“GIMME SHELTER”: SHIFTING CONSCIOUSNESS ABOUT REFUGEES IN NEW ZEALAND

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Source: Stuff, 2015
you broke the ocean in half to be here. 
only to meet nothing that wants you.

— immigrant
QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

How refugees are constructed in New Zealand through history and the present?

‘Gimme Shelter’ – Shifting consciousness about refugees in New Zealand

What is the role of ‘othering’ in constructing refugees?

How does Edward Said’s Orientalism speak to the notion of ‘othering’ in the current context?

Source: The Daily Blog, 2015
New Zealand is a ‘settler’ nation populated by ‘boat people’
The three stages of immigration to New Zealand according to Spoonley and Bedford (2012, p.51-52)

- The first spans the period from 1840 to 1960 – From the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi that confirmed the status of New Zealand as a British colony, immigration policies reflected the ambition of recreating a country that embodied what were seen as the virtues of Britain and of being British.
The second phase, from about 1950s/1960s to the 1980s, produced a new set of ambitions. The nation as a single community and a colony of the British crown was challenged, with greater recognition of Māori and their rights. During this phase a Labour Prime Minister in the 1970s, Norman Kirk, identified the importance of building our Asia-Pacific connections. This led to a more lenient immigration policy for Pacific nations annexed as colonies of the British government then taken over by New Zealand, such as the Cook Islands, Samoa, Niue and Tokelau.
The third phase was marked by major changes to immigration policy from 1986. For the first time, this policy no longer reflected a privileging of ‘white’, specifically British, immigrants.
New Zealand

- European: 66%
- Māori: 13%
- Asian: 11%
- Pacific Zealander: 7%
- Others: 1%
- New: 2%

Auckland

- European: 54%
- Māori: 10%
- Asian: 21%
- Pacific Zealander: 14%
- New Zealander: 1%

Combined Ethnic and Māori population of New Zealand 34%
Auckland 46%
Refugees in New Zealand

- Beginning of WW 2 – 500 wives and children from China
- 1930s Jewish refugees escaping Nazism. 50,000 applications from German Jews for New Zealand entry prior to WW2 – 1,100 admitted. (A. Beaglehole, 1988, p.15)
- 1944 – 800 Polish people (734 of whom were orphans and women)
New Zealand response to refugees

“Non-Jewish applicants are regarded as a more suitable type of immigrant.” (Edwin Dudley Good, Comptroller of Customs in the mid 1930s. Quoted in Beaglehole, A Small Price to Pay, 1988, p. 16)

“There is a major difficulty of absorbing these people in our cultural life without raising a feeling of antipathy to them.” Walter Nash, Minister of Customs in New Zealand’s first Labour Government which took office in 1936, shared the same view. (Ibid).
New Zealand response to refugees

“Now that the war is almost at an end in Europe, cannot some arrangement be made to send all the foreign refugees back to their respective countries to help to build up those places again?..... When the Polish children whom we have here as guests return to Poland, cannot a large transport take Jewish and alien refugees back to Europe as well? It would be a great thing for our own fighting men if this could be done – and I cannot see why it cannot – and surely it’s up to us to see that it is.” (Auckland Star, After the European War, 7 April, 1945).
Refugees in New Zealand

- Between 1945 and the early 1970s – refugees from Hungary, Uganda, Czechoslovakia, Chile, Eastern Europe, Middle East, Chinese from Indonesia (54), Russian Christians (80 families) from China, Chinese orphans (50) from Hong Kong
- 1975-1994 – 5,200 Cambodians, 4,500 Vietnamese, 1,200 Laotians
- Between 1979 and 2010 – 23,000 quota refuges from over 50 different countries
- Vietnam, Iraq, Middle East, Africa (Somali and Ethiopia), former Yugoslavia (Bosnian and Kosovar Albanians)
- In the 21st century – Afghanistan, Iraq, Myanmar, Nepal and Colombia
- 600 Syrian refugees over two and a half years + 150 places as part of an annual quota –from 2016.
Refugees in New Zealand

- 1987 Refugee Quota Programme - 750 per year
- In 2015 New Zealand was ranked 90th in the world by the UN for resettlement on an actual cost invested basis
- 116th per capita within a financial comparisons model (Amnesty International, 2016)
- By 2018 – a new quota – 1000
- 2015 – 65.3M displaced people worldwide. One person in 113 is displaced from their home by conflict and persecution (Global Trends Forced Displacement in 20015. (2016))
"I think we can do better, but we can't do that while we've got mass immigration. And if we're going to do it, let's bring the women and children and tell some of the men to go back and fight for their own country's freedom, like we are." (NZ Herald, Sept, 2015)
"You are saying to them, 'go and fight for your freedom'. But in Syria at the moment there are, according to the BBC, 1000 different rebel groups - which one do you want them to fight for?" (NZ Herald, Sep 8, 2015)
New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern

- Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern reaffirms pledge to take Manus Island refugees (150 people)
- Jacinda Ardern offers $3 million for refugees and asylum seekers on Manus Island and Nauru
- Change of tide?
Contracting “us-others” dichotomy

• In relations to the Middle East (Said’s “Orient”) the ideas of power and powerlessness, manifested through the imperial gaze were crucial in defining interiority and exteriority (us-others).

