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# Hired as a Caregiver, Demanded as a Housewife

## *Becoming* a Migrant Domestic Worker in Turkey

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**ABSTRACT** Women from post-socialist countries started migrating to Turkey in the second half of the 1990s to work in the domestic work sector. Migrant domestics have formed their niche as live-in caregivers, due to the disinclination of the existing local labour power to work in the care sector. Yet, the employer mothers, besides asking their live-in workers to tend their children, often demand that they also do the daily chores in the home, purposely leaving the heavy cleaning to their Turkish domestics. This way, live-in migrant domestics are promoted from the status of foreign employees to fictitious family members, to eventually embody 'the ideal housewife'.

**KEY WORDS** capacity ♦ caregiver ♦ domestic work ♦ feminization of migration ♦ housewife ♦ self ♦ Turkey

Caregiver needed, ASAP. Preferably live-in, foreigner (Moldovan, Georgian, Bulgarian migrant), should speak Turkish well. Will look after a baby, and help with daily tasks. Cleaning is done by another lady.<sup>1</sup>

The above is an email sent to one of the internet groups for mothers in Turkey. Subscribers to such lists are mostly working mothers who juggle their manifold roles in connection with work and home. The lists have multiple uses for the mothers, functioning as bulletin boards, support groups and places for chatting. Members exchange information on what they see as different aspects of motherhood, such as the risks of having an epidural, how to cook artichokes, or where to buy a pram. Caregivers are often a hot topic on these lists. While many employers use these lists to

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post ads for caregivers, as the above example, such cries for immediate help can also often turn into broader discussions about caregivers, like whether they are being paid too much or how one forms a relationship of trust with them. These online discussions indirectly help employers learn from each other about their expectations of their employees and their definitions of domestic work.

The advert example is worthy of attention because it describes quite successfully all the average qualities that employers look for today in their caregivers. They do not need to clean the apartment but they should help with the daily chores, even though their main responsibilities will be looking after a baby or child. And while doing so, they should be able to speak Turkish well because the only people who can do these tasks precisely as described are 'foreign caregivers'.

The demand for a foreign caregiver is perhaps the most striking part of this advert as it demonstrates a recent phenomenon in Turkey. Women began migrating to Turkey from post-socialist countries in the region to work in the domestic work sector in the second half of the 1990s. Today, the market is a segmented one, composed primarily of women from Moldova, but also Bulgaria, Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Migrant domestics work undocumented in Turkey, shuttling between their employers' and their own homes every few months or years,<sup>2</sup> thus creating their own 'transnational field' (Basch et al., 1994).

## TRYING TO NAME THE COMMODITY IN DOMESTIC WORK MARKETS

One of the basic aspects of domestic work markets that distinguishes them from other labour markets is the complex nature of the commodity being exchanged. As one of the first people to point out this fact, Mary Garcia Castro, suggests that 'what is bought and sold in domestic service is not simply the labour power of an *empleada* (employee) or her productive work and energy; it is her identity as a person' (Castro, 1989: 122). Building on this idea, Bridget Anderson argues that 'Employers want more than labour power. They often openly stipulate that they want a particular type of person justifying this demand on the grounds that they will be working in the home' (Anderson, 2000: 108). Another scholar, Sedef Arat-Koç observes that 'the display of deference, obedience, and submissiveness can sometimes be as important or more important than the actual physical work. The domestic worker, therefore, is hired not for her labour alone but also for her personality traits' (Arat-Koç, 1990: 90).

The aforementioned authors' emphasis on the distinct nature of the labour exchanged in domestic work is indeed an indisputable fact. However, these

arguments may lead to a general suggestion that when hiring a new worker employers are after a person with a particular personality; one who is already submissive, ready to be absorbed into the power relationships that the job involves. While the personality/identity of the domestic worker must be encapsulated in describing her services, that should not lead us to assume that the demand there is only for a certain type of personality that is in existence prior to her employment. The question that needs to be posed rather is whether 'the particular person' that employers demand and the one they eventually hire are actually the same person.

In another study on the way gender works on the shopfloor in transnational production, Salzinger reminds us to differentiate between looking at *the self* and *the situated selves* 'which are produced when the self and the social meet' (Salzinger, 2003: 159). Rather than assuming that women who work on the shopfloor possess one kind of docile and dexterous self that is fixed and already existing, which is then put into production, she argues that production reconstructs these selves against a background of a rhetoric of docile and dexterous women. What we end up having is neither one kind of self nor one kind of production but variation across workplaces and also across the way gender interpellates subjects into production.

