Migration at Work
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Introduction

“Wouldn’t you like your domestic worker to be energetic, clean, positive and able to take care of details that even you do not realize? Then Filipina helpers are the right choice for you.”

The above quotation is taken from a human resource consultancy website that matches Filipina nanny candidates with potential employers, i.e. families in Turkey. Since the early 2010s, there has been an increase in the number of human resource consultancies that work on the placement of Filipina nannies. The websites of these agencies provide comprehensive lists of reasons to employ Filipina nannies rather than nannies from other nationalities and they provide ranges of wages for Filipinas.

A report by the International Labour Organisation published in 2018 (Addati, Cattaneo, Esquivel & Valarino, 2018) points to the wage differentials between local and migrant domestic workers, as well as between migrant domestic workers coming from different nationalities, noting that they cannot be explained by the differences in education or work experience. This leads to the question: what contributes to the differences in wages, if not credentials? While Filipinas’ knowledge of English makes them highly sought-after employees, this alone fails to explain why their salaries tend to be higher than those of other migrant women working as nannies for families in Turkey. In this chapter I attempt to tie
representations of Filipina women to their imaginaries and their mobility and I argue that representations of Filipina women construct them as ideal nannies and pricier global commodities that act as status symbols for transnational, aspirant middle classes, and locate them higher in the domestic labour market hierarchy. Moreover, I suggest that imaginaries of Filipina women help structural forces such as gender, race and global capitalism to operate.

Migratory movements always involve the “process of cultural meaning-making” (Salazar, 2010, p. 2) and push-pull theories fall short of offering intelligibility of such dimensions (Salazar, 2011). To move beyond structuralist approaches that regard migration as a discrete event marked by movement, we require a broader and more complex understanding that values “imaginary and discursive dimensions” (Frello in Salazar, 2010, p. 6). Here, the notion of social imaginaries becomes crucial because it challenges the understanding that material realities are the sole driving force of migratory movements, and it encapsulates the symbolic dimensions that contribute to migration (Camacho, 2008, p. 5). With this understanding, not only places of deprivations and opportunities but also migrant imaginaries of what lies ahead and “regimes of mobility” (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013) co-produce migratory flows. Furthermore, imaginaries held by prospective employers about alleged qualities of migrant workers frequently translate into preferences in employing people of certain nationalities. Thus, imaginaries offer glimpses into how migration is pictured and how various anticipations play a role in the unfolding of migratory projects. Looking at imaginaries also sheds light on the power relations that are formed through migratory movements in the sense of how and to whom privileges are granted, and whom constraints are placed upon in relation to mobility.

Media play a central role in the development of migrant imaginaries and, reversing the gaze, imaginaries of migrants. Russell and Wood (2013, pp. 1–2) argue that “media may intervene in the migration process” in three principal ways: by feeding into images of destination countries, into representations of migrants in the destination country, and by facilitating transnational ties via “media originating from the migration sending country”. All three types of links between media and migration are critical in how migration is imagined, dealt with and experienced, and therefore make mediated depictions of migrants central in the exploration of attitudes towards nannies from the Philippines in Turkey.

With the aim of contributing to the body of scholarly work regarding imaginaries, migration and media, this chapter looks at how Filipina nannies are
portrayed on the human resource agency websites in Turkey. Gaonkar (2002, p. 4) suggests that social imaginaries are “embedded in the habitus of a population” and circulated through “images, stories, legends, and modes of address” (p. 10). He argues that social imaginaries exist “by virtue of representations or implicit understandings” (p. 10). Given this “fluid middle ground between embodied practices and explicit doctrines” (ibid.), the human resource agency websites provide a repository of such representations refracted through lenses of race and gender that feed into social imaginaries and are fed by them and contribute to material realities for Filipina women in Turkey. Before examining such representations in more detail, this chapter starts with a brief overview of migration and division of domestic labour in Turkey.

