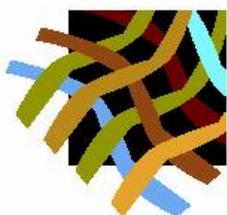


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in South-East Europe
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Ge.M.I.C.



Ge.M.I.C. WP6 National Report

Religion, Gender and Migration: The Case of Turkey

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1. The goal of the research

The aim of the research is to explore the issue of how Christian migrant women experience their religion in the private and the public sphere as they live and/or work in Istanbul, Turkey. The main focus was mostly on women within the Christian faith and their experience in a country where the majority of the population is Muslim.

Women migrants' religiosity in the migration processes has not been researched in depth until very recently, particularly in Turkey. This newly flourishing field of research on women's religiosity in the migration process mostly focuses on Muslim women's piousness in the western secular and predominantly Christian societies. Migrant Muslim women were mostly depicted as being torn in between "tradition" and "progress". These contemporary debates on migrant women's religiosity conceptualize women as either being empowered or suppressed by religion and they do not leave much room for different juxtapositions. Moreover, how predominantly Muslim societies would integrate non-Muslim, or in this case Christian, women into their social canvas has not been problematized before.

The major research question of this report is the ways in which a predominantly Muslim metropolitan city, Istanbul incorporates non-Muslim and Christian women into its social canvas.

2. Context of research

Turkey has been a destination country in the international migration processes since the 1990s. The global economic changes, the end of cold war, the dissolution of the Soviet Union along with the other global economic changes, increased mobility of both people and capital. Particularly, the rise of the service sector created an avenue to encourage women's migration. In the 2001-2006 time period, Turkey received 385,000 undocumented migrants (illegal entry and overstays together), 21,000 asylum seekers (from Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq), 942,000 applications for residence permit (for work, study and other purposes). Clearly, Turkey does not only have a migrant sending country status anymore but also a migrant receiving country status in the 1990s and 2000s. (Icduygu, 2008). These trends together created extremely complex patterns of migration for both people from Turkey, i.e. migrant workers; and also for people migrating to Turkey. Therefore, the interaction and encounters among people from Turkey and people arriving from other countries demand careful analysis. Doing research on these complex patterns of migration need to take into account certain factors that are critical in this process; (1) the change in the job markets both in the receiving and sending countries, (2) the change in the transportation and communication technologies, (3) the change in the women's consciousness through education, emerging egalitarian world view and the feminist movement by seeing their capacities as much more mobile than before. All these factors contributed to increasing women's mobility.

The research on gender and migration in Turkey has moved from more descriptive studies of who moved where and how they got integrated or why they didn't get integrated, focusing mostly on the European experiences, towards understanding the complexity of the process more within the transnational movement and its complexities (Çaglar, 2007). As a result, there emerge a need to pursue two main axes of research (1) about people from Turkey and their transnational activities and relations, and (2) about people who migrate to Turkey and their transnational activities and relations.

As a matter of fact, migration studies responded to this new patterns of mobility by trying to invent new concepts such as "circular migration", referring to temporary migration, i.e. migrants moving from their hometowns with an intention to return in a short period of time. Although researchers argue that migration itself has always had a circular notion, since the migrant almost always has a plan for returning to his/her homeland at some point in his/her life, the new reality demands further conceptualization (Icduygu, CARIM notes 2008/10).

It is important to note that neither Icduygu nor official statistics segregate their data by gender. Therefore, the baseline research for our research question still is in demand. The assumption that the people migrating for work purposes are mostly women is evident in the rhetoric of the new migration literature in Turkey. Icduygu and Koser-Akcapar (2005) classified the irregular migration in Turkey in a rather linear and judgmental manner in four stages; "fertilization", "maturation", "saturation" and "degeneration" periods, referring to trafficking as the "degeneration". This analysis is not only moralistic but also linear in nature and not adequate enough to encompass the complexity of the process. Indeed, the research on international migration, in general, is looking at the nature and content of the interactions that are taking place in the contemporary world, rather than the length or the direction of movement. In that respect, there is a growing literature agreeing to the fact that we can safely talk about the **feminization of migration** in the 21st century. This new inclination makes women the major breadwinners of their households and yet, most of the time, allocates them to gendered jobs like housework, elderly and childcare and works in the entertainment sector and the sex industry. (Engle, 2004)

The nature of these kinds of work, where women are ghettoized in the international division of labor serves both national, international and local reactions and prejudices (Engle, 2004). Because of the nature of the women's work in the informal sector, women lack labor law protections in many parts of the world, including Turkey (Cindoglu, 2003). It has been argued that more women are moving now than ever before (Engle, 2004). However, it is not only the quantity of women moving around the world that is important, rather, the nature of the relationships and economic activities that they are involved in requires a different perspective to this new phenomenon called **feminization of migration** (Engle 2004). It is globally argued that the change in the nature of the industries, flexible work conditions, untenured jobs, growth of the service industries, particularly hospitality, entertainment and child care and elderly and sick care management industries welcome women workers and contribute to the **feminization of migration** (Engle, 2004). Female labor migration needs a careful, objective perspective in order to take into account the unfamiliar forms of domination and integration.