Salzinger's objection is to the unanimous acceptance of the idea that the recent global production is based on the cheap labour of women, as a given. Following her remarks, that the 'notion of an "always-already" docile, dexterous, and cheap woman, that is, of a potential worker whose productive femininity requires not creation but recognition, is [a] transitionally produced fantasy' (Salzinger, 2003: 10), I argue that migrant domestic workers are not hired as having a particular type of personality fit for what the work requires. They, too, like the workers on the assembly line, are imagined and made into what their employers desire them to be, which may happen in different forms, creating different kinds of relationships.

To give an example, when Constable (1997: 14) explains how the Filipinas in Hong Kong are disciplined into being domestic workers she mentions that they are 'expected to follow timetables and work schedules . . . [r]egardless of whether the floor or windows appear clean' (Constable, 1997: 90). This form of applying rules is in fact the opposite of how domestic work is done in Turkey, where employers demand their domestics to take their own initiative. Rather than imposing precise work schedules, they rely on their workers to do whatever needs to be done whenever the workers see it as right without letting anything go pending. Juxtaposing these two cases, and following Salzinger's reminder that while gender always matters, it just works in different ways in different work settings, I want to suggest that we should not pursue the idea of the one kind of domestic worker who has a certain kind of personality or self. What we should be doing rather is looking at what domestic workers become in each context.

This article is an attempt to trace the becoming of migrant domestics who work as caregivers for Turkish working mothers with babies and/or young children. It focuses strictly on the narratives of the employers, taken from 21 in-depth interviews (all done in Istanbul, in the employers' homes, offices or in cafes) about how they perceive their workers and what the job involves, to illustrate that migrant caregivers are demanded not because of who they are but because of who they are thought to have the potential to become. While it is possible to find traces of some of the arguments made throughout the article also in the interviews with other groups of employers (like those who were employing migrant domestics as housekeepers or as caregivers to their elderly relatives), the consecutive stages of training mentioned in the article are most apparent in the narratives of working mothers who more than anyone else need domestic help with the multiple 'shifts' (Hochschild and Machung, 1989) and hence the roles that they have to juggle. The mothers were interviewed using the snowball method. Initial contacts were made via the email lists on mothering. Their regular use of the internet was mostly due to their careers, according to which we may refer to them as upper middle class.

The interviews and emails were collected as part of a broader project on the migrant domestic worker market in Turkey, for which I have interviewed migrant domestics coming from Moldova, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Turkmenistan, Georgia and Armenia; Turkish domestics; Turkish employers; Turkish agencies; and Turkish officials. The methodologies utilized for the research also include participant observation and media scanning, whereby I have followed five email lists on mothering in Turkey between 2000 and 2007 as well as various newspaper reports on the feminization of migration and trafficking in Turkey published since 2000.

#### TURKEY: FROM LIVE-OUT TURKISH DOMESTICS TO LIVE-IN MIGRANTS

At first, the idea that women in Turkey now import foreign domestics sounds puzzling since Turkey already has a well-established domestic labour market composed of Turkish women (Bora, 2005; Kalaycıoğlu and Rittersberger-Tılıç, 2001). Turkish domestic workers are from urban poor classes, who originally came to the cities as part of a major rural-to-urban migration flow that started in the 1950s. While men were mostly integrated into the formal and informal sectors as labour power, the same was not exactly true for many women, who lacked the kind of education or specialization that would allow them to work in any occupation. As many of them are originally of rural background, their only work experience was of agricultural work on their families' plots. That is why they took up domestic work in order to help the family budget and constituted the first fully professional community of domestic workers in Turkey.

An important factor in the composition of the Turkish domestic workers' sector is the patriarchal control of the male relatives over the labour of these women, which has impacted where and how this gendered labour pool could work (Özyeğin, 2000: 3). Even under severe economic hardship, many male relatives have been resistant to allowing the women in their families to work outside. Those who did, at least initially, allowed their wives or sisters to work only for employers who either lived close by or whom they personally knew; such as doormen letting their wives work for the residents of the flats who lived in the same building. Due to this bounded availability, Turkish domestic workers chose to work predominantly as live-out workers, doing mostly cleaning, thus structuring the sector in a special way.