Turkey: Migration and the Domestic Services Sector

In the last decade, Turkey has transformed from a major migrant-sending country to a major migrant-receiving country. The migration flows took an upward turn starting from the late 1970s when the political turmoil, “draconian politics” and humanitarian insecurity pushed people within and beyond the region to seek asylum in Turkey (Icduygu, 2014). Moreover, the country has been imagined to provide “a gateway to a new job, a new life, and a stepping stone to employment in the West” (Icduygu, 2009 in Kaya, 2016) and sometimes a new love (Bloch, 2011) for immigrants from Eastern European and former Soviet Union countries. More recently this came to include countries like the Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Tunisia. Together with favourable visa regimes, “Turkey’s new liberal market economy characterized by informality” (Icduygu, 2014) has been instrumental in attracting migrants. As a result, Turkey witnessed immigration flows from four different categories: (1) irregular labour migrants; (2) transit migrants; (3) asylum seekers and refugees and (4) regular migrants (Icduygu, 2014).

Moreover, the Justice and Development Party’s immigration policies and neo-Ottoman discourse played a critical role in the migration inflows. An example of such rhetoric is demonstrated in ex-President Abdullah Gül’s address to a conference on migration, Islam and multiculturalism in Europe in Ankara on 11 April 2013:
Turkey is changing. Turkey is a country that has accepted migrants and is used as a transit point for migration to Europe. Not only are people from our neighbouring countries arriving in Turkey, but also people from other parts of the world are coming to our country. As Turkey is enjoying successful economic development, the country is becoming a country of immigration... We used to send our citizens to other countries [...] to Germany [...] to France, to Austria, to Australia [...] But foreigners are also beginning to live in Turkey [...] We have so many refugees coming to Turkey [...] In the Ottoman period we were a multicultural country, with people of different religion, ethnicity and culture [...] now again Turkey will be a place with this diversity. (İcduygu, 2014)

Nonetheless, this welcoming portrayal is to some extent deceiving as it disguises its selectivity in terms of the laws and the policies that facilitate settlement for some groups rather than others.  

Migration flows transformed the domestic services sector which has a long history in the region. The Turkish domestic services sector has over the last decades developed into a multifarious system of live-in migrant workers and locals, paid on a daily basis (Toksoz, Erdogdu & Kaska, 2012). Many middle-class and upper-middle-class employers consider migrant domestic workers “European” and “civilised” as opposed to local women of rural origins who are thought of as uneducated (ibid.) and whose bodily labour marks them with “signs of peasantry” (Ozyegin, 2001, p. 125). In the case of nannies, the ethnic stratification of the labour market becomes even more pronounced. A remarkable study done by Danis (2007) portrays the complexity of and the hierarchies within the Turkish domestic labour industry. She suggests that English nannies, followed by Filipina nannies, take the place at the top of the ladder since they address Turkish upper-class aspirations for pre-school education. Turkish-speaking Bulgarians are ranked lower but still have the linguistic advantage. Finally, she states that women from Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia face significant obstacles in entering the Turkish domestic service market. Recently there has been a significant increase in work permits granted to Filipina women. The 36 permits granted to Filipina women in 2011 grew to 1,959 in 2017. Moreover, unlike other migrant domestic workers, Filipina women are highly mediatised by employment agencies, employers themselves and television programmes, which presumably contribute to their perception, desirability and higher wages.
Female migration, transnational division of domestic labour and the Philippines

Women have been on the move for centuries. However, the early 1980s marked a difference in their mobility patterns, as women started to move on their own, rather than joining their husbands as family dependents. This shift attracted scholarly attention to female migration.

