Female domestic workers strategizing via commuting long distance: New challenges and negotiations in neoliberalizing Turkey

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Introduction

This article is framed by the intersectionality of class, gender and space in the context of female domestic workers. We aim to investigate women's work and agency embedded in neoliberalism, with a focus on urban restructuring. We understand waged female domestic labor as a site where class and gender relations intersect (Gorbán & Tizziani, 2014). Women encounter each other in their class positions, reproducing social inequalities; women's responsibility of taking care of the home in the gendered division of labor in the patriarchal family is transferred from one class of women to the other in the commodification of domestic labor (McDowell, 2006). In our aim of bringing a nuanced understanding of waged domestic work, we investigate the labor story of female domestic workers commuting long hours to the homes of their employers to carry out domestic duties and back to their own homes again to carry out domestic duties. Taking a socio-spatial perspective, we locate long-distance travel to wealthy suburbs at the center of our study, both in physical terms and experienced ways, and we investigate how female domestic workers respond to the challenges of long-distance commuting as the city sprawls outwards to accommodate wealthy suburbs, and what its outcomes are in terms of their negotiations in the workplace, at home and in the neighborhood. Our approach to waged domestic work as a gendered class practice is embedded in the socio-spatial transformations of the city as the class gap between women deepens (McDowell, 2006) and the city becomes spatially more segregated (Haylett, 2003); urban neoliberalism as a gendered development has repercussions on the lives of women, especially those in poor families (Peake & Rieker, 2013). Below, we first provide a brief review of the literature on female domestic workers in the Turkish context, locating them vis-à-vis their (rural) families and (urban) employers. It is followed by the literature review in the international context.

Female domestic workers: informality, patriarchy, class

In Turkey, the majority of women who provide labor for housekeeping and childcare in better-off families are rural-to-urban migrants.[1] Conservative values and the need for women's economic contributions work simultaneously in these families: while the former acts as a barrier for women's employment outside the home, the latter requires it (Erman, Kalaycıoğlu, & Rittersberger-Tılıç, 2002). Lacking education, many migrant women are employed in informal jobs that are the extension of their unpaid domestic labor at home. The male breadwinner model is still the cultural norm, symbolizing the family's good economic position (Erman, 2001). The monetary contributions of women to the family budget are devalued by defining them as "pocket money" to be used for daily needs (Erman et al., 2002). The common practice among rural migrant women is to find jobs through their relatives and neighbors, which works to assure that the workplace is not a threat to the family honor (namus). This reproduces social control over women.

The rural/urban hierarchy in Turkish modernization unfolds in the context of waged domestic workers as "ignorant peasants in the city" showing deference to their "cultured urban" counterparts. Today this cultural hierarchy is negotiated by domestic workers: on the one hand, due to the uncertainty of finding new employers and the difficulty in adapting to new homes, they accept the emotional burden of negative encounters with employers (Kalaycıoğlu & Tılıç-Rittersberger, 2000), and on the other hand, they attempt to improve their positions via "strategic intimacy," using their common gender to create sisterhood-like relationships with their employers (Ozyegin, 2000). In a recent study, Bora (2012) theorizes the relationship of female domestic workers with their female employers as a site where both groups encounter each other with their own discourses and strategies; in their attempt to challenge their subordinated positions, domestic workers present themselves as Anatolian women known for their hard work and their employers as parasite women who get things done by others. By showing female domestic workers' strategizing positions in work relations, these studies acknowledge their agency.

Negotiation is central to waged domestic work which is characterized by informality. In Turkey, the rules of work are determined informally; and there is no formal labor contract, and the components of work (wage, workload, work hours) are not standardized (Kalaycıoğlu & Tılıç-Rittersberger, 2000). The unregulated nature of waged domestic

Fig. 1. The map of Ankara showing the locations of the workplaces and homes of the female domestic workers in the study.

work is negotiated through "patronage benefits," that is, non-monetary rewards such as various kinds of gifts and assistance, and long-term social benefits such as family members placed in jobs and financial support provided for children's school expenses (hereafter "benefits"). Under the conditions of informality in which work conditions and payments are not controlled by the state, domestic workers cope with it by expecting to be treated as part of the family. Yet, such relations in the workplace render invisible the class dimension (Bora, 2012; Kalaycıoğlu & Tılıç-Rittesberger, 2000; Ozyegin, 2000). While informality in waged domestic work creates problems such as lack of social protection and low and unreliable payments, by providing some flexibility in work hours, it helps women in coping with their "double burden" (Erdoğdu & Toksöz, 2013).

In sum, informality, patriarchy and rural/urban dichotomy structure the relationship of female domestic workers with their work in the Turkish context. Unregulated by the state, waged domestic work renders domestic workers vulnerable. They are subordinated vis-à-vis their employers in the rural/urban cultural hierarchy in Turkish modernity. In their treatment as part of the family and not as workers, they lose their bargaining power, yet they secure "benefits" from their employers, which downplays the class dimension. As their work is devalued as the extension of women's housewifely tasks and their earnings are devalued as "pocket money," female domestic workers also lose their negotiation with patriarchy in the family.

