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**(De)constructing ‘refugeeness’:  
Exploring mediated discourses of  
solidarity, welcome and refugee  
(self)representation in New Zealand**

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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.



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# Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>Contents</b> .....	<b>vii</b>
<b>Tables, Figures, and Photographs</b> .....	<b>xiii</b>
List of Tables.....	xiii
List of Figures.....	xiii
List of Photographs .....	xiii
<b>Abbreviations and Acronyms</b> .....	<b>xv</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Situating refugee solidarity</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Research beginnings.....	2
Research Aim and Questions .....	4
Rationale and importance of research.....	5
<i>Solidarity with refugees</i> .....	6
<i>Contribution to knowledge</i> .....	8
Outline of thesis .....	9
<b>Chapter 2: Refugee protection and the principle of humanitarianism</b> .....	<b>13</b>
Origins of international refugee law .....	13
<i>The League of Nations and the interwar years</i> .....	14
<i>Refugee protection post-WWII</i> .....	15
<i>UNHCR and the 1951 Convention</i> .....	16
<i>Refugee protection and the global refugee crisis</i> .....	18
Resettlement as a humanitarian tool of protection.....	19
Refugee resettlement in New Zealand .....	22
<i>New Zealand's official refugee resettlement programme</i> .....	27



<i>New Zealand today: Refugees welcome</i> .....	29
Refugees and humanitarianism .....	30
<i>'Refugees Welcome': Western solidarity with refugees</i> .....	33
Summary .....	35
<b>Chapter 3: Constructing 'refugeeness': Humanitarian representations of refugees</b> .....	<b>38</b>
Normative representations of refugees .....	38
The production of humanitarian discourses .....	41
Visual representations of refugees.....	44
<i>The power of the single image: Alan Kurdi</i> .....	46
The mediation of distant suffering .....	48
The implications of humanitarian discourses: Constructing 'refugeeness' .....	52
<i>Humanitarian discourses as justice?</i> .....	56
Summary .....	58
<b>Chapter 4: Discourse and Theory</b> .....	<b>61</b>
The power of discursive constructions: why words matter (a post-development perspective).....	61
<i>Foucault: Power-knowledge-discourse nexus</i> .....	63
<i>Post-colonialism: Representations of the 'other'</i> .....	64
<i>Development as discourse</i> .....	66
Spectatorship of distant suffering and acts of solidarity (a post-humanitarian view).....	72
<i>Humanitarian imagination</i> .....	75
<i>Charity vs Justice</i> .....	77
<i>Agonistic Solidarity</i> .....	80
Self-representation: contesting dominant discourses (an actor-oriented approach).....	82
<i>De/Re-constructing 'refugeeness'</i> .....	86

Conceptual framework: Post-development, post-humanitarianism, and an actor-oriented approach .....	89
Summary .....	91
<b>Chapter 5: Methodology .....</b>	<b>94</b>
Research design and methods .....	94
<i>Critical Discourse Analysis</i> .....	96
<i>In-depth, semi-structured interviews</i> .....	100
<i>Limitations</i> .....	102
Data collection and analysis.....	103
<i>Media articles</i> .....	104
<i>Research participants</i> .....	106
<i>Data analysis</i> .....	108
Reflexivity in research: Positionality and ethics.....	111
<i>Representing former refugee voices</i> .....	113
<i>The ethics of consent, anonymity and vulnerability</i> .....	115
Summary .....	119
<b>Chapter 6: Refugee representation in the New Zealand media.....</b>	<b>121</b>
Refugee Representation.....	121
<i>Refugees overseas (the European/Syrian refugee crisis)</i> .....	122
<i>Former refugees in New Zealand</i> .....	126
<i>Photos and photo captions</i> .....	131
Who is speaking?.....	138
Advocates on refugee representation .....	141
<i>Breaking down stereotypes</i> .....	141
<i>Strength-based messaging: What refugees contribute</i> .....	147
<i>Value-based messaging: Why we should care about refugees</i> .....	149
Speaking on behalf of others.....	151

Summary.....	157
<b>Chapter 7: Welcoming refugees is “the Kiwi way” .....</b>	<b>159</b>
Overview of media articles.....	159
Ethical and moral arguments.....	160
<i>The moral imperative to act.....</i>	<i>163</i>
<i>Shame on you.....</i>	<i>166</i>
<i>Facts and figures: the weight of evidence.....</i>	<i>170</i>
<i>Contribution vs cost .....</i>	<i>173</i>
Kiwi hospitality.....	178
<i>Historic record .....</i>	<i>182</i>
<i>Conditional hospitality .....</i>	<i>184</i>
National identity: “the Kiwi way” .....	187
Summary.....	190
<b>Chapter 8: Deconstructing and redefining ‘refugeeness’ .....</b>	<b>192</b>
Representations, stereotypes, and the ‘refugee’ label .....	192
<i>Public perceptions: Refugees as a ‘welfare bludger’, uneducated.....</i>	<i>194</i>
<i>Public perceptions: Refugees as victims, poor .....</i>	<i>195</i>
<i>Media representations: What do former refugees think?.....</i>	<i>197</i>
Refugee or Kiwi? Feelings of (un)belonging.....	203
Re/Deconstructing ‘refugeeness’ .....	208
Redefine ‘refugee’: Controlling the narrative.....	215
Summary.....	224
<b>Chapter 9: Analysing constructions of solidarity and representation .....</b>	<b>226</b>
The discursive construction of refugees.....	226
<i>Constructing ‘refugeeness’ in the NZ media .....</i>	<i>228</i>
<i>Advocacy and representation: Speaking on behalf of others.....</i>	<i>232</i>
Acts of Solidarity: ‘Refugees Welcome’ .....	239

