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Is migration feminized? A gender- and ethnicity-based review of the literature on irregular migration to Turkey

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Is Migration Feminized?

A Gender- and Ethnicity-Based Review of the Literature on Irregular Migration to Turkey

Gülşay Toksöz and Çağla Ünlütürk Ulutaş

in:

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Table of Contents

List of Figures	7
List of Tables	8
Acknowledgement	9
Introduction	11
<i>Seçil Paçacı Elitok and Thomas Straubhaar</i>	
Demography and Migration in Transition: Reflections on EU-Turkey Relations	19
<i>Ahmet İçduygu and Ayşem Biriz Karaçay</i>	
Turkey's "Critical Europeanization": Evidence from Turkey's Immigration Policies	39
<i>Juliette Tolay</i>	
Turkey's New Draft Law on Asylum: What to Make of It?	63
<i>Kemal Kirişçi</i>	
Is Migration Feminized?	85
A Gender- and Ethnicity-Based Review of the Literature on Irregular Migration to Turkey	
<i>Gülay Toksöz and Çağla Ünlütürk Ulutaş</i>	
Turkey in the New Migration Era: Migrants between Regularity and Irregularity	113
<i>Sema Erder and Selmin Kaşka</i>	
Causes and Consequences of the Downturn in Financial Remittances to Turkey: A Descriptive Approach	133
<i>Giulia Bettin, Seçil Paçacı Elitok and Thomas Straubhaar</i>	

Table of Contents

Bordering the EU: Istanbul as a Hotspot for Transnational Migration <i>Barbara Pusch</i>	167
Emigration of Highly Qualified Turks A Critical Review of the Societal Discourses and Social Scientific Research <i>Yaşar Aydın</i>	199
Continuity and Change: Immigration Policies in Germany from the Sixties to the Present <i>Mehmet Okyayuz</i>	229
Conclusion <i>Seçil Paçacı Elitok and Thomas Straubhaar</i>	259
List of Abbreviations	271
International Workshop on Migration Potentials from and to Turkey	273
Contributors	275

Is Migration Feminized?

A Gender- and Ethnicity-Based Review of the Literature on
Irregular Migration to Turkey

Gülay Toksöz and Çağla Ünlütürk Ulutaş

Turkey today is both a sending and a receiving country in migration. In the 1960s and 1970s, there were flows of mass migration from Turkey to various European countries, including Germany in the first place, to cover the labor shortage then existing in these countries. When the countries of Western Europe stopped receiving migrant workers, the direction of migrant workers from Turkey shifted to oil-rich Middle Eastern countries and, starting from the 1990s, to the Commonwealth of Independent States including the Russian Federation. Meanwhile, Turkey encountered the immigration of ethnic Turks from Bulgaria in the late 1980s as a result of political pressures there and irregular migration inflows swelled from various countries nearby in the period after 1990. While some irregular migrants traveling and/or staying without satisfying specific requirements related to migration eventually target Western countries after temporary stays in Turkey, there are others who come to find jobs to work specifically in Turkey.

There are three fundamental patterns of development that trigger irregular migration. The first is the radical transformation that the Eastern Bloc countries underwent in the 1990s, which led to the collapse of hitherto existing economic, political and social regimes. It was followed by a transition to a market economy, accompanied by unemployment and poverty as major drivers of migration. Rigid migration regulations introduced by the EU countries closed the doors to new migrants, redirected people to look for other countries where they can find jobs and consequently Turkey became a center of attraction for these

people with her employment opportunities in a rather large, informal economy. The second is the fact that irregular migrants originating from various Asian and African countries who have no chance of being legally accepted as migrants by EU countries use Turkey as a transit country while they wait for opportunities to move ahead to Europe. Migrants in this group as well move to informal sectors for subsistence during their stay in Turkey. The same also holds true for the third group of migrants who flee from some oppressive regimes in the Middle East and reach Turkey for seeking asylum.¹ While their motives for arrival may differ, the common characteristic of all irregular migrants is their participation in informal labor markets either for short or longer term. Migrants' participation in labor markets that are structured on the basis of gender and ethnicity certainly takes different forms in regard to sex, and migrants encounter different working conditions as well as different forms of exploitation and exclusion depending on their countries of origin.

By focusing on the state of migrants coming to Turkey for employment and within the framework of existing literature on migration, the purpose of this paper is to seek an answer to the question of the extent to which the global phenomenon of migration is feminized. The increasing share of female migrants is true for Turkey, and, while seeking an answer, we hope to shed light on the comparative employment status of males and females from different ethnic origins. Though remaining scarce for some time, studies on labor migration in Turkey and working conditions of migrants as actors in this process of migration have recently been increasing. What is interesting to note at this point is that these studies mostly focus on migrant women in domestic and care services.

Labor Migration to Turkey

Leaving aside a tiny minority with legal permission to stay and work in Turkey, migrants in Turkey largely consist of those who work illicitly without any official permission. The status of those staying and working legally in Turkey is provided for by the Law No. 4817 (2003) of Permission of Employment Granted to Foreigners. According to the provisions of this law, the Ministry of labor and Social Security (MoLSS) examines applications and, considering the needs of labor market, grants permission to the employment of expatriates given that domestic laborers cannot be found for any particular area of employment. Ac-

¹ İçduygu (2006, p. 2).

