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AMERİKAN RÜYASI VE İRLANDALI GÖÇMEN BİR KADIN  
EİLİS: *BROOKLYN* FİLMİNİN ANALİZİ

AMERICAN DREAM AND IRISH IMMIGRANT WOMAN EILIS:  
ANALYSING *BROOKLYN* MOVIE

AMЕРИКАНСКАЯ МЕЧТА И ЭММИГРАНТКА ИЗ  
ИРЛАНДИИ ПО ИМЕНИ ЭЙЛИС: АНАЛИЗ ФИЛЬМА БРУКЛИН

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Öz

*Brooklyn* (John Crowley, 2015) filmi, genç bir kadının (Eilis Lacey) 1950'li yılların başında İrlanda'dan Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'ne 'Amerikan Rüyası'nı yaşamak için bir gemiyle kıtalar arasında göç etmesini konu almaktadır. Annesi ve ablasıyla İrlanda'da küçük bir kasabada yaşayan Eilis'in Amerikan rüyası, kendi ülkesinde sahip olamadığı, gelir getiren bir iş, eğitim ve daha iyi bir yaşam tarzından ibaretti. Bu bakımdan film, kadın göçünü ele alması bakımından son derece önemlidir. Çünkü, göçün toplumsal cinsiyetleştirilmesi 1980'li yılların sonunda ve 1990'ların başında en önemli konulardan biri haline gelmiştir. Bu yıllarda uluslararası göç ile ilgili yapılan çalışmalar; kadınların, sadece eş ya da aile birleşimi için giden pasif göçmenler olarak değil, bireysel, bağımsız ve aktif olarak kabul edilmeleri gerektiğini belirtmişlerdir. Film tam da bu noktada dikkat çekmektedir. İrlanda'da yaşadığı koşullar, kasaba halkının geleneksel yapısı ve düzenli bir iş bulamaması Eilis'i bunalıma sokmuştur. Genç kadının, daha iyi koşulları sağlamak için Amerika'ya yolculuğu bu şekilde başlamaktadır. Film iki açıdan önemlidir. İlki, tarihsel açıdan az gelişmiş bir ülkeden gelişmiş bir ülkeye göçün nedenlerini anlatmaktadır. İkincisi ise, göçmen bir kadının her iki ülkede de yaşadığı sıkıntılarını, deneyimlerini, düşüncelerini ve koşullarını görsel olarak sunmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, film göstergebilim yöntemiyle analiz edilmiştir. Analiz neticesinde, aktif ve bağımsız bir şekilde göç eden genç bir kadının, Amerika'da aldığı eğitim, daha iyi yaşam tarzı ve iş fırsatı onun güçlenmesine neden olduğu ortaya çıkarılmıştır. **Anahtar Kelimeler:** İrlanda, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri, uluslararası göç, Brooklyn filmi, göç gönderen ülke, göç kabul eden ülke

Abstract

*Brooklyn* (John Crowley, 2015) movie is about a young immigrant woman (Eilis Lacey) who moves intercontinental from Ireland to the United States by a a ship in the 1950s to live American dream. Eilis' American dream who lives in Ireland with her mother and sister was a revenue-generating job, education and a better lifestyle that she could not have in her own

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country. From this point of view the film is extremely important in terms of addressing the migration of women. Because, gendering migration has become one of the most important issues in the 1980s and early 1990s. Studies on international migration in these years; they stated that women should be considered as individual, independent and active, not passive migrants who go after their spouses or families. The film draws attention at this point. The conditions in Ireland, the traditional structure of the townspeople, and the lack of regular employment have made Eilis depressed. This is how the young woman starts her journey to America, providing better conditions. The film is important in two respects. First, historically it describes the reasons of migration from poor country to developed one. The latter, visually presents the problems, experiences, thoughts and conditions of an immigrant woman in both countries. In this context, the film was analyzed by semiotics method. As a result of the analysis, it was found that a young woman is actively and independently migrated, and this migration has empowered her due to the education, better life style and business opportunity in America.

