Music, dancing and clothing as belonging and freedom among people seeking asylum in the UK

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Aims

To argue that clothing, music, and dancing embody experiences both of migration, exile and separation and of familiarity, homeliness and unity. Doctoral research.

Methodology

Fourteen months of ethnographic fieldwork between August 2003 and September 2004 with people from 11 different countries who were, or had been, accommodated in Leeds. The research employed participant observation. Relationships with individuals were built-up in visits to their homes, and

subsequently with their associates and through engaging with the activities of refugee community organisations [RCOs] and other refugee supporting agencies. Access was facilitated by 2 volunteer roles that led to extended relationships with participants following discussion of informed consent. Fourteen men and women [7 refugees and 7 refused asylum seekers] were key participants and further contacts led to a larger group of 40 participants, including RCO representatives and practitioners. Key participants ranged from 17 years old to mid to late 30s and their children ranged from babies to teenagers.

Key issues

Leisure practices of refugee and asylum seeking communities.

Conclusions

Music, clothing and dancing can be important to processes of settlement and negotiation of belonging. They signal a space that announces the creation of a moment, that is, ‘a community moment’, when people who consider themselves within the boundary can be ‘insiders’ in contrast to daily experiences of being an outsider. Dancing may provide a way of embodying home, and of gaining freedom that is particularly important for refugees who are likely to come without material goods but do travel with their bodily praxis.

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Migrant Group

Refugees

Refused asylum seekers

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Community and society

Integration

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Resource

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