According to information available in regard to those employed on the basis of permission, newly granted and extended permissions increased in the period 2003–2009, jumping from 7,302 in 2004 to 14,023 in 2009.² Of the countries of origin of these migrants with work permission, China leads the list with 18.4 %, followed by the Russian Federation (11.2 %). The combined share of EU countries in total is 20 %. Looking at the distribution of work permits granted in 2009 by fields of employment, we see that those from China constitute the largest group as private company employees. It is known that Chinese firms engaged in mining in particular bring along their employees. This is further confirmed by the fact that Zonguldak is among the top five provinces in terms of the number of work permits granted to migrants. Migrants from the Russian Federation and Ukraine, on the other hand, make up the bulk of permits granted in the context of tourism. As for those coming from the EU countries, they mostly enjoy permits granted for academic purposes. As for gender distribution of work permits, males constitute the majority with 61.6 % while the share of females is 38.4 %.³

Since the legislation in effect envisages the granting of work permits to expatriates only in case domestic laborers are not available, the number of permits granted is extremely limited. A large part of migrants employed in Turkey work informally for unqualified jobs that can be taken up by domestic laborers. Though origin countries of irregular migrant workers may change in the course of time, these are mainly the republics of the former Soviet Union or Eastern Bloc countries. These include Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Migrants arriving without the need to get tourist visa or by getting their visas issued at the border find jobs in an informal economy and turn out to be illicit when they remain after the expiration of their visas. According to data provided by the General Directorate of Security, there were over 700,000 persons in the period 1999–2009 identified while illicitly entering the country or leaving after delay. It can be said that the second category mainly consists of migrant laborers.⁴ These persons stay in the country legally with tourist status; some maintain this legal status by leaving and re-entering depending upon their visa periods and others continue to stay in Turkey illicitly. Those who exceed

² MoLSS (2011).

³ Ministry of Interior, GDS, cited by IOM (2010, pp. 37–40). An absence of studies on migrants with legal permission is the reason why our assessment in regard to such migrants is limited to statistics.

⁴ IOM (2010, pp. 15–16).

their visa periods have to pay a fine at the border and they are not allowed to re-enter Turkey unless staying in their home countries for a period of time calculated on the basis of the period they stayed in Turkey in excess of their visa.⁵ Consequently, some migrants continuously postpone return and the penalty mentioned produces an impact, which extends the period of stay in the country rather than dissuading irregular migration. Making money in temporary jobs found in Turkey, and returning back to the country of origin after some time and re-entering Turkey when there is need for jobs, constitute the common characteristics of these migrants, and the process is defined as circular or shuttle migration.⁶ The point in choosing Turkey as a place to work and save money is related to some factors. These include a flexible visa system, geographical proximity, ease in access, existence of networks formed by family members and acquaintances already working in Turkey and possibilities of finding jobs in informal economy.⁷

For a labor supply to be functional there must be demand for it. An extensive informal economy and employment, a shortfall of institutional care services and a demand for informal labor in Turkey are determining factors for the emergence of a migrant labor supply. In this respect, Turkey resembles the countries of Southern Europe, which are the destination points for irregular migration. In countries such as Italy, Greece, Spain and Portugal, gaps left by rudimentary welfare states in the delivery of care services as well as the existence of a wide informal economy based on small enterprises create demand for cheap labor mainly in the sectors of services, agriculture and construction, and the part of this demand not responded to by domestic labor is covered by migrant workers. In Turkey, the dominant character of the labor market is surplus labor, which manifests itself in high rates of unemployment and underemployment. There is demand for migrant workers in spite of the existence of such a labor surplus.⁸ This demand emerged following the partial improvement in real wages in the period 1989–93 which came after falling wages in the 1980s and historically coincided with the period during which people from the countries of the former Eastern Bloc used their newly gained freedom to travel and to start migrating for employment. While a transition to out-

⁵ *Ibid.* (p. 29).

⁶ İçduygu (2008, p. 4), Erder (2007, p. 43).

⁷ İçduygu (2004, pp. 48–49).

⁸ Toksöz (2007).

sourcing and sub-contracting facilitated informal employment, irregular migrant workers were phased in as a reserve labor force in the face of rising wages for domestic laborers.⁹ Migrant workers are employed in labor-intensive and low-paid sectors, the manufacturing industry including garments and food, construction, agriculture, tourism, entertainment and commercial sex and domestic and care services. With the exception of construction sector, it can be assumed that females outnumber males in all sectors. Female labor dominates particularly such sectors as domestic and care services, entertainment and commercial sex, and garment production while both male and female migrants are employed in other sectors including food-restaurants, various sub-sectors of tourism and, particularly in the Black Sea region, agriculture. In the garments, tourism and construction sectors, the subsistence of small enterprises depends upon the employment of cheap labor provided by migrants.¹⁰ While legislation envisages heavy fines for the employment of illicit migrants, they are not dissuading people from it due to insufficient inspection. Or, in cases where inspection is conducted, bribes paid to officials are attractive enough to let cases go “unnoticed”.¹¹ A relatively higher level of education and better work discipline on the part of migrant workers, their laboring without posing any problems to their employers, an absence of social rights and benefits and any tendency to get unionized make migrant workers preferable for employers.¹² Here the major factor that brings along the absence of any protection is the fact that migrants reside illicitly in Turkey and that, even in cases where their stay is legal, they work without working permits. The principal fear common to all migrants is the fear of being spotted and deported. While migrant workers may accept working longer hours than domestic laborers and being paid less than others, what they consider to be a gross injustice and a case of desperation is when they are not paid at all, a situation against which they have no place to apply.¹³ In addition to these, female migrant workers also mention such risks as sexual harassment and, for those in commercial sex, getting infected.¹⁴

⁹ Akpınar (2010).

¹⁰ İçduygu (2004, pp. 45–48), İçduygu (2006, pp. 6–7).

¹¹ İçduygu (2004, pp. 54–55), Dedeoğlu (2011), Akpınar (2010).

¹² Erder (2007, pp. 65–66).

¹³ Dedeoğlu (2011), Toksöz/Akpınar (2009).