Overall, it is argued that modern female labor migration can be characterized by the three D's: dirty, demeaning and dangerous jobs (Engle 2004: 23), which can be considered relevant for female migration to Turkey, where migrant women workers are categorized as either domestic workers (child care, elderly care givers) or entertainers (sex workers or dancers), or traders (suitcase traders).

One of the pioneering works on foreign domestic workers was produced by Weyland (1994), who looked at Philipino domestic workers in Istanbul, their work strategies and support mechanisms. Besides this, there are three other major Master's theses written on migrant domestic workers in Turkey, by Ege (2002), Celik (2005) and Unal (2006), documenting the migrant domestic workers situation in depth, utilizing qualitative research techniques. Ege's research was conducted in Ankara on "Foreign Domestic Workers in Turkey", Celik's thesis is on "Immigrant Domestic Women Workers in Ankara and Istanbul"; both of these works focus on the descriptive nature of the domestic workers by looking at the structural relationship between the Turkish economy and the labor market. However, the latter, Unal's work, is more focused on the interactive perspective between the domestic workers and the employers, focusing on their identity and status construction process. In Turkey, middle class women have always employed domestic helpers from the rural migrant women, in the last half of the 20th century. Earlier, local notables and the well-off bureaucratic elite always utilized young domestic workers, called "evlatlik" (Ozbay, 2001). Mostly the lack of state support in childcare and elderly care created a demand for domestic help. Professional women or women with monthly salaries and women who are well-off, often employed domestic help in the contemporary Turkey to ease their gender role responsibilities. The nature and the dynamics of these relationships between the laborers and the housewives have been explored elsewhere (Bora 2005, Kalaycioglu 2000, Ozyegin 2001).

However, with the entrance of women migrants from the former Soviet Union into the domestic live-in-help market, migrant women workers' salaries competed with the local women domestic workers. Not only did they demand much less pay than the local women, they also provided better quality services, coming from better educated backgrounds in their home countries. In the end, the

local women domestic workers continued working as live-out maids, coming to the well off households only for "cleaning". The Moldavian, Russian, Azerbaijani migrant women worked as live-in caregivers, both for the children and the elderly, in households where the women of the house are either working full time or prefer to purchase these quality services (Akalin, 2007). In her research, Akalin (2007) discusses the role tensions that these new migrant women experience in middle-class Turkish households. Due to their more educated background, the women of the house expect them to fulfill much more than they bargained for, in a sense they expect them to act as a "housewife" not a caregiver of the house. Nevertheless, there are symbolic boundaries that the housewife of the house sets to limit migrant women's status in the household, like allocating cooking and heavy house cleaning in order to distinguish herself from the help. The middle class background of the migrant women makes these strategies significant; otherwise there would be a clear tension in between the help and the housewife over the management and power relations in the household. Akalin elaborates very clearly that the migrant women and their employees feel as if they are sisters and collaborates on the new job definition of maid and employee, as if it is a temporary situation and shall be eliminated in the near future, when the migrant women return home.

Celik's (2005) work focuses on the relationship between the global economy and the labor market by looking at the migrant domestic workers in Turkey. The main focus of the research is to investigate how living and working conditions in Turkey are being shaped by illegal migrants and workers with illegal status, by looking at the lack of legal agreements and legal frameworks on the matter.

Unal's work (2006) also focuses on the same group of migrant domestic workers with a different research question; she argues that Moldavian women reconstitute resisting subjectivities through dismantling and redefining meanings of "ideal" womanhood in relation to multiple affiliations and practices in a transnational field, i.e. Istanbul, as a result of transmigrancy. In this "journey", she concludes, Moldavian migrant women redefine womanhood, motherhood, intimacy, sexuality and housekeeping vis- a-vis their employers.

3. Respondents' Profiles

The field research was constituted of semi-structured in-depth interviews with six women in the July of 2009, and two focus group discussion consisting of five and six women, in December 2009. In the case of Turkey, the relationship between migrant women and religion was observed through their experience both in the public and the private realm. One focus group women were Muslim and the other focus group migrant women were Christian. The comparison of these two group discussions provided us insights for the significance of religion versus ethnicity.

The interviews of the field research with 6 migrant women were held in Istanbul, during the 2009 summer. Most of the interviews were held at the houses where they work as caregiver or maids in suburban Istanbul upper middle class households. Most of the time, the mistress of the house was absent during the interviews. These upper middle class professional women were mostly they were at work.

Some of the interviews took place where the mistress of the house was not in the room, but in the house. Though, because of the fact that these respondents were approached through their mistress' friends' connections, the setting was extremely friendly. Therefore, it was a safe environment in terms of the threat of police persecution, considering that most of these women work on the over-time visa, and/or with no job permit, which was a real threat for them.

The second group of interviewees was reached through a research firm and the interviews were conducted in a coffee shop in their neighborhood. Again, this setting was comfortable enough to carry the interviews. All of these interviews were held in the summer of 2009. During the fall, these interviews were transcribed and analyzed. Overall the interviewees claimed that they don't experience any form of discrimination against their religions and they do not experience any limitations when they wanted to perform their religiosities in these Muslim households.

