Belonging among diasporic African communities in the UK: plurilocal homes and simultaneity of place attachments

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Aims

This paper asserts the importance of an intergenerational lens in exploring generational differences and similarities in the shaping of post-migration lives.

Methodology

Interviews took place in the Yorkshire and Humber region of the United Kindgom during 2008-2009. Participants in the study were from 4 African communities; Sudanese, Somali, Kenyan and Zimbabwean. The project carried out 40 biographical

interviews within 20 families [one parent and one child generation interview in each family]. Seven focus groups were also conducted within the 4 communities, organised by gender and age. All of the participants in this study have lived in Britain for between 5 and 40 years. The parental generation ranges from ages 40 to 60s, with the child generation ranging from late teens to 30s.The families in this study span a range of migration paths [migrant workers, students, family joiners, refugees, EU citizens].

Key issues

The practices and expressions of belonging in, and to, places of current residence are arguably of critical importance to the challenge of ‘living together’ in ethno-culturally diverse contexts. Members of diasporic communities often have complex relationships to their host societies and their feelings of belonging may be stretched and simultaneously ‘here and there’. Scholars often assume that a transnational optic is appropriate for the study of first generation migrants who frequently retain multifarious socio-cultural, economic and political links to their countries of origin, but less suitable for second generation individuals who are assumed to experience stronger emotional attachments to local place-based contexts. This paper troubles such an assumption. Through exploring the emotional attachments to place[s] of first and second generation Zimbabwean, Somali, Sudanese and Kenyan migrants, the paper interprets the emotions associated with senses of belonging through ideas of plurilocal homes and simultaneity of

attachments to different places.

Conclusions

The paper has found a number of over-arching similarities between first generation African migrants and their children in terms of their mutual transnational social fields and cultural repertoires leading to shared ideas of plurilocal homes and simultaneity of emotional attachments to different places. Yet the particular character and intensity of each generation's emotional belongings vary in the light of different lifecourse points of arrival in the UK shaping relative immersion/integration, differing experiences of homeland visits and cultural transmission, and emerging opportunities for locally oriented belongings that vary according to situational contexts and individuals' intersecting identities.

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