

THE USES OF URBAN SPACE: The Case of Immigrant Women from Turkey in Berlin

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Abstract

Generally, women are invisible in the uses of urban spaces. In the case of migration, this invisibility is experienced more negatively because of the gendered division of labor and the disadvantages which are brought by migration itself. Because of gender role expectations, instead of using big spaces like urban public spaces, the migrant women use small urban places like home more. In this study, it is aimed to specify the way in which the migrant women from Turkey in Berlin use the urban spaces. In-depth interviews have been conducted as part of this study and it has been observed that the migrant women use the scales of home and neighborhood during their everyday lives. Everyday experiences of the women and reproduction of household shape these women's uses of urban spaces. Furthermore, it has been observed that family and close social ties are also effective on these women's uses of urban spaces. For social integration of the migrant women, special measures should be taken. It is necessary to implement programs of gender inequality for these women to use urban spaces more.

Key Words: German migration regime, gender, the use of urban space, immigrant women from Turkey.

1. Introduction

German migration regime highlights the guest worker migration. The migrants have been invited to Federal Republic of Germany by German state. In addition, the state bodies issue temporary working permits and visas for these workers. During 1950s and 1960s, these guest workers came to Germany primarily from Eastern Europe, such as former Republic of Yugoslavia and Poland, and Turkey or Pakistan. These workers were employed in industrial sectors (Kofman et. al., 2000:49-51). In 1970s and 1980s, the main dynamic of migration to Germany was the guest workers' families, who were later brought to Germany by the guest workers, and the increasing number of refugees. In 1970s, Germany received a massive influx of refugees especially from former USSR and Eastern European countries (Dedeoğlu, 2010). Federal Republic of Germany has increased its transfer of foreign workers between 1954 and 1965. From 1965 to present day, it has employed more than 1.7 million workers annually in accordance with its economic needs. This 1.7 million mobile, cheap, young and efficient labor power between 1965 and 1986 has contributed to the restructuring of German capitalism after Federal Republic of Germany's massive defeat in WWII and its huge losses related with WWII. The use of this labor power in various sectors was also essential to restore the competitiveness of German capitalism in global markets after WWII in a very short period of time.

If it is needed to summarize the main philosophy of the Act of Aliens, which came into force in 1965, this act specifies guest and temporary status for alien workers rather than permanent residency and related rights. Because of this reason, the expression and concept of *Gastarbeiter* –guest worker- has been defined in accordance with the logic and content of *Act of Aliens* from the beginning. The greater part of the immigrant workers has also come to Federal Republic of Germany temporarily in their own personal planning and outlook. This was true for most of the aliens. The demand for mobile workers have been met by replacing those who return back to their countries with new workers until the Act of *Anwerbestopp*, which came into force towards the end of 1973 and stopped the flux of new workers. However, it has been observed that the foreign workers who came to Federal Republic of Germany for temporary period have also started to stay permanently. This is how the settlement of immigrant workers in Germany started in 1970s. Currently, the major political and economic aim of the Act of Aliens is similar with old Act as to keep the foreign workers in accordance with the needs and demands of German labor market and to push the unwanted labors out of the market (Keskin 1988: 56). However, immigration, unlike guest-worker and temporary worker statuses, contains permanency and being resident and subsequent related rights, borne out of permanent residency.

2. The Perception of Immigrants and People from Turkey in Germany

Although there are many beneficial aspects of the immigration; immigration also bears many risks. These risks have been created and conditioned by the countries of origin, habits, customs, process of work, production, level and process of historical evolution. New and insecure conditions of living, intense social and historical isolation and the fear of losing the things gained may create deep and severe behavioral problems among immigrants (Göhler 1990: 90). Immigrants may also feel alienness, isolation, sense of emptiness and home-sick. Additionally, immigrants may develop personality problems, may experience feelings of unrootedness, suspicion, guilt, disappointment and develop prejudices. It is also observed that, they sometimes belittle and despise the values in their countries of origin (motherlands) and their native-languages (Göhler 1990: 94-95). In Federal Republic of Germany, the overall image of immigrant, which is drawn and widely shared by all social classes, strata and institutions in German society (the political parties, which are represented in federal parliament, federal government, churches, unions and others, of course in different degrees), is as follows:

1. They are coming from rural background.
2. They have big family structures.
3. They are radical.
4. They either do not have any education or simply have basic literacy.
5. They do not have vocational training.
6. Most importantly, the immigrants are coming from societies, ruled by backward and primitive cultures.