In order to understand this seemingly tolerant environment towards the religiosity of the Christian migrant women, we planned to further our research and conduct two focus group interviews one group with Christian migrants and one group with Muslim migrant women from former Soviet Union countries.

In Depth Interviews

NAME, AGE, NATIONALITY, RELIGION, MARITAL STATUS
Ayşe Aksu, 50, Moldavia, Christian, Widow
Maria Elena, 45, Moldova, Christian, Widow
Sonya, 23, Moldavia, Christian Orthodox, Single
Sonya, 30, Turkmenistan, Muslim, Married
Vasilisa, 55, Moldavia, Christian, Married
Zülfiye, 40, Turkmenistan, Islam, Single

Focus Group (Muslim Women)

NAME, AGE, NATIONALITY, RELIGION, MARITAL STATUS
Zulfiye, 35, Turkmenistan, Muslim, Married (3years)
Sureyya, 53, Azerbaijan, Muslim, 3 children,
Şeyla, 47, Azerbaijan, Muslim, NA
Aynuri, 23, Azerbaijan, Muslim, single
Bülbül, 51, Georgia, Muslim, single

Focus Group (Christian Women)

NAME, AGE, NATIONALITY, RELIGION, MARITAL STATUS
Albina, 30, Belarus, Christian, Married (10 years)
Ira, NA, Russia, Christian, Married (10 years)
Natalia, 35, Kazakhstan, Christian, Married (14 years)
Carmen, NA, Romenia, Christian, Married (12 years)
Olivia, 24, NA, Christian, Married (5 months)
Clara, NA, NA, Christian, Married (9 years)

4. Basic premises and concepts

Throughout the research the basic premises and concepts which we tackled with can be summarized as empowerment, religiousness, performance of religiosity, discrimination, harassment in the public and private spheres. Women's migration is a recent phenomenon and probably related with the empowerment process which they experienced in their country of origin. Therefore, what kind of a role religion play in that context would provide us possible processes of empowerment as well as contestations. In that regard, how do women deal with the possible discriminations and harassment in the public sphere and what kind of a role would religion play in that respect needs further inquiry.

We tried to understand (1) to what extent their difference based on their religious affiliation created a foundation for empowerment in Istanbul, (2) What were the ways in which they experienced discrimination and harassment due to their piousness or lack of it, (3) how do they reconcile with the host country religion, i.e. Islam?

5. Basic questions

Most of our respondents were employed in the live in care work settings in Istanbul, taking care of the elderly or the children of the household. The interviews were in the life history format, trying to capture the degree and the nature of their religiosities within their life span. They were asked about (1) their first families, their spouses, children and the nature of their relationships. (2) Holidays and fasting, (3) Church going activities, (4) Life events and religious practices. (5) Their expectations from Turkey regarding performing their piousness, (6) discrimination that they experience at work and at the public sphere.

6. Potential impact and use of the research

Our findings suggest that (1) women migrants do not necessarily use their religious networks for finding employment or social support. (2) subscribing to different belief systems do not necessarily produce a tension in the private and the public sphere as long as migrants and the receiving community respect each others' difference, (3) the concept of hybrid religiosity, although the concept itself can be contested, grasps the actual everyday experiences of migrant women in Turkey. In other words, these women emphasize similarities between their belief systems and those of the receiving society as oppose to emphasizing differences.

These findings require further investigation as they open new ground for the literature on gender, migration and Turkey. They also contest most of the conventional findings of the mainstream literature. Therefore, our research suggests that there is a need to re-think the relationship between religion and society, religion and gender, religion and migration. First, our findings may be used to question how researchers formulate their inquiry on the relationship between majority Muslim populations and Christian migrants. Second, for women who migrate, religion as an institution does not necessarily constitute a central reference point in their daily lives but as an individual coping strategy reserved to private practices.

7. Main results

The main results of the fieldwork are the following: First, migrant women usually experience hybrid religiosity through engaging in different Islamic and Christian religious practices such as fasting during Ramadan, or celebrating Islamic holidays along with the rest of the society and visiting churches throughout the year. Second, migrant women do not differentiate among monotheistic religions as they practice worship and/or prayer in a transnational manner both in the public and private realm. Third, where the single migrant women do not feel or pronounce significant pressure over their religious beliefs in general, the cases of conversion are not very common among single women. However, conversions are expected to happen when they are married to Muslim men, women particularly in those in mixed marriages identified this phenomenon.

7.1. Children and migration

Considering the fact that the focus of our research was on the Christian women migrants both married in mixed families as well as single women who are working in Istanbul and keeping transnational family ties, we were able to witness the reconstruction of the women's religiosity and their off-springs in depth. The analysis of women and children deserves separate discussions as

presented in this section. Women keep close contact with their children and their first families, mostly their mothers are responsible for everything concerning their children.

Referring to how they deal with their mothering responsibilities these are their words.