¹⁴ İçduygu (2006, p. 9).

Feminization of Migration in the Context of the Gap in Care Services in Turkey

In the countries of Southern Europe that have some common socio-economic characteristics with Turkey, child, elderly and sick care services are mostly regarded as matters of family responsibility, and the delivery of public services in these areas have remained weaker relative to Northern European countries. With the further weakening of welfare regimes in the process of neoliberal restructuring, public care services have gradually disappeared. Moreover, the weakening of family ties, which once maintained home care, and higher rates of labor force participation on the part of women, who have traditionally assumed the burden of care, led to the emergence of a rather striking problem of a “care gap”. As female citizens who used to be employed in domestic and care services find other opportunities of employment and refuse to undertake “low status” domestic and care services as there emerged a rising demand for female migrants who could fill the gap. Consequently, the burden of domestic and care services for women, which is the outcome of a gender-based division of labor, shifted from upper-middle class women in a given country to lower-class migrant women.¹⁵ In European countries, those who covered the gap are women mostly from the former Eastern Bloc countries. Since gender-based power relations had remained intact in these countries where wage-work used to be a norm for women during the period of state socialism, it was women who, in the face of upheaval, brought along with them the transition to a market economy. These women decided to migrate, bearing the responsibility to protect their families and in particular to meet the needs of their children. It is often in domestic and care services that these women found jobs and work. Since their goal was to save money while working in other countries and to return back home afterwards, their traffic between two countries is defined as “settlement in mobility”.¹⁶

While the employment of migrant women in domestic and care services in Turkey has some characteristics similar to the case in developed countries, there are differences as well. In many countries of the world, the rise in demand for migrant domestic labor is explained by women’s increasing participation in the labor force.¹⁷ As women increasingly take part in the labor force,

¹⁵ Campani (1993), Kofman et al. (2000), Lazaridis (2007).

¹⁶ Morokvasic (2004).

¹⁷ Parrenas (2001).

it is observed that women shift their traditionally given domestic roles to waged migrant labor. However, contrary to the worldwide trend, Turkey faces a situation where women's participation in the labor force is falling. In the 2000s, the women's labor force participation rate was around 26 % and this rate falls short of explaining the rise in demand for migrant labor. However, the share of women in professional occupations is around 37 %, which is close to that in developed countries, and it can thus be asserted that it is the factor that determines the demand for migrant laborers.¹⁸ As a matter of fact it is upper-middle class women in professional occupations, regarded as employers, that tend to hire migrant women laborers in Turkey.¹⁹

The "care gap" that invites migrant labor is not a recently emerging problem in Turkey, where care-related welfare state policies have never developed and become institutionalized, but a long-standing and deep-rooted one. As a result of the absence of state intervention in this area and a consequent weakness of institutional care facilities, care for the elderly, the disabled and children turned out to be unpaid family service shared by female members of families. Under the given circumstances, only women in professional jobs, enjoying relatively higher incomes, can afford to use institutional care services provided by the private sector or hire persons for home-based care. Among those available for such services, the number of migrant women has been rising steadily in recent years. "Migrant female labor in Turkey emerges not as a remedy for the withdrawal of a well advanced system of welfare state but as elements of labor that provides for the welfare of only a part of families within a welfare regime where family plays a central role".²⁰

In Turkey, women in professional occupations can take part and make a career in working life on equal footing with men only by purchasing domestic and care services while, on the other hand, migrant women working for them say they move out of their countries for ensuring the well-being of their children in particular, covering their costs of education and providing for family subsistence.²¹ The mobility of women to provide for their basic needs started in the early 1990s with the enjoyment of the right to travel in the Eastern Bloc countries. The heroines of the "luggage trade", experienced in the early 1990s

¹⁸ Ecevit et al. (2008).

¹⁹ Kümbetoğlu (2005), Kaşka (2006), Keough (2006), Akalın (2007).

²⁰ Gökbayrak (2009, p. 76).

²¹ İçduygu (2004, p. 44), Kaşka (2006, p. 46).

and considered as the harbinger of irregular migration movements, were mainly women from this bloc, who were engaged in such activity for mere subsistence. In a study shedding light upon this issue, Yüksekler (2003) draws attention to the fact that the Soviet women who developed skills in providing for daily subsistence needs maintained these skills, upon the collapse of the system, by engaging in small-scale trade activities. The luggage trade that provided significant foreign currency inflow to the Turkish economy throughout the 1990s and early 2000s later lost its importance as the former Eastern Bloc countries, including Russia in the first place, integrated with the world economy as the scale of the trade expanded and was institutionalized. Nevertheless, small-scale trade activities still persist with actors from the poorer countries.²² In this process, women kept moving to Turkey to work and make money in various sectors. Of their engagements, the sector of entertainment and commercial sex of course had wider media coverage and was of wide public interest. Our priority topic here, however, is domestic and care services in which we can assume many more women are employed.

Migrant Women in the Sector of Domestic and Care Services

Since the majority of migrants in Turkey working in domestic and care services are women from the former Eastern Bloc countries, almost all literature in this field is on women moving in from these countries, including Moldova in the first place, with the exception of Weyland's (1994) study on migrants from the Philippines and Danış's (2007) study on Christian migrants from Iraq. However, changes in visa regimes together with bilateral agreements between Turkey and other countries bring along a striking impact on the national composition of migrants employed in domestic and care services. According to Atatimur,²³ for example, while the labor force profile of agencies in 2007 was composed of women from Moldova, Romania and Turkmenistan, others from Caucasian countries, including Georgia in the first place, gained weight starting from 2008. This change can be explained by the duration of visa agreements acted with the countries concerned as well as ease in getting visas issued.

²² Erder (2007, pp. 49–55).

