

***Transnational Migrant Mothers
negotiating change and continuity***

Umut Erel

Centre for Citizenship, Identities and
Governance, Open University

u.ereel@open.ac.uk

Small Scale Pilot

- How do migrant women to the UK make a home for themselves and their children?
- How do mothers see their role in bringing up future citizens of their new country of residence?
- What citizenship practices of constructing belonging and participation do they engage in (in their own right and for their children)?
 - Topical life-stories with 15 pairs of mothers and children (Kurdish, Turkish and Polish)
 - This paper focuses on Kurdish and Turkish participants

Pateman's paradox: Women's 'political duty (like their exclusion from citizenship) derives from their (...) capacity for motherhood.' (1992:19).

Bearing and rearing future citizens is considered women's political and social citizenship duty, yet 'remains unacknowledged and set apart from (political) citizenship.' (Pateman 1992:23)

Migrant mothering positioned ambivalently to Pateman's paradox.

- De-naturalizes relation of culture, generation and ethnic belonging.
- brings in potentiality of plural cultural and ethnic identities as a basis for citizenship.
- Potentially injects 'fresh blood' into European aging population
- Potentially undermines social and cultural cohesion of citizen community.

Theorizing migrant mothers as subjects of citizenship can focus on contradictions of citizenship and re-constitute the relationship between population, culture, past and present, territory, national and transnational identities with conceptions of belonging, duties and rights.



- ‘Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, [identities] are subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere “recovery” of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.’ (Hall 1990:225).



- ‘think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These “in-between” spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.’ (Bhabha 1994:1-2)

- '[my children] agree with me. I go to Cemevi for religion and community centres. I go to these places with my children. I have differences with my children in terms of language, I cannot speak English. But there are no cultural differences or differences of values or religion. They behave according to our values. They feel they belong to our culture. I am quite happy about that. They learned their culture, not anyone else's culture. I am very pleased with this.
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- I have not changed. My ideas have not changed. I live my own culture here which I learned back home.' (Evin, 39, Kurdish from Turkey)

- ‘I want [my children] to know our culture because we are more respectful towards communities compared to others. ... First of all, parents need to live their culture. A child sees this behaviour and they learn like that. Home is very important in that sense. If you want your child to behave respectful to you, as a parent, you have to be respectful first. I want them to watch Turkish and Kurdish channels. They learn our culture through those television programmes. (Rojda, 35, Kurdish from Turkey)

- ‘While I was living in Samsun, I was not feeling very safe because we were Kurds and my neighbours were Turks. I was concealing my Kurdish identity from my neighbours, otherwise they would avoid any contact with me.
- ...
- ‘I am closer to my ethnic community and identity than compared to the past. This is because I am with my family. I used to have just Turkish neighbours in Turkey and as I said, they do not like Alevis and Kurds. You have to conceal your identity in Turkey.’ (Evin, 39, Kurdish from Turkey)

- I became more attached to my culture and identity [in London]. Just for the sake of my children. I pretend that I am very close to my identity. I am doing this to influence them. I want them to behave like me. They are between two cultures. This is a decisive age. They are very young now and whatever you give them now, they will grab that and live like that. (Rojda, 35, Kurdish from Turkey)

- I personally don't like [my son] to spend time with friends from Kurdish community. Instead I wish he could be more involved with English community. I think my children should learn more about English culture, because I am familiar with my culture more than enough and I would teach my children my culture at home. For me it's important they learn something different, like something new from English society. Many things we do at home or in our community are a repetition and I don't like carrying out again and again the repetition of these cultures. (Mina, 45, Kurdish from Iraq)

- ‘Kurdish community, no. You know but in my view there are Kurdish people who fight for freedom and equality. But it isn’t a sort of a community. People are Kurds but they don’t call themselves Kurdish community. I don’t feel that I belong to any Kurdish community, or I don’t feel that Kurdish community has a very big role in my life. No, it’s not like that. Some Kurdish people or if we call them Kurdish community, have blown up some traditional and cultural issues here, which don’t exist in Kurdistan. They reproduce these traditions which belong to the past.’
(Ronak, 39, Kurdish from Iraq)

- ‘women must be at home for housework and men would work. Or women must stay at home and be controlled by their men. Or their children are not allowed to be with other children from different communities and they are Kurdish people who must follow the traditional rules from their parents. This is a view for many Kurdish families here, but in Kurdistan these views have decreased. In spite of all you hear about political issues in Kurdistan, people have a secular view about civil rights, women’s and children’s rights. People like a modern culture, they try to build it and behave like modern people.’ (Ronak, 39, Kurdish from Iraq).

- ‘As I said all these reactionary traditions and cultures still exist in these communities. All nationalities have their own communities and they have got a lot of money and opportunity from the government to reproduce these cultures.’