• Following Foucault’s ideas of how power and knowledge are inextricably linked, Said took the argument about otherness one step further, establishing that powerlessness and otherness are also inextricably linked.
Philomena Essed:

Power exists as long as the group stays together against the “others”... Exercising power over other people affects them, through action or inaction... whether or not those who exercise power are aware of the success or consequences of their practices and whether or not the other party is aware of the power being exercised over him or her.”

https://outersociologist.com/otherness-resources/
Gimme Shelter is a project hosted by Unitec which seeks to better understand some of the highly complex circumstances that influence the existence of refugees who have settled in New Zealand.

The project takes as its starting point the notion that there is not one single category of people known as 'refugees' and that displaced people from many different cultures (more than 30 of them) and many different language groups and religions face specific challenges in adjusting to life in New Zealand today.
The Gimme Shelter project focuses on asylum seekers, refugees and former refugees living in New Zealand today.

The aims of the first part of this project are: To consult with knowledgeable stakeholders about the types of questions that can be asked of small invited groups (focus groups/forums which will be conducted during Phase 2) concerning their experience of living in New Zealand.

Source: The Daily Blog, 2015
WHY THE CONSULTATION IS SO IMPORTANT?

- Consult with the people who are the focus of the study.
- Consult about the kind of outcomes they want to see.
- Consult on how can we contribute towards producing these outcomes.
- The aim is to entice those who have been consulted to act in an advisory capacity on an ongoing basis.

Source: Otago Daily Times, 2017
STAKEHOLDERS AND AGENCIES INVOLVED

- Red Cross (Auckland & Wellington)
- English Language Partners (e.g. M Class Wellington)
- Local NGOs (e.g. The Auckland Resettled Community Coalition; ChangeMakers (Wellington), New Zealand National Refugee Youth Council, Pomegranate, EmpowerYouth, WISE Collective etc.)
- Ministry of Education (Refugee and Migrant Support)
- High schools in Auckland (Co-ordinators who work with students with refugee background)
Our questions

- Do you identify yourself as someone from a refugee background?
- Do you feel 'accepted' in New Zealand society now?
- If you feel that you are ‘not-accepted’ – how you can describe it?
- Do you feel you have freedom to be yourself in New Zealand?
Our questions

- What kind of short-term future do you see for yourself?
- If you could make anything about your experience in NZ more positive what would it be?
- Do you feel you have freedom to be yourself in New Zealand?
- What advice would you give a young version of yourself first arriving in NZ?
The term refugee.

“People thing that refugee is a person. But it is really a journey. I always tell people that I am a human refugee. But being a refugee it really means a journey.

When I introduce myself I never feel ashamed of being a refugee. I know that other people do. At school we were always labeled as refugees. I didn’t mind this. It reminds me about my mother’s journey. And my father’s journey. The struggles they went through to come to NZ. I feel that I should have more gratitude and I should be more thankful to my parents. It keeps me grounded. It keeps me humble. It gives me my identity. The journey is me.” (Somalia, F, 27 years old)
Acceptance in NZ society.

“It is a difficult question. I think that I do feel accepted in NZ society. I feel that I am. But I often hear jokes such as “You probably caring the bomb in your pocket”. I got used to it. Often I hear this from the older New Zealanders. I understand why they joke like that. It doesn’t really bother me any more. I simply feel good to be in New Zealand. I received my [permanent] residency at the end of last year and feel that I belong here. “Acceptance” it is more how you feel yourself of been here. ” (Saudi, M, 29 years old)
At first, it was very difficult to accept New Zealand as my home, but now I feel more adapted and I have accepted this country as my home. Besides, I feel like I was born here and I see this country as mine.” (Colombian, F, 21 years old)
Future plans

Further study, work in NZ – gratitude to their parents and NZ as a country who accepted them, travelling.

“After I finish with the study I want to have a good work. I want to make sure that nobody can say that “refugees cost us a lot of money”. (Ethiopian, F, 19 years old)
If you could make anything about your experience in NZ more positive what would it be?

“I wish we were better informed about every day life in NZ. I remember that after the first month living in Auckland we went to school with my siblings and found that the school is not opened in the morning. We panicked. We didn’t know about the day light saving. There were many occasions like that.” (Somali, F, 27 years old)
Preliminary findings

Do you feel you have freedom to be yourself in New Zealand?

“ I am who I am. It was hard at school at first. Other kids were picking on me. I got really depressed at the end of the first year. I didn’t want to go to school. I missed other girls who were my friends when we lived in Pakistan. I wanted them to come here. But now I feel alright. I want to do Political Studies and become an activist. I feel good of being here now.” (Afghani, F, 20 years old)

“A personal freedom for me one of the great things I have in New Zealand. I never had this before.” (Saudi, M, 29 years old)
What advice would you give a young version of yourself first arriving in NZ?

Be patient

Be more active in school life

Do not feel ashamed of being a refugee

Best part of being in New Zealand?

Feel safe and peaceful

“I remember when we arrived in NZ we went to the park with my family. As a kid you notice how your parents feel. My parents were very calm. I never saw them so calm before. We didn’t talk much, just enjoyed being in the park, children were playing. There was no war...”
GIMME SHELTER
OR I’M GONNA FADE AWAY.
In conclusion: how do we respond to the difference of “others”? 