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Becoming a Refugee Woman in a Small City: The Example of Kütahya. PhD Thesis Presentation

Thesis Problem

This thesis considers a small city. The small city will be examined as a whole with its social, political and economic aspects in addition to its geographical features. The problems confronting local women and refugee women living in a small city will be explored and juxtaposed.

The difficulty of being a woman in a small city varies depending on the conservatism of the city. Being a woman in a small city in Turkey brings with it the fact that behaviours are monitored on every street. Because of the social environment, there is family pressure on women. Patriarchy is felt more intensely in a small city than in a big city. In addition, the limited social opportunities of the small city and the social pressure on women lead them to spend their time at home. However, refugee women are more likely to be visible in the streets than local women. Life in a new city makes it necessary to spend more time in the street. This visibility leads to the possibility that the refugee, who is described as a 'foreigner', will attract the attention of local people. For this reason, it is difficult to be a refugee woman in a small city.

Why is it that refugee women prefer to live in a small city if it is so hard to live in a small city as a woman and as a refugee woman? It could be because there are no other alternatives, or that the benefits of living in a small city are attractive to women. For this reason, women produce behaviour patterns according to the rules of living in a small city. Turkey's policy towards refugee women seeks to disperse women to small cities in order to inhibit the concentration of refugees in big cities.

Thesis Topic

The doctoral thesis's case study is Kütahya. This city is three hours from the Turkish capital, Ankara, and it is where Somali refugees are settled by the state. Kütahya has some similar characteristics to Lodz. It is a small city and close to the capital city. The city is quite conservative, and the locals distance themselves from the "stranger". People are helpful but it is not easy to communicate with them. Knowledge of English is very low in general. It is almost necessary for refugees to learn Turkish in order to communicate. A person who does not speak Turkish can be provided with an expression in English or body language may be used. Rents are quite high in Kütahya. Due to nationalism and conservatism, it is also difficult for refugees to find homes. Universities and students provide urban vitality and economic returns. Of course, there are serious distinctions between the two cities, both religious and culturally, in terms of being small cities in a Muslim and Christian country respectively. Also in Lodz, urban parks in the European tradition are widespread. Kütahya has a tea garden culture which is typical of Turkish culture more generally. These tea gardens also provide one of the areas where refugees can socialise.

Irregular Migration in Turkey

It is stated that since the 1990s there has been a significant increase in the number of immigrants, with regional differences, and it is stated that women are at least as prominent amongst migrants as men (Castles and Miller, 2008). In this context, migration from Somalia to a province in Turkey and the way women experience this migration constitutes the focus of this research. Somali refugees are the fourth most common refugees in Kütahya according to UN data. 18 are asylum seekers, and 100 are in the refugee category (Appendix 1).

Further reasons why I am working with the Somalis include the following:

1. They are the first refugee group to come to Kütahya,
2. They have the longest life experience in Kütahya and the possibility of their becoming permanent residents is higher than among other groups,
3. The length of their stay in Kütahya (since 2008-2009) means that they have had the possibility of learning Turkish. They may know English because Somalia is a former British colony. It has been assumed that the refugees can be contacted through children attending school in Kütahya and that it is possible to interview them without an interpreter.
4. According to UN data, they are the fourth most populous group in Kütahya, after Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran.
5. Refugee women are accessible because they live in the family,
6. Refugee women are visible in the street

Migration includes not only refugees, but also citizens arriving from other countries as well as internal migration. The study consists of three parts. First, refugee women will be examined within the framework of migration history to Turkey. Their personal char-

acteristics, family, education, work experience, age and income will be analysed. At this point, the women will discuss the areas of the city that they use by making markings on a cognitive and real map. This will illustrate how the refugee women make use of spaces in Kütahya. The acquisition of this information may also influence the policies of the local government and perhaps provide the policymakers with guidance. Refugee women's everyday life will be analysed through their multicultural, multi-identity, multi-lingual and non-verbal practices.