**Keywords:** Ireland, United States of America, international migration, Brooklyn movie, sending country, receiving country

### Аннотация

В фильме *Бруклин* (Джон Кроули, 2015) рассказывается о молодой женщине (Эйлис Лейси), которая в начале 1950-х годов эмигрировала из Ирландии в Соединенные Штаты на корабле с целью жить “американской мечтой”. Эйлис жила в маленьком городке в Ирландии со своей матерью и сестрой, а его “американская мечта” состояла в том, что она хотела иметь оплачиваемую работу, образование и лучшую жизнь, которую не имела в своей родине. Этот фильм чрезвычайно важен с точки зрения женской миграции. Учитывая то, что гендеризация миграции стала одной из наиболее важных проблем в конце 1980-х и начале 1990-х годов. В исследованиях по международной миграции указывается, что женщины должны рассматриваться как отдельная, независимая и активная группа общества, а не как простые пассивные мигранты, которые эмигрируют ради воссоединения с супругой или семьей. Сам фильм привлекает внимание точки зрения вышеуказанного положения. Условия жизни в Ирландии, традиции горожан и отсутствие постоянной работы привели Эйлиса в депрессию. Вот так и началось путешествие молодой женщины в Америку, чтобы обеспечить себе лучшие условия жизни. В фильме, во первых описываются причины миграции из исторически слаборазвитой страны в развитую. Во вторых, наглядно представлены проблемы, опыт, мысли и условия жизни женщины-иммигранта в обеих странах. В этом контексте фильм был проанализирован семиотическим методом. В результате анализа выяснилось, что молодая женщина, которая активно и независимо мигрировала, стала более сильным, устойчивым к трудностям жизни, улучшила образ жизни и Американское образование дало ей много возможностей для создания деловых отношений.

**Ключевые слова:** Ирландия, США, международная миграция, Бруклинский фильм, иммиграционная страна, эмиграционная страна.

### 1. Introduction

Migration mostly occurs from developing or less developed countries to developed countries. The United States as a developed country has long history of immigrants. It is perceived as a land of opportunity for millions of immigrants from all over the world. From past to present, reunite with family members, marriage, seeking freedom, job offers are the main reasons of newcomers to United States. But, due to their working experience or through

a lottery some are accepted by the government (National Issues Forums, 2013). Depends on different driver factors, first large wave of immigrants to USA in 1850s were mostly from European countries (Abramitzky and Boustan, 2017). Ellis Island in New York Harbor was first place for immigrants from European countries and for New York it is said that “one could find the whole world in a single neighbourhood” (The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation, 2018). In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson declared The Statue of Liberty in Ellis Island in New York which is a symbol of freedom to immigrants (BBC Home, 2018).

*Brooklyn*, the movie which is analysed for this work, gives clues of large number of migration flow to America specially from Ireland. The ‘American dream’ was also true for the Irish, and America perceived as a land of opportunity for them. 1600s were the years of Irish migration to the country. But, largest Scots-Irish migration started from 1740-80 (Ouimette and Rencher, 2007). Famine was the main reason of migration in 1840s which left 1.5 million dead. Of course, large influx of people is not always welcomed. Charge, benefits and disadvantages of them have always been questioned. “Some wonder whether newcomers, especially those arriving illegally, are compromising our quality of life, taking jobs away from those already here, and threatening our security and sovereignty as a nation” (National Issues Forums, 2013).

In 1850s, the short-lived native political party Know-Nothings was known as its anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic leanings (The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation, 2018). It was intolerance toward increasing numbers of German and Irish immigrants whom were mostly Catholic, led to violence in New York and some other places. Native-born Protestants felt that new comers were the threat to the nation. Nativist cartoons took part on stereotypes portraying Irish immigrants as bibulous, election stealers, and criticized them for increasing crime and poverty rates (Briggs, 2017). On the other side, in 1864, The Republicans mentioned “That foreign immigration, which in the past has added so much to the wealth, development of resources and increase of power to the nation, the asylum of the oppressed of all nations, should be fostered and encouraged by a liberal and just policy” (The American Presidency Project, 2018).

