‘How other people see you it’s like nothing that’s inside’: the impact of processes of disidentification and disavowal on young people’s subjectivities

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Aims

To explore narratives of identity among young Somali refugees and asylum seekers in the context of complex histories of mobility. The paper focuses on how processes of disidentification or disavowal impact on young people’s subjectivities and are lived out in particular spaces. Research funded by the Economic

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Methodology

Multi-method qualitative research: 50 Somali children and the majority of their parent[s] or guardians were recruited for interview as a result of snowballing through a school survey, homework clubs and a range of contacts and organisations; in-depth interviews with key stakeholders [representatives from local bodies dealing with asylum issues and various Somali education and community projects]; participant observation was carried out in local Somali community spaces, such as homework clubs. Interviews took place in Sheffield, United Kingdom.

Key issues

Young people’s experiences of having their claims to be British denied, of disidentifying as black, and having to negotiate the complex ambiguities of being positioned as Somali in the UK but British in Somalia.

Conclusions

The authors reflect on the importance of the young people’s emotional investment in the subject position of Muslim as an explanation for why they prioritise their faith above their racial, gender or ethno-national identities in their narratives of the self.

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