Studies conducted in other contexts support the literature on Turkish female domestic workers firstly, in recognizing the historical undervaluation of waged domestic work due to its definition as a female occupation linked to women's unpaid domestic work at home and secondly, in demonstrating domestic workers' subordination by the nature of their work shaped by the conditions of informality (Smith, 2011). In its definition as economically unproductive, waged domestic service is not counted in the statistics and is rendered largely invisible (Cock, 2011). Yet there are differences from the Turkish case. While in Turkey the class difference is diluted by the "big sister-little-sister" relationship framed in cultural terms, in the UK, the class dimension is a strong structuring factor in domestic workers' relationship with their

employers (Gregson & Lowe, 1994), which is deepened by ethnicity and race (Glenn, 1992; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). This literature also demonstrates that female domestic workers are not entirely passive recipients of their subordinated positions. The ways they respond to the unequal relations with their employers vary, ranging from trying to keep their positions by pretending to be unintelligent (Rollins, 1985), to developing coping mechanisms such as mockery (Cock, 1980), to putting strict boundaries between their work and personal lives (Dill, 1988).

In the literature, little attention is paid to the urban context, with few exceptions (e.g. Peake & Rieker, 2013). However, the changes in the spatial arrangements of cities as the outcome of neoliberal urban policies would affect the relations of female domestic workers with their workplaces, which would further affect their relations with patriarchal arrangements in the family. Under the patriarchal control over women in Turkey, rural migrant women may prefer home-based work (Soytemel, 2013) or to work in those places close to their homes, for instance in the textile workshops set up in their neighborhoods and in the apartments in their districts (Erman, 2001). However, the recent trend of better-off families moving to the suburbs has brought new challenges as well as new opportunities for female domestic workers, which is the subject of this article. Investigating female domestic workers' long-distance commuting is important both for political and academic reasons. We need to reveal how female domestic workers are affected by the changes in the city produced by a neoliberal logic, and their "travel stories" would tell us about neoliberal urbanism's taking tolls on one of the most disadvantaged groups in the city, that is, poor women working in the homes of the wealthy. The urban context, which has become the site of neoliberal interventions in the physical realm, offers the chance of understanding how spatial transformations are reflected on the lives of domestic workers.

Another gap in the literature is about the question of how female domestic workers respond to the new values engendered in the neoliberalization of society. It is important to investigate in what ways the neoliberal interventions in the social realm, which target to produce "governable subjects" (Dean, 1999) and to capture individual minds by

creating desires for more (Sorrells, 2009), affect female domestic workers' approach to life, including paid work. Working in the homes of the better-off and observing their lives on the one hand, and targeted for incorporation into the market as consumers through their gendered roles on the other hand, justify to ask how they are affected by desire-creation in neoliberalism.

The issue of agency of domestic workers, i.e., the choices they make and the strategies they use to turn a structural problem (i.e., neoliberal urban restructuring) into an advantage, is significant addressing the two issues mentioned above. We aim to look into the agency of female domestic workers by asking how they negotiate with socio-spatial transformations initiated by the neoliberal logic.

The paper is structured as follows. First we introduce the field research. Then we focus on the spatial dimension and describe female domestic workers' travel experiences in Ankara as the city is restructured by a profit-oriented logic. In the rest of the paper, we proceed to discuss the question of how the neoliberalization of space and society acted upon the lives of female domestic workers, bringing new negotiations and challenges in the workplace, at home, and in the neighborhood.

The field research

To serve our purpose of investigating the experience of female domestic workers' long-distance commuting, the second author of this paper started a research in Ankara, the Turkish capital,[2] by traveling on public buses that run on the routes of upper-class neighborhoods. The fact that upper classes do not only hire domestic workers but also private tutors to prepare their children for the competitive entrance exams of prestigious schools brought her in contact with domestic workers traveling on the same buses. Both being women working for the women of upper classes created the possibility of a "social act" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), allowing domestic workers to share their travel and work experiences with the researcher. She spent some 60 h traveling on the bus, taking several bus routes (she used one bus route eleven times). She engaged in informal conversations with the women on the bus and listened to their talks. In-depth interviews in the homes (20) or workplaces (12) of 32 women followed this stage of the research.[3] The trust created in the relationship and "empathetic listening" of feminist methodology ("more listening, less talking") promoted an easy flow of conservations in the interviews during which the women talked about their work experiences and personal lives in details. The interviews lasted between one and three hours, with the exception of one interview that lasted for 5 h; it was carried out with a woman in the company of her two elderly neighbors. The interviews were tape-recorded except for two, and transcribed.

