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“It’s just heart breaking”: Doing inclusive political solidarity or ambivalent paternalism through sympathetic discourse within the “refugee crisis” debate.

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Abstract

This article explores how people do sympathetic talk in relation to the European ‘refugee crisis.’ The analysis was grounded in critical discursive psychology and also drew on the concept of affective-discursive practice. Data was retrieved from a phone-in program on Irish national radio over a six-month period when the ‘refugee crisis’ debate was at its height. It is shown that speakers deployed elaborate sympathetic repertoires with ease that described their normative emotional response to the plight of the asylum seekers. But these same speakers found it problematic to make explicit, unambiguous and unconditional calls of inclusive political solidarity with the asylum seekers advocating increased asylum provision in Ireland. These findings are discussed in light of the hostile affective-discursive environment towards asylum and the common sense understanding that nation states have the moral right to exclude, which appears to constrain the talk to resemble a position of ambivalent paternalism.

Key words: asylum seekers, affective-discursive practice, identity performance, nationalism, ambivalent paternalism

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INTRODUCTION

This paper explores how people do sympathetic talk in relation to the ‘refugee crisis’ and what this talk achieves. Early work in discursive psychology showed that constructions of the racial other are flexible, context dependent and predominantly ambivalent. For example, Wetherell and Potter (1992, p. 197) showed how white New Zealanders displayed racist hostility whilst strategically denying a negative prejudicial identity. Similarly, Jackman (1994) showed how those in positions of power and privilege espoused ambivalent paternalism towards the less fortunate by cloaking inequality in benevolent and caring discourse whilst simultaneously rejecting policies that may achieve social change. Ambivalence efficiently maintains the status quo whilst legitimizing structural inequality. The aim of the present paper is to critically examine sympathetic affective-discursive practice (Wetherell, 2012) within the European ‘refugee crisis’ debate to explore its functions, particularly in relation to offering refuge to the asylum seekers and potential ambivalent paternalism.

Sympathy towards the plight of asylum seekers is frequently expressed in public discourse but is tempered by the taken-for-granted notion that individuals belong naturally to a specific nation within a world of bounded nations (Billig, 1995). Dominant nationalist discourse is seen to constitute the nation-state as a moral entity with the indisputable right to exclude ‘others’ (O’Doherty & Augoustinos, 2008). The prevailing neoliberal agenda is also dependent on nationalism because the state is assigned the right to exclude, based on economic benefit, and the protection of resources and property (Lueck, Due, & Augoustinos, 2015). A common thread is apparent within nationalist rhetoric of a country under siege by unlawful asylum seekers. Young people discussing citizenship in the UK avoid explicit use of ‘race’ and national identity as a justification for exclusion but “it is notable that exclusion *per se* was not typically treated as problematic” (Gibson & Hamilton, 2011). Sanitised expressions of exclusion are the norm within everyday nationalist discourse, they merely need a rational

pretence and at times can even express 'sympathy' for the immigrant but above all accusations of racism are tactically sidestepped (Durrheim, Quayle, & Dixon, 2016).

Hence, dominant discourse justifies the harsh treatment of asylum seekers due to commonsense economic reasoning and accusations of racism are denied (Capdevila & Callaghan, 2008; Goodman & Burke, 2010). Sympathetic arguments are elicited that support *specific* genuine asylum seekers who have fled persecution, bring desirable skills and intend to contribute to the host society. But this category distinction also provides rhetorical space to demand stricter border regimes, due to the supposed *general* prevalence of bogus asylum seekers and their ensuing economic burden (Lynn & Lea, 2003). These categories are not only demarcated but they are conveniently conflated to question the legitimacy of all asylum seekers (Goodman & Speer, 2007) and construct an endemic 'culture of disbelief' (Souter, 2011). Hostile discourse towards asylum seekers is also prevalent in Ireland (Haynes, Devereux, & Breen, 2006). And the Irish government operates a inhumane policy of deterrence, where asylum claims through the 'direct provision' system have the second lowest success rate in Europe and the public takes up a position of 'not knowing' (Lentin, 2016).