This long history of migration considered as human migration without distinction between man and woman. Studies regarded migration as men movement and women are portrayed as passive family followers. However, in the 1970s and early 1980s, feminist scholarships increasingly drew attention to nexus between gender and migration. Temporary and permanent movements are globalizing, accelerating, diversifying and feminizing (Kofman, Phizacklea, Raghuram and Sales, 2000). The women’s international migration has always been a crucial part of migration literature. Thus, a gender point of view is key concept to understanding push and pull factors of migration. On the other side, gender inequality in sending country can be an important factor for their moving internationally (UN DESA, 2006). Gender is a socio-cultural construct of femininity that shapes how individuals live and interpret the world around them. Gender produced and reproduced, negotiated, and disputed in representations of social practices. It also varies over time in any given culture (Rahman, 2000). Patriarchal domination can be the reason of their migration. In most of the countries traditional and cultural structures let men to dominate on women. Moving to another country allow them to change their gender roles in receiving country. But, lack of data on their migration makes it difficult to understand the main reasons. On the other side there is no categorization by sex on migration. That’s why better data evaluation is needed for analysis (UN DESA, 2006).

Women just like men have variety of reasons for migration and all motives might be different from each other. For this work, movie called *Brooklyn* is analysed in the context of gendering migration. The movie is about a young Irish woman Eilis Lacey (Saoirse Ronan)

living in Ireland, in 1950s. She migrated to New York for a better life. The movie is important to reveal the push-pull factors which motives women to migrate. It helps to investigate the life and experiences of immigrant women after migration.

## 2. Gendering Migration

In today's world, where as a result of recent political and cultural changes as well as the development of new transportation and digital technologies, mobility has become much easier, we are living in an 'Age of Migration' (Castles and Miller, 2009, p. 2-5). Hence, international migration has become a central dynamic within globalisation. People migrate as entrepreneurs, asylum seekers and family followers, or when working in labour-intense jobs in businesses demanding high qualifications, in search of better living standards, greater opportunities and improved lifestyles (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009, p. 2-3; Assis, 2014). Migration is all about the situations and obstacles related with the area of sending country and the opportunities in the country of destination. Living conditions in both the countries effect the migration process of the migrants Lee (1966).

According to IOM (International Organization for Migration, 2018a) a migrant is any one who is voluntary or involuntary moving to another country or moving within a state from his/her home permanent or semipermanent change of residence, no matter what legal status of the person or what the reasons for the movement. The movement can come from refugees, displaced persons and persons moving for other purposes such as political, economic, cultural or family reunification. It can be said that international migration of people has become one of the most discussed subjects in many countries specially developed ones. Migrant receiving countries are became alarmed about the socio-economic burden of migrants, while migrant sending countries are worried about the brain drain and loss of their younger population (Gheasi and Nijkamp, 2017). Because migration is interlaced with the development level of the countries. Thats why migration to destination countries has helped to improve migrants' lives and has offered better opportunities for millions worldwide (IOM, 2018b).

Due to the formal official figures there were approximately 258 million international migrants worldwide in 2017, which makes up 3.4 per cent of the total population of the world. The number of international migrants worldwide is growing day by day and it has continued to grow rapidly over the past 15 years reaching 248 million in 2015. It was 220 million in 2010, 191 million in 2005 and 173 million in 2000 (UN DESA, 2017). It is said that Europe and Asia hosted around 80 million migrants in 2017. It makes up the 60% of the total global international migrant. It means that European and Asian countries are place for destination. These continents were followed by North America, with 58 million migrants from all over the world in 2015. Its 22 % of the global migrant stock (UN, 2017; UN DESA, 2017). Therefore, the movement of thousands of people across international boundaries continues to be one of the most important issues of the global agenda. Thus, international migration creates economic, social, cultural and political burden in receiving countries. Thus, its urgent for receiving countries to take precautions and effective policies to overcome these difficulties.

The womens' international migration has been a critical issue of migration. In 2017, they were 258 million migrants worldwide out of a global population of 7.3 billion. It means that 1 in every 30 person is migrant. 52 % of international migrants are male, 48% are female (UN DESA, 2017). It proves that female migrants are also make up for almost half of the total migrants. It means that women migrants are the important part of global migration (Zlotnik, 2003).