"I call them every week. My son is 19 years old, my mother and my father take care of him, actually they live together. He sees his father too. Sometimes he goes to stay with him. I feel comfortable. I send them money, of course". **(Alone, focus group)**

"Roza: My husband is here, we work together.

- What about your child?

Roza: My mother takes care of her, back in my hometown."

"- So you miss your child?

Nadya: Yes, I left him to my mother and my sisters when he was 15. He could have become a vagabond but thank God he did not. Some people get divorced when they come here. They could have negative effects as well."

"Aksana: My mother only has me as a daughter. I have two brothers. I got married, they started to take care of my daughter since she was 7 months old. My father left his job for a year. He used to work, he left his job to look after my daughter. She grew up, and when she was old enough for the kindergarten, he started working again. Now I don't want it (to take back the daughter) immediately. They look after her better than me. They sacrifice from their food and clothing to feed and clothe her. I am one hundred percent sure of this. What would I have done with that kid. I don't know."

Our focus group findings supported by the interviews suggest that migrant women's children at home country almost always keep their Christian faith. Considering that most of time the grandparents are taking care of these children, and elderly have a tendency to be more religious, it is only expected that these children grow up in a more Christian environment and remain in the Christian faith. For the former Soviet countries' residents, religion is a newly found experience which was blocked or persecuted in the pre 1990 period. Therefore, the rise in religiosity in those societies might be understood as a resistance to the earlier communist regime. Religion might also constitute a coping strategy with which they endure the poorer living conditions that they ended up in the post 1990 period.

7.2. The question of Baptism

One of the indicators of the religiosity of women is identified through whether they proceeded with baptism for themselves and their children. Most of the Christian women in our sample mentioned that they were baptized in their home countries by their families. Even though, this procedure was illegal at that time, their families took the risks to proceed with baptism as a core principle of their faith. This tradition continued when they gave birth to a child in their home country. Our respondents reported that almost all the children who were born in their home countries are baptized. However, children who are born in Turkey to a Muslim-Turkish husband usually became Muslim.

"- **Did you** baptize your child in Russia?

Carmen: I did. I did my duty but he can choose his religion when he grows up.

Albina: I think it is a sin to convert. That is why I did not make my kids Christians. When they are born here, they are automatically Muslims. That's why they should read, see, choose for themselves." (focus group with Christian women).

Interestingly, when women are narrating these cases of how their children borne to a Muslim father are Muslim, they showed signs of having internalized this process almost as a matter of fact without displaying any signs of contestation. Such act was also a sign of how they internalized the paternal rights of the father. Of our respondents majority fit with this attitude. Only a few had left this choice over which religion to subscribe to for the decision of the children to be made when they grow up. Even though they themselves do not convert, most of the time they do not contest to raise their children as Muslim so far as having male children join their fathers in daily prayers.

- "If you have a child one day, how do you raise him/her? Would you marry a Christian man?
- Sacha: I would marry a Muslim guy I guess; or a Catholic guy. But I don't think I would marry others.
- How would you raise the child then?
- Sacha: If we are living in a Muslim country, s/he would be raised as a Muslim because we believe in the same God after all. So let her be a Muslim."

If one factor which seems to explain their accepting behavior of this situation is their embeddedness in the patriarchal family relations and confirming the father's authority in the family, the other line of justification stems from concerns about facilitating the integration of children to the Turkish society. They claim that if the children are raised as Muslims, they would feel more comfortable and fit into Turkish society where they shall continue to live and that this is good for their future social prospects.

Children of these women who continue to live in the former Soviet Union countries on the other hand were found to keep their Christian faith in all cases. This fact itself suggests the impact of migration on people's religiosities and how it influences their survival strategies through internalization of religion in the receiving society.

7.3. Religiosity and religious practices in the public and private realm

7. 3. 1. Wearing cross necklaces

Women experience a different form of religiosity in the public realm. They tend to be very aware of their foreigner look. The signs of Christianity which they carry in public, cross necklaces for example, were very consciously worn and negotiated in different settings. Sometimes they openly show off their crosses as a reaction to discriminatory attitudes from locals. Sometimes they do not mind showing off the cross because they perceive the environment they are in as a 'tolerant' neighborhood, and sometimes they reported that they felt like they had to hide it with a scarf or a turtle neck blouse which does not show their necks. The strategies of how to deal with their cross necklaces as a matter of fact, is a very critical sign of their awareness of otherness-foreignness in a Muslim society. A small group of women participants in our sample of interviews and the focus groups reported that they kept their Christian faith in private and claimed that they choose not to wear their cross in Turkey at all.

"Can you wear your cross comfortably?

- Natalia: I can't.
- Albina: I can. When AKP won the elections, I covered it a bit. Then I said, anyway, it doesn't matter.
- Do you have a cross?
- Ira: No.
- Carmen: I do, both of them.
- I see, the Mother Mary one. Do you wear it everywhere?

