ‘official’ truth” (2003, online). The Australian was the only paper to achieve a better-balanced news copy, but even they had to rely heavily on the government as it tightly managed the event.

The way the newspapers chose to frame the Tampa incident was in most cases influenced by their high use of government sources. This was certainly the case for the Norwegian newspapers, although their chosen news frame also grew out of the Norwegians’ self-image, as they like to look at themselves as good Samaritans, who are part of a tiny rich nation with a carefully built reputation of helping the less fortunate. These two aspects added bias to the coverage as Norwegian government officials gave a too one-sided image of the case, as well as the frame of Norway as the good humanitarian nation opposed by Australia as the evil regime, glorified Norway without putting the incident into a much needed context. The Norwegian
newspapers had few signs of any analyses being conducted, and the result was a coverage that lacked depth and complexity.

*The West Australian* went for the same trap as the Norwegian newspapers, letting government officials' view of what was going on affect the news frame. The paper framed the incident as an on-going crisis where Australian government officials' rhetoric was given room to dominate much of the coverage. *The Australian*, being critical of the government's tough line on immigration, as pointed out in the newspaper's editorial on the 1st September ("PM digs", 2001, p. 18), approached it slightly differently as they gave more room to conflicting views than *The West Australian*. The paper still framed it as an on-going crisis, but as sources like Captain Rinnan and UNHCR were given more room than they were awarded in *The West Australian*, the focus was more on a humanitarian crisis than a crisis for Australia having to cope with the influx in asylum seekers. The problem was that *The Australian*’s news frame at times was contradicting, as it let the government's rhetoric dominate certain parts of the coverage, while most parts were more balanced as oppositional voices were set up against government sources.

*The Australian* had more signs of scrutiny taking place than was evident in *The West Australian*, especially when it came to restriction of information, but further analysis would have benefited the coverage. Both papers gave an extensive coverage of the Tampa case and the political aftermath, but the full complexity of the issue was not covered.

*Aftenposten* domesticated the Tampa incident by looking at the case from a Norwegian point of view. The sources were almost entirely Norwegian or sources that supported the Norwegian government's stand. The political climate in Australia at the time was not covered in great depth, and little room was given to Australian sources, especially those supporting their own government. *Tonsberg Blad*’s coverage depended on newsagencies, and only gave a simple, broad coverage of what was going on. As *Tonsberg Blad* is very much a local paper this is understandable, and the same level of quality as expected from a national paper cannot be demanded from this paper. *Tonsberg Blad* achieved the local effect in the coverage of the Tampa incident by using the case as a framework for more local related articles.

The Tampa case, taking place in Australian waters, was part of national matters in Australia, and became an important part of the country's developing immigration policy and the fight between the major parties to win the upcoming election. With the newspapers giving relatively little room to voices outside the country, a domestication process took place in Australia, too. A difference can be seen between *The West Australian*, being a local paper and *The Australian*, being a national paper, in this field, as *The Australian* gave more thought and space to what outside sources had to say. Both the papers also gave relatively little space to comparing
Australia’s immigration problems with other Western countries, and not many articles were dedicated to find out why the boat people had left their homeland.

An election was imminent in Norway, and it probably had a bearing on how the Norwegian government handled the case. *Aftenposten* was the only Norwegian newspapers to pick up on the problem, but it was only mentioned sporadically in editorials and opinion pieces, and no articles showed any sign of connecting the Tampa incident with the upcoming election, nor of questioning government officials about this. In Norway there was no strong oppositional voice to the government’s condemnation of the Australian government’s actions, which led to an almost non-existing debate around the issue in Norway. And as Norway was not an important part of the Australian newspapers’ coverage, the Norwegian election did not become a point in the Australian papers, as it was only touched upon once in *The Australian* and not mentioned at all in *The West Australian*.

*Aftenposten* acknowledged the importance of the upcoming election in Australia, but it was not a big focus, as the paper failed to cover the complexity of the issue in Australia, and it did not come up at all in *Tonsberg Blad*. The Australian federal election was frequently mentioned in the Australian newspapers, but both the papers failed to draw a line between the upcoming election and the way the government had approached the Tampa incident to turn their own election fortune around. The government depended on the media to showcase their new tough immigration policy without revealing their hidden political strategies, and the media went straight into the trap.

It has to be highlighted that the Tampa incident and the political aftermath was hard to cover as the Australian government controlled the incident by restricting access to information. WWL, afraid of damaging their relationship to Australia as an important market to them, did not want to take part in a political debate, and the only ones left to have had close contact with the asylum seekers, the navy, had been gagged by the government. WWL’s most important contribution to the coverage was the pictures of Tampa’s crowded deck, as they gave a touch of humanity to the story.

The press accepted to a high degree the government’s restrictions without turning to other sources for a wider coverage. If they had applied a broader source network to their reporting, the government may have had to open up for more information. Norway with its Freedom of Information Act limits the restrictions the government can impose. The Norwegian government was much more open than the Australian one. However, this was probably mostly due not because of the law but because the Norwegian government did not have a hidden political
strategy behind the Tampa case, even though they had their own agenda as to how they wanted the case to be portrayed in the media.