²³ Atatimur (2008, p. 121).

While in European countries the demand for low-status and low-paid domestic services not preferred by nationals is met by a migrant labor force, in Turkey these services are shared by live-in migrants and daily paid local people. Due to the given conservative environment and their role of reproduction in their own families, Turkish citizens usually do not prefer to work in the sector of live-in care. Hence, the gap in boarded and flexible labor mostly needed by employers working long hours in professional jobs is covered by migrant laborers. In other words, migrant laborers are left not only with low-paid jobs but also those that are not preferred by nationals for various reasons. Migrant women, on their part, prefer being live-in workers without paying any rent or for daily accommodation.²⁴

Another important factor, which boosts demand for migrant domestic workers, is that it has the function of consolidating the identity and life-style images of middle-class families in Turkey. Indeed, many employees explain their preference for migrants over nationals by the “European” and “more civilized” characteristics of the former while considering the latter as uneducated and of a rural origin. There are also other reasons for this preference, including the more disciplined nature of migrants in fulfilling their tasks and complying with rules set by their employers and the possibility of constant checking since they live and work in the same space.²⁵

The Migration Journey and the Employment Processes of Migrants in Domestic Services

As stated earlier, women migrating to work in the sector of domestic and care services in Turkey enter and leave the country with short-term tourist visas and are thus engaged in a circular (shuttle) form of migration. After their stay in Turkey, they return to their home countries to renew their visas, to help their families in agricultural works and to check the situation of children they have left behind. But there are others who keep staying in Turkey over their visa periods.²⁶ This second group of people, who are penalized for violating visa rules and denied re-entry, find ways of convincing border-gate authorities, including bribes or resorting to counter-strategies, such as divorcing or using a

²⁴ Akalın (2007, pp. 214–215).

²⁵ Demirdirek (2007, p. 17), Atatimur (2008, p. 140).

²⁶ Demirdirek (2007), Kaşka (2006), Keough (2006), Akalın (2010).

maiden name for getting a new passport and tourist visa.²⁷ The Gagauz region in Moldova is the leading one with its migrant workers going to Turkey and this preference for Turkey derives from region's native tongue, which is Turkish. The migration of women in Moldova has also become a life strategy transferred from generation to generation. Some nurses who used to work in care services in Turkey say they worked in Turkey to raise their children and now it is their daughters' turn to do the same to raise their own. This situation, coined as "settlement in mobility" by Morokvasic, reflects the necessity of migrating out in order to have a better life in their countries later.

It is observed that migrant women arriving in Turkey finance their travel and visa costs in four ways: with their own savings, receiving pre-payment from their prospective employers, borrowing from relatives or usurers and through employment agencies that they apply to. Employment agencies may provide for travel and they mostly bill employers as their clients for the cost of travel and other necessary documents. Following the agreement, employers pay a commission fee of 500 USD, which is a kind of guarantee for the agreement acted.²⁸ Women, whose first travel is through employment agencies, may later arrange for their travel after finding good employment opportunities and learning about the route, fees and the working of the system.²⁹ When travel is arranged by employment agencies, intermediaries visit villages to announce the date of departure and migrants complete their exit procedures within a month. Then, when the time of departure comes, migrant women are collected from various stations and transported to Turkey by bus or plane. The migration literature assumes that the poorest cannot migrate for not having enough finances to do so; however, with the phasing in of employment agencies, even the poorest can take part in the process of migration.³⁰

Agreements with agencies involve no written contract and these organizations seize the passports of migrant women as long as they are employed. According to the manager of an employment agency, this practice of seizing passports is not only a guarantee for them but also a protective one for migrant women preventing their shift to other sectors. The manager draws attention to the importance of trust between the firm and the client and stresses

²⁷ Ozinian (2009).

²⁸ Atatimur (2008, pp. 113–114).

²⁹ Keough (2006, p. 441).

³⁰ Atatimur (2008, pp. 115–118).

that an agency alleged to be involved in commercial sex has lost all its clients. It is also stated that there are hundreds of such agencies active in Turkey.³¹ As put by Kaşka (2006), the sole basis of this relationship devoid of any formal contract and taking place illicitly is trust. In a sense, agencies regulate this chaotic area with their “unwritten” rules. The absence of any state regulation on this irregular labor migration, which has been on the rise for about two decades, invited too many informal structures to fill the gap. These informal structures include, for example, “transporters” who convey goods and remittances of migrant women back to their families, employment agencies that conduct their activities as “consulting firms” and more experienced migrant women who make money as intermediaries by arranging jobs for new migrants.³²

Besides employment agencies, networks of relatives and friends also play a role in the process through which migrant women find jobs. It is a common practice that returnees leave their jobs in Turkey to their relatives/friends or seek jobs for them through their employers. Indeed, according to a study conducted by Erdem and Şahin,³³ 54.7 % of migrant women covered in their study found their jobs through employment agencies while 37.7 % had jobs thanks to their friends. While ethnic ties play an important role in providing jobs to Armenian migrants in domestic services, both ethnic and religious ties come to the fore in the case of Christians from Iraq who moved to Turkey after war for reasons of unemployment and insecurity. The study conducted by Danış (2007) revealed that Christian women from Iraq who moved to Istanbul or planned to move forward to European countries via Istanbul could find jobs as domestic workers for families belonging to Syriac and Armenian communities in Istanbul.

Working Conditions of Women Employed in Domestic and Care Services in Turkey

Domestic and care labor as a form socially dis-valued and traditionally undertaken by women maintained its low status and gender-based character even after its commoditization and transformation into wage labor. Consequently, in the determination of the working conditions of migrant women in domestic services, consideration of domestic labor as “valueless” and “invisible” on the

³¹ *Ibid.* (pp. 122–124).

