

Intimations of an 'Us' When Imagining and Encountering the 'Refugee Other': Reactions and Responses to Refugees' Presence in Indonesia



Abstract

Host societies' imaginings of and encounters with refugees are imbued by representations of identities. These representations act to produce and reproduce constructs of collective selves and otherness. This dissertation looks at such representations in Indonesia, generated as reactions and responses to refugees' presence. It is based on use of a Critical Discourse Studies approach and ethnographic research in multiple sites, namely Jakarta, Cisarua (Java), and Medan, with shorter visits to the Riau Islands and Makassar. Looking at refugee reception as an assemblage (the English term standardly adopted to translate Deleuze and Guattari's *agencement*), my study asks: How do the representations of refugees in Indonesia's media and political discourses, and in situated encounters with refugees, reflect and inform constructions of host societies' identities? The empirical findings highlight how these representations work to produce constructs of host societies' 'selves' and refugees' 'otherness'.

In understanding refugee reception systems and processes as an assemblage, this study uses an ontology of connections between multiplicities, connections that bring together an exploration of the space and place that inform host societies' imaginings and encounters with refugees. Refugees' varied living conditions in Indonesia are affected by urban spaces that situate the encounters with host societies. Meanwhile, host societies' imaginings of refugees continue to understand refugees' presence as a temporary transit in Indonesia despite the fact these transits are increasingly prolonged indefinitely due to a sharp decline in refugee resettlement to other countries.

The assemblage of refugee reception is also deeply emotive. The onus placed on refugees to 'prove' the existence of a 'well-founded' fear relies not only on their ability to present facts of their persecution, but also to emotionally convince others of their rights of being in a particular space, within a host country's borders and/or more specifically in a neighbourhood or a particular accommodation. As such, a study on refugee reception assemblage must consider spatiality and temporality, imaginings and encounters, and emotions and affect; all of which are considered in this dissertation.

For exploring this ontology of multiplicity and connections, in this study I was particularly interested in host societies' use of words, expressed in selected texts and observed contexts, which illuminate what representation, reactions, and responses *do* in the assemblage of refugee reception. This is presented through four empirical chapters based respectively on the following methods: (a) media analysis of 228 news articles, from three contrasting geographic locations; (b) 'What is the Problem Represented to Be' frame analysis, applied to the Presidential Regulation no. 125/ 2016 on the treatment of international refugees; (c) thematic discussions of solidarity and 'social jealousy' in encounters between host societies and refugees; and (d) thematic discussion of rumours on relationships between Indonesian women and refugee men. These chapters are my selected entry points into the assemblage of refugee reception. Each chapter shows how representations, reactions, and responses to refugees are loaded with emotions, some of which function to motivate assistance, kindness, and help that may offer a solidaristic shift in host societies-refugee relations, while simultaneously some contain discourses of insecurity and jealousy that counteract such solidarity.

Through these four complementary investigations, we see how host societies' imaginings and encounters with refugees are woven into the narratives of Indonesianness. These four chapters are preceded by a preliminary chapter of historical contextualisation, on the emergence and evolution of national identity discourses in the area of Indonesia, and reflection on the national language's conscious use of both inclusive (*Kita*) and exclusive (*Kami*) forms of the concept 'We'. A discussion about intimations of an 'Us' in the assemblage of refugee reception offers a window to the story of an Indonesian nation told through examination of migration and movement, as experienced not by those who are forced or chose to move, but by the host societies that have the ability to affect and be affected by the mobilities of others.