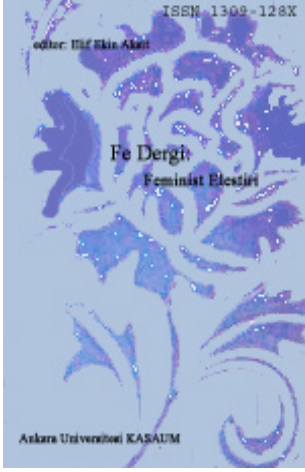


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Adres: Kadın Sorunları Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi, Cebeci 06590 Ankara



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Armenian Care Workers in Turkey**  
*Fatma Armağan Teke Lloyd*

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## **Beyond Illegality: The Gendered (In-)Securities of Illegal Armenian Care Workers in Turkey**

*Fatma Armağan Teke Lloyd\**

*In the migration literature, there has been a shift of interest from studying exclusionary policies of states that result in the criminalization of ‘illegal’ migrants towards more subtle forms of incorporation. In this paper, I will examine such as migration regime imposed upon illegal Armenian migrant care workers, which is characterized by the conditional acceptance of illegality rather than by strict punishments and deportation. Within this context, Armenian migrant care workers are caught in a legal limbo of belonging and non-belonging. The paper argues that the terms of belonging and non-belonging are traversable normative-legal categories negotiated by everyday actors in a way that often crisscross gender and class hierarchies. Migrant women could become more acceptable if they comply with certain gendered expectations and norms of work while at the same time could easily become deportable. At the same time, this article demonstrates that this legal limbo increases the gendered vulnerabilities and labour precarity in women’s everyday lives.*

*Keywords: Illegality and gender, migration and violence, legal liminality, Turkey’s migration regime*

### ***Yasadışıların Ötesi: Ermeni Kadınların Toplumsal Cinsiyet Temelli Güvencesizlikleri***

*Göç literatüründe ilgi, devletlerin göçmenleri ‘yasadışı’ ilan eden dışlayıcı politikalarından devletlerin göçmenleri inceden inceye topluma entegre eden politikalarına yönelmiştir. Bu çalışma, sınır dışı etmekten çok müsamahaya dayanan bu tip bir göç rejiminin Türkiye’de göçmen kadınlara yönelik gelişimini incelemektedir. Türkiye’de Ermeni ev işçileri göçmen kadınlarla yapılan mülakatlara dayanarak bu çalışma yeni tip göç rejiminin yarattığı yasal belirsizlik durumunu incelemektedir. Bu durum, göçmenleri yasal bir aidiyet ile aidiyet olmama durumu ikileminde bırakmaktadır. Aynı zamanda makalede bu yasaya dayalı ve resmi kategorilerin aynı zamanda nasıl sınıf ve toplumsal cinsiyet dayalı kültürel normlarla yoğurulduğunu tartışmaktadır. Göçmen kadınlar eğer işverenler tarafından baskın toplumsal cinsiyet normlarına atıfla tanımlanan makbul kadın ve makbul işçi olurlarsa, yasadışı göçmen statüsü görünmez olmaktadır. Fakat, kadınlar makbul kadın algısının dışında çıkarılarsa yasadışılık görünür olmakta ve onları hem devlet, hem erkek, hem de işveren şiddetine maruz bırakmaktadır.*

*Anahtar Kelimeler: Yasadışılık ve toplumsal cinsiyet, göç ve şiddet, yasal liminallik; Türkiye’nin göç rejimi*

## **Introduction**

From the late 1980s, numbers of irregular migrants and asylum seekers entering Turkey from Post-Soviet countries and Middle East have significantly increased. Irregular migrant workers are now a norm in Turkish care market.<sup>1</sup> In popular commentary (especially in the West) and scholarly writings, the influx of migrants is often represented as an illegitimate intrusion and therefore, ‘as a threat to the security and sovereignty of the state’ (McNevin 2006, 140; Rudolph 2003b; Weiner, 1992; Goldstone 2002; Dannebreiter 2007). In Europe’s border zone and the US, border policing is up-scaled along with punitive and restrictive policies directed at irregular migrants and people-smugglers (Lutz 1997; Bigo and Guild 2002; Walters 2006; Nyers 2004; Nyers 2013). On the other hand, some scholars have pointed that there is a major pitfall in focusing too much on the exclusionary dimension of states’ policies and migrants’ experiences (Doty 1998; Andrejasevic 2009; Calavita 1998). In many cases, migrant workers are incorporated in variety of global economic sectors as subordinate and vulnerable labourers and this is very much enabled by state’s active policies or tacit complicity. This article

\*Yardımcı Doçent. Abdullah Gül Üniversitesi, İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Fakültesi, Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler

explores one such example of 'subordinate inclusion' by focusing on irregular Armenian care workers' incorporation into informal domestic work market in Turkey. It argues that social acceptance as the adopted policy-discourse nexus in Turkey increases gender-based vulnerabilities to violence and labour subordination in Armenian care workers' everyday lives.

