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Abstract

After graphic footage of cows sent from Australia being slaughtered in Indonesia was shown on the current affairs program Four Corners, the issue of live animal export from Australia entered the national spotlight. While debate about the validity of live export was passionate and involved many different voices, an animal welfare frame dominated. The philosophy of animal welfare accepts and promotes the idea that the slaughter of other animals can be humane, whereas an animal rights position rejects this slaughter, regardless of how it is carried out. Ideally, the media would present a wide range of frames on political issues. The public sphere is a concept developed by Jürgen Habermas, which specifies that in its optimal form, the media would function as an integral part of the 'political consciousness and a vibrant site of resistance' (Marden 89) to 'common sense' political discourse, where the public can hear all views on an issue. Obviously the media can never present all views on an issue, but presenting an animal rights as well as an animal welfare frame when it covers human/non-human relations means that the issue can be understood in a broader manner. In this article, a content analysis of the Four Corners episode 'A Bloody Business' and the subsequent media coverage will be carried out. This will determine the extent to which the dominant or hegemonic frame of animal welfare was advanced and also the extent to which the counter-hegemonic frame of animal rights was included.

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Keywords: *Animal rights, animal welfare, framing, humane slaughter, live export, media hegemony.*

Introduction

Since the airing of graphic footage of cows exported from Australia being slaughtered in Indonesia on the *Four Corners* episode ‘A Bloody Business’ in May 2011, there has been heated debate about Australia’s live export industry. *Four Corners* is the flagship current affairs program of the national public broadcaster, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). Many different voices have been heard in the media on this issue; however, most of these have promoted an animal welfare frame – focusing on and seeking to regulate the process of slaughter, in contrast to fundamentally challenging slaughter.¹ Frames set parameters for ‘what is going on’ (Gregory Bateson, cited in Oliver and Johnston 5) – different frames present different ways in which to understand issues and put these issues into a broader context (Carragee and Roefs 216; Oliver and Johnston 5; Williams 3).

An animal rights frame which opposes animal slaughter, regardless of how it is carried out, has generally been neglected. We can consider this an example of media hegemony, which involves ‘the manufacturing of consent’ through ‘excluding alternative visions and discourses’ (Scott and Marshall online).² Debate and disagreement occurs only within a limited framework. Within such a setting, this can benefit dominant interests, as dissenting voices are routinely excluded, meaning that prevailing ideologies are rendered largely unchallenged and are often accepted and taken for granted (Artz and Murphy 254). Wealthy industries that use animals are the biggest economic beneficiaries from the marginalisation of voices promoting animal rights. While animal welfare regulations can be an inconvenience for these industries, arguments implicit in animal rights provide fundamental challenges to their future.

Ideally, the media should present a wide range of frames on political issues, which is consistent with the public sphere. This concept was developed by Jürgen Habermas and it refers to the ‘realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed’ (Habermas, Lennox and Lennox 49). According to Habermas’s understanding of this concept, in its optimal form, the media would function as an integral part of the ‘political consciousness and a vibrant site of resistance’ (Marden 89) to ‘common sense’ or ‘status quo’ political discourse with unchallenged assumptions, where the public can hear all views on an issue (Schiller 53). Topics addressing humans’ relationships with, and responsibilities towards, other animals are part of this equation. It would be impossible for the media to present all views on any given

issue, but according to these principles, in the case of human/non-human relations, media coverage would be improved by presenting an animal rights as well as an animal welfare frame.

In this article, the frames presented in ‘A Bloody Business’ and the subsequent media coverage of the live export issue will be examined through content analysis. Newspaper coverage was analysed from 1 June 2011 (the day after ‘A Bloody Business’) until 7 June. On 8 June, the Australian government suspended live export to Indonesia, which changed the focus from the suffering of animals to the negative economic impacts of the government’s decision on farmers. There will also be a brief analysis of the role of the internet as a space for the promotion of alternative ideas.

Content analysis is useful because it can successfully link the media hegemony thesis with framing research, as well as provide real-life examples to support media hegemony research (Carragee and Roefs 228). The focus of this analysis is to determine the extent to which the dominant or hegemonic frame of animal welfare was promoted, or the counter-hegemonic frame of animal rights. This is an important example to focus on because the episode ‘A Bloody Business’ and the media coverage following this issue was one of the most, perhaps even the most, striking examples of the suffering of other animals reaching mainstream consciousness in Australia (Christensen 31; Probyn-Rapsey 84; Textor 17).

