



MIGRATION and DOMESTIC WORK
*The collective organisation of women
and their voices from the city*
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Why this study?

AIMS

Explore women's agency and its relationship with religiosity among migrant women, especially Kurds.

METHODS

Interviews with 120 women in 3 cities: London, Berlin, Istanbul

- **Agency**: Ability to make effective choices and transform these into desired outcomes, against conditions which may prohibit agency...
- **Patriarchy and Religion** as two obstacles preventing women's agency
- **Qualitative research**, a narrative inquiry, a vantage point for exploring the links between subjectivity and social structures

Religion

52 Muslim

44 Christian

4 Other religions

20 Atheist

Managing the intersections of religion, labour, gender, sexuality and migration

Religion	London	Berlin	Istanbul	Total	% of total
Muslim	17	10	25	52	43%
Sunni	3	3	15	21	
Shaafii	2	-	4	6	
Alawite	12	6	6	24	
Shiah	-	1	-	1	
Christian	15	16	13	44	37%
Catholic	5	9	13	14	
Orthodox	10	7	-	30	
Other	2	2	-	4	3%
Hinduism Buddhism Paganism					
Atheist	6	12	2	20	17%

Women's positions

Defensive –

Some women objected to any possible connection between religion and male dominance

Some women asserted that it was not the religion itself, but out-dated views of religion which was responsible for the secondary positions of women.

- I'm religious not because of my family, my parents are secular people. I became religious [Islam] only because of my social environment here in Berlin.
- My parents don't have any chance to control me here. Despite Turkey is also a Muslim country Turkish people here I see do not have strong relations with religion. They represent good example in my view (Turkmen woman)
- This (doing the housework) is normal because when I was kid, not my father but my mum was doing everything inside home and breadwinners were males, not women in my religion (Catholic). [Italian lesbian spouse]

120 Migrant women

London

Berlin

Istanbul

Domestic workers – carers,
cleaners – in private households

120 women

28 national identities – 39 Kurdish

- For over 30 years I have been doing cleaning and care work. First in 1950s my parents migrated to the UK then I was born here in London. In my big family for three generations we did and still have been doing the same job: cleaning homes, caring for children and elderly or sick people. Imagine, three generations, more than 50 years. My parents, my sisters, my daughter and two granddaughters we all did, and are still doing, care and cleaning jobs. *(Caribbean woman, London)*
- You are alienated from everything, you live with a hope that you would go back home one day, you miss your people but you are unable to go and see them every year because flight costs are very high. *(Kurdish woman, 47, four children and husband living with her, London)*

Why migrate?

- War/conflict - 26 women
 - Seeking asylum
 - Dreams of better life – 53 women
 - Sexual orientation
 - Family reasons
 - Family reunification
 - Education
- I migrated; we escaped from the war in Turkey to London in 1989. As soon as we arrived (together with my husband) we started to work at the same clothing factory in London. My daughters were 11 and eight years old. Moreover living in Turkey was too risky and unsecure for Kurdish people in the 1980s and 1990s; every night we had a police raid. I didn't want my children to grow up in such a crazy political environment. In the last five years I have been doing child care work at private houses. *(Kurdish care worker, London)*
 - I did not dream of migrating. I worked hard to enter university in Armenia... However my brother suddenly became sick and medical treatment had a high cost for our family. Also I was a young woman, meaning that migration alone might be dangerous for me. Despite all these risks I decided to go abroad to work....I chose Turkey because it was easier and cheaper and because there was a Turkish Armenian community in Istanbul.
 - My children always tell me that they are very lucky comparing their friends and relatives in Turkey because they speak three languages, they know different cultures, and they have a chance to get a much better education. *(Turkish woman, Berlin)*

Work

- Elder care
- Disabled care
- Child care
- Cleaning

Previous work/qualifications

- Nursing
- Scientists
- Psychology
- international law

- Clients' needs are not limited by their physical needs, they also need verbal therapy, to chat, to talk. However time is limited because you need to get to other clients..
- I work eight hours a day and five days a week. I hate cleaning, either in clients' houses or in my own home..
- I graduated from the faculty of Chemistry in Bulgaria but I never worked as a chemist because the wages in Bulgaria were too low. (now in Berlin)
- When I migrated from Cameroon to Berlin in 2005 my dream was to get a university degree, but I had to leave in my first year because I needed to survive. In the last nine years I forgot about university

Type of work done, by city

This varies depending on the level of economic development and the demographic demands for such work in each country.