Some, by furthering this line of thinking, claim that the immigrants do not have any cultural background. They also perceive their own society as industrial society, society of culture, modern and contemporary society (Özak 1988: 127). This perception leads to the development of social work for alien and foreign workers in 1960s. This thinking showed itself when first foreign workers were employed in Germany and when they were placed in special housing quarters. This was the first time a secretary and board of social counseling has been instituted for immigrant workers to help them about residency permits, labor law, problems of child-support, social environment work, and unification of families. The need for foreign social workers in Germany has been increased in accordance with the increase of foreign workers, bringing of family members to Germany and foreign workers' adjustments of their lives as to stay longer in Germany (Özkara 1990: 48). There needs to be special emphases on several issues, based on the problems of foreign workers.

1. Work and social security
2. Personal and work-related crises, intergenerational conflicts among family members.
3. Upbringing and education of children and adolescents.
4. Integration and return
5. The national identities of minorities and their independency.
6. Initiatives for intercultural dialogue (Özkara 1990: 50).

In this context, xenophobia and discrimination emerge as important concerns. There are several factors effecting this situation such as the number of Turks in Federal Republic of Germany, the shift in their status from employee to employer and as a result of increasing unemployment, the perception of Turkish workers as rivals among German workers (Özak 1988: 125).

3. Immigrant women from Turkey in Germany

The 10% of the population in Germany is immigrant women. These women, like all women, demand social security, equal payment for equal work. However, immigrant women have also to deal with and battle with discrimination against foreigners. Dagdelen (2011) states that economic conditions are influential in immigrant women's lives. Accordingly, these women experience poverty 2.5 times more than the average. The number of immigrant women who do a second job due to low income is 2 (two) times more than the average (Dagdelen, 2011 <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,14895358,00.html> Germany | 08.03.2011). According to data taken from VERDI (the biggest labor union in Germany), although women in Germany do the same job as men, they get 23% less income. In 70% of the low-income jobs, women are employed. Additionally, the data mention about employed or unemployed Turkish women's relations with close or distant relatives and the related social, psychological and physiological concerns. These women generally do not give the decision to break with their country of origin and move away from their big families; yet this situation is brought by conditions in the country of origin.

In Germany, these women's lives are dependent on the Acts about Aliens and Foreigners. The usual and ordinary changes in legal policies regarding aliens and foreign workers prevent the families to make long-term plans and implement these plans. These problems further isolate the families and especially the women in these families. In many cases, this brings total isolation from outside world. Although the housing problem may affect all family members, especially women tend to get effected more negatively from this problem because of the patriarchal family structure that still defines women's roles in families as mothers and wives and subsequent division of labor this definition brings. Foreign and immigrant workers usually come with the decision to earn more money and buy properties for better future. However, the costs are usually higher than planned and thus it is always expected from women to save more (Göhler 1990: 132). The relations among the partners differ in accordance with the employment status of women. If women are working, they continue working (or they do domestic work) at home after work. As a result of this, women are under double psychological and physiological pressure. In addition, the negative work conditions, cultural differences and psychological oppression, experienced by immigrant women who cannot speak German, cannot be omitted (Göhler 1990: 133).

The expectations of working women from their husbands increase and women demand more authority in familial matters. Especially, family planning, allocation of income and methods of education emerge as primary sites of conflict among women and men in families. In this context, a new need emerges: a need to redefine the major areas of life, which was defined differently before. The problems in these areas found their echo in the increase in the cases of divorces in immigrant families. If an immigrant woman is not working, her dependency to her children and husband drastically increases. This woman does not have close and necessary ties with her relatives and environment anymore. She interacts with her environment only through her husband and children. The situation worsens if she does not know/speak German or foreign language, because the given language barrier makes it impossible for her to understand and engage with the new social environment. For an unemployed immigrant woman, who does not have necessary foreign language skills, the only remaining option to socialize is with female neighbors. She cannot benefit from educational and cultural opportunities in social life other than this (Göhler 1990: 133).