Upon arrival in a new country, job opportunities for these women remain highly limited, often boiling down to domestic work, care work and manufacturing jobs. The “care economy” (Zelizer, 2009) then becomes marked by the employment of a precarious workforce, which has gendered, raced and classed implications. These sectors are the largest venues for migrant women and they are asymmetrically filled by them. Presumably, it is the women from the Global South and East that move towards the Global North. The outcome of such movements is a transnational division of domestic labour, usually involving the delegation of non-biological reproductive work to “third world” women, while leaving intact gender ideologies regarding the family division of labour in sending and receiving countries. Parreñas (2000, p. 577) calls this unequal distribution the “international division of reproductive labour”. She argues that the movement of women is embedded in “transnational capitalism” (ibid.), which is marked by structural inequalities regarding gender, race and class.

In the Philippines, overseas migration has become an institutionalised process in which the government plays a central role in facilitating overseas employment (Guevarra, 2014, p. 136). In the 1970s, the Philippine government started to export labour to oil-rich Gulf countries that needed workers (ibid, p. 135). In 1974, then president Ferdinand Marcos and his administration issued the Labour Code (Gonzales, 1996, p. 164), facilitating overseas contract employment to curb unemployment and payment deficits incurred as a result of IMF and the World Bank loans (ibid.; Guevarra, 2014, p. 135). The Labour Code promoted the establishment of institutions to implement the regulation of migration, such as the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) and private employment agencies to expedite the recruitment process (Guevarra, 2014, p. 136). While initially men migrated to fulfil jobs such as those of mechanics, construction workers or engineers, the increasing need for care work led to the feminisation of the labour to be exported. The export of labour “has become one of the country’s key programs of development” (ibid.).
Promotion of overseas employment that started with neoliberal policies still continues to this date. The economy of the country is contingent on the remittances sent by over 10 million Filipino migrant workers (Näre & Nordberg, 2016). In a 2003 statement, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo referred to herself not only as the head of state, but also as the CEO of a global company providing workforce recruits (2003, cited in Näre and Nordberg, 2016). This contributes to the image of the Philippines as exporter and Filipinas as exports. Moreover, state institutions and recruitment agencies are actively involved in “racial branding” to create a competitive advantage over other countries that export labour (Guevarra, 2014, p. 131). Through essentialising and racialising discourses, institutional actors brand Filipinas as “the Supermaid[s]” (Ibid, p. 140), thereby developing an “added export value” that positions Filipinas as better than the others in the foreign employer’s eyes (Guevarra, 2010, p. 126). Guevarra (Ibid., p. 135) suggests that these discourses also contribute to the creation of “ideal labouring subjects” and this translates into “Filipina” becoming analogous to “maid” in Hong Kong (Constable 1997 in Barber 2000; Tyner 1994) and to “nanny” in certain urban settings in Canada (Barber, 2000).

Mediated representations in the receiving countries are crucial in understanding how these women are imagined and how imaginaries in turn create subjectivities; however, these representations have not been addressed extensively (see Gomes, 2011, and Piocos, 2018, for movies; Saroca 1997, 2006, 2007 for Filipina women’s media portrayals in Australia; and Näre and Nordberg 2016 for media representations of Filipina nurses in Finland). There is a growing need to investigate the representations of migrants, and such investigation will help us to understand the dialectical relationship between imaginaries and representations which in turn contribute to the material dimensions of migration.

Methodology

In this chapter I analyse how Filipina nannies are depicted on 25 human resources agency websites in Turkey. The websites were chosen via an online search with the keyword “filipinli bakıcı” (Filipino caregiver). In other words, search engines for domestic workers and blogs with entries on domestic workers that my search yielded were excluded from the analysis. In addition, two newspaper interviews with the CEOs of a few bigger agencies were included among the data considered. All the websites were accessed during March 2018.
Following a constructionist approach to representation and taking a cue from Hall (1997, pp. 5–9), the chapter explores these representation practices to investigate how Filipina women are imagined. Drawing from Foucault’s approach to discourse as producing social reality by “forming the objects of which [it] speaks” (Foucault, 1972, p. 49), the theoretical departure point of the study suggests that representations feed into imaginaries, produce social reality and subjectivities, and they in turn are fed by imaginaries. A study done by Angeles and Sunanta (2007) looks into the discursive representation of Thai and Filipina women on intermarriage websites to investigate how the intersections of gender, race and nation in these representations facilitate violence towards Third World women. The authors argue that these representations located in the nexus of consumerism, Orientalism and sexism shape how these women are treated and how they experience the world. In the same spirit, in this study I explore the constructions of Filipina women by employment agencies, to look into the ways social imaginaries of Filipina women are produced and result in preferential treatment on the labour market.