Media Framing and the Hegemony of Animal Welfare

Two important frames in which human/non-human relations can be viewed are an animal welfare frame and an animal rights frame. Animal welfare organisations routinely accept humans slaughtering other animals, as long as it is done in a certain way (Bourke 133; Williams 13). They refer to this as ‘humane slaughter’ (RSPCA ‘What Do We Mean by Humane Killing or Slaughter?’ online). They also consider the consumption of flesh and other animal products, including chicken eggs and cow milk,³ which involve the use and slaughter of non-human animals, to be morally acceptable (RSPCA ‘Like Pork but Hate Sow Stalls?’ online; RSPCA ‘Choose Wisely’ online; RSPCA ‘What Happens with Male Chicks?’ online; RSPCA ‘Shop Humane’ online; RSPCA ‘Humane Food Production’ online). Such acceptance of humane slaughter is a key point of divergence from an animal rights position. This perspective views

exploiting and killing other animals for human ends as wrong, regardless of how it is carried out (Francione 'The Abolition of Animal Exploitation' 24; Regan 26–27). Even if animals are slaughtered in less harmful ways, the killing itself is seen as imposing a harm as, just like humans, they have an interest in continued life (Bourke 133; Signal and Taylor 266).

The concepts of animal rights and animal welfare provide a useful starting point in understanding animal advocacy organisations (AAOs) and their campaigns. However, many AAOs and individual animal advocates cannot be labelled as purely promoting animal welfare or animal rights, as they promote a mixture of both. For example, PETA believe in animal rights as their ideal 'end goal', but engage in animal welfare campaigns alongside their animal rights campaigns, in order to achieve short-term, pragmatic gains (Newkirk online). This shows that the concepts cannot necessarily be viewed as binary distinctions but are more accurately perceived as a continuum (O'Sullivan, 'Conflict and Coherence' 3; Oogjes interview; Pearson interview).⁴

Animal welfare and rights are also not the only theories which provide a framework in which to understand our ideal relationship with non-human animals. Other perspectives include the feminist ethics of care and the animal liberation perspective.⁵ While the importance of these other perspectives is acknowledged, the focus will be on animal rights and welfare, due to the particular importance of these theories to animal advocacy movements (Taylor and Signal 346; Signal and Taylor 266; Garner 161). They have also been chosen because they offer clear perspectives on animal slaughter, which was the main focus of the media coverage and animal advocacy campaigns around live export.

Linking framing to the ideologies of animal welfare and animal rights can assist in overcoming some of the shortcomings of a lot of research on framing, which, as David Snow and Robert Benford observe, has tended to neglect 'ideology and its relationship to frames' (55). Analysing framing in the context of these ideologies is very important, as frames can be understood as extensions of existing ideologies (Williams 3). Frames shape how audiences understand and interpret issues and events, as well as their evaluations of political action (Carragee and Roefs 216; Kruse 67–68). Framing is based on 'principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters' (Gitlin, cited in Freeman, 'Stepping up to the Veggie Plate' 95). Social movement

organisations construct frames that define problems, suggest solutions and encourage participation (Freeman, ‘Stepping up to the Veggie Plate’ 95).

There is a considerable amount of existing research on the media coverage of human/non-human relations (examples include Jasper and Poulsen; Mika; Kruse). However, a review of the literature has found that there is a lack of research exploring media framing in the context of animal welfare and rights specifically, despite the animal welfare versus animal rights debate being the most significant in the contemporary animal advocacy movement (Taylor and Signal 346; Signal and Taylor 266; Garner 161). Two recent studies have provided valuable insights into these issues.

Both Carrie Freeman (‘Framing Animal Rights’ 169–70) and Cary Williams (26, 30, 32) found that AAOs, even those with missions supporting animal rights and veganism, tended to frame the problem of our relationship with other animals as the suffering of animals due to cruelty. This is in contrast to more rights-based frames, such as opposing the commodification of animals as objects in contrast to subjects. This framing shows that these organisations recognise that ‘people are generally supportive of animal welfare’ (Freeman, ‘Stepping up to the Veggie Plate’ 108). Therefore they are not striving to get people to fundamentally change their values to the point where they see other animals as subjects rather than resources to be used, but are striving to change behaviours within this dominant mindset (Freeman, ‘Stepping up to the Veggie Plate’ 108).

Media framing is an important area of study, as it has a significant impact on how people understand issues. Kruse explains that ‘framing defines the boundaries of the debate by placing the question within a certain sphere of meaning’ (68). Presentation of a wide range of frames allows the public to gain a greater understanding of an issue and make more informed evaluations of political action (Carragee and Roefs 216). Such a representation, consistent with an ideal public sphere, rarely occurs in the mainstream media because of a reliance on ‘official’ sources such as politicians from major parties and industry leaders, which tends to mean that controversial and radical views that challenge the status quo are routinely excluded from the debate (Kruse 69).

