

Negotiating the dilemmas of claiming asylum: A discursive analysis of interviews with refugees on life in Scotland

Steve Kirkwood (The University of Edinburgh)

Refugees and asylum seekers may find themselves caught in dilemmas in their host societies, such as the difficulty of being critical of the host society without seeming ungrateful. While much research has looked at how refugees and asylum seekers are constructed in political discourse, little research has analysed refugee and asylum seeker discourse in detail, including how they manage such dilemmas. This study addressed this gap by analysing how asylum seekers and refugees talk about their experiences, the social functions that their discourse may fulfil, and how their talk manages the dilemmas in which they find themselves. The data consisted of extracts from interviews with 15 asylum seekers and refugees living in Scotland. The extracts related to difficulties that asylum seekers may face, including violence and antagonism from the host society, and how they work up criticisms of aspects of the asylum process, including detention and legal barriers to employment. The analysis showed that they may present themselves as having no difficulties in the host society and this may function to emphasise the severity of the persecution they previously faced and therefore justify their need for asylum. Negative attitudes towards asylum seekers and refugees were portrayed as not being racist and therefore amenable to change. Aspects of the asylum system were criticised through portraying them as against national interests. Overall, the analysis highlighted the

importance of treating refugee and asylum seeker discourse as fulfilling a variety of social functions rather than being a neutral way of talking about experiences.

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