

NEGOTIATING EXISTENCE

Asylum Seekers in East Anglia, UK

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DECLARATION

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ACRONYMS

BME	Black/Minority Ethnic
CDO	Community Derived Organisations
CID	Certificate of Identity Document
ELR	Exceptional Leave to Remain
GYROS	Great Yarmouth Refugee Outreach and Support
ILR	Indefinite Leave to Remain
IND	Immigration Nationality Directorate
NASRF	Norwich Asylum Seeker and Refugee Forum
NASS	National Asylum Support System
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NNREC	Norfolk and Norwich Racial Equality Council
RCO	Refugee Community Organisation
SEF	Statement of Evidence Form

ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study of asylum seekers in East Anglia, UK, poses the following questions: how do asylum seekers adapt, cope and adjust to life in the UK when their future is so uncertain? To what extent do people seeking asylum relate to an asylum seeker identity? How do asylum seekers negotiate interactions with others as they await an outcome to their application for asylum? This study explores these questions in an effort to gain insight into the role of identity reconstruction during the process of asylum seeking.

This thesis is based on twelve months of fieldwork in the towns of Norwich and Great Yarmouth, and to a lesser extent in Peterborough and London, where asylum seekers had been dispersed by either the London Boroughs or the Home Office's NASS (National Asylum Support Service). During 2002 and 2003, I conducted fieldwork amongst asylum seekers, as well as amongst support workers working for various NGOs that offered a number of support services for asylum seekers.

The focus on asylum seekers' speech-acts is a method to observe the primary form of social action by which asylum seekers articulate a shared place, liminal immigration system and interaction with others. These elements shape asylum seekers' identity in the UK. Consequently, asylum seekers' predicament can be understood as a movement through the immigration system, but also an existential movement as each person tries to negotiate their existence.

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The exiled knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory can also become prisons and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience.

Edward Said

From *Reflections on Exile* (2000:170)