The media generally exclude animal rights views opposed to the dominant ideology of animal welfare, which regularly confines debate to the best way of implementing improvements

in the treatment of animals. Without counter content, this approach can appear to be ‘common sense’ (Parenti 203; King and deYoung 123). This certainly seems to be the case: animal welfare has been labelled ‘the status quo position’ (White 97) – it is accepted by most people in Western countries (Francione, *Rain without Thunder* 1; Garner 161; Sankoff and White 9). Attitudes to live animal export are a good example of this. A 2012 survey found that 69 per cent of Australians believe ‘that the live export trade should be ended’ (WSPA online), while only a very small proportion extend this opposition to other forms of animal slaughter through veganism (The Vegetarian/Vegan Society of Queensland 3–4).

Framing does not develop in a political vacuum, but rather is shaped by the power relations between multiple social actors. Influencing the framing process requires economic and cultural resources, which is why framing contests routinely favour political elites, who are best equipped with such resources (Carragee and Roefs 215–20, 224–28). In the context of animal advocacy, there are two dominant groups with the economic and cultural resources to shape the frames presented when the issue of animal suffering is raised in the media. These two groups are industries involved in the exploitation of other animals and more mainstream AAOs.

Animal industries are very profitable, with over AUS\$15 billion made from animal products produced in Australia alone from 2006 to 2007. This is more than was made from all crops produced in Australia combined for this same period (Australian Pork 40). The cow milk industry alone made over nine billion Australian dollars from 2008 to 2009 and is Australia’s third largest rural industry (Dairy Australia online). While the economic power of these industries is unsurprising, many AAOs around the world also have sizeable financial resources.

This wealth is particularly pronounced in American AAOs like PETA and HSUS, which operate with multimillion-dollar annual budgets and hundreds of paid staff (Economic Research Institute online; Home Box Office online; HSUS online; PETA online). In Australia, the animal welfare organisation RSPCA has many paid staff, receives government funding and has over ten corporate supporters (RSPCA, ‘How We Govern Ourselves’ online; RSPCA, ‘Corporate Supporters’ online). Animals Australia, a mainly animal welfare-oriented organisation, has 10 paid staff, receives a small amount of government funding (Oogjes interview) and has an office in central Melbourne. Although relatively small compared to organisations such as HSUS, PETA and the RSPCA, Animals Australia is considerably larger than other Australian AAOs focused on

animal rights vegan activism, which refers to devoting most or all of their activism to promoting veganism (Gunther 73). Examples of organisations that exhibit this approach include Animal Liberation Victoria and the Vegan Society of New South Wales, which are both run by volunteers (Vegan Society NSW ‘About the Vegan Society NSW’ online; Mark interview).

Resources are critical to mounting a challenge to dominant frames and presenting an organisation’s interpretation of reality (McLaughlin and Khawaja 425). Larger and more professional organisations are likely to have a more significant political presence, as well as greater resources and ability to contact the media and get their message out to the public (Singer interview; Hensby, Sibthorpe and Driver 812; Kruse 68). Smaller AAOs such as the ones mentioned above are likely to find it difficult to influence the frames presented in the mainstream media. Their chance of getting media attention is further limited by the more radical vegan message these organisations promulgate, which is generally viewed as less legitimate than the ‘moderate and respectable’ animal welfare message of the larger organisations (Francione, *Rain without Thunder* 163). In summary, while a welfarist message is more associated with larger organisations, animal rights vegan activism tends to rely more on small, local organisations and individual online activism (Francione, *Rain without Thunder* 5).

Media Framing of the Live Animal Export Crisis

Research Method

This article will analyse the framing of the live export issue in the *Four Corners* episode ‘A Bloody Business’, which aired on the 30 May 2011, and the subsequent newspaper coverage in the *Australian*, *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *West Australian*, from 1 June 2011 until 7 June. It is important to focus on framing in order to gain a greater understanding of social movements such as the animal advocacy movement (Munro 168–69). William Gamson explains that: ‘Today, we recognize contests over meaning as framing contests’ and that ‘competition among frames within a movement about which one should be promoted and emphasized is one major component of a frame-critical analysis of movements’ (245, 247). The contests between welfare and rights advocates over how people interpret our relationship with other animals and the

actions they should take as a result of these understandings is a clear example of a contest over meaning.

By assessing the ideological nature of media content and paying more attention to ‘what is being said and how it is said’ (Rajagopal xi in Carragee and Roefs 222), theorists can begin to evaluate which frames dominate particular news stories and why. Using real-life examples, as is done in this analysis, allows for a reflective and nuanced approach, seeking to address critiques of media hegemony research, such as ‘its broad claims, its overly theoretical character, and its failure to successfully operationalise the concept’ (Carragee and Roefs 222). The hegemony of an animal welfare frame was tested by content analysis of media coverage in Australia in response to the ABC’s May 2011 television program ‘A Bloody Business’, and its revelations about the conditions for cows exported from Australia to Indonesian slaughterhouses.

