PRECARIOUS LIVES, INVISIBLE WORK: A CASE OF CENTRAL ASIAN WOMEN DOMESTIC WORKERS IN ISTANBUL

By
Marhabo Saparova

Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Supervisors: Professor Ju Li
Professor Eva Fodor

Budapest, Hungary
2015

Abstract

This research analyzes the different facets of *precariousness* in the lived experiences of the undocumented migrant women domestic workers from Central Asia employed in the private households in Istanbul. This research aims to overcome the classical understanding of *precariousness,* which oversees the agency of the subjects. The contradictory faces of precariousness are conceptualized in three processes: in departure and arrival, in living-in arrangement and in the day-off of the Central Asian migrant women domestic workers. I argue that, though operating asymmetrically, empowerment and disempowerment cannot be separated in the lived experiences of these women. Based on the in-depth interviews and participant-observation methodology, this thesis reveals complicated and dynamic levels of *precariousness* in the lives of domestic migrant women from Central Asia in Istanbul.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to many people who enabled the research and writing of this thesis. First of all, I would like to take this opportunity and thank all my research participants who inspired me to conduct this project. I am truly grateful to Maya, my main participant and gatekeeper, for all her efforts and help throughout my research. I am indebted to all interviewees but specifically to migrant women who accepted to participate in this research despite their deep concerns of security. This research would not be possible without these courageous women. I owe special thanks to intermediary people who trusted me and helped me to contact my participants. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my thesis advisor professor Ju Li. She was very encouraging and supportive from the very beginning through the whole process of writing my thesis. Her patient guidance and her academic enthusiasm encouraged me to complete this thesis. I would also like to extend my thanks to professor Eva Fodor and professor Viola Zentai for their sincere support and insightful comments for my work. I owe my sincerest gratitude to my dearest friends Poyzan, Dilara, Tom, and Caitlin for always being there for me, for their help and support from the very beginning till the final stage of my thesis. This thesis would be much more difficult without support of my dearest ones.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

> Although they try to make you feel home, you *do not have home*. You are taking care of a child, it is a responsibility. All in all, *you do not have your own life*. You keep on going with life, but *you are living their* [employers'] *life*, do you understand? […] I have to live my own life. Everyone is outside, either studying in universities, or spending time with their boyfriends. Until when I will play Barbie with the child? *I should have my own life*. (Maya 28, my emphasis)

This research is inspired by a story of a young undocumented migrant woman from Turkmenistan who has been working as a domestic worker in Istanbul for about 9 years. Maya migrated to Istanbul at the age of 19 following her aunt who has been working for long time and got married in Turkey. After working for several years in the domestic service as a nanny, she discovered her serious illness, cirrhosis. She continued to work as a domestic worker while receiving her treatment. However, as she narrated, due to the rough working conditions and tiring schedule[1] her situation devolved beyond the treatment with pills. She quitted her job only when her employer's brother, a doctor, examines her and informs her employer that without a liver transplantation she would live less than three months. I met Maya a month before her arranged transplant operation in winter 2013. After seeing an announcement for donations in one of the news sites, I contacted her brother offering my help for logistical arrangements and applications with donations. I visited her at her apartment in one of the poorest districts of Istanbul at the latest stage of her illness. Although all the arrangements regarding the operation have been almost completed, she could not get her operation due to the delay of the document from her home country. Several appeals to the authorities about the urgency of the situation have been rejected due to the fact that Maya

[1] My work was very hard, for instance, it starts at 6 am and continues till 3 am. […] this is why I started to swell out too much. In the hospital doctors said "we can only keep her alive for a year with the pills, not more; there is no other way than transplantation". My pain worsened because I had to be on feet, I had to work until 3 am. Normally the ones with liver illness should get rest after 11 pm. But we had a responsibility, we could not leave the job to the next day. Our employer did not force us but we had to. (Maya, 28)

was an undocumented migrant. Her "illegality" put her in a position that would be described by Agamben (1995) as "a bare life"[2] existence. After several appeals to the authorities, the document was delivered and Maya had a successful transplant. We have been in touch with Maya and her brother for two years. She is my main research subject and my gatekeeper who helped me a lot through my research by both sharing the most detailed account of her experience and by being a bridging contact between my research participants and me.

Maya, as she herself identified, was "one of the luckiest and exceptional" cases where an undocumented migrant woman in Istanbul could get an operation and treatment of such a serious illness. Ironically, she would not be able to survive if she were not in Turkey and if she were not working as a domestic worker in the richest households of famous actresses, singers and businesspeople in Istanbul who helped her to cover her operation and treatment to a large extend. Although I have been acquainted with the similar stories about undocumented women migrants during my studies in Turkey, I have been deeply impressed by Maya's story. Thus, this research started with the personal aspiration to make visible the experiences of the undocumented migrant women from Central Asian countries working as nannies, caretakers, and domestic workers and living-in in the private households in Istanbul.

Due to the practicality concerns my initial research questions were formulated around the day-off experiences, as it is the only day I could interact with my participants outside of the household they are working and living-in. However, in the course of my research I revisited my starting point and organized my thesis around the concept of *precariousness*. I utilize the concept of *precariousness* not as one-directional aspect of experience but rather as

[2] Giorgio Agamben's concept of "bare life" is a significant contribution and revision of biopolitics introduced by Michel Foucault. According to Agamben (1995), bare life is a damaged life, stripped of its political significance, of its specific form of life. Shortly, "bare life is always already captured by the political in a double way: first, in the form of the exclusion from the *polis*—it is included in the political in the form of exclusion—and, second, in the form of the unlimited exposure to violation, which does not count as a crime." (Ziarek 2012) Here I acknowledge the limitations of the concept as it is insufficient to conceptualize gendered, racial or ethnic differences as well as to recognize the power of resistance.

a paradigmatic approach to the experience and life situations. This thesis analyzes the different modes and paradoxical levels of *precariousness* in the experiences of my participants. Based on participant-observation method and in-depth semi-structured interviews, this thesis seeks answers to the following questions: How is *precariousness* experienced by Central Asian undocumented migrant women care workers in Istanbul? What are the contradictory and fluctuating modes of *precariousness* in their experience and how it is exhibited through the whole process of migration? Adopting intersectional approach, proposed by Kimberley Crenshaw (1989), and transnational methodology (Amelina, Nergiz, Faist and Schiller 2012)[3] I will examine migration experiences of these women at the intersecting axes of gender, class, ethnicity and age.

In the next chapter of this research, I will discuss the conceptual framework on domestic work in Turkey by outlining the main literature and historical background on the evolvement of domestic service in the context of Turkey. I will situate my case in the existing academic literature on emotional labor, global care chains and gendered mobilization. The third chapter outlines the gendered experiences of *precariousness* in the process of departure from home and arrival to Istanbul. The gendered processes of transition period in Central Asian countries will be rendered through the narratives of my subjects. In the fourth chapter, I will analyze the living-in arrangement and the multi-layered relationships between the employer and the employee in the private household. The blurred temporal and spatial boundaries of the public and private as well as work and leisure will be discussed in this chapter. The fifth chapter will demonstrate the significance of a day-off in the experiences of undocumented live-in migrants. The various meanings attached to the day-off will be discussed in this chapter. I will conclude my research with the overall discussion of *precariousness* in these three processes.

[3] I will briefly discuss these approaches in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Making Invisible Visible: Migrant Domestic Work in Turkey

[W]hat I do is domestic work, I am doing it back in my home, I am doing it here. It is not difficult.

Nil

It is not tiring at all. All in all, it is just a domestic work.

Bahar

Bahar, a 40 year old migrant domestic woman worker from Turkmenistan, comes to Istanbul eight years ago following her husband to support her family in the hard times of economic crisis in the post-Soviet transition[4] period. Before her arrival in Istanbul, she was not employed outside of her house and defined herself as a housewife. During her stay in Turkey, she has been working in domestic service and differently from other migrant domestic workers changed her workplace only once[5]. I visited and interviewed her in her employer's household in one of the richest districts in Istanbul. When I asked Bahar about her duties in the household she described them as *trivial household chores* that she did not even consider as *work*. Seeing in me an enthusiastic and educated young woman from her own country, she continuously and frankly underlined that she would want to get higher education and to have *a decent job* in her life. Her woman employer Selin, a young woman of about 35, arrived at the end of our interview and joined our conversation in the guestroom. In the course of our conversation, Selin emphasized that she does not see the difference between herself and Bahar, as "both of [them] are working women". Aside from the complex relationship between the employer and the employer that I observed from this conversation and will be discussing in the next chapter, I was struck by the fact that while her employee

[4] Despite my hesitation regarding the term *transition,* which constituted the understanding of change from centrally planned economy to Western style free market (as an already fixed entity), I am using it with the implication of social, political, and economic transformations in the newly independent states.

[5] The frequent changes of working place are very common practices. I argue that the reason for this labor circulation is not only flexible "informal" economy but also personal factors such as boredom from the same work or health issues and maltreatment of the employers, as many of my participants underlined.

defines Bahar's occupation as profession and work, Bahar herself trivializes it and thus makes it more invisible by placing it on the hierarchical scale of professional and unprofessional work.