It has been also observed that the immigrant women from Turkey experience constraints that derive from Islam as a religion. They also experience oppression as being housewives and foreigners and become targets of discrimination. If they are working, it is observed that they are paid less than others. Another problem they face is the invisibility of their valuable economic activities (Wilpert, 1984:319). If one looks at the experiences of immigrant women in Europe, one can see that some of them are working in low-skill jobs and some of them are working in high-skill requiring, professional jobs. European Union (EU) harmonization process creates big differences between citizens of EU-member countries and people from third-party countries in terms of job in/security and temporary (contractual) work conditions (Kofman ve Sales, 1998: 394). It has been observed that immigrant women experience problems due to non-accreditation of their diplomas and degrees and German-language competency (Wilpert, 2007:170). In this study, the uses of urban space among immigrant women from Turkey in Berlin have been researched through scholarly lenses provided by gender analysis.

4. Method

As part of this research, In-depth interviews have been conducted among women members or women participants of various social activities of Federal Republic of Germany Berlin Dersim Civil Society Organization. The research was done at the headquarters of Berlin *Dersim* Civil Society Organization. Berlin Dersim Civil Society Organization puts a special emphasis multi-cultural formations in Tunceli (Dersim) and issues of language/culture. Folklore classes (*folklore-kurse*), choir course (*chor-kurse*), saz course (*saz kurse*), tutorials for school (*Schularbeitszirkel*), Zaza Language Course (A dialect of Kurdish Language), German Language Course (*Deutsch-Sprachkurse*), Space of social/family gatherings (*Freizeitgestaltung Für Senioren*) and Project Biko (this is an employment project) are main activities of the organization.

In addition, by organizing regular weekend meetings among members and monthly breakfasts (1st Sunday of each month), Berlin Dersim Organization aims to strengthen social ties, communication and solidarity among its members. Those who participate in the activities of the organization are not only people from Dersim-Tunceli region of Turkey. Rather, people who migrated from different regions of Turkey to Berlin participate in the activities of the organization. The distribution, based on their cities of origin, of women participants/interviewees in the activities of organization is as follows:

(Adana, Amasya, Ankara (2 people), Aydın, Berlin (2 people), Bingöl, Çorum, Elazığ (2 people), Erzincan (7 people), Erzurum (2 people), İstanbul (3 people), İzmir, Muş (5 people), Sakarya, Sivas ve Tunceli (9 people). The differences among participants can be clearly seen by looking at this distribution. During the period of 2 months, researcher engaged in the activities of organization and established face-to-face relations with women, and then conducted in-depth interviews with them. In addition to semi-structured interview form, developed by the researcher herself, method of participant observation has been utilized as part of the research.

5. Research Data

The research data, collected as part of this study, are grouped under three major sub-headings. These are socio-demographic characteristics of immigrant women, their narratives of immigration to Germany and their social networks and uses of urban spaces in Berlin. Interview forms contain information about quantitative socio-demographic data. Accordingly, interviewees' ages are between 27 and 70. Majority of the women fall into cluster of 39-46 (age), and this is followed by a cluster of 31-38 (age).

5.1 Socio-demographic Findings regarding Immigrant Women

It has observed that women develop different personal registers of belonging.

Whilst 25% of the interviewees were stating that 'they feel they do not belong to anywhere', 22.5% of the interviewees defined themselves as Alevis and foreigners. 12.5% as Turk, 10% as Turks of Germany, 5% as Kurd and 2.5% as Sunnite. During this study, interviewees put central importance on the different registers to define their belonging and identities. Among 40 women, 25 (%62.5) have Turkish and 15 (%37.5) have German citizenship. 13 women are primary school (%32.5), 10 women are middle-school (%25), 9 women are high-school (%22.5) graduates. These data refer to their education in Turkey. One of the two women, who were born in Germany, completed her abitur in Germany. There are 2 university graduates and 2 women who have no formal education. 18 of women define themselves as housewives, and this constitutes almost %45 of the interviewees. As it is observed, regardless of their level of education in Turkey, after coming to Berlin these women, due to traditional regime of gender relations, increasingly identify themselves with home. Additionally, due to the selective labor market structure, they cannot find employment and thus they stay at home and become housewives. Nursing, blue-collar work, salesperson, office-work and maintenance are the primary jobs for women. One of interviewees defines her job as 'model mothering' and this seems to be in consistent with traditional gender roles. In labor market, there is a regime of stratification in accordance with gender and ethnic denominators. The immigrant women are situated at the bottom of this regime of stratification. Immigrant women get paid by doing 'women's work' such as cleaning, child-care, cooking and offering sexual services (Hochschild ve Ehrenreich, 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Morokvasic, 1993; cited in Liversage, 2009:235). Or because of this regime of stratification, women are forced to choose staying at home and becoming housewives.