Because of this conservative approach embedded in the sector, Turkish women, for the most part, do not work in the caregiving niche. While two reasons may be offered to elucidate this, they each have different explanatory power for the limited supply in caregivers for different care-needing groups. The first is the relationality aspect, which is mostly the reason why there has not emerged a sector of Turkish caregivers for the elderly. The crucial element of caring is the face-to-face interaction between the carer and cared for (Bubeck, 1995: 129), which may require caregivers to pass beyond certain lines of intimacy with a person that they normally would not do. This has especially been a problem in situations like bathing or being alone with elderly men. As for the limited supply of Turkish caregivers employed to look after children, it is mostly the result of caregiving being unscheduled work, which may consequently require workers to do tasks at odd times. Turkish domestics, however, because they see their own family affairs as their priority, have been disinclined to submit to the possible fluctuations in work hours in the childcare sector.

Because of this limited availability of Turkish women, the work of caring for children was done either by family members or by Turkish caregivers who worked only as live-out domestics. In Özyeğin's terminology, these 'generalists' work for the same family every or several days of the week, thus being in charge of a range of tasks, from cleaning to childcare (Özyeğin, 2000: 97). However, as they have been insistent on working to regular work schedules, the demand for generalists has never been very high since their approach to work impedes the employers' need for flexible labour, especially in the case of working women. When generalists are employed, any changes in work schedules, or taking a night off definitely require a contingency plan for the employers, which simply becomes more work.

I arranged almost everything in my life to suit the live-out domestic lady. Thinking if she feels happy here, so will my baby. We started with a schedule

of from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. on weekdays, and half-day on Saturdays. I said first comes the baby, then the daily chores. I came home many times early thinking if she goes home early and does her own domestic work, she will work more enthusiastically for me . . . I let her go home around 5 p.m. in the winter since it gets dark early then. In the summer she looked annoyed when it was past 5 p.m. because she got used to going home at 5 p.m. In the holidays (when I sometimes work), never mind the first two days that she did not work but she not only did not show up on the third and fourth days either, but when the holiday included a Friday, she took the half-day Saturdays off as well and ended up taking six full days off. Sometimes I took her and my baby to the events I needed to attend due to my job just so that she would have the experience. . . . But what do you think she did in return? She said 'I got home late tonight, it will be best if I don't come to work tomorrow'. I got her and her children presents every holiday and birthday. Whenever I came home a little late, I either took her home myself, or sent her home by taxi. In other words, everything I did to make her feel nice, came back to me as some kind of negativity. I finally fired her when she asked for a day off, thinking she was abusing my good will. (email, mother of a 16-month-old boy, occupation unknown)

The rapid expansion of migrant domestics in Turkey is then closely related with this unfulfilled demand for caregivers who can show the capacity for flexible labour needed by employers. Unlike Turkish domestic workers, migrant domestics, and especially the newcomers, accept job opportunities unconditionally. In fact, the live-in aspect of the job has made it all the more appealing for them since that way, they do not have to pay for any living expenses. Interestingly, what have been left for them are not merely the poorer paying jobs, as we often see mentioned in the literature on foreign labour (Chang, 2000; Sassen, 1989), but those jobs that the local workers see as culturally unsuitable for themselves.

More precisely, while economic factors cannot be overlooked, I argue that they by themselves are not the determining aspect in the expansion of the Turkish migrant domestic workers' sector. Migrant domestics are indeed paid less than a Turkish woman would be for the same kind of work.<sup>3</sup> What is just as important, if not more so however, is that even when an employer is keen to pay higher wages to a Turkish caregiver, it is much harder to find one who is readily compliant to do the work of intimacy as flexibly as her employer will demand of her. It is because migrant domestics, unlike Turkish workers, do not make such set demands of their employers about the conditions and content of the work, that they have created a new niche in the Turkish domestic work sector as live-in caregivers. Their arrival has not made the Turkish domestics redundant but has created a new division of labour in the sector, similar to that in Italy (Andall, 2000), in which Turkish domestics continue working as *live-out domestics* and migrant domestics<sup>4</sup> are demanded as *live-in caregivers*.

