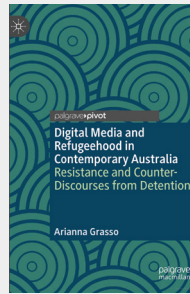

Digital Media and Refugeehood in Contemporary Australia

By Arianna Grasso

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The book, *Digital Media and Refugeehood in Contemporary Australia*, by Arianna Grasso, examines how refugees in Australia use digital media to resist the Australian government's mandatory detention policies. The book consists of 6 chapters, each analyzing refugees' use of digital media from different perspectives and methods. Grasso investigates the counter-discourse strategies and digital resistance of refugees from Kurdish-Iranian, Rohingya (Myanmar), Tamil (Sri Lanka), and Iraqi backgrounds who are detained offshore in Australia. She looks at the challenges these individuals face in using digital platforms to express themselves and make their voices heard. The book highlights various digital strategies employed by refugees and the social and political impacts of these strategies in each chapter. This book can be considered a significant step towards amplifying the voices of refugees and making their experiences visible.



The author's main objective is to investigate how digital media functions as a tool for resistance and counter-discourse for refugees. The book explores how refugees detained in Australia's detention centers use digital media platforms, especially X (formerly *Twitter*), to create their own narratives and defend their identities against misrepresentations in mainstream media and political discourses.

The first chapter, "The Australian Mandatory Detention Policy," explains the historical back-

ground of Australia's mandatory detention policy towards immigrants. The destructive impacts of these policies on refugees and human rights violations are addressed from a political perspective and detailed with data. Significant milestones, such as the Pacific Solution, designed in 2001 and reintroduced in 2012, and the

Operation Sovereign Borders, implemented in 2013, are discussed. The book details how refugees arriving illegally by sea are indefinitely detained in detention centers established on Manus Island (Papua New Guinean) and Nauru, and the serious negative effects of this situation on the physical and mental health of refugees are highlighted through references to international organization reports. Refugees and asylum seekers are deprived of digital communication technologies, in addition to being detained on remote islands and subjected to human rights violations. Under the Operation Sovereign Borders law, refugees arriving in Australia by sea are located on Manus Island, which belongs to Papua New Guinea. It is suspected that the Australian government is organizing the processes related to the refugees on Manus Island together with the Papua New Guinean authorities. It is emphasized that refugees living in unhealthy and challenging conditions try to make their voices heard by the world public through hunger strikes or suicide attempts shared on social media.

Chapter 2, "Digital Media in Refugee Contexts," discusses the concept and characteris-

tics of digital media, explaining its advantages and disadvantages in the context of digital migration studies. The importance of digital media tools, particularly *X*, in the lives of refugees and how they are used as a tool of resistance is analyzed. Grasso discusses the global spread of digital technologies and their impact on the communication practices of asylum seekers and refugees. These technologies enable refugees to communicate with their families and companions, navigate, and seek help in times of danger.

Chapter 3, “The Tweeting Refugee,” examines how refugees articulate their perspectives using *X* and stand against misrepresentations in mainstream media and political discourses. In this chapter, Refugee *Twitter* (*X*) Corpus (RTC) was created using data from 14 *X* users. The selection of this group was based on specific criteria related to the intensity of their tweeting activity and shared experiences. These accounts belong to male refugees, aged between 23 and 38, who were either formerly or currently detained in the Manus Regional Processing Center at the time of the data collection. The focus was on individuals who actively used *Twitter* to articulate their perspectives and share their experiences related to detention and refugeehood. The dataset was compiled from 7661 tweets produced by these users between January 2017 and November 2019. The analysis is grounded in the discourse-historical approach (DHA), a critical discourse studies framework that situates discourses within their socio-historical context. This aspect of DHA is valuable for examining how refugees on social media employ specific rhetorical devices to argue for their humanity, justice, and rights. For instance, the use of metaphors, emotional appeals, and references to universal human rights are strategies that can be systematically identified and analyzed using DHA. These rhetorical el-

ements are crucial in shaping public perception and policy debates about refugees.

The analysis reveals that refugees use *X* to highlight their ethnic and cultural diversity and counter mainstream media stereotypes. By using personal pronouns like *we* and *our*, they stress group belonging and collective identity. They seek to legitimize calls for human rights and justice, criticize Australian government policies, and demand moral and legal accountability, using phrases like *We are human* to emphasize equality and freedom. The chapter also examines how refugees discuss their detention, highlighting the distress caused by uncertainty and waiting, and using terms like *gulag* to liken camps to historical oppression, framing issues like suicides and health problems as signs of fascism and dictatorship.

In chapter 4, “The Imagining Refugee,” 949 visual posts from 14 *X* accounts are analyzed using multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) to explore representation and power dynamics in refugee content. The study highlights themes such as peaceful protest (15.6 percent), self-harm (13.3 percent), and violence (9.3 percent). Refugees use images to reflect their identities, document daily life, and express struggles. Photographs play a crucial role in amplifying voices, expressing opinions, and increasing visibility. Textual content supports these visuals to convey comprehensive messages, showing refugees as active resisters, not just victims.

In chapter 5, “The Speaking Refugee,” interviews with 12 refugees from various backgrounds are examined using discursive-ethnographic methods to highlight personal narratives and identity construction. Themes like *un/attachment*, *un/belonging*, and *non/membership* emerge, with refugees often re-

jecting labels like migrant and embracing their refugee identity. The findings emphasize the complexities of belonging, the role of digital media in maintaining connections, and the dynamic nature of refugee identities, challenging stereotypes and highlighting the importance of context and interpersonal relationships.

Overall, the book highlights that digital communication technologies create a space where refugee experiences can be displayed, shared, and communicated to broader audiences. It also points out that the lack of access to these digital tools prevents refugees from staying in contact with their communities, increasing feelings of isolation and abandonment. The digital technologies that serve as a window to the outside world for detained refugees are valuable for creating alternative discourses against hate speech and expanding the support base. The book stands out for its comprehensive approach, combining digital ethnography, critical discourse analysis, and

semi-structured interviews. This allows for a deep understanding of both the textual and visual dimensions of refugee discourses, providing a holistic view of how refugees express their identities, experiences, and resistance. On the other hand, this specific focus on Australia's offshore detention system and policies, while providing detailed insights into this particular context, might limit the book's applicability to other refugee situations globally. While the findings are highly relevant to the Australian context, the unique nature of Australia's policies may not entirely reflect other countries' experiences. The book could be an important resource for researchers and students who want to understand how asylum seekers develop resistance and counter-discourse through digital media, and for those who work in this field. For future research, the book suggests that future research could examine responses to refugees' tweets, how these tweets are received in the digital environment, and the types of audiences they engage with.