

Refugee Background Communities (Post) Disaster: The Canterbury Earthquakes and Implications for Research

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Map

- Refugee Resettlement and Populations of Concern
- Context – Canterbury Earthquakes
- Ethical Implications of Conducting Research (Post) Disaster

Never Shall I leave

Never shall I leave the places that I love
Never shall they go from my heart
Even though my eyes
Are somewhere else.

(Spirit Walker, 1993, p.61)



Who are Refugees?

WWW.UNHCR.ORG

Under international law, the word 'refugee' has a specific meaning, as set out in the 1951 UN refugee convention. In the Convention, a refugee is defined as someone who:

- Has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion;
- Is outside the country they belong to or normally reside in;
- Is unable or unwilling to return home for fear of persecution.

UNHCR World Report 2012



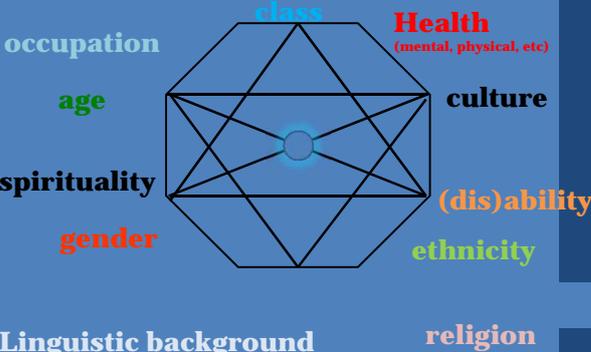
- 10.4 million refugees
- Over past five years – 455,000 refugees resettled
- States parties to the 1951 Convention and/or the 1967 Protocol: 148
- Forcibly displaced (people of concern) – 35.4 million

EU Countries and Populations of Concern



- The top two receiving countries remain France and Germany, followed closely by Sweden, which has taken over third place from Italy.
- Approx 300,000 people displaced by the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s are still in exile.
- Whilst some countries may receive only a few asylum applications in a year, others register close to 50,000.

Resettlement and Some Markers of Identity



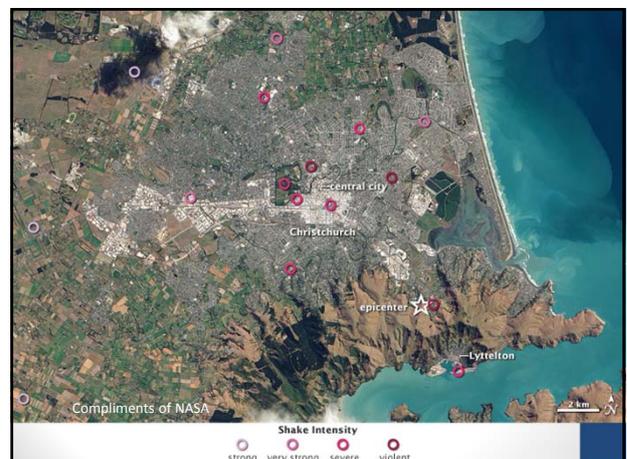
Tasks of Resettlement

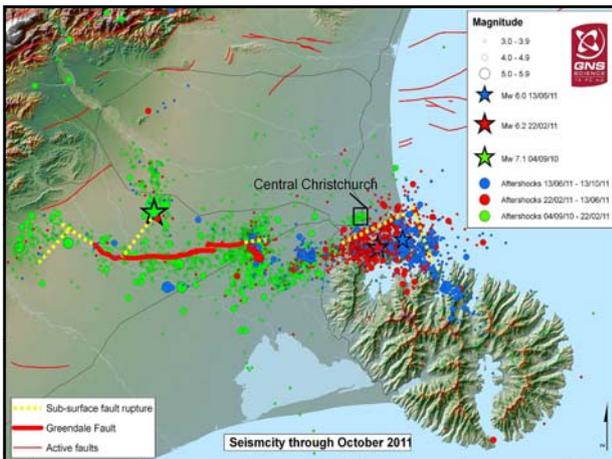
New Arrivals have to learn about many different systems, rules, ideas and concepts

- Language
- Housing
- Education
- Employment
- Finance
- Health
- Legal
- Social mores
- Weather
- Transport
- Medicine
- Forms of Association



- NZ takes up to 750 quota refugees each year





Disasters Can Create and Exacerbate Vulnerability

Vulnerable populations **BEFORE** disaster

- **Intrinsic (rendered?) vulnerabilities**
 - Age, Gender
 - Linguistic competencies
 - Existing physical and mental health conditions
 - Previous exposure to trauma
- **Extrinsic Vulnerabilities**
 - Political, social and economic exclusion
 - Financial insecurities and poverty
 - Inadequate health care
 - Limited access to basic necessities
 - Discrimination

Disasters Can Create and Exacerbate Vulnerability

Vulnerable populations **AFTER** disaster

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.

- **Vulnerable populations after a disaster**
 - Loss, grief and trauma
 - Access to basic necessities
 - Key infrastructure compromised, damaged, destroyed
 - Fragmented communities and communications

Are victims of disasters too vulnerable to permit their inclusion in research? At what point is it ok to conduct research? And who is vulnerable and defined by whom?