The respondents varied in age (25–55); they worked mostly as cleaners (27) and several as babysitters (5). Many were migrants from the countryside (29) and a few were second-generation migrants born in Ankara (3). Some lived in a *gecekondu* (Turkish squatter housing) neighborhood - *Doğantepe* (5), some as apartment caretakers in the middle-class districts of the city (8), and others in apartments in lower-middle class districts (19). They worked on a daily basis for several families, except for the babysitters; their working days ranged from three days to five days a week, with two exceptions one working six days and the other seven days a week. They were all primary school graduates except for three: one was a high-school graduate and the other one was a college dropout; both started working, one as a cleaner and the other one as a babysitter because of economic problems when their husbands went bankrupt. The third woman, a domestic worker, was a high-school dropout. The employer women were from the upper-middle class families[3] who owned their villas or apartments located in upscale gated communities distant from the city. The houses were big and ornately furnished, sometimes requiring two domestic workers to clean the house. Some were housewives, and among others, there were teachers who were also private tutors with high pays, academics, a school president, and in a couple of cases, partners with their husbands in private companies; and their husbands were in professional, managerial and administrative positions, such as doctors, academics (a couple of them held administrative positions as deans), developers, high ranking diplomatic personnel, senior workers in private banks, and high level bureaucrats in public offices.[4] They hired domestic workers with good qualifications that included higher education in a couple of cases with references obtained from other domestic workers already employed in their social circle.

"My work story is a travel story": female domestic workers commuting long-distance to suburbs

Luxurious housing developments on the outskirts of cities where the better-off classes move to live in privatized and securitized gated communities have become a defining feature of today's cities. The new urban order is increasingly "fragmented and socially polarized" (Kern & Mullings, 2013). Today cities are structured to respond to the polarized society in class terms as upper-classes retreat into their gated communities, distancing themselves from the lower classes spatially and socially (Haylett, 2003; Peake & Rieker, 2013).

Neoliberal urbanism, which refers to a wide range of urban arrangements ranging from the privatization and outsourcing of municipal services to the formation of public-private partnerships (Peck, Theodore, & Brenner, 2009), is projected in Ankara through the development of luxurious housing estates and gated communities built on the city's peripheries (Balta & Eke, 2011; Güzey, 2014; Yaşar, 2010). Thereby, neoliberal urban development strategies have come to mark Ankara (Batuman, 2013). Increasingly since the 2000s when the AKP government (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi-* the Justice and Development Party) assigned the construction sector an engine role in the economy, we have been observing a construction boom (Sönmez, 2014), as Turkish cities become fertile grounds for property-led development projects (Çekiç & Gezici, 2009). Gated communities developed as part of this new spatial order characterized by a new life style that prioritizes security concerns, and their residents distanced themselves from the city center associated with pollution, traffic congestion, crowding and crime (Geniş, 2007). This urban sprawl via gated communities is coupled in Ankara with the formation of lower-middle class neighborhoods on the city's fringes, responding to the demands of upwardly mobile rural migrants.

The new spatialization of social classes in Ankara has posed new challenges to the mobilities of female domestic workers. Losing easy and quick access to their employers' homes when their employers moved to farther locations and/or as they moved to emerging districts in farther locations, they have been facing new problems. In the words of Nebahat (40) (46 km, 4 h): "Not working but commuting consumes me." For the last thirty years, their commuting time increased from almost an hour to 5 h a day as a result of the urban growth towards the peripheries. In the case of Filiz (40), who started working as a young woman in 1995, in the period 1995–1999, she traveled 5.97 km and spent 2 h commuting, changing two vehicles; in the period 2000–2005, she traveled 17.7 km and spent 4 h commuting, changing three vehicles; and today she travels 28.6 km, changing three vehicles and spending again 4 h. Traveling long distance also meant more money to spend on

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transportation; the cost of transportation equaled to their one and a half day's work in a month. Domestic workers would travel by public transportation, mostly buses and in some cases subway trains and *dolmuş* (shared taxis); the latter was not preferred because it cost more than the bus. "Trip chaining" complicated the travel when they had to take several buses and subway trains for one route because of the city's unplanned rapid growth; Zeynep (23) (40 km, 3.5 h)[5] complained:

Once I waited for 40 min for the bus. I could have used this time to take care of my children or do housework. Another time I walked from Atakule (a shopping tower located at the end of a steep road in an upper-class district) down to Kızılay (the city center) I said, "instead of waiting for the bus, I can save time by walking so that I won't come home late."

Under the new challenges in commuting to work, time became a critical factor in their lives as they tried not to be late for work and home. Zeynep complained about the time pressure on her:

Time is so vital to me. I have to be on time both for work and home. I leave home at 8 a.m. and leave my workplace at 6 p.m. I take three buses back home. I can be at home barely at 8 p.m. Transportation is terrible. Yesterday I was late for 15 min and my employer got angry with me.

One way of dealing with traveling on the bus for long hours was transforming the bus into their meeting place if the bus was not crowded. The "talk of labor" occupied the center of their conversations, creating solidarities as well as competitive encounters. Once they complained about a domestic worker (Beyhan) for being paid higher than the usual wage. Beyhan (54) (26 km, 2.5–3 h), who worked almost for ten years for the same family as a babysitter,[6] responded to it as follows:

I am paid more than other women (domestic workers) because we (she and employer) know each other for many years. They found out about my daily wage they got furious. They said she paid me above the market rate. Thank god, my employer didn't listen to them.