Armenian migrant care workers, along with many other migrants from the post-Soviet countries, reside and work illegally in Turkey. In common political parlance, this refers to the condition of being a non-citizen, realized after entering into a country without valid work and residence documents. The present article seeks to contribute to the discussion and analysis surrounding illegality in two important ways through a focus on women's care migration to Turkey.

First, the article claims that there is a need to rethink illegality not as something that exists outside of the state's order. On the contrary, states are responsible for producing a plethora of statuses extending from illegality to temporary work (Walsum 2008; Andrejasevic 2009; Ngai 2004; Sassen 2002; Chauvin and Mascarenas 2012, 2014; Mascarenas 2015.) Migration studies have revealed that the total deportation and physical removal of irregular workers has never been on the agenda, even in states such as the US and Europe whose borders are extremely securitized. Rather, migration statuses are repurposed under global capitalism and serve to maintain those migration structures and practices that thwart migrant women's access to rights and protection (McNevin 2007, 2011; De Genova 2002; Ong 2006; Coutin 2006). As De Genova (2002, 429) writes, 'undocumented migrations are constituted in order not to physically exclude them but instead to socially include them under imposed conditions of enforced and protracted vulnerability.' With the increased care deficits of both the developed and developing nations, especially migrant care workers are increasingly incorporated as temporary or irregular workers into the receiving countries.

Turkey's unofficial policy line has also cantered around avoiding restrictive and harsh policies against undocumented migrant women that some other governments are known to have relentlessly pursued in the forms of mass deportations, workplace and home raids, mainly because of the usefulness of these migrant women in ameliorating the care deficit of Turkey by providing cheap labour force. Yet, this form of informal incorporation that aims at utilizing migrants' labour force without providing them with social rights and protection from deportation amplifies the experience of gender-based violence among immigrant women. This article, based on the testimonials of 20 migrant care workers and 10 employers in Turkey, argues that the migration status constitutes a form of 'legal violence' that not only increases the vulnerability of migrant women to sexual and class-based abuse, but also forces them to stay with the perpetrators of violence - that be employers or intimate partners - out of fear of being apprehended and deported by the authorities or out of a hope that display of loyalty would upgrade their legal status in the future.

Therefore, social acceptance and tolerance, rather than intimidation and exclusion, are, to a large extent, transforming migrant women into marginalized subjects in Turkey. I will especially refer to Menjivar's (2006) concept of 'liminality', which highlights that marginalization should be understood as being 'caught' in a limbo, a continuous uncertainty about their legal and social place in society.<sup>2</sup> Liminality is experienced as a 'rite of passage', where migrants experience continuous shuffling between different categories and levels of integration - economic integration and unlawfulness- without ever fully belonging to any of them. Coutin (2003) has argued this creates a 'space of nonexistence' around undocumented migrants - a space of forced invisibility, clandestinity and temporality. Menjivar (2006), using the concept of legal violence, argues that the precarity and vulnerability that characterize a migrant's experience are a direct consequence of their uncertain statuses, thanks to the migration law which situates them in the nether region between documented and undocumented. These notions reflect the nebulous zone that Armenian migrant women found themselves in: on the one hand, they act in the labour market, go shopping and access to certain public services; yet, the possibility of deportation also always lurks behind.

Secondly, my research also points out to a very significant but neglected dimension of liminality: that is, how this liminality intersects with gendered hierarchies of cultural life in the everyday life. In addition to being marginalized as a 'labourer', liminal status holder migrant women are also more vulnerable to gender-based violence and exclusion on the ground because being in a place of uncertainty further pressure them into conforming to the gendered/labour expectations of the members of host society. Scholars have argued that it is a common characteristic of migrants who find themselves in a social acceptance discourse that they try to impress host community - employers, bureaucrats, police officers, and boyfriends - with displays of compliance so as to increase their legitimacy (Chauvin and Mascarenas 2012; Bosniak 2008; Joppke 2011). In the absence of a

certain lawful status, which defines under what conditions a migrant is deportable, hierarchical social values assume the role of arbiter through which a migrant can become more or less deserving of deportation/belonging.

As part of this gendered social acceptance, I would argue that Armenian migrant women have been thought of as more deserving of acceptance on the condition that they embody obedient labourers and sexually modest women. Within these hierarchies, shaped within the sociological context of Turkey's long-standing labour market, migrant care workers are often seen as superior to Turkish 'care workers', who are coded as culturally backward and lazy by employers, as well as to foreign sex workers, who are thought of as selfish, immoral and ultimately illegitimate. Being a good 'illegal' – i.e. a good woman and ideal worker – have earned migrant women access to health care, protection and fairer employment conditions, while it also renders them less criminal in the eyes of police officers.