Before 1970s, there was almost no migration research, which examined men and women migrants separately. Results only shared the experiences of one sex: only men's movement was of interest and women were treated as family followers, dependant, tied movers, secondary or associational migrants (Balan, 1981, p. 228; Kossoudji and Ranney, 1984). Studies on migration were only considered on movement of men, they ignored the movement of women. For this reason, studies were gender-neutral and theories on migration were pointing the experience of male migrants. Female migrants were often treated as dependants. Their movement were considered just for family reunion. Moreover, their economic contributions to the destination countries were ignored (Kofman, Phizacklea, Raghuram and Sales, 2000, p. 3). Unfortunately, studies of migration were lack of gender point of view. It was the missing part of studies on international migration (Morokvasic, 1984).

Studies ignored the oppressive and exploitative structures, which caused women to migrate more independently, for example. They supposed that men and women performed in just the same way and have the same association to those structures (Kofman et al. 2000, p. 22-3). Despite Ravenstein's (1885) foresight that 'women migrate is greater than men', migration theories overwhelmingly focused on men migrants. Generalizing findings to all migrants, simply failed to recognize any potential differences between women's and men's migration (DeLaet, 1999, p. 13; Nawyn, 2010; Kofman et al 2000, p. 22-3). Hence, this kind of 'add women and stir' approaches recognize women. But assume that they are the same as man.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, feminist scholarships increasingly drew attention to nexus between gender and migration. They met on a common ground that women also have reasons for migration as well as men. A gender standpoint on international migration widens present perception about gender-specific causes of international migration. It also examines the consequences of international migration of women (UN DESA, 2006). The main reasons of this intense flow were supposed to be economic such as poverty, debt, sex slavery and unemployment. However, non-economic reasons such as honour killing, marital discord, marriage, education, gender discrimination, violence, divorce, religious and political depressions and social motives (regime, rules, traditions, customs, and patriarchy) could have influenced women's decision to migrate (Morokvasic, 1983; Kofman et al 2000, p. 21; Jolly, Reeves, and Piper, 2005).

Its concluded that not all migration occurs in positive circumstances, however. International migration occurs in two ways, legal and illegal. While legal way is safer for migrants, illegal way dangerous and causes many to die on the move. Insecure and illegal move of migrants draw attention to media and public policy. Its always been newsworthy and it takes media attention. There is so much debate on their security. Therefore, it has high-priority policy issue by many states throughout the world (IOM, 2018b). With the help of these pioneering researches (Morokvasic, 1983; Simon and Brettel, 1986), the literature began to evaluate man and woman migration separately by gazing upon the effects of different gender roles in the mid-1980s.

In the 1980s and early 1990s studies on 'women and migration' were followed by researches on 'gender and migration' (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2000, p. 115; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Cranford, 2006). Researchers noticed the gendered processes of migration. They observed that there are some other factors such as hierarchies of power, authority and resources which affect women's migration. For Hugo (2000, p. 299) the migration of women undocumented.; women work in the destination country; women move autonomously. They permanently work at field of operations. For example, researches added the decision- making processes, gendered nature of family and communities, occupational sex segregation and

gender relations post-migration to their works (Grasmuck and Pessar, 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Repak, 1995). Common point of these works improved that migration is a gendered process and gender relations also change with migration processes (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2000, p. 116).

### 3. Methodology

This work tried to show international migration of women and how it's shown in a movie. The movie called Brooklyn is analysed semiotically to focus on interpretation, positioning of women, their discourses, expressions and cause and effect relationship. Semiology as a qualitative method, is the study of signs. It analysis the media texts such as films, advertisement, literature, magazines and newspapers etc. In this section of the study, the movie Brooklyn is analysed through the semiology. Films visualize the experiences of the people and portrays reality of the world in which we live through signs. Signs have ability of conveying meaning to the people who use them. They are constructed by humans and the meaning is produced in the context of culture in which they live. Therefore, the sign, for Saussure, was a physical object with a meaning and it refers to something other than itself. It consists of a signifier and a signified. The signifier is the sign's image as we perceive it. The signified is the mental concept to which it refers (Fiske, 1982, p. 40-44).