<i>Distant suffering and the moral duty to act</i> .....	240
<i>The “Kiwi way”: National identity and the humanitarian imagination</i> .....	243
De-constructing ‘refugeeness’ .....	248
<i>Redefining ‘refugee’</i> .....	249
<i>Refugee labelling and notions of (un)belonging</i> .....	252
The intersection between discourse, solidarity, and agency .....	257
Summary .....	260
<b>Chapter 10: Solidarity as justice</b> .....	<b>263</b>
Responding to the refugee crisis: Representation and solidarity.....	263
<i>Disempowering and stigmatising nature of humanitarian discourses</i> .....	267
<i>Discourse and agency</i> .....	268
Solidarity as justice: Moving forward.....	269
<i>Holistic representation</i> .....	270
<i>Responsible advocacy</i> .....	271
Reflections on the research process .....	273
<i>Contribution to knowledge</i> .....	274
<i>Future research</i> .....	277
<i>Concluding remarks</i> .....	278
<b>Appendix 1: Media articles analysed</b> .....	<b>281</b>
<b>New Zealand Herald (nzherald.co.nz)</b> .....	281
<b>Stuff (stuff.co.nz)</b> .....	284
<b>Appendix 2: Semi-structured interview schedule: Former refugees</b> .....	<b>290</b>
<b>Appendix 3: Semi-structured interview schedule: Refugee advocates and communications specialists</b> .....	<b>292</b>
<b>Appendix 4: Letter of invitation</b> .....	<b>293</b>
<b>Appendix 5: Information sheet: Former refugees</b> .....	<b>295</b>

<b>Appendix 6: Information sheet: Refugee advocates and communications specialists.....</b>	<b>298</b>
<b>Appendix 7: Consent form: Former refugees .....</b>	<b>300</b>
<b>Appendix 8: Consent form: Refugee Advocates and communications specialists.....</b>	<b>302</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>305</b>

# Tables, Figures, and Photographs

## List of Tables

Table 1: Nationalities of refugees resettled in New Zealand (1944-present).....	26
Table 2: Data Collection Methods.....	104
Table 3: Breakdown of Media Coverage.....	106
Table 4: Migrant vs Refugee.....	122
Table 5: Photograph subjects .....	132
Table 6: Refugee representation (NZH and Stuff) .....	135
Table 7: People interviewed for news articles.....	138
Table 8: Non-refugee vs former refugee voices (news articles).....	139
Table 9: Non-refugee vs former refugee voices (all articles).....	140

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Representation conceptual framework.....	91
Figure 2: Photo of anonymous refugees/migrants (screenshot from Stuff.co.nz, 3 Sep 2015) .....	134
Figure 3: Example of a photo taken with a telephoto lens (screenshot from nzherald.co.nz, 5 Sep 2015) .....	134
Figure 4: Example of a photo of former refugees in NZ (screenshot from stuff.co.nz, 4 Sep 2015) .....	135
Figure 5: Example of the terms refugee/migrant used in both headline and caption (screenshot from stuff.co.nz, 6 Sep 2015).....	137
Figure 6: Example of photo taken with a wide angle lens and a semi-personalised caption (screenshot from nzherald.co.nz, 4 Sep 2015) .....	137
Figure 7: Refugee representation and solidarity conceptual framework.....	227

## List of Photographs

Photograph 1: An example of humanitarian and securitisation representation of refugees in the media.....	39
Photograph 2: Securitisation discourses in the media.....	40
Photograph 3: UNHCR humanitarian campaign. Photo: UNHCR .....	42
Photograph 4: New Zealanders Now - From Refugees to Kiwis exhibition. Photo: Nando Azevedo.....	216

Photograph 5: The Journey of a Million Miles - Following Steps installation on Waiheke Island. Photo: Natalie Slade..... 217

Photograph 6: The Journey of a Million Miles - Following Steps installation on Waiheke Island. Photo: Natalie Slade..... 217

Photograph 7: Sakina outside the shipping container where she screened her short film and a screen shot from the video. Photo: Sakina ..... 221

# Abbreviations and Acronyms

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