At the same time, however, this gendered legitimacy functions as a form of control, regulating care workers' gendered identities and disciplining their labour in everyday life (Inda 2008). This is because women's liminal status is not erased with this partial acceptance, but held as a card by employers and police officers that can be played at any time. In seeking lesser deportability and more acceptance from official and unofficial actors, Armenian migrant care workers have had to put up with sexual violence and intimate partner violence (Salter 2006, 176). In the last part of the article, I discuss Armine's and Lidya's as examples demonstrating how being in a 'legal limbo' make migrants more vulnerable to gender-based violence.

## **Background: Context and Methods**

### **Social Acceptance Framework in Turkey**

For a long time in Turkey, citizenship and migration scholars have utilized the dichotomous framework of exclusion and inclusion to examine the state's framing ideology relating to the management of migrants (Kirisçi 2005, 2007; Icduygu, Toktas and Soner, 2008). Due to its late incorporation in international migration flows in the 1980s and being rather primarily a sending country, Turkey has encountered very limited migration flows, mainly composed of people fleeing from war, civil conflict and persecution from throughout the region. This inclusion and exclusion based framework has been sufficient to address both the lack of migration to Turkey and the 'nationalistic logic' behind the occasional acceptance of refugees and other flows of migrants. The most common explanation for Turkey's insular migration policy appeals to its 'exclusionary' definition of citizenship that has been deployed throughout its history to foster a homogenized national community (Kirisçi 2005, 2007). Migration policy is mostly seen as a part of the nation-building process and to preserve the ethnic homogeneity of the nation (Anderson and Ruhs 2010). Turkey's sporadic acceptance of refugees and other categories of migrants have also been dictated by an ethnic definition of what constitutes an acceptable migrant. Kirişçi (2007) claims that for example the criteria in the acceptance of the Balkan migrants (Bulgarian Pomaks) was based on their belonging to the Turkic ethnic identity ('soy'). This gate-keeping logic adopted by Turkey's migration policies especially towards Balkan migrants therefore has resulted in what Brubaker (1998) has termed 'ethnic unmixing' migrations.

The approach taken here, however, asserts that the dichotomous model of inclusion and exclusion is insufficient to understand the irregular migration flows that have occurred since the 1980s. Unlike those refugees who were forced to flee to Turkey from their homeland, post-1980 migrants to Turkey have been mainly composed of 'irregular migrants' – for example, Middle Eastern transit migrants trying to reach Europe, post-Soviet migrants seeking employment, and asylum seekers (Icduygu 2007). Most of these migrants are irregular labour migrants – even those asylum seekers and transit migrants, initially unmotivated by economic factors, have often remained as active participants in the underground economy. Each of these groups has been integrated in the labour markets along ethnic, gendered and status-based lines (see Yukseker and Brewer 2011; Erdogu and Toksoz 2013). The majority of women from the post-Soviet countries have been absorbed within the care sector as well as in entertainment and sex work (Gulcur and Ilkkaran 2002; Bloch 2003). Although they share a common non-status position, there remain some differences in the manner in which migrant care workers become irregularized. Some domestic care workers stay in Turkey with valid tourist visas, although they work and reside illegally. They are 'settled in mobility' in Morokvasic's terms (2004), circulating between home and host countries to prevent the expiration of their visas. The majority of migrants, however, have been living in Turkey illegally for several years for they have not left the country after the expiration of their tourist visas.

There also exist some migrant care workers who acquired 'temporary work visas' since an amnesty was issued by the Turkish government in 2012.

Ali and Hartmann (2015) suggest that 'inclusive policies' can take on many different forms. First, states might not recognize and grant rights to migrant workers, but tolerate their illegal work and residence within the country. In certain cases, such policies can also facilitate migration flows by applying a liberal visa regime. Alternatively, states can choose to issue amnesties at regular intervals, forgiving the trespasses of irregular migrants and providing them with rudimentary rights – such as to work and reside – within the country. Turkey has pursued both of these policy approaches variously. Most migrants enter Turkey easily, thanks to simple visa procedures and weak border controls, and are quickly integrated into the already large informal market. Unlike many European countries, which have faced similar labour flows from Eastern European countries but have been able to benefit from the cheap cost of migrant workers in institutionalized schemes, such as guest-worker programs and temporary visa programs, Turkey lacks a solid migration infrastructure or legal framework. Yet, Turkey also adopted very instrumental policy with regard to irregular migration flows, allowing useful ones for economy to enter and reside while excluding others.

