

ENCOUNTERING THE ARMENIAN COMMUNITY: EXPERIENCES OF
ARMENIAN DOMESTIC WORKERS IN ISTANBUL

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis presents the perceptions and dynamics of ethnic, national and religious identity of Armenian immigrant domestic workers in Istanbul by analyzing their narratives about their journey to Turkey, experiences in Istanbul and employer-employee relationships with their Armenian and non-Armenian employers. Qualitative methods of social research have been applied in this study by means of utilizing participant observation, focus group discussions, semi-structured and informal interviews with Armenian immigrants. The primordial, ethno-symbolic and constructed aspects of identity has been addressed to understand the role of myths, symbols, ethnic election and common ancestry in the definition of “Armenian identity”. Findings show that a reformulation of identity has taken place on immigrants’ part with the influence of an active Armenian community life in Istanbul. Therefore, the existence of an Armenian community in Istanbul, the role of Armenian language, engagement in the Armenian Apostolic church and sense of kinship based on ethnic ties greatly contribute to the experiences of Armenian immigrant domestic workers in Istanbul despite the differences in socio-cultural background of the two groups.

Keywords: Armenian Identity, Immigrant Domestic Workers, Ethnicity, Armenian Apostolic Church, Istanbul-Armenians

ÖZ

ERMENİ TOPLUMU İLE BULUŞMA: İSTANBUL’DA EV HİZMETLERİNDE ÇALIŞAN ERMENİSTANLI GÖÇMENLERİN DENEYİMLERİ

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Bu tez çalışması, İstanbul’da ev hizmetlerinde çalışan Ermenistanlı göçmenlerin anlatılarını analiz ederek, söz konusu grubun etnik, dini ve milli kimliklerine dair algılarını, Ermeni ve Türk işverenlerle olan ilişkilerini ve İstanbul’daki deneyimlerini inceler. Niteliksel araştırma yöntemlerinin kullanıldığı bu çalışmada katılımcı gözlemi, derinlemesine ve yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşmeler ile odak grup çalışması gibi metotlar uygulanmıştır. Mitlerin, sembollerin, ortak geçmişin ve seçilmiş olma fikrinin “Ermeni kimliğini” nasıl etkilediğini anlamak üzere kimliğin ilksel, etno-sembolik ve yapılanmış yönleri ele alınmıştır. Araştırma bulguları, İstanbul’da aktif bir Ermeni cemaat yaşamı olmasının Ermenistanlı göçmenlerin kimliklerini etkilediğini ve yeniden şekillendirdiğini göstermiştir. Dolayısıyla; söz konusu iki grubun sosyo-kültürel farklılıklarına rağmen, İstanbul’da bir Ermeni komünitesinin bulunması, Ermenice dilinin kullanılması, Ermeni Apostolik Kilisesinin varlığı ve etnik bağlar temelinde bir tür soydaşlık ilişkisinin gelişmesi Ermenistanlı göçmenlerin deneyimlerini önemli ölçüde etkilemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ermeni Kimliđı, Göçmen Kadınlar, Ermeni Apostolik Kilisesi, İstanbul Ermenileri

In memory of Beyhan Paksoy...

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research Question

This study deals with the identity formation among Armenian immigrants from the Republic of Armenia who work as domestic laborers in Istanbul by exploring the dynamics of their life experiences. Building on previous research that explores many layers of “Armenian identity” as a concept, the following research question was formulated: What are the self-perceptions and experiences of Armenian domestic workers in Istanbul regarding their ethnic, religious and national identity? By specifically examining these three aspects of identity, it is aimed to provide a framework to the study. Accordingly, the following sub-questions are addressed:

- How does the existence of an Armenian community in Istanbul influence the identity-formation of Armenian immigrants?
- To what extent do these perceptions and dynamics of identity differ among immigrants who have and do not have working experience with non-Armenian households?
- Based on a micro-level analysis, which aspect of identity predominates in the everyday life practices/experiences of the group in question?

Despite the fact that this research addresses the case of Armenian domestic workers, it will not be an analysis of labor process; rather this thesis will focus on the experiences of the group in question and examine their everyday life practices on the basis of a micro-level analysis with an attempt to investigate the way how their identities are reformulated. While doing so, this thesis presents an overall literature review specific to what is meant by “Armenian identity” and discusses the duality of primordialism and constructivism regarding self-identification. Hence, this study tries to explore the

multiple layers of Armenian identity based on the experiences of immigrant domestic workers in Istanbul. The reason why this group is chosen for analysis is partially related with the methodological convenience I had as a researcher. My ability to access a hidden population as a semi-insider (with whom I share ethnic ties and speak the same language) posed an advantage which encouraged me to pursue this research. Once my first attempt to conduct preliminary interviews with a couple of respondents brought positive outcomes (i.e. easily getting consent for voice-recording, getting invitation for a second meeting without my request, keeping in touch via phone-calls throughout this period and basically encountering with attentive participants who wanted to become a part of the study etc.), I decided to operationalize this research and hear more on their stories, experiences, feelings and everyday life practices. Upon reviewing the literature on undocumented immigrant women in Turkey, it was seen that a considerable amount of the population-in-question is engaged in the informal sector which was also observed in the random sampling of Armenian workers during the early stages of this study. That is why, restricting the sampling only to domestic workers, thus to women, seemed meaningful considering the given time frame and scope of my research. Also, it is not argued that immigrant women from the RoA¹ only reside and work in Istanbul. However, limiting the study only to the city of Istanbul and taking the impact of local Armenian community there into consideration while collecting data was deemed appropriate especially in cases where Istanbul-Armenians appear as employers. Given the fact that the majority of Armenian immigrants reside and work in Istanbul also contributed to this decision in addition to my personal networks and acquaintances that helped me to reach them in my hometown.

1.2. Background Information

As a result of post-Soviet labor migration flow to developed countries for pursuing higher wages, Turkey has become a common destination for many Armenians from

¹ Republic of Armenia

the RoA since 1990s as those were the years when shuttle trading was very dynamic (Taşçı, 2010). Indeed, the existence of a local Armenian community in Istanbul was another factor for migrants' choice of workplace hoping for support by their fellow Armenians which upon first arrival provided a sense of security to some extent along with a sense of belonging (Ozinian, 2009). Despite the closed borders and lack of diplomatic relations between two nations, migration from Armenia to Turkey continues up to this day. The majority of immigrants, mainly consisting of women workers², are engaged in domestic services that include child care, elderly care, cleaning and housekeeping. Considering the migration flow from Armenia to Turkey, the existence of an Armenian community in Istanbul has been a motive in migrants' choice of destination – which is confirmed by the data collected during the fieldwork. Upon arrival, however, both communities (immigrant Armenians and local Armenians based in Istanbul) have encountered a different Armenian “model”, to which they were unfamiliar with due to the historic “iron curtain” where two communities had no social interaction. This brand new encounter was not in the form of a neighbor/friend/acquaintance relationship, but mostly a worker-employer relationship which inevitably brought about class issues since “domestic work is a site in which intersections of the hierarchies of gender, race/ethnicity, and class are particularly evident.” (Browne & Misra, 2005, p. 176). Given the historical and geographical background of both communities, indeed it is only natural to have cultural and ideological differences for RoA Armenians have been exposed to Soviet culture while Istanbul Armenians somehow carry Ottoman, hence Turkish (and say, even an Istanbulite pattern that forms a cosmopolitan/urbanite identity) influence in their everyday life and culture.³ Even the most essential component of culture, namely the language of both communities slightly differs from one another since RoA Armenians

² Approximately 95% of the Armenian workers are women according to EPF report, 2009.

³ We do not refer to a uniform formulation when speaking of “Armenian identity” since it has many layers and differs greatly from one another - which “could not have been otherwise with such a dispersed ethnic group” as Panossian (2006) notes (3).

speak Eastern Armenian while Armenians who are Turkish citizens speak Western Armenian just like most diaspora Armenians. Although this does not mean that there is a language barrier between them, still there can be communication problems. All of these details will be elaborated throughout the study.

Given that this study deals with the identity formation of RoA Armenians, it is mandatory to take a look at the Soviet background of the people in question. Before the independence of Armenia from Soviet rule in 1991, the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia was one of the constituent republics of the Soviet Union for nearly seven decades. Although Soviet Armenia was not a nation-state in a strict sense, the republic had certain characteristics specific to a modern nation under the influence of Soviet rule such as the establishment of certain state institutions, enhancement and preservation of literary Eastern Armenian language as well as dissemination of literacy (Bayadayan, 2007, p. 201). To paraphrase Martin (2000), Soviet policy attempted to make a distinction between national identity and high culture. While Socialism was meant to set the basis of a new Soviet culture, a statewide cultural understanding was being imposed through a “universal, standardized, yet multilingual system of education and propaganda” (p. 167). Without a doubt, these factors had an impact upon the reformulation of Armenian identity under Soviet rule and culture. While national identity was acknowledged in the ethnically diverse union – in order to avoid potential reactionary nationalism—, socialism lied at the heart of the state as a unifying principle (Martin, 2000, p. 167). As for religion, the anti-religious policies and sentiments of the Soviet era brought restrictions in the church life which will be elaborated further in the data analysis chapter. As one of the most important aspects of identity, the preservation of language was crucial for Soviet Armenians who were guaranteed mother-tongue education. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Eastern Armenian became the sole official language of the post-Soviet Armenia as well as the second Armenian state of Nagorno-Karabakh (as of mid-1990s) whose autonomy is not internationally recognized up to this date. Apart from the Soviet background of Armenians, three

major historical events also shaped their memories and identities; namely the tragic deportation of Armenians from Anatolia; the devastating earthquake of 1988 and the following territorial conflict with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh all of which will be discussed throughout the study.

For a more complete picture, it is important to provide context about the Armenian community life in Istanbul today. According to unofficial data, there are 40-60 thousand Istanbul-Armenians mainly residing in the districts of Kurtuluş⁴, Feriköy, Yeşilköy, Bakırköy, Samatya, Kadıköy, Taksim etc. where the Armenian community schools and churches are located. Kumkapı, where the Armenian Patriarchate of Turkey is located, is also a district where both the local Armenian and immigrant Armenian community members reside. Districts that are inhabited by the Armenian community allows for social interaction among group members as well. In addition to Armenian schools, churches and foundations that actively operate, media outlets are also of paramount importance for the Armenian community life in Istanbul. To briefly mention their history; *Jamanak Daily Newspaper* is the oldest newspaper in Istanbul that is published in Armenian since 1908. Founded by the Koçunyan family, *Jamanak* is run by Ara Koçunyan today. *Marmara Daily Newspaper*, on the other hand, is another newspaper that is published in Armenian since 1940. Rober Haddecian runs the newspaper since 1967. Although the circulation of these papers is low, both are published every day for Armenian-speaking readers.⁵ Also, *Agos* is a weekly newspaper published both in Armenian and Turkish since 1996. All three of these papers cover news on the social, political and cultural life of Armenians in Turkey, Armenia and the diaspora as well as news on Turkey. The importance of Armenian newspapers especially on immigrants' part will be detailed further in Chapter III.

⁴ See Appendix D for visuals on Kurtuluş Avenue (Kurtuluş Caddesi) and one of the side-streets (Direkçibaşı St.) nearby.

⁵ *Marmara* costs 1.25 Turkish Liras while *Jamanak* costs 1 Turkish Lira.

1.3. Research Design & Methodology

Initially, the primary objective of this research was to explore the employer-employee relationship between RoA Armenians as workers and local Armenians of Istanbul who employed the immigrants as domestic workers. The purpose was to elaborate on the concept of ethnicity as a mutual characteristic of both groups and to question in what ways it influenced or shaped their identities. The encounter of two Armenian women in a household setting in Turkey; namely an Istanbul Armenian employer and an immigrant Armenian, was regarded as a suitable research subject. Given the scope of this study, however, focusing on immigrants' experiences only and including immigrants who also work for non-Armenian employers was deemed more applicable. Besides, conducting interviews both with the employer and the employee of the same household posed a methodological challenge. Following preliminary data collection and analysis, the research outline was modified accordingly and it was concluded to make an emphasis on the narratives of the group in-question regarding their perceptions, understandings and experiences with a reference to their ethnic, national and religious identity formation. In a way, the abstract concept of "identity" and who an Armenian is or what "Armenian experience" means is being addressed in the narratives of self-perception. Although no in-depth interviews were conducted with employers, I also managed to gather certain information regarding their reflections on the existence of an Armenian immigrant community based on my informal observations which will be incorporated in the data analysis chapter. However, the research will mainly consist of immigrants' narratives and reference to employers' perspectives will be rarely presented.

The study subject of this research is Armenian women who came to Istanbul from the Republic of Armenia and who work as paid domestic laborers either as live-ins or as live-out workers. Qualitative methods of social research have been applied in this study by means of utilizing participant observation, focus group discussions, semi-structured and informal interviews. The goal of most qualitative studies is not to generalize but

rather to provide a rich, contextualized understanding of some aspect of human experience through the intensive study of particular cases (Polit & Back, 2010, p. 1452). Given that, it is acknowledged that neither previous studies based on interviews nor this research will represent the general population of Armenian immigrants working in domestic services in Istanbul – however the purpose here is to decipher certain themes and issues especially in terms of ethnic, national and religious identities. Besides, findings of such qualitative studies can be useful in future research or in other settings and/or contexts. The in-depth, ethnographic nature of this study will therefore require me to “participate in people’s lives, watch what happens, listen to what is said and ask questions” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 2). Indeed, reflexivity will inevitably come up which makes qualitative studies “personal,” poetic” and even “politic” (Barker, 2007, p. 29).

Even though this thesis is the outcome of a rather more extended period of time apart from my graduate studies as I have previously encountered the group in question since my childhood, the research was officially conducted in two phases namely between November-December, 2016 and March-June, 2017 with fifteen immigrant workers engaged in domestic services in Istanbul. Each participant has claimed to have an expired visa as a result of overstay and the number of years stayed in Turkey vary between 2 and 17 years. The average age of participants is forty-seven; although no limits were applied during sampling. Ideally, snowball sampling technique was used to gather data and reach more respondents as it is the most suitable method in contacting a hidden and vulnerable population (since the target group consists of undocumented workers who would not wish to reveal their identities). However, I also used my own contacts through family, friends and acquaintances that led me to half of the respondents. First, I asked my contacts to inform the immigrants about my wish to interview them and after getting consent I was introduced to them over the phone for scheduling date/time/venue. Although some of the workers interviewed spoke Turkish to some extent, communicating in their native language provided a more comfortable

and secure environment for their part while sharing their experiences.⁶ This enabled me to easily build a trust relationship between the interviewees and inevitably created an emotional bond throughout the research. Besides, obtaining consent from the participants before conducting interviews was essential and all necessary procedures were applied in line with the regulations of the Applied Ethics Research Center (UEAM) at Middle East Technical University.⁷ Voice recording was done as long as the participants gave consent; and at certain points, the interviews continued off-record upon the participants' request. A pilot study in November 2016 enabled me to modify the interview questions and helped me to become familiar with the fieldwork⁸. I was especially concerned about requesting permission to do voice recording; yet, nearly all participants (except for two of them) allowed me to do so. In one specific occasion, I personally preferred not to do voice recording as the participant –from the very beginning of our conversation– seemed extremely sentimental while speaking of her journey to Turkey. Preliminary interviews made with seven participants served as a fine experience for me in the early stages of data-collection.

1.4. Strengths and Limitations of This Study

While designing the outline of this project, I was confident that reaching the target group would not be a challenge due to my ability to access Armenian families who employ immigrant workers from RoA. Unexpectedly, six non-Armenian households that employ Armenian immigrants were encountered during my inquiries as well. This gave me the chance to extend the research question and make a comparative analysis of immigrants' experiences who work for Armenian and non-Armenian households and question whether it has any impact on their identity formation. Even though I

⁶ All interviews were conducted in Armenian. Transcription and translation into English was done by the researcher.

⁷ See Appendix C.

⁸ The initial findings of this study were presented at the VIII. National Sociology Congress on December 2016 at METU.

considered my language skills as one of the most powerful strengths of this study, I had my reservations about obtaining consent from the participants considering their illegal status. In the end, the fact that I am also a member of Armenian community positively impacted the course of this study during data-collection and turned a limitation into a strength as I never found myself in a position to convince or encourage the interviewees for participating in the research; more specifically, all of them attentively took part in the study as if they had been waiting for a researcher to hear their stories and in-a-way, raise a voice for them⁹. During many interviews, participants –without my specific request– showed photographs of their family members, social events they attended (i.e. weddings, holiday celebrations etc.) while telling their stories which referred to their willingness to share their experience.

As for the limitations; transcription of interviews (approximately 20 hours of voice-recording) and indeed their coding as well as analysis (about 25.000 words in text) have been time-consuming as in most similar case studies. A broader research with a larger amount of participants could have provided more depth and data if I had the time and logistic means to do so. It is hoped that, however, this study should serve as a reference for future case studies on Armenian domestic workers in Turkey. Even though my insider position created advantages such as being close to the data sources and enabling a careful observation of participants, it also had some challenges. In one occasion, for instance, one participant assumed that I was in a position to help with her legal problems; such as assisting her for applying to working permit. This was an unforeseen detail which pointed out to my over-involvement at the first stages of my fieldwork. Later, I went over the literature on research ethics and recalled that “social distance must be preserved in order to create space for analytic work to take place” (Victoria, 2011). Still, I believed that a balance could be achieved that would not prevent me from having an in-depth understanding of participants’ experiences. As Brayboy and Deyhle

⁹ See Appendix E for viewing the written reflections of participants regarding the research and the researcher.

(2000) suggest, lack of distance enhances the research outcomes (as cited by Adam, 2013, p. 6). Therefore, I worked on creating that balance as a researcher.

Another challenge was encountered while preparing interview questions especially on the conceptualization of ethnicity. Indeed, I had certain assumptions and background information of interviewees. However, I was aware that leading or misleading questions were to be avoided. As the number of interviews I made increased, I felt more confident and in-control. The first couple of interviews were hard for me to moderate especially when emotionally intense stories were being shared by respondents. However, I was able to take charge and moderate the course of the interviews after becoming more familiar with my work.

One final limitation was about the sampling: the limited number of participants did not allow to present a variety regarding religious identity. Even though this study assumes that religion and the Armenian Apostolic Church lies at the heart of Armenian identity, this does not mean that all Armenians are adherents of this church (others might be Catholic, Protestant or atheist etc.). However, every single participant has identified herself with the Armenian Apostolic Church. This was not unexpected; however, it might be regarded as a bias or an intention by the reader. To clarify, it should be noted that the sampling was not intentionally created so as to include only Apostolic Armenians. No matter how uniform it may seem, even the dynamics of religiosity and how it is perceived by the research group showed a rich profile which suffices for the purposes of this study. In short, this study both had its limitations and strengths just as any other scientific research.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Literature Review

Alin Ozinian's (2009) and Anna Muradyan's (2015) researches on the case of Armenian immigrants drew attention that the relationship between local Armenians and immigrant Armenians are complicated, in a negative way, based on class conflicts and socio-economic distinctions between two groups. Both of their findings have shown that Armenian immigrants mainly prefer to work for Turkish households. On the other hand, the exact number of Armenian immigrants who illegally work and reside in Turkey is unknown due to the fact that no population census of immigrants has been officially made on a state level. Therefore, making a general judgment would not be accurate neither for their nor for this study. Still, I wanted to conduct this research with a new sampling and see if it would be valid for my research group as well. In a way, this question became a starting point for my research which led me to inquire the employer-employee relationships based on ethnic ties that evolved into a case study by putting only immigrants' perspectives into center. It should be noted that my study, unlike Ozinian's and Muradyan's, was only dealing with workers in a specific sector, namely domestic labor. As data shows (in Chapter III), not all Armenian immigrants prefer to work only for Turkish households. In contrast, there are women out there who attribute a meaning to their choice of coming to Turkey and working for their fellow Armenians in Istanbul with a sense of duty and a specific attachment to "Armenian identity". That is to say, the outcomes of this research will challenge the common view regarding the "problematic" and "complicated" relationship between local Armenians and Armenian immigrants (as put by Ozinian, 2009, p. 23) as well as

the emphasis made on “contradictions” and “less than friendly relationships” (as put by Muradyan, 2015, p. 40) with one another by revealing the significance of primordial ties and sense of kinship on some immigrants’ part. Before going into this discussion, the following literature review, consisting of four parts, will portray the main themes and categories regarding the case of Armenian immigrant domestic workers.

2.1.1 Literature Review on Armenian Identity

Vast amount of research has already been conducted on Armenian identity within the disciplines of Armenology, anthropology, sociology and ethnographic studies. First of all, it would be wise to clarify what is meant by “Armenian identity” as a concept within the framework of this study. Indeed, its definition has long been a topic of debate among many Armenian communities around the world and its meaning varies greatly. (Ayvazyan, 2008; Bouldoukian, 2008; Hamparian, 2012). There is even a poem written in mid-19th century by Raphael Patkanian with an attempt to define what *real* Armenian identity is which is entitled “The Armenian and Armeniacy”¹⁰. While some groups regard the language as the core of Armenian identity, others put religion at the center. From a socially conservative point of view, Armenian Apostolic Church is an indispensable part of *genuine* Armenian identity. In other words, church is essential for the preservation of traditional Armenian identity; thus for the preservation of the language, culture and religion.¹¹ Reviewing the literature on Armenian identity, however, it is understood that the emphasis is mainly made on the fluid, socially constructed, contingent, multiple and interactive nature of identity (Bal, 2006; Baykal, 2011; Koç Gaabrielsen, 2015). Nevertheless, research outcomes of this study point out that Armenian identity may hold rather more rigid, traditionalist hence primordialist

¹⁰ Հայ և Հայություն, Ռաֆայել Պատկանյան

¹¹ “Church, in fact, has been the only single element which kept Armenians together” claims Vercihan Ziflioğlu (2015), an Armenian journalist based in Istanbul (p. 31). *Translation by the author. Original text: “Ermenileri aslında bir arada tutan tek olgu, kilise olgusu oldu”*.

qualities based on conventions and nationalist sentiments. Yet, the symbolic aspect of ethnicity and its dynamics are not disregarded while arguing so. Therefore, the definition of Armenian identity can be contextual however –within the scope of this study– it is also linked with the ethnic awareness of self, identification with Armenian language and Christianity; the Armenian Apostolic Church, to be specific. According to Boğos Levon Zekıyan (2001), for example, it is impossible to observe any trends towards Deism or an ardent, systematic opposition against the Church even during the Armenian Enlightenment and the modernization process¹². The specific emphasis made on this detail while elaborating on Armenian identity within the context of secularization and religion is noteworthy.

