

The effects of Russia-Turkey crisis on mixed families in İstanbul: Hearing the voices of women¹

Ayla Deniz²E. Murat Özgür³

Received Date: 01 / 09 / 2016

Accepted Date: 15 / 01 / 2017

Abstract

After 1990's, Russia-Turkey migration system has developed and a great number of Russian women and Turkish men have started to cross the border for various purposes. Within this mobility, new social, cultural, economic and political realities have emerged. One of the most important realities is increasing of Russian-Turkish couples and their important roles on the Russia-Turkey migration system. Just like Ley and Waters (2004) said, migrants not only move from one place to another, but also move from one set of social relations to another. In this context, I'd like to mention about what has happened in lives of mixed families in İstanbul after an aircraft belonging to Russian Federation Air Forces was shoot-down by Turkish Air Forces on the November 24th, 2015. This study based on interviews with marriage migrants, their couples and representatives of Russian institutions in İstanbul. In conclusion, the crisis between Russia and Turkey has affected lives of Russian women in İstanbul both negative and positive ways. These women are foreigners in Turkey and their limited social environments have imprisoned them to a narrow area during the crisis. But they have tried to bring into connection with two parts of the crisis and have tried to stand between Turkey and Russia by using their institutional networks which also have supported their collective identities.

Keywords: *Russia-Turkey crisis, marriage migration, mixed families, İstanbul*

1. Introduction

There are only a few studies which address mixed marriages in a social-economic and historical frame and assess daily experiences of people performing such marriage and social-spatial consequences of such marriages from a wide perspective. Furthermore, it is not well known how state policies affect marriage and this issue is rarely addressed by academics. In addition, it is asserted that studies related to marriage are generally conducted by men and that they reflect their ideas (Breger and Hill, 1998). Therefore, by inspiring from John Scott (1991), I hope to make visible Russian marriage-immigrant women living in Turkey and to make them enter into information world. I cannot give a place for Russian-Turkish families living in Russia and husbands of the Russian women in Turkey. First of all, I want to understand and show women experiences about this crisis. Then, I will combine the experiences of men as another important part of the crisis.

In this study, I will try to address what has happened after the aircraft crises between Russia and Turkey on the basis of both transnational life experiences of Russian women and activities of the representatives of Russian institutions. Common characteristics of women whose experiences

¹This study includes some preliminary empirical findings resulting from on-going qualitative research (related to PhD. Thesis: Russia-Turkey Migration System: Mixed Marriages and Transnational Practices in İstanbul) being carried out in İstanbul.

² Corresponding author: Research Assistant, Ankara University, Faculty of Languages, History and Geography, Department of Geography, Ankara, TURKEY adeniz@ankara.edu.tr

³ Ankara University, Faculty of Languages, History and Geography, Department of Geography, Ankara, TURKEY

Deniz, A, Özgür, E.M. (2017). The effects of Russia-Turkey crisis on mixed families in İstanbul: Hearing the voices of women. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Education Research*, 3(2), 406-410.

were involved in this study are that, they all worked before getting married but some of them left business life later on, have all been living in Turkey for more 3 years and in upper-middle class and have children. I prepared this paper based on the information obtained from field study conducted in İstanbul. This city is including one of the most populated Russian diaspora in Turkey. I have made 25 interviews between 26 November 2015 and 5 April 2016.

2. Between two countries: The reflections of Russia-Turkey crisis on Russian-Turkish families in Turkey

"I came in 1995. As you know the economy was bad after the dissolution of Soviets, many people came here to work because there was an opportunity. Stores at Laleli... They had opened two-three years ago. The market had just started to know itself. Translators, sales persons who know Russian and Turkish were needed. I did come and go during that period. Then penalties such as entry bans started. No working permit was given during that period, it was difficult to get it. Then marriages started here. Newcomers started to get married and to have families slowly. They entered Turkish society deeply."