The Ideal Nanny

In representations on the selected agency websites, Filipina women were commonly depicted as highly desirable employees because of their presumed knowledge of English. They were portrayed as well-educated and their level of education was backed by statistics indicating that 80 per cent of Filipinas were college graduates and the remaining 20 per cent were high school graduates. However, presumed personality traits seemed to be just as relevant. Filipina nannies were portrayed as disciplined, an alleged characteristic that was echoed across all websites. Yet, this discipline was carefully curated; it was the right amount of discipline implemented at the right times and in appropriate measure. Filipina nannies were said to be disciplined in their own work and when it came to children’s education, sleeping and meal times, but they were equally cheerful during play time. They would not implement hard and cold discipline on the children. The common trope of nannies from the Philippines was one that highlights hard work, carefulness and meticulousness, as well as trustworthiness, and a task-oriented, energetic attitude. Yet these more work-related traits were counterbalanced with another group of traits; they were “disciplined yet loving”. Filipinas were portrayed as calm, easy-going, avoiding
conflicts with their employers, tolerant, sweet-tempered and patient. In contrast to the work-related traits, the second group related to docility and obedience. Nonetheless, this passivity was not an obstacle to dealing with a potential crisis like small accidents. They were seen as friendly, positive, sincere and clean. They were loving, compassionate and merciful. One of the websites provides a comprehensive ten-item list to convey why Filipinas are the best choice on the market.

10 reasons to prefer a Filipina child caregiver:

1) Language: English is the official language of Philippines
2) Discipline: hardworking, meticulous but not oppressive. Their discipline is limited to homework and sleep and meal times.
3) Kindness/grace: due to their culture, they are naturally graceful
4) Respectful/tolerant: a Filipina is respectful and does not get into conflict with you.
5) Exotic, Asian food: they are good cooks
6) Overnight stay
7) Service quality: the Philippines are known to provide a workforce for luxury cruises
8) Dynamism and energy: they have slender and agile physical traits, which enable them to do their jobs energetically and practically
9) Clean and well groomed: they have self-respect, they dress up in a clean and decent fashion all the time
10) Loving, compassionate and positive: they always smile and they are loving at all times.

On the websites it was stated that Filipina nannies fit perfectly in your family and will accompany you all the time: in vacations, in business trips and in special times. However, their presence would not be annoying because they were not chatters and they were good at keeping secrets. Moreover, the long journey from the Philippines and their visa, which is tied to their contract, elicit the promise of long-term commitment to an employer, which constitutes added value.

Overall, the combination of these traits made Filipinas successful at childcare and “better than other groups of nannies”, which turned them into the “Mercedes Benz” of nannies, as Guevarra (2014, p. 140) argued. Hence, these representations located Filipina women more highly in the hierarchy of the domestic labour market by constructing them as ontologically distinct. To keep
the imagined ontological distinction intact, Filipina women’s identities were depicted hiding the inconsistencies. The stereotypes were strategically used and maintained by the agencies because they marked the success of placement. They indicated agencies’ “ability to render a perfect match between client and applicant in practice, their ability to stereotype in a way that is consistent with employers’ expectations” (Bakan & Stasiulis, 1995, p. 317). The pride derived from a successful placement is clearly manifested in agencies’ Instagram pages posting family photos of “perfect matches”.