Speaking of the case of undocumented immigrant workers, feminist analysis of domestic labor (Dinçer, 2014) and “feminization of survival” (Sussen, 2000 as cited by Çelik, 2005, p. 28) appear as a recurring motif in analyzing the experiences of women laborers engaged in in-house services. Women are the main actors of domestic labor; therefore, a feminist analysis and approach to the matter seems inevitable. Narrowing down the case to the identity formation of Armenian immigrants, themes as motherhood and the consideration of family as a sacred unit come to the forefront which will be discussed in Chapter III while dealing with the data.¹³

2.1.2 Paid-in-house Services

Reviewing previous studies on domestic service, it is understood that mainly interview techniques and case studies based on participant observation have been utilized to collect information regarding immigrants’ experiences. Also, feminist theories and approaches are widely used to argue the relation between gender and labor especially

¹² Translation by the author. Original text: “Ermeni Aydınlanması’nda, genel eğilimler olarak Deizm veya sistematik bir kilise karşıtlığı görmek mümkün değildir (p. 110).

¹³ The notion of “motherhood” will be discussed further in the following sub-chapter of the literature review.

in African-American studies within the context of domestic labor (Browne & Misra 2005; Dinçer 2014). Another prominent theory seen in this topic is the globalization of domestic labor which is widely linked with the increase in demand and supply to the migrant domestic labor (Dinçer, 2014, p. 7). To be clear, domestic labor here refers to *paid in-house services* within the scope of this study despite the fact that the term may be attributed to any unpaid labor regarding housework mainly indicating those of women (i.e mothers, housewives, working-mothers etc.). It is needed to be clarified as the term domestic service/labor itself has various definitions in the literature like “invisible labor” (Acar-Savran & Tuna-Demiryontan, 2008 as cited by Dinçer, 2014 p. 7) or “social reproductive labor” (Glenn, 1992 as cited by Dinçer, p. 7). Within the framework of this study, “immigrant women” serve as the main actors of domestic service which constitute an important part of informal labor all over the globe. Given the setting of employment, that is a private household, along with insecurity issues put the migrant workers in a vulnerable position at most times. Reviewing the literature, it is understood that a feminist approach with an emphasis on social inequalities are applied while discussing the matter. The most comprehensive literature on domestic labor appears in the case of Filipina workers in the Americas where intersectionality of race, gender and class dynamics are discussed in detail (Parrenas, 2001). Indeed, the literature on domestic service is not confined only to migrant workers and as Raya Muttarak’s (2004) case study suggests, in countries like Thailand, Bolivia and Indonesia most domestic workers are local people, not foreign migrants (p. 503). Moreover, the theory of transnational migration is widely used while dealing with the issue of domestic labor (Körükmez, 2012). Scholarly attention is given to the issue of domestic labor especially after the development of gender studies and comparative studies that deal with lower and middle-class women. Besides, the exploration of “why domestic workers are necessary in middle-class households?” has attracted academic researchers in many fields ranging from economics and work-family policies (Misra, 2010) to anthropology (Öztürk, 2013) and cultural studies. To be more specific, the

issue has interdisciplinary aspects within that expose researchers to a vast amount of literature. For this reason, specifically focusing on three main concepts while conducting this research, namely ethnic, national and religious identity (broadly dealt in Chapter II) is believed to make a humble contribution to the literature with a different relational approach in order to link these theories with the experiences and self-perceptions of migrant workers.

2.1.3 Emotional Labor

A significant amount of literature is encountered while reviewing former works on women's paid domestic services which leads to the discussion on "emotional labor" in the employer-employee relationship of women. Especially works by Arlie Russel Hochschild, who has coined the term emotional labor, is of paramount importance to understand the "pseudo-sisterhood" aspect between domestics and mistresses which eventually turned out as a global concept not only for women who are engaged in care-giving works but also for flight attendants, teachers, nurses, call center workers etc. and for the service industry in general. First of all, we should look at the definition of emotional labor: emotional labor refers to "the process of managing feelings and expressions in order to fulfill emotional requirements as part of the job role" (Hochschild, 1983; Grandey, 2000). This form of labor is especially seen in in-house services where employer's home becomes a workplace of the employee. Early works on emotional labor, which is usually dealt in the fields of sociology, psychology and human communication, show that although race and class create stratification in the case of domestic servants, gender serves as a mutual value while constructing emotional labor in the guise of a "sisterhood". In other words, a pseudo-kinship is observed where workers almost lose their personal lives and their own families (especially for live-in workers) by means of which employers increase their anticipations (Kalaycoğlu & Rittersberger-Tılıç, 2000). Mary Romero's studies in 1980s also show that gift-giving, which is practically giving away old clothes or belongings to workers that are no longer needed by employers, is a tool to construct a

sisterhood where a “close relationship” and affection is expressed where in exchange gratitude (in form of extra labor or additional task requests) is expected from the workers as a result of this so-called sincere approach. On worker’s part, on the other hand, emotional labor comes out as a means to identify with job as in the example of Filipina care-takers in the USA who are unable to take care of their own families: as Parrenas explains, these workers experience a *displaced mothering* or more generally a *displaced caretaking* where they “pour their love” to children they take care of (Parrenas, 2000, p. 576). This is also called as a “diverted mothering” by Wong (1994). Coming back to in-house servants, the degree of emotional labor expected from private household workers can be deduced from the common expression “she is just like one of the family” (Romero, 1988, p. 329). Indeed, this phrase is relevant not only in the American example, but also in the case of Turkish household services which is exemplified by Kalaycıoğlu and Tılıç (2000) as “pseudo-kinship” that is regarded as an on-purpose “strategy” of employers. In short, emotional labor is encountered both on employers’ and workers’ parts depending on their circumstances, experiences and roles.

2.1.4 Motherhood as an (Armenian) Identity

Hondagnou-Sotelo and Avila (1997) refer to the arrangement where mothers migrate to other countries to financially support their children as “transnational mothering” while Parrenas (2000) emphasizes the fact that these transnational mothers (Latinas in the USA) who constitute “global care chains” find comfort in “loving” the elderly or children whom they take care of as if they were caring their own family who are left behind. Therefore, gender > womanhood > motherhood comes as a character that carers identify with in their displacement (as mentioned previously about “displaced/diverted mothering”). Narrowing it down to the case of Armenians, Armine Ishkanian’s study (2002) on Armenian women’s labor migration in the post-Soviet period –which she calls as “mobile motherhood”– serves as a fine example for our case. She argues that “in the Armenian model of kinship, where the mother is “idealized” and seen as

“sacred,” she is considered to be the hearth (*odjakh*), pillar (*syun*), or lamp/light (*jrak*) of the family (p. 384).¹⁴ In her field work, Ishkanian has confirmed that migrant women working in the US still hold on to that character of sacred motherhood in their actions and practices despite “deterritorialization” for the purpose of maintaining their Armenian identity even in a foreign land. Thus, this “mobile” form of motherhood is carried along as a character. Speaking of all these terms, indeed it is understood that once again gender roles lie at the heart of the case of caregiving migrant workers. In short, while there is feminization of migration and labor in domestic services as part of globalization and the rising demand for immigrant workers from middle-class (urban) households, there are also deeper meanings attributed to the roles of workers as *surrogate mothers* (Hondagnou-Sotelo & Avila, 1997), carers and pseudo-family members which are all related to the previous review on emotional labor as well as with the concept of transnational motherhood. The case of Armenians here is even more specific with “sacred motherhood” being a national value attributed to women as the hearth of family and as a theme formulating a firm identity. As Boğos Levon Zekiyan (2001) argues, Armenians have managed to progress in women’s liberation movement without denying womanhood and motherhood.¹⁵ This, also, is an interesting detail regarding the way how motherhood and gender roles are perceived in a modern world which can be applied to the case of Armenian domestic workers who are engaged in transnational parenting and caring sector.

2.2 Introducing the Key Concepts

With an attempt to set the basis of the theoretical and conceptual framework of this study, this sub-chapter will introduce three key concepts; namely the ethnic, national

¹⁴ Here Ishkanian refers to another scholar Sona Zeitlian who argues that “the idea of an idealized sacred mother has shaped and continues to shape gender ideology about the role of women in Armenian society and within the family” (Nationalism, 84 as cited by Ishkanian, p. 384)

¹⁵ Translation by the author. Original text: “Ermeniler dini inançlarını reddetmeden sekülerleşebilmiş, kadınlık durumunu ve anneliği reddetmeden kadının özgürleşmesi yolunda ilerleyebilmişlerdir (p. 111).

and religious identity of the group in question. Before that, a discussion on the primordialism-constructivism debate with respect to ethnicity will be made based on Henry Hale's (2004) conception of identity which he theorizes as "reconstituted primordialism" (p. 481). Accordingly, the duality of primordialism and constructivism will constitute the theoretical framework of this study. In other words, these two approaches will not be treated as binary oppositions; instead, the "personal points of references" as put by Hale (2004) will be utilized to comprehend the complexity of ethnicity and what it means. Additionally, Anthony Smith's (1991) theory of ethno-symbolism will be addressed to understand the dynamics and perceptions regarding identity formation by highlighting the significance of such concepts as myths, symbols, ethnic election, common ancestry etc. – all of which will be linked and analyzed with the data collected for this thesis in Chapter III. Besides, concepts like homeland, the role of language and religious experience specific to the Armenian community will be elaborated. In the meantime, the role(s) of Armenian Apostolic Church will be noted in the last subchapter in order to conceptualize its impact on national and religious identity as well as on its function as a network for Armenian immigrants. Finally, Razmik Panossian's (2006) approach will be acknowledged, especially in the data analysis stage of this study, which points out that:

After all, most nations have both modernist and primordialist/perennialist elements to them. The same is true of the civic/ethnic and the subjective/objective 'debates'. To understand the formation of national identity and nationalism in a specific case it is, therefore, important to examine and to combine various theories of nationalism from 'opposing camps'. This approach is more than just a 'middle position'. It is the acceptance of theoretical diversity as the basis of analysis (p. 5).

2.2.1 The Primordialism-Constructivism Debate

By detailing the relevance of both constructivism and primordialism in evaluating the concept of "identity", Hale (2004) finely synthesizes these terms and concludes that ethnicity derives from an individual's "need to make sense of the world" for whatever

intention or goal he pursues (p. 482). According to Hale, the dichotomization of primordialism and constructivism in the literature is “somewhat miscast” (p. 461). Even a self-declared primordialist, Van Evera (2001), affirms that ethnic identities are socially constructed as they are not “stamped on our genes” (p. 20). That is to say, this study has no intention to deny the constructed nature of ethnic, national or religious identities; however, it also does not ignore the primordial ties such as myths of common ancestry, blood relations, kinship and shared cultures which identities and especially ethnic groups assume as “givens”. In other words, the fact that identities are social constructs does not mean that individuals cease to attribute primordial meanings and attachments while identifying themselves as citizens, group members and/or adherents of a religious community. Therefore, self-perceptions are crucial in the definition of such identities and how they are experienced in groups. Another approach that is believed to be complementary for the conceptual framework of this study is Anthony Smith’s (1991) ethnosymbolism which constitutes the following subchapter.

2.2.2 Ethno-symbolism

While acknowledging the inner-workings of constructivism, yet at the same time paying tribute to the significance of ethnic ties, Anthony Smith (1991) claims that *ethnies* (pre-modern ethnic communities) are formed by specific cultural attributions which have a collective proper name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more differentiating elements of common culture, an association with a specific “homeland” and a sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population (p. 21). Accordingly, values such as myths, symbols and memories which unify nations can be ancient even though groups may interpret or utilize them in new ways for different endeavors at different time periods (Hale, 2004 p. 461). From the perspective of ethno-symbolists, the emphasis regarding nation-formation is especially made on such concepts as myths, blood ties, common fate, traditions, shared memory and tradition. Likewise, ethnic ties are fundamental in the genesis of nations according to ethno-symbolism. However, this approach does not reject the possibility of change or

reconstruction for ethnic and/or national identities. Even though certain cultural values or abstract notions are positioned at the center, it is also acknowledged that adaptations or alterations might occur due to various reasons or situations.¹⁶

2.2.3 Ethnic Identity of Armenians: Primordial Sentiments

Claiming that a “search for identity” serves as a purpose along with a “demand to exist”¹⁷ while defining and experiencing ethnicity as a phenomenon, Clifford James Geertz (1996) notes:

By a primordial attachment is meant one that stems from the ‘givens’ - or, more precisely, as culture is inevitably involved in such matters, the assumed ‘givens’ - of social existence: immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language, or even a dialect of a language, and following particular social practices. These congruities of blood, speech, custom and so on, are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering coerciveness in and of themselves (p. 41-42).

The “givens”, therefore, are definitive tools in the construction of identity. Although ethnicity may also be discussed in sociobiological terms as argued by Pierre Van den Berghe (1987) who advises to regard ethnicity both subjectively and objectively, the role of individual affiliation, attachment, feelings, sentiments and “incurred obligation”; namely primordial ties are of paramount importance in order to comprehend the “myth of ethnic election” as put by Anthony Smith (2003) in his *Chosen Peoples*. Patterns of being the member of the elect community can only be understood through considering the primordial ties which are essential to understand the meanings attributed to ethnicity. The discussion on “chosen peoples” is exemplified with the case of Armenian community which holds certain distinctiveness as the first

¹⁶ For instance, in the events of war, forced migration or other extraordinary cases -where people are exposed to extreme life experiences which bring new memories – not only ethnic and national identities, but also religious identities would be subject to change (Baykal, p. 58).

¹⁷ As Geertz refers to Mazzini in *Ethnicity* (1996), p. 41

nation to adopt Christianity as a state religion. In that sense, ethnicity cannot be explained without religious identity in the case of Armenians who have a “root-oriented” model of identity as depicted by famous anthropologist Levon Abrahamian (2006). In fact, being the first nation to adopt Christianity has become a source of pride for Armenians which connotes to the God-given, biblical reference as seen in *Chosen Peoples* (2004). Likewise, Ronald Grigor Suny (1993) notes that “an exclusive concentration on survival” has resulted in an “essentialist” understanding of the nation [for Armenians] (as cited by Harutyunyan, 2006, p. 285). Therefore, ethnic election and chosenness can be better understood through looking at primordialism where “one is bound to one’s kinsman, one’s neighbor, one’s fellow believer [as a result of] some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself” (Geertz, 1996, p. 42). Considering all these dynamics, no wonder why identity has always been a contested term as an abstract concept. Likewise, ethnic identity has been approached with different theories mainly with the dominant paradigm of constructivism in social sciences and ethnic studies. Despite that, this study will also consider the primordialist approach while analyzing Armenian identity with respect to its idea of “ethnic election” as noted above. Speaking of the definition of an ethnic group, Weber (1968) has referred them as those groups that “entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration” (p. 389). Hale (2004), on the other hand, notes that:

Ethnic identity (or ethnicity) is a set of personal points of reference, thick and thin, that involve what we call “ethnic” distinctions between people. An “ethnic group” is thus a set of people who have common points of reference to these ethnic dimensions of the social world and who perceive that they indeed have these things in common and that these similarities are captured by a label, the ethnic group’s name (p. 473).

Elaborating on these “common points of reference” would be meaningful in understanding the self-perceptions of a group. On the other hand, common descent and

shared memories are especially important while analyzing the identity formation of Armenians. Even for a social-constructivist scholar, namely Ronald Grigor Suny (2001), there is a “selective affinity between nation, essentialism and primordialism” (p. 40). In his article *Constructing Primordialism*, Suny (2001) further highlights the significance of emotions (i.e. pride, memories of survival, threats from other groups etc.) in the generation of group or personal identities especially in the Armenian case (p. 42).¹⁸ Reviewing the interviews made with Armenian immigrants within the scope of this study, it is seen that emphasis on this “common descent”, “common language” and “kin connection” are apparent especially among those respondents who have specifically chosen to work for Armenian households in Istanbul – which will be detailed in the data analysis chapter. While primordialist theories define ethnicity as fixed; the constructivist approach regards identity as a fluid concept that is subject to change with external factors and in relation to social circumstances. Chandra (2001) summarizes the constructivist view as follows:

Those who subscribe to the constructivist approach agree on two basic propositions: First, individuals have multiple, not single, ethnic identities; and second, the identity with which they identify varies depending upon some specified causal variable. Changes in the value of these causal variables are likely to lead to changes in individual identifications. As individual identifications change, the ethnic groups and the ethnic demography that describe these individuals also change. (p. 7)

On one hand, the case of Armenian immigrant domestic workers can be interpreted from a constructivist perspective as they hold multiple identities ranging from being “a woman”, “an undocumented worker” to “an immigrant” and “an ethnic minority in Istanbul”.¹⁹ On the other hand, this view should not rule out the primordial ties that Armenians identify themselves with such as common ancestry, shared memory and

¹⁸ See “Constructing Primordialism: Old Histories for New Nations” by Ronald Grigor Suny (2001) to learn more on his personal experiences on primordial attachment as a diaspora Armenian.

¹⁹ It should also be remembered that Armenia is one of the most ethnically-homogenous nations in the world with 98% of the population being ethnically Armenian (National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia, 2011 Population Census)

awareness of a single ethnic belonging. In other words, constructivism and primordialism may be considered as binary oppositions in the literature; however, they represent a duality where they can correlate at times depending on social interactions and circumstances. Thus, it can be argued that both a primordialist and a constructivist view can be made while speaking of the group in question depending on circumstances and narratives of self-perceptions. Implementing one and crossing out the other rigidly is not mandatory unlike general opinion in academic circles. As Murat Bayar (2009) finely puts it in his *Reconsidering Primordialism*:

[Geertz's] theory underlines the fact that the boundaries between ethnic groups are drawn along assumed similarities and dissimilarities. Therefore, the construction of ethnicity through social interactions does not constitute a dichotomy between constructivism and primordialism, despite the conventional wisdom (p. 1642).

Therefore, the theoretical framework of this study embodies both schools of thought in the analysis of the data at hand with a reference to Henry Hale's (2004) approach of "reconstituted primordialism". It should be noted that the intention is neither to prioritize an approach (primordialism or constructivism) nor to prove its authenticity or superiority. Here, subjective knowledge is being sought through the narratives by linking the case study with these theories for the purpose of understanding their applicability while analyzing identities.

2.2.4 National & Diasporic Identity

Even though we can make a primordialist interpretation of ethnicity for Armenians to some extent, speaking of a singular, monolithic, uniform national identity may not be relevant as there are multiple factors (i.e: geography, culture, language, economic status) that influence national identity. Considering that only one third of the Armenian population in the world is living in the RoA as Armenian citizens, looking at the identity formation of Diaspora Armenians is mandatory to have a better understanding on the matter. As Sona Manusyan (2010) puts it:

Diaspora by itself is a rather complicated subject of research; it implies single nation but not a single culture, single nation, but not a single language, one ethnic identity combined with many other group identities, as well as the necessity to integrate and organize them from time to time (para. 2).

To illustrate, citizenship plays a crucial role in the definition of national identity on Armenians' part as the socio-cultural profiles of Armenians who are Turkish citizens and RoA Armenians differ greatly. Likewise, the social identity of diaspora Armenians are also formulated in accordance with the local culture they are exposed to. Indeed; it should be kept in mind that the concept of "Diaspora Armenian" is extremely broad and is not only limited to the West; namely to Canadian-Armenians, American-Armenians or French-Armenians unlike popular opinion. There is also a considerable population of Armenians based in Middle East whose numbers are disputed, changing between half a million and a million. Speaking of Armenians based in Turkey, the case is a little more complicated. This group does not consider itself as part of the "diaspora", claiming that they are still living in their historical homeland and they have not left home unlike others have even though they are Turkish citizens.²⁰ Moreover, some RoA Armenians and Diaspora Armenians argue that Istanbul Armenians also constitute a sort of "diaspora" for they no longer live in Anatolia, namely the historic homeland which corresponds to southeast Turkey today.²¹ All these details point to the fact that identity may be regarded as a subjective belonging; namely a "self-categorization" (Manusyan, 2010, para. 4). Given that, even an ethnic group can have the dichotomy of us vs. them among each other (Manusyan, 2010, para. 5). It is understood that, despite mutual ethnicity, citizenship is definitive in the evaluation of Armenian national identity (even without being the citizen of RoA) and it is only

²⁰ See the following articles for further discussion on the wrongful categorization of Armenians who are Turkish citizens as "Diaspora" from the perspective of Istanbul Armenians:

<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/diaspora-degilim-17747755>
http://hyetert.blogspot.com.tr/2011/01/diaspora-bakanligi-tarafindan-bana_26.html
<https://azadalik.wordpress.com/2011/07/05/istanbul-diyaspora-midir-degil-midir/>
https://www.armenianow.com/features/29791/istanbul_armenians_diaspora_armenia

²¹ See Ziflioğlu (2015) for further discussion on the matter, p. 30-31

natural that each community carries certain elements from the countries they are born into. Besides, collective memory, myths and symbols cannot be underestimated in this evaluation. As put by Ronald Grigor Suny (2005): “the narrative [of nations] is most often a tale of origins and continuity, often of sacrifice and martyrdom, but also of glory and heroism” (p. 93). According to Smith (1996), on the other hand, nation is a modern phenomenon and at the same time it has roots in pre-modern eras and pre-modern cultures. He argues that:

Modern nations are closely related to older, long-lived *ethnies* which furnish the nation with its distinctive mythology, symbolism and culture including its association with an ancient homeland. Most importantly the nation that emerges in the modern era must be regarded as both *construct* and *real* process in a dual sense (Smith, 1996, p. 124).

This very duality is similar to the interrelatedness of primordialism and constructivism as discussed in the previous subchapter regarding the nature of ethnic identity. Finally, it would be suitable to speak of Smith’s (1999) Golden Age theory which is attributed to Armenians. He argues that:

Armenians as well as Greeks and Jews look back nostalgically to golden age of great kings, sages, poets, yearned to return to ancient capitals with sacred sites and buildings, took with them wherever they went their ancient scripture, sacred scripts and separate liturgies, founded in every city congregations with churches clergy and religious schools, traded across Middle East and Europe [...], used their wealth education and economic skills to offset their political powerlessness (Smith, 1999, p. 212).

This nostalgic recollection of the “good old days” refers to the attempt of satisfying “the quest for *authenticity*” (Smith, 1997, p. 48). Another function of golden age memories is to establish a “sense of continuity between generations” (Smith, 1997, p. 50). This is especially important for Armenians as a community that is spread all around the world in many different geographies and nations. Coming back to the conception of national identity, Sima Aprahamian (1999) argues that the ethnic identity and “nationhood” of Armenians can be considered as an outcome of their struggles, historical experiences, common language and other primordial ties (p. 5). From this

perspective, ethnicity and nationality are ideological and/or theoretical constructs where collectivity, shared memory and “diversity of historical experiences” once again appear as core elements to the identity construction of Armenians.²² Likewise, Alla Mirzoyan (2010) points out the “eclectic” feature of Armenian nationalism and writes that it combines both primordialism and modernism (p. 13). She further notes that Armenian nationalism not only emphasizes the ancientness/antiquity of ethnicity, but also stresses the ultimate goal of establishing the Armenian state with a reference to Levon Abrahamian’s (2006) “root-oriented model” which in Mirzoyan’s words, “describes a nation constantly moving forward to the past reenacting essentially the same story” (Mirzoyan, 2010, p. 13). Considering these details and the diverse literature on the matter, it can be concluded that the national identity of Armenians can be multi-faceted and situational despite being root-oriented. In Levon Abrahamian’s (2006) term, after all, it is as if “Armenians are doomed to be essentialists” (p. 142).²³

2.2.4.1 Narratives of Homeland

Arguing that Armenian literature in Turkey is crucial for understanding the collective identity of Armenians, Özdemir (2010) draws attention to Anatolian narratives and explains the way how being uprooted from homeland has damaged the collective identity of Armenians as a result of displacement. In a way, Anatolia as homeland constitutes an important aspect of collective memory for the group in question. On the other hand, we have the Armenian state –Republic of Armenia– which may be regarded as the “homeland” of Armenians to some extent. Still, “many [diaspora] Armenians

²² For further discussions on the matter, see Sima Aprahamian (1999).