There are two reasons why the framing of ‘A Bloody Business’ was chosen for the first part of the analysis. Firstly, it was the catalyst that thrust the live export issue into the national spotlight and the story ‘set the tone’ for future coverage. Secondly, it was very influential, receiving an overwhelming reaction from the Australian public. A good demonstration of this was illustrated by feedback on social media. On *Twitter*, the hashtags #4corners and #banliveexport ‘exploded’ just a few minutes after the show started (Christensen 31). In fact, ‘the hashtag #4corners was moving so fast it was difficult to track specific comments in real-time; the discussion stream was bombarded with opinion tweets conveying shock and disgust, and uniquely, the sentiment was almost 100 per cent negative’ (Textor 17). Due to the widespread public revulsion and outrage after the airing of the episode, the animal welfare organisation RSPCA Australia and the progressive political advocacy organisation GetUp! managed to gather 65 000 signatures for their online petition in just 24 hours, and 220 000 within a week after the episode (Christensen 31).

The newspaper coverage of the issues raised by the program made up the second part of the analysis. The analysis of the newspaper coverage assessed the extent to which coverage was consistent or otherwise with the framing applied in the ‘A Bloody Business’ episode. Newspapers have been chosen partly due to their agenda-setting role, which is created through the influence they exert over other media, such as talkback radio (Manne cited in Bolton online). Multiple newspapers have been chosen in order to account for any differences in

coverage between various mainstream media (JingJing 5). The two largest media companies in Australia are News Limited and Fairfax. One paper was chosen from each of these companies to include content from both of these significant companies and account for differences in the perspectives they provide.

The *Australian* was chosen partly because it is a nation-wide newspaper with influence across the country. Another reason is that it is the News Limited paper with the highest readership amongst the wealthiest one per cent of Australians. This cohort comprises the ‘most senior Executives and Directors’ of Australian companies who are ‘crucial to the success of newspapers’ because they exert enormous power and influence (Roy Morgan Research 1). The *Sydney Morning Herald*, owned by the Fairfax group, is mainly aimed at the state of New South Wales. In terms of state-based newspapers in Australia, it has the highest readership amongst the wealthiest one per cent of Australians (Roy Morgan Research 1).⁶ Content from this paper has further reach, as much of it is replicated in the Victorian newspaper, the *Age*.

The third newspaper examined was the *West Australian*, which represents a category of state-based newspaper not owned by either of the major companies. This newspaper has also been chosen because, while the live export issue is important nationwide, it is particularly contentious in Western Australia, as many live export ships leave from Fremantle (O’Sullivan, ‘Live Animal Export’ online), where cattle trucks heading to port and the ships themselves are highly visible. The mayor of Fremantle, Brad Pettitt, has pushed for live export to be banned and there have been numerous rallies opposing live export in Fremantle (Gardiner online; Pucar and Leitch online; Love online).

The coverage from these newspapers was obtained through searching the *Factiva* news database for the terms ‘live export’, which was restricted to the chosen time period and the above newspapers only. The time period analysed was from 1 June 2011 (the day after ‘A Bloody Business’) until 7 June. The analysis ended on this date because the Australian government suspended live export to Indonesia on 8 June, which changed the discourse from a focus on the suffering of animals to the negative economic impacts of the government’s decision on farmers. From this search, all of the articles for the three relevant newspapers were accessed. Statistics on how the articles fitted into frames were collated, together with an analysis of the coverage and explanations for the placement of the articles into certain frames (Goot 107). For

both the newspapers and the television program ‘A Bloody Business’, the composition of experts sought out for opinion was analysed. The choice of experts is important as it affects the range of frames presented, as was noted earlier, and it also influences which voices the public perceive as legitimate and which ones are not (Gamson 251).

All media coverage, within the parameters of the study, was analysed to identify which frame they matched. The three frames chosen on the issue of animal slaughter were:

1. *Animal welfare*, which involves framing the problem as the animals being slaughtered in the ‘wrong way’, with the solution being to improve the way this is done. The idea of humane slaughter is accepted and promoted.
2. *Animal rights*, which involves challenging the idea of humane slaughter or proposing that other animals should not be slaughtered at all, rather than being slaughtered more humanely.
3. *Neither*, where the concept of humane slaughter is neither challenged nor accepted.

Four Corners Episode – ‘A Bloody Business’

The *Four Corners* episode ‘A Bloody Business’ aired on 30 May 2011 and showed graphic footage of cows exported from Australia being slaughtered in Indonesia. *Four Corners* is a widely-watched and well-respected current affairs program on the national public broadcaster, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). The airing of this program sparked widespread outrage about the live export industry.

This episode was a clear example of the hegemony of animal welfare, with a variety of different views expressed, but all firmly within the limits of an animal welfare perspective. An animal rights view was not presented at all. The problem presented in this episode was *how* the cows were slaughtered, not the fact that they were slaughtered – a central tenet of an animal welfare perspective (Francione, ‘The Abolition of Animal Exploitation’ 24). For example, in one voiceover in the episode, journalist Sarah Ferguson says: ‘Despite all the Australian training at Gondrong, many animals were still alive minutes after the throat [was] cut. According to international rules on slaughter, they should be dead within 30 seconds’ (cited in Ferguson and

Doyle online). Another reason that this quote falls within an animal welfare frame is that it refers to animal welfare laws governing slaughter.