The knowledge of English, high levels of education and good work ethics and habits were wrapped up in the mantle of Asian female desirability, and personality traits were stressed rather than other characteristics like experience or age. Rollins (1985, p. 36) suggests that employers rank the “personality of the worker and the kinds of relationships employers were able to establish with them” “as more important considerations” than the job performance. By the same token, Akalin (2007) argues in her study on migrant and Turkish domestic workers that what was sought from the migrant domestics was “not their personalities as fixed entities, but the capacity to mould them”. In this case, Filipina nannies’ identities were imagined as fixed but at the same time mouldable, providing room for customisation if the employer needed it.

Filipina women are not perceived in the same fashion in different places. For instance, Humphrey (1990) found that in Jordan Filipinas were regarded as assertive. They were seen as optimistic and outgoing but “difficult to manage” in Taiwan (Lan, 2006, p. 77). Thus, the Philippines’ neoliberal policies that led to the marketing of Filipina women as the “Mercedes Benz” of care work (Guevarra, 2014, p. 140) did not lead to homogenous imagination of Filipinas around the world. However, representations were consistent across all websites of agencies based in Turkey and constructed Filipina women as ideal nannies.

A Global Commodity

The representations of Filipina domestic workers as ideal nannies are part and parcel of the commodification of women’s labour. As suggested by Tyner (1994, pp. 607–608), “when migrants are not viewed as individuals, but by the functions they perform, they become nonentities: products. Employers can select applicants through catalogues, order them through the mail (through the POEA), and have them delivered”. The catalogues Tyner refers to in 1994 are now more commonly
available in the form of video resumés or skype interviews, which have a more personal dimension. On the websites, statements such as “your selected nanny” prevail. Most agencies even promise a “replacement” if the client fails to get along with a nanny within the first six months.¹⁶

Moreover, when justifying the preference for Filipinas, the agencies advocate that families around the world look for Filipina nannies to employ.¹⁷ They suggest that Filipinas receive training in childcare, cleaning, elderly care. They further argue that the Philippines has been a source of labour for more than 100 years and the country provides workforces especially in the services sector. This way, the export of nannies becomes normalised in global capitalism and hiring them comes to be framed as the right consumer choice.

In the process of Filipina women’s construction as a universal commodity, racialisation or “racial branding” (Guevarra, 2014, p. 145) plays a central role. While in other countries in the region like Jordan (Liebelt, 2008), skin colour has been mentioned overtly, in Turkey racism and skin colour have a more complex relationship with each other. In the discursive construction, Filipina women’s “culture” serves as a repository for a number of imagined qualities making them desirable labouring subjects. This is in line with the literature suggesting that culture has replaced race in the glorification of difference and declarations of superiority/inferiority (Todorov, 1993, pp. 156–157), and racism has been formulated through culture instead of “biological themes” (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991, p. 26). As Blaut (1992, p. 280) maintains, “[t]oday’s racism is cultural racism”. Cultural racism exaggerates and radicalises differences and essentialises them by conceiving culture “along ethnically absolute lines, not as something intrinsically fluid, changing, unstable, and dynamic” (Gilroy, 1990 in Giroux 1993, p. 8). Attributing Filipina women’s success in childcare to their culture justifies their place to serve and the “dominant group’s place to be served” (Uchida, 1998, p. 14). While reproductive labour as a commodity has been purchased by women from privileged classes and links women to each other (Parreñas, 2000, p. 561), racialisation helps the division of labour in transnational capitalism to function. Through the “racial branding” engaged in by institutional actors in both the Philippines and the destination countries, Filipinas are imagined as global commodities with a superior export value and qualities. Thus, culture/race becomes the parameter by which the individual’s potential for a job – her mobility across borders – is judged as desirable or undesirable.
A class-conscious item of consumption