#### 3.1. Findings

According to the analysis, *Brooklyn* movie shows the feelings, problems, experiences and difficulties that immigrant women face both in original and destination countries. Eilis proves that immigrant woman is no more considered as family followers, dependent and passive. They are also active and dependent movers. Irish migrant woman Eilis feels more self-confident, stand on their own legs, economically free and better educated. Therefore, the movie also visually presents the gendered transnational migration process. It also shows the contributions and positive effects of immigrants to the country even though immigrants are considered as threat to the developed countries. It subverts the stereotyped migrant concept.

##### 3.1.1. Semiotic Analysis

The *Brooklyn* movie (2015) is about a young Irish woman Eilis Lacey (Saoirse Ronan) living in Ireland, in 1950s. She works in a bakery shop in her country. Her sister's friend priest (Jim Broadbent) changed Eilis's life completely. He finds a job for her in New York (Brookly) where the Irish community mostly settled. Eilis is willing to go to Brookly for a better life. After completing documents, she departs Ireland and moves to Brookly by a ship where full of Irish immigrants, leaving her mother and sister behind. International migration from Ireland to America crossing the Atlantic, Eilis was very unhappy due to homesick. She was missing her country, mother and sister. She was keeping herself busy with work and bookkeeping course in Brooklyn University. She was hopeless till she finds young Italian man Tony (Emory Cohen) in an Irish party and new life stars for both of them. Cast of the movie is mentioned below;

Eilis Lacey (Saoirse Ronan): Hard-working, quite and ambitious young Irish woman who immigrates to New York/Brooklyn for a better life.

Mrs Lacey (Jane Brennan): Eilis and Rose's mother. She always supports her daughters.

Rose (Fiona Glascott): Eilis' older sister. She organizes Eilis' emigration from Ireland to New York. She dies from heart attack.

Father Flood (Hugh Gormley): Irish priest in New York. He is friend of Rosa and helps Eilis to find a job and guest house in Brooklyn. He also encourages her to study bookkeeping in University.

Miss Kelly (Brid Brennan): Owner of a shop which Eilis works. She is very rude and harp-tongued.

Georgina (Eva Birthistle): She is an immigrant and shares a cabin with Eilis on the same ship. She advises Eilis how to act like American during their journey.

Jim Farrell (Domhnall Gleeson): Irish and handsome Irish man who falls in love with Eilis.

Tony Fiorello (Emory Cohen): Hardworking, funny, honest handsome immigrant Italian man who falls in love with Eilis. He lives in Brooklyn and works as a plumber.

The movie Brooklyn is something more than a story of an immigrant woman. It tells the stories of most of the immigrant women who cross continents. For the story of Eilis who moves from Ireland to America, it was better income and high standard of living. Just like other Irish immigrants, she also had American dream. America is the country of destination, hope and full of opportunities. When Eilis was packing her suitcase, her sister worried a lot that she has so few clothes to take with her to New York. Eilis replied to her sister, *“That’s why I’m going to New York for better standard of living and to buy better clothes”*. Her sister replied back, *“I can buy new clothes for you, but I cannot buy a future for you”*. The conversation between them is an evidence of America is land of opportunity. The origin country fails to satisfy expectations of her. It can be said that, for women, transnational migration depends on variety of factors in the emigrant country and in the receiving country. This push and pull factors of migration can be different for every migrant.