The negligence of domestic work is one of the main challenges that feminist movements have addressed for years: second wave feminists in the 1970s questioned the gendered division of labor where a male breadwinner was "supported and stabilized by the 'serving background work' of housewives" (Bock and Duden 1977 in Lutz 2008, 47). Domestic work has been defined mainly as a gendered activity, which demarcates the existing social order of the genders. This social order along with the gendered division of private and public, of productive and reproductive work attained woman a "natural" role of housewife. It is impossible to disagree with Erving Goffman (1977) who underlines that gender codes are acquired as "natural" during childhood and particularly inside the private household (Gofmann 1977: 302 in Lutz 2008: 48). The prominent scholar of migration and citizenship Bridget Anderson calls attention to the similar point:

> "How a house is ordered, what food is cooked, and how children are brought up is an expression of who 'we' are as individuals, and as people within particular sets of social, cultural, and economic relations. The work of doing this is not just about the accomplishing of tasks, but the doing of tasks in a particular way. The organization of our homes and their accouterments demonstrates our position within wider social relations". (Anderson 2013, 162)

Thus, the gendered nature of domestic work is not limited but closely bounded to the space of the private household. The claims of the feminist movement to professionalize domestic work have been always confronted with the challenge of the private space. It is a private space, which is "publicly inaccessible", and lacks a supervision that workplace demands. Outstanding migration and care work scholar Lutz rightfully notes that:

> "The Janus-headed aspect of care/domestic work is that, on the one hand, this work historically done by women is considered to be feminine-gendered and anchored in the private sphere, and on the other hand, since the dawn of the

> bourgeois society it has been deemed to be unproductive, in contrast to paid employment." (Lutz 2011, 9)

In fact, as Lutz (2011) claims, these debates over the professionalization of domestic work are far from being discontinued[6]; however, they are revisited with a bunch of new questions and new perspectives in the globalization processes (ibid). Recently, the aspects of *migration* and *globalization* have been added to the intersecting axis of gender and work. I will discuss these intersections in the following parts of this chapter in context of Turkey by situating my case in line with this newly emerging literature. Additionally, I will provide the theoretical framework as well as methodological specificities of my research in this chapter.

2.1 Migrant Domestic Work in Turkey

2.1.1. Local Domestic Labor in Turkey

The historical transformation of the domestic work in Turkey can be divided into three main periods. Among the limited studies on domestic work in Turkey, the prominent feminist scholar Ferhunde Özbay examined the sociohistorical development of domestic work through the system of *evlatlık* – "adopted daughters" who were from Anatolian rural areas and easily distinguishable from other members of the family (Özbay 1999). The adopted children were used in the domestic services in the early period of the Republic until the 1950s. The law prohibiting this system was issued in 1964 and marked a start of a new social arrangement regarding the domestic work. Internal rural to urban migration after the 1960s, rapid urbanization and the "end" of the system of *evlatlık* fostered opening of a new sector in labor market in Turkey: the paid domestic work (Özbay 1999, Bora 2005, Özyegin

[6] For more on professionalization of domestic work: Karsten, M.E. (2000) People-Oriented Services for Women. Current tendencies and Requirements for Professionalization in *Modernizing People-Oriented Services: Innovations for Education and Continuing Education.* pp. *89-109;* Krüger, H. (2003) Professionalizing Women's Careers – Or Are Men Interested in Women's Work? The Double Face of the Labour Market's Gendered Systems' pp. 123-145 in K. Heinz and B. Thiessen (eds) *Feminist Research – Sustainable Objections. Studies in Interdisciplinary Gender Research* Vol. 2.

2001). This sector has provided a significant channel of access to income for the rural origin women with low educational status. These local domestic workers are called *gündelikçi* (dayworkers) and usually they provide various domestic services on particular days of a week or a month. Referred to as "a loyal lady" (*sadık hanım*) in Kalaycioğlu and Rittersberger-Tılıç's vocabulary (2001), the new figure of a domestic worker are first generation migrant women who enter the labor market to support their families when their husbands' income is not sufficient to sustain a household[7].

The informality[8] of the domestic services and care work sector brings complex dynamics of relationships among the employers and the employees[9]. Local domestic workers find their work either through their acquaintances (Bora 2005, Kalaycioğlu and Rittersberger-Tılıç 2001) or via their husbands who are janitors in the same apartments (Özyegin 2001). While the employees look for "safe working environment", the employers search for a "loyal and trustworthy" employer who is usually recruited through the assurance of the employer's acquaintance as well. Although I will be discussing the multilayered relationship between the employer and the employee in the next chapter, it is crucial to mention that this interaction is rather reciprocal (Lutz 2008, 2011). While the employees benefit from social and cultural networks of their employers, the employers work extending their working hours and

[7] The story of Aylin, a 55-year old local employer and currently a head of IMECE Domestic Workers Union whom I interviewed at the Union, reveals the same "pattern". Being originally from Dersim, Aylin started working at the age of 43 when her children grew up and her husband was not able to provide for his family due to his illness. It is her first time working outside of her own household. After 13 years of domestic service in one family without any social protection and insurance, she sued the family as they discharged her easily just by telling her not to come anymore.

[8] The term "informal economy" was coined by Keith Hart (1970) in the context of Ghana where there was high irregularity of income earning among urban poor population. The informal economy has been defined quite widely as a whole range of activities falling outside the organized labor force. Although I am still struggling with this term as it does not allow flexibility and implies the clear-cut division of formality and informality, I am using it here to refer to domestic work as it was already conceptualized as informal in the literature. By term "informality" I mean rather a flexibility of market and its openness to changes rather than disorganization, as domestic labor market has its own intricate gendered organization.

[9] I use terms *employee* and *employer;* however, I would also call attention to the paradox in this terminology, as domestic work is not fully recognized and practiced as work.

responsibilities based "on consent" (Sugur et al. 2008). The limited anthropological researches on domestic work in Turkey mainly focus on these interactions in the private household and approach it from different perspectives.

Rather than conceptualizing it as an open class conflict, Kalaycioğlu and Rittersberger-Tılıç (2001) argue that there is a "covert" contradiction between the employers and the women domestic workers: despite the difficulties they face in the work they believe their work is an opportunity to empower economically and provide their children with better future. Aksu Bora's work (Bora 2005) brings to light another important point: the new division of labor does not challenge the prevailing gender-based division as it presupposes a transfer of domestic and care services from one woman to another. The household becomes a realm where women from different economic and ethnic backgrounds experience power relations (Bora 2005). Thus, it becomes a realm where the intersectional differences between "modern, urban, educated and equal" women and "rural, powerless, ignorant" women are reproduced. Another insightful ethnographic research by Women's Studies and Sociology professor, Gül Özyegin (2001) reveals experiences of *gecekondu*[10] women and wives of janitors, who delivered domestic services in the same building as their husbands. Differently from other local domestic workers these women do not have the same flexibility to choose their employers, as their husbands already arranged the job (Özyegin 2001).

As it is disclosed in the paragraphs above, the existing scarce literature on domestic work in Turkey mainly delivers the cases at the intersection of gender, class and work. Apart from this literature there is growing new literature pointing to a more intersectional differences. This literature concurs with the previously mentioned literature on globalization, migration, gender and work. I will discuss this emerging literature in the following section.

[10] Means squatter house.

2.1.2 A New Actor in Private Household: A Migrant Domestic Worker

Although Akalin rightly points to the fact that all domestic workers in Turkey have been migrants: either internal or transnational (2011), the transnational domestic migrant work is quite a new phenomenon in the context of Turkey. The growing literature on this phenomenon in Turkey lies in accordance with several already existing scholarly researches at the conjunction of globalization, migration and domestic work. The mobilization of women has intensified on the global scale and has been conceptualized as "feminization" of migration (Raijman&Schammah-Gesser&Kemp 2003, De Regt 2010) in the literature. It becomes a global phenomenon where women from various parts of the world migrate to become nannies, care takers and maids either in neighboring countries or economically stabile countries (Lutz 2011, Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003, Anderson 2003, Lan 2003, Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003, Parennas 2000, Sassen 2003). The similar cases of migration, gender, class and domestic labor have been approached from different angles by scholars throughout the world. Some researchers conceptualized the phenomena as "care drain" (Hochschild 2003), as "international transfer of caretaking" (Parennas 2000), as "the feminization of survival" (Sassen 2006) or as "the feminization of migration" (Raijman&Schammah-Gesser&Kemp 2003, De Regt 2010). Most of the studies draw attention to living/working conditions of women migrants and framed their researches with a cross-national perspective (Lutz 2008, Parrenas 2000, Ehreinreich&Hochschild 2003).

