

## Book Review

**Erel, Umut (2009)** *Migrant women transforming citizenship: Life-stories from Britain and Germany\**

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Although since the end of the 1980s and throughout the 1990s, women's agency in transnational migration received attention in several disciplines, academic works on the transnational experiences of female migrants, unfortunately, are few. Contrary to the earlier studies that presented a view in which women were considered backstage in transnational migration, the present book uses an intersectional perspective, an important point of distinction that rests upon different ways of constructing women's subjectivities. The author uses Bourdieu's notion of social and cultural capital along with his idea of habitus, which is required to get to the heart of women's experiences in the transnational sphere and their status in society. The explores the form of construction of the migrant women's subjectivities and everyday practices in the middle-class, skilled, educated Turkish female immigrants in Britain and Germany. As such, the attention to different societies stands out as a distinctive point for understanding transnational citizenship. This is because migrants or ethnic communities in receiving societies cannot be accepted as given and each country presents a unique context. In other words, transnational citizenship is experienced differently in different countries due to the politics of citizenship, gender, migration, ethnicity, which are not the same in any given country. The various histories of these two countries and receiving societies are considered when investigating gendered ethnicization.

Umut Erel is a senior lecturer at the Open University, Sociology Department. Erel's works are mainly about the relationship between gender, migration, ethnicity, and citizenship. This book, originally written as the author's PhD thesis, appeared in 2009 as a book in the series called Studies in Migration and Diaspora. First published by ASHGATE in 2009 it was reprinted by Routledge in 2016. Its reprint shows that it is always ripe to think about women's experiences in different migration settings.

Organized in seven chapters, the book tackles several aspects of women's transnational citizenship experiences such as the meaning of life for them in the host

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country, their changing identities and culture, their positions in education and family life as well as their work experiences and the meanings of longing and belonging. Each chapter discusses concepts like feminization of migration, the feminization of economies in the developed countries, intersectional feminism, migrant women's social classes, and being stuck in economic difficulties.

The women migrate to the "developed" countries for new employment opportunities, whereby they became important economic mobility actors. Even though migrant women in receiving societies are in the marginalized part of the community, they are active in claiming their citizenship rights. In this process, they can attribute meaning to belonging to the country they live in. This book describes how this process works. In that way, the book looks at the concept of transnational citizenship from the perspective of working migrant women by shedding light on Turkish women's life stories living in Europe. Under the conditions in the new country, the new culture, and new lifestyle patterns, women re-create their subjectivities and develop distinct ways of dealing and coping with the unique needs of being strangers. The reader meets these issues starting from real-life stories, which becomes an exciting and critical perspective and wishes to explore more in detail. As the readers start their reading journey, they can understand the effects of international migration, a macro-political issue, on individual lives, which is then presented in micro perspectives. Important is that the author discusses migration as an international macro phenomenon, relating it to women's personal experiences. In this way, the reader can see traces of her individuality in this macro-political issue. Additionally, this narrative style simplifies the complexity of international migration as a global phenomenon.

Erel criticizes an Orientalist form of othering whereby Turkish women in Europe are labelled as "backwards" and "traditionalists." She underlines that Muslim women are deeply affected by practices of marginalization. Interestingly, Turkish Muslim women internalise this situation and have prejudices about the interview questions because the problems are towards their religious or national identity. However, the notion of "Self" is not fixed. It is open to changes in the face of contextual conditions of place and time. And, of course, Turkish-Muslim women are not independent of this identity transformation. But it should also be emphasized that identity formation is not independent of the context of one's home country.

This book sheds light on the relationship between the political/cultural/social contexts of the countries and the process of identity formation, as she writes about the differential construction of visibility and identity. Erel presents an argument, in line with Germany's and Britain's policies in terms of policies in race, ethnicity, and migration. Britain and Germany have different histories of nationalism and racism (p. 24). Relatedly, the notion of citizenship has different meanings in each context.

For instance, Erel suggests that the economic incorporation of migrants from Turkey differs significantly in Germany and Britain (p.31), or racism has deeper roots in Germany.

Identity formation is not all about the relations between migrants and the host society; it also about the interactions between the first and second generations. The readers can notice all these differences in life stories. From the other perspective, being Turkish, Black, Romanian, or Kurdish carry different meanings in each context. Erel poses several questions: How does the idea of “being from Turkey” intertwine with the societal context of Germany and Britain? How can one identify this process? To what extent these immigrant women are excluded from and included in the host society? The author strives to answer all these questions based on her argument that identities are contested and negotiated. Thus, her approach towards citizenship is more about social, cultural, and political practices than the static, state-centred notion of citizenship. Accordingly, citizenship is a dynamic and transformative process that includes social relations between immigrants and the host society. The Turkish immigrant women try to participate in community and political activities to feel that they belong in their new states.

The integration process does not proceed independently from transnational experiences, which is very contingent on the agency. I think it is impossible to think of women from Turkey without considering their Turkish background. It is also appropriate that the author uses the term “women from Turkey” instead of “Turkish women” to include multiple forms of identification of migrant women with their countries of residence such as ‘British’, ‘German-Turkish’, ‘bi-cultural’ or “migrant” (p. 3). Besides, Erel discusses the other types of citizenship, such as post-national (Soysal 1994)) and multicultural (Kymlicka 1995), which is useful in understanding the meaning of transnational citizenship.

Erel uses the life-story method by benefiting from the micro-binary approach to grasp the migrant women’s inner self. I agree with the author regarding the importance of life story methods in the diaspora or ethnic community studies. This is the practical and strategic way to get a picture of the marginalized and vulnerable segments of the society like migrant women. Reading these migrant women’s life stories by portraying them can gain a proper insight to understand these women’s subjectivities. Opposite to journalism, life-story methods elicit not only what happened, but also how people experienced events, and how they make sense (p. 5). It should be considered as the art of portraiture, but not like portrait photography.

On the other hand, subjectivity is at the centre of the process of life storytelling. Although the method may lead to interpretive biases (Atkinson, 2002: 133), it has the potential to explore the experiential aspects of one’s life. Erel relies on a structural reading of one’s life history. However, she should have benefited from the

participants' photographs, souvenirs, and diaries. From a theoretical perspective, the book could have benefited from the “feminization of survival” a concept that owes its coinage to Saskia Sassen (2003). As Erel examines migrant women's economic mobility in global cities like London and Berlin, this concept seems appropriate to apply: Even though these women can be considered skilled and educated in Turkey when they first came to Germany and Britain, they were stuck in the secondary labour market. That is why their initial period in Germany and Britain might have been read through the concept of feminization of survival.

To sum up, gender, as it is used in the book, remains as a central concept in constructing the ethicised other (p. 37). The identity of Turkish speaking women transforms when they migrate to different countries. In the host society, in their constructed transnational space, they invent new belonging practices. However, women do not experience this process in the same way—intersectionality matters. To demonstrate the importance of intersectionality, she puts some categories like class, ethnicity, immigration status, language, education level to the forefront. Immigrant women's experiences vary according to their class, marital and residential status, education level, and Cypriot, Kurdish, or Turkish identities. The internal hierarchies among the categories can hinder their recognition in the society. The lack of recognition precludes them from entering the labour market or obtaining a residence permit. In short, this book views gender and ethnicity as social locations that mutually constitute each other (p. 193).