## MIGRANT DOMESTICS: FIRST A CAREGIVER, THEN MUCH MORE . . .

In the case of caring for children, it is usually either the birth of a baby or the end of the mother's maternal leave that initiates the employment of a migrant domestic. Mothers do not prefer that the extra help needed at this point come from relatives – their own mothers or mothers-in-law – because that may also potentially mean handing over the management of their own family affairs to their older relatives and jeopardize their position of authority. When a caregiver is hired, the role set out for the older relatives instead is supervising the caregivers while the mothers are absent. In this new arrangement, as the live-in domestic does most of the physical labour of caregiving, the grandmothers pay frequent visits to see their grandchildren during the day and then report to their daughters/daughters-in-law any problems they may have sensed with the caregivers. When the mother arrives at the end of the day, she preferably only spends quality time with her baby/children.

Most employers define the responsibilities of their caregivers as paying full attention to their children the whole time that they are not home. Yet, as the advert at the beginning of this article illustrated, tending the children is hardly their only job. Despite the initial form of the demand for migrant domestic labour as live-in caregivers, most of them take over other responsibilities right away.

Speak to anyone in Turkey, I know this from my colleagues too, that a caregiver cannot just take care of children. This is simply not possible, this is not America. We cannot afford to employ one person for cleaning the pool, another for filling it, another for clearing away the leaves like they do; it just does not work that way here. Our economy cannot support all this. We work for so many hours and make only so much money and give a good part of it to the people working in our homes. That's why, ask anyone . . . you will know that the caregivers must help with the domestic chores as well. . . . Some may demand a lot, another may demand less but the daily general tasks, things you would be doing if you were not working, even if you have a cleaning lady, *whatever you are responsible for*, she should help you at least with that. (Interview, mother of a four-year-old boy, IT department, transnational firm; my emphasis)

In other words, the suggested division of labour, that is migrant domestics being in charge of caregiving and Turkish domestics of the other household chores, especially cleaning, does not work perfectly since migrant domestics are expected to take up other household responsibilities, as well. Looking closely at the transformation of domestic labour in Turkey, then, we see not only new actors emerging but also a new kind of coding around the domestic tasks in relation to the different capacities that the actors in question show.

I argue that in the households employing a migrant domestic, there are perhaps two boundaries drawn among domestic chores. While the first



one is a thick, impenetrable one, the other is a more permeable one. As these two lines create three subsequent categories within domestic work, they also establish different positions within each for the different actors involved in the realm of domestic tasks. Moving from one category of tasks to another also means moving from one position associated with that task to the next one. These categories, based on their eminence for maintaining the order at home, together constitute a pathway for migrant domestics to follow. The direction of this pathway is for them ultimately to become what their employers need and desire them to be. In the next part of the article, I explain what categories this pathway involves and in following it, what migrant domestics are expected to become.

#### A LIVE-IN CAREGIVER IS: NEITHER A CLEANING LADY . . .

The first line, which I refer to as the impenetrable one, helps to define the responsibilities of live-in domestics by distinguishing them from those that live-out Turkish cleaning ladies are in charge of. Besides the generalists, who were mentioned earlier as working for one family and usually doing all the domestic chores, the more predominant group in the Turkish domestic work sector are the 'specialists' (Özyeğin, 2000: 97) who work for multiple employers. It is the image of a specialist that comes to mind when one refers to a cleaning lady in Turkey. As they only work for one household a day every week, or every other week, their work is mostly confined to doing the 'heavy cleaning', which is described as the more physical, labour-intensive tasks like washing the windows, vacuuming the entire apartment, scrubbing the floors and shaking out the carpets. As the advert at the beginning of the article illustrates, many employers now living with migrant domestics continue employing their specialist Turkish cleaners. The impenetrable line drawn between domestic chores now distinguishes between 'heavy cleaning' and the 'daily chores', as well as the actors who are identified with each. Apart from the activities labelled as heavy cleaning, all others, such as ironing, doing the laundry, dusting, making beds, come under the description of 'daily chores'.