Adventure of Eilis in 1950s is one of the best examples of international migration of a woman who moves voluntarily. She and other women who stay in guesthouse with her, and the women she met in the ship prove that “female migrants are moving on their own by herself without male partner. They were not dependant, tied movers or family followers. Even the girls she met in the ship were also moving independently. One of them was her cabin mate Georgina. Eilis was warned by Georgina about her clothes. She said to Eilis that she looks “Irish”. Both decided what to wear during entry control. Eilis was looking so pale because of nausea. Georgina said to her, “guard will put you in quarantine”. She makes up on her face and advised her to act like an American. Immigrants were unwanted, and they were seen as a threat to country. She enters a blue door with her suitcase in her hand after controlling her documents by the guards in New York. As soon as the door is opened by her, very bright light was visible. Sign door symbolise the New York. Significant bright light represents new world, signified new life and new opportunities. Then she goes to Kehoe’s guest house in Brooklyn where other immigrant Irish women live.

The movie shows that country of destination improves the lives of immigrant women. For example, the improvement of their own skills or education. Priest enrolls Eilis bookkeeping course in Brooklyn University for three nights in a week proves this situation. As Lee (1966, p. 56) states ‘migration means advancement’. Migrant women may also influence the societies of their country by disseminating new values and ideas that they have seen in other countries. Eilis feeling of homesickness decreased when she falls in love with Italian man Tony. He works as a plumber in Brooklyn. He also contributes the economy of America as an immigrant. This hardworking man tells Eilis about his future plans and asks her marriage. They get marry before her sister’s death. She decides to go to Ireland for few weeks. In Ireland everything was familiar such as her town, friends and mother. She also enjoyed being with her new cute and rich friend Jim Farrell. She had feeling of belong to Ireland that made her not to reply Tony’s letters. She was not sure about her feelings to Tony

and to America. Emotionally she was between two man and two country. She was not clear what to choose.

When she goes to seaside with friends and comes closer with Jim. They surprise with her new designed swimsuit. Her friend says that she has never seen such a nice swimsuit before. Nancy said in your clothes you look different. Swimsuit is representing modernisation, development and fashion. Rose's boss wants her to work as a bookkeeper for him. In her country she was now feeling more confident than before. Because, she is more educated and well dressed. Migration also empowers immigrant women and it has positive effects for them. Going back to New York, she saw a lonely Irish girl who was travelling to new world for a better life. It means that there are more and more dependent women moving to developed country. Soon after conservative and narrow-minded society confused her mind and she decided to go back to America where Tony lives. Eilis was sure about her feeling to Tony and America.

In conclusion, migrant women's education degree, perception, self-confidence, language proficiency, knowledge, independence, and comparison made of the positive and negative situations between the origin and destination country can shape transnational migration. As Lee (1966, p.51) states that "*personal sensitivities, intelligence, and awareness of conditions elsewhere enter into the evaluation of the situation at origin, and knowledge of the situation at destination depends upon personal contacts or upon sources of information which are not universally available*". For this reason, Poverty and unemployment were the push factors transnational migration of Irish immigrant women. Better standard of living and opportunities in New York were the push factors of Irish women.

#### 4. Conclusion

*Brooklyn* is not only shows the simple life of an Irish woman who wants to see the "American dream" but also the history of immigrants who move from Ireland to America. It helps us to see the conditions of both the countries why people choose to migrate. Immigrant women, relatively, have different drivers of international migration. In the case of Irish immigrant women in the movie, they mostly migrated due to unemployment, conservative society, traditions and culture in the country of origin. They have chosen New York for income opportunities, employment, freedom and better lifestyle. As active participants in their migration to New York, all Irish immigrant women had a chance to consider opportunities, advantages and disadvantages between the two countries. They entered a socially, politically and culturally different system which contributed them to change their perception. Imagined better life, freedom, more income, in summary, important factors for Irish immigrant women to move from the emigrant country to country of destination.

As a result of migration to a developed country, Irish migrant women feel more self-confident, stand on their own legs, economically free and better educated. Consequently, this paper aims to contribute to feminist studies and migration literature. Consequently, America gives more freedom to women than conservative Ireland. Eilis proves that immigrant woman is no more considered as family followers, dependent and passive. They are active and dependent. When the origin country fails to satisfy expectations just like Eilis case, they move to country of destination. On the other side, *Brooklyn* movie is also important to show the feelings of immigrant women. For this, different analysis is needed to depict the differences of female and male migrants in the context of international migration. In sum, this work will contribute to gender and migration studies.



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