Recent work has shown that ambivalence is common in discourse orientating to asylum seekers. Callers to an Australian radio program mitigated accusations of prejudice by embedding hostility towards refugees in expressions of sympathy (Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2011). Australian politicians emphasised the country's humanitarian credentials to frame justification for excluding asylum seekers (Every, 2008). Similarly, citizen officers in the UK displayed an ambivalent tension between humanitarianism and pragmatism (Andreouli & Dashtipour, 2014), constructing their British identity as both tolerant but realistic. In these examples the persuasive power of humanitarianism in support of asylum seekers was easily neutralized by nationalist rhetoric focusing on economic arguments.

Some discursive work has examined arguments explicitly supporting asylum seekers. For example, those protesting against the removal of children from asylum seeker families in the UK employ images of “loving families” (Goodman, 2007). Groups fighting against detention and deportation of asylum seekers in the UK, appeal to shared humanitarian values and mobilise identities of solidarity (Bates & Kirkwood, 2013). Defenders of asylum seekers in Australia attempt to shame the opposition, but this strategy can be counterproductive, further entrenching the targets’ hostile positions (Every, 2013). Kirkwood, McKinlay, and McVittie (2013), show that disputing the normative hostile position towards asylum seekers requires considerable discursive labour.

But these studies tend to pertain to issues of integration and treatment of asylum seekers who are already inside the state. Less work has examined arguments advocating the relaxation of the asylum processes and declaring inclusive political solidarity with those outside the nation-state. One exception would be Every and Augoustinos (2008) who showed how asylum advocates in the Australian parliament *cautiously* construct a counter argument against the opposition. They note that this argument is constrained to a liberal position and avoids more radical political demands that question the legitimacy of border restrictions and global power relations. This strategy potentially lacks potency due to the dependence on humanitarian motivations of caring and concern rather than rights and justice.

Despite asylum from persecution being a fundamental human right, asylum seekers are dependent on winning over the ‘hearts and minds’ of the citizens of Europe who have the power and privilege to offer or withhold inclusion (Subasić, Reynolds, & Turner, 2008). Advocating inclusion is not only dependent on shifting group boundaries but is reliant on the groups self-representation and embedded prized norms and values (Reicher, Cassidy, Wolpert, Hopkins, & Levine, 2006). These norms and values are forged by contesting the nature of prejudice and what counts as legitimate exclusion (Durrheim et al., 2016). The nature of prejudice is

continually contested by those attempting to persuade and mobilise audiences in support of inclusion or not. Similarly, dominant national narratives, not only define who deserves inclusion and governs what can be felt and said in relation to asylum, but also who has the power and privilege to influence what is felt and said (Wetherell, 2013).

The present study explores how Irish callers to a national radio show, deploy sympathy towards the plight of people arriving at the borders of Europe within an affective-discursive environment that is prevalingly hostile or at best ambivalent. Specifically, our aim is to scrutinise what sympathy accomplishes within the talk of those who have the privilege to feel it.

PROCEDURE

Data was drawn from “Liveline”, a phone-in program on Irish national RTE radio, over six months from 1st August 2015 when the ‘refugee crisis’ debate was prominent. “Liveline” deals with topical social and political issues and has an estimated 378,000 daily listeners accounting for 10% of Irish’s adults. It is aired at 1.45pm every weekday. Hence, this institutional setting diverges from what Hanson-Easey and Augoustinos (2011) describe as evening ‘shock jock’ radio. Here repertoires are potentially tempered by normative understandings. The ‘stakes’ are high for speakers who are ‘accountable’ to a large day-time national audience (Potter, 1996), which places constraints of social acceptability on their affective-discursive repertoires. These data are particularly suited to our aims because the speakers are likely to be intent on persuading and mobilizing an audience. The broadcaster’s website synopses were used to identify shows relevant to the ‘refugee crisis’ during the sampling period. These were downloaded providing five hours of data for analysis. They were transcribed using abbreviated Jefferson notation (Jefferson, 2004) which has been further simplified for publication.

The analysis first inductively coded for overtly sympathetic, antipathetic or ambivalent positions. From there, focus was narrowed to sympathetic talk orientating towards a humanitarian position (e.g. expressing overtly positive appraisals of the asylum seekers and advocating care, support and help to be offered). Particular attention was paid to how possible arguments were addressed in calls for inclusive political solidarity. Extracts have been presented in the analysis below that exemplify the processes identified, and show the way that culturally recognisable affective-discursive practice was reproduced and how speakers orientate to the issue of where the people arriving at the borders of Europe might find refuge.