And I never expected cleaning from my caregiver. But I expected her to tidy the place up. I especially expected the live-ins to do so. Ironing, etc. But I did not expect her to wash the windows. There was a cleaning lady in charge of that. (Interview, mother of a three-year-old boy, independent lawyer)

Since my son is now old enough to go to school, she is totally free. From 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Therefore all the domestic chores are her job, I don't mean the heavy cleaning, there is another lady for that, but the daily cleaning of the apartment, cooking, ironing, washing. She is like a housekeeper, in other words. I do not want to know that if, say, we need to buy yoghurt that day

that I was supposed to buy it. No. Everything to do with home is her responsibility. (Interview, mother of a six-year-old boy, banker)

The invisibility of domestic work that has long been suggested by feminist scholars is now projected onto the new migrant actors of domestic work in Turkey. By emphasizing the distinction between heavy cleaning and daily chores, employers suggest that the former needs to be seen as real work while the latter is not. While the daily chores are what the employers would have to be doing themselves, had they not been working, they would have never done the heavy cleaning themselves. Özyeğin suggests that heavy cleaning appears as the most masculinized task of domestic work, marking the body of those who perform it, i.e. Turkish cleaning ladies, with 'signs of peasantry' (Özyeğin, 2000: 125). This is perhaps the most definitive distinction made between middle classes and their Turkish employees. The peasant body of the Turkish domestic does what it was always cut out for: non-stop physical activity in the apartment of her employer all day long, leaning out of windows to wash them immaculately, moving the heavy furniture around so as not to leave a single spot that has not been both vacuumed and scrubbed. In the eyes of the employers, these are the kinds of physical tasks that are not all that different from what the Turkish cleaner would be doing in the fields or groves, had she not moved from her small village. The Turkish domestic is always the outsider to her employer's middle-class family, not just because she is a live-out and has preferred her own family over that of her employer, but also because it is already inscribed on her body as such.

### ... NOR THE LADY OF THE HOUSE HERSELF

The first boundary drawn, between heavy cleaning and daily chores, then, determines who live-in domestics are, by establishing that they are *not* live-out Turkish cleaners. As this boundary work identifies the outsider, it also sets up the difference between the inside and outside of the employer's family, which then helps to bring those living inside, i.e. the live-in migrant domestics and their employers, even if in a hierarchical relationship of power, closer to one another. While the Turkish domestic is distinguished by her peasant/lower-class background through the work she is put in charge of, the more modern appearance of the migrant domestic stands out all the more, confusing the employer into thinking that she has hired someone who is not all that different from her.

Migrant workers look cleaner to me. I mean I have never seen a Turkish employee bring her own tooth brush and towel when she came to work. These migrants do that. OK, so they don't have money but they always have a body lotion, a deodorant. They dress up nicer, cleaner. They pay attention

to that. I have never sensed body odour from them. . . . They take a shower every night. (Interview, mother of a six- and a two-year-old, accounting department, transnational firm)

At first look then, the new migrant domestic is significantly different from the former employees of the middle-class home and seems to simulate her employer. Especially because now she handles the daily tasks that her employer was doing prior to the employment of the migrant domestic, the second work boundary becomes crucial to establish the differences between her and her female employer. With the heavy cleaning now set aside, this project can only be realized by posing a new set of categories into the daily tasks.

The second line is drawn around cooking to distinguish it from the rest of the daily chores. Cooking appears to be the only domestic task that employers are consistently reluctant to hand over to their live-in domestics, even when they appear to be short of time or when they can afford more domestic assistance. Two things perhaps mark cooking as discrete. First, unlike the other domestic chores, which are perceived as women's natural talents, it is considered something that one learns and achieves over time. Unlike the other tasks, it requires a combination of skill, experience and a particular kind of subjectivity (Valentine, 1999). One both has to practise it over and over again and should have the sense of taste to tell what makes a dish good quality. The other aspect of cooking is the possible codification of taste as being cultural (Mintz and du Bois, 2002). The 'foreignness' of migrant domestics, whose diet is based more on meat products and carbohydrates as they come from Eastern Europe and Central Asia, is seen to hinder their ability to create the 'right' tastes for their employers who wish to consume more vegetable-based dishes – partly because of the way Turkish cuisine is and partly because the middle-class employers prefer more healthy diets. As a result, many employers use their migrant domestics' help for the basics of cooking, like peeling or slicing vegetables, while they themselves mix all the ingredients, adding their own spices and hence their 'magical' touch.

