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## Book Review

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## Book Review

M. Mustafa İyi (Ed.), **Kesitler: Üçüncü Kuşakla Konuşmalar**, GAV Perspektif Yayınları, 2021, pp. 410, 72 TL, ISBN: 978-605-73877-0-7

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On the sixtieth anniversary of the labor migration from Turkey to Germany, social scientists must contemplate the position of the descendants of the guest-workers in contemporary German society as an exclusive social phenomenon. Germany has considered labor migrants to be temporary residents for a long time, therefore, avoiding enacting the legal framework to recognize their substantive membership rights in the polity. Until the amendments at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, formal citizenship was largely inaccessible for labor migrants and their families due to the *jus sanguinis* (right of blood) principle. Historically, German citizenship was defined through an ethnic understanding of nationhood.

Although the members of the Turkish minority were able to access welfare benefits and a large span of civil and social rights, they have been deprived of political rights and permanent legal status in the country. Moreover, official incentives for immigrant integration were introduced relatively late. Integration has been interpreted as a unilateral process that mainly depends on the individual effort of the migrant subject. Adaptation to the German lead culture (*Leitkultur*) was set as the primary goal of integration, discouraging the preservation of the culture of origin. There was a fear of loss of identity (*Überfremdung*) because of cosmopolitanism.

Considering the historical background of Germany's immigration regimes, one can argue that there have been significant improvements concerning the scope of immigrant rights in the current context. Acknowledging itself to be a country of immigration (*Einwanderungsland*) evolved the responses to cultural differences and carried the definitions of insider and outsider beyond the legal boundaries. In this respect, *Kesitler: Üçüncü Kuşakla Konuşmalar* aims to reveal the inter-generational consequences of labor migration and the key features of the emerging Turkish diaspora through transnational perspectives.

The book consists of 60 interviews which are conducted with the third-generation grandchildren of Turkish labor migrants. The book begins with the introduction of the editor, M. Mustafa İyi. In this section, İyi explains the research's objectives and methodology. Diverting from the traditional bipolar division between segregation and assimilation,

Iyi traces the elements of post-migrant society, which is a pluralist and less state-centric definition of integration described by Langhoff and Foroutan (p.19). In this framework, multiple identities can be combined and altered. Therefore, the overall transformation of German polity, including non-migrants, is discussed in line with the transition of the migrant subject into a citizen.

Qualitative methodology is used in the study to reflect an interpretivist perception of the social phenomena. In-depth interviews are designed in a semi-structured form to allow the participants to express themselves comprehensively from the first-person point of view (p.25). Participants are asked to delineate their childhood memories, education, family relations, professional achievements, and expectations from German and Turkish societies. Experiences of discrimination, proficiency in the mother tongue, definitions/significance of religious and national identities, and attitudes regarding political participation are included in all interviews.

Almost all participants reside in Germany and plan to stay there until the end of their professional lives. They successfully adapt themselves to all segments of the public sphere in their host country, having a perfect command of the German language. All participants state that they completed at least a secondary degree in the German education system, and they practice a profession to maintain their living. Therefore, the third generation is fully integrated into the labor market, which has been crucial for German authorities.

Participants believe that they are inadequately represented in German politics despite the fact that there are politicians and deputies of Turkish origin (p.205). Some are involved in German politics through political party membership or casting their vote. The Turkish diaspora is considered weak in terms of influencing formal decision-making mechanisms in Germany at both the local and federal level. Fragmented political positions among individuals of Turkish origin and the Turkish government's unstable foreign policies are indicated as the major reasons for the representation gap. In addition, Germany set certain constitutional/systematic boundaries to avoid strengthening ethnic identities.

*Kesitler: Üçüncü Kuşakla Konuşmalar* shows that many of the descendants of Turkish guest workers are prone to sustain their ties with their homeland in the future. Their spiritual identities are predominantly shaped by the elements of Turkish culture, nationhood, and Islam (p.52). None of the participants define themselves as solely German. Accordingly, they did not transfer their identifying affection and value judgments to the host society. Improving Turkish language skills is still considered crucial (p.129). Assimilation is perceived negatively; however, participants believe it is inevitable for the fourth generation (p.200).

According to the interviews, members of the third generation gather under the roof of diaspora organizations and devote their free time there, networking with other Turkish

immigrants, praying, and educating children. These organizations consist of mosques, religious communities, and formal/informal branches of Turkish right-wing political parties.

Most of the interviews highlight subtle forms of discrimination. One of the most common is practiced through the administrative discretion of teachers. Accordingly, students of Turkish origin are systematically recommended to low-ranking schools, which are under their potential. Consequently, their access to higher education is prevented. Although this is justified by the weak German language skills of pupils, *Kesitler: Üçüncü Kuşakla Konuşmalar* proves that there is a significant pattern observed country-wide.

Many interviewees do not have close or intimate relationships with Germans because of cultural differences. Although in a respectful manner, many Germans criticize Islamic religious practices and emphasize/impose a secular lifestyle as a prerequisite of being a part of German society. Individuals of immigrant descent are highly encouraged to adopt the German way of living (p.66).

Earlier generations were harshly disciplined and traumatized in workplaces. Nevertheless, several interviews praise the implementation of the equality principle regarding the delivery of certain public services. Participants state that they are frequently asked where they are originally from and their political affiliations concerning Turkey (p.84). In this regard, many participants state that they have been insulted several times since their childhood. However, such unpleasant experiences could be well related to their lower-class identity and illiterate parents.


Approximately half of the participants support their long-distance right to vote in Turkey, as they see themselves as rightful members of Turkish society. The other half claim that they ethically do not have the right to affect the lives of residents of Turkey, hence, choose not to vote. Pejorative expressions such as “gurbetçi” and “Almancı” are disliked and denied. Worsening economic conditions in Turkey exacerbate the relationship between home and diaspora.

A more diverse sample of participants could improve the quality of the study, as it would demonstrate a broader spectrum of standpoints, identities, experiences, and lifestyles adopted by the third generation. Atheist, (Kurdish)-Alevi, LGBTQI+ members of the third generation would pursue different ways of membership in contemporary German society. Strikingly, none of the participants mentioned Atatürk and the republican values as a part of their national identity affiliated with Turkey. This could be a result of the low impact of the Turkish national education system on the Turkish-German community. Additionally, questions on intimate life and relationships could expand the perspectives. For example, many participants implied they got married in their 20s to Turkish partners.

*Kesitler: Üçüncü Kuşakla Konuşmalar* is a quality scientific study that is conducted

with a relatively large sample of participants from different educational and socio-cultural backgrounds. The target audience of the book could be social scientists, as well as people who are interested in the field. The research is a unique contribution to the literature as it shows that the third generation formed a distinct culture with unique elements incompatible with Turkish and German cultures alone. Also, regardless of their legal status, it is undeniable that members of the Turkish diaspora are an indispensable part of German society.

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