Moreover, this differentiation has often manifested itself as a gendered process. Feminist migration research has revealed the role of the politics of gender in shaping the practices of exclusion and inclusion in states' responses towards international migration (Andrijasevic, 2009; Luibheid 2002; Spijkerboer and Walsum, 2007; Benhabib and Resnik 2009; Resnik, 2007; 46; Kofman and Raghuram 2015). This gendered logic is also reflected in Turkey's treatment to irregular migrants. For example, Sema Erder (2007) has explored how female and male irregular migrants were treated differently by border police after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Female migrants at this time were entering Turkey on tourist visas in order to buy garments and transport them in suitcases back to their home countries. According to Sema Erder (2007, 47), the expectation of foreign currency from this informal activity translated into a welcoming migration environment, while the opposition of unions and trade chambers within the country led to stricter border controls placed upon male migrants from Eastern Europe. In another example, Kemal Kirisci (2008, 10) has noted how Turkey was forced revise its visa policy with Romania by granting a longer stay for tourists visas, after pressure from the entertainment sector which relies on irregular women migrants from this country for much of its profits. Ayse Parla (2007) similarly notes that this 'differential inclusion' is very noticeable in the different treatment meted out to post-1989 labour migration of primarily women from Bulgaria. They were 'tolerated' and seen as cheap labour source within the care economy.

This selective attitude on the part of the state when evaluating the difference among irregular migrants testifies to the fact that, contrary to popular depictions of it as an exception to state order, irregular migration is always subject to the oversight of the state. Women's irregular migration to Turkey can also be considered as such, receiving open tolerance as opposed to denial of entry, mass deportations or strict surveillance by the various security apparatuses. In Turkey, care workers are met by a form of unofficial social acceptance that supports their integration into the informal labour markets; yet, which goes hand in hand with a construction of legal vulnerability. As Parla (2007, 161) notes, social acceptance can be viewed as a softer variant of what Calavita and De Genova variously described as 'the legal production of illegality'. This social acceptance discourse has especially favoured migrant care workers over other types of irregular migrants because of the mounting care deficit that has emerged as a result of the breakdown in Turkey's traditional family based welfare system. Turkey's weaker border controls and an already existing informal market reliant on domestic work have been the main pull factors for care workers. However, Turkey has also attempted to institutionalize the ongoing racial segmentation in the care market by instituting two temporary work visa laws passed in 2003 and 2012. Both were formulated in response to pressure from the European Union on Turkey to exercise greater control over informal market activities. The 2003 law was ground-breaking for being the first example of a temporary work visa issued to a low-skill labour group in the Turkish labour market. Yet, it was regarded as a failure because of its complicated visa application procedures that both employers and care workers conspicuously avoided. In a somewhat different vein, the 2012 law introduced a new visa regulation. In addition to making the circular migration impossible by applying a time limit for re-entry after departing the country, the law issued an amnesty to illegal workers, allowing them to pay a fine and become regular.

At the time that my research was conducted, the law was too new to assess how it might impact the experiences of vulnerability by migrant care workers on the ground. However, similar to other temporary work visas, it was rigid in terms of employment conditions; does not promise to decrease workers' dependence on

employer's decisions; and does not include any possibility for becoming permanent residents or changing sectors. The most important element of the law however is the fact that foreign domestic care workers are the only group to whom this regularization is applicable. Above all, this law demonstrates Turkey's determination to transform this sector into the racialized province of foreign care workers by official decree.

### **Setting and Methods**

The present analysis examines the link between macro and micro level contexts and their respective and collaborative production of a particular form of liminality in Turkey's care market. Here, I take the analysis one step further, addressing how this ambiguous legal status is refurbished as a form of gendered and labour control imposed on migrant care workers at the local context, through which legal marginality has assumed new forms of subjugation. The relationship between liminality – produced by the national laws – and labour control in everyday employment relations has already been plentifully documented (Anderson 2010; Ball And Piper 2002; Sassen 2001). The relationship of legal status with gendered forms of control is less obvious and more specific to the particular hierarchical social relations that have developed in the context of Turkey.

Women's migration from Armenia is part of a broader trend known as the feminization of migration witnessed in all of the post-Soviet countries. However, Armenian women's migration is proportionally much lower than in other similar countries. The existing patriarchal structures within the household as well as the nationalist project undertaken by the Armenian state have undoubtedly been more conducive to male migration overall (Teke Lloyd, 2016). Yet, despite the existence of long-term political and historical problems with these two countries, Armenian migrant women experience illegality very similar to any other ethnic group in Turkey. They enter Turkey on tourist visas, over-stay the time allowed in the visa and automatically slide into an illegal status.