The historical trajectory of the domestic migrant work in Turkey can be traced to the beginning of 1990s since the decline of the Soviet Union. The ethnographic cases of migration of women from post-socialist countries (mainly cases of women from Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, and Bulgaria) in Turkey have been tackled mainly in feminist scholarship related to work and gender (Akalin 2007, Kaska&Erder 2003; Kasli 2005, Parla 2007, Pusch 2010, Rutishauer 2010, Kalaycioglu&Rittersberg-Tilic 2010). One of the main distinguishing

aspects that separates local domestic worker from the migrant worker is the living-in arrangement and the status of undocumentedness. Thus, the irregularity of the status and visa policies (Parla 2007, Kasli and Parla 2009), the coping strategies of migrant women with stereotypes (Kasli 2005, Rutishauer 2010) and the impact of globalization and neoliberalization (Eder 2010, Kaska&Erder 2003) have been main discussion points in the existing literature. Rendering this literature in detail in the upcoming chapters, I will engage in the discussion of my ethnographic data along the similar cases of undocumented migration.

2.2 A paradigmatic approach to precarious labor: Theoretical framework

Situating my case study in the line with the transnational domestic/care work literature that intersects with migration, gender and work debates, I approach to these debates with a feminist criticism of the precarious labor theory. With the specific focus on *precariousness* as an organizing concept of life situations and experiences, I will analyze the layered meanings of *precariousness* in the case of my subjects. It is beyond the scope of this section to give a detailed historical overview of precarious labor theory; however, I will outline some significant points.

Precariousness has been conceptualized as a negative concept in the classical literature on labor. It has been mainly outlined in the framework of economic insecurity in a "risk society", or as Bourdieu (1999) calls it, "precarious generation", where uncertainty is a given and risk is taken for granted (Fantone 2007, 6). Fantone (2007) elaborately criticizes the concept of precariousness in the mainstream discourse of economic insecurity to demonstrate its inconsistencies and contradictions in the case of Italy: "it is a paradoxical term, capable of hiding old inequalities and new forms of exploitation. The reality of precariousness, in its manifold aspects, is addressed here through generational and gendered analysis, as it redefines the basic notions of work and labor for Italian men and women "

(Fantone 2007, 7). I do not claim that this is a unique approach as the term evolved through the years since 1980s, where it was considered only negatively – the lack of the main advantages in a lifetime security, to 2000s when precariousness became more of political tool to raise consciousness over temporary work contracts. Fantone proposes feminist critique of the concept and claims that it is "extremely important for the precarious movement to look at gender and precarity together in order to move beyond the goal of unifying a supposed 'new' post-industrial European working-class" (9). It is important not to lock precariousness in unidirectional understanding of flexible job and uncertain life conditions but rather it can be, for instance, "a life choice, a rediscovered space of temporary freedom from family ties and a boring job […]". (Fantone 2007, 11)

Following Fantone's suggestion I will engage in a more "complex political analysis of precariousness that can address gender and reproduction, citizenship and social welfare, [and] immigration […] at the same time" (10) By drawing attention to different modes and levels of precariousness, I attempt to demonstrate the inevitable interrelation and interconnection between two stands that has been dominant in the similar cases on the situation of migrants working in this sector. While on one side migrants are depicted as the "agents of change" (Morokvasic 1991), on the other, they are victims of "precarious" life situations. Thus, the first viewpoint is built on *empowerment* and achievements of migrants, while the second perspective passivizes migrants by only calling attention to violations of labor law and human rights. My empirical findings stand on the intersections of these two points and prove the conjuncture of these two sides as two faces of the same coin. I conceptualize *precariousness* as a fluctuating process, as a paradigmatic analytical tool to analyze experiences of my subjects. Thus, my case study lies in line with the literature on global care chains, feminized migration, and affective labor with specific contribution to the literature on precarious labor and precarious life.

2.3 Transnational Lives, Transnational Methodological Analysis

This study is not limited to a one-month ethnographic research that I conducted in Istanbul in April 2015. My academic interest in the lives of the undocumented migrant women from Central Asia derives from my personal background as a young woman migrating from Turkmenistan to pursue education in a foreign country and my frequent encounters with these women both in my home country and in Turkey. I have reached my research subjects through my personal contacts and by snowball sampling method. My initial contacts and my gatekeepers were Maya (from Turkmenistan) and Nil (Uzbekistan). I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with four migrant women domestic workers from Central Asia. Three of which are from Turkmenistan and one is from Uzbekistan. During the interview, we had conversations in Turkish, Turkmen, Uzbek and Russian. All of the interviews were tape recorded, transcribed and translated in English. Apart from these in-depth interviews, I met and talked to two other Turkmen, one Uzbek migrant woman, one local domestic worker and one Turkish employer. All of the names and personal information details are changed in the thesis for the sake of anonymity.

"We talked yesterday with Selin abla, I asked her and she said you will do no harm. Nobody should strip someone from their job" (Bahar, 40). I contacted Bahar and some of my other participants through their employers. One of the main difficulties that I have experienced in the field was the limited access in the limited time. It is important to remember undocumented migrant women domestic workers are quite a closed group due to their status of undocumentedness that fosters fear and distrust towards the "outsiders". Interestingly, I could reach my participants through their employers much easier than through their acquaintances. Limited time in the field and undocumentedness of the migrant woman have been significant obstacles to the establishment of more "trustworthy" and "reciprocal" relationships. All of the interviews and participant-observation were conducted on the only

day when the migrant women could go out of their employer's house – on their day-off. My knowledge of language (Turkish, Turkmen, Russian and some Uzbek), relatedness of my experience and familiarity with the context of Central Asia created an opportunity for me to access this closed group. My identity of a young woman researcher studying in Europe played a significant role in this research: some of my elder participants were eager to help out of their "motherly" concern for my educational accomplishments, while the younger ones were more interested in my education experience abroad.

The formation and development of transnational approach on migration have been accompanied by the main criticism of methodological nationalism, which has restricted the research within the boundaries of nation states and has homogenized view on social reality (Amelina 2012, Beck & Sznaider, 2006; Pries 2008; Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2003). Departing from George Marcus' concept of "multi-sited ethnography" (1995) various methodological strategies started to emerge in order to research and conceptualize transnational formations like transnational networks, families, communities and organizations.

As Amelina and Faist state, the new methodological transnationalism approach encompasses various research methods that correspond to current epistemological approaches to the relationship between space, the social and mobility (Hannerz 1996; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Urry 2007 cited in Amelina & Faist 2012). Adopting Amelina's (2010) proposition of transnational method, I intend to analyze transnational lifestyles of my subjects at different levels (local, national, transnational and global). Although not restricted to this approach, I believe that this methodological strategy will allow me to explicate "new social contexts simultaneously situated within two or more nation state frames".

Additionally, I find Kimberley Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectional analysis extremely beneficial for my analysis of relationships and interactions in the daily lives of my

subjects. The proposed analysis suggests to examine how multiple axes of identity (gender, class, ethnicity, race, nationality, age, etc.) interact on different levels creating or reproducing the hierarchies and social inequalities. The intersectional approach to lifestyles of my interviewees helps me to dig deeper into the sometimes hidden forms of discrimination and privilege in their interactions. In the following chapter, I will analyze the gendered processes embedded in transition period in the home countries of my participants.

Chapter 3: Gendered "Transition", Precarious Mobility

3.1 Labor Migration from Central Asia in Turkey

Mass labor mobilization of women conceptualized as "feminized labor migration" (Raijman& Schammah-Gesser& Kemp, 2003; De Regt, 2010) or as "feminization of survival" (Sassen 2006) becomes a wide phenomenon in the context of Central Asia since the second half of 1990s. Women from Central Asian countries, populously from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, migrated to Turkey in search of job to sustain the family household in their home countries. According to the recent rapport *Irregular Labour Migration in Turkey and Situation of Migrant Workers in the Labour Market* prepared by International Organization of Migration (2012), the most populated migrant groups that are coming to Turkey for work are from Georgia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Moldova, Uzbekistan, Armenia and China (Erdogdu, Kaska and Toksoz, 2012)[11]. The geographical proximity, flexible visa regime, ease of travel and the already established networks for working and living in Turkey are among the factors that are significant in decision-making process of the women migrants. Although, the acknowledgement of Turkey's candidateship for EU membership has affected Turkey's migration policies at the end of 1990s (Erder 2007, İçduygu 2010), as Kirişçi argues, Turkey's foreign policies have already been heavily based on commercial considerations since 1980s (Kirişçi 2009). Together with the transformation to "trade state" (Kirişçi 2009) flexible visa regime has been adopted with the Middle Eastern and Central Asian countries (Erdoğdu, Kaşka&Toksöz 2012).

According to the adjustments in visa system, the citizens from Georgia, Moldova, Bulgaria and other Balkan countries are allowed stay in Turkey for 90 days in every 180 days

[11] The original rapport was downloaded from: http://www.turkey.iom.int/documents/Labour/IOM_irregular_labour_migration_eng_05062013.pdf. For more information on irregular migration in Turkey also see: Irregular Migration In Turkey (Aksel&Icduygu 2012) http://www.turkey.iom.int/documents/IrregularMigration/IOM_Report_11022013.pdf

without visa. Thus, women from the above-mentioned countries started to work for 90 days in Turkey and returning home for 90 days and coming back again in order to avoid status of undocumentedness. The return home after 90 days and circular mobilization is not beneficial and profitable; thus, many of the women preferred to overstay their visas. Thus, initially, women from the above-mentioned countries would migrate in shuttle mode, travelling back and forth every three months.

