

Transnational Marriage among the Kurds in Finland

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MA Anne Häkkinen's PhD thesis in ethnology examines marriage migration, in particular the formation of transnational marriages and marital practices among the Kurdish population in Finland. By transnational marriage, Häkkinen means marriages where a spouse is chosen from the same ethnic or cultural background but lives in another country. The data were primarily collected by ethnographic thematic interviews with Kurds (17 women, 11 men) who arrived in Finland as quota refugees or asylum seekers in the 1990s or during the first years of the 2000s. In addition, Häkkinen uses statistical data to ascertain the prevalence of transnational marriages among Kurds in Finland and to provide a larger context for her qualitative study. The use of both quantitative and qualitative data is a strength of the overall study, as different types of data help the researcher to highlight the phenomenon of transnational marriage from different viewpoints.

Häkkinen utilizes various theoretical discussions and analytical concepts such as transnationalism and diaspora, transnational marriage, ethnicity, ethnosexuality, gender, intersectionality and agency. She situates her study in constructionist social and cultural research and in the post-colonial and post-structuralist, anthropological and feminist research traditions. Both theoretically and empirically, the most important core of the study is the analysis and description of different marriage practices and forms.

The topic of Häkkinen's research is excellent, and it has high societal relevance: marriage migration, marriage practices among migrants, as well as family reunification are important current topics with regard to integration and migration policies. The study also contributes to the research literature on Kurds in general.

In public debate, transnational marriages are usually seen as a challenge for integration. So-called arranged marriages are often regarded as a synonym for forced marriages, where young women in particular are not believed to have a say in the choice of their spouse, and transnational marriages in general are

believed to be a way of circumventing immigration rules rather than be based on a love relationship. Therefore, in many European countries, transnational marriages are regulated by various legal and political measures that greatly impact people who form transnational relationships and live in transnational families. Häkkinen aims to diversify this ongoing debate on marriage migration.

The book is divided into nine main chapters, including introduction and conclusion. The strength of the study lies on its subtle and careful empirical analysis, which shows that the researcher masters the ethnographic method well. Ethical questions have also been carefully considered.

The research produces new knowledge about the multiplicity, motives and practices of transnational marriages in the context of the Kurdish diaspora and identity politics. I find the presentation of different types of arranged transnational marriages particularly welcome. Arranged marriages are often perceived straightforwardly as forced marriages organized by the parents, whereas Häkkinen shows the variety and complexity of the practices aiming at finding and negotiating a suitable mate: both individuals and their social roles, the spouses' desires, as well as the influence of parents and families have an impact on the process, depending on the situation. Häkkinen's empirical data include examples of different types of arranged marriages: parents may initiate the process of finding a suitable spouse and negotiate between the two families, and the young couple will learn to know each other better only after the formal marriage contract; young people may have a larger role in the selection of the spouse, and they have a chance to learn to know each other already before the marriage; a young person may ask his/her parents, siblings or friends to suggest possible suitable marriage candidates, but there is no pressure to learn to know him/her or marry; and finally, a young person may also experience pressure from or even be forced to get married by his/her parents and family.

Furthermore, Häkkinen describes how Kurdish youth initiate transnational relationships and seek a mate independently, without the help of their parents and kin. Even then, the parents' consent is usually considered important before making the final decision to marry. The internet and online dating are new ways of seeking a partner and provide young people with a private space for building relationships. The examples of online dating reflect the increasingly heterogeneous attitudes towards couple formation and marriage among Kurdish young adults.

In her analysis, Häkkinen interestingly describes "relational agency" (p. 54), where negotiations and choices take place in the intersections of hopes and opportunities of individuals, families and communities. The choice of a spouse is not an either/or question; rather, individual and communal nego-

tiations and influences are embedded in agency. Person-centeredness and community-centeredness are not mutually exclusive but fluctuate in the research participants' narratives depending on the context and given situation.

Even though the book offers a thorough analysis of marriage practices among the Kurdish diaspora, I also paid attention to some missing themes: in chapter four, Häkkinen provides a background for the history of suffering in Kurdistan, Kurdish nationalism and the formation of the Kurdish diaspora. In the data and analysis, however, nationalist discourse does not seem to appear as a theme that would impact spousal choice, except that interviewees preferred not to marry "Arabs". In addition, the refugee situation, political conflicts, attempts to migrate to a safe country or settled migrants' responsibility to support relatives back home are not discussed as factors possibly impacting transnational marriage practices and preferences in choosing a spouse. Perhaps these questions could be studied further in the future. The book is well written, but the author could have reduced the number of additional discussions in numerous footnotes.

The majority of the interviewees preferred a Kurd as a spouse, but their views on whether their future spouse should be a relative such as a cousin were divided. In general, Kurdish identity was more important than religious identity for the interviewees. Often migrants from Muslim-majority countries in particular are religionized, and therefore it is important that Häkkinen has highlighted how a Muslim background may entail different things and meanings for different people in everyday life.

Anne Häkkinen's PhD thesis is an in-depth investigation of a topical issue and shows excellent knowledge of relevant concepts, methods and theories. The results are applicable to societal and political discussion on transnational family ties and marriage, gendered family practices and cultural change. Hence, the book can be recommended to a wide readership, including professionals and policy-makers.

AUTHOR

Marja Tiilikainen, docent, PhD, is a Senior Researcher at the Migration Institute of Finland. Her studies have focused on issues such as transnational family life, everyday lived religion, and cultural dimensions of illness and healing. In particular, she has researched Somali diasporic communities.