²³ On page 340-341, Levon Abrahamian gives an interesting example of the “mythological primordial entity” with the following quotation: “Such a big event was organized in September 1999 in Yerevan under the motto ‘One nation (*azg*), one culture.’ This event was thought to be a kind of a Pan-Armenian forum, involving all the diaspora structures (territorial, political, social, etc.). It was as if the diaspora as a unit (including all the diasporas) was reuniting with the homeland. The motto of the event, ‘One nation, one culture,’ reflected this mythological primordial entity, rather than the actual situation, which anthropologically could be better defined as ‘One nation, many cultures’.”

would tell you [...] that their Armenian identity has no connection with the Armenian state, that their ancestors do not come from what is Armenia today [...] (Seferian, 2017, para. 13). This argument is especially relevant for Armenians (born as the citizens of Turkey) who have Anatolian background. Therefore, even the definition of homeland varies greatly among the group in question which makes the concept of “sense of belonging” situational as well. Inevitably, narratives of trauma, catastrophe, genocide and denial –which are used as political terms– majorly appear in the literature concerning Armenians whether it be in the field of sociology, history or anthropology. These concepts are indeed contributing to the formation of collective memory, hence the identity of Armenians. After all, attachment to a particular land and its history generates the collective memory of an *ethnie*. For instance, the collective memory of Armenians in Turkey, *Artsakhtsi/Karabakhtsi*²⁴ Armenians and/or *Gyumretsi*²⁵ Armenians will of course differ from one another as each of them have had different experiences and histories as communities. It could be argued that the collective memory of *Karabakhtsi* Armenians with respect to trauma and war are much more vivid than the other two communities due to the ongoing conflict between them and the Azerbaijani since 1988. Likewise, the memories of people from Gyumri with respect to the devastating Spitak earthquake are still vivid. Therefore, it is only natural that groups might experience what is termed as “collective memory” different from one another based on many factors ranging from the conception of homeland, local identities and cultural formations with respect to the geography in which they interact with other groups. After all, as Connerton (1987) states in his *How Societies Remember*, “our experiences of the present largely depend upon our knowledge of the past” (p. 3). For example, Mount Ararat –as a national symbol– plays a crucial role in the collective memory and identity of Armenians. Unlike Istanbul-Armenians, however, having the

²⁴ Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh

²⁵ Armenians from Gyumri, RoA

sight of this national symbol on a regular basis especially from Yerevan, RoA Armenians naturally may have a deeper attachment to this sacred mountain where Noah's Ark is believed to have landed. According to Darieva (2006), Armenians regard Mount Ararat as a symbolic cultural property (p. 90). The fact that it does not currently remain within the official borders of Armenia, on the other hand, attributes other meanings to Mount Ararat; such as longing for the past and a constant reminder of lost soils, since it is considered as an important part of historic homeland for Armenians. In a way, even the physical closeness of Mount Ararat to Armenia provides a different dimension to the way how collective memory is being experienced. As Adriaans (2011) notes, the image of Mount Ararat provides an "imaginary link to a golden past" with reference to Anthony Smith's (2003) ethnic election and golden age theories (p. 40). That in mind, narratives of homeland also vary based on local identities and memories. But the common feature of such narratives –which will be discussed later– is "the usage of the emotional language, dramatization of good memories, idealization of the beauties of the homeland and over-emphasis on the uniqueness of the homeland" as revealed in a similar study on Crimean Tatars with respect to perception of homeland (Aydingün & Yıldırım, 2010, p. 22). The similarity in discourses and findings that point out the strong attachment to homeland without even being born there (or without having been there) as well as the idealization of land is noteworthy not only in the case of Armenians but in other studies on ethnic groups.

2.2.4.2 The Role of Language

Another significant aspect to collective identity/memory is indeed a common language spoken by an ethnic group.²⁶ Speaking of national identity without discussing the dynamics of language would be an insufficient elaboration as it is a crucial element that shapes national identity. In Abrahamian's terms (1998), language serves as an "evidence of a society's ethnic roots" (p. 4). The importance attributed to "mother

²⁶As David Leupold (2016) notes, "language is the transmitter of collective memory" (p. 160).

tongue” can be observed in Armenian textbooks taught at school both in Soviet and post-Soviet Armenia as well as in the Armenian community schools in Istanbul. Palandjian’s (2012) study on how national identity is reflected in educational textbooks show that the famous children’s poem “I Love You, My Armenian Tongue” («Կը սիրեմք քեզ իմ հայ լեզուն») appears continuously as “a constant reminder to love and be proud to know the mother language” (p. 30). Yet, whether knowing the mother language is regarded as a criterion to be considered as a “true Armenian” or not has been a topic of debate among the in-group members which continues up to this day. While primordial ties, namely ethnic background and kinship would suffice for some, others believe knowing the mother tongue by heart is a must to be or feel Armenian. To illustrate, Serj Sargsyan, president of RoA has noted in 2013 that “Any young Armenian must speak Armenian language. If a person does not speak the native language, he is not only posing a threat to his existence/identity, but is also becoming weak as an individual” (*President Sargsyan*, 2013).²⁷ Also, Archbishop Oshagan Cholalyan has once said that “an individual may have an Armenian psyche, but something would be amiss if he did not have his language” (as cited in Vaux, 2004). On the other hand, some argue that “those who do not have the Armenian language skills are no less Armenians than those who speak the language” (Dolarian, 1993, p. 21). Life conditions, educational background, place of birth and many more factors determine whether an Armenian is able to read, write and/or speak in his or her native language. Interestingly, those who lack the language skills may still consider Armenian as their mother language which is termed as a “desired mother tongue” (Kock Kobaidze, 2001, p. 155) that can be considered as the portrayal of nationalism in a symbolic sense – even though it might seem contradictory. Besides, the fact that Western Armenian is an endangered language makes its speakers face with a matter of

²⁷ Original Text: Յուրաքանչյուր հայ երիտասարդ պետք է տիրապետի հայերենին, քանզի, եթե մարդը չի տիրապետում իր մայրենի լեզվին, նա ոչ միայն վտանգում է իր ինքնությունը, այլև թուլանում որպես անհատ:

survival as well. What is more, it is also regarded as a holy language whose alphabet was invented by St. Mesrob Mashtots, a linguist and a theologian, in 405 AD. This alone attributes a sacred meaning to the Armenian language by its speakers. Such examples will be further discussed in Chapter III while analyzing data since “language” has been a recurring motif in the narratives.

2.2.5 Religious Identity

As the first nation to officially adopt Christianity as a state religion in 4th century (301 AD), religion and the Armenian Apostolic Church has an indispensable influence upon Armenian identity. As noted earlier, this has often caused a source of pride among Armenians for being one of the most ancient peoples in the world. Without a doubt, this does not simply mean that there are no non-Christian Armenians (i.e. atheists, Muslims, pagans etc.). But still, according to a social anthropologist Dr. Hranush Kharatyan (2010): “Armenians see religious diversity as a direct threat to their ethnic unity. The Armenian Apostolic Church also safeguards this ethnic identity” (p. 80). What is more, the Armenian Apostolic Church is at times perceived as an “ethnic church” (Kharatyan, 2010, p. 79). Moreover, it should be noted that the church has a crucial role in maintaining unity and togetherness among the Armenian community in general. To be more specific, going to church is not only a religious practice (or maybe not even a religious practice for some) but a means to preserve the community’s existence (especially in a Muslim country) by sticking together. Besides, there is a cultural aspect to it where church ceremonies serve as the manifestation of one’s Armenian identity whether he or she is a devout Christian, a regular church-goer or not. For example, getting your child baptized in the Armenian Apostolic Church or having a religious marriage ceremony accompanied by many guests are major events in the community which manifest the existence of Armenian identity in front of other group members who witness and participate in these ceremonies. Traditions and customs, in this respect, cannot be underestimated while discussing identity as they greatly contribute to the dynamics of religious and community experience for

Armenians as well. Likewise, funerals are also among the major events where the community comes together via the religious institution. Speaking of self-identification, for instance, Levon Abrahamian (1998) notes that confessional identity is like a tradition for Armenians and “not a question of faith in the strict sense of the word” as I tried to explain earlier (p. 114). In other words, “Hay-k'ristonya (‘Armenian-Christian’) is understood by Armenians as a single whole, the two characteristics being linked certainly by a hyphen” (Abrahamian, 1998, p. 114). Therefore, the ethnic character of religion for Armenians should be highlighted in order to better understand identity-formation. This alone explains the reason why religious diversity is not welcomed as being an Armenian equals to being a Christian on most occasions which will be revealed later in the following chapter on data analysis with specific examples (i.e. the reception of Muslim Armenians). Besides, being a Christian-Armenian not only connotes to the ethnic character of the community, but also to its national character. A striking example to this can be shown from Yulia Antonyan’s (2011) article on Religiosity and Religion Identity in modern Armenia where one of her informants, a theologian based in the diaspora, claims: “I don’t know for certain whether God exists or not. As for myself, I am working here as a bishop in the name of national purposes” (p. 318). Although this might seem like an extraordinary case, the intention here is to stress the linkage between the ethnic and national character of Armenians’ religious identity which might become instrumental due to many reasons varying from conserving traditions, maintaining group identity or simply serving for the community – ultimately, for the Armenian nation. While elaborating on this matter, remembering Tölölyan’s (1988) remarks on the role of the Armenian Apostolic Church with respect to the national identity of Armenians might be relevant:

Since the days of historian-clergymen like Yeghishe and Khorenatsi [5th century], the Armenian Apostolic Church has worked to shape a national culture in which to die for the Church was to die for the nation, and where, eventually, Church and Nation became inseparable (p. 59).

Therefore, the role of Armenian Apostolic Church upon Armenian community is also multi-faceted. Apart from being a religious institution and representing both ethnic and national values, the Armenian Apostolic Church also serves as an important network both for local Armenians and for immigrants. For instance, Surp Asdvadzadzin Mayr Yegeğetsi –the Mother Church in Kumkapı, serves as an important network. Given its location, the Kumkapı district where many Armenian immigrants reside, this church has often become a means to find workplace through interacting with other immigrants and local Armenians especially upon first arrival to Istanbul. The fact that it is very close to the cargo agencies as well as to the Armenian Patriarchate also make it a common meeting center. Thus, Armenian churches become a place to communicate, interact, socialize and exchange information with other Armenians about potential workplaces or simply to make new acquaintances (Muradyan, 2015, p. 50). This alone, attributes another function to the church apart from its abovementioned roles and features.

Introduced by Herbert J. Gans (1994), on the other hand, the concept of symbolic religiosity was used to analyze the acculturation and assimilation of Jewish immigrants that were based in the US. Here, this concept will be applied in the religious practices of Armenians who identify themselves with the Armenian Apostolic Church. Although there are other sects and churches that Armenians follow (i.e. Protestantism, Catholicism, Jehovah's Witnesses etc.), this study will focus only on the Armenian Apostolic Church considering the scope of this research and due to its assumption that the Armenian Apostolic Church has much more influence upon the group in question. According to Gans (1994), symbolic ethnicity refers to the utilization of religious symbols –such as wearing a cross necklace, lighting a candle, attending the Divine Liturgy majorly in Eastertime or Christmastime or cooking traditional food on religious holidays– for purely secular purposes. For instance, one may attend a religious service as a spectator, not as a participant. Visiting religious sites as “tourists” rather than as “pilgrims” can be regarded as another example for the practice of symbolic religiosity

(Gans, 1994, p. 585). Indeed, as Gans (1994) further notes, this does not necessarily prevent the actors of symbolic religiosity from being engaged in religious meditation or prayers. Besides, symbolic religiosity alone does not suffice to explain the dynamics between cultural, national and ethnic identity of a group. Therefore, all these factors should be considered as a whole. For example, while pointing out symbolic practices, the function of church as a site for conserving national identity despite being away from homeland should also be remembered. After all, “the Armenian Church serves as the chief institution for bringing together all Armenians, beyond their diversities and dissensions, thus maintaining their collective identity around a common institution” (Schnapper & Davis, 1999, p. 234). According to Panossian (2006), on the other hand:

The Armenian church played a dual role. Insofar as church and ethnicity were intertwined it helped to reinforce national identity. It was a symbol of the nation, of national unity, at the abstract level. By attending church people affirmed their Armenianness [...] without necessarily having any religious beliefs (p. 355-56).

To sum up, no matter what the driving forces behind engagement with the church or related activities –be them secular or religious, the power of symbolism in those practices deserves attention as they contribute to the dynamics of identity formation either individually or within groups.

2.2.5.1 Muslim-Armenians: An Oxymoron or a “New” Identity?

In his *Ethnicity without Groups*, Brubaker (2004) criticizes the fact that “groups” are taken for granted in the discussion of ethnicity by automatically defining ethnicity as a collective notion. In other words, he suggests that ethnic groups should not be regarded as “internally homogenous, externally bounded groups as basic components of social life” in what he terms as “groupism” (p. 164). An interesting debate between Craig Calhoun and Rogers Brubaker has taken place regarding the matter in 2002 with open letters to one another discussing over the individualistic, collective, groupist and relational aspects of ethnicity and ethnic groups. Although they are not in completely

contradictory positions, Calhoun criticizes Brubaker's suggestion that ethnicity should be studied without groups while the latter opposes the overgeneralized coding and ethnicity framing as it causes bias in his opinion. The debate gives us an idea on the complexities of studying ethnicity with firm theses on both sides while also forcing us to think on the dynamism, fluidity and reification of ethnicity. In his article, Brubaker (2004) gives a concrete example of his thesis with the examples of PKK, IRA and KLA, stating that these organizations do not necessarily represent each and every member of the (ethnic) group in question despite the fact that they act in the name of them and he warns analysts against making false judgements and overgeneralizations out of "groupism". The reason why I wanted to include a final sub-chapter on this matter was about another identity narrative which I unexpectedly encountered throughout my fieldwork while speculating on the individual and collective perceptions of identity: Islamized Armenians in Turkey –a topic that became popular in 2013 and gained media attention especially after an international conference on the subject was organized by Hrant Dink Foundation in Istanbul.²⁸ While speaking of Islamized Armenians who were either forced to convert or hide their identities in Turkey, an interesting conflict has risen between "genuine" Armenians who continue to practice their religion and preserve their Christian traditions and those who have been assimilated despite their blood ties but have recently started to come out with their "original" identities.²⁹ Recent interviews³⁰ with the group in question show that Islamized Armenians are not accepted by the Christian Armenian community as "Armenian enough" since they no longer have Armenian names, practice the religion and conserve Armenian customs; thus they

²⁸ <http://hrantdink.org/en/activities/projects/history-program/230-muslumanlas-tiril-mis-ermeniler-konferansi-2014>

²⁹ See Yasemin Koç Gabrielsen's PhD dissertation (METU) for further information on Islamized Armenians, 2015

³⁰ Interviews conducted by Vercihan Ziflioglu
<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/islamized-armenians-voice-their-100-years-in-purgatory-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=57432&NewsCatID=339>

no longer carry the “real” Armenian identity.³¹ Therefore, Brubaker’s criticism on groupism becomes meaningful in this case and over-ethnicizing becomes futile because as understood from this example, even blood ties (primordial approach) do not suffice to *categorize* Islamized Armenians as part of the “Armenian ethnic group” and this group cannot be regarded as “chosen” for they have *fallen from grace* –figuratively speaking. Indeed, this debate is related with the perception of religious identity among Armenians and to what extent they put Christianity at the center of their Armenianness. Besides, as this is a rather recent debate, perceptions and interpretations regarding the matter are precarious and calls for another research. Nonetheless, to the extent permitted by the scope of this study, theories of ethno-symbolism, constructivism and primordialism are also applicable while analyzing the data at hand on this matter. In addition to the identity experiences of the participants of this study, their perceptions and sentiments regarding Muslim Armenians were also taken into account – considering the recurrence of the topic– with the assumption that they will reveal the way how they experience their own ethnic and religious identities by providing a comparative insight. Whether it is treated as an oxymoron by sticking to primordial arguments based on religiosity or welcomed as a newly constructed identity will be revealed in the following chapter.

2.3 Concluding Remarks

This chapter attempted to introduce a conceptual framework with respect to the ethnic, religious and national identity of Armenians by arguing to what extent do these concepts are defined by primordial and constructivist theories. This study does not argue against the constructed nature of identities, yet in the meantime it does not compromise the symbolic logic behind ethnic, national and religious identity of

³¹ In her research book “Purgatory Armenians” (Araftaki Ermenilerin Hikayesi), Vercihan Ziflioğlu stresses the fact that Christian Armenians definitely have prejudices and concerns about Muslim Armenians or Islamized Armenians and that they are not ready to accept them as their own kin (p. 19).

Armenians. For this reason, concepts of “reconstituted primordialism”, symbolic religiosity and ethno-symbolism will be adopted while analyzing the data of this research. Indeed, it should be remembered that the source of data for this study has been the life experiences, beliefs and practices of individuals which provides subjective knowledge based on personal accounts and narratives. Given the exploratory and qualitative nature of this research, we are exposed to a variety of perceptions and understandings regarding their ethnic, national and religious identity. Therefore, the richness of the data at hand will be elaborated in order to conceptualize the theories with the fieldwork with a reference to the ultimate research question of this study which addresses the perceptions and experiences of Armenian immigrant domestic workers in Istanbul based on their narratives, personal experiences and sentiments. While doing so, the educational and socio-economic background of immigrants as well as their recollections of the Soviet era will be taken into account as they are fundamental in the formation of identities as well.

CHAPTER III

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

3.1. Introducing the Research Group

This study was preliminarily scheduled to include 20 Armenian women working in Istanbul who are engaged in domestic services. Although expressing willingness to participate, two of them –who were child carers– had left Istanbul with their employers for vacation purposes while one of them had left for Armenia due to a family funeral during my field work. Another potential participant could not manage to spare time for an interview, noting that she is working for 8 different households as a cleaner including weekends. Despite that, she wanted to introduce herself to me and talk about her experiences in Istanbul over the phone every two weeks. Another woman from Armenia said on the phone that she is a live-in worker caring for an elderly man who would not approve of her giving an interview. She also noted that she does not have any free time to meet me. In the end, narratives of fifteen women were collected through semi-structured interviews that were followed by a range of unstructured observations or informal conversations over coffee/lunch and sometimes through follow-up phone calls throughout the research period. At one specific event, a participant had invited her family members and friends who were living close-by to take part in our conversations which ended up in an unplanned group meeting of 5 women where I was hosted as a guest for about 2 hours. This helped me to become even more familiar with my fieldwork and have a better understanding of the family dynamics and domestic life of the participant. It was found that only four out of fifteen participants live with their families in Turkey. The following table will introduce the profiles of the research group.

Table 3.1: Personal Information of the Research Group

Name ³²	Year Born	Born in	Graduate of	Marital Status
Karine	1957	Vanadzor	ASPU – Faculty of Culture	Widowed
Hasmik	1982	Yerevan	YSC (Conservatory-Piano)	Single
Maryam	1975	Gyumri	High-school	Engaged
Makruhi	1962	Aparan	High-school	Widowed
Silva	1955	Gyumri	High-School	Widowed
Anya	1963	Gyumri	Yerevan Medical Institute (Nursing Care)	Widowed
Eliza	1961	Vanadzor	Yerevan Medical Institute (Nursing Care)	Widowed
Anuş	1958	Yerevan	High School	Widowed
Anahid	1970	Yerevan	Academy of Design & Arts – Ukraine	Divorced
Lusin	1956	Vanadzor	Faculty of Letters (Armenian Literature)	Widowed
Nazeli	1958	Vanadzor	Teacher in Physics	Widowed
Valantin	1960	Gyumri	High School	Widowed
Gayane	1961	Yerevan	Yerevan Medical Institute (Nursing Care)	Widowed
Sirpuhi	1989	Gyumri	High School	Single
Mane	1943	Gyumri	High School	Widowed

The first cycle of interviews was conducted in late-November, 2016. I had the opportunity to do a second one-on-on interview with 8 of the participants in April 2017 which provided further data for my study. The fact that I was even more conscious and informed regarding the fieldwork during the second cycle of interviews –both in terms of my experience regarding data collection techniques and familiarity with the respondents– has contributed to the advancement of the study. I was able to receive much more detailed, personal and particular information from the respondents especially on our second meeting. The following table will introduce the professional/occupational background of the participants.

³² Pseudonyms are used to protect anonymity.

Table 3.2: Professional/Occupational Background of Participants

Name	Last Job in Armenia	Current Job in Turkey	Year started Working in Turkey	Monthly Income
Karine	Director of Library at a State University	Elderly Care and cleaning ³³	2014	900 USD
Hasmik	Unemployed	Housekeeping ³⁴	2007	750 USD
Maryam	Shop Assistant at a Toy Shop	Elderly Care	2014	700 USD
Makruhi	Cleaning	Elderly Care	2015	800 USD
Silva	Laborer at a Shoe Factory	Elderly Care	2000	650 USD
Anya	Nurse	Housekeeping	2001	700 USD
Eliza	Nurse	Housekeeping	2007	700 USD
Anuş	Unemployed	Housekeeping	2001	700 USD
Anahid	Unemployed	Housekeeping	2006	500 USD
Lusin	Instructor of Armenian Literature at a State University	Elderly Care Housekeeping	2010	800 USD
Nazeli	Physics Teacher at a High School	Elderly Care Housekeeping	2005	800 USD
Valantin	Unemployed	Elderly Care at a Hospital	2007	400 USD
Gayane	Nurse	Elderly Care	2008	700 USD
Sirpuhi	Unemployed	Child Care	2012	650 USD
Mane	Laborer at a Textile Factory	Elderly Care	2000	680 USD

During the interviews, I have inquired about the way how participants were treated by their family members, neighbors, friends and fellow Armenians regarding their destination to Turkey (i.e. what kind of comments they received because of going to Turkey etc.). While some had hidden their final destination from family members,

³³ In-house worker

³⁴ Responsibilities include cleaning, ironing, laundry, grocery shopping, washing dishes, tidying-up the house, cooking etc. In short, any kind of domestic work that requires for household maintenance.

some had left the country without notifying some of their family members. For instance, it has taken almost three months for Karine to persuade her sons about her intention to work in Turkey. In Makruhi's case, on the other hand, she has secretly issued a passport as her family would oppose her idea of going to Turkey for work. Another example would be Maryam, who has initially come to Istanbul for a wedding during which she coincidentally gets an elderly care job offer in an Armenian household and accepts without her mother's consent. As Maryam notes, it has taken almost a year for her mother to come to terms with her new job in Turkey during which she has never taken Maryam's phone calls at all. Another example is Hasmik, who has misinformed her parents claiming that she has been working in Poland instead of Turkey, fearing their potential criticism and opposition. Only after 2 years Hasmik has told her parents the truth about her whereabouts. Such details are treated as important for the purpose of making an in-depth analysis of the data at hand.

