

Welcome to 'Almanya': Effects of Displacement among Refugee Women

Authors : Carmen Nechita

Abstract : This research explores the world of Syrian refugee women living in Dresden and their efforts to reconstruct their lives in the state of Saxony in Germany. The focus is on the initial period of adjustment and understanding how refugee women use culture, family ties, and tradition to contest and rebuild new relationships with the host country. Faced with a new status as “the refugee”, women have to re-imagine their ethno-cultural identity in order to cope with life in Diaspora. In order to understand the coping mechanism and the displacement effects on Syrian women, interviews with twelve refugee women were conducted. Traumatic experiences of loss and oppression are at the core of their confessions. While gender violence, abuse and patriarchal framework shape their narratives, this research argues that there is a need to look at this from a cultural perspective and try to distance ourselves from the western paradigm. The way Syrian women refute and rebuild their national and ethno-cultural identity in order to negotiate for themselves new space within German borders is explored. Two discourses are bridged: one of multiculturalism and one of tradition in order to explain how Syrian women experience western notions of family, womanhood and spousal dynamics. The process is painful, traumatic and marked by feelings of low self-worth, but in the end, new codes emerge and these women come out more empowered. The paper includes the migration experience and explores the ways in which Syrian refugee women tend to tell their complex stories, and how they reconstruct their identity in a new territory while faced with a different culture that discriminates against them. During the research, four distinct phases in the acculturation period were identified: “the survival”, “the honeymoon period”, “the isolation period” and “the anger period”. Each phase is analyzed in order to understand what triggers them, how women migrate from one phase to another and what can be done to make the process easier. This paper contributes to the field of refugee studies by offering a thorough understanding of the initial phases of the acculturation process in the case of Syrian refugee women. The study examines the fleeing and settlement experience in order to understand the complex ways that refugee women cope with the traumatic experience of settlement in another country and in a different culture. *Almanya: The Arabic word for Germany.

Keywords : displacement, migration, refugee women, Syria

Conference Title : ICGFWS 2017 : International Conference on Gender, Feminist and Women’s Studies

Conference Location : Singapore, Singapore

Conference Dates : January 08-09, 2017