

Social and political dimension of stigmatization: The development of Natasha and Maria images for immigrants in Istanbul¹

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Abstract

This study aims at understanding how the perceptions about migrants have been created and transferred into daily life as a stigmatization by means of public perception, media and state law implementations. The focus would be briefly what kind of consequences these perceptions and stigmatization might lead. First section will examine the background of migration to Turkey briefly and make a summary of migration towards Turkey by 90s. Second section will briefly evaluate the preferential legal framework, which constitutes the base for official discourse differentiating the migrants and implementations of security forces that can be described as discriminatory. The third section deals with the impact of perceptions influential in both formation and reproduction of inclusive and exclusive practices towards migrant women. Additionally, impact of public perception in classifying the migrants and migratory processes would be dealt in this section.

Keywords: Gagauz; women migration; Natasha; Maria; public perception.

Introduction

In general, migration towards Turkey in early 90s was mainly formed according to social, economic and political and such dynamics in both origin and destination countries like any other migratory movement worldwide. However, the effects of pull and push factors in the formation of the migration process has not been so simple and automatic as Ravenstein and Lee foresaw, therefore cannot simply be generalized by following their Migration Law approach. There are other multilayered and multi directional sub/processes in which the migration as a process has been substantially altered. The question whether migration is all about the outcome of social and cultural layers or it might be a twofold process that alters the social and cultural layers through perceptions in turn is still pending.

Here, we will analyse the pattern and dynamics of this construction partly by highlighting how the perception about and public visibility of migrants

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have been constructed as social or cultural layers at the end of 90s. In order to do that, we need to decompose the social or cultural layers beyond the very perception towards migrants since beliefs and attitudes continue to influence the meaning of stigma as we understand it in terms of our own culture and societal context (Whitehead et al., 2005). We further argue that perceptual factors that we are dealing with here have not only been formed by the social and cultural layers but also emerged as an invisible element of pressure in determination of state policies and their implementations. In turn, these discriminatory frameworks have likely posited a deterministic view of the individual actor in the face of cultural, social and official stigmatization respectively (Scimecca, 1977) and reshaped the migratory process. At the end of the circle, last but not least, the migratory process has likely been very decisive agent feeding the stigmatization negatively or positively towards ethnic or ethnic division of labour in specific sectors. The findings reveal that while the public perception in Turkey has been one of the major exponents of the multi-layered relational migration model, official hegemonic framework in line with the mass and printed media² has been invisibly considerable agent generating this perception and visibility.

Legal framework i.e. policies and implementations of law introduced by the state along with the images of migrants created through media (i.e., public perception) have caused the migrants to be subject to social, cultural and political stigmatization. In other words, migrants have been differentiated regardless of the pull-push factors first by ethnicity (as Turkish-origin Foreigner –TOF and non-Turkish)³ then by ethnic in line with the state and media respectively. These stigmatizations for migrants have been legitimized, and in some points, turned to be part of daily life, namely a determinant in social and work relations. Therefore, migration to Turkey in early 90s cannot be discussed without taking into account the efforts for ethnic categorization by state, ethnic classification by media, and creation of public perception as a result, which all together led to discrimination cyclically.

Here, we will attempt to understand how the perceptions about migrants have been created and transferred into daily life as social and cultural stigma by means of media and briefly what kind of consequences these perceptions and stigmatization might lead to in daily life⁴.

The findings have been based on field research carried out during 2005 in Istanbul Turkey. I have used nearly all qualitative and quantitative means of data collection from a multi-ethnic perspective. All were in form of

² Here we focus on the mainstream means. We exclude the alternative media focusing on human rights issues.

³ There is no direct migration policy and regulation law in Turkey.

⁴ However, this study aims neither at making a chronological index of content analyses over the news on migration and migrants that have been covered in the media, nor at studying an altered identity in the migrants, necessitating a reconstitution of self in response to form of *labelling* or official typing, and consequent stigmatization.

participant observation and unstructured interviews with a variety of people; migrant women workers (13), employers (7), all sort of agencies (4), state officials (2), persons who transport the IHSWs to the labour market (2), and the market place owner (1) in the district of Laleli. I have carried out participant observation among in-house workers and in agencies for almost three years. Participating in the culture of the ethnic group under study provided me with accounts of Gagauz and Ukrainian women's lives in details. In addition to developing relationships through visits or on a friendly basis, participant observation in agencies as well required my taking on several roles, such as secretary or office gopher. This direct observation enabled me to directly witness contacts between the agencies and the demand and supply sides, as well as to understand these relations more thoroughly.