- Carmen: Yes, I never take it off.
- Olivia: I don't feel the need to hide it.
- Carmen: I don't wear it to show off.
- Olivia: When people see it, their face changes badly sometimes. I want to wear it but I feel uncomfortable.
- Albina: In Acıbadem we are alright, but in a different district it may be a problem.
- Clara: I live in Kocamustafapaşa. There are covered people there so I don't show it.
- Olivia: It is not just the cross, sometimes we even hide that we are foreigners." (focus group with Christian women)

7. 3. 2. Church attendance

The Christian women rarely visited churches in Istanbul though they all knew where the churches are and mentioned the fact that they wish they were able to visit the churches more often. However, they claimed that their family and work responsibilities hold them from participating in the masses or simple visits to the churches. When they attend visit churches, they rather go to far a way churches, far from their neighborhoods. They describe these practices as a tourist experience, rather than being part of the social fabric of the church community.

"- What is the role of religion in everyday life for you? How often do you go to the church, how many of your friends are from the church?

Carmen: I can pray wherever I want. We don't go to the church too often, our church is too far. We live in Yedikule, our church is in Eyüp, as far as I heard. Some of my friends go to the church for Easter, but it is too far from where we live.

Olivia: It is too far to us too. Our church is in Kadıköy, it isn't easy to go every Sunday.

- When is the last time you visited a church?

Clara: Two years ago, in my home country.

Olivia: I never went to the church here.

Ira: I visited a church in my country, 2,5 years ago.

Carmen: 4 years ago, I went to San Antonio church in Taksim.

Albina: I went to the Orthodox church in Taksim for Easter. We go there like once a month.

Carmen: Not going to the church does not mean that we do not pray. What is important is what lies inside." (focus group with Christian migrant women).

"Sacha: We are not a religious family, my father always says that going to the church is not important. What is important is to have it inside you. He got a little bit interested in religion after my grandmother died but normally we are not interested in religion."

"- Do you go to the church?

Tanya: No I don't.

- Why not?

Tanya: Why, I have things to do, I see people. I had an intention to go (to the church) but it did not work out.

- Which one would you go? There is one in Fenerbahçe, in Beyoğlu, in Moda...

Tanya: Well, there is one around Laleli, you know women go to that one. We intended to go, we were going to buy headscarves, but it just did not happen.

- Do you wear a headscarf in the church?

Tanya: Yes, they do in my home country."

Even those who were willing to visit the church regularly, were concerned about attracting their employers' attention and avoided asking for permission to visit the church on special days.

"Do you go to the church on special days?

Nadya: I go every Sunday. But I cannot go on special days, because I am working. They would not allow me, I came here to work. My day off is Sunday, I go to the church on Sunday.

- Sunday is your day off.

Nadya: Yes, I definitely want Sunday off, I go to the church."

Sometimes, they confessed that they rather stay away from the churches and the church community for fear of being apprehended by the police, as most of these women are in a status of irregular migrant, lacking work permits or overstayers:

" – Did you make a contact with the church after you came here?

Sacha: No not really.

- Why not?

Sacha: They say there are policemen next to the church. I don't really know very well, Christian Orthodox church. There are a lot of churches but they are Catholic churches.

- I see, it has to be an Orthodox church."

7. 3. 3. Praying

Although the church attendance is rare, or absent, among the migrant women in Istanbul, the private prayers are very prominent. They pray everyday, in almost all occasions, for example in the hard times such as when they miss their children back in their country of origin, when they lose a job, when they are mistreated, and regularly before bed time. Some of them have a special corner in their homes decorated with Virgin Mary statues as a private sanctuary. Most of them choose to pray in private spaces when neither the husbands nor any other one of the family members could observe them.

"When did you last pray?

Carmen: While I was on my way, coming here. But from the inside, I mean I did not have to bow or anything.

Albina: I pray every evening, I thank God before I go to sleep. I say whatever I feel like.

- Is there a special place where you pray?

Albina: I have an icon in my bedroom, a small one. But I pray from the inside, not by looking at them" (focus group with Christian migrant women).

- There are certain conditions in Islam, like ablution. How is it in Christianity? For example, how did your mother use to pray?

Albina: There are icons, we read the prayer book looking at those icons. I have a few icons, and sometimes I read while looking at them.

Natalia: We don't have icons but when I go to bed, I pray for the kids. I do it silently, not looking anywhere.

Clara: I pray every minute. Thank God you gave this, you gave everything. I hold my religion equal to Islam. Because there is one God.

Olivia: I pray whenever I feel like it. Yesterday, for example.

Ira: I prayed last night while I was putting a meal in the oven, so that it will turn out fine. Yesterday it was new year according to our former calendar, that is when we pray and wish for things." (focus group with Christian migrant women).

"-Is there a change in your belief in God?

Sacha: No it stays the same, no change. Sometimes I pray, I pray to God."

"Sacha: In religion it says, do good, there is a reward to every good you do. I see this in my own life, too."

"Nadya: Sure, the God helps a lot, if it weren't for him... He helps a lot. Hears the prayers, feels the prayers... What I think is, religion changes people. I didn't use to be so accomodating. I became so because of my belief in God, I approach people with love, I have compassion. So it changes you".

The strength to survive as an immigrant in a foreign country that they derived from their prayers was very visible in their narrations.

"After you came here, has there been a change in your belief in God?

Şeyla: There is an increase.