The guests drawn on throughout this episode further reinforced the animal welfare framing presented by the journalists. Although there was disagreement between the animal advocates and industry spokespeople interviewed about whether live export should continue, the validity of the concepts of humane slaughter and animal welfare were accepted by both sides. In order to conform to the dominant interpretation of objectivity, which involves providing ‘both sides of the story’, there is a tendency for media outlets ‘to reduce controversy to two competing positions’ (Gamson 169, cited in Kruse 69). In the context of animal welfare and rights framing, presenting the views of animal welfare advocates and industry spokespeople can mean the issue is framed in a narrow manner.

Some quotes from industry spokespeople and animal advocates were virtually indistinguishable. For example, Luke Bowen from the Northern Territory Cattleman’s Association stated: ‘We in Australia expect that *animals should be slaughtered* quickly and speed and efficiency is what it’s about’ (my italics) (cited in Ferguson and Doyle online). The ‘alternative’ perspective from animal advocates is mainly presented by the animal welfare organisation Animals Australia, with their Communications Director Lyn White arguing that: ‘*We should be killing the animals* here under Australian conditions, under our control, and then they should only be shipped as meat products, not live animals’ (my italics) (cited in Ferguson and Doyle online). While there was debate over *how* and *where* the animals should be slaughtered, the slaughter of other animals was rendered unquestioned by all parties.

Another area of commonality between all parties was that killing a non-human animal did not impose harm or suffering in itself. This idea that other animals have an interest in avoiding pain, but not in continued life, has been central to an animal welfare perspective, both historically and currently (Francione, ‘Animal Welfare’ 3-7). Ferguson states: ‘You say we’ve got to have patience but why should the animals suffer while we help Indonesia get its act together on stunning?’ (cited in Ferguson and Doyle online). Such a statement implies that other animals do not suffer as a result of having their lives ended, as long as they are slaughtered in a certain way. From an industry point of view, Ken Warriner, Chairman and CEO of Consolidated Pastoral Company, spoke of treating animals kindly and not tolerating cruelty to

animals; however, he did not see slaughtering them as breaching these principles. Similarly, Dr Bidda Jones, Chief Scientist of RSPCA Australia, was concerned that slaughter was not being carried out with enough ‘skill’ or with sharp enough knives, but just like industry representatives, she did not see slaughter itself as imposing a harm (cited in Ferguson and Doyle online).

Finally, all parties agreed not only that humane slaughter existed, but that stunning ensured it. Ferguson explained that: ‘Some of the cattle shipped to Indonesia will die humanely, stunned before slaughter in conditions similar to those in Australia. Most will not’ (cited in Ferguson and Doyle online). Stunning is the RSPCA’s (‘What Do We Mean by Humane Killing or Slaughter?’ online) requirement for humane slaughter and the industry representatives accepted this as the ideal process. Warriner stated: ‘Our mentality is we’ve got to get these...stunning guns in soon as we can’, and Rohan Sullivan, President of the Northern Territory Cattleman’s Association, argued that: ‘We need to be moving towards stunning...as our ultimate goal’ (cited in Ferguson and Doyle online).

The RSPCA was not the only AAO which equated stunning with humane slaughter. White, from Animals Australia, also promoted this idea, stating: ‘Even if mark one was humane, even if there was stunning there, workers could still have chosen to do what they were doing in that facility and kill animals in a different way out the back’ (cited in Ferguson and Doyle online). When it came to the key tenets of an animal welfare perspective, particularly humane slaughter, all views presented in this episode fitted comfortably within this frame. Aspects of slaughter were challenged, such as *how* and *where* it was carried out, but the idea of slaughtering animals for food itself was not challenged at all – an animal rights frame was not presented.

*Newspaper Coverage***Table 1** **Frames of the Newspaper Coverage**

Number of Articles for Each Frame				
Newspapers	Animal Welfare	Animal Rights	Neither	Total
The Australian	8	0	1	9
Sydney Morning Herald	6	0	0	6
The West Australian	3	0	0	3
Total	17	0	1	18

In the mainstream media coverage of the live export issue after the *Four Corners* episode, the hegemony of an animal welfare perspective was just as clear. All but one of the 18 articles clearly presented an animal welfare frame. This one article that did not fit the norm was about social media in the campaign against live export. While it did not promote animal welfare, it also neither presented a rights-based view nor challenged animal welfare framing (Christensen 31). The rest of the articles accepted and promoted concepts such as humane slaughter in Australia, the idea that slaughter can be problematic if it is not carried out according to certain guidelines but is not inherently a harm to animals, and seeking solutions that attempted to improve rather than abolish slaughter.