In the first section of this study, we will examine the background of migration to Turkey briefly and make a summary of migration towards Turkey by 90s. In the second section, we will briefly evaluate the preferential legal framework, which constitutes the base for official discourse differentiating the migrants and implementations of security forces that can be described as discriminatory. The third section deals with the impact of perceptions influential in both formation and reproduction of inclusive and exclusive practices towards migrants. In this section, we will also discuss the negative and positive ethic perceptions classifying the migrants and migratory processes in turn. We will mainly address how the positive or negative perceptions created through media have in turn started to re-form the reality of migration being a root of the very perception.

Migration wave to Turkey: Patterns and dynamics

There has been a massive women labour migration to Turkey right after the Soviet's disintegration in the late 1980's. Due to the social, economic, and political chaos in ex-Soviet countries, many women have been mobile temporarily for (1) nearest but (2) easy-entrance countries where (3) they can not only find job and (4) earn money but also (5) save most of their earnings. It is certain that this stream of migration has not been independent from the globalization of Istanbul (Aksoy, 1996; Erder, 1999, 2000; Icduygu, 2000; Keyder, 1999). Besides the pull factors in Istanbul, there have always been push factors which have been increasingly becoming an issue from the economic and political point of sending countries (Nazpary, 2002; Yüксеker, 2003; Unal, 2004).

The men's inability to find a job to obtain further income to support their families' needs was obvious within the collapsed economic structure. Following the men's exclusion from regular or irregular labour market, women had to head towards mostly exchange economics and gradually replaced the men as an income earner (Yüксеker, 2003). Among those who migrated to the nearest countries in early 90s right after the collapse of

Kolhoz system⁵, only women migrants have been able to find the job due to economic opportunities in *somenwhat* globalized service economy (Yükseker, 2003; Unal, 2008). Mostly the jobs that can be undertaken by women have turned to be available in an increasing number within the service sectors (Sassen, 2001) in globalized Istanbul. It is not an exception that the labour gap in Istanbul's service sectors has been filled by immigrant women labour (Ozyegin, 2001; Sassen, 2001). The major work areas have been suitcase trade, tourism, In-House Service Sector, and Sex and Entertainment Industry.

Most of these sectors have been subjected to the state's discriminatory policies and the law's implementations, and to the media's propaganda towards establishing the stigmatization from the ethnic and ethic point of Turkish norms and values.

State's preferential framework: Legitimization of discrimination against migrants

The reason to briefly include the state's preferential treatment here is that all kind of stigmatization created and supported by media have been going hand in hand with the ethnic and ethic discriminatory implementations carried out by law enforcement officers (Unal, 2011). Our first assertion is that the ethnicity is organized culturally by the state itself and subjectively transformed into assumed ethical rules thus turned to be the social criteria for assigning status (Holstein 2009). Our second assertion is that not all of the migrants are equally legal, illegal and being illegalized (Unal, 2011).

These inequalities can be conceptualized on two factors: *ethnic categorization* in accordance with the TOF⁶ origins and *ethical preferential implementation of law* in line with the social and cultural stigmatization. The former is the creation of legal preferential protection by categorizing migrants Turkish vs. non-Turkish. Here, state's discrimination renders exclusion and inclusion rules legitimized for police officers' individualized discriminatory practices towards migrants. However, the impact of TOF categorization has been direct and gradually led to preferential treatment in migrants' visa, working and residential permits and their overstay issues. In other words, TOF categorization turns out to be a frame of references for security officers for their preferential treatment.

⁵ Planned Economy's most favoured agricultural collective established by Soviets. It was major employment sources for people.

⁶ Turkey has no law regulating the migrants and migration process; simply those who are not Turkish citizens are all foreigners and thus are equal in law. The concept of Turkish-Origin Foreigners was introduced in Law No. 2007 (1932), then in Law No. 2510 (1934) to apply flexible employment regulations on preferential foreigners. There is no clear definition of the concept in law. Rather, the content is subject to political preferences of the council of ministries in charge, meaning that the concept is to reflect the state's preferential approach to Turkic people from Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Turkmenistan, Iraq, Iran and several other Asian countries, as well as from Moldova.

However, it would be a naïve mistake to conclude that the preferential framework is related to only migrant's "*ethnic origin*" inferred from the TOF categorization. The latter, the "*ethical aspects*" inferred from the type of work in which they engage (sex business, suitcase trade, IHSs, textile manufacturing, sales, tourism, and so on), turned out to be important factors and were attached to the previous ethnic categorization.

