
Book Review

Abadan-Unat, Nermin and Gretty Mirdal (2015) (eds.) *Emancipation in Exile: Perspectives on the Empowerment of Migrant Women*. Istanbul: Bilgi University Press. 281 pp.

Emancipation in Exile: Perspectives on the Empowerment of Migrant Women is a collection of articles written by 19 scholars who attended a symposium organized to honor Prof. Dr. Nermin Abadan-Unat by the Paris Institute for Advanced Studies on November 7-8, 2013. The articles are essentially gathered around Abadan-Unat's pioneering article *Implications of Migration on Emancipation and Pseudo-Emancipation of Turkish Women* that was published in 1977. The articles in the volume critically evaluate the main themes of women's migration and emancipation within the framework of the changing global socio-political and economic conditions of the last four decades. On the conceptual level, the scholars discuss whether the main theme of 'emancipation' is still as pertinent as it was when defined in 1977 by Unat. Emancipation was presumed to be a necessary and direct outcome of modernity according to the contemporary approaches; however, as the authors emphasize, in an era of transnationalism, the feminization of migration, and religious and ethnic revivals new perspectives and methodologies are now required. Therefore, the issues involved in emancipation and integration—ranging from assimilation to multiculturalism—demand more comprehensive approaches that can surpass methodological nationalism (p. 34-35).

Nermin Abadan-Unat, in her article from 1977, relates emancipation directly to modernization and proposes criteria for the fulfillment of emancipation process: the decline of extended family relations, the adoption of nuclear family arrangements, fragmentation of the family structure, access to wage-paying work, exposure to the media, a decline in religious practices, and an increase in the adoption of egalitarian values for girls and boys in terms of education and the adoption of consumption-oriented behavior (p. 121). However, Unat also reminded readers that, although migrant women will easily integrate into the economic system, this will not necessarily entail their social and political emancipation.

In the volume under review, Abadan-Unat and other authors underline the negative effects of national integration policies, as well as latent or open xenophobia (p. 36) displayed by the host population. Of course, these are not the only factors behind the failure of 'integration' and "emancipation" discourses based on modernist assumptions. The social and political changes in migrants' homelands, new transnational practices that have arisen due to globally changing methods of communication and transportation, new migration patterns such as 'circular migration', and the revival of political Islam and terrorism (p. 31-32) also contribute significantly to the complexity of integration. Therefore, Western anti-immigration discourse has already undergone a rhetorical shift from an economic framework towards an ethnic, religious, and consequently, a cultural one. This involves political rhetorics of cultural essentialism which can be traced back to Samuel Huntington's

Clash of Civilizations thesis and can be clearly observed in the contemporary European Refugee Crisis, which only adds to the discriminatory and exclusionary pressures on migrant women (p. 38).

This reminds us of the importance of focusing on the ‘ethnic/religious resurgence’ and the so-called religion/emancipation paradox. Gender issues and female migrants have always been situated at the intersection of this paradox. For the Islamic movements and countries of immigration, as well as for the host and secular countries, women’s bodies are frequently the symbolic battlefield. The tension between religious and secular rhetoric both in academia and in public debates are indeed centered on the agency of Muslim women, and between the dichotomy of victimization versus resistance (Vasilaki, 2011). Yet this dilemma is also relevant to feminist discourses about Muslim women and Islam.

In this respect, the articles by Yeşim Arat, Sema Erder and Serpil Sancar mainly focus on the Islam-related issues of gender and female agency. As Serpil Sancar points out: ‘Turkey is a crucial test-case for the relation between feminist/secular and religious women’s political agenda...’ (p. 65)–and one in which women’s emancipation has different social and political connotations, surpassing conventional understandings of gender equality and justice. The reconciliation of gender issues and religion/tradition has always been contested in Turkey. However, after the 1980s, and particularly after the coming to power of AKP (Justice and Development Party) in 2002, Islamic conservatism was revitalized and even promoted through various political and social mechanisms. Promoting an Islamic way of life with an emphasis on Islamic family values that are easily intertwined with the existing patriarchal social order has meant that women must face new restrictions on their bodies and life choices (p. 6). The problematic relationship between women’s emancipation and religion has also been one of the topics of heated debate in feminist discourse and women’s movements in Turkey, as recognized by Yeşim Arat in her article.