Analytic framework

This study is grounded in critical discursive psychology (Wetherell, 1998; Wetherell & Potter, 1992), interrogating how discourses maintain, normalise and legitimise inequitable power relations through commonsense understandings (van Dijk, 1993). Hence, we pay particular attention to what repertoires are chosen, how easily they are deployed and what goes unsaid (Billig, 1999, p. 140).

Due to the significance of emotion within intergroup relations (Billig, 2002), and nationalism particularly (Billig, 1995, p. 18; Wetherell, 2014) and our specific interest in expressions of sympathy, we draw on the notion of affective-discursive practice (Wetherell, 2012). This acknowledges the performance of recognisable well-established affective patterns and routines that are culturally prescribed and evident in social interaction. It avoids an unhelpful dualism by conceptualizing affect and discourse as inseparable and entangled. Therefore, while acknowledging sympathy as an embodied experience for participants (cf. Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2011), we are primarily concerned with what a sympathetic position accomplishes within discourse.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The speakers initially describe in extended detail their emotional distress in response to the ‘refugee crisis,’ implicitly inviting the audience to join a sympathetic alliance. But despite this opening affective-discursive labour to mobilise sympathy for the asylum seekers, it was noticeable that the speakers struggled to directly advocate inclusive political solidarity.

This highlighted two repertoires. The first, ‘It’s just heart breaking,’ oriented to the largely emotional work done to elicit sympathy within the audience. One would expect that this affective discourse would lead to calls of inclusive political solidarity with the asylum seekers. But as highlighted in the second repertoire, ‘Struggling to advocate inclusive political solidarity,’ it was problematic for the speakers to explicitly, unambiguously and unconditionally advocate inclusive political solidarity with the asylum seekers. In line with previous discursive work, exposing the normative repression of prejudice, talk attempting to contest the norms defining inclusion is problematic or even repressed (Durrheim et al., 2016) due to the taken-for-granted assumption that the nation-state has the moral right to exclude (Billig, 1995). It is important to note that the two repertoires are demarcated for analytic purposes, but in practice they are probably better understood as being entangled and occurring concurrently.

It’s just heart breaking

The speakers frequently orientated to their emotional reaction to the ‘refugee crisis’. An Irish man Pat, calls from the Greek island Leros where he is on holiday on the 21st August 2015. He describes at length how he is confronted by asylum seekers landing on the islands shoreline and his consequential emotional distress.

Extract 1: Pat 21/08/2015

1. Pat: about 500 people this morning we had sandwiches made for three hundred

2. Host: okay

3. Pat: and the dilemma is you know when we reach the end of three hundred how

4. do we tell the people we have no more food? and

5. uhm it's just heart breaking and .hhh ((sounds close to tears))

This is a brief example of Pat's protracted affective-discursive repertoire constructing his sympathetic reaction and humanitarian action. Pat repeatedly explicitly describes the affective impact of the situation, for example 'it's just heart breaking' (line 5). Just after this statement Pat's emotion is made palpable for the audience as he struggles to hold back the tears (audibly available in the data). This affective-discursive practice is not merely a simple description of a perceptive response to an environmental stimulus, it is performative and potentially mobilises sympathy within the audience by presenting an embodied affective experience that they can understand and recognise (Wetherell, 2012).

Extract 2: William 21/08/2015

1. William: [...] Pat and Pat sounded genuinely you know just shocked by what he

2. witnessed (.) I I think if you have any empathy and any humanity in you

3. you couldn't but be (.) I think his reaction is admirable

4. but it's it's normal because you couldn't

5. you'd want a heart of stone not to be moved by what is

6. happening there [...]

William calls from Dublin, having recently returned from Lebanon working for five weeks with the NGO, 'Schools for Syria'. He forms an affective-discursive alliance with Pat,

‘Pat sounded genuinely you know just shocked’ (line 1). William takes up the sympathetic repertoire and pursues the persuasive performance declaring to the audience that Pat’s reaction is ‘genuine’. By inserting ‘you know’ he is drawing upon an inferred shared understanding between members of the same community (Tree & Schrock, 2002). Hence, he hails the audience to align themselves with the sympathetic position of understandable ‘shock’ (Wetherell, 2012).