The reason I highlight "*ethnic*" and "*ethical aspects*" is that the migrant selectivity that is so far assumed to be determined by the migrant's positive assets⁷ in general, is limited to ethnic and ethic stigmatization in Turkish case and it is done through the intervention of media. In other words, positive selectivity in Turkey mostly comes from and based on *perceptual stigmatized assets*—such as ethnic origin, ethical aspects, ambition, and the notion of *chastity*. These assets have long been the basis for both preferential regulations and public perception on migrants in turn. It is a very common view among the police officers that Gagauz women deserve special treatment, especially since they are of Turkish origin and come to Turkey to work *specifically* in the domestic services sector only, contrary to other women who are not of Turkish origin and supposedly *come to work in the sex sector*. Thus, the police have been obviously handling the cases differently based on their ethnic origin and their ethic assigned work (Unal, 2004, 2011).

These discriminatory practices with the media's intervention have stigmatized the public perception in the form of social memory in accordance with values of the Turkish society. The next section will discuss this process by focusing on the creation of Natasha and Maria images.

Ethical stigmatization based on ethnicity

3.1 Story of Russian Women from Black Sea to Istanbul: Russianization of Natasha vs. Nathashafication of Russians

The creation of Natasha image has likely started in everyday life with the generalization of the Natasha as nickname for Natalia, common Russian name, right after the Russian women have travelled to north of Turkey with the purpose of having sex in exchange of money. Many Russian women have come to the north, especially to city of Trabzon, with or without force to earn money in early 90s (Gulcur & Ilkcaracan, 2002)⁸ and the city image has been widely introduced as the town of *Natasha* (Berberoglu, 1997). Beside the involuntary nature of the migration and work in these sectors (United States. Immigration and Naturalization Service. & USINS Immigration Officer Academy.), we

⁷ The migration patterns in which education, skill, wealth and family background are important factors in the reception of migrants in the country of destination are likely limited to managerial and administrative migrants

⁸ This was the first example of women trafficking in Turkey by illegal organizations.

have further witnessed a temporary shift from suitcase trade to sex business in order to accumulate the capital needed for suitcase trade (Yükseker, 2003).⁹

At first glance this labelling might be seen as community-based practice (Bergvall, 1999) since the social symbolization of gender and sexuality have always been through local language. However, the image itself has soon gone well beyond the original community in which the term came up. Less than a decade, we witnessed that many Russian or Russian origin women have migrated to Istanbul and worked in variety of sectors including sex-entertainment sector, voluntarily¹⁰ or involuntarily. By the 90s it is observed that the name of Natasha has been consubstantiated with prostitution in the content of news taking place in both printed and mass media and that almost all of the news have been supported by the images of young and *sexy* Russian women (Guzin Abla, 1999; Hurriyet, 2002; Haberler, 2009).

Thus Natashas have been placed in the center of social prejudgments and they have been made a part of daily life where they have been subject to numerous discrimination (Hurriyet, 1998). For instance, through the movie named *Balalayka*, the prejudgment that all women coming from Russia have come for sex business and all without exception are “Natashas” has been transferred into daily life from the viewpoint of state authorities even though the movie had an attempt to present individual life stories of these women called “Natashas”.

There is nothing to say. It is more than enough that you are Russian and woman. Abuse starts right before at customs, and always after the first entrance, while we are looking for a job or while working, shopping, walking on street...regardless of the time. I do have two identities: one is Tatiana that is me. The other is Natasha, the one in Turkish men's imagination. I have never had a sex for money. I have been here for 6 years...my name is not even Natalia and I do have a moderate dressing. But, to whom you can explain...police and men on the street think always the same thing. I am Natasha regardless of what I do and feel (Tatiana 29).

From the beginning of 90s to its second half, the image of a *young-beautiful* and *sexy* woman was always identified with the will for *sex* in return for money and with her Russian origin. In an officially informal understanding there has always been generalization of Natasha labelling to cover all Russian origin women (Coskun, 2001).

All are Russian. Whatever reason they come for, the ones who have been captured for having sex for money are all Russian. We also know that those who have been killed were killed since they went against the organizers. They make their minds way before

9 The work characterized by sexual affairs can be seen in domestic services and among the Moldovan Gagauz women as well (Unal, 2008)

10 If we do not count the impact of women traffickers and women trade into sex and entertainment sectors, the portion of those women who come to these sector voluntarily is way below the that of who come to work in non-sexual business i.e. domestic services, suitcase trade, translation in business and so on (Gulcur & Ilkcaracan, 2002).

they depart from their country and they come for this business. And when they do not want to do this they are being killed (Retired Police Officer, 56).

So we have witnessed the Natashafication of Russian as a common view that all of the women whose profiles have been depicted within the image of Natasha were Russian and here in Turkey to work in the sex based entertainment business.

In your opinion, all of us came here to engage in prostitution. We have happened not to walk in the streets. If you are red-haired and wearing tight pants you are a Natasha. You are subject to molestation and bad words. But the worst of all comes when you refuse their sex offer. Since they know us as Natasha, they become cruel to us when we refuse them. They force us for sex. Some of us get killed (Valentina 26).