Likewise, Sema Erder discusses the issue of the religion/emancipation paradox in connection with the visibility/invisibility nexus. Particularly focusing on AKP’s family policies which encourage an Islamic and patriarchal family order, Erder addresses the contradicting demands faced by women. On the one hand, while the government’s Islamization politics and increasing conservatism demand the visibility of veiled women as ‘political subjects’ (p. 63), the family model promoted by AKP asks women to return to their homes and to their traditional roles as wives and mothers. This refers to their ‘not active’ (p. 62) visibility in public life. The visibility/invisibility duality increases the constraints on migrant women living in Western countries, especially in Europe. With the rise of Islamic terror and Islamophobia, veiled women are becoming the embodied presence of Islam and the Islamic threat, but at the same time they are turning into targets of discrimination and racist attacks which distort their sense of selfhood and agency and affect their participation in the public sphere.

Besides demonstrating these unexpected findings with regard to women’s emancipation and migration, the articles are not only supported with valuable empirical data but also highlight the importance of undertaking subjective evaluations

of migrant women and their experiences. Çiğdem Kağıtçıbaşı, using a social psychological approach, investigates the transformations in the family models that influence migrant women's emancipation and their "overall well-being" (p. 101). Kağıtçıbaşı's article is followed by one from Grettey Mirdal and Fatma Küçükayıldız. Their analysis is based on the results of a longitudinal study on Turkish migrant women living in Denmark (the study was first carried out in 1980 and was followed up in 2010). Mirdal and Küçükayıldız's article is a significant one, since it is the only study that analyses Unat's hypothesis. The results indicate that the Unat's criteria for emancipation have mostly been fulfilled, but also highlight the declines in the psychological well-being of the women. The authors argue for the necessity of including 'subjective definitions of self-fulfillment' and the 'emancipation' of migrant women in academic studies (p. 129). Grettey Mirdal, who co-authors another article with Anika Liversage based on the same study, raises the issue of the intergenerational differences in the experiences of emancipation through a focus on three generations of women from the same family.

Some other articles evaluate the issue from a different point of view, mainly focusing on how migrant women are perceived in host countries, and in what ways structural discrimination and civil xenophobic manifestations towards them affect their integration and emancipation. Czarina Wilpert and Ruth Mandel discuss the effects of migrant women's motivation in the process of emancipation, while Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim raises the issue of how the stereotyping and discrimination of Turkish women migrants by Germans discourages their emancipation. The common point of interest about both articles is that, although we can talk about the increase in the visibility of 'success stories' of women migrants from Turkey, the statistics as well as the media and public discourse still frame Turkish migrants as unsuccessful and unable to integrate, and women migrants as victims of their own religion and family traditions. In other words, they are stigmatized as the 'permanent other' (p. 194).

Ahmet İçduygu and Deniz Karcı Korfalı's article, as well as the chapter by Christiane Timmerman and Kenneth Hemmerecht, are based on different analyses of EUMAGINE (Imagining Europe from the Out-side) data. İçduygu and Korfalı focus on investigating the situation of women who have been left behind in homelands after a relative has migrated to a Western country. In migration scholarship, this is usually a neglected area of study. Focusing on Abadan-Unat's concept of pseudo-emancipation (rather than emancipation), the authors question if the women who live in migrant sending areas are affected more (p. 197). Following this article, Christiane Timmerman and Kenneth Hemmerecht analyze the aspirations to migrate of women and men in contemporary Turkey. The results are striking in terms of the gender-differentiation: while men are mostly concerned about making economic gains, women are motivated more by 'social and democratic opportunities' which will involve more 'equal gender relations'; or in other words, opportunities for emancipation (p. 234).