However, citizens of Central Asian countries are not allowed visa exemption for more than 30 days. Thus, if in cases of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine it is called "a shuttle migration" or "circular migration" (İçduygu 2008 4, Erder 2007 43), the same phenomenon does not operate in the cases of Central Asian countries. They become undocumented migrants after overstaying an allowance month. Hence, the migration from Central Asian countries can better be conceptualized with the term "irregular migration". It is not only flexible visa allowances and an easy "integration" of migrants into the strongly developed informal economy of Turkey (Kirişçi 2007, Erder 2007, Içduygu 2008), but also the economic instabilities aftermath the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the newly independent countries that fed the flow of this migration. The high levels of unemployment, low-income rates and opening of borders mobilized population of the newly independent nation-states in Central Asia.

There is a rather limited academic research and information regarding the migration from Central Asian countries. There are several reasons that make these migration flows challenging to capture. Since the beginning of economic transition the flow, the type and the directions of migration tremendously changed due to emergence of 22 new states and the increase in freedom of movement across the borders (Mansoor&Qullin 2007 27) On the one hand, the environment of "porous borders" and loosening of state control over migration

made the recording of the migration flow difficult (ibid.) On the other hand, as Abazov (1999 237) rightfully calls to attention, migration is a politically sensitive issue for the Central Asian countries because of its impact on the relationships with the neighboring countries, the authorities of these countries tend to not publicize the information regarding the migrants. Another significant factor is the difference in definitions, concepts and reporting systems among the countries: the statistics and information regarding the migrants become more fragmented (ibid.). The flexibility of visa regime makes it difficult to distinguish different groups of migrants because all of them are subjected to the same allowance period to stay in certain countries. And the last, but not the least aspect: the statistical information only reveals data about the documented migrants excluding the majority of migrants who cross the borders and overstay their visas to work. Moreover, risk of being deported makes undocumented migrants a "closed" group for researchers and outsiders. Taking into consideration all these limitations, in this chapter I will analyze and discuss the arrival process of my participants.

3.2 Gendered Transition: Victims or Agents of Transition Period?

Needless to mention, the shrinking labor market in the transition period affected mostly women employers. They were the first to lose their jobs and affected by low-income rates. The transition reforms pushed women to seek alternative solutions to sustain their family. Tracing employment opportunities outside of the country was one of these solutions. Almost in every household in my town there was at least one woman who left to Turkey to earn money. It is not a unique case but rather gendered facets of transition period. "Are there any women left in the country? Are there any women left in Turkmenistan?" – asked Bahar with scolding and questioning expression on her face and stopped talking immediately. Although at first glance it seems to be a "naive" question, it is rather a strong statement that I have already heard several times from different domestic migrant women from Central Asia.

Bahar was referring to the number of domestic migrant women arriving to Turkey that has increased tremendously in the past decade.

All of my participants, regardless of their age, marital status and country of origin, narrated that they migrated in time when their family experienced serious hardships. Nil (52), one of the eldest women whom I interviewed, arrived in Istanbul eight years ago from Uzbekistan. Before her arrival in Turkey, Nil was working in a suit-sewing factory for about 20 years and about 8 years at textile mill. In the transition period she was expelled from the factory due to the growing unemployment in crisis time. She had to start working in a private sector: in a hotel owned by Turkish businessmen. However, it was not enough to sustain a household with three children. As she says, she had to leave her country for her children's sake, for their future. Although she could not attend the weddings, her son and daughter got married with the money she sends back home. When I asked Nil whether she is planning to return home, she replied in the following manner:

> I am planning to go home at the end of the year for three or four months. I missed everyone. Everyone asks why she is not coming back. I am thinking now, I am already 52 years old. *If I return I will not find a job, nobody will hire me, right?* May be I will return when it is two months to my retirement age but my children say "Enough, Mom, come back. You worked enough". But what I do is domestic work, I was doing it back in my home, I am doing it here. It is not difficult.

Although she is longing to see her family, Nil does not see future for herself back in her country. She is aware that the labor market is not open for her due to her age and gender: she is old woman, as she describes herself. Referring to her friend's story, she underlines that "there is no bright future for any elderly woman" back in her home country:

> I remember her going back and staying there for eight months. But then she came back. *What can she do there?* Alone there? She has two grown-up sons. *She has to arrange their weddings; she has to help them to build their houses, their homes.* This is why. I sometimes think, are there any women left in my country? I see so many Uzbek women here so I question: are there any left in the country? I thank God for letting us work in such good places, in such good families.

Sociologist Eva Fodor (2001) draws attention to the gendered face of poverty and economic crisis in her research on the low-income households in Budapest. Her main argument of the article is that men experience gender role crises in the times of destitute while women's role as caretakers intensify. She identifies main strategies that maintain avoidance of incongruence with hegemonic femininities. As in the case of my participants, women are primary agents in the times of scarcity. The responsibility falls on woman's shoulder: she has to put extra time and effort into substituting for the lack of family income. On the other hand, as Fodor (2001) claims men were experiencing loss of masculinity and were aware of this loss when they could not fulfill their breadwinner or provider role. They described this experience as shameful and stressful and dealt with it by putting burden of poverty on women.

Apart from the economic burden, there is another "burden" that reveals itself in a much-nuanced and more complicated way in the narratives of my participants. It comes with discourse of morality and the control over women's body and sexuality[12]. In their narratives Bahar (40) and Deniz (25) reiterate how the *acts* of several women defames "all the honorable women" from their countries:

> Some of our Turkmen women come here and do not turn an honest penny; they immediately find an easy way. They become prostitutes; they become thieves. Then they get caught and send back to country. The migration office in Turkey sends a fax, revealing information about them. One or two Turkmen women disparage our names and we all are labeled after them. Whoever goes to Istanbul becomes a prostitute. This is our people's view. (Deniz 25)

Bahar and Deniz either put blame on these "other" women for being immoral or pitied "them" as they were the victims of domestic instability: "I've seen a lot of women doing this. The reason is poverty; the reason is unemployment. Why do the poor engage in prostitution and theft? Poverty. A lot of women come to Istanbul because of this." (Bahar 40) Thus, a

[12] I will discuss this discourse in the context of living-in arrangement as well.

migrant woman has to "deal" with the moral obligations that intensify in the times of crisis, as she should not overstep the boundaries of hegemonic femininities.

The constructed image of "an immoral woman" leaving her family behind and chasing an "easy life" and "easy earning" operates at different levels in everyday lives of women migrants. A 25-year-old Deniz from Turkmenistan was accompanied by her mother at her first arrival in Istanbul:

> **Deniz**: I arrived here in August 2013; of course, I was accompanied by my Mom, because I was too young to cross the border.
> **Me**: You were *young* to cross the border?
> **Deniz**: Yes, you know, in our country you *cannot* cross the border alone as a young woman if you are not 35 years old or if you are not married. (my emphasis)

Deniz is not the first woman migrant who told me about the restrictions on the border control of her home country, Turkmenistan. The unwritten legal regulation has targeted single women under the age of 35 in Turkmenistan to prohibit their migration. When I was a student in Turkey I was travelling both ways for several years and I have witnessed the conversations of groups of young women stopped by the migration officers and interrogated about the purpose of their flight. These were all sorts of formal and informal questions asked in a disturbing and unpleasant manner. While some officers were thoroughly searching for a minor "misconduct" or "mistake" in the documents, some others did not even try explain why they were preventing these women from flying to Istanbul: the right to move to another country, to mobilize was "granted" upon the mercy of the migrant officers (who *represented* the state and its authority on the national borders[13]). Woman's body represents a reproductive

[13] I do not intend to simplify the term/notion of "state" here; however, given the context of post-Soviet (authoritarian) regimes in Central Asian countries, one can see the clear-cut *division* between State/authoritative official body (which is mostly one person ruling government) and citizens. Interestingly, women migrants have become a mediating body between these two bodies: a state and family.

mean in the nation-state construction[14]. The control over the "marriable" and the fertile body of the woman is given in the hands of the migration officers who can ban mobility of the women. The "productive" body of woman is banned based on her age and marital status, which does not work in the same way for male migrants. Given the increasing number of citizens (especially women) leaving the country in the search of job, it can be assumed that there is a constant negotiation (between the state and the citizens) and transformations in this specific migration processes because the repressive gendered bureaucracies did not stop the massive outgoing labor mobilization.

3.3 Becoming "Illegal": Undocumentedness and Deportability

Along with the gendered processes of transition period that fosters mobilization of women, women experience another important precarious life situation: the status of undocumentedness. Only one among four migrant women that I interviewed is documented. Although there have been recent changes in the legislation regarding the migrant domestic workers, that made the process of documentation easier to obtain, many migrants "preferred" staying undocumented. The precarious faces of undocumentedness also involves paradoxical layers: while the status of undocumentedness deprives the subjects from their social and political rights at the same time it is the only way for women to work and earn living in another country.