Sürreya: We pray more. We learned our prayers here, because here they value religion.

Şeyla: Yes, we did not see that sort of stuff in Soviet era. It was forbidden.

Sürreya: We forgot a lot. I learned most prayers here." (focus group with Muslim migrant women).

7. 3. 4. Fasting

Although migrant women kept telling that nobody is limiting their life styles overtly, maybe except for eating pork, they rarely can fast (Christian fast) due to their family responsibilities where they may have to cook two different meals, one for themselves without any dairy and meat products respecting Christian way of fasting and one for their families.

"**Carmen:** We cannot do our own fast. I used to do it in my homeland, now I cannot.

Natalia: I do it here, nobody says anything.

Carmen: I don't have time. Because I will have to cook seperately form e, the kid and the husband, how can I do it? I fast but not full 56 days." (focus group with Christian women).

However, fasting in Ramadan seems like something which most of them tried at least once to fit in the husband's family or the family where they are working at. Though most of them claimed that it was physically too challenging not to eat or drink all day from sun rise to sun down respecting the Muslim observation of fasting.

"- Does anyone fast like a Muslim?

Clara: I do.

Natalia: I tried it but it is difficult.

Carmen: I get hungry, I want to drink water. They say you cannot even drink water. So I don't fast." (focus group with Christian women).

7. 3. 5. Religious holidays "NOW, WE CELEBRATE MORE HOLIDAYS"

They all celebrate Christmas and Easter with their families. The women migrants whose families are in their home countries try to travel to their homes during that time of the year. As a matter of fact, to organize a focus group during early January became a problem because of their travel schedules.

They also do not mind celebrating Muslim religious holidays. They claimed over and over that there is only one God and it does not matter if you are born Christian or Muslim, in the end of the day, what counts is your belief in God.

"**Olivia:** Now we have more holidays. We celebrate double holidays.

Carmen: Yes, we celebrate both Muslim and Christian holidays." (focus group with Christian women)

"Sacha: There is Christmas, there is Easter. There are a lot of religious holidays but nobody says anything to me, so I do not remember them that much and I don't celebrate".

"- Does it cause a problem to be of a different religion from the people you are staying with?

Sacha: No, not really, because they respect every religion.

- Can you observe your religious holidays? Are they tolerant about that?

Sacha: In Easter and in Christmas, I do observe the holiday. I spend time with relatives and friends."

In short, there is a significant difference in terms how migrant women live their religiosity in the public realm vs the private realm. In the public realm, they do not claim any religious space or performance in public. They do not claim any space neither in the church or any other social group. In the private realm, they are inclined to blend in with their families by observing Islamic life styles, for example not eating pork at all.

7.4. Religion and citizenship

We have also aimed to observe whether and how religion is used as a tool for simultaneously redefining and accessing citizenship. Most of these women were Turkish citizens if they were in a mixed marriage, or awaiting Turkish citizenship. We have not observed any statements suggesting that they had identified a connection between religion and accessing citizenship. None of the single women whom we interviewed from Christian faith converted on Islam. The very few conversions were due to the marriages with pious Muslim men upon the requests of the men or his family. Even those conversions took time and did not happen right a way during the marriages.

"If you meet someone like that would you consider conversion?

Sacha: No, I would only convert if I believe.

- For love?

Sacha: No I would not mix religion with love. I would only convert through my own belief".

"- How do you see yourself in 5 years? More Muslim or living Christianity more than today?

Olivia: I think it will be the same. If I had made that choice, I would make it 10 years ago.

Carmen: No, there will be no change." (focus group with Christian women).

7.5. Religion and women rights

We have also attempted to observe the whether and if so to what extent women's rights have changed/expanded through religion. In the Turkish case, Christianity is not directly a terrain to implement or increase women's rights in their negotiations with their families or their bosses.

However, women's religious faith (Christianity) and their performances of religion in the form of daily prayers and occasional church visits constitute definitely a source of strength for their everyday lives. The ways they narrate their praying, fasting or feasting refers to re-claiming their agency in a different, if not foreign environment.

Through religion they have an opportunity to claim their roots and connections to their homeland and former families. In that regard, it is not the nature of their faith and how they experience it that is significant, rather its instrumentality to provide a source of (private) support to continue their existence in a foreign land and in much disadvantaged positions.

"**Nadya:** A lady from the church brought us here. We did not stay in a hotel, we stayed in the church and went to the company directly from there.

- How long did you stay in the church?

Nadya: I found (a job) in a week, it takes three weeks in some cases.

- So the church helps these people?

Nadya: Sure, sure, the church helps a lot, gives love. It would not work without love, would it?"

Over and over, migrant women with Christian faith emphasized that it is their belief in God and faith which keeps them going in a foreign and sometimes discriminatory environment. They attribute their patience and endurance to their faith. Faith is an internal source of strength rather than publicly claimed identity.

In the quotation below, Nadya reveals how she "needed" the church, possibly to manage her loneliness immediately after she migrated, but still how she avoided insisting on a church permit, even on Sundays.