Following Abadan-Unat's argument that the various freedoms obtained by migrating do not liberate women migrants, and 'indeed create a false climate of liberation' (p. 237), Nancy Foner focuses on women's migration in the United States and reminds the reader of the necessity of obtaining a more in-depth understanding of

the complicated and even contradictory outcomes for women migrants. The argument in the final chapter by Mirjana Morokvasic is similar to that put forward by Nancy Foner and locates the issues in a broader global dimension, while also touching on different forms of female migration. Morokvasic points out some of the other dilemmas for women migrants that were not raised by other articles. One interesting point is that while the increasing feminization of migration opens up new opportunities for mobility and the emancipation of women, prevailing traditional gender roles put the blame on women for the 'disruption of families' (p. 266).

To sum up, *Emancipation in Exile: Perspectives on the Empowerment of Migrant Women* is a rich volume that challenges modernist assumptions about women's process of emancipation by criticizing prevalent conceptual and methodological perspectives and offering new insights. Following Abadan-Unat's pioneering argument, the authors jointly emphasize the dilemmas involved in migration for women: migration and employment sometimes create gains, but at the same time can negatively impact women or strengthen the prevailing position of women as oppressed and subordinated individuals. Due to all the options they have and challenges that face them, women are usually the most vulnerable group to be frequently discriminated against or exploited. Thus, as claimed by the authors, the situation of women migrants cannot be comprehended through a gender-blind scholarship of migration. The gendered aspects of migration demand the analysis of the mutually constitutive relationship between migration and gender. In other words, and as the authors of this volume also suggest, migration affects and transforms gender roles and relations, but it is also crucial to analyze the dynamics of gender as an antecedent of migration. The constitutive relationship between migration and women also necessitates the historical tracing of repercussions across generations, as well as an investigation of affective reflections related to the country of origin.

Such an effort demands the adoption of an 'intersectional approach' (p. 155), as suggested by Czarina Wilpert and Ruth Mandel, and also emphasized by Mirjana Morokvasic (p. 272). I think that this is one of the most significant contributions of the volume. Favored recently by many feminist scholars, a gendered focus on migration also requires an intersectional approach. The positions and experiences of migrant women are difficult to fully conceive of since they involve discrimination in terms of gender, class and race (Morokvasic, 1984). This increases the challenge for the analyst who is required to untangle the dynamics of oppression and exploitation since one form of discrimination can mask others. Taking an intersectional perspective will enable to us to move beyond the established dichotomies of emancipation theories. Also, emerging transnational practices—whether economic or political—entail new patterns of integration and social engagement that subvert the patterns and politics of belonging. Without falling into the trap of cultural essentialism, and at the same time unraveling resistance through the 'cultural hard core' introduced by Dominique Schnapper, intersectionality offers a more flexible approach to observing the diverse and contradictory factors that contribute to emancipation. Pursuing an intersectional approach allows us to deconstruct the overlapping categories of exclusion/inclusion such as race, religion, culture and gender. Such approaches also emphasize the importance of agency (in our case, female agency) alongside the structural factors that

have been ignored in previous approaches. Another contribution of the volume is Schnapper's emphasis on conceptualizing 'emancipation' as a process, not as an ideal outcome of migration and democratization. This enables us to follow the historical and geographical trajectory of emancipation, not only in form of advancement or improvement, but also in other patterns of 'backfiring' (p. 6) such as the well-known 'veiling' dilemmas of Muslim women migrants.

Emancipation in Exile: Perspectives on the Empowerment of Migrant Women is thus a valuable academic source, providing significant findings and introducing challenging insights for academics, social science students and policymakers. Consequently, I believe the experiences of Turkish migrant women in Europe represent an excellent example of a historical trajectory and an inspiring case for future studies of women and migration.

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