Filipina nannies, in the Turkish context, were constructed not only as global commodities, but as valuable items of consumption linked to privilege. As in many countries, higher social standing can be claimed through consumption in Turkey (Ustuner & Holt, 2009, p. 52). This is reminiscent of Baudrillard’s (2016) sense of consumption, by which individuals distinguish themselves from others and immerse in society. In the broader consumption field, domestic service is an essential commodity (Frantz, 2008, p. 614). Humphrey (1990, p. 13) argues that domestic servants in Jordan were “essentially an item of consumption with symbolic value”, akin to “owning the right car” (Tyner, 1994, p. 605). Filipina nannies, branded as “supermaids” (Guevarra, 2014) or “supernannies” and as having “added export value” (Ibid.), appeal to higher classes and act as a status symbol. The agencies consistently mention that elite families’ choices were Filipina nannies. In an interview, the CEO of the largest agency stated that she became an insider in high society; she knew which artists were pregnant and which were getting a divorce before everyone else (Hurriyet, 2016). This was a way of suggesting that, by employing Filipina nannies, one could be an insider to that high society as well. On the websites it is argued that children of the British monarchy have been and still are being raised by Filipina nannies. Thus, through being able to afford the “Mercedes-Benz” of nannies, employers were constructed as members of the upper-middle classes who possessed the “best” out there, in relation to global standards.

The aspirational upper-middle-class status is further reified through photos shared on social media. One of the agencies refers its users to its Instagram page; on the Instagram page there are photo displays of families who are happy with their Filipina nannies. Posts include photos of families travelling to foreign countries, eating out or celebrating birthdays or New Year’s Eve with their Filipina nannies. When at home, families are photographed in their decorated, spacious living rooms filled with pianos and staircases and their Filipina helpers. The communication of status via imagery is nothing new. John Berger (1972) in his influential series investigating the hidden ideologies behind visual imagery, argues that oil paintings were used as a means of depicting the wealth, status and possessions of the individuals who commissioned those works of art. Following his interpretation of European paintings, portrayals of families happily posing with their Filipina nannies circulating on social media, too, can be seen as akin to statements of possession. Furthermore, these representations were in line
with “an essential aspect of what Bourdieu (1984) refers to as ‘presentation’, the ability of upwardly mobile classes to give the impression of living effortlessly and without apparent cost or sacrifice” (Humphrey, 1990, p. 10). Thus, within these representations Filipina women were constructed as status symbols that buttressed the performance of middle-class belonging by their employers.

Moreover, aspirations for an upper-middle-class life include desires for a cosmopolitan lifestyle. On one of the websites the agency argues that, growing up with a different culture, children will have a wider perspective. This promise assumes a cosmopolitan mind-set as “having experience and engagement with the foreign or cultural other” (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013) without making any reference to different and less desirable “others”. Less exoticised “others” such as Uzbeks or Tunisians are not imagined in the same way as offering children a cosmopolitan mind set. However, the employment of Filipina nannies was envisaged as a step into children’s future of belonging to the transnational cosmopolitan class.

Class reproduction through the successful upbringing of the children is a crucial aspiration for the upper and upper-middle classes. Ustuner and Holt (2009, p. 50) argue that Bourdieu’s cultural capital, which needed to be “sedimented” and reproduced quotidianly, can be imported into the Turkish context. They argue that “it is not the fruit of indigenous socialization as is the case in Bourdieu (1986)’s France” but it heavily depends on learning and internalising “deterritorialized cultural capital” (Ibid.) through such activities such as travel to the West. Thus, “perfect command of the English language” rather than knowledge of Turkish language, history and literature becomes a defining characteristic of elite education (p. 52). In this case, economic capital enables the privilege of having a Filipina nanny, which is convertible to the enriched and deterritorialised “cultural capital necessary for employability and social networking” (Skeggs, 2004, p. 75) in later life. Filipina nannies were imagined to put the children one step ahead in life.