In Berlin, the majority of elder care workers also found themselves cleaning, but did not define themselves as cleaners as this is the least prestigious work.

Type of Work	London	Berlin	Istanbul	TOTAL
Elder Care	12	36	10	58
Disabled Care	1	1	-	2
Child Care	11	-	6	17
Cleaning	16	3	24	43
Totals	40	40	40	120

Experiences of discrimination

- Language
 - Being a migrant
 - Being a domestic worker

 - Nationality

 - Race
 - Sex
- You can never speak a second language fluently and this makes you a second class citizen and causes you to be insulted and shamed in the society you live in. *(Turkish woman in Berlin)*
 - I am exposed to discrimination every day! German colleagues usually ignore and exclude me not because of the lack of language, but because I'm from a backward country, for instance they behave to staffs from other EU countries such as Spain or Italy differently. Also because I'm a temporary worker unlike from the majority of them. Discrimination is also related with the cultural difference between Eastern and Western Germans so that when I work with Eastern German colleagues they offer me coffee, lunch, and inform me about all rules of the firm we work for. If I work with Western Germans they tell me that I have no business drinking coffee or having lunch with them, they even warn me that I must bring my own coffee and meal with me. *(Kurdish woman, Berlin)*
 - Once I was faced with sexual harassment in Turkey but could tell no-one, because in my culture mostly it is the women who are punished not the men. *(Kurdish atheist woman, Berlin)*

Identity

- National
 - Family
 - Marriage – 59 (+ 34 divorced)
 - Religion
 - Culture
 - Education
 - Gender
 - Race
 - Ethnicity
 - Class
- Yes, I am woman, but I am not only a woman, I am also worker, I am also Kurdish and I am also Alawite.
 - I belong to both Germany and Turkey.... Also I am totally free in Germany; if I stayed in Turkey I wouldn't be able to work.
 - We neither belong to this country nor to this culture. We're totally alienated. German patients do not like black care workers.... If there was no war in Eritrea I wouldn't go to any country.
 - Family and home is like a prison for women

Health and welfare

Mainly the over 40s

- Cracked pelvis
 - Herniated disk
 - Back surgery
 - Hand and carpal badly injured
 - Pains in arms and shoulders – lifting
 - Legs and knees
 - Exposure to dangerous cleaning chemicals
- I have asthma, so I have serious attacks, breathless, coughing and etc.
 - Many care workers are not provided with equipment, but still have to move and clean patients; our bodies replace the lack of tools and equipment. By doing that the German state saves money but we lose our health.

Gender roles

QUESTIONS:

- Distribution of household tasks by gender
 - Who is the breadwinner?
 - Who in the family relationship takes priority in their paid work and particularly in a situation of promotion, the man or the woman?
 - Who in the family relationship dominates decision-making on paid work and relationships with collectivism, especially trade unions?
- it is dictated by religion and culture that only men are breadwinners. I don't understand this...Money is the same, but males' money is more valuable than the money earned by women. *(Kurdish/Shafia woman, Istanbul)*
 - *The Kurdish women were more independent and were interested in their own material prospects rather than those of their partners. One woman in Istanbul believed that her job promotion would help her to leave her husband.*
 - I renovated our house in Moldova... thanks to the money I earned here in Istanbul. I transfer all my money to my husband. Now we have a car and a house. But all properties are officially registered to my husband, not to me. This is very common in Moldova; it is an important part of our culture.
 - I have to ask permission from my husband before I am unionised. If he says no, I don't become member in TUs. Because I don't want to cause any uneasiness at home. *(Kurdish woman, Istanbul)*
 - I believe that religions were invented only to make women slaves of men and oppressed slaves of oppressors. *(Atheist Turkish woman, Berlin)*

Table 7.2 **Domestic division of labour by religion and host city**

City	Housework is the task of women in my religion			Total	Housework is not the task of women in my religion			Total	TOTAL
	Islam	Christian/ Others	Atheist		Islam	Christian/ Others	Atheist		
London	15	14	6	35	1	4	-	5	40
Berlin	8	11	11	30	3	6	1	10	40
Istanbul	23	12	2	37	3	-	-	3	40
TOTAL	46	37	19	102 (85%)	7	10	1	18 (15%)	120

Agency of migrant women - personal acts of resistance, steps towards establishing 'spaces of power' and maybe collective solidarity.