Encountering people of higher class while traveling on the bus to wealthy suburbs, younger women who were new in domestic work gave importance to their self-presentation; they would make preparations before they got on the bus, spraying perfume to mask the strong unpleasant odor of bleach, putting cream on their hands, and a few, putting on lipstick, which is very uncommon among the domestic workers in Turkey. Accordingly, in line with the cultural definition of class (McDowell, 2006), they would negotiate new terms about their social position by working on the bodily manifestations of domestic work.

The new experience of long-distance commuting was embraced by domestic workers for various reasons, discussed below.

Negotiation with geographical distance: strategizing in work relations

Long-distance commuting affected the female domestic workers' negotiations with their employers in a number of ways. A group of women strategized via "pooling,"[7] that is, by creating a large and diverse pool of potential employers, which would give them the power of negotiating their own terms and the chance of selecting their employers, indicated as follows: "Just like our employers select us after they investigate us, we can select them. We would not work for any employer." In line with other studies, their negotiations involved more than monetary gains; they wanted their employers to treat them fairly

and decently, put clearly in the following quotation: "If she (the employer) treats me like a human, it is enough for me. Some employers treat us as if we are slaves."[8] Despite such social concerns, they were interested in getting paid more: "People living here have more money and they are in need of domestic workers, so they pay us more. That is why I come to work here although it is far away." They were strong in their self-definitions as worker, and as such they distanced themselves from the idea of helping their upper-class urban counterparts with their house chores. Unlike those who showed deference to their employers in the "big sister-little sister" relationship, they contested the superior position of their employers; by calling them "my woman" (*kadınım*), they reversed the employers' humiliating naming.[9] Yet, like the female domestic workers in other studies, they kept an open door for "benefits," expressed in the words of Filiz (40): "I will work for a little money if she is supportive of me." Thus, material interests, personal dignity and social benefits interacted in complicated ways in their negotiations with their employers.

Commuting long distance worked differently for those women who had been with the same employer for many years. They would travel to farther places as their employers moved to more distant locations. For instance, Karanfil (53), who started working in 1993 when her employer lived close to the city center, started commuting long distance when her employer moved more and more away from the city center.[10] She explained it in her own words: "Working for her for many years, we have got used to each other. Wherever she moves, I go there." This brought new difficulties to their lives, put by Yemen (46) (98 km, 5 h):

I leave home at 6:30 a.m. and I arrive back home at 8:30 p.m. I come home and sleep. Even in my dreams, I see domestos, domestos, domestos (a detergent brand)… I'm on my foot all day long and on the bus, I stand, pressed by people. Cost is my other concern. *Dolmuş* (shared taxi) cost 10 liras and public buses cost 7.5 liras, so I try to get on the bus even if it is crowded.

In Yemen's case, the employer's nice behavior towards her made her commit to her employer, agreeing to travel to distant locations to work for her: "How far my employer's place is, is not important to me. She treats me like a human being, so I will go wherever she lives. I have been going to Gölbaşı (34.9 km away from the city center) for 15 years because of *hanım* (my lady)." Despite the fact that they might be paid more if they started working for a new employer, they chose to work for the same one. This was firstly because of acquiring a certain degree of power that gave them some control over their tasks, and secondly because of the intimacy they established with their employers, creating a sense of being a member of the employer's family. Nebahat (40) was proud of the many keys she carried on her key chain that belonged to the many homes she went cleaning, which symbolized the employers' trust in her; she said she knew where things were in the house better than the family members.

The relations of intimacy with the employer brought them substantial benefits: Şerife's employer paid for the school expenses of her child; Nebahat's employer placed her disabled husband in a job as a tea-maker; Lütfiye's employer took Lütfiye with her on vacation. Hatice (45), who was the only domestic worker with a high school diploma and had to work because of her husband's debts, would be paid 12 months in advance; her employer (a high school president) would take out a bank loan so that Hatice's family could make a timely

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[5] These numbers show the traveling distance and commuting time, both ways; we calculated the distance using Google map by following their route chains in which Kızılay was the transport hub at the city center (See Fig. 1).

[6] Babysitters differed from cleaning women both in their higher status and higher payments.

[7] The term "pooling" is originally used by several women in our research; they said they would enlarge their "pools" by working long-distance.

[8] The attitude of employers towards their domestic workers, which could be rude and uncaring, justifies their call for humanly treatment. The researcher's experience while working as a tutor supports the domestic workers' claims.

[9] When rural migrant women started working in the homes of urban families, a new term emerged to address domestic workers, namely, "taking in woman" (*kadın almak*) that emptied domestic workers of their subjectivity.