³² Kümbetoğlu (2005, p. 19).

³³ Erdem/Şahin (2009, p. 306).

one side and the status of being “migrant” and “woman” on the other are interacting factors. The other two factors that shape the working conditions of migrant domestic workers are the facts that work is done “at home” and employment is “informal”.

Coinciding living and working environments of migrant women and the fact that these environments are those of the upper-middle classes in receiving countries make the distinction between public and private spheres ambiguous. The women-specific nature of the home space as well as production in this space creates a relation of employment whose parties are women.³⁴ As a matter of fact, the term “employer” in the literature on migrant domestic laborers is used for describing not the employing family but the woman concerned. The study by Atatimur shows that married employers as well as single parent employers pay migrant women out of their personal incomes and this situation confirms that this employment relation in Turkey is in fact between women.³⁵

Wages paid to migrant domestic workers vary from 300 to 800 USD. For care services, employers make their preference between new migrants who do not speak Turkish but are ready to work for lower wages and higher-paid migrant women who have some experience in working for middle-class Turkish households. Those who can use weekly days off are given stipends of 7–13 USD on those days. Payment of wages on a monthly basis enables the employer to extract more services from the employee in return for wages and also transfers all responsibilities of reproduction to boarding migrant workers who can use their working time in extremely flexible ways.³⁶

Kümbetoğlu³⁷ summarizes the negative impacts of “informality” prevailing in working and living conditions of migrant women in domestic services as follows: dying hair black to look Turkish, rare meetings with friends in order not to be spotted by security, preference of private homes rather than public places in such meetings, feeling of loneliness, missing children back home, abstinence in order to save as much as possible, and undertaking even the most disrespected work in spite of a good educational background. Preconceived ideas fueled by the presence of women from the former Eastern Bloc countries in commercial sex led to the stigmatization of migrants in domestic services as

³⁴ Ünlütürk Ulutaş (2010, p. 288).

³⁵ Atatimur (2008, p. 141).

³⁶ Kaşka (2006), Özinan (2009), Akalın (2010).

³⁷ Kümbetoğlu (2005, p. 21).

“Natashas”, as well as to their harassment when out of their working places.³⁸ Political considerations too may determine some negative attitudes towards migrants. For example, when political strife between Turkey and Armenia intensifies upon such issues as bills related to Armenian genocide or Karabağ, migrants from Armenia feel themselves more threatened by possible deportation.³⁹

Unfavorable working and living conditions leave migrants to face the problems of chronic stress. While not being able to go out freely for the fear of getting spotted and deported aggravates the psychological problems of migrant women, those who can more frequently return to their countries through shuttle migration and get together with their friends on their days off are in much better condition. When migrant women (who permanently remain in home environments mostly alone with the child, the elderly or the sick person under their care) have to spend their leave days too in the same environment, their potential for renewal and comfort is also seriously compromised.⁴⁰ Since migrants in Turkey other than refugees or asylum seekers cannot benefit from any health insurance scheme, migrant women in domestic services either use medicine they brought along or wait for their next return to the home country for medical treatment. It is only in very serious cases that they can use private health facilities. Since a frequent emergence of health problems may cause the loss of a job, they often tend to hide such problems from their employers.⁴¹

In upper-middle class homes, migrant women abide by high norms of work discipline in favorable conditions in some cases and with a rather heavy work burden in others. Women conceive of work as an essential part of life and express their attitude towards work by saying “it is better if there is work to do, otherwise we start worrying about ourselves and our children”. These women are saddened and disturbed in conscience not by their own circumstances but by the situation of their children back home who may feel abandoned.⁴² Nevertheless, it is also the case that they may face humiliating attitudes in their working environments. A woman states that she once faced following type of

³⁸ Keough (2006).

³⁹ Özinian (2009, p. 26).

⁴⁰ Lordoğlu and Etiler (2010, p. 109).

⁴¹ *Ibid.* (pp. 103–108).

⁴² Kümbetoğlu (2005, p. 17).

questions in her apply for a job: “Do your feet stink?”, “Do you wash out well after defecating?”, “Do you have a boyfriend and do you think about bringing him here if there is?” and “Do you eat much?”.⁴³

In studies on migration, while excessive exploitation and unfavorable working conditions exemplified above are focal points, it is necessary to carefully analyze the relations between the migrant woman worker and her employer and not to assume that it is a one-way relation emerging in a single form.⁴⁴ In other words, the relation in between must be analyzed by taking due account of the dimension of mutual dependence.

Employer-Employee Relations: Intensive Exploitation or Mutual Dependence?

The “fictive ties of kinship” with migrant workers and the fact that the living environment of the employer is also that of the migrant worker create a relation of employment where migrants do their jobs not only as a result of a necessity but their willingness to do so. The rhetoric of kinship ensures the assimilation of the worker in the family of the employer and consequently the latter’s approach to professional work as a natural responsibility. Just like mothers/spouses who cannot be “off” household work, any boarded servant/caregiver, too, cannot. The migrant worker is expected to leave aside the fact that she is employed professionally and instead turn into a housewife by accepting the home environment of the employer as her own.⁴⁵ When care services are concerned, the relationship between the worker and employer assumes an even more complex character. This relationship between the caregiver and her employer can be constructed both in a form that yields “mutual benefits” and in another form that is based on the exploitation of the workers. The form of relationship is determined by multiple economic and socio-cultural variables. Care labor which is otherwise devalued by the patriarchal system and structural dynamics of the market becomes “valuable” through the social meaning attributed to care responsibility as well as the emotional dimension of the service delivered. This system of clashing values determined on the one

⁴³ *Ibid.* (p. 21).