It is also important to mention that (un)documentedness has a demarcating feature not only between the locals and the foreigners but also among the migrants themselves. Bahar (40), who obtained her working permit with the help of her employers, was constantly referred as the "privileged" one among her undocumented migrant friends. When I asked about these "privileges", she replied in the following manner:

[14] For more on formation of certain womanhood and manhood in nation-state construction: Yuval-Davis, Nira. *Gender & nation*. Vol. 24. London: Sage, 1997. Walby, Sylvia. "Woman and nation." *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 33.1-2 (1992): 81-100.

> "Bahar, you are not illegal, you don't give a damn about anything". They, [my friends], are also right. They live with fear. I was also illegal. I even did not know the way to Bostanci (to place I live). My mom and dad came to visit me and stayed here for three months. They were living in an apartment two blocks from the place I lived and worked. I could not walk with them at the same street with the fear that I could get caught and deported. You know how my mom is dressed, it is obvious that she is a foreigner. And my dad, he was wearing his *boruk* (a traditional Turkmen hat for men). I told him to take it off, he did not. This is why we walked separately. I did not enjoy it at all. … I told them to go to the seaside and enjoy it but they could not go there alone, so I took them but I was sitting far from them.
> Now, when [my friends] go out at their day-off, they wish they return without getting caught. I am not like that anymore. I am going out and I am happy that I go out to send money or to meet my needs. But my friends, the only thing they care about is how to come back without getting caught.

Paradoxically, the undocumentedness both restricted and provided the freedom of movement for these women. Although, as Bahar narrates, being undocumented created a constant fear of being deported, Deniz and Maya made it clear that they learned to cope with the status of undocumentedness during their long stay. "I am not afraid. I go outside without any fear. No one should be afraid. Nobody bothers you, unless you do something wrong", - said Deniz.

As De Genova (2002) accentuates, "illegality" is a rather a political identity convertible to commodified migrant labor and its exploitation than a legal category:

> Undocumented migrant labor has been criminalized as "illegal" and subjected to excessive and extraordinary forms of policing. The undocumented have been denied fundamental human rights and many rudimentary social entitlements, consigned to an uncertain sociopolitical predicament, often with little or no recourse to any semblance of protection from the law. The category "illegal alien" is a profoundly useful and profitable one that effectively serves to create and sustain a legally vulnerable—and hence, relatively tractable and thus "cheap"—reserve of labor. (De Genova 2002 440)

Additionally, I would argue that it would be more accurate to conceptualize undocumentedness as a process rather than a status: it is a constantly transforming process, which shapes the experiences of migrants. This process both empowers and put women in vulnerable position making them both agents and victims of the transition period and migration processed.

Chapter 4: Precariousness of the Private Household: Living-in Arrangement

> How a house is ordered, what food is cooked, and how children are brought up is an expression of who 'we' are as individuals, and as people within particular sets of social, cultural, and economic relations. The work of doing this is not just about the accomplishing of tasks, but the doing of tasks in a particular way. The organization of our homes and their accouterments demonstrates our position within wider social relations. (Anderson 2003 4)

The relationship between the employer and the employee is an interactive process of boundary-setting in the private household (Lutz 2008). The constant negotiation of boundaries requires the involvement of both parties; however, I do not claim that this relationship is a relationship of dominance and subordination. Domestic workers are active agents in this relationship, in the negotiation of the boundaries of the relationship. The boundaries of the employer-employee relationship are significantly shaped by the living-in arrangement. The physical and spatial boundaries of the private household blur with migrant woman's presence in the family setting. I organized this chapter around the discussion of relationship between the employers and the migrant employees using the concepts of boundary-setting (Lutz 2008) and "availability" (Akalin 2007) in the living-in experiences of Central Asian women migrants.

4.1 "Give them an inch, they will take a mile": The "Availability" of the Migrant Domestic Worker

> It is not your home country: it is Istanbul. It is difficult. The bills are expensive, the rents are high. Everyone comes here to work as live-in, but, for instance, not everyone can do it. I could not do it. I had nervous breakdowns. Do not misunderstand me, but if you want to live-out you have to find someone who will meet your needs, you have to be someone's protégé. (Deniz, 27)
>
> I was very lucky, when I first arrive. I heard about different families, I saw different families. It is not easy to come to some house, to work in a foreign place, in a foreign house. You do not know anything about that house. (Bahar, 40)

All women migrants whom I met and interviewed during my fieldwork, except Deniz and Yasemin[15], are living-in with their employers in the same house. It is a turning point in their lives as they did not have such an experience before[16]. The living-in arrangement has been new in the context of Turkey and had emerged with the opening of labor market for migrant workers. Although live-in arrangement is not unique to the context of Turkey[17], it marks a definitive division between the Turkish employers and migrant employers in the labor market since 1990s (Akalin 2015, 68). As in several other cases the domestic labor market in Turkey had a capacity to accommodate both live-out local domestic services with the live-in migrant work. The arrangement of living-in with the employer has determined the division of labor among the local and migrant workers: migrant women have undertaken tasks that were impossible to allocate to local women. Predominantly, it is a care work where the presence and the constant control of the caretaker over a child or the sick are required. As all of my participants mentioned, most of the time they have been hired as caretakers.

A prominent feminist scholar Ayse Akalin who writes extensively on feminization of migration, and on service sector in Turkey, have argued that differently from other cases[18] of living-in arrangement "the demand for migrant domestic work in Turkey is a demand for the potential of 'available' labor power." (ibid) Here, she defines availability as "a labor capacity that emerges in migrant domestics' live-in working status." (ibid) The commonly practiced living-in arrangement played a determining role in the multi-layered experiences of the

[15] The stories of Deniz and Yasemin differ with the change of their marital status: they got married while working in Istanbul (Deniz is married to a Kurdish man; Yasemin is married to Turkmen). Until their marriage, they also were living-in with their employers. Although Yasemin's husband is in Turkmenistan, she lives in a rented apartment with her mother and 1,5 year-old daughter. Currently, both of them work as *day workers*, which is a common title for the Turkish domestic employers.

[16] Interestingly though, all of my interviewees remember the exact dates of their arrival in Turkey.

[17] There are cases of UK (Cueva 1995) and Italy (Bettio, Simonazzi and Villa 2006) where live-in labour have been revived as a common practice.

[18] For instance, in cases of Canada (Fudge 2011) and Spain (Gutiérrez-Rodriguez 2007) the live-in status changes with the regularization of their legal status. (Akalin 2015, 68)

(undocumented)[19] migrant women in Turkey. The private household becomes a setting of negotiations and of blurred boundaries. The "modern" definition of work that presupposes definite division of private and public space as well as work and leisure time are obscured in this setting[20].

This ambiguity emerges vividly in the experiences of my subjects as well. When describing their regular workday, these young women migrants repeated several times that they did not have definite working hours and definite duties. According to Maya, they were living in the pace of their employers: "Six days a week we live their (our employers') lives. We have only one day for ourselves." (Maya, 28) Maya, my main participant in the research with whom I could spend more time than other women, has been working as a cook for a family. She is not a *regular* cook. She has been cooking dietary meals for her employers. Maya learned these skills from her previous employer, a famous dietician in Turkey, and was utilizing them in other households[21]. These skills provided her with a privileged treatment of her employees and the higher than regular salary. However, in the place she works currently, she did not only work as a cook, she started to help her employee with the accounting in her business upon her employee's "request". Although Maya was eager to help at the beginning, it turned to a full job with no extra payment. When I met her in her day-offs she was exhausted and was telling about the late night stays: "Give them an inch, they will take a mile […] I should not let them do it at the first place […] We have not stayed so late this week; it was just two nights when we worked until 3 am."

[19] It is important to note, that despite the huge numbers not all of the migrant women workers are undocumented.

[20] For more information, see Pratt, Geraldine. 2005. "Abandoned Women and Spaces of the Exception." Antipode 37(5): 1052–1078; Staples, David. 2007, "Women's Work and the Ambivalent Gift of Entropy." In The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social, edited by Patricia T. Clough and Jean Halley, 119–151. Durham: Duke University Press.

[21] While the discussion on competencies and skills that are earned since the arrival in Turkey lies beyond the scope of this thesis, I would like to mention that it is an important part of "self-constructed professionalism" (Lutz 2011 76).