Since the sex and entertainment sectors have become one with the image of Natasha, many Russian women have been forced to undertake the work either directly in sex and entertainment business or in work consists of sexual affairs to some extent (The Agency A, B and C). Regardless of the migrant women's intention, all Russian have been assumed to be involved in sex business and all were Natashas (Officer B), through stigmatized public perception¹¹.

The "hour?" , physical features of these women, along with their cultural differences have also been assumed as the supporting motives (Turenc, 2003) behind the labelling them as Natasha. Most of them were in the age group of 18-25, single and relaxed in their dressing codes, work relations and relationships with men contrary to their conservative Turkish peers (Agency A, B, C, D). Dressing without any hesitation for being sexually attractive has supported the misperception that these women are always ready for sex in exchange of money.

Having sex...is part of life. Essential need, isn't it? Turkish women are under pressure. They do not think so. No sex before marriage for them. After marriage, husband has the right to be gadabout, but woman is always suspended from sex. Husband cheats wife, but not vice versa. We do not accept this. If he cheats his woman, woman gets divorce, or in some point at least, she cheats him too. (Agency A).

Once the ethic framework has been attached to the ethnic origin, the labelling process from the point of the public perception would be inevitable at a societal level. Media's and State's interventions have further rendered pathological perception about Russian migrant women possible by consubstantiating ethnicity with ethics in social memory (Ercan, 1997; Haberturk 2012). Albeit there are other Turkish and Turkish origin migrant women, especially from Moldova and Azerbaijan, working in the same sectors, the negative labelling process consists of only Russian women. In other words,

¹¹ This turned to be diplomatic issues (Sevinc, 2002)

being a woman from non-TOF category would be enough for being labelled negatively as Natasha.

3.2 *Connecting Ethics to Ethnicity: Turkishness of Marias*

While the image of Natasha which has been created and fostered by media has been used to describe something that is pathological in terms of Turkish social and cultural values (Haberturk, 2012), it has also inevitably created its opposite that is Maria. Just the opposite of Natasha image, there stands the image of Maria which is used for Moldovan Gagauz women who are of Turkish origin that have been protected and favoured by means of printed and mass media in accordance with the categorization of TOF¹². The image of Maria has been created to identify the properties like diligence, chastity, and being conservative in dressing and also to identify migrant women who are not involved in sex related business, and thus this image has been consubstantiated with virtuousness in Turkish social memory¹³. Their honesty and ability to communicate in Turkish has long been considered as “inherently decent and *untainted*” in the public perception that regulates the private sphere and also considered them as “one of us” in the legal implementations that regulates the public sphere, by the help of media intervention (Radikal, 2009).

Coupling of ethnicity and ethic framework has not only deepened the separation in the process of migration but also started to classify the migrant women coming into Turkey in terms of the jobs they can do or must be eligible for. In other words, the type of jobs that the migrant women can have in Turkey has been, in turn, reshaped in accordance with the labelling that has been created by the media. The prejudice on the intersection of ethnicity and ethic has further started to determine the production relations. For instance while the privilege of working in in-house services has been spared completely for the Gagauz women mainly because of their positive images, the Russian and Russian origin women, prisoned by the Natasha image, have been rendered helpless by being isolated from many non sex-based work areas, especially from the in-house services.

Marias have become the members of transnational ethnic domestic worker community as they are “historically Turkish Origin” and “Western” workers in the eyes of Turkish public. It is widely thought that they are here for only domestic services rather than sex business. Thus, they are perceived as *Marias, innocent and helpless*.

Conclusion

¹² The most deprecating news about Moldovan women has been about their cost (Milliyet 2004).

¹³ Although there was nothing about these features in printed or visual Media, the Moldovan women have never been mentioned in a negative manner such as prostitution like Russian origin women.

There are many examples where the perception causes the exclusion and inclusion of migrants. For instance, many municipal administrations have resorted to closing down entertainment locations in many cities on the grounds that “employment of women of Russian origin in entertainment locations has been causing public discomfort”. Furthermore, the mayor of a town in Antalya who declared that he would not “solemnize any Natasha espousal” has been considering the phenomenon of crime within an ethic framework. Additionally, Russian and Russian origin migrant women are not demanded in in-house services as they are identified with prostitution. The justification that we have seen in these examples is that Russian women are “leading to corruption of local ethical values”.

We can reveal then that the Natasha image of Russian migrant women not only outlaws them from the points of ethnic and ethic framework but also excludes them from ethically accepted work relations, thus gives them no choice except being involved in outlawed work relations.

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