Linda Tuhiwai Smith – Decolonizing Methodologies

Research Design



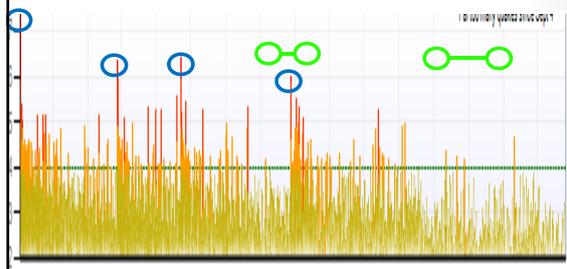
Phase One (Sept 2011 – Jan 2012)

- Focus Group Discussions with three largest refugee communities
 - Third Party Recruitment with Refugee Services

Phase Two (June 2012 – Jan 2013):

- 27 Semi-Structured Interviews and 11 Focus Group Discussions with several Refugee Background Communities and Groupings
 - Research Assistants from Refugee Backgrounds
 - Third Party Recruitment
 - Use of Interpreters, translated materials

What/When is 'post' disaster in a recurring event?



Timeline

Implications for Research – Pragmatic

- Local infrastructure may be seriously damaged or unavailable (research sites, mobilities, safety)
- When the environment is still unstable, uncertain – the feasibility of research in disaster contexts (local and otherwise; participants and researchers)
- Research may involve multiple institutions from different parts of the world
- The process of providing emergency/post disaster care and support may conflict with research priorities and possibly confuse participants/subjects

Implications for Research – Methodological



Authentic Knowledge?

- Politics of access, knowledge and deciding what counts
- Partnership and relationship with local service providers
- Local Research Assistants from Refugee Backgrounds
- Use of interpreters, translated material
- Questions of 'Authentic Knowledge' and deeper levels of authenticity

Implications for Research – Ethical

- 'Layers' of vulnerability – a dynamic and relational process (Luna, 2009)
- Ethics approval was not quick – driven through community engagement
- Being vulnerable does not imply that risks of research are necessarily greater in relation to less vulnerable individuals → though precautions should be in place to minimize risks
- However, the more 'layers' that are there, the more stringent the analysis

Implications for Research – Ethical

- Informed consent and freedom of participation
- Following a disaster, participants can be (further) traumatized by interviews, focus groups, questionnaires or other forms of inquiry that ask them to recall difficult and even terrible circumstances
- Dangers of stigmatisation
- Moving from emergency → post → recovery

Space & Place

Community Centres & Meeting Places

Afghan – Functioning Centre

- 'We have gathering twice or three times a week in our community centre.'
- "Good things for our prospects and our future. We feel this city is a very good city for our young generation, to bring a lot of brightness, especially for their education, we are thinking to stay in this city."

Ethiopian – Damaged Centre

- 'More than half have left'
- "We've lost a lot of them because they left Australia and Auckland. Some of them haven't and so we left a few of us— almost we are alone."

Bhutanese – No Centre

- 'It takes time. Nearly one month, two months.'
- 'We might have to think other options'
- Before the earthquake we think that Christchurch will be our home but now because of the lots of the aftershocks, we can't make our mind

Other Important Considerations

- Gender
 - Those women have no idea how to drive and – small kids, looking after their small kids, single mother with kids. (B)
- Language
 - Most people, they never understand what he is talking on the radio and they never listen English, so how do we get to those people? (E)
- Age
 - The other thing is the elderly people, they didn't have a cell phone. And mostly they are alone so that was a bit hard for them. (E)

Community Response & Resilience

- Land ruptured but relationships intact
- 'Being Together' – Community Centres and leaders
- Comparative Perspectives
 - We passed so many bigger issues back at home ... (A)
 - If you compare the opportunities to our life, that's nothing. We would like to stay here... (B)

Organisations with Established Research Priorities

- **MSF** – Medecins Sans Frontieres
- **EHLRA** – Enhanced Learning and Research for Humanitarian Assistance
- **ICSU** – International Council for Science / IRDR Integrated Research on Disaster Risk
- **UN ISDR** – Hyogo Framework for Action

Whilst the importance of disaster research cannot be denied, no internationally agreed guidelines or codes exist for research in disaster settings.



Key Questions and Possibilities

- Identification of and collaborative approach with local service providers and key community leaders
- Critical engagement with trauma, vulnerability – a layered approach? What dynamic and relational layers are present in any given context?
- Thinking 'Beyond Do No Harm' – MacKenzie et al (2007)
 - What might reciprocity possibility mean?
- Capacity Building
- Reporting back

Possibilities – Ethics Review

- Pre-established applications, opportunity for expedited review
- Where possible, the importance of iterative processes that respond to different needs and contexts that deepen our analysis of the ethical considerations required in a particular setting (across time, place, culture, etc)
- Ethics repository of high quality studies that have addressed ethical issues in the past
- New Zealand Ethics Committee

The Ethics Application Repository



Hope

So if people work together... maybe the city might not be that beautiful but what makes a city beautiful is not really the buildings. Mostly the people actually make the city beautiful. As long as the people stay friendly and you feel you can belong then there's hope in it.



Thank you

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Works Cited

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