I refer to this second boundary line around cooking as more permeable for two reasons. First of all, not so many employers mention this second distinction between cooking and the other chores. In these families, the migrant domestic is put in charge of all the daily tasks, from the beginning. More importantly, however, in those families where cooking is not made the migrant domestic's responsibility at first, it is seen as a task that was only *initially* denied to the live-in domestic worker. For those employers, while cooking is indeed the most personalized of the daily chores, it can nonetheless be learned when practised regularly. Most employers see it as a process in which they can 'train' their domestics so that they will eventually be able to hand over the work of cooking, along with all the other chores, to the latter.

My argument so far has been that in many homes, as the domestic tasks are in themselves categorized, the set of responsibilities in each group also alludes to a position. As a live-in caregiver is hired, she is assigned some of these tasks, and not others, in a gradual manner, which functions like a pathway that moves her closer to the family she now lives with and works for. I try to introduce their progress along this pathway as 'the training' of the migrant domestics in terms of the tasks and their 'becoming' in terms of their status vis-a-vis their employer families.

I told the agency that we wanted someone to look after the baby and help with the daily chores, who had children herself, had not worked in Turkey before, did not smoke, would not take time off . . . who would run around and play and have the energy to laugh with my baby. . . . I could never have imagined we could have such a sincere, decent, loyal, respectful caregiver. When my daughter woke up, she would run to me saying 'our baby is up, Mrs . . .', would follow me at home like a shadow without disturbing me, would show up by my side every time I needed her, would be *so open to learning new things*, such a smart young woman. . . . By the end of the second month, she was *definitely the lady of the house*. She was able to use the high-tech cooker that even my mother could not operate, would take out the food processor every morning and squeeze fresh orange juice for me, would carry around my baby, who would cry non-stop because of colitis until 1 a.m. in the morning, as I was dead tired, but would get up in the morning at the exact hour we told her to, even more precisely than the clock. (email, mother of a six-month-old girl, occupation unknown; my emphasis)

As this extract illustrates, rather than hiring a certain kind of self, employing a migrant domestic is about gradually integrating the worker into the way domestic work is done in middle-class families. Many employers I interviewed told me about a trade-off they found themselves making while hiring a live-in migrant domestic. Their options were choosing between a newcomer who would be paid whatever the minimum rate was at the time, yet would not know how to maintain the 'order' in a Turkish middle-class home, or a 'trained' domestic, who having previously worked for other Turkish families had enough work experience in how to run a similar home but would in return demand a much higher wage.<sup>5</sup> Each time the need to hire a new person arose, the matter appeared as one of either preparing to move the migrant domestic along the pathway of training or finding a worker who had already been led the way by another employer.

Once the migrant domestic is led along the training pathway, she passes beyond the two lines that organize domestic work. The position where she now stands vis-a-vis her employer family, since she is now in charge of most of the tasks – looking after the baby, doing the daily chores, including cooking but minus the heavy cleaning – has placed her closer to the lady of the family due to one simple fact: the migrant domestic has now taken over *the exact list* of domestic responsibilities that her employer had prior to her employment.

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## THE MIGRANT DOMESTIC AS THE PROFESSIONAL HOUSEWIFE

Once a migrant domestic has passed this last stage, a Turkish employer could feel that the live-in services of the former have saved her from doing all the work herself as well as from assigning some of the chores to her Turkish live-out, and could rest content, seeing her employee as the perfect servant. The narratives of working mothers, however, indicate that there is yet one last step to be taken.

The problem now is that leaving the migrant domestic in the status of a servant would still require the employer to closely inspect the work of the domestic and regularly instruct her. If, however, the migrant domestic is urged to take the initiative into her own hands, she can both do the work and monitor her own shortcomings without needing her employer to assess them. Thus, the last step in the becoming of the migrant domestic is to fictively adopt her as 'one of the family', so that she will do the work not just because she is obliged to do it but because she also wants to do it.

Since the position of the domestic worker, whose workplace is her employer's home, is always potentially ambiguous, the boundaries between her private life and that of the employers can easily become blurred. Through the use of kinship rhetoric, the migrant domestic is fictively assimilated into her employer's family, which in turn serves to frame her professional work as her natural responsibility towards them. She gets swamped in all the domestic chores, just as her employer used to. Like in the joke among Filipinas in Hong Kong that Constable recounts: the lady does not want to give her live-in domestic any time off, not because she does not want the latter to have some free time, but simply because she is 'one of the family' (Constable, 1997: 104): one cannot take time off from being a family member. As long as the lady cannot take time off from being the mother, the wife, the manager of household affairs herself, neither should the live-in domestic. She is expected to become someone who can push aside the fact that she is professionally employed and embrace the home of her employer as her own and turn into a 'housewife' for all of them.