⁴⁴ Akalın (2007, p. 221).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* (p. 220).

side by wage and status of work and on the basis of human relations on the other shape the working conditions of migrants who deliver care services.⁴⁶

The emotional dimension of care services enables migrant women to have control over what they do while encouraging them to feel themselves as a part of the families they work for; but at the same time this position forces them to be “loyal caregivers”, always patient and understanding. For example, migrant worker Maria with her four children back in Moldova could not stop her teardrops when she saw her employer returning home cheerfully with her children. Her employer, on the other hand, scolded her for her sullenness instead of asking whether there was any problem.⁴⁷

Care labor necessitates close surveillance as well as physical and emotional care. Particularly in cases of childcare, the relationship between the caregiver and children is one where various ideas and experiences of the caregiver are transferred to children and basic life skills as well as cultural norms and values are taught.⁴⁸ In the case of elderly care, on the other hand, the caregiver takes over the responsibility for ensuring the physical and emotional well-being of the elderly person while, at the same time, accompanies as a friend the elderly person who is isolated and whose physical mobility is restricted. This situation makes the employer dependent on the caregiver who spends more time with her child or household member in need of care. However, common ideas about affection, family and child-rearing mask different power dynamics and inequalities inherent in waged care labor. The contradiction between motherhood and commoditized care labor makes lines of demarcation as to which duties are to be transferred from the mother to the caregiver ambiguous.⁴⁹ Thus, the existence of co-habitation in the same home with the employer, constructed with the rhetoric of kinship, may create both advantageous and disadvantageous outcomes for women in domestic services. Women employed in closed home environment and facing the threat of deportation are vulnerable to almost all forms of exploitation and abuse. Nevertheless, such factors as the employer’s sharing of her home and family with the migrant worker and the establishment of an affection-based relationship with the child or elderly person when care services are concerned may also create relatively favorable

⁴⁶ Uttal (1999, p. 759).

⁴⁷ Demirdirek (2007, p. 18).

⁴⁸ Uttal (1999, p. 762).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* (p. 759).

working environments in which migrant workers may put their employers in the place of their own families back at home. Since the cessation of the care relationship (which is tightly connected with the caregiver due to its emotional dimension) may create adverse outcomes from the point of view of the employer, the relation between the employer and worker may in some cases be founded upon mutual dependence. Such a relation of dependence cannot be observed in other sectors where migrants are employed.

Migrant Women in Entertainment and Commercial Sex Sectors

When the concepts of pleasure and desire gained a transnational character with globalization, the demand for sex services increased and more and more women started to work in the sectors of entertainment and commercial sex. Along with the rise in demand, services offered diversified and sector workers from various countries and ethnic origins became accessible. The development of communication technologies and the feminization of migration led to the global expansion of the sector, which is rather based on the commoditization of woman's body. Upon the collapse of the Soviet System, which was followed by the inflow of women from the former Eastern Bloc and their participation in commercial sex in Turkey, there emerged a diversification in the sector and a rising demand for expatriate women.⁵⁰ After domestic and care services, commercial sex is the sector where demand for migrant women is the highest. Contrary to such sectors as the manufacturing industry, tourism, agriculture and construction, in which there is competition with a domestic labor force, in domestic services, entertainment and commercial sex, domestic labor and migrant workers constitute two distinct groups responding to different demands by employers/clients.

Migrant women in the sector of entertainment and commercial sex can be addressed in three different groups in respect to their entry into the sector and their working conditions. The first group comprises those employed as persons granted permission to work in the entertainment sector. The second group consists of those entering Turkey with a tourist visa and working in commercial sex either as free-lance or by paying to intermediaries. Persons in this second group have either migrated directly for the purpose of working in this specific sector or shifted to it after having worked for some time in the

⁵⁰ Ünlütürk Ulutaş/Kalfa (2009, p.16).

luggage trade, tourism and domestic services. The third group is composed of the victims of human trafficking who have been deceived by promises of employment in other sectors and then forced to take part in commercial sex. This third group differs from the first two since a process of exploitation is forcefully imposed and will not be addressed here as a distinct topic of study. Unlike the sector of domestic services, studies and statistical data relating to migrant women in the sectors of entertainment and commercial sex are scarce, naturally leading to very limited information on their living and working conditions.⁵¹

In the entertainment sector where mostly women from Ukraine and Russia are employed, formal employment is more common than others sectors where migrant workers are also employed. According to data provided by the MoLSS, work permits granted to those from these two countries are mostly for the entertainment sector and enterprises in this are considered a part of the tourism sector. The procedure is firstly to reach show groups to be employed in entertainment facilities over agencies in origin countries and then to apply to the MoLSS for work permit.⁵² The protection of migrants working in this sector is ensured through the employment contracts of migrants in their native languages as well and informing them about their rights emanating from the Labor Code.⁵³ Legal and formal employment facilitate the access of women in this sector to health and security services and make it possible for them to work in more favorable conditions than other irregular female migrants.

While some migrant women in commercial sex move to Turkey specifically to work in this sector, there are also others who shift to the same sector as a result of such reasons as not being able to find other jobs, low wages offered and others. A study by Kalfa (2008) reveals both sexual violence encountered by women in domestic services and a transition from domestic services to commercial sex. In whichever sector they are employed, the perceived status of women from the former Soviet countries as sex workers and their stigmatization as “Natashas” may lead to their harassment in other sectors as well an eventual drift to commercial sex.⁵⁴ The wide presence of migrants in commer-

⁵¹ As the most accessible of all, data from the General Directorate of Security reveal the criminal dimensions of the issue; however, even these statistics fall short of enabling us to gather information regarding the motives and processes of migration and conditions that women encounter.

⁵² Erder/Kaşka (2003, p. 66).

⁵³ Dedeoğlu/Gökmen (2010, p. 54).