Yuliya had told me about her story of coming to Turkey on a cold winter day of 2014, just after Sunday Church Service at Russian Orthodox Church in Karaköy She was one of those who had come to Turkey for working after the dissolution of Soviet Union. Yuliya and Russian women coming to Turkey with her worked at male-dominated places in Trabzon and Istanbul (Aydın, 2006; Bloch, 2011; Yüksek, 2003) where they performed different works such as shuttle trading, prostitution, caring works and salesperson. After 2000's they tried to hold on to life by working at hotels and tourism agencies in Antalya where wealthy Russian tourists were served. During the same period Turkish men had also started off for building Russia after Soviet period (Karaçay, 2011). Tourists, professionals, students, retired people and marriage immigrants were added to this human flow in time. In all of these categories, most of the people who came to Turkey from Russia were single women in parallel to women participating in transnational movements worldwide (White, 2009:565) and marriage-immigrants among those women were increasing. According to the figures taken from Turkish Statistics Institution (TÜİK), average of 1.300 marriages took place between women, who were citizens of Russian Federation and Turkish men every year for 2009-2013 period. The fact that women are frequently in follower role in transnational marriages, brings a sexist nature to these migrations. As married man is held responsible for covering economic needs of the family traditionally, the country where the man gains high income is settled. Therefore in mixed marriages, woman settles in the country where the man lives (Cheng, 1999). Regarding to Russian-Turkish marriages, I can also say that Russian women have to be followers of their husbands and rebuilt their statuses over their husband' statuses with the influence that their career is interrupted during this journey.

Actually the marriage areas, in other words, geographical areas where people that become partners meet have the tendency to be proportionally small traditionally. However, many people went abroad for working, education and/or tourism purposes upon economic development and ease of travel that has never seen before. This situation unsurprisingly affected the increase in international marriages (Cottrell, 1990) and increase in international couples has started to be expressed as a global trend (Piper, 2009). It is possible to divide place of meeting of Russians, following this trend, with their spouses basically into 3 categories: Meeting in Russia, meeting in Turkey and meeting on the internet. There are 5 basic areas within these areas and they are the

areas where these people spend their daily lives. Living place, working place, place of study, entertainment/leisure place and cyber environment.

Just like Ley and Water said (2004), immigrants not only move from one place to another, but also move from one set of social relations to another. In this context, there is a flexible transitivity in transnational lives of Russian marriage immigrants between Turkey and Russia. Of course this situation does not cover all women at the same level. Sustaining multi-dimensional practices between two countries includes various conflicts and strategies created for overcoming these conflicts. In this study, due to the time constraints, I'd like to mention about what has happened in lives of Russian women after an aircraft belonging to Russian Federation Air Forces was shoot-down by Turkish Air Forces on the November 24TH, 2015.

The women whom I interviewed were affected by the crisis in two ways. The first one is that it has *created a sense of unity* in their relations with friends and neighbours. Daria, expresses her experience as follows

“All of my neighbours in the building site came to support me. They said ‘your husband and child can fly without any problem’ and, they even brought a cake for my child.”

Anastasya stated that her husband's family had supported her greatly after the incidents and expresses how she gained power from this as follows:

"My family is my castle. I understood the value of this."

She has aggrandized family institution by associating it with ensuring security and presented herself as a part of this.

There is a *conflict* in the second one. The source of this conflict is different. As an external source, mails containing swearing sent by nationalist Russian men to Russian women who got married with a Turk can be given as an example. In these mails, it was written to Russian women that they were with an enemy from that moment and on and they were told not to go Russia anymore. As an internal source, there were some reactions by the family members of nationalist Turkish spouses. Irina, who was exposed to these, expressed her experience as follows:

"They told me that ‘You are an enemy from now on, we cannot speak anything near you with trust, this marriage must end.’ After the crisis, they invited me to their houses and tuned very nationalist news from Russian channels. They asked me to translate even though they know Russian.”

Dali who enabled her husband to make business connection in Russia and get a comfortable life as the result of this business, was exposed to violence by her husband when problems had arisen in her husband's business due to customs regulations after the crisis. In participant's words:

"Dali was the smartest one when she makes him earn money. He acts like I created the crisis. He says: We got into these because of you. I understood with this crisis that they will never accept me as one of them."

Dali's statement gives some clues on the weakness of social belonging and in-betweenness her experiences.