Furthermore, he hails the audience using the referent ‘you’ and states ‘if you have any empathy and any humanity’ (line 2), ‘you’ would feel the same. William challenges the audience by declaring Pat’s reaction as ‘admirable but ... normal’ (line 3), arguing there is nothing special about Pat and if the audience dispute this position they stand to be accused of a deviant abnormal response. This proclamation is emphasised by ‘you’d want a heart of stone not to be moved by what is happening there’. The frequent usage of ‘you’ invites the audience to join his sympathetic position. William forms an alliance with Pat and presents a persuasive performance consisting of a recognisable normative affective-discursive repertoire (Wetherell, 2012). This talk employs affective performance to mobilize shared humanitarian values and to potentially induce a sympathetic collective response (Durrheim et al., 2016).

On the 3rd September 2015, the day after the picture was released of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi found drowned on a Turkish beach there was an outpouring of sympathy for the asylum seekers, of which Mary’s voice is an example. She is an Irish woman calling from the South of France.

Extract 3: Mary 3/09/2015

1. M: [...] I have cried since I saw it it’s heart breaking (.)
2. we did it for the Special Olympics (.) Joe as I emailed you

3. and I remember distinctly the joy and the feeling in the country was amazing (.)
4. these people want help for the moment
5. they want to go back to their own country eventually
6. we all do we all do home is home
7. but we have to help them now there is no point in hanging around
8. and suggesting that we take six hundred is absolutely a disgrace (.)
9. I mean that the eighty-two thousand in Croke Park
10. over the weekend for god sake (.)
11. I don't suggest we take eighty-two thousand

Mary constructs her emotional response as 'heart breaking' and she describes how the photograph brought her to tears (line 1). This emotional distress is echoed by other callers to this program. Mary's affective preamble then demands the audience to provide 'help' to the asylum seekers by using the referent 'we' (line 7, line 4). The sympathetic helping is emphasised by drawing on an affective national occasion the Special Olympics (Wetherell, 2014) which reportedly promoted 'joy' within the national collective (line 3). Mary's performance to the audience is a recognisable and understandable emotional response to the 'refugee crisis' (Wetherell, 2012) and she is seen to evoke an affective-discursive alliance intended to mobilises sympathy within the audience (Durrheim et al., 2016). But how far does this sympathy extend? To which we turn next.

Struggling to advocate inclusive political solidarity

Mary does build a case towards inclusive political solidarity requesting that Ireland should volunteer to take in more asylum seekers and this does resonate through other speakers

on this program. Mary's statement, 'suggesting that we take six hundred is absolutely a disgrace' (Extract 3, line 8), is orientating to Ireland's offer of accepting 600 asylum seekers over two years as insufficient. Interestingly, this call is framed in affective term 'disgrace' which is an inward looking reference to the loss of honour for those in a position of power and privilege.

However, these calls of inclusion expressed on this program were noticeably constrained because they were delivered with conditional restrictions. For example, 'these people want help for the moment they want to go back to their own country eventually we all do we all do home is home' (Extract 3, line 4). Mary's political request to accommodate more asylum seekers is undeniably well-intended, but she is not suggesting to the audience that they are offered indefinite stay and a home to build a new life. Mary repeats this temporary condition later and it is echoed by others voices on this program. A conditional restriction of quantity is also deployed 'I don't suggest we take eighty-two thousand' (Extract 3, line 11). These conditions undermine the authenticity of inclusion, suggesting the cost to the state ultimately overrides humanitarian concern (Every, 2008; Lueck et al., 2015) and is underpinned by an explicit acknowledgement that the nation-state has the moral right to exclude (Billig, 1995; O'Doherty & Augoustinos, 2008). This position of temporary sympathetic help is further emphasised by Mary drawing a comparison with the 'Special-Olympics' (line 4), a time limited event that also implicitly equates people seeking refuge to people with disability, who are often construed as warm but incompetent. This exposes a position of ambivalent paternalism (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002).

Importantly, when this political position is viewed alongside Mary's preceding construction of emotional distress induced by the picture of Aylan Kurdi, it is strikingly constrained in its remit. Mary is seen to effortlessly deploy a repertoire of sympathy which the audience will recognise. But when it came to advocating increased refuge Mary finds it

necessary to retain common-ground with the audience by framing the inclusion claim as providing temporary access for more than 600 but less than 82,000 (Durrheim et al., 2016).

Directly following Pats protracted repertoire of sympathy discussed previously (Extract 1.) he makes the audience privy to a crucial ideological dilemma, where should the asylum seekers find refuge (Billig, Condor, Edwards, & Gane, 1988), by way of a reported interaction with the asylum seekers.