[10] At the beginning, her workplaces was 10 km away and it took two hours of commuting time, changing two vehicles; in 2000–2005, she traveled 44 km and it took approximately four hours, changing three vehicles; and today she travels 66 km, changing three vehicles and spending again four hours.

investment in their greenhouse. The fact that their employers were better-off families in good positions and with connections to those in power created the belief that working for them could bring benefits to their children, such as getting jobs or educational support. Thus, they strategized via intimate relations to take advantage of socio-economic benefits from their employers, while they accepted their relatively lower pays despite the increased time they spent commuting.

Yet, the intimate relations between the worker and the employer create complications. Employers could attempt to exploit it by making demands that override the usual duties of their domestic workers, for instance they could ask for extra work such as cooking special meals for guests or staying late for special occasions such as birthday parties; and workers could ask for "tolerance" as they consolidate their positions in their workplace, expressed by Lütfiye: "They have to be tolerant with me. After all, I have been putting up with them for many years." Thus, the employer-worker relationship in long-term employment becomes complicated as it evolves into intimacy, bringing new forms of negotiations that move beyond the formal employer-employee relationship.

In order to make sense of the female domestic workers' negotiations via long-distance commuting, we need to understand their subjectivities grounded in the neoliberal transformation of Turkish society since the 1980s, presented below.

Negotiation with "social distance": developing new aspirations for the economic advancement of their families

In our research, some women chose to work in distant locations to satisfy their desire for "better lives," which included homeownership, new business for family members, private education for their children, and increased consumption. This corresponds with the changes in Turkish society since the 1980s.[11] In the shifting paradigm towards neoliberalism, new desires are brought into the lives of people, including domestic workers. A culture of privatized consumption is created via the neoliberal project that places competitiveness as its core. It is observed, for instance, in "liberalizing India" where the new middle class is discursively constructed as the site of commodity consumption; seeking upward social mobility, they developed new aspirations to gain status through car ownership and access to private education (Fernandes, 2000). In Turkey, institutions are restructured in line with the neoliberal logic; for instance, the mortgage system is institutionalized to activate the housing financial sector (law no. 5582, 2007), incorporating those with limited economic resources into the scheme of homeownership (Kuyucu & Ünsal, 2010). In addition, since the 1990s and particularly in the 2000s, the use of credit cards has increased in unprecedented scale: in 2015, the number of credit cards reached 58 million, which has created difficulties for economically disadvantaged groups to pay their credit card debts (Hürriyet Daily, 2015).

In the neoliberalization of society, the promotion of a consumerist society is accompanied by the informalization of economic activities (Şenses, 2016); precariousness in the formal sector in developing economies is compensated by informal work, which is built upon "appropriation" and "cooptation" by neoliberalism (Cross, 2010: 365). As the promises of neoliberalism fail to materialize, the gap between created desires and economic realities come to shape the lives of lower classes (Erman & Hatiboğlu, 2017). Moreover, as the income distribution is worsened by economic crises, the labor force has been increasingly feminized (Çağatay & Özler, 1995), forcing migrant women into informal work (Yaman Öztürk, 2010; Dedeoğlu, 2010). The reasons of why domestic workers in our research started working echo the changes in society: those who started working between 1985 and 1999

mentioned dire necessity (7 women), those who started working between 2000 and 2010 mentioned increasing expenses on their children's education (17), and those who started working after 2010 stated mortgage loans and bank credit debts (8) as their reason to work.

In their gender roles of homemaking, the women in our research aspired for new and bigger homes. The fact that they could attain their goals only by getting into debt via bank credits increased their commitment to working long-distance. Ayfer (45) (34 km, 2 h) is a good example. She wished for a new apartment although her family already had an apartment. She wanted to live in a big place: she said the new apartment should have four rooms and a *salon* (a big room used to entertain guests). They recently bought it by using mortgage loans that obliged the family to pay monthly installments for several years. Since it was Ayfer who insisted on buying the apartment, she became deeply committed to working as a cleaning woman in faraway places.

Buying her fourth apartment - one with four rooms and a *salon* - by taking a loan from the bank, Lütfiye (50) (46 km, 4 h) was also willing to increase her workload and commuting time. In her interest in investing in apartments, she acquired a good knowledge of the housing market, which transformed her from a rural woman in the city to one who knows how the urban housing market operates. Her material success increased her self-confidence and sharpened her desire for social mobility: she said when she had enough money, she would hire a domestic worker for her new apartment. Several women were entrepreneurial in their activities. For instance, Nergis (34) (42 km, 4 h), whose husband worked as an apartment caretaker in a central middle-class district, organized her family members to make various food items to sell. She used her money to pay for the private lessons of her children. And Hacer (40) (40 km, 3.5 hours), a high-school dropout whose husband worked in a food factory, was saving money to open a small restaurant with her husband now that she finished paying for the mortgage loan of her apartment.