Concerned not only with the formal legal experience of migrants, but also with the intersection of local gender hierarchies in Turkey's labour market and migration regime, I conducted a multi-sited ethnographic work both in Armenia and Turkey between 2013-2014 that involved both participant observation as well as interviews. I accompanied migrant women in their shopping trips, involved myself in their social circles, and witnessed their employment conditions within the employers' households. In my visit to Armenia, I met with the families of various migrant women and conducted interviews with them. In Turkey, I conducted 70 interviews in total, composed of migrant care workers, their employers, police officers, migrant's boyfriends, children and relatives.

Throughout the course of my research, I remained focused on the status of liminality produced by the state's social acceptance frame and the interaction of this status with the local gender hierarchies in the labour market. During the interviews, it became clear to me that women experience the consequences of their statuses in many discordant ways. This variance is explainable with reference to what Chauvin (2012) refers to as the 'moral economy of illegality' in which local actors use various judgements to verify women's deservingness of social acceptance. This article clarifies two axes of differentiation employed by local actors to judge migrant women – their morality, which entails values such as self-sacrifice, sexual modesty, and fidelity to family; and their modernity, which implies their high degree of literacy, distance from village life, and cleanliness. These gendered frames actually represent a kind of negative identity which pit migrant women against other groups of women within the society. Local actors in the domestic care market see migrant care workers as embodying a certain kind of femininity rather than viewing them solely as illegals. This is true for every ethnic group of migrants. Under these conditions, social acceptance does not only refer to the state's framing ideology, but also becomes a site of social production where perceptions of gender can either increase the deportability of migrants or can integrate them further within informal employment relations. However, I should note that during my interviews, I have not come across with any evidence that 'Armenian' women came across with a 'mistreatment' based on their ethnic identity. Both employers and Armenian migrant women regarded their relationships only shaped at the context of 'labour'- 'employer' relationship.

### **Gendered Negotiations of Social Acceptance**

The context of everyday interactions between Armenian care workers and local actors is structured by the former's ambiguous liminal status. On the one hand, in the official parlance they are 'illegal intruders' and on the other, local actors, 'including the police' view most of them as (conditionally) legitimate actors in the labour market. Anderson et al (2011, 548) argue that 'belonging' is not an entirely legal term. Scholars, for example, pointed to the conflation of racial and cultural difference with legal status, which, in turn, is confused with

criminality (Holmes, 2007). However, in a somewhat different vein, this article sheds light upon the practice of social acceptance, which is afforded to migrant women on the basis of gendered norms and categories which migrant women are thought to embody.

Often, it is assumed that the pejorative term ‘unmodern’ – which can refer to culturally backward, dirty, lazy and/or illiterate – constitutes the main discursive bulwark used to culturally vilify migrant workers. The narrative presented here centres upon the perceptions of migrant women as performing highly valued feminine tasks, which are prized above the ‘primitive femininity’ of the native domestic care workers and the ‘immoral femininity’ of migrant sex workers. Definitely, this gendered boundary is unique to Turkey’s labour markets and rooted in the larger socio-economic transformations of the country. The socio-historical works on the institution of domestic work reveal that the dynamics of acceptance and exclusion in the sector have been shaped by gendered, class and ethnic based hierarchies. It is useful to briefly mention these works, because today local actors view migrant care workers’ illegality with references to these dynamics.

In one of the first articles to draw attention to the historical constitution of servitude relations in Turkey, Fehunde Ozbay examined the institution of the foster child as part of the development of domestic services in Turkey. ‘Foster Children’ (‘evlatlık’), she argues, were often orphaned Armenian, Greek or Kurdish girls distributed to (or purchased by) middle class families who used them as servers at home. These modern domestic servants, according to Ozbay, were expected to be clean, hardworking and obedient as well as being unattractive to the patriarch of the household. At the same time, however, foster girls were defined by their sexual appetite towards outsiders. They were foreign in the sense that they were often non-Muslim, embodying a different sexuality, which was seen as in need of control by their adoptive family.

However, the institution was dissolved with the changing socio-economic structure of Turkey during the 1960s, and those foster children were replaced by paid servants consisting of daily cleaners from the rural hinterland (Ozyegin 2001). Rural women occupy an inferior status within the society, depicted as illiterate, religious, dirty and unskilled (Bora, 2008). In Turkey’s cultural imaginary, the urban is associated with the West, which embodies the values of propriety, uprightness, productivity and modernity, while the rural with the East and being backward (Erman 2001). Scholars of gender have noted that Turkish domestics are largely perceived as internal others who have remained resistant to modern values (Ozyegin 2001; Bora 2008; Akalin 2010). However, unlike evlatlik, their sexuality was not regarded as threatening, because most of them were elderly, pious women, participating in the labour market under the auspices of their husbands. The special treatment afforded to foreign care workers in Turkey is closely related with the construction of a local hierarchy between native domestic care workers and migrant domestic workers.