Extract 4: Pat 21/08/2015

1. P: a lot of the the men are coming up to me and asking for advice to know which
2. country they should go to ↓ I really can't advise them because .hhh it's difficult
3. you know and they say we don't speak German we speak English can we go to
4. your country can we go to England and
5. I said (.) don't go to Calais for god's sake (.)

In light of Pats extensive sympathetic preamble, it is significant that he proceeds to describe an interaction between himself and the asylum seekers, declaring how he 'can't advise' the men arriving in Leros on what country they should head to (line 2). Reportedly they explicitly ask him 'we speak English can we go to your country' (line 3) and he avoids telling them that he is Irish and not English. He does not recommend that they should attempt to proceed towards Ireland or even point to Ireland on the map. On one side of the dilemma sits a protracted sympathetic repertoire, whilst on the opposing side is a resignation to the 'banal' unspoken acceptance of the nation's right to exclude (Billig, 1995). This commonsense position needs no explanation and the sympathetic repertoire is insufficient to facilitate an explicit call of inclusion.

Pat attempts to mobilise sympathy in the audience but struggles to advocate inclusion. Instead he performs his encounter with the asylum seekers which makes the audience privy to this 'difficult' dilemma (line 2), allowing the audience to observe the situation for themselves

and acknowledge how ‘difficult’ it is (Holt, 1996). By deploying the inference ‘you know’ (Tree & Schrock, 2002) he evokes a shared commonsense understanding. Pat’s affective-discursive repertoire of sympathy is readily available and effortlessly deployed, but citing Ireland as a possible place of refuge is problematic and off-limits. In this he engages in ontological gerrymandering (Potter, 1996) because the duty of responsibility owed by the Irish government and people, to protect the human rights of the asylum seekers is not explicitly addressed. Understandably, it is ‘difficult’ for Pat to openly express a position of inclusion to the asylum seekers because they are unlikely to be welcomed in Ireland and in suggesting Ireland as a destination he may expose them to the indignities of the ‘Direct Provision’ system.

It is also noticeable that Pat’s talk assumes a resigned pragmatic realism and is less emotive. His conversation with the asylum seekers is ‘difficult’ not ‘heart-breaking’. Pat is left with no option but to tell the asylum seekers ‘don’t go to Calais’ (line 5) which strategically sidesteps the preceding question, ‘can we go to your country’ (line 3) and places Calais on the map whilst keeping Ireland hidden. He appears to have little option than to display ambivalent paternalism by cloaking the Calais option in a return to an affective display of sympathetic caring ‘don’t go there for god’s sake’ (Jackman, 1994).

As described previously William forms an affective-discursive alliance with Pat and extends the mobilisation of sympathy (Extract 2). William then goes on to address the political issue of potential refuge in Ireland but constructing a position of inclusive political solidarity as problematic. To convey his sensitive political repertoire, he avoids making direct demands on the audience and is ambiguous about where the asylum seekers should find refuge.

Extract 5: William 21/08/2015

1. W: [...] where the refugees are coming in but they can’t stay there (.)
2. they are going to have to move you know

3. west and west and west throughout Europe
4. and it it's incumbent upon all of us to make large gestures at this stage
5. uhm I would certainly be very happy if there was if if there you know
6. if our government could extend what they are doing
7. in terms of bringing in refugees (.)

William initiates the argument by pointing out that the asylum seekers 'can't stay' where they are (line 4). The repertoire then becomes ambiguous when he states that these people 'are going to have to move you know west and west and west throughout Europe' (line 2), which can only be assumed to mean the asylum seekers are likely to reach Europe's most westerly point, Ireland. He then places a demand upon the audience, 'it's incumbent upon all of us to make large gestures' (line 4). It is ambiguous what he means by 'large gestures' and at this point who he specifically means by 'us'. He then makes a number of false starts, indicating the talk is approaching a sensitive matter, 'if there was if if there you know if our'. Finally, he arrives at making a tentative statement of inclusion but he tactically shifts footing (Potter, 1996) away from 'us' to 'I' (line 5) in order to express his individual request to 'our government' (line 6). Although he initially states 'it's incumbent upon all of us' (line 4), he then carefully avoids provoking the collective and presuming that the audience will join him in his lone request to 'our government'. William is cautious not to alienate the audience who may position themselves in opposition to him (Durrheim et al., 2016).

