‘No! I'm Not a Refugee!’ The Poetics of Belonging among Young Oromos in Toronto

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Published: 01 June 2006

Abstract

This paper presents some findings from an empirical study carried out with young Oromos living in Toronto. To capture the complexities of negotiating belonging, the paper offers dispersal-affinity—a new conceptual framework empirically grounded in an innovative methodological design.
Using participants' narratives in the empirical material, the paper contests the dualism created between essentialist and constructionist perspectives. It employs dispersal–affinity to explore participants' understandings of 'the refugee' and the wider processes of refugeeization and refugee belonging. Findings suggest that belonging is a project of selfhood that is both fixed and constantly shifting. It is argued that belonging is constructed from the same movements of selfhood within and through social relationships. Young Oromos employ both essentialist and constructionist discourses to weave multiple layers of fixed and mobile belonging. Implications for refugee studies are discussed wherein dispersal–affinity is offered to critically engage the recent debate on 'deceit and trickery' among refugees.
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unusual approach.