The Norwegian newspapers handled the problem with restriction of information in different ways. Tonsberg Blad did not mention it at all as their coverage was not extensive enough. Aftenposten did comment upon it, but it was not an important aspect of their reporting, as they were too preoccupied with national sources.

The West Australian had extensive coverage, and therefore should be expected to have covered this aspect adequately, but failed to do so. The only paper to come out of this aspect with flying colours is The Australian. It was an important issue for them, and defence reporter Robert Garran made sure it was covered regularly.

MacCallum claims that the government’s media restrictions during the Tampa incident and its political aftermath were mostly accepted by the Australian media without too much protest. He further claims that, “It was not Australian journalism’s finest hour. The once feared rat pack had been reduced to a somewhat grumpy mouse pack” (2002, p. 59), but he also acknowledges The Australian efforts stating that “foreign editor Greg Sheridan (certainly not bleeding heart left), kept up a chorus of disapproval throughout”, but luckily for the Howard Government “this was countered, indeed overwhelmingly, by Murdoch’s other publications, which threw themselves into full khaki mode and regarded any questioning of the government’s line as unpatriotic, if not actually treasonable” (MacCallum, 2002, p. 60).

All the papers’ coverage could have benefited from a wider source network, where marginal sources had been given more coverage. Former refugees, now settled in Australia, could have added a human touch to the coverage of the Tampa incident, and given a better understanding of boat people. As seen in the analysis of the Australian newspapers this type of coverage only appeared after the drowning of more than 350 asylum seekers, who were on their way to Australia. Unfortunately a large-scale tragedy, which was not controlled by the Australian government, was needed to give the boat people issue a human face.

The importance of connotative words needs to be noted, as the words chosen by sources and the newspapers themselves to describe asylum seekers, helped to frame these people in distinct ways. It would have been beneficial for the readers if this had been highlighted in the news report, but this was not done.

The analysis into the newspapers’ choice of label for the survivors revealed some interesting facts. The Norwegian newspapers, as mentioned, relied heavily on the government officials, and
as an outcome of this ended up adopting the term refugee. This term, although not racist, added bias to the coverage since it is not neutral, and the label asylum seeker would have been a better option.

Inconsistency at several levels was discovered inside the Australian newspapers. *The West Australian*’s editorial adopted the government’s negative labelling to a high degree, while the articles mostly opted for neutral terms. In *The Australian* it was the other way around. The editorial opted for neutral terms, while the articles used different terms interchangeably. Another inconsistency was the difference between labelling in the headline and the article. The term ‘illegals’ was used in both papers in the headline while mostly not in the subsequent article, and *The Australian* was the biggest offender here.

The inconsistency between headline and article did not happen in Norwegian newspapers, which points to a difference in forms of reporting between the two countries. In Norway reporters mostly write their own headlines. This gives a consistency between headline and article, but in Australia sub-editors are mostly responsible for the headlines, which as seen in the Tampa coverage, created an inconsistency.

The labelling analysis also pointed to another difference in forms of reporting between the two countries. Direct quotes are seldom used in Norway, while being favoured in Australia. As seen by the analysis of Norwegian newspapers, reporters at times failed to understand the importance of the connotative words opted for by their sources, and sometimes when paraphrasing quotes changed these important words, which partly changed the sources’ rhetoric.

The negative labelling opted for by the Australian government indicates that race played a part in the 2001 election. But as Marr and Wilkinson point out, “For Howard’s opponents to accuse him of racism was extremely difficult. To condemn him was to accuse his supporters – some millions of Australians – of being racist, too” (2003, p. 176). And none of the two Australian newspapers explored were willing to contemplate that race was a part of the immigration issue and the 2001 election campaign, even though several politicians hinted to this fact.

The Howard government took its negative labelling one step further after 9/11, implying that there could be a link between boatpeople and terrorists. Fortunately, both the Australian newspapers explored took a stand in the end and highlighted that the government played on people’s fear of terrorism.

The main problem with the countries’ coverage was the failure to ask the necessary critical questions, and not to analyse why the incident turned into such a crisis. Norwegian reporters
should have commented upon the importance of the Norwegian election in the hard news articles, and compared Australia’s immigration policy with Norway’s way of dealing with immigration. They could have given readers a better understanding of the Australian political climate and analysed the complexity of the issue instead of only reporting what was taking place in front of their eyes. Had a wider source structure been applied, government officials would not have dominated that heavily and a more neutral news frame might have appeared.

Australian reporters faced a much bigger task than Norwegian journalists did, as the issue was complex, dominated by secrecy and went on for months. As analysis did not seem to have been an important part of the coverage, certain questions never entered the reporting. Australian reporters failed to analyse the then on-going situation, and investigate the underlying reason for the government’s actions, and also to comment upon why the government had such a strong support base in the public. There can be several reasons for this failure. Knowledge about the public relations industry is one point worth mentioning, while another problem was to be that journalists seemed reluctant to challenge authoritative sources because they are too dependent on them. Having powerful sources give status and the public does not always appreciate it when journalists attack people in power.

