

In Transition: Multiple Temporalities of Displacement for Trans-Venezuelan Asylum Seekers in Brazil

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Abstract

Gender and sexuality politics are omnipresent during displacement and “borders breed uneven geographies of power and status” (Hyndman 2000, p. 1). Our surveys and interviews with 20 trans-Venezuelan asylum seekers in Brazil, seven of which are trans sex workers, have found that these folks have a multi-layered and complicated experience and relationship with temporalities of displacement. First, research on LGBT populations displaced by conflict and disaster, have found that one’s sexual orientation, gender identity and other identities – such as race, age, migration status and disability status – impact their experience of displacement (Cowper-Smith et al., 2021; Su et al., 2021). Second, trans-Venezuelan asylum seekers are often forced to take paths which take them on longer and more dangerous journeys. Most of our respondents were forced to travel through trochas (informal paths) to escape danger in Venezuela’s political crisis and crippling economy and because of fear of transphobia and xenophobia at the Brazilian border. Lastly, trans-Venezuelan asylum seekers often find themselves going through multiple transitions in displacement as they transition both 1) internally, through a recognition of the greater freedom of expression afforded to them, 2) externally, as many go through hormone therapy or reassignment therapy and 3) geographically, as they migrate from city to city looking for work and acceptance.

Biography

Yvonne Su is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Equity Studies at York University, with a specialist on forced migration, queer migration, migrant remittances, climate change-induced displacement and community resilience. She holds a PhD in Political Science and International Development from the University of Guelph and a Masters in Refugee and Forced Migration Studies from the University of Oxford. Her research is supported by four SSHRC grants that examine Brazil and Colombia's response to Venezuelan LGBTQI+ asylum seekers, the impact of COVID-19 on Venezuelan LGBTQI+ asylum seekers in Brazil, and the impact of COVID-19 on disaster-affected resettlement areas in Tacloban City, Philippines. Yvonne is a Faculty Fellow of the Dahdaleh Institute for Global Health Research and an executive member of the Centre for Refugee Studies, Centre for Research on Latin American and the Caribbean, as well as the York Centre for Asian Research. Yvonne volunteers as Head of Research for LetsStopAIDS, Canada's biggest Youth-HIV charity where she is researching the impact of the pandemic on the sex lives of Canadian youth. She is the recipient of over 20 international and national awards for her leadership and contributions to youth engagement and community building.