"Nadya: When I first came I immediately contacted the church. I took the address when I came here. Because you cannot manage without the church, I mean I need it. I started working, the woman was sick, I could not go out every Sunday, she would not allow me. I was yet a stranger in İstanbul, I did not know the city, I was scared. I did not insist, I did not go out of the house every Sunday. But now I get permission every Sunday."

7.6. Religion and liberal/secular traditions of receiving societies

We have also examined whether the story of Christian immigrant women in Turkey pose challenges similar to the challenges identified for the Muslims in Europe as posing challenges to the liberal/secular societies in Europe. The story of Christians as immigrants in Turkey is substantially different than the story of Muslims as immigrants in Europe. Christian immigrants in Turkey, in a predominantly pious Muslim society with a secular state tradition, are not presented as posing a threat to Turkish identity or society. To the contrary, in the recent years the rising piousness in Turkey indeed tries to justify the Islamic religiosity by claiming rights for all kinds of religious beliefs denominations (Christianity, Judaism etc), including but not limited to Islam.

"Nadya: Let me tell you something. For example when I search for a job, I immediately say that I am a Christian, a Protestant. They employ me more easily. I ask them why this is so. They say, whoever is afraid of God, will not do bad, either Christian or Muslim. This is a good thing."

However, due to the nature of the Islamic teaching, the pious men and women try to "deliver" (teblig etmek) Islam to those who are incognizant of the Islamic faith. Indeed a pious Muslim would receive more virtue (sevap) from this "good deed" in the eyes of God. Besides, Muslim men marrying a non-Muslim (person of a book, i.e. believer of another religion) is not an advised yet an accepted phenomenon in Islamic belief system, not the other way around. Muslim women are not accepted to marry a non-Muslim according to the belief system.

The women we interviewed appreciated attempts to teach Islam as long as they did not feel any pressure.

"Who tried to teach you Islam?"

Natalia: The veiled (women).

Carmen: My former landlord taught me. She taught me how to pray, wrote down the prayers. She told me to write down what I hear because there is no way to memorize. Started to explain religion, I liked it, it is nice. But when I look around, I don't see anyone practising Islam completely. Because you have to be honest. I have not seen any such person around.

Natalia: I was curious myself when I first came here. I bought a Quran in Russian and I read it. I had read the Bible before, but the Quran is different, I mean I liked it." (focus group with Christian migrant women).

However, some of the women whom we interviewed, time to time felt that pressure was coming from the pious Muslims around them, including but not limited to family members, co-workers, bosses, neighbors, etc.

"Natalia: I used to go to a kindergarten 6 years ago, an hour a week. The owner wanted to make me a Muslim, a lot of pressure, gave me presents all the time. Someone else told me to stay away from him. Then I never went there again". (focus group with Christian women).

"Albina: Once when I was pregnant, I went to a relative of my sister-in-law. They were veiled women. One of them came, she was in a black chador. She said to me, your child will be a Muslim and you will give him a Muslim name. She put pressure on me and frightened me.

Olivia: They say, our religion came the latest, everybody will be Muslims one day. Nobody has to be a Muslim. There is no such rule. I don't want to be a Muslim at the moment.

Albina: We have a Russian Facebook. We discuss religion there. A lot of Christians convert here. They ask them why they converted. He says, I had not seen religion before, I learnt it here and I think it is right so I choose it." (focus group with Christian women).

"- Do you think that Islam is more oppressive? Did anyone put pressure on you (for conversion)?"

Nadya: Nobody can put pressure on me. If someone says something to me, I start to explain, Christianity is good, etc. They immediately stop because I know better than they do. They cannot put pressure on me. Maybe they can do it to other people.

- Is Islam essentially an oppressive religion?

Nadya: Yes, well, I mean, they don't know much, there is ignorance. They don't read themselves. I think they don't have much information. Maybe it is wrong but..."

7.7. Religion and rights in the public realm

We have also observed whether religion could serve as redefining the boundaries between the public and private realms while negotiating alongside other social movements which question the secular/liberal/majority religious sphere. Contrary to the Muslims in Europe, our observations in İstanbul suggest that migrant women do not claim any space in public. They want to blend in to the public in order to avoid the critical looks and judgments associated with the sex workers who first came to Turkey. The relatively fair skin and hair tones and slimmer outlooks of these women actually make their invisibility impossible. Over and over they talked about the clothing issues in their lives. How they felt uncomfortable when they put on lower skirts, low cut blouses outside of their homes. The fact that they have desirable looks on the street does not work in favor of them, just the opposite; they experience overt or covert harassments.

Even inside their own homes, the other family members, particularly mother-in-laws challenge their attire as revealing and request them to switch to more modest dressing. The extent to which the migrant women can resist such requests, is very much related to the husband's attitude, as in the story of Ira:

"Ira: When my husband introduced me to his father, his father said "I wish she were one of us". My husband said, sorry father but this is the girl I want. They accepted. When I wore short trousers, they would say don't let her wear that. My husband would say "sorry but she will wear it, because that is what she is used to." Now they like me a lot. They are not conservative, but they were uncomfortable when other people looked at me." (focus group with Christian migrant women).