The idea of animal welfare laws ensuring humane slaughter in Australia was unchallenged. Two articles referred to Australia's high standards in animal welfare (Lawson 48; Rickard and Loney 5). One quoted cattleman John Wharton as saying: 'It is not the way we do things in this country' (cited in McKenna and Shanahan 2). Another quoted independent politicians Nick Xenophon and Andrew Wilkie: 'if abattoir workers in Australia treated beasts in

such a fashion, they would be in jail’ (cited in Coorey, ‘MP Backlash Puts Live Cattle Trade in Doubt’ 1). Similarly, one article included a quote from RSPCA’s chief scientist, Dr Bidda Jones, who pointed to ‘substandard practices which would be illegal under Australian laws’, and this article also quoted Dr Barry Smyth, President of the Australian Veterinary Association, as saying: ‘The live export of all cattle to Indonesia should be suspended until the same animal welfare standards as Australia’s can be assured’ (cited in Burke 5). The slaughter of other animals for food in Australia was generally not problematised. On the contrary, it was often lauded as being carried out according to high standards that punished any wrongdoing, and was portrayed as the ideal to which other ‘less developed’ countries should aspire (Probyn-Rapsey 90, 96-97).⁷

The article ‘Economics Overrides Ethics when it comes to Animal Husbandry’ by Brian Sherman and Annemarie Jonson from the animal law think tank Voiceless, published in the *Australian* newspaper, represented the only deviation from this theme. This article linked concerns about the animal export trade to the situation for other animals in Australia, which was certainly problematised. In the article it was claimed that: ‘Hundreds of millions of animals on our own doorstep live lives of misery and deprivation.’ However, the addition of ‘on factory farms’ exemplified the animal welfare tone of the article (Sherman and Jonson 14). It focused on the *intensive* confinement of battery hens, hens raised for their flesh and pigs raised in sow crates. Directly after referring to the confinement of battery hens, Sherman and Jonson point out that: ‘Once spent, she is killed. Her male chicks, surplus to requirements, are killed by maceration: that is, placed alive in a grinding machine’ (Sherman and Jonson 14). While this is standard practice in all commercial chicken egg production, including free-range, organic or humane (RSPCA ‘What Happens with Male Chicks?’; LaVeck and Stein; Peaceful Prairie Sanctuary), this point was only made in relation to chickens raised intensively.

The article did provide some challenge to the idea of humane slaughter in Australia. The authors explained that:

Australian standards for domestic halal slaughter require stunning. However, it has been reported that several large slaughterhouses have allowed slaughter without stunning... [and] Given the nature of the industry, it is highly likely that there exist other Australian slaughterhouses practising ritual slaughter without stunning. (Sherman and Jonson 14)

While this article moved away from an uncritical acceptance that slaughter is humane in Australia, it did not depart from the dominant idea that stunning ensures humane slaughter. This idea was reinforced very clearly, when Sherman and Jonson spoke of the likelihood of ‘introducing humane slaughter methods based on stunning into Indonesian abattoirs’ (14). Rather than challenging the core concepts of animal welfare, such as beliefs that stunning ensures humane slaughter and the importance of the welfare requirement of providing adequate space for non-human animals raised and slaughtered for food, this article actually reinforced them – it just challenged cases in Australia where these standards were not met.

The idea that the footage shown on *Four Corners* was a case of a few ‘bad apples’ in an otherwise unproblematic flesh industry was also argued from all sides of this discussion. Wharton spoke of ‘a few dodgy abattoirs’ (cited in McKenna and Shanahan 2). Kooline Station manager Peter Stammers argued that the ‘brutal treatment shown in graphic footage was not common’ and he blamed it on ‘the poor behaviour of a few overseas slaughterhouses’ (cited in Rickard 5). The Nationals leader, Warren Truss, said ‘cattle growers were just as horrified as the general public’ (cited in Coorey, ‘MP Backlash’ 1). Jubilee Downs station manager Keith Anderson said, ‘the footage was disturbing and the brutal treatment shown was not something he wanted his cattle to go through’ (Rickard and Loney 5). WA Farmers Federation president Mike Norton said he ‘supported a ban on facilities which undertook cruel treatment’ (cited in Rickard and Loney 5) and Heytesbury Cattle Company chief executive Paul Holmes à Court ‘praised the Federal Government for cutting out abattoirs found to be killing Australian cattle inhumanely, which he believed were a minority’ (Rickard and Loney 5). The animal welfare view that slaughter is potentially, but not inherently, problematic was also promoted by animal advocates. Just like in ‘A Bloody Business’, White did not challenge the idea of humane slaughter, stating: ‘Anywhere, *except for the four facilities that are using stunning procedures*, animals are going to be brutalised’ (my italics) (cited in Schliebs 8).

