

Sex, Love, and Migration: Postsocialism, Modernity, and Intimacy from Istanbul to the Arctic. By Alexia Bloch. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017. 272 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$28.95, paper.

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Alexia Bloch's *Sex, Love, and Migration*, an outcome of more than a decade of intense work, is an essential and extensive study of postsocialist women's labor migration to Istanbul. Bloch sets out to disengage transnational migration from the narratives of trafficking and victimization. Instead, she calls for understanding the phenomenon of transnational mobility in the context of economies of desire, growing precarity, shrinking social security, and various, sometimes contradicting, visions of modernity. Building on these gendered stories of mobility in the region, the book complicates liberal narratives of a unidirectional way from "an 'oppressive' state socialism to the 'opportunities' offered by global capitalism" (5).

The book is divided into three parts. Part one, *Mobilities and Intimacies*, starts with a detailed introduction, where Bloch reflects on the origin of the project, her positionality in the primary fieldwork sites (Istanbul, Vulcănești (Moldova), and Moscow), and defines the main analytical concepts. The first chapter lays out a history of shifting ideas about masculinity and femininity in the Soviet and post-Soviet eras, as well as in 20th-century Turkey. Then, going as far back as the 10th century, Bloch shows a rich history of transnational migration and intimate encounters between the areas of present-day Turkey and the former Soviet Union.

Part two, *Intimate Practices and Global Circuits*, opens with a chapter that reflects on changing gender sensibilities around entrepreneurship and socialist ideals of un/productive labour. Bloch insightfully narrates how women migrants negotiate emotional work and struggle to come to terms with their statuses as entrepreneurs and as primary breadwinners. She shows how her participants' ideas on what it means to be an entrepreneur were heavily inspired by the Soviet concept of "social parasite", because in the Soviet Union entrepreneurship was officially condemned as socially

unproductive labour. Bloch is also very attentive to gender dynamics that is at stake, since many of her participants struggle to accept their identity as primary breadwinners. Being aware of the shame that their male partners feel for not being able to provide for the family, post-Soviet women migrants negotiate a great deal of emotional work, attending to their partners' "need for validation" as household heads (69). Chapter 3 takes the reader to the town of Vulcănești in Gagauzia (southern Moldova). In this chapter, Bloch focuses on the generational aspect of labor migration, conclusively arguing that for young people in Gagauzia, mobility has become linked to "aspirations for material well-being" rather than "to the ambivalence that global capitalism invoked for their parents' generation" (97).

The final, third part, entitled Sex, Love, and Unpromising States, is introduced by Chapter 4, which questions the line between strategic intimacies and "real love" by showing how post-Soviet women migrants and Turkish men negotiate and contest various intimate practices. Chapter 5 continues to interrogate the issue of intimacy and sexuality. It focuses on the sexuality exhibited by young post-Soviet women who work in Turkey as entertainers: Bloch thoroughly explains how the idea of a sexuality "without hang-ups (*bez kompleksov*)" (135) is informed by the women's vision of and aspiration to modernity. Finally, Chapter 6 puts forward the topic of mothering and migration. Rooting her argument in the history of "other mothering" (164) in southern Moldova, Bloch, shows how migrant women's nurturing practices are shaped by increased mobility and precarity.

Sex, Love, and Migration is undoubtedly a solid contribution to the field of anthropology of postsocialism. In particular, Bloch makes a strong case for the utility of the concepts "postsocialism" and "post-Soviet," arguing that not only do they "describe a common historical experience" (15) but they also encapsulate "the ways in which a Soviet past influenced and continues to influence specific ways of understanding gender, labor, and morality" (15). Secondly, the book complicates existing scholarship on race by reminding readers about intricate local cartographies of desire. Bloch points out to the fact that while post-Soviet women are usually perceived as 'white', they are nevertheless in a more economically unstable and precarious position than racially 'nonwhite' Turkish men. However, while Turkish men are in a superior economic position, compared to post-Soviet women, the latter are still ascribed more symbolic

capital in the form of education and sex appeal. In other words, Bloch cautions that a simple dichotomy of white (as a signifier of [economic] power) and non-white (as a signifier of oppression) do not work.

The book thus attentively considers local intersections and interplays of desire, race, and economic capital. Finally, *Sex, Love, and Migration* is a concise and persuasive argument against the discourse of human trafficking: time and again Bloch shows how campaigns against human trafficking, failing to account for migrant women's lack of economic capital and social security in their home countries, continuously hinder women's migration and detract "from finding durable solutions for addressing the working conditions under which undocumented migrants labor" (150).

However, every good scholarly book has its shortcomings. The most obvious one is the lack of discussion of the Arctic. Though it is promised in the book's subtitle, the author extensively discusses Istanbul and Gagauzia and mentions Moscow and Siberia a few times, none of which is the Arctic. The Arctic itself seems to appear only once, in the very beginning, so the books' claim to engage with labour migration all the way from Istanbul to the Arctic is rather a poetic exaggeration. Overall, the book seems to present a lot of historical and geographical context, sometimes at the expense of the particularities and the findings of the research. On the other hand, precisely because of this fact, the casual reader will find *Sex, Love, and Migration* an appealing and engaging read. Moreover, this can also be interpreted as the author's meticulousness and the desire to complement ethnographic methods with an extensive use of historical and popular publications. Last, but not least, since Bloch's fieldwork stretched well over a decade, the curious reader may wish for more discussion of the changes in female migration patterns from the former Soviet Union to Turkey.

Bloch has a lucid and flowing writing style and rarely uses jargon, so the book is quite suitable for an audience larger than scholarly circles. Still, students of anthropology and sociology who are interested in the region and/or the topics of female labor migration and shifting intimate practices will also find it a gripping read. Overall, *Sex, Love, and Migration* is a welcome addition to much-needed ethnographic research on the meanings of post-Sovietness, modernity, and intimacy.