

Interactions and Integration: Implications of Victim-Agent Portrayals for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Germany

Authors : Denise Muro

Abstract : Conflict in Syria, producing over 11 million displaced persons, has incited global attention to displacement. Although neighboring countries have borne the largest part of the displacement burden, due to the influx of refugees into Europe, the so-called 'refugee crisis' is taking place on two fronts: Syria's neighboring countries, with millions of refugees, and Europe, a destination goal for so many that European states face unprecedented challenges. With increasing attention to displacement, forcibly displaced persons are consistently portrayed as either un-agentic victims, or as dangerous free agents. Recognizing that these dominant portrayals involve discourses of power and inequality, this research investigates the extent to which this victim-agent dichotomy affects refugees and organizations that work closely with them during initial integration processes in Berlin, Germany. The research measures initial integration based on German policy measures regarding integration juxtaposed with the way refugees and those who work with them understand integration. Additionally, the study examines day-to-day interactions of refugees in Germany as a way to gauge social integration in a bottom-up approach. This study involved a discourse analysis of portrayals of refugees and participant observation and interviews with refugees and those who work closely with them, which took place during fieldwork in Berlin in the summer of 2016. Germany is unique regarding their migration history and lack of successful integration, in part due to the persistent refrain, 'Wir sind kein Einwanderungsland' ('We are not an immigration country'). Still, their accepted asylum seeker population has grown exponentially in the past few years. Findings suggest that the victim-agent dichotomy is present and impactful in the process of refugees entering and integrating into Germany. Integration is hindered due to refugees either being patronized or criminalized to such an extent that, despite being constantly told that they must integrate, they cannot become part of German society.

Keywords : discourse analysis, Germany, integration, refugee crisis

Conference Title : ICSMI 2017 : International Conference on Sociology, Migration and Integration

Conference Location : San Francisco, United States

Conference Dates : June 07-08, 2017