Jupp points out that, “The politicians’ rationale – that the majority of Australians supported the policy, as proved by the Coalition’s victory of November 2001 – was fully in the populist tradition that ‘the people are always right’” (2002, p. 198), and maybe this was some of the problem for the newspapers as well. Talkback radio and opinion polls showed that the government had a strong support base, and for newspapers depending on their paying readers, they could not afford to alienate the public by being too critical of the government.

It can be argued that the two Australian newspapers failed their role as the fourth estate by not conducting research into the government’s reason for acting the way it did, and by not giving readers an understanding of the complexity of the issue since little analysis was conducted giving readers a shattered picture of the then on-going situation. Aftenposten failed its duty to Norwegian readers as their coverage lacked complexity and balance, and these features were absent in Tønsberg Blad’s coverage too, but the paper partly gets away with it for being a highly local paper – much smaller than The West Australian – with other duties than a national paper.

The coverage of the Tampa incident was far from satisfactory in any of the newspapers explored, but the two Norwegian newspapers could be argued to have done the poorest job as they seemed more preoccupied in showing Norway in a good light, as a humanitarian nation fighting an evil regime, than to report on the complexity of the issue and what it signified for Western immigration policy.
The Tampa case had all the elements to create a public debate around immigration, challenging newsreaders both in Australian and in Norway, but the focus seem to have been on easily gathered information used to entertain the readers rather than to truly inform them, which goes together with Clemet’s (1998, online) observation that the media increasingly tend to take on the role as the entertainer instead of being an informer.

According to Tuchman reporters refuse to “present stories in their ongoing situational context – to analyse the relationship among yesterday, today and tomorrow” (1978, p. 192), a statement the findings of this thesis support. This makes it hard for the reader to understand the complexity of an issue, and s/he is left with a far from good enough understanding of what actually took place.

So how far does newspapers’ responsibility go? Is it their job to analyse and uncover political strategies implemented to sway the electorate, or is it good enough that they simply report on what is unfolding in front of their eyes? The problem is, who will do the analysis if the media do not step up to the responsibility? It is the media’s responsibility as the fourth estate to keep an eye on political institutions, but when analysing is lacking, the media lose some of its watchdog effect.
According to Middleton election “campaigns are far more cynical than before” (2001, p. 3). In the 2001 Australian federal election asylum seekers were used as bait by a government willing to sacrifice others for the sake of a re-election. As Labor joined in the fishing trip, a political debate around immigration issues was almost non-existent. MacCallum points out, “in 1998, Beazley, deeply affected by the reports on the generation of stolen Aboriginal children, had taken the unpopular position of opposing the government’s rejection of its recommendations. To those advisers who objected, he replied that there were some things worth losing an election for. But not in 2001 there weren’t” (2002, p. 55).

This thesis demonstrates the newspapers’ tendency to listen to authoritative voices, and by giving too much room to these types of sources, as in the case of the Tampa incident were government officials dominated most of the coverage, biased news is the outcome as one source’s rhetoric exercise control over how an incident is being portrayed. Allern (2001, p. 303) points out that it is not the professional sources and their consultants, which should be accused of wrong doing when the media fail to be critical of their sources, or when journalists lack knowledge in the fields they are assigned to cover.

Nobody can deny that the Tampa incident was a hard case to cover because of its complexity and strict control of information. The journalists worked under difficult conditions, but all the same the journalists have to take the blame when an incident does not get the proper coverage it deserves. Mencher states that, “The press has to take full responsibility for coverage that allows candidates and officials to manipulate the public” (1991, p. 229). The Tampa incident is a case in point.

It is, according to White, the journalists’ duty to find out what the public relations’ motives are, and not blindly accept the information given to them (1996, p. 46-47). It seems that the reporters working on the Tampa case failed to conduct research into the reason for the government’s actions, which means that, following White, they failed their journalistic responsibility. The coverage of the Tampa incident as analysed in this thesis proves that journalists need to have a better knowledge base for what strategies the public relations industry is using in the political game.

The strategies implemented by politicians to sway voters in their direction need to be highlighted, otherwise politicians get away with their constructed reality, where the media is their tool, and the democracy suffers. Because as Kuhn states, “By first demonising the power
of spin, journalists can hope to create a positive image of themselves in the minds of their audiences when they act subversively to reveal the machinations of the spin-doctors” (2002, p. 66). And when information cannot be obtained because of newly implemented restrictions, it needs to be highlighted to the readers so they have the chance to get a more complete picture of what is happening.

According to Allern (2001, p. 284) it is normal for media people to describe the public relations industry as a threat to a free critical press, which he acknowledges that it can be. But as he further points out the main responsibility for such a development lies within the newsroom and not with the public relations industry. Reporters in Norway and in Australian failed to step up to its responsibility when covering the Tampa case, and even if clever spin-doctors made their work hard, a journalist has to take full responsibility for his/her own personal work.
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