3.2. Reflections on Being an Armenian in Istanbul

First of all, it should be noted that Istanbul is the cultural, educational and religious center for Armenians living in Turkey with an estimated population of 40 to 60 thousand people. In other words, it is an important site within the borders of the Republic of Turkey in which Armenians have the largest community with certain districts where Armenian schools, churches and cultural associations are located³⁵. One of the most important factors contributing to the existence of a community life of Armenians in Istanbul is the printing press; especially the *Marmara* and *Jamanak* daily newspapers which publish only in Armenian. Although their circulation is very low (together about 1500 per day in total), they provide a sense of belonging to immigrants who can read news in their mother language despite being away from home. Both of these papers cover news on the Armenian community, church, Turkish politics and

³⁵ In Istanbul, there are only sixteen Armenian schools and 48 churches left that are in operation. See <http://istanbulermenivakiflari.org/en/home> for further details on the properties of Armenians in Istanbul.

other social contents.³⁶ That is to say, the existence of an Armenian community in Istanbul has made an impact on Armenian immigrants' preference in choosing Istanbul as a destination for workplace as noted earlier –which is also revealed by the collected data from the interviewees. While inquiring on this matter, one of the participants have noted that:

I feel like home in Istanbul as there are many Armenians around me. I do not feel as a stranger because I only interact with my own people. Thanks to the organizations made in Mithatyan Armenian High School, I have made close friendships with Bolsohay³⁷ writers here such as Vart Şigaher, Aram Kamburyan, İkna Sariaslan. In a way, I have the same life here in Istanbul just as back home. I used to organize art and cultural events with writers as the director of a university library. Here, I attend them as a participant. For example, last week Aşot Melkonyan, Rector of the History Department in Armenia visited Istanbul for the book launching of Armaveni Miroğlu at Esayan High School. I always follow these events via *Marmara* daily news. I never miss them. This is like a little Armenia for me (Karine, 60, Vanadzor).

As a graduate of the Faculty of Culture, Karine has worked as the director of a state university library for fifteen years before coming to Turkey. Her narratives, as will be revealed throughout the data analysis process, always reflect her intellectual and educational background as a librarian. She always placed emphasis on the importance of family and how sacred it is. Karine is coming from a well-educated family and she always recalled her deceased husband during our conversations and made an emphasis on his role in the society as a polyglot and a respected professor of Armenian literature. As a woman who belonged to a reputable family in Vanadzor –as she puts it–, Karine mentioned that taking care of an elderly lady was not her only job in Istanbul. By lowering her voice, she told me about her second job as a cleaner in a business office once a week that is run by an Istanbul-Armenian businessman. She told me that it would be too “hurtful” for their children to know about her second job as a cleaner; so,

³⁶ *Marmara* costs 1 TL and *Jamanak* costs 1.25 TL

³⁷ Istanbul-Armenian

she keeps it as a secret from her family. In fact, it is also a humbling job for her as she has requested to work only on Saturdays when nobody is at the office. Her employer, who is also a relative to the elderly woman she cares for, has agreed to these terms. She earns 40 USD per week for cleaning up that office and transfers that money to one of her friends back in Vanadzor who has lost her husband and needs financial help. This also is one of her secrets. None of her family members are informed about her engagement in this donation. Even from a distance, Karine tries to help her fellow Armenian who has gone through same hardships in life. In the end, Karine noted that she is grateful for the local Armenian community in Istanbul for giving them an opportunity to work and feel welcomed.

Sense of belonging which is defined by “feeling at home” and “safe” by Yuval-Davis (2011, p. 10) seems to be empowered by an active engagement in community events in this case where ethnic ties can become definitive throughout the experience. As for being an Armenian, in general, nearly all participants have defined themselves with such words as “proud”, “ancient”, “unique”, “first”, “Christian” and “honored”, which points out to a distinct word choice in their discourses. Additionally, memories of 1915, shared past, shared pain, trauma, family bonds, victimhood and deportation usually came up during the interviews which gave away certain motives of collective memory. Therefore, emphasizing the state of “being a proud Armenian” serves as a reminder of being the “chosen people” who survived despite political and historical upheavals (Harutyunyan, 2006, p. 285). Considering all these, the following excerpt from one of the interviews resonates what Anthony Smith (1991) defines as a “nostalgic look to the golden age of great kings, sages and poets” (p. 212) by exemplifying Armenians:

Being an Armenian is a source of pride for me. I have never concealed my Armenian identity. I have never been in a situation that forced me to deny my identity and even if it happened, I would never hide myself. Even in Istanbul, say for asking for an address on the street, I have never hidden that I am Armenian. For example, when they ask my nationality while shopping in the

market, I proudly say that I come from Armenia without any fear. I came to Turkey in fear, knowing that it is the enemy's land. I knew that I was going to the land where the great thinkers of my people, my culture, my ancestors were destroyed (Anuş, 58, Yerevan)

Anuş, who works both for Armenian and Turkish households, proudly emphasized her national identity but also noted how much her negative opinions have changed regarding Turkish people after her arrival to Istanbul. In the meantime, she kept giving references to the great thinkers and Armenian poets in order to underline that she has never forgotten where she is coming from despite having lived in Turkey for 16 years.

3.2.1. Being a Christian in Turkey: Istanbul as a Site for Religious Revival

Even though this thesis puts an emphasis on the importance of Christianity and the Armenian Apostolic Church in the formation of Armenian identity and “Armenianness”, it should also be noted that religious experience in Armenia has had different dynamics given the Soviet background of the nation. As Yulia Antonyan (2011) puts it: “In Soviet times, as a result of the Soviet ideology of militant atheism, the terms ‘religious’ and ‘believer’ (havatats’yal) ultimately acquired negative connotations as something outdated, primitive, and reactionary” (p. 319). Anatolian Armenians, on the other hand, had a firmer religious character given their Ottoman background as noted by Panossian (2006):

In the Ottoman empire the Armenian community formed one of its (self-governing) *millets*. According to the *millet* system, imposed by the rulers of the empire, a community was distinguished by its religion, no matter where its members lived in the empire. Hence identity was based on religion and was formally divorced from territory, as well as ethnicity and language. But since the Armenian church was an autocephalous national institution with ‘exclusive’ membership, ethnicity and religion completely overlapped (p. 69-70).

Therefore, it is only natural to observe different dynamics of religious experiences among RoA Armenians and Istanbul-Armenians. Interviews made for this research has also revealed this pattern with respect to the way how religiosity is being experienced

by immigrants coming from the Republic of Armenia. The following narratives provide an insight to this matter:

In Armenia, I'd go to church sometimes but I didn't know the prayers. In Soviet times, they did not teach our prayers at school. I learned my religion, my prayers in Istanbul. My generation was not taught religion. Here, I go to church every single Sunday and I've seen almost all of the churches in Istanbul. I visit all of them every week. If I find out about a church that I haven't visited yet, I try my best to go there. For instance, last week I went to Eyüp and took the blessed water. I learned many things, all traditions and Armenian customs that I didn't know about in Istanbul (Eliza, 56, Vanadzor).

For example, I feel much more Armenian here in Istanbul. I can attend church more often comparing to Armenia. I did not know as much as I do now about church and about our prayers. Now I can tell you which country has Armenian communities, churches and also about their Patriarchs etc. I am more informed about these issues thanks to the *Marmara* daily newspaper which also teaches me the way how religious holidays are celebrated in the Istanbul-Armenian community (Valantin, 57, Gyumri).

As understood from these excerpts, Istanbul –as a city where local Armenians try to maintain their traditions, culture and religious practices as a minority group– has become a site for religious revival among immigrants who were previously not exposed to or engaged in church life back in Armenia as much as they do today. This argument is especially valid for participants who have spent their childhood, adolescence and adulthood in Soviet Armenia. Therefore, it could be argued that a reconstruction of religious identity has taken place on immigrants' part under the influence of a local Armenian community life.

3.2.2. Reception of Islamized Armenians

Apart from inquiring the religious life of Armenian immigrants in Istanbul, this study also addressed the feelings and experiences of the group in question with respect to living in a Muslim country as Christians. Interestingly, the outcome of this inquiry resulted in receiving information on the reception of the recent coming out of Islamized or Muslim Armenians who were either forced to convert or hide their identities during

World War I in Anatolia. (Ziflioğlu, 2015). Besides, reception of those who voluntarily convert to Islam or marry with Muslims today was also among the data provided by participants while discussing the matter. It is understood that, the general discourse on the issue is an ardent objection to mixed marriages and conversions to other religions by claiming that “an Armenian should die as a Christian no matter what”. The discussions with immigrants went so far as to define who “real” Armenians are:

A true Armenian should not convert into other religions. We are Christians. For example, I recently read in *Agos* newspaper that there are thousands of Islamized Armenians in Turkey today. However, they are distorted people. They are not real Armenians, so I do not even consider them as one. We would have died for our religion but they chose to hide their identities which is a shame (Mane, 74, Gyumri).

I don't want to give names here but I am very offended by the children of one of our famous journalists who was a very patriotic man, a real Armenian. He sacrificed many things and worked hard for maintaining the Armenian culture in Istanbul. But his children didn't follow the rules and married Muslims. It is a shame. A real shame. So, I cannot even see those children as Armenians anymore (Gayane, 56, Vanadzor).

Right at this point, Vercihan Ziflioğlu's (2015) observations come to mind where she notes that Istanbul Armenians are not quite ready to welcome Islamized or Muslim Armenians yet (p. 19). Considering that the role of Christianity and the Armenian Apostolic Church has been an important data collected throughout this study, Ziflioğlu's (2015) argument seems to be valid for immigrant Armenians working in Istanbul as well. A striking example to this can be the case where an immigrant worker gradually decides to give up her work after finding out about the way how her employer conceals his Armenian identity:

My first job was in an Armenian household. I was taking care of a child. In time, I realized that my employers were Muslim Armenians. In fact, they were ethnically Armenian but had recently converted to Islam and were calling themselves “Turks” when asked. They knew Armenian but kept speaking in Turkish all the time. So, I left them because I cannot work with such people. I told them ‘thank you’ and went away. The thing is, I understand that living

in Turkey as an Armenian is a very difficult reality, because there is oppression against our culture. But, we are obliged to protect our identity. That is why I could not stand it anymore and gave up working for them after 6 months. Luckily I found a new job quickly. (Lusin, 61, Vanadzor).

Razmik Panossian (2006) also comments on this matter: “Christianity became a rigid distinguishing marker, a cultural and symbolic boundary [for Armenians] (p. 44). Therefore, “once a person crossed this boundary by converting to another faith—especially to Islam— he or she was no longer considered to be Armenian”. Accordingly, even being “a chosen people” would not suffice to be an Armenian in this case. That is to say, Christianity is perceived as an undeniably important character of Armenian identity to a great extent. For Lusin, who used to work as a lecturer on Armenian culture and literature at a state university, this is especially significant. She works as a live-in carer in Kurtuluş, nearby the Armenian church. As a grandmother of four, she supports her family with the money she earns as there are financial and health problems with her family members back in Armenia. Lusin also occasionally publishes her poems and articles in the Armenian newspapers which she regards as a strategy to cope with hardships in life such as being a Christian in a Muslim country. To put it in her terms, her “soul finds shelter” through literature and church.

It should be noted that this study has also examined the preferences of immigrants about their choice for working with Armenian and non-Armenian families. As stated earlier, the existence of an Armenian community has served as a motive in immigrants’ decision to choose Istanbul as final destination. Each participant, without exception, has claimed that their first job had been in Armenian households upon arrival. While some of them has continued in this direction by rejecting to work for non-Armenian employers if it ever came to that, others have agreed to do so noting that “no matter what their background, being good-hearted matters the most”. Lusin is also among the first group who specifically prefers to work for Armenian households, emphasizing that the reason why she ended up in Istanbul is the local Armenian community there.

On the contrary, Karine (60, Vanadzor) who also works for Armenian households only, has another point of view on the case of Islamized Armenians:

I have read from *Marmara* that there are many hidden Armenians in Turkey, especially in *Dikranagerd*³⁸. I read that they keep their Christian faith inside but come out as Muslims. So, this is very situational and it is about the tragic events in our history. The case is very problematic and one cannot judge whether or not they should be regarded as Armenians. After all, they are Armenian by blood since they have tried to get married with one another even while hiding themselves. Therefore, it is our duty to accept them as one of us.

Karine's narrative reminds us of the "reconstituted primordialism" approach as discussed by Henry Hale (2004) where primordial elements (in this case, blood ties) provide people with a "deeply rooted psychological mechanism facilitating social categorization" while "identity is constantly and inherently changing as the environment changes" with a reference to the constructivist point of view (p. 460). In the meantime, recalling what Weber (1968) terms as "the belief in common ethnicity" may be relevant (p. 398). Accordingly, real or assumed common descent sets the basis of ethnic ties. Therefore, the factual background of one's lineage is less significant than his personal belief in common descent. What matters is not whether a blood relationship actually exists, but whether it is believed to exist, "not *what is* but *what people perceive*" (Connor, 1993, p. 377 as cited by Cornell & Hartmann, 1998, p. 16-17). From this perspective, ethnicity is perceived as a "subjective" concept. Here, what Karine refers to as a "problematic case" guides her into finding an affinity to create a discourse on "common descent" by emphasizing "blood ties" despite the group in question being Islamized.

3.3. National Sentiments

Longing for national unity and homeland has been one of the most recurring themes in the narratives of participants especially while talking about their lives back in Armenia.

³⁸ Tur. Diyarbakır

How does one end up in the “enemy’s land” while identifying herself as a “patriot”, one might ask –especially many RoA Armenians who criticize those who immigrate to Turkey for work. The answer is clear in Anya’s mind: “Hunger”. She goes on: “When you wake up in the morning and don’t know how to feed your children, there’s nothing to miss about that country anymore. Yes, I am proud to be an Armenian –yes it is true, I am, but... Such sentiments can become secondary (Anya, 54, Gyumri). Anya was 25 years old when the Spitak earthquake had hit the country in 1988. As a nurse, coming from a poverty-stricken region, she claims to have tried a lot to survive and stay in her homeland despite having losses in her family and despite losing their houses in the earthquake. Many more narratives provide information on the corruptions within the Armenian government, blaming the state for not providing for its people which forces them to go out of the country. However, it is understood that irrespective of the distrust in the Armenian government, each participant has underlined their longing and love for homeland. The following excerpts provide an insight on the matter:

Everybody in the world should hear this: The Armenian government is no government at all. Why did I have to come to Turkey, why did I have to leave my country? Why? I could have earned the same money back home, but they did not allow us. The government gave us no choice (Silva, 62, Gyumri)

I protest the Armenian government. They sold out our country. They destroyed our beautiful city. They stole our everything. We used to have big factories and jobs. (Lusin, 61, Vanadzor)

Serj [Sargsyan] goes abroad and spends all our money on gambling and comes back to Armenia shamelessly. Meanwhile, our people die in hunger (Mane).

Bolsohays, diaspora Armenians, French-Armenians periodically help a lot for the Republic of Armenia. But the financial aids never reach to people. The money always goes to frauds, rich people or to important people. We never benefited from the charities. For instance, Charles Aznavur helped us greatly after the earthquake, but none of the donations reached us (Nazeli, 59, Vanadzor)

Despite this situation, Makruhi's narrative on everyday life is noteworthy:

When they understand that I am a foreigner on the street [in Istanbul], they ask where I come from. I make up something else, I say that I'm from Russia and cut it off. Why should I say that I am coming from Armenia? That would make my country look bad. They'd think I left my country because of bad conditions. No matter what happens, I never want anybody to say a bad word to my country. I can never say to a stranger that I am coming from Armenia as there was no money there. It's the governments fault, not my people's (Makruhi, 55, Aparan).

Previously, Anuş (58, Yerevan) had noted that she never hides her Armenian identity whenever asked in the name of "being proud" of her Armenian background. Although Makruhi "conceals" her identity, motives of their actions are both the same. Here, Makruhi's attitude can be regarded as a strategy to cope with everyday life challenges as an immigrant, again in the name of protecting the reputation of her ethnic identity, people and/or nation. The following excerpts also provide information regarding the longing for unity of one's own people:

We are Armenians and we have to be patriotic in order to survive. For instance, we have to unite and help each other. If I see an Armenian in need, I feel like it is my duty to do anything I can for help. After all, we are one nation. A real Armenian is the one who has good deeds regarding other Armenians. We need to be honest to one another (Maryam, 42, Gyumri)

According to Hovhannisyan (2012): "Unfortunately, this unity and accord can be observed only on occasions related to the Genocide or some other adverse realities, but not in relation to Armenia's Independence Day or Constitution Day or any other celebrations (p. 31). An interesting reflection of this argument was observed while interviewing with Karine:

Us Armenians are very interesting people. Those who had left Armenia for work returned last year during the 4-Day War to support their homeland. They strike me because they leave home during time of peace but come back when there is conflict to protect their land from danger. They came back from all over the world to fight back. It is the blood that connects us to Armenia. There's a saying: land is gained with blood, land is lost by blood.

As understood, national sentiments are maintained and sometimes increase even while away from homeland. Therefore, a distinction is being made by respondents who have left home while continuing to hold on to their identities. As Mane (74, Gyumri) notes: “I dream of an Armenia in which all Armenians of the world unite and develop our homeland. We need cooperation. We don’t have any Armenians left in Armenia. We are spread all over the world”. Sacred and national symbols, at this point, gain even more importance for those are separated from their countries. Apart from the discourses on national unity and homeland, symbols were among other recurring motives throughout the research. Accordingly, the symbolic conceptions of Mt. Ararat and Armenian language from the perspective of Armenian immigrants will be elaborated in the following sub-section.

3.3.1 Sacred & National Symbols of Armenian Identity: Mt. Ararat & Language

*take my heart out of my tomb,
and bury my heart under the snows of Mount Ararat,
so that in my tomb as well
it won't be cold from the fire of longing for centuries*
Hovhannes Shiraz (1919-1984)

While speaking of homeland, Mt. Ararat and what it represents for Armenians came up during the interviews. Despite being within the borders of modern Turkish republic, it is regarded as part of Armenia by most Armenians, including the participants of this study. As Lusin notes:

21st century has been the worst century ever. I would never imagine or expect that our younger generation would be in such a situation in economic terms. Despite all, I still love my country. Armenia is full of beauties –especially the Ararat region. Today, Turks claim Sis and Masis (Ararat) of their own. Ararat does not belong to them. It is ours. There is no need to argue over this. It means much more than a mountain to us.

According to Hasmik (35, Yerevan):

Ararat, for example, symbolizes Armenia and Armenians. It is our mark. Wherever we see the image of Ararat in the world, we understand that there are Armenians there. Hovhannes Shiraz, for instance, has a beautiful poem about Ararat. He was a real patriot who truly paid tribute to Ararat in his literary works. Shiraz had a last will before his death, asking for his heart to be buried among the snows of Mt. Ararat. Although years later after his death, his will was fulfilled. Now, Hovhannes Shiraz's heart rests under the snows of Mt. Ararat.

Even though no questions were intended to be addressed on the perception of Ararat to respondents, it has been an interesting topic that came up without my specific guidance during the interviews, which reminded me of the way how collective identity is experienced by Armenians, even in the case of immigrant workers. Indeed, the qualitative nature of this study which was conducted by open-ended questions allowed us to reach such additional details that provided an in-depth understanding of perceptions, insights and experiences of the group in question with respect to their national sentiments. Accordingly, it was once again confirmed that myths and symbols are core to Armenian identity. After all, Mt. Ararat, –Sis and Masis– are such symbols which is argued to be a fundamental representative of “being Armenian” that have primordial/ethno-symbolic roots. As Vasken Knouni (n.d.) once told after climbing up Mt. Ararat: “It’s a national symbol that embodies thousands of years’ of Armenian survival and religious inspiration; and is present in every book, poem and painting. It’s almost larger than life, a *Myth!*”³⁹ Of course, Ararat is not the only single symbol that comes to mind while speaking of Armenian identity and culture. The Armenian alphabet and language are indispensable especially when speaking of maintaining and conserving national identity against assimilation. Within the framework of this study, the role of Armenian language, the frequency used while in Turkey and perceptions regarding Armenian as a mother tongue have also been inquired. Research outcomes show that those who have only been working with Armenian employers in Istanbul have not learned Turkish except for basic expressions that are used every day. On the

³⁹ <http://www.azad-hye.net/news/viewnews.asp?newsId=350119>

other hand, those who have working experience with Turkish employers have naturally learned the language and use it on a daily basis. Refusal to learn Turkish or simply not learning it (because it is not needed) despite having lived in Turkey for nearly a decade or more –as in the case of Hasmik, Gayane, Maryam and Anahid is deemed interesting. Also, the fact that Istanbul Armenians mostly speak Turkish even among each other have surprised and upset Armenian immigrants as understood from their narratives. Lusin, for instance, notes that: “It hurts me deeply when I see my people speaking Turkish even though they know Armenian. Interestingly, even graduates of Armenian community schools prefer not to speak their mother language”. The fear of losing mother tongue was observed among most participants as it is considered as a threat to a nation’s existence. Therefore, considering Armenian as a holy language and attributing religious meanings to it is not uncommon among most Armenians as discussed earlier in the theoretical framework:

Last Sunday I went to the Yeşilköy Church and I was shocked to hear the priest preaching in Turkish. I could not understand it. How come, a priest of our Armenian Apostolic Church preach in the language of Turks? Don’t we have our own holy language? Don’t we have our own faith, our own nation, our own church? We have our own language and why should we pray in Turkish in our church where we cross ourselves? It is unacceptable. Nobody should take it away from us. I understand that elderly Armenians do not speak well in their mother language because they were not taught that. But we should put enough efforts to conserve our values. If our church was strict enough about preaching in Armenian, people would have already learned their mother tongue by now and the language would have sounded more familiar to their ears. After all, we are the first nation to have accepted Christianity as a state religion. We should be proud. It is crucial. For example, when we say *Kristos*, even the sound of the word sounds so precious and sacred in Armenian (Hasmik).