In the social construction of women's traditional roles as wife and mother, women's new desires were embedded in their nuclear families. In the Turkish context, "women derive their social identities primarily from family" (Erman et al., 2002, p. 396). Investment in their children was a strong theme that emerged in our research. Lütfiye, who had been working since 1996 and bought her fourth apartment, explained her investment in apartments as follows: "Good parents should provide housing for their children when they get married." These women envisioned respectable positions for their children, which, they believed, could be attained through good education in quality private universities, and as such they differed from those rural migrant families who gave importance to their children's education but would not dare to think of private education. Gülaç (47, babysitter) (44 km, 3 h), who lived in the gecekondu neighborhood, was committed to the education of her children, one of whom she succeeded to send to a private university. She talked about it as follows:

I have been working for eleven years, and I am doing it for the education of my children. When they reached school-age, their needs increased. I began to work as a babysitter at the Middle East Technical University. My husband worked there and I heard that women were working as babysitters or cleaners in the homes of professors. So I started working. I had to do it because I wanted my children to get a good education. My daughter went to a private university, and although I had a rough time affording her school expenses, I am very proud of it.

Sevinç (46) (60 km, 3 h), who had a disabled daughter, started working long-distance to pay for private tutors:

I have a daughter with hearing loss and she needed a full-featured nursery. We had a hard time financing it. So I began to think about how I could use my time when she was at the nursery. If I were a salesman, I could work late at night. But as a woman, I had to find a job with flexible work hours during the day. I heard about a woman looking for someone to clean her house. Upon recommendation, I began working for her three days a week. [...] The money I earned a day was less that the money we paid per hour for the tutor we hired to help my

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daughter's education. But I didn't care.

She managed to send her daughter to a private university for which she received support from her employer, a math teacher whose husband was a high-ranking employee at a bank:

My big sister (*abla*-employer) helped me decide where I would send my child for her university education. With her help and encouragement, my child started a private university. My relatives gossiped about it, asking why I went to cleaning houses when my husband was a civil servant and we owned our apartment. But my employer always supported me. Thrusting her ability to use urban institutions, she continued: "I would borrow from the bank instead of my relatives."

Rukiye (23) (44 km, 3 h), a young woman who had a 5-year old daughter and a husband who worked at a shopping center as a cleaner, also sought employment in order to be able to send her daughter to a private kindergarten in a "nice" neighborhood, i.e., in an upper-class district, paying for the school bus service:

I wish the best for her. I want her to be in nice places. The expenses of the kindergarten compel me to work. My neighbors and relatives do not approve it. They ask why I send my child to a private kindergarten and work in the homes of others to pay the expenses instead of staying at home and taking care of my child. They would not understand.

As seen in the above quotations, these women differed from their relatives who adopted traditional roles as mothers staying at home to take care of their children and did not approve working in the homes of better-off families to earn money to pay for the care and/or education of their children.

In their middle-class aspirations, some would negotiate with their work life to reserve some free time to spend in activities outside their neighborhood. Nergis (34) (42 km, 4 h) who lived in a middle-class district where her husband worked as an apartment caretaker, would spare time to go out with her children; Hatice (45) (60 km, 3 h), a high-school graduate, would work six days a week to afford going on vacation in the summer; and Sevinç (46), who worked for the same family as a babysitter five days a week, would use the weekends to go to the movies with her children.

Unlike the individualization of responsibility for one's livelihood in neoliberalism, the community takes on responsibility in the Turkish context, enabling female domestic workers to sustain their long-distance commuting, discussed below.

Negotiation with patriarchy: receiving support from the community, gaining new position in the family

The communities that rural migrants establish in their gecekondu neighborhoods act as a means of reproducing patriarchal family arrangements (Erman, 2001). Yet, the community-oriented life of the gecekondu contributes to women by creating a support system that is much needed in coping with the challenges of urban life, but it causes problems by acting as a control mechanism especially over young women (Erman, 1997). Moreover, by disapproving women's working outside the home, the local community may create a barrier for women's employment (Erman, 2001; Gökçe, 1993).

The gecekondu neighborhood in this research does not represent the migrant community described above. Recognizing the need of women's employment outside the home, the local community had come to terms with it, relaxing the constraints on women's mobility. Thus, women's working long-distance gained cultural legitimacy in this local context. Several women in this neighborhood worked to fulfill their roles as breadwinner when their husbands failed to provide for the family (they were unemployed, a couple of them sick or disabled, and one husband worked in Saudi Arabia but stopped sending remittances), and others to contribute to the family budget. Neighbors helped each other to find jobs. Those women who stayed in the neighborhood during the day (mostly older women) compensated for working women's absence of long hours by helping with taking care of families, and as such they acted as a buffer against the challenges to traditional gender roles.

Thus, they accommodated to some extent the new challenges produced by socio-spatial transformations, which helped to preserve the patriarchal order.

For many women, the local community was more than just a means of mitigating the problems produced by their long-distance work. They preferred their neighborhood for the close neighborly relations which would help them to cope with the emotional challenges of urban living. For them, the neighborhood was simultaneously both a place of social support and a place of social control. In the interviews conducted with four women living in the gecekondu neighborhood, the two older women talked emotionally about how they shared their lives with their neighbors, laughing and crying together, whereas the two younger ones regarded their work as an opportunity to get away from their neighborhood. Yet both of them still wanted to continue living there, which, they said, provided a breathing space away from the struggles of urban life which would be difficult to manage alone. What Halime (44) said conveys the feelings about the gecekondu life: "When I come home from work, I find my neighbors' tea and pastry waiting for me. We spend our time together, eating and chatting."