36 of women (out of 40, 90%) are married. Their years of marriage change between 1 to 45 years. 55% of the women are married with their relatives. 57.5% of the women state that 'they are happy in their marriages'. 40% of women define their husbands as egalitarian and 62.5% of women stated that the decision to marry was mutual. 95% of women have kids and 47.5% of them have 2 kids. The majority of the children, 22.5% of the children, is attending vocational training schools and this is followed by high-schools, 17.5% of the children. 55% of the women know Kurdish, Turkish and German, 35% of the women know Turkish and German, 7.5% of the women know German, English and Turkish, and 1 woman knows German and Bosnian. 47.5% of the women are employed and 52.5% of them are unemployed. Majority of the employed women earn 1400 Euro (%22.5) and secondly 1000 Euro (20%) per month and this is followed by 2000 Euro (12.5%) per month. The lowest wage is 400 Euro per month and the highest wage is 3200 Euro. According to interviews, 28 women (70%) do not find their wages enough and 12 women (30%) stated that they find their wages enough. There is a positive correlation between low income and finding the wage insufficient.

5.2. Migration to Germany

Women came to Germany with different ways. Marriage is at the top these ways.

"My husband saw me when he came for a visit in holiday. We got engaged, and married and I came here" (25 years old, Aydın)

"My husband is my relative from my maternal side. (I did not know that) he was also in love with me, he asked for my hand from my family in marriage. I got married and then came here. (28 years old, *Tunceli*)

Women's other way of coming to Germany is 'having an arrangement as a worker's family'.

After Varto earthquake my dad registered himself as a worker for Germany. We are 6 brothers and sisters. We took our mother and came to Germany. (34 years old, *Mus*).

My mother was working in a factory in Adana. After the death of my father, she moved to Germany for work with us. I am glad she did that, otherwise our situation would be bad in Turkey. She only experienced goodness and kindness from Germans (35 years old, *Adana*).

Men usually move first to Germany and then take their children to Germany after certain period of time. It is observed that, women occupy a disadvantageous position in this process of 'taking the children after'. Families usually leave their girls behind boys and after years of separation, girls can re-unite with their families.

My dad brought all his children to Germany except me. They left me, only me, in the village. I was raised by my grandparents. I called them dad and mum. They brought me Germany after 8 years. I was so angry at them at first because they left me. I did not talk with them for a while. Then we reconciled. (42 years old, *Tunceli*).

The number of political refugees and single-women who came to work to Germany are very small. These women are migrated to Germany independently not through marriage or 'chain or dependent migration'. As it is observed, although the majority of the women's migration to Germany can be seen as dependent migration, there are also cases of independent migration among the women from Turkey. Their year of arrival to Germany changes between 1964 and 2004. Their ages change between 4 and 40 when they migrated to Germany. 87.5% of the women's formal education process has not been hampered by their immigration to Germany.

5.3 The Social Networks in Berlin and the Uses of Urban Space

'Everyday lives' of women in their sheer simplicity consist of urban inhabitants' daily routes, spaces of working, resting, walking in the city, shopping and eating out between their homes and work-places and their uses of these spaces to reproduce their households. Everyday life also means a space in which women and men live-in/inhabit in, work, interact with others, construct their identities, and resist to mundane and acquire peculiar habits and codes of conduct (Vaiou and Lykogianni 2006:732).

During the interviews, the women reported that they know Berlin very well and they can deal with state organs by themselves. The researcher thinks that this is related with their young ages and their levels of formal education. Some of them also reported that they do not know the city (Berlin) very well and they spend their times with work. When one looks at the women's uses of urban spaces, it is observed that they predominantly know and use shopping places, health clinics, their own neighborhoods/districts in which they live, state offices and social service offices. Actually, these places are spaces in which 'everyday life' has been produced and the women know and use these spaces very well. These spaces are essential for the reproduction of the households. Thus, it has been observed that these women's uses of urban spaces are determined by their everyday and mundane activities and primary sites for the reproduction of the household.

Among the social networks in Berlin, the family comes first. At least 82.5% of the women have a relative or kin in Berlin and social relations stream through families. These women spend most of their times with members of their nuclear families and their large families in Berlin.

"My mum, dad and four sisters, and one brother, we all live in the same district. Almost every week, we come together. We talk on the phone at least one time in a day" (45 years old, *Tunceli*).

Another network is the neighbors in terms of frequency of meetings. The women tend to socialize with other women who come from Turkey in order to avoid or escape from sense of isolation.