Second, the relationship between local governments and refugee women, the perspective of local governments towards refugees, and the efforts of refugee women to ensure urban adaptation, will be assessed. Third, a sample group will be selected from Kütahya's native women, and their ideas and approaches to refugee women will be discussed. Whether or not there are evaluations such as discrimination and racism will be analyzed.

Identity and Compliance

Discrimination, Racism, Multi-Language

I asked Kütahya's Provincial Immigration Director about the reaction of the people of Kütahya to the refugees in a preliminary field interview, and he stated that the Kütahya people were quite "hospitable" and the refugees had stayed in Kütahya as "temporary" residents. In a questionnaire about the relationship of Africans to Turkish citizens, Africans have said that their neighbours treat them well. About 30 per cent of people who did not know whether they were treated badly or whether they were discriminated against were very poor. Some said that the Somalis living in Kütahya are temporary immigrants. There are those who have been waiting 7–8 years in Kütahya. This period is a time that exceeds the status of "hospitality" and "being temporary". Therefore, what is meant by the hospitality of indigenous people must be questioned, and the changes in the lives of older immigrants along with the new wave of migration must be examined.

Thesis Purpose

Turkey was a country from which people emigrated. Now it is a country to which people immigrate. The aim of this study is to ensure that the experience of refugee women is known to the academic world. Looking at the issues through the eyes of the local administrations and the residents of Kütahya can provide a deeper understanding. A literature review reveals a gap in the academic literature on the experience of Somali refugees. Hence, I hope that this thesis will make a contribution to the social sciences.

Somali refugees have been told to live in particular cities by the state. However, when the refugees entered the country, the registration system was rather inadequate. For this reason, after the refugees were placed in particular cities, some moved. In this context, the thesis's objective is to answer the following questions:

Why do the refugees living in Kütahya continue to live in Kütahya?

- What is the daily life of refugee women living in Kütahya?
- To what extent were they seen as ‘strangers’?
- Where did they come from? (city/metropolis)
- How do women use space in the city?
- What is the attitude of the people of Kütahya towards refugee women?

It is thought that the pre-migration and post-migration lives of the refugees migrating to the country are quite different?

Thesis Importance

The advancement of technology and the internet has made it possible for people to access more information and increase their mobility. For this reason, it allows the normalization of the twenty-first century boundaries. However, immigration is considered to be normalization in theory, but it is still a tough process, which is bureaucratic. Mass migration causes a lot of technical problems because the country of immigration is unprepared. The history of dealing with the mass migration problem in Turkey is short. In 2011, the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) was identified as the leading institution responsible for the management of the Syrian refugee crisis. In April 2014 the General Directorate of Immigration took over the issue of Syrian refugees from AFAD to develop policies and support cooperation efforts (Karaca ve Kirişçi, 2015: 308–309). However, the General Directorate of Migration Administration was established by publishing the Foreigners and International Protection Law dated 04/04/2013 and No. 6458 in the Official Gazette dated 11/04/2013 and numbered 28615.

Despite the periods in which Turkey faced serious migration waves, the importance of immigration was not fully recognised. Migration is a very serious and important issue to be dealt with by the General Directorate of Immigration Administration, which has become the main source of data about immigration in the country. Academic work on migration is supported by these institutions, but the word ‘support’ is relative. Permission to do research on migration and to collect data was not provided to the researcher. Even information was kept confidential. However, Dumlupınar University’s Political Science and International Relations and Sociology Departments in Kütahya have been requested by the governorship and the Foundation for the Development of Human Resources to work on immigration and refugees.

Most of the research on refugee women is about Istanbul or other metropolitan cities. Looking at the provinces is important for revealing refugee problems in the provinces, to make qualified comparison with other research, and to provide data for social policy. As this thesis considers the provinces it can provide a comparison with the everyday lifestyles of the refugee women in the metropolises and with the originality of the thesis. Being in a minority does not mean that the problems are unimportant. Consideration of the refugee experience in the provinces may provide grounds for examining Turkey’s future migration policies.