Not only were the problems framed in terms of animal welfare, so were the solutions. Wharton suggested ‘Australia increase aid and education programs to Indonesia on animal treatment’ (cited in McKenna and Shanahan 2). Wilkie argued ‘money should be invested in building abattoirs in northern Australia to do the slaughtering and create local jobs’ (cited in Coorey, ‘MP Backlash Puts Live Cattle Trade in Doubt’ 1). Truss ‘advocated redirecting foreign aid to Indonesia to clean up the slaughterhouses’ (cited in Coorey, ‘MP Backlash’ 1). One of

Australia's biggest live export companies, Wellard, supported 'an increase in animal market handling education in Indonesia' (cited in Rickard and Loney 5). Holmes à Court said 'all slaughterhouses should use stun guns' (cited in Rickard and Loney 5). Smyth maintained that 'pre-slaughter stunning must be mandatory and the appropriate use of restraining boxes...enforced' (cited in Burke 5). West Australian Premier Colin Barnett urged 'a progressive transformation of the industry that could include exporting chilled carcasses or semi-processed meat' (cited in Rickard 5). Pollster Mark Textor (17) stated that 'Australia should export live cattle only to the 10 or so abattoirs in Indonesia which use stun guns prior to slaughter' and the Australian cattle industry contended that the number of Indonesian abattoirs that slaughter Australian cattle should be reduced from over 100 to just '25 abattoirs which meet acceptable standards' (cited in Coorey, 'Compromise Offer' 5). While the solutions varied, they all focused on seeking to regulate (rather than abolish) slaughter, either by reforming slaughter methods in Indonesia or moving slaughter to Australia.

There were many different groups represented in the newspaper coverage of the live export issue in the week following the controversial *Four Corners* episode, including journalists, politicians, animal advocates, animal farming industry representatives and veterinarians. Although the coverage drew on many different groups, the perspectives provided were very narrow, with all voices firmly within the dominant animal welfare frame. AAOs like Animals Australia clearly fell into this category, although it sometimes presents arguments closer to a rights-based position on other issues, such as encouraging people to choose cow milk-free alternatives rather than more humane cow milk products (Animals Australia).

It is necessary to look elsewhere than the media outlets covered in this analysis to get any coverage from an animal rights perspective. Smaller Australian AAOs such as the Vegan Society of New South Wales and Animal Liberation Victoria provided an alternative, rights-based perspective, calling for veganism rather than exporting chilled flesh as the solution to the slaughter shown on *Four Corners*. The Vegan Society of New South Wales argued that one of the proposed solutions, exporting chilled flesh from Australia to Indonesia, 'does not go nearly far enough' and that for anyone concerned with the plight of other animals, the solution is to 'just stop eating or using them and call for others to do the same' (Vegan Society NSW, 'Live Animal Export'). Similarly, Animal Liberation Victoria argued: 'Believing that humane killing exists in any abattoir is effectively turning our backs on an unjust reality in order to preserve a way of life

we have been conditioned to see as acceptable' (ALV). It also hoped that having the spotlight of the country being placed on this issue would 'force all Australians to question the practice of killing animals for industry and personal greed. Not just how, but why?' (ALV).⁸

Not only has the internet provided a space where activists can promote alternative frames with limited resources (Goggin 259–76; Petray 924–25), it has also led to greater participation from audiences of mainstream media content. This has always been the case to some degree, even with traditional media forms, through mechanisms such as letters to the editor and talkback radio. However, with a move to more online news, there is less control over the screening of responses from the audience (Flew 11). It is important to note that while an animal rights frame was not presented by the sources studied, this does not mean that people viewing the content were unable to interpret it in ways more consistent with animal rights. Researchers have to be aware of this 'active audience' and accept that the social construction of meaning is shaped by both media producers and audiences (Carragee and Roefs 222, 227). However, production occurs before consumption and therefore sets limits on the interpretation and use of media products (Murdock 16–17). The way the issue was presented moved many people toward the position that stunning was the way to address the cruelty they had witnessed (Probyn 84–85). This highlights the influence of the frames presented by the media. While the welfare frame dominated the mainstream media discourse on the issue, there were clearly other ways in which to understand and interpret the footage from Indonesian slaughterhouses. Voices outside of this frame certainly existed, and were promoted online (see, for example, ALV; Vegan Society NSW, 'Live Animal Export'), however, the rights frame was missing from 'A Bloody Business' and the subsequent newspaper coverage.

Conclusion

This article has examined the hegemony of animal welfare in the mainstream media coverage of human/non-human relations. This analysis has been carried out with a focus of framing. Some of the reasons why an animal rights frame tends to be neglected in the media have been explored. These ideas were tested through content analysis of the media coverage of live animal export in Australia. The presentation of the ABC *Four Corners* current affairs television program 'A Bloody Business' and the subsequent newspaper coverage of the issue were closely considered. This

study found that an animal welfare perspective dominated commentary across a variety of media outlets.

