Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.
(De)constructing ‘refugeeness’: Exploring mediated discourses of solidarity, welcome and refugee (self)representation in New Zealand

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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New Zealand.

Natalie Frances Slade
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Abstract

The tragic photo of Alan Kurdi ignited protests of solidarity and compassion across the Western world in support of refugees. In New Zealand, refugee advocates and media commentators urged the government to increase the refugee quota and welcome in more refugees. Although discourses of solidarity and welcome stem from humanitarian concern, they also risk encouraging a regime of compassion and charity that speaks more about ourselves and how we feel. Refugees are framed as objects of ‘our’ moral responsibility, stereotyped as helpless vulnerable victims without agency. These discourses consequently produce a generic type of refugee – an imagining of ‘refugeeness’ – that consigns individuals to an anonymous presence, silenced and marginalised by the very act of solidarity and protest that is performed on their behalf.

Situated within a post-development and post-humanitarianism paradigm, and an actor-oriented approach to discourse and agency, this research aims to explore refugee representation and discourses of solidarity and welcome in the New Zealand mainstream media, and how people from refugee backgrounds experience and contest dominant discourses of ‘refugeeness’. Using critical discourse analysis, this research critically examines the discursive constructions of refugees and solidarity in the New Zealand mainstream news media, and the power dynamics involved in the production of discourse. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews with refugee advocates and former refugees are employed to create spaces for participants to share their stories and experiences, enabling voices to be heard, misconceptions to be challenged, and new meanings to be constructed.

The emergence of themes in this research highlight the relationship between discourses of solidarity, humanitarianism, and imaginings of New Zealand national identity. Within these discourses, refugees are stereotyped in a particular way that calls on the New Zealand public to respond. However, as the title of this thesis suggest, meaning is not infinitely fixed. Refugees may be labelled by discursive structures, but they will also use their agency to deconstruct and redefine the refugee label for their own ends, creating space for the construction of their own identities in the process.
Acknowledgments

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# Abbreviations and Acronyms

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<th>Description</th>
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<td>ARCC</td>
<td>Auckland Resettled Community Coalition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDA</td>
<td>Critical Discourse Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Citizen Solidarity Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRNGO</td>
<td>Human Rights Non-government Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICCI</td>
<td>Inter-Church Commission on Immigration and Refugee Resettlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRO</td>
<td>International Refugee Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NZ</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZRC</td>
<td>New Zealand Red Cross</td>
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<tr>
<td>RFSC</td>
<td>Refugee Family Support Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDHR</td>
<td>United Nations Declaration of Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNRRRA</td>
<td>The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration</td>
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