Deniz, A, Özgür, E.M. (2017). The effects of Russia-Turkey crisis on mixed families in İstanbul: Hearing the voices of women. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Education Research*, 3(2), 406-410.

Russian women develop various strategies for reducing these conflicts. It is possible to separate these as individual and corporate strategies. *Agreement in silence, autism, strategic approaching* can be counted in individual strategies. Agreement in silence concept is not to follow news about crisis and to watch consequences of the crisis In Mina's words:

"I know that we'll have an argument if we talk. If one talks, then the other one will talk, too He is right according to him and I'm right according to me. Therefore no TV is turned on at our house anymore".

Autism is postponing short term visit plans for Russia and reducing meeting with the social environment where the crisis can be discussed. This has been chosen especially by Russian women with children. Strategic approaching is to start making cultural practices that the man and his family demand but Russian woman do not do in marriage process. In Svetlana's words:

"I must get along with them. There is no other way. I live in here. I did not understand the importance of this but it is necessary to get along with the family. I'm not stubborn anymore. I took out the cross from my neck, went to a marriage ceremony with my mother in law, started to make dishes that they like, started to wear longer cloths and dyed my hair in brown. These are the things that the family had wanted for years. I understood that it was a brink of war and I could not return. I did whatever they wanted in a week. Now they hold me in high esteem".

Corporate strategies are related to what Russian associations in Turkey do. These are to *gain visibility, political cooperation and exhibit social solidarity*. In order to gain visibility, they gave statements to Bosfor and Roxalana that make Russian publications in Turkey. For political cooperation, heads of the associations met with bot Turkish and Russian politicians. In order to exhibit social solidarity, they started to organize solidarity meetings that point out to Turkish and Russian societies in Antalya and Istanbul that they were "sister societies."

3. Conclusion

Briefly, the crisis between Russia and Turkey has affected lives of Russian women in Turkey mostly in a negative manner. However, the facts that these women are foreigners in Turkey and their limited social environments have imprisoned them to a narrow area during the crisis. This study tried to show some effects of the crisis on Russian women. Of course, women are not a single category and different women create different experiences. Presentation of the experiences of other parties of the crisis in a comparative manner within the context of intersectionality is aimed in the continuity of this study.

References

- Aydın, S. (2006). *Post-Sosyalist Ülkelerde Açığa Çıkan İşgücü ve Trabzon'da Yabancı Uyruklu Kadın Olgusu*. Muğla Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Basılmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi
- Bloch, A. (2011). Intimate Circuits: Modernity, Migration and Marriage Among Post-Soviet Women in Turkey. *Global Networks*, 11 (4), 502-521
- Breger, R. ve Hill, R. (1998). *Cross-Cultural Marriage: Identity and Choice*. Oxford, New York: Berg.
- Cottrell, A. B. (1990). Cross-National Marriages: A Review of the Literature. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 21(2), 151-169.

Deniz, A, Özgür, E.M. (2017). The effects of Russia-Turkey crisis on mixed families in İstanbul: Hearing the voices of women. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Education Research*, 3(2), 406-410.

- Karaçay, A. B. (2011). *Bir Göç Sisteminin Anatomisi: Türkiye-Rusya Örneği*. Marmara Üniversitesi, Basılmamış Doktora Tezi.
- Ley, D. and Waters, J. L. (2004). Transnational Migration and the Geographical Imperative. In Jackson, P., Crang, P. and Dwyer, C. (Eds.) *Transnational Spaces*. Londra: Routledge, 104-121
- Piper, N. (2009). Wife or Worker? Worker or Wife?: Marriage and Cross-Border Migration in Contemporary Japan. *International Journal of Population Geography*, 9, 457-469
- Scott, J. (1991). The Evidence of Experience. *Critical Inquiry*. 17, 4, 773-797.
- White, A. (2009). Internal Migration, Identity and Livelihood Strategies in Contemporary Russia. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 35(4), 555-573. doi: 10.1080/13691830902765095
- Yükseker, H. D. (2003). *Laleli-Moskova Mekiği: Kayıtdışı Ticaret ve Cinsiyet İlişkileri*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.