It is this availability that is demanded from the migrant workers. The domestic workers have to be "accessible" at any time of day and night. This also can exceed to the holiday times. The migrant domestic workers have to travel with their employers to the holiday resorts or other trips where they don't have their day-offs as they cannot go and sleep overnight at their place. Maya quitted her job as her employer violated the "agreement". She agreed to go to the holiday and work without a day-off only for two weeks. However, at the end of two weeks her employer announced that they are staying for two more weeks. Maya objected but was convinced by her employer to stay for another two weeks. When the same story repeated at the end of the month, she quit her job: "I told her 'I have self-respect, I am not your slave. You deceived me, this is why I am not staying here.'" In Maya's point of view, her employer violated an unwritten contract of trust relationship by "abusing" her "accessibility". Similarly, Deniz and Nil narrated how their duties of caretakers were not limited to taking care of the sick or a child. The three Cs *(Cooking, Cleaning and Caring)* (Anderson 2000) that define the domain of domestic work are overlapping in the duties of a caretaker. However, it is not specific to the migrant employee as the local domestic worker, Aylin, also underlined how she "did everything one can imagine in the house: from sewing the buttons to cooking meals and salads, from greeting guests to meeting all the needs of the old grandma, including bathing, and looking after a dog." In migrant workers' case it is the "portability" and availability of her labor that shapes the demand in the market.

4.2 "I started to call her Mom from the very beginning": "One of the family" discourse

The obscureness regarding when one is at work and not at work turns these women into an "integral" figure within the employer family (Akalin 2015). In the course of my research I observed how the employees referred to the employers in familial terms. The family discourse reveals itself not only in the language but also in the relationships between the employer and the employee. As caretakers of elderly, women migrants refer to them as

Mommy or Uncle and as nannies they call them my son or my daughter. It is important to notice that these two types of care work are completely different; thus, the dynamics of relationship between the caretaker and the cared vary as well.

When Bahar (40) arrived in Turkey around eight years ago, she was employed by an old couple in Istanbul and worked for them almost for seven years. She repeatedly emphasized that she was "lucky" as the family accepted her as "their daughter":

> They were very good people to me. They told me that I am not a maid of this house, I am their *daughter*; *I am part of this house*. Sometimes, when uncle Ahmet got up early in the morning, he was slamming the door with noise, and then my *Mom* was shouting at him "Close this door silently, Ahmet, my daughter is sleeping"… Now I am here, and [my new employers] are very good as well. *They are like my family*. They do not intervene in anything. Nobody says anything *as long as you do your job*. Now, I have my *daughter* here. She calls me sister. I call her my daughter because she is very polite, she is very lovely. (my emphasis)

Throughout the conversation Bahar referred to her female employer as "mother", while she called the male employer "uncle". She is not the only case. In a like manner, Nil has been mainly working as a caretaker of the old and sick people. As other migrant women whom I met, she referred to her employer as Mommy. When I asked whether it was an employer's requirement, all of my subjects told it was a spontaneous act from the very beginning. The familial references are made quite often in the narratives of my subject, which reveals the blurriness regarding the relationships between the employer and the employee and that goes beyond the distinct separation of "business and friendship" relationship (Mezzadra 2006). This ambiguous relationship is reiterated and reproduced on the daily basis. However, it is important to distinguish between two relationships when the cared one is a child and the elderly sick person[22]. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to unfold these relationships in detail, as they are reactivated in very robust and fluctuating processes of boundary-setting.

[22] Although I observed an interesting dynamics like *infantalization* of the migrant worker under the label of protection and the subscription of the employee to this discourse, I could not give space to discussing these dynamics.

There is a constant negotiation and reaffirmation of invisible hierarchies through family discourse within the household. Lutz (2011) beautifully summarizes this relationship in her book:

> A recurring principle is the complicated matter of dealing with status differences. Even where efforts are made to describe this relationship as a friendship or family relationship, the underlying asymmetry is visible. Although familiar personal interaction may make a working relationship look like a friendship or family relationship, all parties involved nevertheless attach importance to keeping the attendant danger of mix-ups and misunderstandings under control (see also Ozyegin 2001: 11). Provided no conflicts arise, the definition of the relationship is largely shared; as soon as dispute occur, however, the boundaries are accentuated. (Lutz 2011, 94)

4.3 Revisiting Ethnicity and Gender in the Private Household

When I visited Bahar at her employer's house, her employer joined our conversation at some point and shared her insights and her experiences with the previous migrant employees: "You leave everything at home, you leave your child to a person of different culture. I do not know how we did it back then. It is insane courage." (Selin) As one of the leading scholars on gender migration and domestic work, Helma Lutz states "[not only] home is the designated form for individual marks of distinction and family habitus, [but also] it is here that identity is negotiated among the active players through affirmation and exclusion." (Lutz 2011, 29) Selin is not disturbed by the fact that she is leaving her child to another woman, her concern is that she leaves it to "a person of different culture". In the previous chapters, I discussed that housework has gendered characteristic and is mainly about upholding society's gender system. Reproductive work ensures hegemonic femininities and masculinities in the social system. However, it would be a very limiting analysis if other markers of difference are left out of discussion. Lutz (2011) also proposes an intersectional analysis of these differences to display the asymmetries of the power relations and conceptualizes these differences as "symbolic capital that may be deployed differently in different situations" (30).

One of the recurring themes in my research has been the exclusion of the migrant workers from the food-sharing practice that unites family and reaffirms the social relations and hierarchies. My participants narrated different stories where they were either deprived from food in the employer's house or kept out from the "familial ritual". Paradoxically, while some of these women cook and set the table for their employers, they are not allowed to eat the same meal or sit together at the same table. During our interview, Deniz mocked her employer for her "ridiculous" behavior and practice of keeping the refrigerator locked so that her domestic workers did not touch "her food". Moreover, this exclusion was not set only in the boundaries of the private household: Maya's sister who worked as nanny had to go with her employers to restaurants to look after the child but was never ordered food. This discriminative act of the employer clearly indicates the class inequality between the employees and the employers. Moreover, it is not only about gender and class. Nil worked as a cleaner in the household with a local domestic worker who was a cook. While the local worker cooked and was invited to the eat with the employers all the time, Nil was completely ignored:

> I took care of an old woman. They did not give me food; they ate but they did not give me food. I had to buy food for myself.[…] After I start work we went to Izmir. There was a Turkish woman who cooked for them. I was taking care of an old woman and cleaning and she was cooking. *They were inviting her to eat with them, but did not invite me.* I felt very bad. Then, I said I am not robot. […] I had to feed their dog twice a day. I told her take me back [to Istanbul], I do not know the way. […] The Turkish employee talked to our employer. [The employer] then started to give us money to cook our own meal separately. […] Until then I was eating bread and butter. I lost 15 kilos in two and half months there.

Food-sharing practice among other dynamics in the private household served as a boundary-setting practice. Gender as an analytical category in itself is not sufficient to explain the negotiations and social interactions between the migrant worker and the employer. In Lutz's vocabulary it is classified as "ethnic boundary work" (2011) that "revolves around the construction of the cultural categories with the help of which

boundaries are set in the private sphere. This boundary-setting takes place on the part of both employers and employees, but need not necessarily be complementary. There is a cross-over here between the above-mentioned process of *doing gender* and that of *doing ethnicity*, in that ethnic justification models are resorted to in order to legitimize asymmetrical power relations." (110).

* * *

The living-in arrangement cannot be recognized only as an opportunity for the women to cut on the expenses and save more money to send back home or only as a space constantly open to violation of workers' human rights. My empirical data reveal that these two constructions are interrelated and do not operate separately. In addititon, the relationship between the employer and the employee are rather complex and should not be demeaned to the subordination and exploitation relationship. However, it should be kept in mind that it is also "a working relationship that is characterized by multiple interlocking asymmetries" (Lutz 2011, 110). The "one of the family" discourse complicates and blurs the boundaries of employer-employee relationship. It can also be a concealing frame for the emerging modes of hierarchy in the power relations between the employer and the employee.

Chapter 5: Exiting a Private Household: A day-off

Migration of women or women in migrating processes are no longer invisible in the academic literature. The growing theoretical as well as case study research on women migrants calls into attention gendered processes of mobilization (Harzig 2001, Sharpe 2001, Morokvasic 1984). Some studies on gender and migration overcome the reductionist approach that analyse migration only as economic phenomenon and demean women's role to their place in reproduction by ignoring the intersectional relations of race, ethnicity, gender and nationality (Harzig 2001, Friedman-Kasaba 1996, Morokvasic 1984). One of the main contributions of these studies is that by analyzing the intricate relationship between gender and migration in the literature they call into attention the agency of women migrants. Women migrants are active participants in migration processes and as engaged subjects of their own lives. However, the new spaces for agency and the emerging social inequalities that can not be separated in the process of transnational migration of women. Therefore, the analysis of these migration processes on any level cannot be reduced to the study of agency or victimization. Hence, in this chapter I will accentuate on the precarious modes of "exiting", of going-out the private household. I will analyze the complex processes of empowerment and vulnerability in the practices of a day-off.

