

The Conversion of Asylum Applicants' Narratives into Legal Discourses in the UK and France: A Comparative Study of Problems of Cultural Translation

Investigators

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Statement

The research project has contributed to the Diasporas, Migration and Identities Programme as a whole in the following ways:

(1) High quality research was undertaken that was distinctive and innovative in both approach and methodology: it extended the US-derived 'new legal pluralism' perspective to the study of European immigration systems, and used ethnographic methods to investigate processes and problems of cultural translation entailed in the legal recording and representing of asylum claims. The research promoted collaboration between social anthropologists, academic lawyers, legal practitioners and administrative staff in the government and NGO sectors which is continuing after the end of the award period.

(2) The research project made 'a distinctive contribution to the theoretical, conceptual, thematic, practice-led and empirical study of diasporas, migration and identities' by focusing on the analysis of issues of linguistic and cultural translation arising in contexts of migration and asylum. In so doing, it has thrown new light on problems of representation and discourse in relation to asylum applicants and refugees, and contributed to a better understanding of the relationship between legal and ordinary language conventions, and of processes of legal change more generally.

(3) As an empirically-based comparative project on asylum procedures in both the UK and France, the research has furthered the development of 'a body of theory, methods and cases to enable a comparative analysis of diasporas, migration and their associated identities to be undertaken'. The research is in fact the first ethnographic study comparing the practicalities of providing legal advice to asylum applicants in the UK and France.

(4) Direct and sustained engagement over the course of the research with nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) providing free legal representation to asylum applicants, and other non-academic stakeholders such as judges, lawyers and interpreters, and the organisation of a highly successful stakeholder workshop at the end of the award period, have together facilitated 'connection, communication and exchange... between researchers and a wide range of individuals and organisations who have an interest in their research and its outcomes'. In policy terms, the research is already assisting the respective national NGO communities in the development of best practice, and the further dissemination and publication of its results will contribute to

fairer decision making on asylum claims in France and the UK and also inform UK and French debates surrounding ongoing reforms of asylum and immigration legislation.

(5) Through the project website, the organisation of a stakeholder workshop, and presentations to a range of different audiences, the project has contributed in different ways to 'public awareness of arts and humanities research on diasporas, migration and identities'.

(6) The research has generated high quality, internationally significant findings and outcomes, elements of which have already been disseminated to research audiences in the UK, France, The Netherlands, Irish Republic and Slovakia. Future publications will disseminate the results further to an international research audience. The project has contributed to the development of networks of researchers (social anthropologists and sociologists, academic lawyers, linguists, NGO research staff) based in the UK and in France which are likely to lead to future collaborative research in the area of Diasporas, Migration and Identities.

(7) The research developed the use of ethnographic methods to investigate processes and problems of cultural translation entailed in the legal recording and representing of asylum claims. Among other issues, this highlighted the need for further ethnographic investigation of the specific practices and problems associated with interpreting in legal contexts, and a future application to the AHRC for funding in responsive mode is being considered for such a project.