HAL
open science

Faith and the politics of resettlement

Shoshana Fine

To cite this version:

Shoshana Fine. Faith and the politics of resettlement. Forced Migration Review, 2014, pp.53 - 54. hal-03460395

HAL Id: hal-03460395

https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-03460395

Submitted on 1 Dec 2021

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Faith and the politics of resettlement

Shoshana Fine

For some asylum seekers in Turkey, conversion may be an opportunistic strategy to improve resettlement prospects.

Those working with asylum seekers and refugees in Turkey have noticed that a growing number of Iranian Shi'ite asylum seekers are converting to Christianity during their migratory passage through Turkey. With apostasy punishable by death in Iran, asylum claims and requests for resettlement can be based on or strengthened by such conversion.

Resettlement is considered a privilege rather than a right under international law, and the selection process occurs in a context in which demand is much greater than the quotas stipulated by resettlement countries. This selection process divides refugees into sub-categories of deservedness, which are in theory based on vulnerability but are in practice linked to political as well as humanitarian rationales.

It has been argued that in the case of the United States – by far the most important resettlement country for refugees in Turkey – foreign policy interests have in the past played a key role in deciding which refugees are selected for resettlement. Resettlement selection processes have long favoured the entry of ideologically useful entrants, such as individuals fleeing Communist regimes during the Cold War. With a shift in focus from resettling religious minorities in the former Soviet Union to a similar focus in Iran, the US gives preferential treatment through reduced evidentiary standards to Iranian religious minorities (Baha'is, Jews, Christians). It is in this context that conversion is perceived by some Shi'a Iranian asylum seekers in Turkey as a way to improve their prospects for reaching the West; several studies have shown that the conversion of Iranian migrants and asylum seekers is a significant practice in Turkey.[1]

The absence of welfare support for migrants and refugees in Turkey opens up a space for voluntary support mostly provided by

NGOs and Christian associations. Their staff are frequently missionaries, a significant number of whom are fluent in Farsi and who are associated with networks of Farsi-speaking churches throughout Turkey. Missionaries assist migrants such as by offering translation services or establish contact by inviting Farsi-speaking migrants and asylum seekers to social events and church services – providing social networks which can give meaning to migrants' lives in an otherwise unstable situation.

An important part of the trajectory of conversion is the production of a personal narrative of conversion. Undoubtedly some of these narratives of conversion are 'real' in the sense that the Christian faith is believed and internalised by the individuals in question over the course of their passage in Turkey. For others, conversion maybe more of an opportunistic strategy to improve resettlement prospects.

Shoshana Fine *Shoshana.fine@sciencespo.fr* is a PhD Candidate at CERI Sciences Po Paris. *www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/en*

1. See Koser Akçapar S (2007) 'What's God got to do with it? The role of religion in the internal dynamics of migrants' networks in Turkey', *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, November 119-120; or Leman J (2007) 'A "Lucan Effect" in the Commitment of Iranian Converts in Transit. The case of the Pentecostal Iranian Enclave in Istanbul', *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, November 119-120.