- *'when I divorced I thought I would be free to decide my career. I was wrong because my husband started to interfere everything. **In the last two years I declared my 'liberty'; that nobody can say anything about my own decisions anymore. Now my relationships with my family are not so good... but I don't care.'***

women who when their parents tried to control their religious observation from afar, just lied to them

Women Migrants by Unionisation

«I am working with an agency which is very kind to me, it would be highly ridiculous for me to organise against this firm!»
(Bulgarian woman/London)

«I'm scared to become member in TUs because if employers know that I am unionised they may not give me a job!»
(Malaysian woman/London)

«I am not unionised and I know nothing about German TUs» (Montenegro woman/Berlin)

«It was too late when I understood that I had to get permission from him before I was unionised. I remember we had a big fight, he got crazy.» (Kurdish woman/Berlin)

- «My destiny is written on my forehead. If I do anything to improve my working conditions this will be a rebellion against God himself» (Brazilian woman / London)

Migrant women	London	Berlin	Istanbul	TOTALS
Unionised in country of origin	5	4	4	13
Unionised in host country	8	3	1	12
Never unionised	27	33	35	95
TOTALS	40	40	40	120

Organising collectively

10 had been union members in their home countries

75% had no experiences of collective organising in trade unions

Informal solidarity – Berlin employment agency

Union structures difficult to accommodate migrant domestic workers

International Domestic Workers' Federation
2011. ILO Domestic Workers Convention 189

Union 'turn' to community organising

- Ethnic community organisations
- Religious centres/churches
- Justice 4 Domestic Workers (London)

- I've never been organised in TUs, here in the UK, organising in the TUs is not so fashionable I think. What is more amazing is that there are associations we belong to that they do not inform us about unionisation. If we're not unionised this is not our shame, it is the shame of political organisations we belong to. (*Kurdish woman, London*)
- I had been a union member in the past. But after I worked three years, epilepsy was diagnosed and the agency fired me despite I was unionised. I remember the meeting with management well. It was big shock for me when I saw that the union rep. was sitting just near the management, against me. At the end of that meeting I understood that my Union and Management had agreed that I needed to be fired long before our meeting. (*Kurdish woman, London*)
- Since unionisation also depends on the permission of husband in Islam this has a very negative impact on working women. On one hand they are deprived from collective tools like trade unions to protect their rights, on the other hand they are regarded as secondary which makes them much more vulnerable at work. (*Turkmen woman, Istanbul*)
- I am not organised in any union. But I know that Ver-Di is the competent union for organising care staff. I had too many responsibilities both outside and also inside home as my husband used to do nothing. So I didn't have time either for thinking about TUs nor being active member in TUs. (*Kurdish woman, Berlin*)

Conditions for successful organising

- Communities of coping – informal organising
- Cognitive liberation - consciousness raising
- Development of associational organising – with community and other groupings, and with trade unions

Women's 3 top demands

London:

- higher minimum wage
- pension rights
- early retirement rights

Berlin:

- higher minimum wage
- government respect for domestic workers
- shorter working hours

Istanbul:

- removal of deportation
- legal recognition for domestic work
- right to public social insurance

TUs organizing migrant workers - dilemmas

Insider-outsider approach?

Include or set up separate structures?

Integration ←-----→Autonomy

- UK - separate structures and learning initiatives via Union Learning Fund
- GERMANY – ver.di: Minimum wage for all migrant workers. Special structures
- TURKEY – v restrictive union laws. TUs have little engagement with ‘outsider’ groups. But