

Çağla Gül Yesevi. *Migration from Central Asia: Stories and Identity Formation*. Vol. 43. Taylor & Francis, 2023. 160 pp. doi <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003410539>. eBook ISBN 9781003410539.

In recent years, there has been a surge in research on migration from Central Asia due to a notable rise in labor migration from the region. Migration patterns from Central Asia have been ongoing for a long time, with significant movements beginning after the Russian occupation of the region. The book, *Migration from Central Asia: Stories and Identity Formation* by Çağla Gül Yesevi, analyzes the migration movements from Turkestan to neighboring countries and the enduring migration narratives of Turkestani migrants. These migrants have relocated to Afghanistan, subsequently to Pakistan and/or India, with potential migration routes extending to Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the United States, and other destinations. Çağla Gül Yesevi is a Professor of International Relations at Istanbul Kültür University and a daughter of a migrant family who moved from Turkestan. The author's belonging to the target group made it more accessible to collect data on families experiencing migration. Using oral history methods, the author conducted seventy-one in-depth interviews between 2018 and 2020 and enriched her book by giving narratives of Turkestani migrants. Focusing on her family history, the author underlines how religion was important among Turkestani people, along with the push factor to leave the homeland to keep their religion and identity.

The book consists of seven chapters. The book is written descriptively, with each chapter exploring a different theme that emerged from the author's interviews with migrants from Turkestan. Chapter 1 introduces the recent scholarship on migration and the theoretical framework, following methodology and book outlines. By delving into the experiences of migrants who moved from West Turkestan in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the author points out the central argument. Meanwhile, it revolves around the analysis of migration from Turkestan to various countries and the identity formation of these migrants. In Chapter 2, the author gives detailed information on the historical background of migration, focusing on the links between Turkestan and the Golden Horde, the chronological events of the Russian occupation of Central Asia, how the *Basmachi* (*Korbashi*) movement started, and the impacts of political regimes on migration. She refers to Turkestan and Central Asia as a region of five countries in the book, mainly using Central Asia as a term after the independence of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan.

Chapter 3 starts with her family migration stories, introducing Khoja Ahmad Yasawi and the importance of his religious-spiritual ideas among Turkestani people, focusing on its impact on migration. The author elaborates on how Sufi traditions evolved in the region, the meaning of the *begira*, and the *muhajirs'* decision-making process to migrate to Afghanistan from the lenses of *Yasawiyya tariqa*. Her deep understanding of the regional context and her unique approach to the Yesevi family history make the book an important contribution to the study of the interrelationship between migration, religion, and identity. As such, in Chapter 4, Prof. Yesevi categorizes the factors affecting the decision to migrate using the

shared experiences of migrants. She indicates that religious and cultural factors were the main reasons for moving from Turkestan to Afghanistan, while economic and social factors played an important role in pushing them to move to Turkey, Saudi Arabia, etc. Also, the author presents a comprehensive picture of migration as the result of a national struggle known as the Basmachi movement against Russian oppression, expansion, and persecution.

Reading this book from the perspective of Migration Studies and International Relations, it is evident that it complements recent research performed in those fields on mobility within and beyond Central Asia.<sup>1</sup> The political regime, socioeconomic conditions along with migration, adaptation, and integration are all impacted by narratives of the Turkestani diaspora. In this regard, chapter 5 gives readers detailed information about migration flows and how lifestyles of the Turkestani diaspora differ in host societies such as Afghanistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the USA. Drawing on the Turkestani families that migrated from Afghanistan, especially in the 1950s and then in the 1980s, the author argues that social norms and networks were important tools to support kinstate and keep belongingness while relocating and adapting to new migration destinations.

Moreover, chapter 6 describes identity formation, the Turkestani diaspora's integration into transnational communities, the preservation of culture, and how marriage affects keeping identity. After giving a comprehensive discussion of the concept of diaspora, the author demonstrates how generational changes determine identities and values. In the starting explanation of Turkestan as a unified world until the Soviet regime and 1924 delimitation, the author contends migrants identified themselves as Turkestani, muhajir, or with their cities in the diaspora. Additionally to Alimova's work on the Turkestani diaspora, preserving identity by the tradition of Sümelek, the institution of gep-geshtek, the Uzbek language, music, and other cultural practices in Turkey, Yesevi shifts the analytical focus to how the Turkestani diaspora keeps its identity in other countries.<sup>2</sup> The author reveals that early migrants from Turkestan were more actively participating in community events, while fourth and fifth-generation migrants are most likely married to local people and not involved in preserving Turkestani traditions.

The last chapter outlines the Turkestani associations and their activities as tools for the integration of migrants into foreign countries. While the associations served to keep identity alive abroad, the experiences and narratives of the Turkestani migrants reveal how, in reality, they endure being "enemies of people, *kackaks*, descendants of Basmachi, and descendants of escapers" for their motherland. The chapter concludes with the possibilities of the return of Turkestani migrants to their motherland. The author underlines unsuccessful attempts of

<sup>1</sup> Kamoludin Abdullaev, "Emigration Within, Across, and Beyond Central Asia in the Early Soviet Period from a Perspective of Translocality," in *Mobilities, Boundaries, and Travelling Ideas: Rethinking Translocality beyond Central Asia and the Caucasus*, edited by Manja Stephan-Emmrich and Philipp Schöder (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2018), 61.

<sup>2</sup> Dılfuza Alimova, "Türkiye Özbekleri gündelik yaşam, kimlik ve bellek (Adana ve İstanbul örneği)" [The Uzbeks of Turkey daily life, identity and memory (The cases of Adana and Istanbul)] (Master's Thesis, Istanbul University, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 2017), <https://acikbilim.yok.gov.tr/handle/20.500.12812/341442>.

migrants to settle in Uzbekistan, the *Oralman* program returnees to Kazakhstan, and migrants who hold Afghan citizenship living in Saudi Arabia who desire to migrate to another country.

Overall, in addition to successfully explaining her arguments from an array of historical, cultural, and political perspectives, Prof. Yesevi interrelates concepts like migration, identity, and belongingness by integrating them with narratives from her fieldwork. I would like to elaborate on two final original points regarding the book. Firstly, the book situates the results and argument within the broader framework of not only migration from Turkestan but also the long history of migration routes from Afghanistan. Secondly, this scholarship is a significant contribution to contextualizing the change in the structure of migration and identity formation and the emergence of the notion of Turkestani migrants. As the author points out, the study fills an important gap in the literature on migration from Central Asia.

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