Resisting the Disempowering Discourses that Dominate Refugee Resettlement in NZ

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‘REFUGEE’
Refugees

Individuals living outside their country of nationality who are unable or unwilling to return to that country due to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

The United Nations 1951 Convention
Discourses of Refugee Resettlement

‘Trauma’

Pathologizes refugees (PTSD) & resettlement workers (VT)

Pre-flight & flight trauma vs. post-flight trauma
Discourses of Refugee Resettlement Neglects:

Discourses of Survival & Resilience

Prevalence rates of PTSD

Negative Resettlement Experiences

Personal & Professional Growth (VR & VPTG)
Methodological Approach

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

Discourse – Power – Subject

Powerful use practices to privilege particular discourse(s) & produce subjects

Postcolonialism Process AND Product
Methodological Approach & Aim

Semi-structured interviews

Examine the extent to which the disempowering discourses that dominate resettlement are RESISTED and/or REINFORCED by resettlement workers in New Zealand.
Acts of RESISTANCE (5) from Former Refugees (2), Migrants (2) & NZ European (1) Engaged in Resettlement
Male, former refugee, engaged in a practical capacity

‘I think we have only certain images about refugees. When you hear ‘refugee’ it looks like somebody is scared, it means somebody escaped and they have no options. We need to change that idea about refugees. We need to focus on the positive side of their lives. How they managed to survive. How they were able to succeed here in New Zealand.’
Female, NZ European, engaged in a practical capacity

There is the reaction of ‘Oh those poor people’. ‘Oh you're just amazing helping them’. ‘Oh how do you cope? It's disempowering for everybody. It's disempowering for the refugee communities. It's disempowering for people working in the sector. It's disempowering for me. I want people to see refugees as skilled, intelligent, talented people who come from really diverse backgrounds.’
Male, migrant, engaged in a therapeutic capacity

Everybody we see just has some incredible tale of adversity and resilience. It’s a horrible clique but it really does feel like a privilege to hear these stories. I guess what I’d like people to know about refugees is that they’re not helpless individuals who we should all pity and wrap in cotton wool. They’re people. People with skills. People with attributes.”
Female, migrant, engaged in a practical capacity

‘I find that there is not enough encouragement about what they are actually achieving here. I see it across all professionals, particularly Kiwis. ‘Oh it was so horrible there and now you arrived to paradise’ This is not paradise.’
Female, former refugee engaged in a therapeutic capacity

‘For refugees who come to New Zealand, it’s not only their task to resettle. It’s our mutual task.’
Conclusion

Resettlement = Resilience & Reward

Responsibility for resettlement

Reflect on ‘REFUGEE’ words

Recognize how WE talk about refugees has implications for how others perceive resettling refugees AND how resettling refugees perceive THEMSELVES and their PLACE in NZ society
References


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