The social support in the gecekondu neighborhood would be reproduced albeit in limited ways in the apartment context: children would be left with neighbors, food for the winter (e.g. stripped pasta, tomato paste, winter bread) would be prepared collectively with neighbors, and women would accompany each other to visits outside the neighborhood. Thus, in the community of rural migrants, women would help each other in everyday lives. Moreover, senior domestic workers would act as a "subcontractor," connecting those women looking for jobs with those women searching for domestic workers. For instance, Emine (49) (36 km, 2 h), who had been in the business since 1998, helped her relatives and neighbors to find jobs through her network:

I use my network. When somebody is looking for a babysitter, I recommend a relative or a neighbor of mine who wants the job. I am only an intermediary. I am helping both those who need someone to work for them and those who need the job. I do it for *sevap* (a religious reward in Islam for doing good deeds).

While for these women, the physical embeddedness in a locality and the social intimacy it created was at the core of their everyday lives, for some others, distancing themselves from their community was the preferred attitude, reflecting the new tendency among domestic workers. In their encounter with urban life and their desire for material success for their families, they would position themselves against the community.

Husbands were affected by their wives' working in distant locations, less when the local community provided support, and more when such support was lacking. To discuss this issue, we ask two related questions, namely, how husbands respond to their wives' going far away from the home to work, traveling long hours on crowded buses with (male) strangers, and how husbands respond to their wives' spending many hours away from the home, which creates challenges to carry out housewifely duties. Addressing the first question, some husbands were supportive because they wanted or needed their wives' bringing home money; they could even demand their wives to work, observed in Yemen's (46) case: she said her husband would ask her to work for more hours even though she complained about how much she got tired. And other husbands were obliged to accept it. Husbands' compliance with their wives working long-distance, which might cause their coming home late, is a complicated issue that contains husbands' ambivalent positions. Despite their general approval, some husbands would find ways to upset their wives when they were late, expressing in veiled ways the anger they felt, especially when confronted with the increasing power of their wives. For instance, Ayşe (50) would be harassed by her husband's many phone calls during her travel time until she reached home. This reaction of husbands would be especially if the wife had increasing power in the family, as in Ayşe's case who had a strong sense of her new position in the family: "I was the one who

opened a bank account, and I taught my husband the habit of saving money." And Nurcan (43), the breadwinner in the family, would be upset when her husband accused her employer for Nurcan's coming home late, saying, "You are spoilt by your employer. This is why you dare to come home so late." Thus, despite the husband's approval of his wife's working long-distance, there could be tension in the family if the wife arrived home late, making the commuting time back home stressful for the women.

Addressing the second question, when women used their earnings for family investments, their money gained social value and visibility, increasing their power of negotiation with their husbands. Husbands working together with their wives for the economic advancement of their families would provide support for their wives (15/32). A "partnership" between the wife and the husband characterized spousal relations, reflected in the words of Ayfer (45): "My money is his money, his money is my money." These husbands were tolerant of their wives' coming home late and not having enough time to carry out their housewifely duties. They would take over some of the duties as their wives spent many hours away from the home, even preparing meals. Sevinç's husband would prepare breakfast and dinner when Sevinç had to leave home early and come home late at night. He worked by shifts in a public hospital and changed his working hours to fit with his wife's:

My husband is different from other husbands. He never gets angry when I arrive home late or leave home early. […] Sometimes I come home by taxi and my husband never questions it. He has even adjusted his own work hours to fit mine.

Nebahat (40), the breadwinner, also talked about the reversal of roles in her family: "Why would I hurry back home? If I am late, my husband will light the stove and prepare the dinner. My husband is like my daughter." In these cases, traditional patriarchy was flexibilized in some ways, and some role reversal was possible. Women could even regard themselves as the head of the family, put by Fatma (34), whose husband was an apartment caretaker, spending most of his time at home: "I am the man of my family." Yet in a patriarchal society, this change in gender roles was a painful process full of confrontations and fights, stated again by Fatma:

At the beginning, I had to give my daily earnings to my husband. When I came home at the end of the day, he would always ask for the money. This situation was annoying. One day I had a big fight with him. Then he began to respect me. Now he even helps me with the housework.

Using their new positions strategically, women would also gain some decisionmaking power in the family, expressed by Beyhan (54): "I make decisions in the family. After all, the money is in my hands." This new status of women challenged the traditional view of men's economic role as providers and women's social role as homemakers.