5.1 (Re)-Connection, Solidarity and Empowerment

> "If only you could interview her that day. There is only one day-off for the foreigners and they want to rest, they are tired, they don't want to spare their time to anyone. If you only you could interview her that day in a silent café. Now she says she doesn't have time. Now they all say they don't have time." (Maya, 28)

This was the most disappointing and discouraging message I received during my fieldwork from my main participant and gatekeeper Maya. Going to the field with the idea of exploring the transnational practices of a day-off, I became more interested in the

precariousness and its paradoxical facets. It is the only day in a week that they can go out and spent their time outside of the private household of the employer. The rest of the week they spent in the house and have to ask for permission from their employers if they have to go out on occasionally. I have interviewed and have talked to all of my participants on their day-off. Most of the live-in domestic workers have the similar time and the same day for their day-off. It is often a 24-hour time from Saturday afternoon till Sunday afternoon. However, it can also change according to the schedule of the employer or to the employee's demands. Most of my interviewees emphasized that priority was given to their employer's routine. Going out of their employers' household, these women were going to the collectively rented apartment, which were mostly in a cheap far from the employers' houses' district. They rented apartments with five or six more domestic migrant workers and gathered there every week for a day-off.

For domestic live-in migrants, a day-off is not an ordinary leisure day where they can have rest from their work, which is also their "home". It is crucial for the living-in migrant to go out once a week and stay at the apartment with her friends. Maya and Nil resigned because their employer denied their right to have a day-off. Nil, in her first workplace, worked without any day-off for two and half months. She was not allowed to go out alone. She describes her days as harrowing experience: "I can not even explain how I was in those days. I was questioning myself: Why did I do this? Why did I come? I was talking to myself while I was cleaning. I thought I am going crazy. Then when I asked permission to see my sister-in-law, they did not let me go. I was not allowed to go out for 2 months and 9 days. I quitted the job. I did not go out at all. I was only talking to my sister-in-law on the phone." For Nil, a day-off was not only a leisure time, it was a mean to alleviate her homesickness and connect to "her people".

53-year-old Nil who travelled from Uzbekistan about 8 years ago is currently employed as a care worker of an old woman who has Alzheimer's disease. During 8 years of her employment in the domestic service in Istanbul, unlike many other younger women, she changed her workplace only twice. Nil has three children and four grandchildren. As she did not travel back home during her stay she was not able to see her three grandchildren. For her a day-off meant much than an ordinary leisure day. It was a re-connection day for her; it was as she describes it a day of unexpected reconnections.

> Can you believe I have met my neighbor here in Istanbul? It happened yesterday. It is like a miracle. She was my sister's friend from the same neighborhood. I saw her yesterday in Kadikoy. I cannot explain how happy I was. I looked at her, she looked at me. […] Then I approached and asked her "Are you Firuze?" […] We hugged each other. It is fate. We could not meet back at home; I cannot even explain how happy I am.

Networking with the other migrant women plays crucial role in the whole process of migration for the migrant women from Central Asia. All of my research participants arrived in Istanbul either via their acquaintances or via close friends and relatives. Furthermore, networking and keeping together with other migrant domestic workers is not only important during the arrival to Turkey but also is a powerful mechanism for coping with longing, depression and various types of harassment, violations and abuse of (undocumented) migrant women in the whole process of migration. Migrant women consolidate these network ties on their day-off by spending it collectively either in their apartments or in the restaurants where they can have their traditional food. Nil explained her happiness when she first saw a community of Uzbek women who were working in Istanbul just like her:

> My sister-in-law took me to the place they were gathering each week. When I first entered the place, I saw ten to fifteen Uzbek women. I was screaming: "Everyone is here!" I was screaming because of happiness and excitement as if I found my relatives, my family. […] Since then I am meeting them every week. We are meeting, cooking our [traditional] meals and talking. These restaurants are very good. […] Sometimes we do shopping; we buy something to send back home.

Sending some gifts or money back or receiving some items like photos from their home country and calling home also usually occur on the day-off. Through the practice of food-sharing or cooking with the other migrant women from their country and receiving/sending gifts these women keep in touch and reconnect with their homes.

As I observed in two day-off gatherings the migrant workers not only share the information regarding their employers and their relationships with their employers[23] but also develop coping strategies to manage the burden of emotional work or violations of the employer. The more experienced migrant women were "teaching" the newcomers the mechanisms of coping with power relations within the household. The solidarity relationships among these women is not only limited to the lightening the burden of the heavy work and sometimes discrimination from their employers; for instance, they have been extended to taking care of each other when they are sick. Nil is expecting a surgery in several months and she told me that her friends here will not leave her alone; Maya's friend also brought some herbs for her treatment of liver.

However, as I noticed, these groups of solidarity are quite small in quantity. Bahar told me that she does not like meeting other people/women from Turkmenistan rather than her friends that she lives with. When I asked her the reason she told the following:

> I talk to [other Turkmen], I say "Hi", but I never stay in their place. If I do not know them I do not go in their rented apartments. It is crowded. They might smoke, they might drink, I don't like such places. […] Our apartment is safe, it is locked. But whenever there is a trouble, [the landlord] says, you are foreigners/you are illegal. But we are the responsible ones, we give our money on time this is why our landlord trusts us.

The undocumentedness might disrupt the solidarities in bigger groups and make these groups small and closed. The constant fear of deportability isolates migrant women from interaction. Moreover, not all the migrant women try to socialize in group or go out in their

[23] Ridiculing and discussing their employers' lives is one of the most common activity they had. Mockery (humor) can be seen as a strong mechanism of coping with power and exploitation.

day-off. Some of them like Bahar prefer keeping detached from migrant community from the fear of being reported by them or like Maya wanted only to rest at their apartment in their day-off[24].

5.2 Sexualized Body of the Migrant

Although the food-sharing and gathering every week becomes a ritual on its own, it breaks the routine of the six days spent at the employer's home. It is, as Maya called it, a day when they live their own lives. As Akalin discusses in her article on sexuality and sexualized body of the migrant woman, in some of the cases the employer does not show tolerance to the migrant women "having their own life" or bringing the "imprints of her private life" into the private household of the employer (330-331). The sexuality of a migrant woman is already, in most cases considered "a threat". [25]

Su, whom I visited in her employer's house, invited me to her 35th birthday party at her place on a day-off. Su, who is from Turkmenistan, works as a carer for one and half year old child. I met her through her employer and visited her at her employer's house in one of the richest districts in Istanbul. Meeting Su during her workday and her day-off provided me with a comparative perspective on her experience within and outside the employer's household. Previously informed about the absence of the employer in the household, my initial attempt was to interview Su directly at her employer's house. However, after my arrival I learned that in the long-term absences the employer was substituted by her mother in the household. The employer's mother did not hide her curiosity and wanted to be involved in our conversation. She did not leave the living room throughout our conversation, where I introduced myself to Su and explained the project. It was only on the day-off when I learned

[24] "If they say there is a king's party, you would not want to go. Even if a king organizes party, I will not go, I will go home, eat my soup and sleep." Maya (27)

[25] A local domestic worker Aylin witnessed her employee beating a migrant worker for going out of her room in shorts.

how uncomfortable Su was with the domineering presence of her employer's mother. However, what was striking to me is Su's behavior outside of the employer's house. Instead of a shy and silent woman, I met a very talkative and entertaining woman. In her birthday party, where she invited some of her male and female Turkmen friends, she was flirting with some of her friends and making a lot of jokes with sexual references. Whenever, she made such a joke, she turned to me and said: "Do not ever tell what you see and hear here to Aylin", to her employer. Her sexuality, her flirtiness had to stay in the borders of her day-off, where she lives her own life or should be controllable by her employer.

However, being outside of the constructed "safe" space of the employer's house, the migrant woman can experience various gender-based discriminations and harassment as well. Bahar and Maya openly talked about the harassment of the taxi-drivers and the shopkeepers who easily recognize foreign woman either due to the accent or to appearance. As the study on Moldovan migrant women in Turkey show, some of the Moldovan women veiled when they were going on their day-off for two reasons: first, in order not to be caught and deported and second, to reduce the harassment in the street, bus or any public place (Akalin 2010 339). The potential of danger coming from the outside gives the employer "a legitimate excuse" to control the sexuality of migrant woman. Bahar's employers did not let her go outside in the evening or were handling her necessities without letting her go to "the dangerous parts of the city". Under the veil of protection, some of the employers continue to supervise their employee even outside of the house.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Migration is not only a risk-taking process but also an empowering path for women. "Feminization of migration" (Raijman&Schammah-Gesser&Kemp 2003, De Regt 2010) has become a global phenomenon. It is not only a migration of women from former colonies to the "developed" countries, namely from "the third world countries" to the "first world countries" or from "global south" to "global north" but a very complicated mobility process within the "global south" and "global north". Conceptualized in the literature through different perspectives and frameworks, this migration is being discussed at the crossroads of gender, globalization, and care/domestic work. Situating my case study in line with this literature, in this thesis I analyzed the complicated process of *precariousness* in the lives of Central Asia undocumented migrant women working as caretakers and domestic workers in the private households in Istanbul. Operationalized as a fluctuating process of empowerment and vulnerability going hand in hand, *precariousness* in the framework of my analysis steps outside of its classical understanding of precarious labor theory that tends to passify the subjects. I examined paradoxical modes of *precariousness* in the encompassing experience of migration of Central Asian women migrants in Istanbul. It was important for this research to capture different levels of precariousness in the overall experience of migration, as the process of migration should not be separated from each other. Specifically, I focused on departure and arrival, living-in arrangement and exit from the private household in three empirical chapters process.

