TURKISH GERMANS IN TURKIYE
From their children’s perspective

Oya TOPDEMİR KOÇYİĞİT
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to all children...
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Oya Topdemir Koçyiğit graduated from Istanbul University, Medical Imaging Techniques Program in 1998. She worked in the American Hospital in Istanbul, Department of Radiology between 1998 and 2010. She graduated from Istanbul University Faculty of Letters, Department of Anthropology and Turkish Language and Literature (double major) in 2006. She completed her master’s in the Department of Anthropology, Institute of Social Sciences of the same university in 2011 with her thesis titled “Kentsel Yaşamın Sosyo-Kültürel Açıldan Sağlığa Yansımı (A Reflection of Urban Life on Health from a Social and Cultural Perspective). She completed her doctorate in the same department in 2017 with her thesis titled “Uluslararası Deneyimler ve ‘Türk-Alman” Olmanın Anlamı” (Transnational experiences and the meaning of being a “Turkish-German”). She managed her postdoctoral studies as a visiting scholar at Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz in Austria, Institut für Kulturanthropologie und Europäische Ethnologie between 2018 and 2019. This project, titled “War Memory Across Generations and Mixed Families Between Europe and Turkiye,” was supported by the TUBITAK-2219 International Postdoctoral Research Fellowship Program.

Oya Topdemir Koçyiğit became a Research Assistant in 2012 and was granted the title of Assistant Professor in 2020. She currently works at Istanbul University, Faculty of Letters, Department of Anthropology, and lectures at undergraduate and graduate levels. Her research areas are related to infertility, reproductive technologies and in vitro fertilization (IVF), comprehension of health and diseases, marriage, family, cultural memory, and identity construction. Some of her publications are “İnfertilite ve Sosyo-Kültürel Etkileri” (Infertility and its socio-cultural impacts) 2012, “Savaşın torunları: Trakmatik belleğe kuşaklar ötesi bir bakış” (The Grandchildren of war: A transgenerational perspective on traumatic memory) 2016, “Köyde Değişen Kültürel Bir Öğe Olarak Beslenme Organizasyonu ve ‘Kadın’” 2017, “Comprehensions on Health and Diseases in a Black Sea Village” 2017, “‘Turkish-German’ Families: An Insider Viewpoint about War, Migration and the Transnational Family Building Experience” 2019.
This book is a revised version of my doctoral dissertation titled “Transnational Experiences and the Meaning of Being 'Turkish-German'”. I presented it at Istanbul University, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Anthropology in 2017. It was based on the ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in Turkiye. I interviewed 45 people whose mothers were German and fathers Turkish. I found the participants using the snowball method. I carried out the research using the in-depth interview and participant observation technique. Thirty-one of them were women and the others were men. In this research, I aimed to reveal how the family experiences of parents with different cultural backgrounds are evaluated by their children. In other words, I studied how being in a transnational family was perceived across generations.

There are not many studies in the literature showing the cultural dimensions of marriages, which have gradually increased between Turkish and German citizens, that focus on their children. This research includes striking findings in terms of war memory, high-skilled migrants and return migration, and experiences of transnational family, kinship, and identity, which are important phenomena in our present time. The research also reveals a transnational and unwritten common cultural history between Turkiye and Germany through mixed marriages that have increased as of the 1930s.

The book aims to make an original and important contribution to the national and international literature in terms of being based on ethnographic research, the framework of the subject, the sample (which also reflects the evaluations of different generations and siblings), and the results. It embodies the fact that the identity constructions of today’s “Turkish-German” generation in Turkiye are closely related to the experiences of war, migration, and kinship that occupy an important place in familial memory.

As the children recounted their life stories, they focused on the familial experiences that largely shaped their personal stories. Among these experiences, especially from the Second World War (WWII), migration between Turkiye and Germany and kinship practices were the subjects that children focused on the most. I was able to see how they made sense of these experiences, and on the other hand, I had the opportunity to understand how they construct their own identities based on these meanings. As an anthropologist, it was unique for me to see the relationship between personal experiences, identification processes, and the histories of several previous generations.

While conducting the research, I started to discover the aspects of cultural memory that connect the present with the past and relate them to the future, and I became more and more excited when I thought about the contributions that my results could make to the literature.
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in this area. One of my most important motivations was to carry the transnational familial histories, which have been increasingly dense and settled as of the 1930s, to the future, and the other was to be a tool for the efforts of everyone interested in understanding their recent past. I hope everyone can find something for themselves in this book, which tries to be a voice for children’s voices. Therefore, this book is not only for those who are interested in anthropology, but also for students, researchers, academics in other related social sciences, and anyone who is interested in issues such as common family histories, forms of kinship, cultural practices, and identity.

The Turkish-German children forced me to think differently many times. The difficult aspects of their life stories often hurt me, but I learned a lot from them about the meanings and ways of staying strong in life. I think I reminded them once again how valuable they and their life stories were. While conveying their life stories to me, they sometimes faced the painful aspects of memory but also discovered its therapeutic value. In this respect, many of them gave great importance to my research and made great efforts to find people who could participate in my research. Moreover, there were those who brought gifts to the interviews, opened family archives that they did not show to anyone, and wanted to turn the research into a book.

The book reminds us that each life story has its own great value. Throughout the research, I witnessed the testimonies of the participants about their family backgrounds, their inner journeys, and even their reckoning. During the interviews, they sometimes were tired of facing their family history, but they were also happy to be a part of this research. I can’t express enough gratitude to these special people who opened up their own life stories and helped me present this book. I would like to thank each and every one of the esteemed heroes of this book.

Anthropology teaches man to discover both herself/himself and the other by connecting to the other. I am grateful to the academic staff from whom I learned a lot, especially Prof. Yüksel Kırımlı (my dissertation advisor). Likewise, Prof. Taylan Akkayan, Prof. Suat Gezgin, Prof. Nilüfer Tapan, Prof. Canan Ayata, Prof. Sevinç Hatipoğlu, Prof. Ersel Kayaoğlu, Assoc. Prof. Barbara Pusch, and Assoc. Prof. Gülşem Baykal Büyüksaraç. I would also like to express my gratitude to the entire academic community that I couldn’t mention here for their untold help and friendship.

Finally, I am grateful to my beautiful family, who always stood by me with love, patience, and understanding. Especially, I owe a lot to my dear daughter Irmak Koçyiğit. She was born
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and grew up during the research process. She has always given me extraordinary strength. To create this book, I stole a lot of the time that I should have devoted to her.

I dedicate this book to all children, as it offers the opportunity to see our familial heritage and collection of experiences from their point of view, wishing that children’s voices would be heard more.

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