Working in distant places did not necessarily bring women such change in gender roles. If the wives' earnings were not connected to the goal of investing for the family, traditional gender roles would not be altered enough to challenge patriarchal family arrangements: some husbands would provide some help sometimes, such as making the salad or clearing the dinner table, yet women would be the ones responsible for housekeeping; and other husbands would not be around for help and would demand their wives to carry out their traditional gender duties. This was a heavy burden that required the habit of waking up very early in the morning before setting off to work. Sultan (42) (47 km, 4 h) talked about her everyday life as she stepped on the bus:

I get up at 5 a.m. I heat the stove. I clean up the house and cook something for dinner. Then I take the bus at 6 a.m. and go to Kızılay (the city center). I rush to catch the subway train and the connecting bus. I have to do it in 75 min so that I would not have to pay for another ticket, and by then I am all sweaty. I should be at home (workplace) no later than 8 a.m. All day cleaning. That's 6 p.m., the end of work. Rush again. Then I come home and prepare dinner. In their limited time to spend on house chores, some were obliged to get support from their

relatives, which had the potential for new crises in the family, especially if it were mothers- or sisters-in law providing the help.

Contrasting sharply with those husbands in alliance with their wives for economic advancement, a couple of others, both unemployed, and their wives working out of necessity, would react negatively to their wives' long-distance commuting to work; they would even resort to violence. Hülya (38) told that her husband used violence against her to prove his manhood. She started crying, saying that her husband would beat her often and threatened to kill her if she tried to divorce him. To sum up, on oppositional poles of the spectrum, husbands who supported their wives by sharing house chores and husbands who made their wives' lives difficult by demanding from them full share of housewifely duties and resorting to violence were positioned.

Overall, some with their new power in the family due to their ability of making family investments, and others with their commitment to their marriages even in forced ways, and some relying on the social bonding rooted in the local community and others distancing themselves from it, the women in our research initiated negotiations with their communities and families, empowered in some cases and victimized in others.

Conclusion

This article engages with gender, class and labor, along with space, in the context of female domestic workers, with a focus on their agency. We aimed to understand their multi-sited negotiations with their employers, families and communities in the Turkish context as the outcome of the spatial transformations in the neoliberal turn of Ankara's urbanization. As the city sprawled towards its peripheries under the rule of profit-making and the better-off classes moved to farther locations in urban space to live in gated communities, it simultaneously created new challenges and new opportunities for female domestic workers in their negotiations with their employers and husbands. In their workplace, they strategized to take advantage of both their new power in negotiations via "pooling employers" and the old practice of "securing benefits" from employers. In long-term employment, domestic workers were embedded in relations of intimacy with their employers, which decreased their negotiation power for higher salaries but increased their chances of access to "benefits" in their status as part of the family. In their new consciousness of their identity as workers when they traveled long(er) distance away from the home in the public sphere, they gained the power to challenge the cultural hierarchy between rural domestic workers and their urban employers in Turkish modernization. Accordingly, while they negotiated with their employers about their increased traveling distance, they also negotiated about their social positions as "humble peasants in the city." And in their families, an emergent group of women strategized to take advantage of their new economic positions as their earnings became an asset used for family investments; as their money became more visible and valuable, it disrupted the view that women's earnings were just "pocket money." Moreover, in their new roles in material accomplishments for their families, they challenged both the neoliberal view of atomized individuals working for their self-interests and the traditional view of women as housewives. Yet others lacked strong negotiation power in the family when they were not investing in the family's economic advancement, especially if they were restrained by unemployed husbands threatened by their wives economic capacity. Thus, long-distance commuting changed household dynamics: it brought new opportunities of gender equality for some women, and for others, it increased their workloads and even incited domestic violence.

We argue that these developments in the lives of female domestic workers are linked to the new values in neoliberalizing society that create aspirations for material advancement via consumption and the new opportunities of participation in the market, which interrupts the already existing work and spousal relations. As the neoliberal ideology encounter traditional social structures, new desires and old ways of life

interact in complex ways, producing promises of social mobility by hard work that include traveling longer hours to work and spending more hours at work. Some women could turn the disadvantages created by neoliberalism via the restructuring of urban space into an advantage as desires for better lives via consumption and the opportunities of investment in the family, such as homeownership and better education for their children, interacted, challenging the traditional gender division of labor and power in the family, and as domestic workers struggle against their subordination in the workplace via "pooling" employers. Yet we should be cautious about the improving positions of female domestic workers in their negotiations with their employers and husbands. Patriarchal structure in society and informality at the workplace are still the dominant frameworks in which such negotiations take place; and the promises in neoliberalism render disadvantaged groups vulnerable to risks. Under the new desires created in neoliberalism, female domestic workers are obliged to work harder and to commute longer; despite the new opportunities for negotiation, they are trapped in the adversity of long-distance commuting.

This article has made its contributions by pointing out the significance of studying female domestic workers in relation to the social and spatial transformations in the city under the imperatives of neoliberalism. It has also contributed by revealing the specific features about the Turkish case: "sisterhood-like relations" is a factor shaping domestic workers negotiations with their employers in a context defined by informality; the family is the site of investments of female domestic workers as their roles are framed by the ideology of parental responsibilities; and the local community acts as a means of compensating for the problems of women's working long-distance, and as such serves to preserve patriarchal family arrangements.

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