While some Armenian domestic workers, especially child carers were hired to teach their children Armenian at an early age (such as Hasmik); some immigrants were themselves feeling obliged to do so. To illustrate, Maryam says that:

I was shocked to see that Armenian families were speaking Turkish among each other and even at home. The grandma which I take care of doesn't even know Armenian. Coming from Armenia, we actually teach them their mother language. In a way, it is our duty.

Also, Karine's narrative on this matter is noteworthy. She emphasizes the importance of Western Armenian by quoting a poet:

'Sacrifice your soul, give away your breath but do not forget your mother tongue' says one of our greatest Armenian poets. I feel deep pain when I realize that Western Armenian is an endangered language. Western Armenian is like music, like a prayer to me. Even though my grandchildren speak Eastern Armenian, I try to teach them Western Armenian through Hagop Baronyan, Taniel Varujan and Zabel Yesayan. Unfortunately, my grandchildren are growing up away from me but we always talk on the Internet and I try my best to make good use of our time together online even while I am away.

Once again, the importance of *Marmara Daily News* becomes apparent in the utilization of language within the Armenian community in Istanbul. Karine has actually developed a strategy to teach Western Armenian to her grandchildren with distance education:

Marmara newspaper has children's section on every Saturday and I collect all of them to send for my little grandson. I also keep one copy for myself and when we talk to each other on Skype, I read from my copy and have him repeat after me so that he can practice. I encourage him by telling that: 'My dear, when you start reading Western Armenian at school in 6th grade, you'll always go first because you are the grandson of your grandpa S. Z.'. My husband, may he rest in peace, was a lecturer on Classical Armenian at the university. And it excites my grandson when I remind him of that. You see, mother tongue is sacred for us.

While talking about her daily routine apart from work, Lusin also notes the importance of *Marmara* where she has actually met with Karine three years ago:

So, being an Armenian, being engaged in my language, culture, literature is a way of life to me. The only single factor that keeps me standing outside Armenia, the things that empowers me is my Armenian literature and the

Marmara daily newspaper. Visiting the Marmara publishing house on my day-off and having conversations with the editors and other Armenians there is like breathing to me, is like revitalizing my soul.

Considering all these details, it can be concluded that the *Marmara Daily News* plays an important role not only in local Armenians' but also Armenian immigrants' daily life. In addition to the sacred and national symbols of Armenian identity, the existence of an active community life in Istanbul which is realized to a great extent with the activities of the Armenian printing press contribute to the national sentiments of Armenian immigrants working in Istanbul. Theoretically speaking, the experiences of Armenian immigrant workers in Istanbul are being reconstructed with social interaction yet they still have primordial roots considering the perception of language as a sacred value of identity, the primordial ties that bind people together (as argued by Geertz) and the importance attributed to ethno-symbols which are used to reconstruct or transform the community for the purpose of "preserving and maintaining the form of the group, and the content of its identity over the *longue-durée* –i.e. those myths, symbols, values and memories that make the *ethnie* distinct and separate" (Githenz-Mazer, 2007, p. 4). Another remarkable strategy was observed in Lusin's narrative where she tries to contribute to her community (both in Istanbul and in Vanadzor) by exchanging books whenever she travels to Armenia:

In Vanadzor, we have a section on Diaspora Armenian literature at our university's library. I took 30 kg. of Western Armenian books to Armenia so that they can benefit from the literature. And likewise, I brought many more Eastern Armenian books here for Istanbul Armenian readers. While others bring and take goods to sell for making profit and trade, I carry books all the way –because books are priceless. A nation won't survive without protecting its literature.

As understood, community service within the limits of one's own capacity is also being realized which attribute new roles/identities to immigrants other than merely being a domestic worker. Therefore, contributing to the community in Istanbul becomes an assumed role that also helps an immigrant to feel like a part of the group. This also

proves the importance of a local Armenian culture in Istanbul for Armenian immigrants.

3.3.2 Recollections of the Soviet Era

Considering that the majority of the respondents have been brought up in Soviet Armenia, their recollections regarding the period were taken into account. While most of them emphasized that their lives were better in financial terms before 1991, there were some among the research group who praised independence and freedom after separating from the Soviet Union:

Independence... “Independent Armenia” sounds amazing, doesn’t it? It makes you feel free; it refers to liberty. However, we are not as independent as the term suggest. If the financial supports and various aids coming from the diaspora was being allocated among our society, we would be independent in the real sense and it would be a splendid experience. Yes, we are now independent, we have our flag, we have our government... For example, we can proudly carry our flag in national meetings, sports events etc. It is a fantastic feeling. And we were devoid of this experience during the Soviet era. We used to act as the member of Soviet Union, not Armenia. For instance, we had the world chess champion Tigran Petrossian, musician Lusine Zakarian in those times. Yes, they were Armenian –it is beyond dispute. But still, they somehow belonged to the Soviet culture. They were under Soviet influence. We were not free. But oh well... Those were the old times. We used to live under specific standards. Now we can live as we wish in terms of life-styles, mobility, free movement to other countries etc. Freedom is very important. (Eliza, 56, Vanadzor)

These words belong to an immigrant who has left Armenia a decade ago because of not getting paid her salary for three years from the hospital where she was working as a nurse back home. Despite that, she cherishes the sovereignty of her homeland with a hope to return one day and underlines the corruption in the government as the reason why many Armenians leave home to other countries in pursuit of making a living for their families. Once again, national sentiments appear as a motive while reading between the lines of the transcribed texts. On the contrary, longing for the life conditions back in Soviet era is also observed

especially by emphasizing the importance of a stable income and stable life standards. The following excerpts explain the situation:

During the communist period, we were living under good conditions. We did not need independence. Following the independence, everything went upside down. Our elderly had their golds and belongings for harsh times, and they had to sell them all during that era. All our young generations had to leave the country and left behind their jobs and studies at the universities. Everybody migrated to Europe and other countries. That's why, wherever you go in the world, you can find an Armenian. Is this independence? We are all scattered around the globe. What was the point of establishing a republic if its citizens cannot live there anymore? (Anya)

Our homeland is sold. Serj [Sargsyan] has sold out our everything. He cheated his people. We don't have a homeland anymore. It is gone. Soviet period was much better in every way. We had our jobs, we could work. Most importantly, there used to be a working-hour concept. After that, we could at least enjoy a book or go to the theater (Mane).

I graduated from high school in Yerevan and I got accepted to a university in Ukraine, the department of design. I didn't have any opportunity to stay in Yerevan for work because those were the early 1990s when politics were in conflict. All of our artists, actors, opera singers etc. started to work in commerce. We understood that arts and culture was going to change in the country from then on (Anahid, 47, Vanadzor).

According to Anya, Armenia does not seem like "homeland" anymore, because there are no opportunities or promises left for her family back home. She has brought almost all of her family members to Turkey over the last decade and now they are settled in Istanbul. When asked if she ever wants to go back, the answer is: "I will be buried in Armenia. That's only when I go there". The fact that she wishes to be reunited with her homeland after passing away is noteworthy. Besides, even though her working conditions are very tough as a domestic worker with a myriad of responsibilities, she prefers not to complain about them in gratitude "for at least having a job". Mane's and Anahid's narratives on the other hand give clues about the daily-life in Soviet Armenia by mentioning "order", "standards", "working-hour concept" as well as on the intellectual and cultural atmosphere of the period by referring to literature, music and

arts. For instance, almost all of the participants have claimed to have a musical instrument, either a piano or a violin, in their childhood houses and at least one person in their family who could play a musical instrument. Likewise, the narratives reveal that literature, arts and books used to be among the topics of discussion while around the dinner table during the childhood or adolescence years of the participants, irrespective of the educational background of their families. Such details provide us with an overview of the background information regarding the research group. Considering the influence of national sentiments, symbols and memories from the Soviet era upon Armenian immigrants, their relationships with Armenians based in Istanbul will be discussed in the following section.

3.4 Relationship with Istanbul-Armenians

Considering the preference of RoA Armenians in choosing Istanbul as a final destination for work due to the existence of an Armenian community there, observing the relationship between two groups who have mutual ethnic ties have been the concern of this study. Accordingly, this has given an opportunity to observe their employer-employee relationships from the perspective of immigrants as well. Even though making an analysis of labor processes was not the ultimate goal of this research, specifically concentrating on a highly selective group who are engaged in domestic labor in the private sphere of Armenian and/or non-Armenian households provided sufficient information to analyze the dynamics based on ethnic ties, kinship and patterns of emotional labor which overlap while examining the relationship of two groups. In the meantime, socio-economic, cultural and educational background of immigrants become definitive in the analysis of these dynamics as inferred from the narratives. Interestingly, these dynamics can sometimes become contradictory based on the experiences, perceptions and working conditions of the narrators where mutual ethnic ties and national sentiments may become irrelevant in the employer-employee relationships. Therefore, the data at hand provide us with subjective knowledge as it is based on human experience. For this reason, concentrating on the richness and

complexity of the data received from respondents instead of generalizing has been the approach in the analysis process. From the perspective of immigrants, there are two opposite receptions regarding their relationships with local Armenians. First of all, some respondents have emphasized the importance of social interaction with local Armenians, speaking their native language in Turkey and attending church as previously discussed in Chapter 3.2. For example, according to Karine, Valantin, Maryam, Hasmik and Lusin, the existence of an Armenian community in Istanbul plays a crucial role in their decision to stay and continue working in Turkey. Especially those who can speak with a less thicker accent which resembles the Western Armenian dialect (i.e. Karine, Makruhi) attribute new meanings to their roles in Istanbul (apart from working as domestic laborers) in the name of serving the community there:

Here, we speak Armenian to one another and therefore local Armenians can practice their mother language which gives them a chance to improve their language skills. Even though most of them have graduated from Armenian community schools, the language dies if not used. In return, I have learned many things about Turkey thanks to our conversations on politics, society etc. It is important to communicate with each other. We have very nice, good, educated Armenians here in Istanbul (Karine).

Considering that the aforementioned names have no previous experience in working with Turkish households and they do not speak Turkish at all, sense of kinship and ethnic ties become more meaningful and stronger in terms of their relationship with their employers, and with the local Armenian community in general. Other similarities in their cases are that they all work as live-in workers (except for Hasmik who lives in a rental apartment), either as housekeepers or elderly carers, and they all prefer not to work for non-Armenian households according to their statements. The fact that they have limited or no interaction with Turkish society (or with the outside world as they barely go out in public) is therefore definitive in their perceptions regarding the local Istanbul Armenians. To their surprise, on the contrary, experiences of other respondents have been different with respect to the way how Istanbul-Armenians have received them. The following examples give certain clues about the dynamics of

employer-employee relationships; this time not based on ethnic ties, but on the educational, intellectual and socio-economic status of the immigrant workers who have worked for Armenian households as domestic laborers:

Of course, it's not easy to work in other people's houses. For example, I was a more respected woman back home because I had a more respectable job in Armenia as a nurse. I used to work with doctors, wear white gowns. Here, I clean the house. But I try not to think of these things, otherwise it will be more difficult for me to cope with problems (Eliza).

I cannot take it when they treat educated people like brutes, like animals. And my employers are not ignorant people, they have been all over the world. They have money. They got higher education. But apparently, it doesn't suffice. I am doing my best to take good care of this sick lady, and in return all I get is humiliation. For example, they think my language sounds like *köylü*⁴⁰. I keep explaining her that we have many dialects in Armenian ranging from classical Armenian, local dialects like Karabakh or Gyumri, Eastern and Western Armenian but they think their language is superior even though they [Istanbul Armenians] mix many words with Turkish. I cannot comprehend this point of view. I tell her that I have worked as a teacher at schools and that I cannot speak incorrectly, but she cannot understand what I mean. Simply, our dialects are different. That's all. The only reason why she uses the "*köylü*" term against me is to hurt my feelings, that's all. There's no reason to humiliate villages or villagers but I can tell that her intention is derogatory (Nazeli).

I do not want to upset you with my stories but, think about it... I have raised a generation of doctors, sportsman and academicians. My grandchildren are also well-educated. One of them is doing her master's right now. My other granddaughter is coming first in dancing in Georgia. But now, here I am taking care of a grandma, cleaning her up and tidying up the house etc. There is no job in Armenia even for the educated people (Lusin).

As understood from these narratives, class conflicts may appear among the employers and employees based on their socio-economic and educational status. While some Armenian immigrant workers such as Anya and Eliza have noted resentment about being treated as inferiors by those employers who have no higher education or no working experience while they have at least some vocational training; others, such as

⁴⁰ Tur. Peasant

Nazeli tries to comprehend the reason why her employers are trying to look down on her and act like “ignorant people”. As Browne and Misra (2003) exemplify in their study, “employers do not respect their workers’ experiences and backgrounds, in part because of the superiority they derive by treating their workers as inferiors” (p. 504). Therefore, the personal background and educational status of immigrants are disregarded due to their position as domestic workers. The confrontation of two women in a private sphere of brings about other dynamics such as gender roles and narratives of womanhood which will be discussed in the upcoming sections. Other narratives point out that Istanbul-Armenians do not respect them and degrade them for coming to Turkey:

Those who come to Turkey are leaving Armenia because of hunger. We come here to earn money, to work, to help our families back home – not because we want to. Some Istanbul-Armenians do not appreciate that we are leaving our homeland and coming here as immigrants. Some of them do not respect us for that. Sometimes I hear that Turkish employers are treating better than local Armenians do (Makruhi).

They blame us for leaving our homeland and coming to Turkey for some reason that I cannot comprehend. They also accuse us of being ignorant and think that we are peasants. I think they are jealous of us because we are proud, strong and we take care of our looks. We are not destitute as they think. Armenian women in Armenia are very hardworking, however, here most local Armenians are housewives. They don’t work hard. For example, my son’s mother-in-law is an Istanbul-Armenian and when I tidy up my house, she says “who is coming? Why are you cleaning up?”. It’s pure laziness (Anya).

When it comes to speaking of their relationships with local Armenians, respondents provide examples by comparing the life styles in Armenia and Istanbul as can be seen in Anya’ s note. Even though this study did not include the perceptions of local Armenians with respect to immigrant Armenians, I have had the chance to observe at least some aspects of their relationships from the perspective of employers over informal conversations. In one case, an employer who had previous experience with an Armenian domestic worker noted that it was as if RoA Armenians were emotionally

exploiting local Armenians based on ethnic ties: “Just because we are all Armenians, they treat us like we have to help them, support them and provide them by any means. Some of them make employers feel like they are obliged to do anything they ask for based on this argument”. Although I will not make an analysis from the perspective of employers within the scope of this thesis, I thought this statement was relevant in terms of understanding the dynamics between employer-employee relationships where meanings are attributed to ethnic ties on immigrants’ part –as put by an employer. Coming back to the conflicts between two groups, the following excerpts from the interviews provide examples about immigrants’ experiences as domestic workers for Armenian households:

I live in with the old lady and it is only two of us in the household. In the beginning, my employers –who live in another apartment– had promised to raise my salary by 50 USD every 6 months, but they told me that the USD rates have gone up too much and that I should be thankful for what I receive. However, even though my job is only to take care of the lady, they bring their wrinkled clothes from their house all the way here for me to iron them for free (Nazeli).

I prefer to work for Turkish households as long as they are nice-hearted people. They regard Turks as enemies but even Armenians are hostile to one another. Mark my words, it’s true. I came here, expected that our Armenians would welcome us, but it did not happen. *Bolsohays* are not fond of RoA Armenians for some reason. So, we prefer to work for Turkish households. For example, I worked for a very rich local Armenian family and all they paid me was 300 dollars per month for working 6 days a week (Anyia).

Just as Mane had noted earlier, national sentiments and ethnic ties become secondary under such conditions where you are in need of a job or help. In their experience, according to the aforementioned excerpts, common ancestry and shared history have been irrelevant as class identities and socio-economic statuses were more evident than primordial ties in the employer-employee relationship dynamics. Yet again, this does not refute those cases where kinship and ethnic ties play a part in these dynamics which will be discussed in the upcoming section. Keeping in mind that each woman has a

different story, the reason why these experiences contradict at times can be summarized as follows: “national, gender, class and racial/ethnic identities form interlocking, relational, socially constructed systems of oppression and privilege [on worker’s part] (Stiell & England 1999, p. 45). Therefore, motives for those contradictions vary depending on circumstances, persons and other factors such as gender roles, socio-economic status or ethnic ties. The following section will solely focus on kinship and the influence of ethnic ties upon the formulation of pseudo-families with Armenian employers.

3.4.1 Pseudo-families & Narratives of Womanhood

As it was previously discussed in the literature review, the encounter of women in the private sphere of household who are engaged in an employer-employee relationship over domestic labor provides a basis to analyze the dynamics over gender roles and socio-economic statuses of both parties. In our case, ethnic ties also appear as a shared value provided that both the employer and the employee is of Armenian background which enables a common ground in the development of kinships. Whether these relationships characterized by ethnic ties in the case of Armenian immigrant domestic workers are fictive or pretentious is open to debate. According to the data collected in the fieldwork, discourses of narrators pointed out certain “sisterhood” and “being like a part of the family” aspects regarding the relationships with employers. While some narratives resembled fictive affinities and pseudo-family relations which pointed out certain patterns of emotional labor, there were other examples where ethnic ties were regarded as the basis of kinship on workers’ part. The following excerpt exemplifies a pseudo-family relation which is voluntarily formulated by the worker like a strategy:

Loving the elderly we take care of is part of our job. If we treat them like our own kin, like our own mother and grandmother, things will be much easier. Actually, we shouldn’t think of this as a “job” but as helping our own family member. From the first day on, I regarded this woman as my own mother. And she loved me, too. We’ve been on good terms since day one. Not everybody is lucky as I am (Makruhi).

As Pei-Chia Lan (2003) notes: “a fictive kin relationship improves the quality of care and retrieves personal meanings for both the provider and the recipient” (p. 187). Makruhi’s narrative resembles this type of affinity while the narrative in the following excerpts provide more emphasis on the importance of ethnic ties in the definition of such affinity:

I am thankful to my *yaya*⁴¹. Yes, I have a hard work. I have a lot of responsibilities here. But after all, I am working for my own kin, my own people. If I can make money and support my children, I owe this to my own Armenian-Christian community who lives here in this country. I live in this house with her and I am very happy that I serve for my Armenian *yaya* (Lusin).

I could not take care of my sick mother because of financial issues and I lost her for that. Now, I have my *anuşig*⁴² here. I take care of my sweetheart not as a job, but as if she was my relative. I care her with love. I kiss her hands and provide her what I couldn’t to my own mother. Family is holy for me, and these people became my family, like my relatives. Believe me, I am not using these big words out of pretense, but it is the reality. Every holy Sunday, I sit with her under the picture of Jesus Christ and his 12 disciples and we say the Lord’s Prayer together. Every single Sunday. We celebrate all the religious holidays together. Thank God, I feel blessed to live with them in this house (Karine).

Karine’s narrative resembles Parrenas’s (2000) exemplification of “pouring love into another” as a care-giver which corresponds to emotional labor (p. 576). Ethnic ties and religious motives are once again apparent in this case where kinship is empowered by these factors. On the other hand, Hasmik who has been working in the same household for 10 years stresses the close relationship she has with her employer to whom she addresses with her first name, without adding ma’m or “*kuyrig*”⁴³:

With the lady of the house, we are like two sisters. I listen to her problems, she hears mine and we keep each other’s secrets. We are very close to each

⁴¹ Arm. Grandma

⁴² Arm. My dear one/sweetheart in Armenian

⁴³ Arm. Big sister

other. For instance, if I get sick she takes me to the Armenian hospital and takes care of my problems. In general, I am very content about my job here.

This might be the case with Hasmik as she is not a live-in worker which enables her to have her own space outside work. However, if the working area becomes the living space of a domestic worker; distinguishing between private and workplace becomes a challenge as in the case of Maryam who does not have a separate bedroom in the house she works in. She specifically notes that it was not their employer's fault, it is simply because there is no extra room for the employers to host her. Therefore, she has been sleeping in the living room for two years. Before that, she has worked for two different Armenian households where she was provided with a separate room, again with the responsibility of elderly care.

My bosses prefer me to leave home as little as possible, and it is hard for me to stay in all day long. I am supposed to sit with the old lady all the time. In Armenia, I had a freer life. It is hard. But, on the other hand, these people make me feel like home, they are like brothers and sisters to me. So, I am not satisfied with the job I am doing, but I am happy about working for these nice people. They are true Armenians. They even give me extra 100 Liras for my day-off. So, I try to contribute with other chores such as cleaning, cooking etc even though it is not my responsibility. I do it upon my own will just like I'd do in my own house. I should not complain (Maryam).

Maryam also notes that this emotional bond between her employers are at times empowered by gift-giving practices on special days such as holidays or birthdays. While speaking of familial ties, narratives of womanhood also appeared as a motive throughout the interviews. Being a woman, a single-mother and the pillar of family were among the definitions while immigrants were identifying themselves. Also, "sacrificing" was a common term used while expressing their responsibilities for family. The following statements from our interviews refer to the narratives of womanhood and motherhood:

I left behind my honorable life back in Armenia and came here to work at this age for the sake of my children and grandchildren. Family is sacred, family is everything to me and as a mother I was obliged to sacrifice (Karine).

As mentioned earlier, Karine continuously referred to her old life as “honorable” and “respectable” given her educational and professional background. For this reason, she considers her decision to come to Turkey as a great “sacrifice” for the sake of her grandchildren so that they don’t grow up in the absence of their father like her children have. Karine’s elder son used to work in Russia as a teacher and she was very concerned about her youngest grandson’s psychological state due to the longing he had for his beloved father. Instead, she convinced her son to come back home to reunite with his family so that she could come to Turkey for providing financial support for them. Other narratives also provided an insight on “sacrifice”:

You cannot find a mother like me. No mother would ever go through what I have been through. No mother would have sacrificed as much as I did. It is a long story. Being a single-mother has been very challenging. (Anuş)

I lost my husband at a very early age. I became both a mother and a father to my son. Now he is unemployed and has a son. I take care of my son, his wife and my grandson. I support the family on my own as a woman (Eliza).

A large number of participants, eleven out of fifteen, have lost their spouses at an early age. Three out of fifteen participants, namely Hasmik, Maryam and Anahid do not have children; yet, they support the children of their sisters or brothers with the work they have in Istanbul. Sirpuhi, on the other hand, supports her sick parents back home with the money she earns as a child-carer as her brother is unemployed. Moreover, Maryam especially stressed the hardships of being a woman not only in Armenia, but also in Istanbul with the following statement:

Now that I am engaged to be married [with an Armenian from Yerevan] for a second time, people gossip about me because it is not very acceptable to have a divorce and get married again in our society. The gossip happens not only in Armenia but also here. They will think that I am not an honorable or a pure girl. Let them speak... I don’t have anything to fear. I don’t have anything to be ashamed of. If I was uncomfortable, I would have not invited you over or talk about these things. In Istanbul, I have worked for 3 families and had no problems at all. I do my job as good as I can. This is what matters. Not my personal life. Being a woman is hard everywhere.