However, there are different stories which reveal that sometimes the prejudices surrounding the "Russian migrant woman" image in the public space prevails over finely built personal relations:

"Alone: I came here 16 years ago. I was 26 years old then. I once had a boyfriend but we did not get to marry because his family did not accept me. Actually they loved me, I used to cook for his mother, our Russian food, the relatives used to come and we would eat together. Everything was fine, but when it came to marriage, no, he said my career could be ruined. (focus group with Christian migrant women)

In the face of those prejudices, Alone blames other migrant women for rendering all migrant women vulnerable to sexual harassment and untoward approaches in the public sphere. Strikingly, she also tries to differentiate herself from those "other"; "easy" women by underlining her religious and ethnic ties.

"Alone: Russian women, Bulgarian women, it is their fault. Because they come here... for example, I used to do trade, I first came to Turkey for that. My friends too, I mean they get into relationships too easily. Too easily. This is wrong. I grew up as Caucasian, maybe that is why I am different. My family is Catholic, Polish, not Russian. They are all Russians. They have very easy relationships. Pardon me, but they have intercourse the same night. This is not nice. Then people start to talk. That is why the men here have started to treat us this way. Because they don't see such Turkish women".

Migrant women are very visible in the public sphere, due to the difference in their features which present a fairer outlook, height, and shape compared to an average Turkish women. The respondents report that they would rather be invisible than visible in the public sphere.

"Meryem: You have become like a Turk.

Alone: I started to dress very modestly because I am already blond, obviously I am a foreigner. They are already looking at me, so why should I attract more attention?

Meryem: This is a complex.

Alone: What complex?

Meryem: Complex. In Georgia, even in a mountain nobody looks at you. Nobody disturbs you on the street." (focus group)

The will to invisibility through modest clothing does not go uncontested. The discussion in a focus group study reveals that while some migrant women willingly engage in a special effort to abide by what they perceive as the norms of clothing in Turkish society, some others feel that such effort threatens their identity.

"Oka: I changed my clothing a lot. I used to wear short skirts back in my homeland.

İrma: I got used to this.

Alone: I started to dress modestly.

Meryem. I don't want to get used to doing what they do.

Alone: Whichever country you go to, you have to abide by their norms.

Meryem: No, not everything.

Alone: If you want a comfortable life here, you abide. If you don't, you have a lot of problems. Because I came to Turkey, Turkey did not come to me. I want to live here so I have to be like them." (focus group with Christian migrant women)

The range of harassments extend even to include the harassments of the police forces. Most of these migrant women have irregular status – overstayers. Because of the mere fact that they have a very distinguished look in public, they can be pinpointed by the forces very easily to be "controlled" which they all fear. Indeed, most of the times it is reported that these officers expect of the women is a 20 dollar bill tucked in the passport. These instances particularly narrated very often for the church vicinities, which obviously acts as a deterrent factor for the women's church attendance.

Therefore, especially the ones with the overdue passports do not prefer to go out on their own. They would rather go out with the families where they work as housekeepers.

7.8. Religion and national/ethnic identity of the receiving society

In our research, religion and national-ethnic identity also collapsed as in one religious identification of the migrant women as "gavur". In the Islamic discourse, "gavur" refers to others who do not believe in any denomination. Case after case, women told us how often they come across this judgment and despise this category. They claimed that they may not be Muslim, but they believe in God and therefore do not deserve this put down by the Muslims in Turkey.

"Carmen: They call foreigners "gavur". In our language gavur is a barbaric word. They use it for "foreigner" but it has nothing to do with that.

Clara: In Turkey they call foreigners as "gavur". It is the same in my homeland." (focus group with Christian women)

8. Conclusions

In short, the Turkish field research suggests that Christian migrant women usually experience hybrid religiosity through engaging in different Islamic religious practices such as fasting during Ramadan, or celebrating Islamic holidays along with the rest of the society.

Muslim migrant women on the other hand, are coming from different and practices of Islamic lives, from former Soviet countries. Therefore, their integration to upper middle class Muslim life styles requires further accommodation of Muslim way of life in Turkey; the way that they use headscarf back home for example is a totally different practice than their observations in Turkey.

This phenomenon of adopting and accommodating can be interpreted as results of migrant women's backgrounds on the one hand, their powerless positions on the other. These women are coming from predominantly non-religious backgrounds, therefore their acceptance and adaptation to different forms of religiosities can be interpreted in that respect. As a result of their backgrounds and their current relationships with religion, migrant women do not differentiate among monotheistic religions as they practice worship and/or prayer in a transnational manner both in the public and private realm.

Where the single migrant women do not feel or pronounce significant pressure over their religious beliefs, the cases of conversion are very common or expected to happen by their husbands particularly for those in mixed marriages. Married women often feel that they need to convert or at least live like their husband's families and raise Muslim children.

It is important to note that living as single Christian migrant women in a predominantly Muslim community is not an easy task. There may not be overt discriminatory practices; however, considering that these women lack their family support, living apart from their families in Istanbul makes them more vulnerable. They do feel like they have to fit in. Therefore, single women's migration and their relationship with religion need to be understood within this framework.

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