In the Turkish care market as it exists today, these two preferred criteria of femininity – modern, but asexual – are seen to be embodied by Armenian migrant care workers. The majority of employers interviewed for this study voiced some initial ambivalence toward the thought of hiring irregular migrant workers. One employer pointed out: ‘I was hesitant to give my money to foreigner, especially when they are criminals entering without permits’. Similarly, another admitted that she used to see irregulars as ‘culturally inferior’. Obviously, their illegal status was also a concern for many employers who were suspicious of their motives: ‘If one does not obey the rules set by the state, you could possibly imagine that they would steal from you also’.

However, migrants’ association with ‘criminality’ and inappropriateness did not seem to survive the encounter and most employers altered their views considerably in the direction of becoming appreciative of these women over time. Employers often invoked their past experiences with Turkish native domestic care workers as a means of affirming the value of migrant women to their families and to the society. Many employers regarded Turkish care workers as unsatisfactory and lauded migrant care workers as ‘much more modern’ by comparison. In addition, migrant women were widely regarded as more docile and obedient than Turkish domestics. Migrant women are positioned on the continuum of acceptability and deportability, depending on which ‘feminine’ qualities are seen to be dominant in their character.

When modernity becomes a reference point in the comparisons of Turkish and foreign domestics, the relationship between femininity and work ethics is often salient. For example, one employer viewed Turkish domestic’s reproductive choices –too many children- as inferior and saw these as impinging negatively upon her workplace performance. Other complaints from employers concerning Turkish care workers focused on their being too intrusive in the family life of employers; asking for too much money and doing little in return; smelling like the ‘village’ and not representing the family well in the eyes of others. Foreign women, on the other

hand, are favoured for being free from family encumbrances and hence able to accommodate themselves professionally to the employer's needs.

It should be recognized that this idealization of modernity does not involve a blind privileging of foreign women simply because their foreignness is deemed superior in some sense. On the contrary, the modernity of migrant women is neatly compatible with the sort of care worker that employers would prefer to hire – docile, hardworking, literate, clean, and hassle free. Employers are often effusive in their praise for migrant workers, whose hard work in managing the household differentiates them from Turkish care workers, who are seen as prone to greed and sloth. Suzan, a professional woman with two children, employed three separate domestic care workers before hiring an Armenian. The way in which she framed the difference between these two categories of workers is instructive with respect to how the deservingness of migrant women is evaluated according to their femininity/labour performance in the conduct of household work. According to Suzan:

Native domestic care workers are lazy. They pretend to work, but they cannot finish the simplest of cleaning jobs in working hours. Instead of watching the children, she spent her time shopping.... However, thanks to Gohar, I can see that not all domestic workers are the same. I do not have to repeat my demands constantly as I did with my native worker.

Labour flexibility – being able to shift from task to task – and taking the initiative were also seen as important qualities expected of migrant workers. According to Akalin (2007), this may account for the preference of Turkish employers for migrant workers, who can more readily conform to 24/7 working schedule and who are generally more deferential toward their employers. These qualities, however, are also seen as lacking among live-in native care workers.

As the most sensitive issue for employers, however, sexuality and promiscuity were seen as an aspect of foreignness that needed to be carefully policed. Employers often referred to the lenient attitude some foreigners might have towards sex – a culturally inappropriate quality – in order to emphasize the importance of being selective when hiring. In my interviews with intermediary agents, they emphasized that women employers were often very interested in the private affairs of prospective care workers. During one such interview, I had the opportunity to hear the demands voiced by employers who arrived at the office to seek out a candidate. Among the first praiseworthy qualities listed was the worker's initiative and hard work, followed by a guarantee that she was family-friendly and had no interest in men.

Among the employers I interviewed, many were careful to differentiate between women who were already mothers and younger domestic care workers, whose purpose in coming to Turkey might be very different. Employers voiced a clear preference to work with elderly women because they are especially in need of money and their modesty can be relied upon. Immodesty, as it concerned migrant women, was often identified with unlawfulness'. As one employer indicated,

We employed a young woman once from the Ukraine. She introduced herself as a babysitter, but her intentions were different. She used to talk to the young men in the apartment. We not only fired her, but also spoke to the police to inform them that she was earning her money in a dishonourable way.