Moreover, Turkey's immigration policies have been transformed with recent migration. Turkey was a stopping point for transit migrants. It has now become a country where immigrants may settle. At this point, many provincial cities of Anatolia – 62 cities – have become heterogeneous cities. With the refugees, there are new places for shopping in the provinces; new food and beverage areas, and changes in the labour market, and so on. Different identities are distinguishable in the social structure of society, and the impact of migration has spread from the big cities to the countryside. This thesis can help to raise awareness of these identities. New research questions and discussion areas may arise.

Thesis Problems/Hypotheses

I mentioned above that the research will take place in three phases. Accordingly, the general question of each chapter will be as follows:

1. How did the refugees come to Kütahya? What are the refugees' experiences of life in Kütahya?
2. What is the attitude of the local administrations towards the refugees?
3. What is the attitude of the residents of Kütahya to the refugees?

Research Methods

Various methods can be used within feminist scholarship. Feminist methods encourage the researcher to look at the topic and include the researcher in the research. For this reason, the relationship between the researcher and the subject is important, and an attempt is made to understand the daily experiences of women by using qualitative methods (Stæheli and Lawson, 1994). I am a researcher who has experienced life in a small city during childhood, adolescence and adulthood. I hope to develop a perspective on the daily lives of refugees in a small city by living in Lodz and having an immigrant-like experience.

Research Universe and Sampling

Official records about immigration in Turkey do not seem sufficient. Because of the relatively small number of immigrants in the provinces, official records are considered to be regular and sufficient for the big cities. There is little research on immigration in the provinces. The basic data is primarily kept by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. Population censuses in Turkey are presented by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK) to summarize some of the qualifications of international migrants. The main source of specific statistics on immigration to Turkey is that kept by the Directorate of Foreign Border Asylum within the General Directorate of Security of the Ministry of the Interior (İçduygu and Biehl, 2012: 17–18). The General Directorate of Immigration does not respond adequately to questions that are asked for research because they do not have data or do not want to share the data. The research will be supplemented with

data received from the General Directorate of Immigration or the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. In addition, semi-structured interviews with refugee women will be conducted to ensure that refugee women’s experiences are not overwhelmed by statistics. In this way, an attempt will be made to reach a rich source of data. It is aimed to be multidirectional by working with local governments and the local people of Kütahya, not only with the refugees.

References

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Appendix 1: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees’s Current Active Cases in Kutahya

Nationality	Asylum Seekers		Not of Concern		Refugees		Total	
	Cases	Indyvid.	Cases	Indyvid.	Cases	Indyvid.	Cases	Indyvid.
Iraqi	1791	4522	0	0	306	837	2097	5359
Afghan	859	1835	0	0	25	70	884	1905
Iranian	365	518	0	0	31	63	396	581
Somali	5	18	0	0	45	100	50	118
Pakistani	42	47	0	0	0	0	42	47
Syrian	0	3	0	0	1	11	1	14
Egyptian	4	13	0	0	0	0	4	13
Yemeni	4	7	0	0	2	5	6	12
Sudanese	0	0	0	0	3	10	3	10
Palestinian	5	8	0	0	2	2	7	10
Ethiopian	1	1	0	0	3	9	4	10
Turkmen	8	9	0	0	0	0	8	9
Ugandan	6	6	0	0	0	0	6	6
Cameroonian	5	5	0	0	0	0	5	5
Eritrean	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	2
Congolese (Brazzaville)	2	2	0	0	0	0	2	2
Burundian	2	2	0	0	0	0	2	2
Ivorian	2	2	0	0	0	0	2	2

Nationality	Asylum Seekers		Not of Concern		Refugees		Total	
	Cases	Indyvid.	Cases	Indyvid.	Cases	Indyvid.	Cases	Indyvid.
Uzbek	2	2	0	0	0	0	2	2
Sri Lankan	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Libyan	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
Malian	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Nigerian	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Guinean	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Congolese (DRC)	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Central African	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Bahraini	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Grand Total	3109	7007	0	0	420	1110	3529	8117