⁵⁴ Gülçür/Ilkcaracan (2002, p. 414).

cial sex is so pronounced that even when they go back to their own countries there emerges a preconception that all migrant women to Turkey are motivated by commercial sex. This is the reason why migrant women in all sectors may be disrespected and made objects of harassment in both Turkey and in their home countries.⁵⁵

The motives of women migrating to work in the sector of commercial sex largely overlap with the motives of others migrating for employment in other sectors. However, considering the working conditions of women in this sector, it is possible to infer that commercial sex which is extremely vulnerable to sexual, physical and psychological violence, accompanied by illegality and being foreigner, will generate much more adverse conditions. Sexuality, which is directly about a person's self and body, is an area that is extremely conducive to direct violence against woman's body.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, their illicit residence and working status deprive these women of all means of access to and claiming of their rights. Forcible employment by intermediaries, long working hours, non-payment of their earnings and the withholding of passports are problems frequently observed in commercial sex. Women lack the means of resorting to legal procedures when they suffer harassment or violence in their daily lives, too. The fear of being deported prevents their application official authorities in case of any violation of their rights while the shame they feel because of their engagement keeps them from applying to their own consulates as well.⁵⁷ Other than clients, intermediaries and police may also be the actors of violence that women suffer.⁵⁸ In their study Gülçür and Ilkcaracan reveal that migrant women who are working in commercial sex sector are detained by the police frequently and upon threats of deportation must bribe officers for release.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Kalfa (2008), Keough (2006).

⁵⁶ Ünlütürk Ulutaş/Kalfa (2009, p. 23).

⁵⁷ Gülçür/Ilkcaracan (2002), Kaşka/Erder (2003), İçduygu (2004), Kalfa (2008), Üstübcü (2010).

⁵⁸ Ünlütürk/Kalfa (2009, p.16).

⁵⁹ Gülçür/ Ilkcaracan (2002, p. 416).

Ethnicity-Based Participation in the Labor Market: Those Who Are Close and Distant from “Us”

In such feminized sectors as domestic and care services and entertainment and commercial sex, ethnicity is an important factor in determining who will be involved in which. In other sectors too, ethnicity in addition to gender is an important factor in shaping the preferences of employers. Even though it may change depending on the region and nature of work, employers mostly prefer Muslim migrants who can speak Turkish. It is also stated that the police too are more lenient to those akin to “us” in its approach to irregular migrants. This state of affairs is particularly relevant when it comes to Turks from Bulgaria, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan.⁶⁰ However, whatever the ethnic origin of migrants may be, what makes them preferable for employers is their lack of protection due to illicit status and openness to all kinds of exploitation.

Migrant Women in Garment Workshops

Going out of households, garment workshops are common production units employing migrant women. A study conducted in Istanbul points out that poor families especially from the Nahcevan region of Azerbaijan come to Turkey for employment, male members work in construction or remain jobless while females are employed in garment workshops as a cheap source of labor. While informal employment is common to all laborers in these workshops, women from Azerbaijan are paid lower than nationals doing the same work, work longer hours and sometimes they are not paid at all. They have no means of standing up against injustice they suffer. What is striking here is that children accompany their mothers to workshops and work there with them. Since they cannot have their children enrolled in school because of their illicit status, it seems to mothers better to have children with them while working. Children who are deprived of their chances for education are destined to spend their adult lives as unskilled workers. Because of the similar culture, common language and religion, people from Azerbaijan are not “aliens”, but “the other”. The submission of “untainted” Azeri women, acceding solemnly and silently to all kinds of work that may be assigned, shows how functional patriarchal cultural norms can be in creating a docile worker profile for employers. In her work,

⁶⁰ Daniş et al. (2009), Akpınar (2009), Erder (2007).

Dedeoğlu (2011) draws attention to the fact that the process of migration makes women the major actors in household subsistence, bearing the potential of strengthening the status of women in their families though it may not bring along any serious change in a gender-based division of labor.

Migrants in Trade and Tourism

Besides their objective characteristics, some subjective characteristics attributed to migrants are influential in determining where they are employed. At the centers in Istanbul where luggage trade is intensive, such service personnel as salesmen, interpreters and receptionists who can speak Russian and Serbian are commonly employed in communicating with foreign traders. Likewise, for complying with product standards and demand from the former Eastern Bloc countries, there is need for and thus employment of qualified workers such as models and stylists.⁶¹ However while Muslim- and Turkish-origin migrants from Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan are employed in textile and garment workshops even when they can speak Russian, men or women from Moldova, Ukraine and Russia are preferred as sales personnel in shops.⁶² Influential in this preference is the subjective cultural characteristics such as “better educated”, “cleaner” and “more disciplined” attributed to the second group. In fact, these cultural attributions are used as instruments of making use of bodily performance of migrant women. The “sexy” and “fantasy” nature of women’s dresses sold by some stores and acceptance by migrant women employed in these stores to serve as models exhibiting these dresses means “bringing down two birds by throwing a single stone” by employers. It is observed that some migrants performing well in sales are able to negotiate wages with their employers. As to migrants who work as unqualified laborers in cargo shops and workshops, they can react to unfavorable working conditions only by changing their jobs or they just remain silent.

There are some migrant women who legally stay in Turkey upon their marriage with Turkish citizens and obtainment of Turkish citizenship, having a work permit. In spite of this favorable status, they are still employed informally. According to a survey conducted in a touristic settlement, these women, almost all of whom are university graduates with experience in their profes-

⁶¹ Erder (2007, p. 67).