As noted earlier in the Introduction, approximately 95 percent of illegal Armenian immigrants working in Turkey are women according to Alin Ozinian's (2009) large-scale research –which is a striking number (p. 17). Therefore, in addition to ethnic, national and religious identities, narratives of womanhood inevitably came up throughout the fieldwork.

3.5 Reflections on Turkish Society: Everyday Life Narratives

As the final sub-chapter of data analysis, this section will try to portray some outstanding examples from the daily lives and experiences of the group in question in addition to their impressions regarding the host society. Each participant, including the ones who have no experience in working with non-Armenian households have noted that their perceptions regarding Turkey and Turkish society has changed. Their encounter with Turkish people has mainly been through sellers while shopping or, as in Valantin's and Eliza's case, through interacting with the Turkish nurses who work at the Armenian hospital.⁴⁴ According to their narratives, they have been well-received by the Turkish society in Istanbul:

When my family wanted to visit me here in Turkey, I had no money to host them. The grocery man [a Turkish greengrocer] told me that I could get anything I want from his shop and pay later. I was shocked because the guy didn't even know me, didn't know where I live. He told me that he trusts me. He knew that I am from Armenia but did not treat me wrong. People in Turkey trust to each other (Anuş).

At first, I had different opinions about Turkey. I used to think that there was conflict, there was fight every day in this country. Yes, we've been enemies in history but I haven't seen anything bad from these people. For example, one day I was lost in the street and I asked for help from Turkish ladies and they helped me. I was very surprised because it was unexpected for me. And one another time I went to the hospital but on the way back I couldn't find the bus stop. I asked two ladies who were sitting in a car in front of the building and they offered me a ride. I accepted without thinking anything bad. I didn't

⁴⁴ Valantin and Eliza have previously worked at the Surp Pırgıç Armenian Hospital in Istanbul as elderly carers where they had the chance to interact with Turkish workers who also helped them learn Turkish.

fear for some reason. And after they dropped me off, they warned me not to get in the car of strangers in Istanbul [laughs] (Maryam).

Most participants noted that they have come to Turkey with fear due to prejudices. Apparently, their opinions have gradually changed even though the “enemy image” is not completely over as a motive coming from their memories and recollections. For example, Anya specifically requested me to put down the following statement of hers: “We would have died if Turks had not accepted us in their country. But this does not change the fact that we are historically enemies. We will never forget”. Despite that, most participants emphasized their appreciation for the opportunity they have in Istanbul:

I cannot say something bad about Turks because with their money I can provide for my family. Even though we are enemies, this is a problem of governments. I have always seen good things from them. I can never say a bad word for these people. I am grateful. I would have never imagined to buy a single room house ever in my life; now I bought a four-room house for my family in Armenia and arranged a fine wedding for my son as a single-mom. I’ll work as much as I can as long as I am healthy (Eliza).

In Silva’s case, for instance, her first encounter with a Turkish person took place at the bus terminal in Yerevan before her journey to Istanbul:

I chose Turkey because it was the cheapest option. I had no money to buy the tickets. I asked the bus driver, who was Turkish but knew Armenian very well, to take me to Turkey free of charge. I promised him to pay back after finding work there. He agreed. I was all alone. There was nobody to greet me upon arrival. The journey took 1.5 days and I had no food to eat all the way. My shoes were ripped. But I’m not ashamed to tell you all these because I’ve always been honest to people. I am thankful to that bus driver for his help.

While expressing their impressions about the Turkish society, participants who have working experience both in Turkish and Armenian households like Silva, Anya and Mane have made comparisons regarding their experiences:

For example, in Eastertime or in other holidays, local Armenians do not pay attention to us or celebrate us. In Turkish houses where we work, they give us

bonus salary or presents and they care about our traditions. Interestingly, they are already informed about our holidays (Mane).

Turks are treating us better than local Armenians. I have heard stories where local Armenians treat RoA Armenians like slaves. There are of course good ones, but many bad ones too. I have taken care of many sick elderlies here who are not Armenians, and I never felt like they were not my kin. I felt like they were my own people. For example, they opened up their homes when my children visited me. (Anya).

Indeed, it should be noted that the Turkish community in Istanbul (especially the older generation) who are locals in certain districts such as Bakırköy, Yeşilköy and Kurtuluş can be familiar with Armenian and Greek culture and traditions as a result of social interaction over the decades⁴⁵. This familiarity might seem odd to those immigrants who have no previous encounter with Turkish people apart from their memories from the past and “what they have learnt from history books” as Nazeli says.

I also inquired about their legal status as immigrants in Turkey and found out that none of them have a working permit; after entering Turkey with a 30-day visa, they overstay and end up with an “illegal” status. In case they need to travel back to Armenia, they pay their fine on the border and come back with a new passport. When I asked whether they have ever encountered any police officers who requested identification, most participants noted that authorities usually disregard them as long as immigrants are not engaged in any crimes or cause trouble. Even the Office for Foreigners is located in Kumkapı where most migrants live. According to their narratives, the officers are already aware of their whereabouts and the jobs they are engaged in, but do not bother as long as they behave as ordinary citizens. Only one out of fifteen participants has faced deportation during her stay in Turkey:

One time a policeman caught me in the market in Kadıköy while I was speaking Armenian on the phone. They brought me to *Yabancı Şube*⁴⁶. I was

⁴⁵ See Appendix D for a photo regarding Easter-time in Kurtuluş.

⁴⁶ Tur. Office for Foreigners

scared but the policemen took care of me well. On that day, I didn't have a *kuruş* in my pocket. They gave me food, they bought me *dürüm*⁴⁷. They asked me if I needed anything. My bosses paid for my plane tickets for Armenia because I was already supposed to get paid by that time. So, I was deported but I came back in one month with a different passport as there was nothing promising for me in Armenia (Silva).

While inquiring about their reflections on Turkish society, the topic of mixed marriages also came up multiple times. The following excerpts from interviews give an insight on the matter:

I love my employer Pelin so much. I've been working for her for 17 years and she has helped me greatly with everything. Anything you can imagine... Teaching me the language, helping me financially etc. We are very close to each other. I see her like a daughter. If only she was Christian... I'd want her for my son as a bride. We would have been much closer if she were not Muslim. It is important for me. I want to have relations with my own people, people of my faith. Wouldn't you want more deep in your heart to marry a Christian or have your sons marry a Christian girl? Be honest. This is how I think, how I believe. OK, I'm happy here in Turkey. I am content about many things. I never think bad anything about them. But still. I think you know what I mean. (Anuş)

The Turkish family that I used to work for was fond of one of my granddaughters and they wanted her for their son as a bride. They asked for my permission but I did not accept. I told that I love them very much but I do not approve mixed marriages. I don't know. I am a Christian and I cannot accept a Muslim groom in my family. They were understanding about it. Even if my granddaughter agreed, I wouldn't have let her. It's not possible. No, no, no. A Christian should die as a Christian. I do not approve of conversions. After all, they are Turks and they have caused many tragedies for our people in history. Despite that, I still loved them as employers. These are two different topics (Lusin).

There are kind Turks, some of them are even better than [Istanbul] Armenians but I am against mixed marriages. And there are some good Turks that would take better care of us than Armenians –but still, the bloods should not mix (Mane).

⁴⁷ Tur. Wrap/roll

As it can be interpreted from these narratives, despite having been on good terms with their non-Armenian employers, they specifically note a certain distinction while talking about their relationships. It was an interesting moment when Anuş decided to comment on mixed marriages right after she was telling how much she loves her employer Pelin and how indebted she is for her support all these years. Likewise, the idea of “mixing blood” with “others” through marriage was notable during this discussion.

3.5.1 Strategies to Cope with Challenges

The natural flow of interviews accompanied by open-ended questions enabled participants to express themselves freely without feeling under pressure for providing “correct answers”. As a result, some interviewees spoke about the problems they encounter with respect to their works and/or employment conditions. This section will illustrate some of the challenges encountered and specific strategies developed to address these issues within the scope of everyday life narratives. It should be noted that the following narratives belong to those who are live-in workers.

Sometimes I feel depressed and dehumanized with all these hard work. We are humans, we need some rest, our souls need rest. We need some fresh air, some change in the environment. I would go mad if I didn’t go out for grocery shopping. I specifically asked my employers to put me in charge of the shopping so that I could at least take a break from the house (Sirpuhi, 28, Gyumri).

Going to church gives peace to me. I go every Sunday and sometimes give charity if I have some coins, say 1 or 5 Liras. For example, I used to go to church back in Armenia as well but not every single Sunday. Here, it is like a way for me to go out of the workplace and breathe some fresh air. It’s like a reason for me to get out (Anahid).

Another recurring motive about daily life challenges was homesickness and longing for family members. Karine’s narrative provided an interesting insight about the way how she deals with such sentimental challenges such as homesickness. As noted earlier, she has attributed a special meaning to the *Marmara Daily News* and the publishing house in such a way that gives a meaning to her presence within the Armenian

community. She noted that it would be impossible for her to endure all the emotional challenges if *Marmara* wasn't there for her. The following excerpt summarizes her strategy to cope with everyday life challenges:

I read *Marmara* every single day and I have made a personal archive for myself for the last 3 years. This is how I survive here. I try to help people, socialize with my own people and interact with them. For example, I had a friend who had written a letter to İknâ Sariaslan, sharing her impressions on his poetry. I encouraged her to go to *Marmara* and have her letters published. She kept it for herself for a while and later decided to do so. Today, her letters are published and she thanked me very much for supporting her. I say to myself, why not? Why not support each other, help each other, feed each other's souls? If I am not useful to anybody, if I don't talk to people, if I don't leave an impact on others' lives, why do we live? We need a purpose in life.

Following our dialogue, Karine went to her room with excitement and brought me her archive which she had turned into a scrapbook with many articles that were cut from the newspapers. After hearing that she wakes up at 6 in the morning every day to read and cut out interesting news and articles about Armenia, Armenian culture, church and language until 10 am made me consider this regular practice of Karine's as a "strategy". She also noted that her intention is to take all these archives back to Vanadzor so that the university library can benefit from them. "This is my job every morning", she said and continued by reading out some of the outstanding headlines from her archive:

- "How did an Armenian establish one of the most beautiful cities on earth? Rio De Jenario". The architect of the city was an Armenian.
- "First female oceanographer of the world was an Armenian: Anita Conti [Anita Caracotchian]"
- "Top 10 most famous Armenians in the world"
- "10 million 297 thousand 770 Armenians live in the world"
- "The strongest man in the world is an Armenian"
- "10 Mesmerizing Sites to See in Armenia"
- "Wealthy, Art-Lover Armenians"
- "Eastern Armenian Language"
- "French-Armenian Middle School to be Established in France"

- “Armenian sites in Van are renamed with Armenian names”
- “Cem Özdemir: Van would be the Paris of the East if Armenians were not killed”
- “There Were Two Armenians on Titanic”

As she was reading the headlines, I remembered Levon Abrahamian’s (2006) definition of “pioneer complex” regarding Armenians who “desire to be the first at everything” with a reference to their adoption of Christianity for the first time as a state religion. “Nativism in Armenia has been steeped into language and symbolism of a pioneer people” notes Abrahamian in order to stress its impact upon the formulation of Armenian identity (p. 11). Therefore, even when coping with challenges, the elements of Armenian identity are being revealed as observed in the aforementioned examples such as going to church or making scrapbooks out of articles that concern Armenianness. In the meantime, an attempt to contribute for Armenian community serves as a motive, as a purpose in everyday life practices.

3.5.2 Remarks on Daily Politics

This final section will present participants’ remarks on daily politics which also provide their impressions on the host society. The following excerpts from interviews shed a light on this matter:

Honestly, I wouldn’t want to live in a Muslim country forever. But, my ideas on Turks have changed very much. I’d never imagine that Turks would be so open-minded and European considering the tragedies in history. Especially the younger people are very apologetic about the genocide, they feel ashamed for what has happened (Makruhi).

While Makruhi’s narrative draw attention to the perceptions of Turkish people regarding Armenians, Lusin has a different interpretation regarding the attitude of Kurds and Kurdish politics:

Today, Kurdish people are apologizing for the 1915 events on Armenian TVs. In fact, they are the ones who are living on our Armenian homeland. They are the ones who took our belongings and wealth. They took part in the genocide.

They live in our lands, today. What's the point of apologizing? Now, they are asking for autonomy, asking for their liberation, asking for their flag – but actually they don't even have a flag. They live under Turkish flag just like our Armenians here in Turkey.

While speaking of Turkish politics, the role and status of Kurdish people were also brought up during the conversations. Also, criticisms were often made towards Istanbul-Armenians for politically supporting the Kurdish cause. According to Sirpuhi, “Istanbul-Armenians are not politically aware when collaborating with Kurdish politicians. Don't our people understand that what we claim as Western Armenia, our historical homeland is regarded as Kurdistan by them?” Once again, an emphasis on Armenian religious identity was made while talking about Turkish politics. “We are a Christian nation and we need the support of Christians in our cause, not the so-called support of Kurdish people who are Muslims” (Anuş). Another narrative pointed out that Armenians would be more unified and powerful if they were more attached to Christianity:

I observed that Turkish people are more religious than RoA Armenians. Turks here always use the word *inşallah*, *Allah'ın izniyle*⁴⁸ after every sentence. They are more faithful people which creates togetherness among each other unlike us. Many Armenians grew apart from religion during the communist period. At least, Istanbul-Armenians have managed to keep that strong in this country (Eliza).

The following excerpts provide information regarding how Turkish government is perceived by Armenian immigrants with a reference to the case of Syrian immigrants living in Turkey:

I am upset about Turkey because I've been working here for more than 10 years, serving for their people but I cannot benefit from any rights while Syrians are provided with new IDs. I have never committed any crime, stole or done bad things or anything but I am not given my human rights despite that. That's so sad. Syrians don't even work. They all live in the streets and get Turkish IDs. Is it because we are Christians? Maybe that's why. (Anya)

⁴⁸ Tur. Godwilling; if God allows

One day, I saw on TV that there were poor immigrant people on the street with children who didn't have the money to pay for their rent. I guess they were Syrians. The Turkish government provided for that family, gave food and helped them. In our country, we don't have that services. It is a shame when a government is not helping for its people's basic needs (Sırpuhi).

It was unexpected to hear comments on Syrian immigrants by Armenians who do not have working or residence permit despite having lived in Turkey for a long time. The glimpse of discriminatory judgments regarding other immigrants was also interesting.

3.6 A Short General Assessment

With an attempt to introduce and categorize the data collected through interviews under various subtitles, this chapter tried to exemplify the way how Armenian identity is perceived and experienced by Armenian immigrant domestic workers through inquiring their reflections on being an Armenian-Christian in Istanbul as well as the way how sacred and national symbols are reflected in their discourses with a reference to their recollections of the Soviet era. Moreover, their relationship with Armenian and non-Armenian employers were portrayed by providing examples from their everyday life experiences which also connoted the dynamics of kinship, pseudo-families as well as narratives of womanhood. While doing so, educational and socio-economic status of immigrants were taken into consideration as they have an impact on the formulation of identity in general. In the end, it was understood that Armenian immigrants have developed certain strategies while coping with everyday life challenges such as homesickness, feelings of being trapped in a household-workplace environment and other emotional burdens that come along as a result of their immigrant status. Inquiring about their reflections on Turkish society also provided an opportunity to interpret the way how self-perceptions are formulated by comparing themselves with the "other"; namely, the Turkish society in Istanbul. In short, research findings affirm that ethnic, national and religious motives are definitive in the self-perception of identity among Armenian immigrants, confirming the hypothesis of the research which was formulated before conducting the field work.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

This study started off with an exploratory question, aiming to understand the perceptions and experiences of Armenian immigrant domestic workers in Istanbul regarding their ethnic, religious and national identities. After conducting fifteen interviews with the group in question, it was understood that the existence of an Armenian community in Istanbul enhances the sense of belonging on immigrants' part while strengthening their ethnic, national and religious identities. Prior to conducting the research, it was already known that a local Armenian culture and community was a motive in immigrants' choice of Istanbul as a final destination; however, with the data collected for the purposes of this study which targeted an in-depth understanding of national, ethnic and religious sentiments, it is concluded that a reformulation of identity has taken place on immigrants' part with the influence of an active community life in Istanbul. In other words, the existence of an Armenian community in Istanbul, the role of language, engagement in the Armenian Apostolic church and sense of kinship based on ethnic ties greatly contribute to the experiences of Armenian immigrant domestic workers in Istanbul. Despite having different socio-cultural backgrounds, ethnicity and religion as a shared value has been an umbrella motive for local Armenians and RoA Armenians.

From a theoretical perspective, this study has addressed the primordial, symbolic and constructed aspects of ethnic, national and religious identity formation of Armenian immigrant workers. Considering the significance attributed to myths, symbols and common ancestry regarding Armenianness and the importance of social interaction in the shaping of identity, it was concluded to approach these issues from the perspective of "constituted primordialism" as put by Hale (2004) who highlights the importance of "personals points of references" while defining identity. Therefore, it is argued that

primordial ties such as blood relations, kinship and shared cultures lie at the heart of Armenian identity formation without ignoring the constructed nature of ethnic, national and religious identities that can be shaped by social interaction.

As expected, research outcomes pointed out different perceptions among immigrants who have and do not have working experience with non-Armenian households. Seven participants have worked only for Armenian households while the rest of them have working experience both in Armenian and non-Armenian households. This provided an opportunity to compare and contrast perceptions and experiences regarding the multiple layers of their identities. Each member of the first group who has no working experience in non-Armenian households noted that it is a known fact among Armenian immigrants that Turkish employers pay more salaries to domestic workers. When I inquired whether they would accept a better offer from a non-Armenian household if they ever needed another job, six out of seven answered “no”. Coming to their reasons, the answers were related to their preference in serving for their “own Armenian kin” and that “money was not everything in life”. Another difference was about having the urge to contribute in community life in any way; either teaching Armenian to Turkish-speaking local community members, creating newspaper archives for future reference or encouraging one another to take part in the community events such as publishing poetry and contacting Armenian news agencies when necessary. The other group who has working experience both in Armenian and non-Armenian households expressed positive reflections regarding Turkish society. The contradictory aspect was regarding some negative experiences they have previously had with Armenian employers. Still, the emphasis was at times made on that “every community/nation has good and bad people within”.

Even those who have noted to prefer working for non-Armenian households for better salaries and treatments have provided such narratives that underlined the importance of a local community in Istanbul for being able to speak their mother tongue in a foreign

land, go to church which is usually nearby their workplaces or houses and develop relationships with local Armenians. Interestingly, either children or grandchildren of four participants have married with local Armenians in Istanbul which has brought a new dimension other than having an employer-employee relationship with Istanbul-Armenians on a personal level. So, even if some immigrants work for non-Armenian households, no compromise is being made with respect to their Armenian identity according to the research group of this study. This is best understood in the criticism made regarding the use of Turkish language among local Armenians and their opposition to mixed marriages as discussed in the previous chapter. Differences in perceptions and dynamics of identity are mainly related with the subjective quality of narratives based on human experience, circumstances and the course of events in immigrants' lives. Given the scope of this research, it is understood that the case of Armenian immigrant domestic workers is particular thanks to the existence of a local Armenian community in Istanbul which provides them a sense of security and participation in community life. I argue that the fact that there are narratives pointing out specific preference to work for non-Armenian households does not rule out other powerful narratives that stress the importance of "being an Armenian" as part of the local community in Istanbul. To answer the final sub-question of this research, it can be said that both the religious and ethnic identity is definitive in the everyday life practices and experiences of Armenian immigrant workers in Istanbul irrespective of their preference to work for Armenian and/or non-Armenian employers.

The answer to the ultimate research question of this study is as follows: the experiences of Armenian immigrant workers are highly related with the local Armenian community in Istanbul as they live close to one another in such districts as Kumkapı, Ortaköy, Yeşilköy, Bakırköy and Kurtuluş, creating an opportunity for social interaction. As for their perceptions of identity; ethnic, national and religious sentiments play such a role that cannot be underestimated as inferred from narratives. As a researcher, I tried not to guide the participants into answers by avoiding to use these three key words (ethnic,

national, religious) throughout the interviews. Instead, I tried to inquire on these by asking how they celebrate holidays, how they feel about working in Turkey, what they think of the Armenian community in Istanbul, what are their recollections of their childhood/adolescence (which provided information on the Soviet era) etc. In cases where this method did not succeed in providing necessary information, then I took charge as a moderator to introduce them with the topics I wished to dig in further. The detailed, rich and in-depth quality of narratives were significant for the purposes of this study. Besides, my ability to access the research group and provide an insider's perspective served as an advantage.

This study argues that the existence of a local Armenian community in Istanbul empowers the ethnic, national and religious identity of Armenian immigrant domestic workers in Istanbul. The empowerment of ethnic identity is understood from the narratives where emphasis was made on “being an Armenian”, “being a proud Armenian”, “serving for the community”, “preserving the language” and importance of “common ancestry”. As for national identity, the perceptions differ based on the interpretation of their status as immigrants and citizens of post-Soviet Armenia. While some of them draw attention to the importance of “independence” from Soviet Union, others look nostalgically back to those days during which an economic stability and certain standards were maintained. As for being an immigrant in Turkey, the perception of Armenian immigrants with respect to national identity usually drives from comparing themselves with local Armenians and appreciating that they have not lost their mother language unlike most local Armenians. They also note that, no matter what, they are the official citizens of the RoA unlike Istanbul-Armenians who are subjugated to Turkish citizenship. Besides, no matter how unfavorable their stories about their homeland given the adverse economic conditions and past memories (such as losing family members, the after-effects of the earthquake which can be still felt in Gyumri even after nearly three decades etc.), there is a myth of return as inferred from narratives. While some participants have noted that they cannot wait for the day to go

back home, some hopelessly said that “there is nothing left for us in Armenia” in a fashion that almost meant “we no longer have a homeland”. Despite that, every single participant –whether they want to go back or not– said that they know they will eventually “end up in Armenia” and “reunite with their Armenian soil” when they depart from this life which adds to their national sentiments and longing for home.

In conclusion, this study has contributed to the limited literature on Armenian immigrant domestic workers by providing insights and perceptions of immigrants with respect to their identities, narratives of homeland, reflections on the host society –both Armenian and Turkish– as well as their everyday life experiences which provided information on the dynamics of employer-employee relationships such as the role of ethnic ties, sense of kinship, narratives of womanhood and the formation of pseudo-families. In the meantime, research outcomes pointed out to certain strategies that immigrants utilize either to contribute to the community or to cope with challenges such as homesickness and emotional burdens –which was an unforeseen outcome. After conducting this research, it is understood that primordial ties that shape identity is still relevant in the dynamics and perceptions of the self on Armenian immigrant domestic workers’ part. Besides, the role of myths, symbols, traditions and memories are apparent in the narratives of the group in question which makes the ethno-symbolic approach to ethnicity and national sentiments valid. This study has only focused on the perceptions and dynamics of Armenian identity from Armenian immigrants’ point of view. Conducting a broader study with a comparative approach by including Armenian and/or non-Armenian employers to the sampling would provide more insights, aspects and dimensions to the subject matter in future researches. Besides, this thesis could contribute to future studies that might explore the employer-employee relationships of other immigrant groups that share ethnic ties with their employers such as Mexican immigrants working for Chicano/a households in the US or Georgian

immigrants working for people of Georgian descent in Turkey⁴⁹. Yet, the most peculiar aspect of this research has been studying a Christian group in a Muslim country whose employers officially belong to a “minority” group and share ethnic ties with their employers in a household setting in Turkey. Besides, including Armenian immigrants who also work for Turkish families has provided a broader understanding to this study.

