

Meriç Çağlar Chesley
PhD Candidate in Gender Studies
Central European University

Abstract

This paper investigates the resettlement regime in Turkey in relation to its categorization of refugee vulnerability. According to Turkey's geographic limitation on the 1951 Geneva Convention, Turkey only provides full refugee status to those who became asylum seekers as a result of events occurring in Europe. Asylum seekers in Turkey from other countries, called conditional refugees, under temporary (Syrians) or international (non-Syrians) protection are entitled to stay in Turkey until their eventual resettlement to a third country, which may take up to several years. Resettlement is a complicated system where refugees' current vulnerabilities in the host country, in this case Turkey, as well as priority categories of the resettlement countries coincides to determine which refugee groups will be prioritized for resettlement. In this paper, I will firstly examine how categories of refugee vulnerability are constructed, assessed, and put into practice by local and international actors such as UNHCR, Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), and resettlement agencies of third countries as well as are negotiated and contested by the refugees themselves. In other words, while the resettlement system aims to put refugees in a hierarchy of vulnerability based on pre-set, mostly gendered, categories, refugees implement multiple strategies in order to fit into these priority categories to ameliorate their position. This particular understanding of categorical vulnerability is strongly embedded in the concept of real refugeeness, which is inherently a gendered, racialized, and classed construction informed by colonial discourses regarding 'the other'. In this sense, while some groups of refugees are perceived as vulnerable based on their gender, sexual orientation, country of origin, ethnicity, or religion, the actual vulnerabilities of others who do not fit these pre-set categories are overlooked. In this case, refugees are expected to present and perform their vulnerabilities in certain ways that will fit these pre-defined categories, and/or employ multiple strategies in order to ameliorate their chances for resettlement. However, these vulnerability categories, which qualify refugees for resettlement, do not necessarily match resettlement countries' priority groups which, on one hand, prioritize the most vulnerable cases and, on the other hand, aim to resettle those who have higher of integration potential to the new society and chances of self-sustainability.

Finally, considering the resettlement procedure might take up to several years, I will discuss how refugees themselves make sense of this period of waiting in relation to the concepts of liminality, precarity, and hope. This paper is based on my doctoral dissertation informed by 12 months of ethnographic research in Turkey, conducted with refugees under international protection, social workers, UNHCR and resettlement agency representatives.