William's tentative suggestion 'if our government could extend what they are doing' (Extract 5. line 6) is literally a proposal and hardly a call of inclusive political solidarity. It is what they 'could do' and not what it they 'should do'. It is not framed as a moral, legal or justice obligation rooted in international human rights legislation. Premised on making him 'happy,' it is merely a suggestion to 'extend' present policy not to change it.

The insertion of the referent 'our' before 'government' provides 'banal' clarification for the audience that William is indeed talking about the Irish government. But in this instance national belonging is being contested (Durrheim et al., 2016) and nationalism has moved from 'banal' to 'hot' (Billig, 1995, p. 139). Interestingly William's talk is in stark contrast to that used by anti-asylum politicians in Australia who repeatedly and boldly restate the country's title, 'Australian soil, Australia's treatment, Australia's right, Australia's resolve, etc.' (O'Doherty & Augoustinos, 2008). Notably all of the speakers are tentative about naming Ireland as a place of refuge.

William's restrained rhetoric constructing a political argument is distinct from his sympathy-raising rhetoric (Extract 2), where he made extensive use of 'you' pointing an accusatory finger at the audience and compels them to join his and Pat's sympathetic alliance or be accused of 'abnormal' inhumanity. The ease of expression shows that this sympathetic affective-discursive repertoire is a recognisable commonsense response to the 'refugee crisis,' flowing easily from those who have the privilege feel it. In contrast, suggesting that the government should change its policy is problematic and off limits. The cautious rhetorical strategy indicates that inclusive political solidarity is contentious.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Recognisable emotional talk is effortlessly deployed in an attempt to mobilise sympathy towards the asylum seekers (Wetherell, 2012). These repertoires are constructed as normal, commonsense understandings of how people should respond and are entangled with more problematic attempts at inclusive political solidarity (Subasić et al., 2008). Pat provides protracted detail about his emotional distress before tentatively presenting an ideological dilemma of where the asylum seekers should go. William shifts from the accusatory 'you' when he is mobilizing sympathy to a humble 'I' when he presents a weak call for inclusion.

Mary evokes an emotive national occasion and implores the collective ‘we,’ to provide ‘help’, but puts strict restrictions on her call for action.

The speakers draw on affective-discursive repertoires of caring and concern to choreograph their identity performance that tentatively contests the norms defining national exclusion (Durrheim et al., 2016). But evidently sympathetic repertoires have limited power to facilitate explicit, unambiguous and unconditional inclusive political solidarity. In Pat’s words the situation is ‘difficult,’ which renders him relatively silent on the appropriate response from his own nation. Williams’s repertoire is ambiguous about where the people should seek refuge and he suggests that the Irish government ‘could extend’ present policy not change it. Both Pat and William avoid making direct inclusive political solidarity demands on the audience. After pictures of Aylan Kurdi’s drowned body were released, political statements that advocated an increased refuge provision in Ireland were more prevalent, but even then calls were bounded and conditional, limited to ‘help’ rather than inclusion.

Callers cautiously endeavoured to mobilize inclusive political solidarity amongst their fellow citizens (Subasić et al., 2008) and to construct a case for ‘helping.’ However, this analysis shows that while it is easy to deploy affective talk to achieve consensus about human tragedy, it is much more difficult to capitalize on that discursively shared affect to call for specific action. Speakers engaged in a delicate identity performance that used sympathy to contest normative understandings of national belonging. However, exclusion is integral to nationalist rhetoric and as long as it can be constructed as non-prejudicial exclusion is espoused with ease (Durrheim et al., 2016; Gibson & Hamilton, 2011). In this public context, unanimous and powerful sympathy was simply not enough to dispute the assumption that the state has the moral right to exclude (Billig, 1995).

Speakers utilise recognisable social practice expressing sympathy, caring and concern (Wetherell, 2012), but its effectiveness is undermined by the sacrosanct patchwork of bounded nation-states and commonsense migration regimes. The identity performance occupies a persuasive middle ground which tentatively advances the inclusive political solidarity agenda. But the hostile affective-discursive environment enforces an ambivalent paternalistic constraint on sympathetic repertoires, which undermines potency for political change and merely reproduces a recognisable discomfort that cloaks power and privilege. These findings add support to the notion that liberal humanitarian ideologies are potentially limited in their persuasiveness for those advocating on behalf of asylum seekers (Every & Augoustinos, 2008), particularly when anchored in sympathy.

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