

Book Review

**Gender Justice, Education and Equality:
Creating Capabilities for Girls' and Women's
Development**

By: Firdevs Melis Cin

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Education is a basic human right; “everyone has the right education” as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognised in 1948 (UNESCO, 2007). However, many girls and women cannot access education due to persistent gender bias and inequalities in societies (UNESCO, 2014). As Cin (2017) highlights in her book, around the world, approximately “65 million girls are not schooled and two-thirds of the world’s 774 million illiterate are female” (p.3). Even though it is well-known that access to a quality of education helps to eliminate gender bias and patriarchal values that exist in societies, most of the current educational systems across the world reflect and reproduce gender inequalities and prejudices. More



importantly, and not surprisingly, the ideologies of individuals and governments in power do not challenge the social status quo (Cin 2017; Stromquist, 1995).

This timely publication *Gender Justice, Education and Equality: Creating Capabilities for Girls' and Women's Development* explores how education can reproduce some of the existing gender equalities and at the same time be transformative and distribute justice in women's private and public lives. The book gives a voice to three different generations of women teachers in Turkey while discussing their experiences through a Capabilities framework. The author's story like style makes the readers engage deeply with these women's experiences and understands "the cycle of reproduced gender inequalities" within the Turkish society.

The book is divided into eight chapters. The first two chapters conceptualise gender justice and introduce the readers to the Capabilities Approach (CA). The author utilises the Capabilities Approach, which was developed by Amartya Sen (1999) and Martha Nussbaum (2000), to address these three-generation teachers' individual experiences concerning wider societal, cultural and educational issues. The third chapter of the book focuses on Turkish political history while describing the multiple layers of gender and educational politics in Turkey. The author's description of the history and politics of Turkey in this chapter allows readers to understand the journey that her research participants have lived through. Chapter Four, which I believe is the heart of this book, introduces the readers the three generations of women; Republican Women, Amazon Women and Postmodern Women. The readers learn about the women's life stories, struggles and limitations due to being a woman in Turkey. All these stories offer commonalities within the periods they live in which

again help readers to conceptualise the participants' lives. Chapter Four also illustrates the data collection and analysis process. The following three Chapters reveal the participants' narratives from private, educational and professional perspectives. The final chapter, drawing from the narratives of the women, discusses how gender justice in Turkey is actually a result of a patriarchal mindset rather than a lack of policy or legal provisions.

The strength of the book is that it depicts a realistic picture of the participants' experiences in their private and public spheres and discusses issues regarding gender roles both within their families and professions. What is significant about these women's personal lives is that, as the author herself describes, their family lives "present an understanding of how the gender perceptions and gender norms established by their families started to 'haunt' their lives by setting limits to their freedoms and opportunities at an early age" (p.90). When it comes to their professional and educational lives, these women value education and believe that they need to secure their range of "physical, social, economic and intellectual capability sets and strengthen their agency" for them to have better futures (p.121). Notably, whichever generation the participants might have been raised in they strongly believed that the education they receive would empower them. Learning about the women teachers' compulsory teaching posts in rural areas of Western Turkey and Eastern Turkey portrays a vivid picture of socio-economic and political issues in Turkey. The reflections from these three-generation women; allow the reader to appreciate what it means to be a woman teacher in Turkish society.

While focusing on the case of Turkey, which could be initially observed as a limitation, this publication actually contributes to gender



issues in a broader arena and it is universal enough to be used as a textbook with university students in different countries. One especially noteworthy feature of this book is its use of the Capabilities Approach; inspired by Nussbaum's list of capabilities, the author created her own list of capabilities and applied this list to the participants' lives (p.178). Considering that the CA has generated considerable interest in recent years, this book is particularly a significant contribution to the field. In all, the book is an excellent one; clearly written and reads like a story that engages the reader from the first page of the book.

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