She does everything, even though I did not give her too many responsibilities at the beginning. She looks after the kids, then she tidies up the house, mops it up, cleans the bathroom and kitchen every day, then she irons and cooks, I mean she does everything *like it is her own home, like she is tending her own children*, even though I have not told her to do all that, she makes me feel so much at rest, when I come home, I find everything ready. (Interview, mother of a one- and a four-year-old, corporate outdoor training firm; my emphasis)

. . . for example, I never told her to do so but when I came home I would find all the curtains washed and clean. I mean she really would look after the place *like her own home*. I mean she would look around and see that the

place was dirty, because she lived there with me, she would spend all her time there, so *just as any housewife would do*, she took down those curtains, washed them all and hung them up again without asking me and I would come home and see all she had done and would say good for you, well done. (Interview, single mother of a 12-year-old girl, lawyer; my emphasis)

It is important to note here that what I mean by becoming the housewife is more complicated than acquiring a particular type of personality, something I objected to earlier in the article. The housewife, rather, refers to two things: one is doing all the domestic work out of love and not as work and the second is flexibility in the domestic sphere – in terms of both time and work. In other words, whoever embodies it, needs to be sometimes submissive, other times directive and other times something else and do the chores in hand accordingly, depending on the situation. As it is normally the working mother who has to fill all these roles, the help that she needs is not a fixed state of being but a capacity to move between all the different roles that she herself would have to perform in her home.

#### THE DEMAND FOR MIGRANT DOMESTICS: PERSONALITY OR CAPACITY?

Despite their professional training skills [maids of the 21st century] cannot earn enough to make a living in their own countries. Thus, they migrate to countries where they are needed. However, their professional expertise is not wanted there either; instead, what is needed are *capacities* that women seem to possess everywhere and that are ascribed to either their nature or their gender-specific socialization. (Lutz, 2002: 7; my emphasis)

I started this article by expressing my disagreement with the arguments that suggest that in the domestic work sector, workers are expected to have a certain kind of self. My objection there was twofold; one was questioning the presentation of migrant domestics as already submissive women who simply possess what the job would require and the other was underlining the fact that the role employers play throughout the process should not be overlooked. When looking at the migrant domestic work sectors, the relationship between the employers and employees needs to be thoroughly problematized and should not just be assumed to be of a single kind that happens in the same way wherever it may be.

In the Turkish context, the employers' narratives demonstrate that they want their workers to have neither a submissive nor obedient self. Instead, their appreciation of the work they pay for becomes utmost if they can see that their employees can take over the different tasks and demonstrate on their own initiative the appropriate approaches to home and children required by these tasks.

That is why I suggested viewing the employers' demands from their employees not as wanting them to *be* a certain kind of person but as wanting the person they hire to *become* the kind of person they feel they are in need of. Contrary to a view like 'The employer is buying the power to command, not the property in the person, but *the whole person*' (Anderson, 2000: 113), I argue that the demand in the migrant domestic workers' market is instead for a 'genderly' capacity, as also suggested by Lutz in the previous extract, that can then be shaped and reformed, based on the needs of the employers. The services that they buy from their migrant domestics are not their personalities as fixed entities, but the capacity to mould them.

My point about the demand for a 'genderly' capacity is crucially important to explain the expansion of the migrant domestic workers' sector in Turkey. When women from the post-socialist countries first started migrating to Turkey, there was no overt need for a new professional labour source in the domestic work sector. Yet, from the perspective of a 'genderly' capacity, the services of Turkish workers were limited when compared with those of migrant domestics. Turkish live-out cleaners plot their lives around their own private family affairs. Their job is always constrained by their primary responsibilities to their own families and the patriarchal power over their bodies and labour. That is why they could never really pass beyond the role of servant/cleaner for their employers. The live-out cleaner leaves the home of the employer every time her work there is done, handing over a clean and tidy apartment, to go to her own home. She is always outside the boundaries of guilt that the employer herself experiences when she is unable to match a domestic task with the right kind of affective state (Cowan, 1992: 390), as the cleaner only sells her labour for the limited periods of time she spends in the employer's home.