"When I first came from Ankara, my neighbors helped me a lot to get used to here. With them, I got used to Berlin quite easily. But sometimes I am wondering, if I would have German neighbors, maybe I could speak German better (28 years old, *Ankara*).

During our interviews, some women reported that since they do not trust their neighbors, they prefer not to meet or get together with them.

For the women, having a "foreign" neighbor or friend seems to be something proud of. Here the term "foreign" refers to Germans. However, it is observed that the frequency of meeting with foreign friends and neighbors is not very high among women.

"I have German friends in my workplace, we get along well" (38 years old, *Erzurum*).

“I have German employees in my workplace, I employed Germans in my cleaning company, they are hard-working. There are foreigners among my friends” (43 years old, Tunceli).

During their meetings with other women, they stated that they chat about their children, household chores, political and social issues. It has been observed that, even though Berlin Dersim Civil Society Organization is one of the key dimensions that effects these women’s uses of urban spaces, the women are not active in volunteering in another institution and membership issues. They come to Berlin Dersim Organization at weekends but not more than 3 women are members and active participants of Europe-wide organizations.

Walking in the city by herself is not an obstacle for the women. The success of urban planning of Berlin and effective public transportation have a significant impact on this easiness.

“I freely wander around, I am not worried about getting lost. First generation of labors does very funny things to not to get lost such as eatin one roasted chickpea in every subway station to get off at the right U-bahn station. I do not have a problem like this. (39 years old, Mus).

The immigrant women’s hobbies have an impact on their uses of urban spaces as well. “Walking around and shopping” are among their major hobbies and they are important in their uses of the urban spaces in Berlin. Reading a book, listening to music and cooking are home-based hobbies. In Cakmak’s research (2010), it is observed that in their everyday lives, the women generally use urban spaces which are in a walking distance from their homes. A similar observation was made in this study too.

During our interviews, it has been observed that women stated that they are happy by living in Berlin, which as a city, offers variety of services and opportunities. Women also reported that it is easy for them to live in Berlin. For these women, walking in the street and going to supermarket for shopping are leisure activities when one considers the small areas they live before coming to Berlin.

6. Final Words

The social construction of womanhood and manhood relies on specific roles and expectations for men and women. This also separates the spaces in accordance with gender roles and role-related expectations from each gender. There is a distinction made between small and large spaces. In this vein household or home are small spaces and urban space, public spaces, spaces between the cities and urban areas, spaces of nation-state, spaces between the nation-states are large spaces. The social construction of manhood and womanhood identifies women with the ‘small spaces’. The space of woman is basically room or house (Atauz, 2004). However, bigger spaces are identified with men and they belong to men.

In this study, it is observed that women predominantly use ‘home’ as a space and tend to be in public places for everyday life activities and to meet the household needs in order to reproduce and maintain the household. The will to transform these women’s uses of the urban space for greater equality should go hand in hand with struggles for equal participation of women in every aspect life, equality of opportunities between men and women and elimination of gendered social structures and inequalities in education, employment and politics. When the problems faced by immigrant women combined with already existing alterity and oppression of women, immigrant women become more and more invisible in urban space. Their uses of urban spaces are realised in the scales of home and neighborhood. These women, who find Berlin as a hub/city of opportunities, cannot benefit from these opportunities throughly. Because in the framework of the universal gender role expectations, women are expected to involve with family, children and home.

In this study, it was observed that family has an utmost significance in these women’s uses of urban spaces. These women use urban spaces to meet the needs of the families and for the reproduction of families. However, they do not use urban spaces for their own personal development and growth. In terms of the perception of the oppressed women, it is compulsory that institutions provide support and they be provided with the opportunity to be effective in policy making to facilitate their social, scientific and everyday life (Inowlocki ve Lutz, 2000:307). By doing this, it has been possible for women who have different belongings to integrate into German society and to experience the transformation of urban spaces for greater equality.

Relating differences of immigrant women to a larger framework is meaningful when difference does not mean disadvantage or become part of social exclusion and discrimination. Additionally, this is meaningful when it is explained without reducing it into cultures and is framed holistically. This would make integration of the immigrant women into German society much easier.

Seeing how gender roles limits women's lives under this light and re-designing everyday life and politics for greater equality will definitely transform immigrant women's uses of urban spaces in more equalitarian way. This will also make the invisibility of women in urban spaces more visible and discernible.

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