In brief, Filipina nannies were constructed to reify one’s claim to upper-middle-class status and equip children with the necessary skills to enable a successful adulthood in which structural problems such as insufficient language training at schools or widespread unemployment might be circumvented. On the other side of the coin, through constructing Filipina nannies as status symbols, these representations also constructed a transnational consumer middle-class in Turkey in pursuit of global, unique and pricier commodities. These imaginaries
of Filipina women can influence how they are treated. The next section will explore how imaginaries may contribute to their material conditions.

**Imaginaries and Mobility**

Problematising sociology’s approach to the “social”, Latour (2005, p. 7) argues that the “social” is “not as a special domain, a specific realm or a particular sort of thing” but “a very peculiar movement of re-association and reassembling”. He suggests that the “social” is visible only “when a new association is being produced between elements” (p. 8). Drawing from Castoriadis (1987) and Taylor (2002) primarily, these associations and connections that produce the “social” can be approached as social imaginaries (Valaskivi & Sumiala, 2014, p. 230). Social imaginaries are not the opposite of real, but they are “the condition of the perception and production of the real” (Kim, 2016, p. 62). Moreover, imaginaries generate and transform “realities”. As Salazar (2010, p. 9) writes, “the imaginary can thus be conceived as a mental process, both individual and social, that produces the reality that simultaneously produces it”. Griffiths and Maile (2014) provide an example of this co-productive relationship between reality and imaginaries. In relation to social imaginary of Berlin, they argue that the representation of the city is embroiled both in the “individuals’ construction of place and in their embodied encounters with the city” (p. 142). Thus, they point out how imaginaries have the power to shape realities created personally or collectively.

As argued by a number of scholars (Castoriadis, 1987; Salazar, 2011; Camacho 2008), imaginaries have implications for mobilities. Imaginaries made and remade through the circulation of images, stories, representations, meanings and values make “certain types of mobile individuals become the subjects of praise or condemnation, desire, suppression or fear” (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013).

In the case of Filipina nannies in Turkey, the imaginaries may contribute to the material conditions of labour migration for these women. Benson (2012, pp. 1682–1683), looking at British migration to rural France, suggests that understanding of “how imagination is translated into action” requires a focus on “privileges and constraints”. For Filipina nannies in Turkey, social imaginaries create various privileges. In an interview, the CEO of the biggest agency states that they are leading a legal action against a client who abused an employee (Hurriyet, 2016). Some of the agency websites clearly state that they protect the
interests of both the families and the Filipina nannies. Some agencies argue, moreover, that some families send these women to their countries by private jet and buy Filipina satellite channels for their entertainment.

Conclusion

This chapter looked into representations of Filipina nannies on human resource consultancy websites in Turkey. Investigation of websites suggests that Filipina women are constructed as ideal nannies. They were represented as ontologically different from and better than other groups of nannies due not to their job performance but to their imagination as the “other”, constructed through the essentialisation of cultural practices, racialisation and gendering. Moreover, they were depicted as global commodities, ownership of which is presented as certifying one’s belonging to transnational, cosmopolitan classes. Through these constructions, transnational consumer middle classes in Turkey were imaged as pursuing global, pricier commodities with particular symbolic significance. Market-based, racialised and gendered valuation of subjects consequently may harden or loosen the borders. These imaginaries of Filipina nannies in return seem to contribute to the material conditions for Filipina women in the form of mobility, preferential treatments, privileges and higher wages that are not granted to other nannies in the hierarchical domestic labour market. The market-oriented, racialised and gendered valuation of their subjectivities presumably leads to differential experiences in transgressing borders that are hardened or loosened through imaginaries of Otherness.

The maintenance of such positive imaginaries of Filipina nannies requires labour; studying the human resource agencies and interviewing their owners, Deniz (2018) finds that these agencies do not favour hiring Filipinas who have never left the Philippines. She suggests that they prefer women who have gone to Singapore or China through their personal means and who have worked in these places for a period of time and acquainted themselves with the use of electronic home appliances. The brokerage of nannies from the Philippines thus involves selection strategies that rely on previous cross-border labour mobility to maintain the image of the well-versed, ideal nanny. In the Turkish case, then, their mobility becomes contingent upon the imaginaries that are fed by previous mobilities. By looking into the representations of Filipina women in Turkey, I
aimed to contribute to this dialogic relation between representation, mobility and imaginaries that create and perpetuate one another.