According to the intermediary agency, employers preferred to hire middle-aged women who already had children rather than younger women who are more open to relationships. Sexuality in other words polices the boundary between deserving migrant women and undeserving migrant women at the level of the everyday. While the foreignness of migrant women is upheld as morally and culturally fitting, and even as preferable to the mores of rural Turkish women, it is also construed as asexual foreignness, which is equated with social acceptance and legitimacy.

This expectation of sexual modesty amongst migrant workers also extends to their interactions with police. Chauvin (2012, 248) points out that in the Netherlands, the local police departments have learned to make practical distinctions between 'the law-abiding undocumented migrants', who are simply regarded as a nuisance and 'the criminal illegal' whose capture is a priority for police. It could be that local police departments in Turkey also utilize these distinctions. As Gulcur and Ilkcaracan (2002) noted, sex workers from Turkey are



treated very differently from care workers. Named as Natashas, 'hot and blond' women are depicted by news media and local actors as a threat to Turkish family structure.

For police officials, domestic workers are often seen as the law-abiding undocumented migrants, while the sex workers, because of the nature of their work, are seen as encouraging crime within society. As one police officer: 'Sex workers are more dangerous to the society. They regularly fight with their customers since they want more money. Then, there is more work for us and the order of the society is disturbed.'

The discrimination between moral women and immoral women determines the deportability of migrants. A migrant woman recounted a story of how she saved herself from deportation:

One day I was outside and wearing a skirt. He was suspicious and he offered to save me from deportation if I spent a night with him. I angrily told him that I would rather be deported than do what he asked. He gently smiled, congratulated me and gave me my passport back (giggling).

The social acceptance of domestic workers is realized through their simultaneous production as ideal workers and as ideal women. They are no more criminals in a strict sense and are recognized as such both by informal and formal circles within Turkish society. Their good behavior and display of ideal femininity has proven to be a valuable asset that secures the continuation of their acceptance in the host society. In what follows, I will discuss how this ambiguous legal status combined with gendered expectations can either result in a migrant's increased vulnerability or lessen the threat of deportation and further their integration within the host society.

#### **Legal Liminality: Between Rewarding Submissions and Deportability**

Armenian migrant women experience their liminal legal status within this gendered context. They quickly learn to rely not upon 'rights' to work or reside, but upon their gendered assets, which they must call upon to 'increase their deservingness' in Turkey. Their gendered identities can assist them in the following ways: sparing them from deportation, enabling them to access certain 'rights' such as health care and stable wages which would otherwise be denied them and increasing their opportunity to earn a 'temporary work status'. Although there may be other opportunities afforded them by proper conduct, these three points were impressed upon me by stories recounted by the migrant women themselves. These stories reveal that migrant women seek to remain obedient despite their acute awareness of the unfair and often abusive treatment that renders them economically vulnerable. They are also aware that their inclusion is conditional upon remaining desirable in their employers' eyes and this promises social and economic rewards.

One of those rewards concerns access to a stable income and health care. When I was visiting one of my subjects, Lydia, at her workplace where she cared for an elderly woman, her employers (the daughter and son-in-law of the woman) came to pay an unexpected visit to their mother. Lydia, who seemed ever prepared for such an eventuality, got up in a brisk move and welcomed her employers at the front door with gestures of submissiveness. We all sat together in the living room to sip coffee while Lydia refused to sit down, waiting for her next command. When they finally left, I was curious about her inflated deference. She remarked that she had been unable to receive her full wage for the last two months and she hoped that by her good behaviour could earn her back wages. In addition, she was having difficulties with her health, for which she absolutely needed to receive medical attention. In order to convince her employers to assist her, she needed to communicate how hard working and deferential she was.

Lydia is not alone in behaving this way, but all of the migrants I interviewed and observed conducted themselves likewise as a means of shoring up their lack of legal rights. One migrant worker noted that her employer loved her so much that she saved her son from deportation by bribing police officers. Lydia, like many other women I met, often seemed fearless, claiming that deportation did not scare them because they 'act in good faith'. The confidence in being endowed with morality and a good work ethic seemed to counter the fear of being deported and helped her to self-identify as un-deportable. This sort of confidence is common to all migrant women.

However, silence and remaining in the shadows emerge as some of the means through which migrant women demonstrate their loyalty and assume the mantle of 'law-abiding' migrants in Turkey. Migrant women were anxious not to be identified as immoral women in public. They avoided engaging in friendships with women who were known to engage in sex work; they paid attention to wearing the proper clothes and would

scrupulously avoid appearing improper. The performance of submissiveness and silence which are enacted in order to solicit the image of deserving womanhood are a pathway to protection or security for migrant women, but also lead to greater gendered vulnerability.