After a sociohistorical background and theoretical framework outlined in the second chapter, I draw attention to the post-Soviet transition period in the home countries of my interviewees in the third chapter. Although women become the most disposed to "vulnerability" bodies in the disintegration process, they are the ones who create new alternatives to balance the economic instability in their families. Ironically, the gendered

facets of transition becomes a way for women to execute their agencies in a more intensive way by being actively involved in the decision-making processes of the family. Here, I do not argue that women were passive and immobile before the transition period, but intend to show the intensified mobility and empowerment of women in that process. From time to time women's empowerment, which equates to mobility in this case, has been perceived as a "threat" to nation-state building processes of the newly independent Central Asian countries and the repressive bureaucratic procedures have accompanied the strict border control and deportation. However, it did not prevent the massive flow of women to leave their countries to sustain their households back in their countries of origin. Needless to say, this mobility still operates in the framework of family: women move to other countries to economically support their families. Whenever, they step out of these lines and start "their own life", as my participants said, they face with various stigmatizations.

The living-in arrangement is commonly practiced among the undocumented migrants from Central Asia in Istanbul for several reasons. On the one hand, it reduces the cost of living in an expensive metropolitan city. However, on the other hand, it blurs the boundaries of work and home, of private and public, and more importantly, this arrangement creates a space of constant negotiation and reaffirmation of constructed identities. Differently from local domestic workers, the living-in arrangement brings in an aspect of "availability" to the migrant labor. In the discussion of experiences of the living-in arrangement in the fourth chapter, I focus on the relationship between the employer and the employee at the axis of trust and exploitation. The discourses of friendship and kin/one of a family rhetoric veil the intricately approved hierarchies. This is not to say, that it is a straightforward the exploiter-exploited relationship but rather a reciprocal boundary-setting interaction. These interactions maneuvered at the intersections of gender, class and ethnicity. Utilizing Crenshaw's (1989)

intersectional analysis, I focused on the food-sharing practice between the employer and the employees, which revealed the ethnic discrimination embedded in this practice.

My last empirical chapter, entitled *Exiting a Private Household: A Day-Off* should receive more attention and has a potential of becoming a wider and deeper research. A day-off transgresses the blurred boundaries of the private household and in itself implies mobility and interaction with the outside of the private household world. My participants' narratives revealed the different meanings and practices that shaped their day-off. On the one hand, it is a significant day for the migrant women as they not only spend it outside of their employers' house but also re-connect with their "home" by establishing network ties with other migrant women from their country. The networking turns into smaller solidarity groups of the migrant women where they not only share the information regarding their employers and their relationships with their employers but also develop coping strategies to manage the burden of emotional work or violations of the employer. The more experienced migrant women were "teaching" the newcomers the mechanisms of coping with power relations within the household. However, on the other hand, going out of the private household might put a migrant woman into a vulnerable situation of being harassed. Her status of undocumentedness and travelling alone to a foreign country intensifies the risk of being exposed to gender-based abuse. This also provides an employer with an extra "power" to legitimize the control of their migrant employee. Thus, a day-off is both a day where migrant women can eventually "live their lives", though for a determined by the employer time, and also a day where they can easily harassed at public places in Istanbul. A day-off is a reconnection and solidarity day while it is also only a leisure day for some migrant women.

To conclude, in this thesis I tried to depict the experiences of migrant women from Central Asia through the whole migration processes. I acknowledge the limitations of this research and see it as a case study contribution to the transnational migration, domestic/care

migrant work, and gender and migration literatures. This research is a humble attempt to make the precarious experiences of these women more visible without victimizing or "heroizing" my subjects and to foster further research on the experiences of this group. One of the further research suggestions would be the analysis of returning "home" processes under the paradigmatic intersectional approach.

Bibliography:

Agamben, Giorgio, and Daniel Heller-Roazen. 1998. “Homo sacer”. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.

Akalin, Ayşe. 2007. "Hired as a Caregiver, Demanded as a Housewife". European Journal of Women's Studies. 14 (3): 209-225.

Akalin. Ayşe. 2015. "Motherhood as the Value of Labour". Australian Feminist Studies. 30 (83): 65-8.

Amelina, Anna, Devrimsel D. D. Nergiz, Thomas Faist, and Nina Glick Glick Schiller. 2012. Beyond Methodological Nationalism Research Methodologies for Cross-Border Studies. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.

Anderson, Bridget. 2010. "Migration, immigration controls and the fashioning of precarious workers". Work, Employment and Society. 24 (2): 300-317.

Anderson, Bridget. “Us and them?: The dangerous politics of immigration control.” Oxford University Press, 2013.

Bora, Aksu. 2005. Kadınların sınıfı: ücretli ev emeği ve kadın öznelliğinin inşası. İstanbul: İletişim.

De Genova, Nicholas. 2005. “Working the boundaries race, space, and "illegality" in Mexican Chicago”. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press

De Regt, Marina. 2010. "Ways to Come, Ways to Leave". Gender & Society. 24 (2): 237-260.

Ehrenreich, Barbara, and Arlie Russell Hochschild. 2003. Introduction in Global woman: nannies, maids, and sex workers in the new economy. New York: Metropolitan Books.

Ehrenreich, Barbara, and Arlie Russell Hochschild. 2003. Maid to Order in Global woman: nannies, maids, and sex workers in the new economy. New York: Metropolitan Books.

Erder, Sema, and Selmin Kaska. 2003. Irregular migration and trafficking in women: the case of Turkey. [Geneva, Switzerland]: International Organization for Migration.

Friedman-Kasaba, Kathie. 1996. Memories of migration gender, ethnicity, and work in the lives of Jewish and Italian women in New York, 1870-1924. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press.

Fodor, Eva. The Feminization of Poverty in Six Post-State Socialist Societies. *Review of Sociology* 7:2 (2001), 91-107.

İçduygu, Ahmet, and Kemal Kirişci. 2009. Land of diverse migrations challenges of emigration and immigration in Turkey. İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi University Press

Kalaycioglu, Sibel and Rittersberger-Tılıç. 2000. “Evlerimizdeki Gündelikçi Kadınlar: Cömert “abla”ların Sadık “hanım”ları”, Su Yayınları, Istanbul.

Lutz, Helma. 2008. Migration and domestic work a European perspective on a global theme. Aldershot, England: Ashgate.

Lutz, Helma. 2011. *The New Maids: Transnational Women and The Care Economy.* London: Zed Books.

Mezzadra, Sandro. 2005. *Taking Care: Migration and the Political Economy of Affective Labour.*

Morokvasic M. 1984. "Women in migration". The International Migration Review. 18: 882-1382

Özbay, Ferhunde. 1999. Türkiye'de evlatlık kurumu: köle mi, evlat mı? İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi.

Ozyegin, Gul. 2001. Untidy gender domestic service in Turkey. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Parennas, Rachel Salazar. 2006. “Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers and the International Division of Reproductive Labor” in Global Dimensions of Gender and Carework, eds. M. K. Zimmerman & J. S. Litt & C.E. Bose, Stanford University Press, California

Parla, Ayse. 2007. "Irregular Workers or Ethnic Kin? Post-1990s Labour Migration from Bulgaria to Turkey". International Migration. 45 (3): 157-181.

Pratt, Geraldine. 2005. “Abandoned Women and Spaces of the Exception*”.* Antipode 37(5): 1052–1078.

Pusch, Barbara, Tomas Wilkoszweski, and Mutlu Çomak-Özbatır. 2010. Türkiye'ye uluslararası göç: Toplumsal koşullar, bireysel yaşamlar. İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi.

Raijman, Rebeca, Adriana Kemp, and Silvina Schammah-Gesser. 2003. "International migration, domestic work, and care work: undocumented latina migrant in Israel". Gender and Society. Sage Publication

Rutishauer, Hanna, 2010. “Önyargıları Yıkmak ve Ortak Nefreti Yumusatmak: Istanbul‘daki Ermenistanlı Kadın Göçmen Isçileri” in Türkiye‟ye Uluslararası Göç: Toplumsal Koşullar-Bireysel Yaşamlar, eds. Barbara Pusch&Tomas Wilkoszewski, Kitap Yayınevi, Istanbul

Sassen, Saskia, 2006. “Global Cities and Survival Circuits” in Global Dimensions of Gender and Carework, eds. M. K. Zimmerman & J. S. Litt & C.E. Bose, Stanford University Press, California

Sassen, Saskia. 2006. Cities in a world economy. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Pine Forge Press.

Sharpe, Pamela. 2001. Women, gender, and labour migration: historical and global perspectives. London: Routledge

Staples, David. 2007, "Women's Work and the Ambivalent Gift of Entropy". In The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social, edited by Patricia T. Clough and Jean Halley, 119–151. Durham: Duke University Press.

Walby, Sylvia (1992) Woman and Nation. International Journal of Comparative Sociology, 33 (1-2).

Yuval-Davis, Nira. 1997. Gender & nation. London: Sage Publications.