⁶² Dağdelen (2008).

sions, face problems in confirming the equivalence of their diplomas and are consequently employed in the tourism sector as tourist agents, massagers, guides, tour operators, animators or saleswomen despite their qualification.⁶³ There are also cases where these women are employed in jobs that are not preferred by nationals for low wages offered or paid lower than others. Since seasonal employment is the distinguishing character of the tourism sector, these women work only half of the year and they explain this lack of any social protection by their origin. The problem of non-payment, which is frequently experienced by illicit migrants, emerges to a limited extent when it comes to migrants with legal status. Among problems they face as women they cite verbal or physical sexual harassment at their workplaces.

Migrants in Construction Sector

A very interesting study revealing how employers can functionalize ethnicity for raising the level of exploitation is the one by Akpınar (2009) on the employment of migrant workers in the sector of construction. Extremely informal as a result of widely practiced sub-contracting, the construction sector is a point of entry to Turkish labor market for male migrants. Migrants are employed as the lowest status of unqualified workers in building construction/ restoration, road and bridge construction/restoration and in the restoration and preservation of historical properties which change many hands in the chain of sub-contracting. They are employed for long hours at very low wages and in some cases they are dismissed without the payment of wages due. A field study conducted in Istanbul shows that mostly migrants from Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan and Georgia are employed in construction; migrants from countries other than Georgia identify themselves as Muslim-Turks, a ground upon which they are recruited by employers who then seek from them a kind of loyalty and gratitude. While not of Turkish stock, Georgians are recruited with an emphasis on their friendship and kinship ties with the people of Eastern Black Sea region. Migrants are preferred over Kurdish people as national source of labor in construction works. Behind what seems as nationalistic sentiment against Kurds, there is the fact that, unlike Kurds, migrants have no means to claim their rights and they can be more readily exploited than others. The same state of affairs is observed in industrial enterprises in the region

⁶³ Gökmen (2011).

of Thrace. In the 1990s and early 2000s, it was the primary preference of employers to recruit industrial laborers from among Turks from Bulgaria. When it was observed that unqualified Kurdish workers from South-Eastern Anatolia had a tendency to get unionized and as the number of migrants incoming from Romania and Bulgaria decreased, employers preferred to bring in workers from Istanbul. It is further observed that in Bursa, which is the most preferred place of settlement for Turks coming from Bulgaria, they are considered as “cognates” and not “aliens”, and their status in the labor market is not disadvantaged relative to the long-settled inhabitants of Bursa and they are received much more warmly than Kurds recently migrating to Bursa.⁶⁴

Refugees and migrants from Africa who have a small share in irregular migrants are completely different in terms of their culture, language and religion. Even when they are Muslims, their different skin color prevents them to be close to “us”. Their participation in the labor market is much more limited than other migrant groups. According to a study conducted in Istanbul focusing on the enmeshing of migrant and refugee groups, in case their appeal for refugee status is rejected, refugees switch to the status of irregular migrants and start seeking jobs in the informal sector to subsist and save some money while waiting to be transported to EU countries by human smugglers. These migrants, who are subsisting in worn-out buildings in the depressed areas of the city-state, point to difficulties in finding a job and working as the biggest problem. Some of these people work in small garment or illumination workshops, some sell goods in marketplaces and some women visit houses for cleaning works. Among them, there are also those engaged in the luggage trade, depending on their countries of origin. Their wages are even lower than legal minimum wage, if it is paid at all. The Roma people and Kurds from South-Eastern Anatolia inhabiting the same depressed areas live and work under similar conditions.⁶⁵ In the labor market hierarchy, black migrants have the lowest status while sharing the same fate with those excluded categories of the domestic labor force, mostly subsist on scavenging.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Erder 2007 (p.65–72).

⁶⁵ Yökseker/Brewer (2010).

⁶⁶ Saltan/Yardımcı (2007).

Conclusion

A large number of studies on irregular migrants living and working in Turkey cover migrant women employed in domestic and care services and provide detailed information as to their state and working conditions. This can be explained by a mostly upper-middle-class origin of researchers that facilitates their access to the employers of migrant women or by the fact that their relatives or close acquaintances are employers. As to other areas of employment, the negative attitude of employers towards researchers as well as the fear of migrants from being spotted and deported makes related studies much more difficult to conduct. In spite of the difficulties of conducting surveys and collecting data, research focusing on migrant women shows us that the question posed as “Is migration feminized?” can be answered positively.

The point common to all studies examined is that they expose the unprotected status and vulnerability of migrants. No matter in which sector or job they are employed, irregular migrants are employed in much more unfavorable conditions, for longer hours and also paid lower than nationals and they have no channels to claim their rights in cases of non-payment. From the point of view of migrant women, additional risks include sexual harassment and, in the case of working in commercial sex, sexual violence and sexually transmitted diseases.

The transformation of the demographic structure and the growing share of the elderly in the total population increase the need for care services in Turkey. Parallel to this development, more women graduating from universities start to work in professional jobs. And yet, the state withdraws from the provision of institutional care services, adopts social policies that reinforce the familial supply of care services along traditional lines and few private companies offering care services demand high prices for their work. Under these circumstances, it is quite predictable that the demand for female migrant workers in middle and upper class families will increase. In the entertainment and commercial sex sectors, the prevailing interest in the young and blonde “other” will perpetuate the demand for migrant women from former Eastern Bloc countries. In the tourism sector, the increasing number of tourists coming from Russia and their expanding share in tourism revenues will raise the demand for Russian-speaking employees who are mainly migrants from former Eastern Bloc countries. In all of these service sector sub-branches, where the competition with native workers is weak, it is important to take measures for the

legalization of migrant workers. As long as the demand for migrant labor remains and Turkey accepts the pressures for the alignment of her migration policy with that of EU, it would not be an exaggeration to say that migrants' efforts to reach Turkey will take place under more dangerous and risky conditions.

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