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Why Don't They Hate Us More?

Book Review: *Beyond Dutch Borders. Transnational Politics among Colonial Migrants, Guest Workers and the Second Generation* by Liza Mügge. Amsterdam University Press, 2010

The book in question has been published within the series edited by the IMISCOE program (International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion in Europe), which had been established in 2004 as a Network of Excellence and became “an independent, self-funding endeavour open to qualified researchers and research institutes worldwide” in 2009.¹ Liza Mügge is a political scientist from Amsterdam and she has focused on three groups of migrants in the contemporary Netherlands: the Surinamese, Turkish and Kurdish ones. Her research questions are concerned with the emergence of transnational migrant politics, the evolution of political participation of migrants over time (especially the “coming of age” of a second generation, which grew up entirely or almost entirely in the country of settlement and, well, the third question is unintelligible because of poor English and minimalist editing effort (see p. 22) third bulleted point, but we may guess that she is interested in cross-influences between the social response to migrants’ political activism and their willingness to continue transnational politics.

The author mentions all relevant literature, including Kearney, Vertovec, Granovetter and an Erasmus University colleague, Engbersen, or a Surinamese colleague of mine from Tilburg University, Gowricharn, but her strength is in empirical studies of three selected minorities in the contemporary Kingdom of the Netherlands. The topic is not entirely of a theoretical and methodological interest to me. I share some of the dilemmas with the subjects of her study. As a Polish migrant to the Netherlands, I participate in both Dutch and Polish national politics, by voting in respective national elections, though I have to choose between the two on those days when elections to the European Parliament are held (I usually vote for the Polish representatives with my wife and my children vote for the Dutch ones). What did the author find out?

First, that there were significant differences between the three groups of migrants. The Surinamese went mostly for the homeland-directed activities (they were the only group of migrants, who came from the former Dutch colony, with a painful record of corrupt deals between the postcolonial Surinamese and Dutch political elites). The Turks and the Kurds shared their focus on transplanted homeland politics (revived in a foreign setting), but they differed in that the Turks

¹ See Mügge (2010, *International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion in Europe*).

complemented these transplanted homeland politics with country-of-residence directed activities, while the Kurds added the diaspora politics (not so surprising considering the fact that their homeland is divided between Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria). The transnational ties of the Turks had an institutional setting (the Turkish state or political parties acting from Turkey) while the Kurds were rallied by influential political leaders in exile. The Surinamese ran the highest risk of being considered renegades (migration as an act of treason – leaving homeland behind), Turks were subjected to the most systematic guidance from the country of origin and the Kurds were most open for chances for political participation in their host country (having been denied this chance in their country of origin – for instance, by a repressive Turkish state, which is why the Dutch parliament granted the Kurds a right to establish a Kurdish Parliament in exile on Dutch territory).

She concludes, using the twin concepts of ‘ties’ and ‘activities’:

[t]he significance of transnational politics lies in the existence of transnational ties through which collectivities can be mobilized. Once established, they can be used for social-cultural, economic or political purposes. Ties have the broadest scope when they are collective and are more highly institutionalized. Such ties will more likely survive and evolve among second and third generations. (Mügge 2010:201)

Perhaps, this would suggest that the Turkish migrants are most active, involved and politically motivated. However, as the author herself admits in a methodological appendix, at least some of the 298 Turkish respondents might have been ethnic Kurds, since, if they came from Turkey, they were automatically registered as Turks, and self-identification as Kurdish was a political decision, easier in the Netherlands than in Turkey where it would have been punishable by anti-Kurdish laws. When she started identifying Kurds, she finally located them in Kurdish organizations and through Kurdish websites, but this made her sample of 21 interviewed Kurds much more educated and politically engaged than 28 Turks or 23 Surinamese who had also made it to the in-depth interviews.

Nevertheless, this is a promising beginning of a more empirical and pragmatic approach to the sociological and political study of migrant communities and it might contribute to the lifting of scapegoat stereotypes, which are often evoked by the populist parties, especially in times of crises.

References

Mügge, Liza. 2010. *Beyond Dutch Borders. Transnational Politics among Colonial Migrants, Guest Workers and the Second Generation*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

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