⁴⁹ My special thanks to Kenneth Weisbrode for bringing up this discussion.

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APPENDICES

A. THE ORIGINAL VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION FORM IN ARMENIAN (Կամավոր մասնակցության հայտ)

Տվյալ հետազոտությունն իրականացվում է ՄԵՏՈՒ Մեդիայի և մշակութային ուսումնասիրությունների մագիստրանտ Մոնիկա Պակսոյի կողմից: Այս փաստաթղթի նպատակը հետազոտության մասնակիցներին ուսումնասիրության պայմաններին ծանոթացնելն է:

Ո՞րն է այս հետազոտության նպատակը: Այս հետազոտության նպատակը Թուրքիայում տնային աշխատանք կատարող ներգաղթյալների առօրյա կյանքի ուսումնասիրումն է, ինչպես նաև նրանց և Ստամբուլում տեղական հայկական համայնքի միջև հարաբերությունների գնահատումը: Հետազոտությանը մասնակցության դեպքում Ձեզ կխնդրենք պատասխանել որոշ հարցերի և կիսվել Ձեր անձնական փորձով: Հարցազրույցը կտևի մոտ 45 րոպե:

Ի՞նչ կպահանջվի Ձեզնից: Ձեզնից կպահանջվի պատասխանել հարցերի՝ Ձեր կյանքին, փորձին, զգացմունքներին ու կարծիքին առնչվող:

Ինչպե՞ս կօգտագործվի Ձեզնից ստացված տեղեկատվությունը: Ձեր մասնակցությունն անպայման պետք է լինի կամավորության սկզբունքով: Ձեզնից չի պահանջվի անձնական այնպիսի տվյալներ, ինչպիսիք են նույնականացման (ID) կամ աշխատավայրի մասին տեղեկատվությունը: Ձեր պատասխանները կպահվեն գաղտնի և կգնահատվեն միայն հետազոտողի կողմից: Մասնակիցներից ստացված տեղեկատվությունը կուսումնասիրվի համապարփակ կերպով՝ խուսափելով անհատական

օրինակների մոտեցումից, և կօգտագործվի գիտական հրապարակումներում:

Ի՞նչ պետք է իմանալ Ձեր մասնակցության մասին: Հետազոտությունը որևէ ռիսկ, վտանգ չի պարունակում Ձեր կյանքի հանդեպ: Դուք ազատ եք դադարեցնել հարցազրույցը, եթե անհարմար եք զգում հարցերի կամ ցանկացած այլ պատճառով: Նման դեպքում կարող եք պարզապես տեղեկացնել հետազոտողին, որ ցանկանում եք դադարեցնել հարցազրույցը: Եթե հարցեր ունենաք, հետազոտողը կպատասխանի Ձեզ հարցազրույցի վերջում: Այս հետազոտությունը հասարակությանն ավելի իրազեկ կդարձնի տնային աշխատանքով զբաղվող ներգաղթյալ հայերի կյանքին:

Հետազոտության մասին ավելին իմանալու ցանկության դեպքում: Շնորհակալություն ենք հայտնում հետազոտությանը մասնակցության համար: Լրացուցիչ հարցերի համար կարող կապվել հետազոտողին՝ Մոնիկա Պակսոյին՝ էլ. փոստի հետևյալ հասցեով՝ monika.manisak@gmail.com:

Կարդացել եմ վերոհիշյալ տեղեկատվությունը և կամովին մասնակցում եմ այս հետազոտությանը:

(Խնդրում ենք այս մասնակցության հայտը հանձնել հետազոտողին՝ ստորագրություն հետո):

Անուն-Ազգանուն

Ամսաթիվ

Ստորագրություն

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B. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION FORM (ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

This research is conducted by Monika Paksoy, a master's student at METU Media & Cultural Studies. This form is prepared to inform you about the conditions of the research.

What is the purpose of this research? The purpose of this research is to learn about the experiences and everyday life practices of Armenian immigrants in Turkey who work in domestic labor sector. Another objective is to evaluate their relationships with the local Armenian community in Istanbul. If you agree to participate in this research, you will be asked to answer questions and share your personal experiences. This research will take approximately 45 minutes.

What Will We Request from You? We'll kindly ask you to answer our questions about your life, your opinions, experiences and feelings.

How will we use the information we get from you? Your participation should definitely be voluntary. We'll not ask your information such as personal ID or institute etc. Your answers will be kept as confidential and they will be evaluated only by the researcher. The information received from the participants will be evaluated collectively and will be used in scientific publications.

What you should know about your participation: This study will not pose any risks to your life beyond the potential risks you may encounter in daily life irrespective of this research. You are free to end the interview if you feel yourself uncomfortable in any way due to the questions or due to any other reason. In such a situation, you can simply tell the researcher that you wish to stop. You will receive answers to your questions, if any, after the research. Your participation in this research will increase awareness about the experiences of foreign domestic workers in the society.

If you wish to receive more information about the research: Thank you for your participation in this research. You may contact the researcher, Monika Paksoy, at monika.manisak@gmail.com for any queries.

I have read the information above and I am voluntarily participating in this research.

(Please give this form to the researcher after signing it).

Name-Lastname

Date

Signature

----/----/----

C. APPROVAL BY THE UEAM

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ
APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER



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05 Mayıs 2017

Konu: Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (IAEK)

İlgi: İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu


Sayın Prof. Dr. Helga TILIÇ ;

Danışmanlığını yaptığınız yüksek lisans öğrencisi Monika PAKSOY' un "*İstanbul'da Ev Hizmetlerinde Çalışan Ermenistanlı Göçmen Kadınların Kendi Kimlik Algısı*" başlıklı araştırması İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülerek gerekli onay **2017-SOS-081** protokol numarası ile **08.05.2017 – 30.08.2017** tarihleri arasında geçerli olmak üzere verilmiştir.

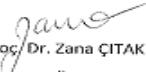
Bilgilerinize saygılarımla sunarım.



Prof. Dr. Ş. Halil TURAN
Başkan V

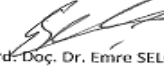

Prof. Dr. Ayhan SOL
Üye


Prof. Dr. Ayhan Gürbüz DEMİR
Üye


Doç. Dr. Yaşar KONDAKÇI
Üye


Doç. Dr. Zana ÇITAK
Üye


Yrd. Doç. Dr. Pınar KAYGAN
Üye


Yrd. Doç. Dr. Emre SELÇUK
Üye

D. SCENES FROM KURTULUŞ



Kurtuluş is one of the most diverse districts in terms of income level of its inhabitants. This photo shows the famous Kurtuluş Caddesi where mostly upper-class families reside. The side streets of this long avenue hosts immigrants and lower class households as well. In a way, one can observe wealth and abundance on the main street and witness poverty-stricken households on the alleys that are 10-15 minutes away from Kurtuluş Caddesi (Photo Credits: Gürkan Çakır – January 29, 2017)



This photo shows the Direkçibaşı Sokak nearby Kurtuluş Caddesi. I conducted two different interviews in this street (at immigrants' rental apartments) and observed that the condition of households and life-styles can drastically change even one street away from the main avenue. (Photo Credits: Berk Erkent – March 2, 2017)

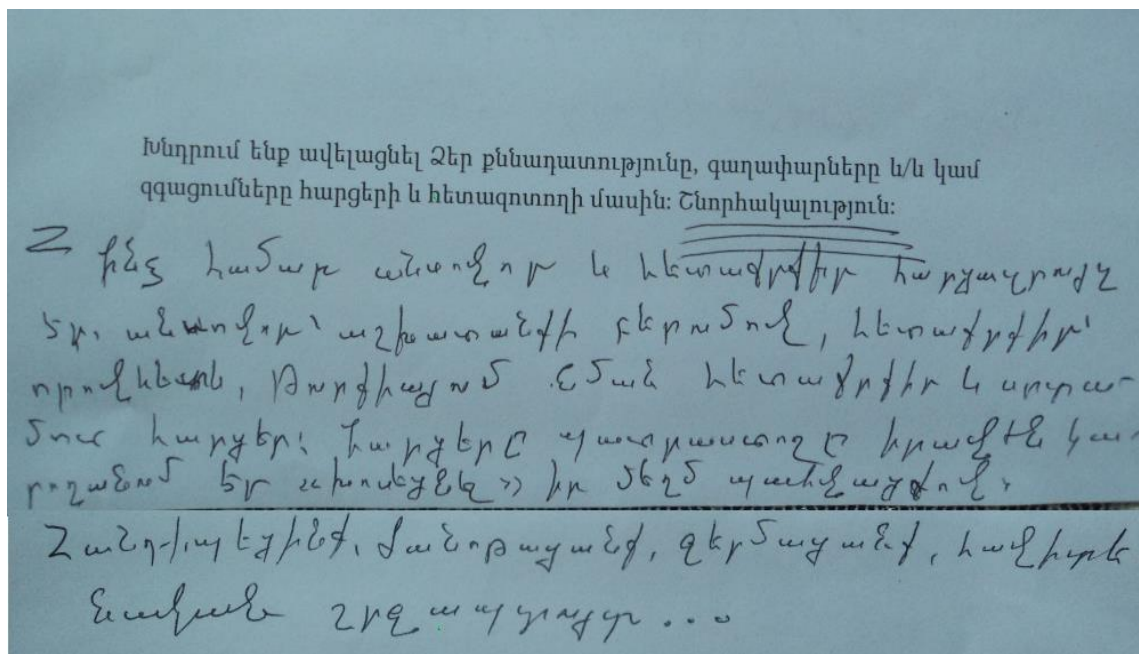


This photo was taken at Kurtuluş Pastanesi (Patisserie) at Kurtuluş Caddesi. The smell of freshly baked Easter bread surrounds the streets of Kurtuluş every April; colorful eggs and special chocolates in the shape of Easter Bunny can be easily found in this district. Therefore, Turkish inhabitants of Kurtuluş, Şişli are also familiar with the way how Eastertime is celebrated by local Christian communities as a result of social interaction over the decades as noted earlier. (Photo Credits: Berk Erkent – April 16, 2017)

E. WRITTEN PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH AND THE RESEARCHER

Խնդրում ենք ավելացնել Ձեր քննադատությունը, գաղափարները և/և կամ
զգացումները հարցերի և հետազոտողի մասին: Շնորհակալություն:

Please add your criticism and/or opinions about the interview questions and the
researcher. Thank you.



“This was an unusual and an interesting interview for me; unusual, in terms of the topic
and interesting because of the questions. The person who prepared the questions had a
mild approach while addressing them and she was able to make the interviewee ‘speak
out’. We met each other, got to know each other and became closer; an everlasting
cycle...”

Խնդրում ենք ավելացնել Ձեր քննադատությունը, գաղափարները և/և կամ
զգացումները հարցերի և հետազոտողի մասին: Շնորհակալություն:

Շատ հագեցիչ էր և շատ կուպենայի
դու, ծրար պլաների մեջ հապազու և
դու պատկար հաճելի կանոն-ընթացիկ
հաջ հարցեր կար դու ծեփ հապենցիկ
և շատ բաժանարար զգացիկ ծր
Մենք կա Պաշտոնի շնորհակալ և
ծր հայր: Արեւելիս արած 684
դու:

“It was a very interesting experience for me. I wish we always had such interviews. I am proud that there are such Armenians in Turkey who is interested [in these issues]. There were questions that excited us and made us glad. I was satisfied. We thank our Monika Paksoy, our Armenian girl. My dear, we liked you very much.”

Խնդրում ենք ավելացնել Ձեր քննադատությունը, գաղափարները և/և կամ
զգացումները հարցերի և հետազոտողի մասին: Շնորհակալություն:

Ճոշմանքիս առջևի գոհեմ ու շնորհակալ, և ճե՛մ
փառաբանութեամբ քոյնիս ինչ մի: Ըստ արգասիքի,
շատ հեղինակաւոր, հարցերի շարքի ցրտանքիս:
Կապարութեամբ ունեմ 2-րդ. ազգան հաշիւակալ: ԿՅԼԵ

“I am very pleased with Monika and with this interview. This had a very good impression on me. We had conversations around many interesting and sophisticated questions. I would like to have a second meeting.”

Խնդրում ենք ավելացնել Ձեր քննադատությունը, գաղափարները և/և կամ
զգացումները հարցերի և հետազոտողի մասին: Շնորհակալություն:

Ճոշմանքիս շատ սիրելի. շատ զերեւել
առիկ հանդիպում մեր շատ ինչնայի
կերպով առջիկ 5 շատ. շնորհակալ եմ
ձեր հանդիպումիս ինչ

“I was fond of the researcher who was a very smart young woman. I would like to thank Monika for this meeting.”

Ըստ հաշիւի եր և շատ շնորհակալ եմ
այսպիսի հարցարարիս անկասկածաբար համար.

“It was very interesting. Thank you very much for this interview”.

F. TURKISH SUMMARY/TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Bu tez çalışması, İstanbul’da ev hizmetlerinde çalışan Ermenistanlı göçmenlerin deneyimlerini, öykülerini ve kimlik algılarını inceler. İlk etapta Ermenistanlı göçmenlerin etnik, dini ve ulusal kimlik algılarına dair bilgi toplamak amaçlanmıştır ve teorik çerçeve bu bağlamda tasarlanmıştır. Akabinde, “İstanbul’da bir Ermeni toplumunun varlığı, Ermenistanlı göçmenlerin deneyimlerini ve kimliklerini ne şekilde etkilemektedir” sorusu ise araştırmaya dâhil edilmiştir; böylece iki grup arasındaki etkileşime dair bir değerlendirme yapılmıştır. Bu değerlendirme çalışma boyunca göçmenlerin perspektifinden yürütülmüştür. Toplamda 15 göçmen işçi ile yapılan görüşmelere ek olarak işverenler ile derinlemesine görüşme yapılmamıştır; ancak saha çalışması esnasında gözleme dayalı yapılan değerlendirmeler analize belli ölçüde dâhil edilmiştir. Ermenistanlı göçmenlerin Türk ve Ermeni işverenlerle olan ilişkileri ise değerlendirmede önemli bir unsur olarak ele alınmıştır ve göçmenlerin kimlik algılarına ve deneyimlerine dair toplanan verilerde bir değişken olarak incelenmiştir. Mikro düzeyde yürütülen bu çalışmada söz konusu grubun günlük hayatta hangi kimliği/kimlikleri ile öne çıktığı araştırılmıştır.

Bu araştırma Ermenistanlı göçmen işçileri konu alsa da, bir emek süreci analizi gerçekleştirilmemektedir. Tezin amacı; söz konusu grubun gündelik hayat pratiklerini, fikirlerini ve öykülerini değerlendirerek kimliklerin ve aidiyetlerin nasıl şekillendiğini anlamaktır. Ayrıca, “Ermeni kimliği” kavramının ne anlama geldiğine dair literatür incelenerek kimlik inşa sürecinde ilksel (primordial) ve yapısalcı (constructivist) yaklaşımların ikiliği (duality) tartışılmıştır. Özetle, bu çalışma İstanbul’da ev hizmetlerinde çalışan Ermenistanlı göçmenlerin deneyimlerine dayanarak Ermeni kimliğinin çok katmanlı yapısını irdelemektedir.

Göçmenlere ulaşma ve görüşmeler gerçekleştirme konusunda bir dil bariyerinin olmaması araştırmanın en büyük avantajı olarak görülmektedir. Bütün mülakatlar Ermenice dilinde gerçekleştirilmiştir ve ses kayıt cihazı ile kaydedilmiştir. Konuşmalar

araştırmacı tarafından İngilizce diline tercüme edilmiştir. Çalışmanın ilk safhasında katılımcılar ses kaydı alma konusunda büyük ölçüde rıza göstermiştir ve araştırmacının özel bir talebi olmaksızın ikinci bir görüşme gerçekleştirmek için gönüllü olmuştur. Katılımcıların istekli yaklaşımı çalışmanın olumlu yönde ilerlemesine olanak tanımıştır. Türkiye’de kayıt dışı çalışan göçmenlere ilişkin yapılan literatür taraması özellikle kadınların ev hizmeti sektöründe çalıştığını göstermiştir. Bu durumun Ermenistanlı göçmenler için de geçerli olduğu yapılan seçkisiz örnekleme görülmüştür. Çalışmanın kapsamı ve zaman dilimi de göz önünde bulundurularak, örneklemin sadece ev hizmetlerinde çalışan işçilerden yani göçmen kadınlardan oluşturulması uygun görülmüştür. Türkiye’deki Ermenistanlı göçmenlerin sadece İstanbul’da yaşadığını ve çalıştığını söylemek doğru olmayacaktır; ancak ağırlıklı olarak bu şehirde bulunmaları ve İstanbul’da yerleşik bir Ermeni cemaatinin olması iki grup arasındaki işveren-işçi ilişkisini irdeleme fırsatı tanıyacağı için bu çalışma sadece İstanbul ile sınırlandırılmıştır. Araştırmacının İstanbul Ermenileri ile olan şahsi bağı ve tanışıklığı ise araştırma grubuna ulaşmada ve örneklem oluşturmada kolaylık sağlamıştır.

Türkiye’de çalışan Ermenistanlı göçmen kadınlardan bahsederken, Sovyetler Birliği’nin dağılmasının ardından Türkiye’ye doğru yaşanan göç akışını göz önünde bulundurmak gerekir. 1990’lı yılların başından itibaren günümüze kadar devam eden bu göç akışı yalnızca Ermenistan’dan değil, diğer eski Sovyet ülkelerinden de oluşmaktadır. Ermenistan’dan özellikle İstanbul’a doğru yaşanan bu göç akışını özel kılan, hali hazırda İstanbul’da bir Ermeni cemaatinin varlığıdır; zira bu durum Ermenistanlı göçmenlerin bir tür güven duygusu ile İstanbul’a gelmeyi tercih etmesinde rol oynamıştır. Dolayısıyla, işveren-işçi ilişkisinde ortak etnik bağların rolü incelemeye değer görülmüştür. Türkiye ve Ermenistan arasında diplomatik ilişkilerin bulunmamasına ve iki ülke arasındaki sınırların kapalı olmasına rağmen söz konusu göç akışı halen devam etmektedir. Aline Ozinian’ın (2009) raporuna göre, Ermenistanlı göçmenlerin yaklaşık %95’ini kadınlar oluşturmaktadır ve bu kadınlar ağırlıklı olarak

çocuk bakımı, yaşlı bakımı, temizlik gibi ev hizmetlerinde istihdam edilmektedir. Tarihsel olarak Demir Perde'nin iki tarafında bulunan ve mevcut sınırların kapalı olmasına bağlı olarak etkileşimleri kısıtlı olan bu iki Ermeni toplumunun işveren-işçi konumunda bir araya gelmesi kayda değerdir. Yekpare bir Ermeni kimliğinden bahsetmek anlamlı olmasa da, bu iki grubun sosyo-kültürel altyapısı ve tarihsel süreçleri farklılık göstermektedir. Netice itibarıyla geçmişte Osmanlı tebaası olan ve bugün Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde azınlık statüsüne sahip İstanbul Ermenilerinin kültürü ile Sovyet geçmişi olan ve bugün Ermenistan Cumhuriyeti ile özdeşleşen bir milli kimlik taşıyan Ermenistan vatandaşlarının kimlik formasyonlarında çeşitlilik ve farklılık gözlemlenebilir. Keskin bir iletişim kopukluğu olmasa da, kültürün en önemli unsuru olan dil bile Doğu ve Batı Ermenicesi olarak farklılık gösterir. Bu tez çalışması Ermenistan vatandaşlarının kimlik süreçlerini incelediğine göre, söz konusu grubun Sovyet geçmişinden bahsetmek yerinde olacaktır. Yaklaşık yedi asır boyunca Sovyetler Birliği idaresinde olan Ermenistan Sovyet Sosyalist Cumhuriyeti 1991 yılında bağımsızlığını ilan etmiştir. Bağımsızlık öncesi Sovyet Ermenistan tam manasıyla bir ulus-devlet olmasa da, belli açılardan modern ulus devlet özelliklerine sahipti. Bu duruma –Sovyet etkisi altında olmakla beraber– belli devlet kurumlarının mevcudiyeti, Doğu Ermenicesinin korunması ve geliştirmesi ve okuma-yazma oranının artırılması gibi örnekler verilebilir (Bayadyan, 2007, p. 201). Sovyet politikaları ulusal kimlik ve yüksek kültür arasında bir ayrım yapma girişiminde bulunuyordu (Martin, 2000, p. 167). Kuşkusuz, bu faktörler Ermeni kimliğinin Sovyet yönetimi ve kültürü etkisiyle yeniden şekillenmesine sebep olmuştur. Çeşitli etnik grupları barındıran Sovyetler Birliği'nde tepkisel bir milliyetçiliğin önüne geçmek adına ulusal kimlikler inkâr edilmese de, birleştirici unsur olarak sosyalist ideoloji baskın geliyordu. Din karşıtı politikalar ve eğilimler neticesinde, Sovyet döneminde kilise yaşamına da kısıtlamalar getirilmişti. Kimliğin en önemli unsurlarından olan dil, Sovyet Ermenileri için son derece önemliydi ve söz konusu grup ana dilde eğitim görme hakkına sahipti. Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasından sonra, Doğu Ermenicesi

Ermenistan'ın ve Dağlık Karabağ'ın (de facto) tek resmi dili olarak kabul edildi. Sovyet geçmişine ek olarak, Ermenilerin kimliklerini ve hafızalarını şekillendiren üç büyük tarihsel olaydan bahsetmek gerekir: Ermenilerin Anadolu'dan sürülmesi; 1988 Spitak Depremi ve ardından gelen Karabağ Savaşı. Tüm bu tarihsel olayların yarattığı toplumsal etki çalışma boyunca göz önünde bulundurulmuştur.

