

Refugees welcome: Exploring discourses of solidarity, welcome and refugee representation in New Zealand

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Overview

- Introduction
- Research outline
- Media findings
- Refugee advocacy
- Ways forward



Introduction



Introduction

Acts of solidarity - Refugees Welcome



Research Outline

- 76 online articles from nzherald.co.nz and stuff.co.nz (Sep 2015)
- 8 in-depth interviews with refugee advocates
- 18 in-depth interviews with people from refugee backgrounds



Media Findings

- Overwhelming moral argument
- Imaginings of NZ nationhood
- About 'us' and 'our' values
- Refugees as vulnerable victims



Media Findings

*“some of the world’s most **vulnerable** people.”*

(nzherald.co.nz, Sep 7)

*“**distraught mothers** holding their babies and looking through razor wire. People dying ... trying to flee their **desperate and dead-end situations**.”* (stuff.co.nz, Sep 7)

*“**hopeless** millions”* (stuff.co.nz, Sep 3, 2015)

*“**doomed** and **despairing**”* (nzherald.co.nz, Sep 7)

*“**nothing** and **nowhere**”* (nzherald.co.nz, Sep 3)



Media Findings

- Humanitarian representations – empathy, feed into acts of solidarity
- Risk encouraging a regime of compassion and charity – refugees as objects of humanitarian concern
- Stereotypes render refugees speechless
- Non-refugee voices 83% compared to former refugee voices 17%



Refugee Advocacy

- NZRC, Action Station, Human Rights NGO – important to include and be informed by former refugee voices
- NZRC – less ‘experts’, ‘white saviours’

*“I’m not there to determine how they want to tell their story ... like, **I’m not spinning their story for them**” (NZRC)*



Refugee Advocacy

- Advocates have a responsibility to use their skills to speak up for others
- Refugee background communities may not have resources, capabilities or confidence

*“As **a Pākehā guy it’s kind of a lot easier**. I mean get harassed and attempts at getting personal, but I think **[others] get it a lot more viciously**.” (Murdoch)*



Refugee Advocacy

*“I want to talk about the someone who [is] talking about doubling the quota. **What do you know about the resettlement?**”* (Abann)

*“they talk about something **they don't understand** [...] they've not lived that experience. **Let the refugee talk for themselves.**”* (John)



Refugee Advocacy

*“I’m really **tired of seeing the white Pakeha male or female talk about somebody else’s story** ... then they get the respect and all of that to ... be invited to the table, when actually **why aren’t you inviting that very person who’s story it is?**”* (Tayyaba)

*“Please, **do it with us, not to us**”* (Abann)



Criticisms of Solidarity

- Acts of solidarity involve power dynamics, turn 'vulnerable' others into objects of pity
- Stereotypes fail to address root causes and multiple experiences of displacement
- Tension between avoiding stereotypes and getting message out
- Lack of refugee voices problematic



Criticisms of Solidarity

- Need for alternative discourses
- *But* ... speaking on behalf of refugees can reproduce stereotypes and mute/obscure refugee voices
- Refugees largely absent from decision-making process, reduced to 'soundbite'
- Western advocates seen as authoritative figure



Ways Forward

- Refugees solidarity campaigns – potential to address social inequalities and injustice
- Self-reflexivity in practice needed – mindful of reproducing stereotypes
- Work collaboratively with refugees/former refugees
 - more stories told from their perspective



Thank you!

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