The migrant domestic, however, through her physical movement from her own home to that of her employer, is turned into an 'unclaimed' woman. As long as she works in another country, for another family, she has no home of her own to go to, no family affairs to attend to, no children of her own to tend, no husband to keep content. She stays in her employer's home after the cleaning lady leaves. She can get up as early in the morning as necessary, or as many times throughout the night as she is asked to, go to bed late or iron the same shirt again and again and again until it is absolutely wrinkle-free. It is due to the potential of being open to do all these things, if the need occurs, that migrant domestics become the embodiment of the ideal housewife on behalf of their employers.

As one user wrote earlier 'I have to attend all the chores of my home and tend my baby, why can't caregivers do all that as well.' That is true, too (although I have never been such an efficient woman myself). As long as the two sides communicate their expectations, there should be no problem but we, as [someone else] too, said the other day, expect everything. The poor woman should be an excellent cook, the apartment should be spotless, our

children should be the most well-behaved, smartest kids in the world while we become career women. Let's face the truth, such a thing is just not possible – unless your name is Samantha and you can make all these come true by twitching your nose. (email, mother of an 18-month-old boy, also interviewed, independent lawyer)

## CONCLUSION

Had it not been for the covert need for live-in caregivers in Turkey, the demand for migrant domestics would probably not have been as high. However, in this article I have tried to illustrate that the reasons behind the employment of migrant domestic workers are more complicated than what the initial demand for them appears to entail. Their capacity to provide live-in domestic services is appropriated by the working mothers in order to gradually pass their own domestic duties onto the new employees. Yet, this is a selective process, whereby only the kinds of tasks that would strictly have to be done by the employers are recoded as the responsibilities of the migrant domestics. These redefinitions simultaneously work as mechanisms of reconfiguring the positions of all the actors involved with the work in the domestic sphere. The place allocated to the migrant domestic in all this is a specific point where she stands close enough to her employer family so that she would neither take a merely professional approach to her work the way her Turkish cleaner colleagues do – who as a result do the work reluctantly – nor claim the status of her employer, which would give her the potential to assume a position of authority to slacken or to reclassify the pending tasks. My argument has been that these distinctions between the positions of the parties involved are not the result of some fixed features of their identities but of the boundaries created out of the everyday practices of domestic work, especially by the employer mothers. The migrant domestic is, as a result, made merely the labourer of all the daily tasks of the middle-class home, not through mechanisms of classic exploitation by which she would be turned into 'the other' in relation to her employer family but by accepting her as 'one of them'. This way, she is to assume all the responsibilities and initiatives that a perfect housewife would be expected to, while being denied the right to step out of that role.

As a final note, I would like to emphasize that while the work of most migrant domestics is assessed by the criteria of the perfect housewife, this argumentation does not mean that this is what they all ultimately turn into. This image of a woman who makes everything possible and ready for everyone at home is really the description of a superhuman being more than a real person and yet it continuously hounds the migrant domestics just as it once did their employers.



## NOTES

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1. All the interviews were conducted and all the email correspondences were originally in Turkish and were translated by the author.
2. How long migrant domestics choose to stay and work in Turkey varies, depending on their nationality and visa status. For example, while most Moldovans work for six months, Bulgarians, most of whom are of Turkish descent, cross the border once every three months to renew their visas, while Turkmens stay for at least a year or longer.
3. In January 2007, the minimum rate for migrant domestics was around US\$400–US\$450 a month, which had gone up from the US\$250 that applied when they first started working in Turkey in the second half of the 1990s. A Turkish caregiver, if she worked as a live-in, would demand at least US\$700–US\$800 a month.
4. Despite the wide variety in their backgrounds, the ethnic diversity of the migrant domestics is mostly insignificant in terms of the kinds of work they are employed for. In other words, regardless of their national and ethnic background, all non-Turkish domestics are demanded first and foremost as live-ins and/or as caregivers; while some also work as housekeepers. Interviews with employers have shown that hiring women strictly from the same ethnic/national background is not an issue for most people.
5. A migrant domestic with experience would demand US\$550–US\$600 a month. The highest wage I heard of being paid to a migrant domestic was US\$650. There were, however, also myths circulating in the market about migrant domestics who were being paid US\$700–US\$800 a month, although I did not meet anyone who confessed to earning that much.

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