Türkiye Ermenilerinden bahsedecek olursak, resmi olmayan rakamlara göre 40-60 bin kişiden oluşan İstanbul Ermeni toplumu ağırlıklı olarak Kurtuluş, Feriköy, Yeşilköy, Bakırköy, Samatya, Kadıköy, Taksim vs. gibi belli semtlerde ikamet etmektedir. Bu semtlerde yer alan Ermeni okulları, liseleri ve kiliseleri, toplumu bir arada tutan en önemli etmenlerdendir. İstanbul Ermeni Patrikhanesinin yer aldığı Kumkapı ise hem yerli hem de göçmen Ermenilerin yaşadığı bir semttir. Bir arada yaşanan bu semtlerde toplum içi sosyal etkileşim mümkün olmaktadır. Aktif olarak kullanılan kiliselerin ve okulların yanı sıra, İstanbul'da uzun yıllardan beri varlığını koruyan Ermeni yazılı basını toplum hayatı için son derece önemlidir. Ermenice basılan bu gazetelerin tarihçelerinden kısaca bahsedecek olursak, 1908 yılında yayın hayatına başlayan *Jamanak* gazetesi kurulduğu günden itibaren çalışmalarını aralıksız sürdüren en eski gazetelerdendir. Koçunyan ailesi tarafından kurulan *Jamanak* gazetesinin yayın yönetmenliğini bugün torun Ara Koçunyan yürütmektedir. *Marmara* gazetesi ise 1940 yılından beri yayın hayatını sürdüren ve İstanbul'da Ermenice basılan günlük gazetedir. *Marmara* gazetesinin genel yayın yönetmenliğini 1967 yılından beri Rober Haddecıyan yürütmektedir. Bu iki gazetenin günlük tirajları çok düşük olsa da, Ermeni okuyucular için her gün yayınlanmaya devam etmektedir. *Agos* gazetesi ise 1996 yılından beri haftalık yayınlanmakta ve hem Türkçe hem Ermenice dillerinde basılmaktadır. Bu üç gazete de Türkiye Ermenilerinin, Türk toplumunun, Ermenistan'ın ve Ermeni diasporasının siyasi, kültürel ve toplumsal yaşamına dair haberler ve makaleler yayınlamaktadır. İstanbul'da Ermenice dilinde yayınlanan gazetelerin özellikle göçmenler özelindeki önemi çalışmanın analiz bölümünde ele alınmıştır.

Başlangıçta, bu çalışmanın hedefi sadece ev hizmetlerinde çalışan Ermenistanlı göçmenler ile İstanbul Ermenileri arasındaki işveren-işçi ilişkisini incelemektir. Amaç; iki grup arasındaki ilişkinin ortak etnik bağlara dayalı bir değerlendirmesini yapmaktır. Ancak çalışmanın kapsamı düşünüldüğünde yalnızca göçmenlerin bakış açısını ele almanın ve Ermeni olmayan işverenler ile edinilen deneyimleri de değerlendirmeye dâhil etmenin daha uygun bir çerçeve sunacağı düşünüldü. Ayrıca, aynı hanede hem işveren hem işçi olan kişilerle röportaj gerçekleştirmenin metodolojik bir problem oluşturabileceği göz önünde bulunduruldu. Toplanan ilk veriler ve analizler ışığında çalışmanın taslağı yeniden düzenlendi ve göçmenlerin etnik, ulusal ve millî kimliklerine dair anlatıları ele alındı. Bir anlamda “kimlik” adı verilen bu soyut kavramın ve “Ermeni olma deneyiminin” nasıl anlamlandırıldığı irdelendi.

İstanbul’da ev hizmetlerinde çalışan Ermenistanlı göçmenlerin deneyimlerini konu alan bu çalışmada katılımcı gözlemi, yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşmeler, odak grup çalışması gibi niteliksel araştırma yöntemleri kullanılmıştır. Öznel deneyimlere, bireylerin bakış açılarına ve algılarına ilişkin çözümlemelerin yapıldığı niteliksel araştırmalarda elde edilen veriler genel popülasyona addedilemeyeceği için bu çalışmanın Ermenistanlı göçmenlere dair bir genelleme yapma iddiası yoktur; temel amaç belirli bir örneklem dahilinde özellikle etnik, dini ve ulusal kimlik bakımından ne tür temaların ve konuların ön planda olduğunu keşfetmektir. Ayrıca, bu tür kalitatif çalışmaların ileride benzer alanlarda yürütülecek olan araştırmalara ışık tutması amaçlanmıştır. Dolayısıyla, bu çalışmanın etnografik yapısı araştırmacının “insanların hayatlarına nüfuz etmesini, olan biteni izlemesini, söylenenleri dinlemesini ve sorular yöneltmesini” gerektirmiştir (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 2).

Kasım-Aralık 2016 ve Mart-Haziran 2017 tarihleri arasında yürütülen bu çalışmaya katılan 15 kişi de kayıt dışı çalışmaktadır. Katılımcıların Türkiye’de bulunma süresi 2-17 yıl arasında değişmektedir ve yaş ortalaması 47’dir. Katılımcıların kimlikleri gizli tutulmuştur ve analiz bölümünde anonim isimler kullanılmıştır. Katılımcılara ulaşma

konusunda hem kişisel ağlar hem de kartopu tekniği kullanılmıştır. Bir tanıdık vesilesi ile potansiyel katılımcıya ulaşıldığı zaman, telefon üzerinden çalışmanın amacı anlatılmış ve yüz yüze görüşmek için karşılıklı yer/saat belirlenmiştir. Bazı katılımcılar kısmen Türkçe bilse de, özellikle Ermenice olarak iletişim kurmayı tercih etmiştir; görüşmelerin ana dil ile gerçekleştirilmesi karşılıklı güven ilişkisinin kolayca kurulmasına ve daha sağlıklı bir veri toplama sürecine olanak tanımıştır. Araştırmaya başlamadan önce ODTÜ Uygulamalı Etik Araştırma Merkezi'ne bağlı İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu'na başvurulmuş ve araştırmanın yürütülmesi için gereken onay alınmıştır. Söz konusu kurula sunulan Gönüllü Katılım Formu Ermenice diline çevrilmiş ve katılımcılara imzalatılmıştır. Toplamda 20 saati bulan ses kaydı metne aktarıldığında yaklaşık 25.000 kelimelik bir belge ortaya çıkmıştır ve bu metin önce tercüme edilmiş, daha sonra kodlanarak analiz edilmiştir. Mülakat tekniği ile toplanan verilerin bir başka dile tercüme edilerek analiz edilmesi okuyucu tarafından bir tür araştırma kısıtı (limitation) olarak görülebilir. Ancak veriye hâkim olan araştırmacının tercüme yapmış olması bu durumun önüne geçmiştir. Kısıt olarak görülebilecek bir diğer nokta ise örneklem ile ilgilidir; zira katılımcıların tamamı kendisini Ermeni Apostolik Kilisesi mensubu olarak tanımlamıştır. Bu araştırmanın Ermeni Apostolik Kilisesi'ni Ermeni kimliğinin baş unsurlarından biri olarak kabul etmesi ve örneklem bu katı özelliği yanlı (biased) bir örneklem oluşturulduğunu düşündürebilir. Bunun önüne geçmek adına açıkça belirtilmelidir ki örneklem kasten kendisini Hristiyan olarak tanımlayan katılımcılardan oluşturulmamıştır. Örneklem bu özelliği her ne kadar beklenmedik olmasa da, araştırmacının kullandığı kişisel ağlar ve kartopu tekniği bu şekilde sonuç vermiştir. Elbette “bütün Ermeniler Hristiyan'dır” diye bir iddiada bulunulmamaktadır. Her ne kadar araştırma grubu kimliğini kilise ile özdeşleştirse de, analiz bölümünde de tartışıldığı üzere dini kimlik dinamiklerine, pratiklere ve algılara dair tek tip bir portrenin aksine zengin bir profil ortaya çıkmıştır.

Alin Ozinian'ın (2009) ve Anna Muradyan'ın (2015) Ermenistanlı göçmenler üzerine yaptığı araştırmalar İstanbul Ermenileri ile Ermenistanlı göçmenler arasındaki ilişkinin

sınıf çatışması ve sosyo-kültürel farklar bakımından karmaşık olduğunu göstermiştir. İki araştırmacının da vardığı sonuçlara göre Ermenistanlı göçmenler ev hizmetleri alanında ağırlıklı olarak Türk işverenlerle çalışmayı tercih etmektedir. Öte yandan, Ermenistan'dan gelerek kayıt dışı çalışan işçilerin sayısı sadece tahminlere dayalıdır çünkü daha önce bu yönde resmi bir nüfus sayımı yapılmamıştır. Dolayısıyla, konuyla ilgili sayılara ve genellemeye dayalı bir yargıda bulunmak mümkün gözükmemekle birlikte, ancak bu tür saha çalışmaları ile veri toplanabilmektedir. Buna karşın bu tez çalışması kapsamında yeni bir örneklem oluşturarak söz konusu grubun hangi işverenlerle çalışmayı tercih ettiği araştırılmıştır. Veri analizi bölümünde tartışıldığı üzere, bu çalışmaya katılan göçmenlerin yarısı Türk işverenler ile daha önce hiç çalışmamıştır ve bu yönde bir tercihleri olmamıştır. Aksine, katılımcıların tamamı Türkiye'ye gelme kararını İstanbul'da bir Ermeni toplumun bulunması ile ilişkilendirmiştir. Sonuç itibarıyla, Ozinian (2009, s. 23) tarafından “problemlili” ve “karmaşık”; Muradyan (2015, s. 40) tarafından “pek de dostane olmayan” ve “çelişkili” olarak tanımlanan işveren-işçi ilişkilerinin aksine bu tez çalışması ilksel yaklaşıma, etnik bağların önemine ve kan bağı/akrabalık olarak tanımlanan ilişkilerin varlığına dair bulgular sunmaktadır. Bir diğer ifade ile bu çalışmaya dâhil olan katılımcıların anlatıları Ermeni-Hristiyan kimliğine, İstanbul Ermenileri ile olan birlikteliğe, bu durumun verdiği güven duygusuna hatta Ermeni ailelerin yanında çalışmanın bir tür görev duygusu yarattığına vurgu yapmıştır.

Araştırma sonuçlarına göre; İstanbul'da bir Ermeni cemaati olması Ermenistanlı göçmenlere bir tür aidiyet duygusunu vermekle birlikte, onların etnik, dini ve ulusal kimliklerini güçlendirmektedir. Bu araştırmayı gerçekleştirmeden önce zaten İstanbul'da bir Ermeni toplumu olmasının Ermenistanlı göçmenlerin bu şehri tercih etmesinde bir etmen olduğu biliniyordu; ancak bu tez çalışması İstanbul'da aktif bir cemaat hayatının göçmenlerin özellikle etnik bağlar ve dini kimlik özelinde şekillenen yeni bir aidiyet duygusu geliştirdiğini göstermektedir. Daha detaylı bir şekilde ifade edecek olursak; İstanbul'da bir Ermeni komünitesinin bulunması, göçmenlerin günlük

hayatta/işte ana dilinde iletişim kurabilmesi, Ermeni Apostolik Kilisesi ve ortak etnik bağların kurduğu akrabalık/soydaşlık duygusu Ermenistanlı göçmen kadınların deneyimlerinde ve anlatılarında önemli bir yer teşkil etmektedir. Farklı sosyal ve kültürel altyapılara rağmen, etnisite ve özellikle din Ermenistanlı göçmenler ve İstanbul Ermenileri için bir ortak payda olarak değerlendirilmektedir.

Teorik bir çerçeveden bakacak olursak, bu çalışma Ermenistanlı göçmenlerin etnik, dini ve ulusal kimliklerinin ilksel (primordial), sembolik ve inşa edilmiş unsurlarını katılımcıların bakış açısı ile tartışmaktadır. Mitlere, sembollere, Ermeni kimliği ile ilişkilendirilen ortak geçmişe ve kimliğin şekillenmesinde rol oynayan sosyal etkileşime atfedilen önem göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, söz konusu kavramlara Hale'in (2004) tabiriyle "inşa edilmiş ilkselcilik" ("constituted primordialism") olarak yaklaşmak mümkündür. Hale'e (2004) göre kimlikleri tanımlarken "kişisel referans noktalarını" göz önünde bulundurmak gerekir. Dolayısıyla; kan bağı, akrabalık ve ortak kültür gibi ilksel olarak görülen değerler Ermeni kimliğinin bel kemiğini oluşturmaktadır; öte yandan, sosyal etkileşim vasıtasıyla şekillenen etnik, ulusal ve dini kimlik gibi kavramların inşa edilmiş olduğu da göz ardı edilmemektedir.

Beklendiği üzere, araştırma sonuçları Ermeni aileler yanında çalışan ve Türk işverenlerle çalışan göçmenlerin farklı anlatılarına, bakış açılarına ve kimlik algılarına işaret etmiştir. Katılımcıların yedisi Türkiye'de bulundukları süre boyunca sadece Ermeni ailelerin yanında çalışmıştır; sekizi ise hem Türk hem Ermeni işverenler ile çalışma deneyimi edinmiştir. Böylece işveren-işçi ilişkileri açısından farklı algıların ve deneyimlerin karşılaştırılması ve kıyaslanması mümkün olmuştur. Katılımcıların anlatılarına göre; bazı durumlarda Türk işverenlerin Ermeni işverenlere nazaran göçmenlere daha yüksek maaşlar ödediği öğrenilmiştir. Buna rağmen, daha yüksek maaşlı bir iş imkânı karşısında Ermeni olmayan bir aile yanında çalışma teklifi gelse ve bu işe ihtiyacınız olsa kabul eder miydiniz sorusuna ise yedi katılımcıdan altısı "hayır" yanıtını vermiştir. Sebebi sorulduğunda ise "kendi soydaşım için çalışmayı

yeğlerim” ve “para hayatta her şey değildir” gibi yanıtlar verilmiştir. Ermeni aileler yanında çalışmayı tercih etme konusundaki bir diğer yaklaşım ise göçmenlerin verdikleri hizmet vesilesiyle “Ermeni toplumuna katkıda bulunma” söylemi idi. Burada bir tür “vazife duygusunun” hâkim olduğu görülmüştür. Buna Ermenice bilmeyen işverenlere veya onların çocuklarına Ermenice öğretmek, Ermenistan’daki kütüphanelere götürmek üzere İstanbul’da basılan Ermenice gazetelerden arşiv oluşturmak, topluluğu ilgilendiren etkinliklere katılmak, yazdıkları şiirleri Ermenice basılan gazetelerde yayınlamak gibi örnekler verilebilir. Hem Türk hem Ermeni işverenler ile çalışma deneyimi olan katılımcılar ise Türk toplumuna yönelik olumu yorumlarda bulunmuştur. Çelişkili olan bir diğer bulgu ise bu grubun Ermeni işverenlerle daha önce olumsuz deneyimler edinmiş olmasıydı. Buna rağmen söylemlere “her memlekette iyi de vardır kötü de” gibi yorumlar eklenmiştir.

Katılımcıların bir kısmı ise Türk işverenlerle çalışmayı tercih ettiklerini, daha yüksek maaşla çalıştıklarını ve daha iyi muamele gördüklerini kaydetmiştir. Buna rağmen söz konusu katılımcılar İstanbul’da bir Ermeni toplumu olmasının, iş dışında da olsa yabancı bir ülkede Ermenice konuşabilmelerinin, evlerine veya iş yerlerine yakın olan kiliselere gidebilmelerinin ve işveren-işçi ilişkisi dışında da İstanbul Ermenileri ile bir araya geldiklerinin altını çizmiştir. İlginç bir diğer bulguya göre, Türk işverenlerle çalışmayı tercih eden Ermenistanlılar arasında çocukları veya torunları İstanbullu Ermenilerle evli olan göçmenler bulunuyordu. Bu da işveren-işçi ilişkisinden ziyade daha bireysel düzeyde yeni aile ilişkilerinin kurulduğunu göstermektedir. Dolayısıyla, bazı Ermenistanlı göçmenler Türk ailelerle çalışmayı tercih etse de, bu çalışmaya konu olan katılımcılar Ermeni kimliğinden ödün vermemektedir; zira söz konusu grup aynı zamanda karma evliliklere karşı olduğunu anlatılarına dile getirmiştir. Ermeni kimliğinden ödün vermeme hususunda verilebilecek bir diğer örnek ise göçmenlerin İstanbul Ermenilerinin ağırlıklı olarak Türkçe konuşmasına veya Ermenice öğrenmek için gayret göstermesine getirdiği sert eleştirilerdir. Elbette kimliğe dair algılar ve dinamikler anlatıların insan deneyimine ve yaşam koşullarına bağlı olmasından ötürü

farklılık göstermektedir. Bu tez çalışması kapsamında İstanbul Ermenilerinin sürdürdüğü toplum hayatının Ermenistanlı göçmenler için son derece önemli olduğu anlaşılmaktadır. Buna göre, gündelik hayatta hem etnik hem de dini kimliğin Ermenistanlı göçmenler arasında belirgin olduğu söylenebilir.

Araştırma sorusunu yanıtlayacak olursak; Ermenistanlı göçmenlerin deneyimleri İstanbul'daki Ermeni cemaatinin sosyal yaşamından önemli ölçüde etkilenmektedir ve kimliklerin yeniden şekillenmesinde rol oynamaktadır. İstanbul Ermenilerinin Kumkapı, Ortaköy, Yeşilköy, Bakırköy ve Kurtuluş gibi belirli semtlerde yerleşik olması bir tür sosyal etkileşime de olanak tanımaktadır. Anlatılardan anlaşıldığı üzere, etnik, dini ve milli duygular göçmenlerin kimlik algılarında azımsanamayacak bir yer teşkil etmektedir. Araştırmacı mülakatları gerçekleştirirken katılımcıları yönlendirmemek adına özellikle bu üç kavramı yani etnik, dini ve milli/ulusal terimlerini kullanmaktan kaçınmıştır. Bunun yerine katılımcılara bayramları nasıl kutladıklarına, Türkiye'de çalışma konusunda ne hissettiklerine, İstanbul'daki Ermeni cemaati hakkında ne düşündüklerine, çocukluk/gençlik yıllarına dair anılarına ilişkin sorular yöneltilmiştir (bu son soru özellikle Sovyetler dönemine ilişkin bilgi toplamada yardımcı olmuştur). Anlatıların detaylı, zengin ve canlı özellikleri çalışmanın amacına hizmet etmiştir. Ayrıca, araştırmacının çalışmaya “içeriden” dâhil olması yöntemsel bir avantaj sağlamıştır.

Bu tez çalışması için toplanan verilere göre, ev hizmetlerinde çalışan Ermenistanlı göçmenler etnik kimlikleri ile öne çıkmaktadır. Anlatılarında, “Ermeni olmak”, “Ermeni olmaktan gurur duymak”, “Ermeni toplumuna hizmet etmek”, “Ermeniceyi korumak” ve “ortak soy/geçmiş” söylemleri dikkat çekmiştir. Ulusal kimliklerinden bahsederken ise yer yer göçmen olma hali yer yer ise Sovyetler sonrası kuvvetlenen “Ermenistan vatandaşı” kimliği vurgulanmıştır. Katılımcıların bir kısmı Sovyetler sonrası ilan edilen bağımsızlığın önemine vurgu yaparken, bir kısmı ise Sovyet döneminde korunan ekonomik dengenin verdiği güvenceye ve standartların yarattığı

düzene duyulan özlemi dile getirmiştir. Bir diğer ilginç bulguya göre, katılımcılar milli kimliklerini tanımlarken kendilerini İstanbul Ermenileri ile kıyaslama yoluna gitmiş ve “en azından biz ana dilimizi koruyoruz” gibi ifadelerle yer vermiştir. Öte yandan İstanbul Ermenilerinin Türk bayrağı altında Türk vatandaşı olduğu hatırlatılmıştır ve “en azından biz Ermeni vatandaşıyız” gibi söylemlere yer verilmiştir. Ortak geçmiş ve soydaşlık söylemlerine rağmen bu tür çelişkili detayların dile getirilmesi kayda değerdir. Ayrıca, komşu ülkede çalışan “kayıt dışı işçi” konumlarına rağmen, Ermenistan vatandaşı olma kimliğine yapılan vurgu da dikkat çekici olmuştur. Katılımcılar her ne kadar ana yurtlarındaki olumsuz koşullar ve anılar nedeniyle (aile bireylerinin vefatı, eşini/çocuğunu kaybetme, üzerinden otuz yıl geçmesine rağmen bugün hala bölgede hissedilen deprem-sonrası koşullar vs.) Türkiye’ye göç etmiş olsa da, anlatılar bir tür “eve geri dönüş mitine” işaret etmektedir. Kimi katılımcılar eve dönecekleri günü ipe çektiğini söylerken, kimisi “artık orada bizim için bir şey kalmadı”, “bizim artık anayurdumuz yok”, “ülkemiz satıldı” gibi ifadeler kullanmıştır. Tüm bunlara karşın, her bir katılımcı – eve dönmek istediğini söylese de, söylemese de – bir gün elbet Ermenistan’a döneceklerini ve ömürlerinin sonunda “Ermeni topraklarına kavuşacaklarını/karışacaklarını” söylemiştir. Bu söylem de söz konusu grubun milli duygularına ve vatan özlemine dair bilgi vermektedir.

Sonuç olarak; bu tez çalışması kısıtlı bir literatüre sahip olan İstanbul’da çalışan Ermenistanlı göçmenler konusuna katkıda bulunmaktadır. Yapılan derinlemesine görüşmeler ve gözlemler ışığında; göçmenlerin kimliklerine, vatan anlatılarına, Türk toplumuna, İstanbul Ermenilerine, işveren-işçi ilişkilerine ve bu ilişkiler özelinde etnik bağların önemine, soydaşlık mefhumuna, kadınlık anlatılarına ve hayali akrabalık ilişkilerine dair deneyimleri, algıları ve duyguları değerlendirilmiştir. Sonuçlar, Ermenistanlı göçmenlerin kimlik algılarında ve dinamiklerinde ilksel bağların (primordial ties) önemli bir rol oynadığını ve Ermeni olmanın Hristiyan olmak ile bir bütün olarak değerlendirildiğini göstermektedir. Katılımcıların mitlere, sembollere, geleneklere ve kolektif hafızaya atfettiği önem düşünüldüğünde ise etnisite ve milli

değerler konusunda etno-sembolik yaklaşımın uygun olduğu anlaşılmıştır. Bu tez, ev hizmetlerinde çalışan farklı göçmen gruplarının ortak etnik bağlar özelindeki işveren-işçi ilişkisini ve kimlik formasyonunu inceleyen gelecek çalışmalara ışık tutabilir (örneğin, ABD’de Meksika kökenli Amerikalıların yanında çalışan Meksikalı göçmenler veya Türkiye’de Gürcü kökenli ailelerin yanında çalışan Gürcistan göçmenleri gibi). Ancak, bu çalışmanın en belirgin özelliği Müslüman bir ülkede çalışan Hristiyan göçmenlerin Türkiye’de “azınlık” statüsüne sahip Ermeni-Hristiyan işverenler yanında çalışan bir araştırma grubunu konu alması olmuştur. Ayrıca Ermeni olmayan aileler yanında çalışma deneyimi olan göçmenlerin de araştırmaya dâhil edilmesi karşılaştırmalı bir yaklaşıma olanak tanımıştır.

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