

BOOK REVIEW**Williams, L., Coşkun, E. and Kaşka, Selmin. (eds.) 2020. *Women, Migration and Asylum in Turkey: Developing Gender Sensitivity in Migration Research, Policy and Practice*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. 251 pp**

Meltem Yilmaz Sener

Nord University, NO

meltem.y.sener@nord.no

Keywords: Migration; Asylum; Turkey; Women; Gender

Women, Migration and Asylum in Turkey is a collection of articles written by Turkish researchers on women and gendered migration in Turkey. The volume is important not only because it has brought together the writings of many experts on women's migration in Turkey, but also because it makes an important contribution to the international literature on women's experiences of migration. As stated in the first chapter written by the editors, the idea for this collection grew out of a panel titled 'Gender and Migration in Turkey' at the Turkish Migration Conference in Athens in 2017. The contributors later came together at a workshop in 2018, and the book emerged as the outcome of their collaboration. As Williams and Coşkun state, 'this is a book about women', thus it does not seek to cover 'the full effect of gender and gendered norms on migration experience and patterns' (236). There are no articles, for instance, on the impacts of gendered norms on men's experiences of migration.

The volume has been organized in three major parts. The first part includes one vignette and three articles, which are successful in setting the stage for the rest of the book. In addition to providing an overview of the book and providing the main theoretical frameworks, the introductory chapter gives background information about the history of migration to and from Turkey, women's roles in these migration flows, and Turkey's current asylum regime. The articles in the first part give additional contextual information by discussing the use of 'women' and 'gender' in migration studies in general, as well as the main paths of migration research in Turkey, which have a women/gender perspective (Kaşka, chapter 2); the forms of precarity that emerge from the intersection of gender and migration; and the distinct forms of precarity in the Turkish case (Şenses, chapter 3); and finally, the changes in the welfare regimes both in Europe and in Turkey and the impacts of these changes on migrant women (Toksöz, chapter 4).

In the second part, there are three vignettes and three articles. Although the title of the second part is 'Policy on gendered migration in Turkey', the first two articles in this part are less

about policy, and more on women (and to a limited extent LGBTI+) migrants'/asylum seekers' experiences in their interactions with governmental and non-governmental institutions and their living conditions in Turkey. The three articles in this part all depend on interviews and discuss the effects of the Turkish asylum regime on women and LGBTI+ (Coşkun and Eski, chapter 5); social workers' interactions with and perceptions of Syrians and their empathy (or lack of empathy) towards Syrian women (Atasü-Topçuoğlu, chapter 6); and finally, gendered forms of trafficking in Turkey and in what ways these forms impact migrant women and girls (Coşkun, chapter 7). The article by Coşkun successfully demonstrates how problems with Turkey's policy approach to human trafficking creates vulnerabilities for migrant women and offers suggestions for moving towards better policy against trafficking in women.

Finally, the last part includes one vignette and three articles. The first three articles focus on Syrian women, looking at their experiences in agricultural production (Dedeoğlu and Bayraktar, chapter 8), skilled women's experiences in the labor market (Ünlütürk-Ulutaş and Akbaş, chapter 9), and marriage of Syrian girls who are under the age of 18 (Yaman, chapter 10). Although the last article by Williams and Coşkun (chapter 11) on 'a future agenda' is also placed in the third part, it is, in fact, the concluding chapter of the book.

Although the title of the volume may give the impression that the articles in the volume examine several different flows of migration to Turkey from different countries, overall there is a special focus on the experiences of Syrian women in Turkey. While this focus is understandable given the fact that Syrians now make up the largest group of migrants living in Turkey, another title that reflects this special focus could possibly give a more precise idea about the composition of the book.

In the Overview of the Book, the editors write that the articles in the book not only demonstrate 'the circuits of vulnerability and precarity that restrict women's mobility and reduce their agency' but also 'the resilience of women claiming their rights and finding ways to protect themselves and their families as migrants in Turkey' (11). The articles in the volume do a very good job in terms of the first objective; throughout the book, we read well-structured descriptions and discussions of those structures which make migrant women 'outsiders and subsidiary players' (236) in the Turkish context. However, examples for the latter are rather limited, and the women's strategies for empowerment and efforts of organizing are not equally covered. The discussion of migrant women's agency and subjectivity seems to be largely left to the vignettes, where, the editors tell us, migrant women tell their 'firsthand experience of life as migrants in Turkey' (13). The idea that derives from such a division seems to be that migration experts write about structures of oppression, vulnerability, and precarity and that migrants can only give voice to their experiences.

In the book, there also seems to be a clear distinction between researchers/academics and migrants. However, a closer look at the backgrounds of the authors of the articles demonstrates that many of them have been migrants themselves during different periods of their lives. Reflexivity is one of the key principles of feminist research, and it involves '...a turning back of inquiry on the formative conditions of its production by variously addressing questions of the researcher's biographical relationship to the topic...' (Gray 2008: 936). While reading this collection on women and migration, one expects to see at least some of the authors reflecting on their own experiences as women migrants and to what extent those experiences had an impact on their research. That kind of reflexivity can help to erase the conceptual boundaries between migrants and migration experts, demonstrating the same people can be both. It can also concretely challenge 'the deeply rooted power relations in social sciences in general and in migration studies in particular' (41) that Kaşka points out in the second chapter, by showing, for instance, that the researcher/academic had also been vulnerable as

a woman migrant at one point and there may be common experiences of those who produce the knowledge and the ones about which they produce that knowledge.

The aim of involving migrant women as contributors to the book through the use of vignettes is an important effort for challenging the traditional distinctions between researchers as knowledge producers and the 'subjects' they write about. While the editors interpret these vignettes as 'testimonies' or 'personal stories', where migrant women 'write directly from their experience' (13), I would argue that what these women do in these vignettes go beyond that: they give context information about their countries of origin and the migrants from their country, point out problem areas for migrant women, evaluate and criticize Turkish institutions, offer their own interpretations of their experiences, give information about solidarity networks of migrant women, and offer suggestions. In other words, they also do at least part of what the researcher/scholar does: they take their own experiences as a starting point, but they also use some conceptual tools to make sense of them as suggested by standpoint theory (Smith 1990). Interpreting these vignettes as such can bring another challenge to the hierarchies of knowledge production. For instance, in the fifth vignette, Rasha Najy makes an important critique of NGOs when she writes about losing her belief in aid agencies and NGOs because they 'hire highly qualified staff who do not have experience in the field and who do not develop empathy toward refugees and other migrant groups' (170–171).

Women, Migration and Asylum in Turkey is an important contribution to the literature on women's experiences of international migration/asylum. The issues that have been highlighted in the articles of this book have implications for understanding not only what the Turkish context offers to migrant women, but also structural elements that put migrant women in precarious positions in different contexts. With its special emphasis on the experiences of Syrian women, it makes a timely intervention to a burning issue.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

References

- Gray, B.** 2008. Putting emotion and reflexivity to work in researching migration. *Sociology*, 42(5): 935–952. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038508094571>
- Smith, D.** 1990. *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Power*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

How to cite this article: Yilmaz Sener, M. 2020. Williams, L., Coşkun, E. and Kaşka, Selmin. (eds.) 2020. *Women, Migration and Asylum in Turkey: Developing Gender Sensitivity in Migration Research, Policy and Practice*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. 251 pp.. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 10(4), pp. 114–116. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.362>

Submitted: 01 July 2020 **Accepted:** 07 July 2020 **Published:** 26 November 2020

Copyright: © 2020 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.