

Experiencing Citizenship in Urban Motherhood

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The interview material used for this paper stems from a study on political participation of Turkish immigrants in Berlin. The study focuses on the importance of civic organizations and social networks for political participation (e.g. Bloemraad 2006). Over the course of the interviews it became clear that being a mother was in a lot of cases a specific channel to get in touch with others through social networks and urban institutions such as schools and kindergarten (Nast/Blokland 2014). The experience made by immigrant women in these urban environments of mothering were inter alia decisive for if and how they got involved in civic or political action. Beyond this, experiences made in urban institutions such as school or kindergarten affected how they perceive themselves as citizens. For instance, women very often responded with stories about everyday interactions in their neighborhood care institutions when asked what citizenship means to her. Myriam a 42-year old mother answered this question by telling a story about the kindergarten where her daughter went to some time ago and where her wish that her daughter should not eat pork was not respected. She used this urban everyday experience to express how she perceived her position as a (non)citizen. The manifold discussions around the notion of urban citizenship as well as gender and citizenship (Beauregard / Bonds 2000, Varsanyi 2006, Holston 2006, Yuval-Davis 1997, Fenster 2005) offer an appropriate theoretical frame to analyze this relation between the abstract notion of citizenship and everyday experiences in urban surroundings. However, beyond this feeling of not being accepted and being a second class citizen Myriam, and other women developed strategies of resistance or endurance (Feagin/Cobas 2014) to deal with such situations of discrimination and racism.

The paper will first center on questions of how mothering in urban contexts shapes the substantive side of political citizenship by connecting mothers to political or civic engagement. Thus, it shows how gendered child care affects the ways how women get active in the city. Second, it focuses on how interactions in urban child care institutions form perceptions of being accepted as full citizens or not and therefore constitute a specific form of experiencing urban citizenship. This is crucially connected to how cultural diversity is negotiated in these institutions. In a third step the paper shows how mothers resist discrimination and racism in these institutions and how they develop strategies for themselves and their children. These strategies are often aimed at transgressing prevailing images of immigrant motherhood as well as transgressing the constraining conditions of the educational system that limit the advancement of their children. By doing so they often strive to deploy and expand their (in many ways limiting) urban citizenship and may contribute to the emergence of a post-migrant urban society (Foroutan 2015).

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