While many different voices were heard in the rush to comment on the issue, an animal rights frame was not present in either ‘A Bloody Business’ or the newspaper coverage. An animal welfare frame on the live export issue was represented by industry spokespeople and animal advocates alike. There were debates and disagreements, but all within the confines of an animal welfare frame – this limited debate is consistent with the maintenance of hegemony (Artz and Murphy 254). The frame promoting the idea that the Indonesian slaughter shown on ‘A Bloody Business’ was being carried out in the ‘wrong’ way is just one viewpoint from which to understand the issue.

The alternative animal rights frame, presented by some smaller AAOs, expounding the horrors of all animal slaughter and exploitation was ignored in the mainstream media coverage. These organisations did not have the finances or perceived legitimacy to be able to contest the dominant animal welfare frame in the mainstream media. The internet provides a platform for such organisations to promote their animal rights-based message in the public sphere. This is an important tool for small AAOs with a limited resource base to challenge the hegemony of an animal welfare frame.

By limiting coverage to an animal welfare perspective and ignoring animal rights frames, mainstream media does not provide the public with a good appreciation of the broader issues involved in human/non-human relations. Adding animal rights perspectives can move the media away from a narrow, hegemonic portrayal of these issues that excludes ‘alternative visions and discourses’ (Scott and Marshall) and towards a type of coverage that would more closely match the concept of the ideal public sphere (Schiller 53). On the issue of human/non-human relations, or any other political issue, in a healthy democracy it is important that people are given a wide range of perspectives. This allows people to gain a greater understanding of issues and make more informed evaluations and choices (Carragee and Roefs 216). One area of future research is the visuals presented in the media coverage of live export (and other issues) and how this influences the framing. Further research on audience interpretations of the frames presented would also be useful, in order to determine the extent to which audiences accept the hegemonic animal welfare framing.

Notes

¹ Throughout this article, the terms ‘non-human animals’, ‘other animals’ and ‘animals’ were used interchangeably; however, the importance of the terms ‘non-human animals’ and ‘other animals’ rather than ‘animals’ is certainly accepted, as using the term ‘animals’ to refer only to non-human animals reinforces the idea that humans are somehow separate to other animals, rather than simply being one species of animal. The decision to refer to non-human animals in this way was made in recognition of the practicalities of readability when the term was being used so often (for more on the term ‘animals’ and speciesist language, see: Yates 15-16; Dunayer, *Animal Equality* 10).

² For online sources that do not have page numbers, I have indicated this by including ‘online’ in the reference.

³ Due to the importance of avoiding speciesist language, referred to above, I have used alternative terms suggested by Joan Dunayer (“Avoiding Speciesist Terms” online), who has written extensively on this topic. She suggests using the terms ‘flesh’ rather than ‘meat’ and ‘cow milk’ rather than ‘milk’. Speciesist euphemisms such as ‘meat’ and ‘milk’ render the animal involved invisible, whereas the alternatives bring the animal back into the equation. These alternative terms will be used throughout this paper, unless the speciesist terms are directly quoted. To be consistent, I have also used the term ‘chicken eggs’ rather than ‘eggs’.

⁴ For information based on interviews I have conducted as part of my research, I have indicated this by including ‘interview’ in the reference.

⁵ The feminist ethics of care is neither an animal rights nor welfare theory, but is an alternative perspective. From this viewpoint, humans have moral obligations to other animals because they are beings with feelings and people must respond to those feelings based on the particularities of the situation (Donovan and Adams 2, 3, 13).

The animal liberation perspective is similar to an animal rights position in that it demands the abolition, rather than reform, of animal exploitation and slaughter. However, it differs particularly in terms of tactics, with a focus on direct action rather than working within

institutions such as the state. It is associated with the direct action movement, the Animal Liberation Front, which engages in sabotage in the name of non-human animals (for more on the Animal Liberation Front, see Best and Nocella; Glasser ‘Moderates and Radicals’). The liberation approach is also associated with total liberation – seeking liberation for both human and non-human animals, rather than focusing just on non-human animals. There is an acknowledgement that different forms of oppression, such as speciesism, sexism and racism, are built on a common logic and all need to be opposed – rather than focusing on one in particular (Glasser ‘Tied Oppressions’ 53; Best 13). Investigating the coverage of both of these perspectives in media reporting of live export or other animal issues is an important area for future research.

⁶ The *Australian Financial Review*, despite having a higher readership for this group than the *Sydney Morning Herald*, was not chosen as the Fairfax paper to analyse, as the *Australian* already gives an example of a nation-wide newspaper.

⁷ This highlights the underlying racism that was present in the live export campaign (Probyn-Rapsey 90, 96-97).

⁸ At a live export protest in Melbourne, many large Animal Liberation Victoria vegan banners were visible (ALV online).

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