“Global capitalism, patriarchy, and racial inequalities are structural forces that jointly determine the subject-positions of migrant Filipina domestic workers in globalization”, writes Parreñas (2015, p. 30). However, imaginaries of Filipina women should also be added to the equation as imaginaries work at the intersections of and through gender, class, race, contributing to the perpetuation of these structures of inequality. Thus, imaginaries complicate migration by adding layers to how migration is desired, perceived, realised, mediated, received and experienced, and looking at representations and imaginaries enhances and complicates our understanding of structural inequalities that are embedded in migratory projects for these women. The purpose of this chapter was to look at the intersection of discourses and imaginaries of Otherness and mobility. While this helps to unravel some complexities of mobilty in relation to neoliberal international divison of labour, I would like to note that as a form of political work we need more research that decentres dominant and privileged voices of academia and that opens up spaces that centre these women’s epistemeologies and histories.

Notes

2 The employment agency websites use the terms nanny (dadv), child care giver (bakıcı) and domestic helper (yardımcı) interchangeably. One reason is that the Turkish equivalent of the term nanny is old-fashioned and replaced by caregiver and helper to refer to nannies as well. Despite having commonalities as well as differences, and despite the fact that boundaries between them rarely remain solid, I choose to use the word “nanny” as Filipina women are mostly employed to take care of children within a family setting.
3 On some of the webpages it is overtly stated that hiring Filipina nannies will require the payment of higher salaries.
4 I use the term in Hall’s sense. Hall (2003, p.15) states that “[r]epresentation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It does involve the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things”.
5 To illustrate: Armenians leaving Syria, which challenged the JDP’s “Muslim brothers” rhetoric, were settled in Vakıflıköy, the only Armenian village in Turkey and were issued
with foreign-national certificates with which they could have access to healthcare services for births and operations, but only in hospitals within the region, unlike the nation-wide access given to Sunnite Syrians (Korkut, 2016). And as argued by Korkut (2016), “It may then be that Turkey’s insistence on selective humanitarianism is forcing the Syrians to select more primordial associations rather than simply being Syrian”.

6 These data were taken from the 2017 report of the Turkish Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services on https://birim.alevecalisma.gov.tr/media/11707/cal%C4%B1smayeti-istatistikleri-2017.pdf.

7 These numbers do not match the data on statistics tool offered by the Turkish Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services on http://cibs.csbg.gov.tr/Istatistik/ . According to the data published on this tool, only 20% of Filipinos who were granted work permits in 2017 and 2018 were college graduates.


14 “Filipinli Bakıcı Arıyorum”, [I am looking for a Filipino Care Worker], http://www.filipinonanny.agency/tr/filipinli-bakici-arıyorum.

15 “Filipinli Bakıcı”, [Filipino Care Worker], http://www.filipinlibakici.net/blog/detay/filipinli-bakici-ankara/ (accessed on 19 January 2019).


17 “Filipinli Bakıcı Arıyorum”, [I am looking for a Filipino Care Worker], http://www.filipinonanny.agency/tr/filipinli-bakici-arıyorum.


While some agencies do have Instagram pages, they only post short videos of women introducing themselves. These introductions generally include names, ages, parental status...
and work experience in terms of years and number of children taken care of. Some agencies on Instagram do not have any links to websites and operate only through these Instagram pages. Nonetheless, this practice of posting photos of families is unique to this agency. Moreover, through this Instagram account this agency organises Christmas parties for its employees.


21 “Filipinli Bakıcılar Dünyada 1 Numara” [Filipino Helpers are World Number 1] https://www.damladanismanlik.com/blog/filipinli-bakicilar-dunyada-1-numara.


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