The story of a younger migrant woman, Armine, is instructive in this regard. She explained that she has been working for a rich married couple in an Istanbul villa and her employer has several times sexually abused her. Her narration reveals the ostensible vulnerability created by her liminal status:

I cannot go to the police. Often they are okay if you are a domestic worker, but if they think, you are sexually involved with men, they can abuse you or deport you. My current employer can lie and say I seduced her husband. I'm more inclined just to stay at this job. They promised that they will pay the fine and register me as a temporary worker.

Armine is fearful of being seen as 'sexually loose', which can lead to her exclusion from the labour market as 'unacceptable' as well as obstruct her from acquiring a 'lawful' status. She has to hide and remain silent, in a space of non-existence, as Coutin (2012) describes it. The legitimacy that she earns with her hard work and moral bearings can quickly vanish. Her position exemplifies the impact of legal liminality – the possibility to move between being legitimate to being deported.

The last example I would like to recount is from Lydia. The lack of a family in Turkey and the need to feel safe, she said, compelled her to date a married Turkish man, Ahmet. Lydia was pleased that he took her to the hospital, shopped for her, did some errands for her and gave her money when she needed it. However, Lydia was obliged to follow his rules. She expressed that he does not let her go out on her own and has beaten her several times for interrogating him about his behaviours.

Lydia established a relationship with Ahmet out of the sheer vulnerability associated with living in a foreign country. As much as it was protection that Lydia sought from the relationship, it is also the vulnerability of migrant women that attracts some men. Men often feel a sense of entitlement over migrant women, because, as Ahmet notes, 'they do not even belong to Turkey.' He says: 'These women come here alone. I protected one of them.'

Although an undocumented status is not something that generally provokes fear amongst migrant women, Ahmet was quite aware of the fact that these women will avoid unnecessary encounters with the police. Lydia told me that he often threatened to report her to the police if she decided to separate. One day during my field work, Lydia left Turkey hurriedly without announcing her departure to anyone. Months later, I found Lydia again and she spoke of her desperation during those times:

One day Ahmet called me. He said he is coming to kill me. I could not go to the police because they will prevent me from reentering the country. If I told my employer, she would immediately call the police. I had to run away.

Lydia's desperation points to some of the obvious pitfalls of her liminal status. Her silence and suffering was partly a function of her status which prevented her from seeking out the aid of the police. Her employability depended upon her avoiding any association with criminality but the fact that she was driven into this dangerous situation is also not unrelated with her status. However, Lydia's framing of her desperation also reveals a significant dimension of gender-specific vulnerability. Her silence and invisibility are also a result of her efforts to remain as a 'deserving' feminine subject within the local geographies of value.

## Conclusion

Although classified in a seemingly rigid legal vernacular as 'illegals', the experiences of Armenian migrant care workers draw attention to the importance of variegated forms of integration and exclusion on the basis of gendered and class-based moral norms in society. At the macro-level, migrant care workers are 'socially accepted' and integrated to the key sectors of economy with the complicity of Turkish state. While they are physically present in economic life, they completely disappear as rights-bearing subjects. With the law enacted in 2012, some of them have harboured hopes to have a temporary work status with limited rights. Among all these

prospects and potentials, in Parla's words (2007, 172) 'migrants share the experience of being "betwixt and between"'. They are caught in a limbo that can tilt at any direction.

In this context of legal disappearance, moral judgements on gendered morality and work-ethics have become a significant filter for local actors, according to which they judge the deservingness of migrant women for the afforded 'tolerance'. Rewards including access to health care, stable wages, 'temporary work status', and greater forgiveness for illegal transactions are delivered to 'good women', defined as sexually modest, sacrificing mothers and hard-working women. Three important implications of this culturally modified social acceptance discourse have been revealed: first, the gendered discourse of local actors within which legitimacy is produced is based on pitting different femininities against each other, thereby creating inequalities beyond the question of legal status second. Migrant women are seen as superior to Turkish care workers as well as foreign sex workers, generating hierarchies of femininity conflated with 'legal statuses'. Secondly, this social acceptance discourse, however, implied additional vulnerabilities related to gender and labour abuses as migrant women remained in the shadows of silence so as to appear as more deserving. Thirdly, migrant women also emerge as agents on their own rights, contributing to their own gender and class marginalization when they pursue opportunities in a gendered-base as opposed to a rights-based framework.



<sup>1</sup>For a broad base review of migration into Turkey's domestic care sector, see Ayse Akalin (2007); Sema Eder 2007; Serpil Kaşka 2006; Leyla Keough 2003; Saniye Dedeoğlu 2011.

<sup>2</sup>Elsewhere, scholars have pointed to the significance of several other graduated statuses, including temporary statuses, refugees, permanent residency and live-in care worker programs and argued that such different experiences of marginalization for migrant workers (Staulis and Bakan 1997; Anderson 2010; Johnson 2013).

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