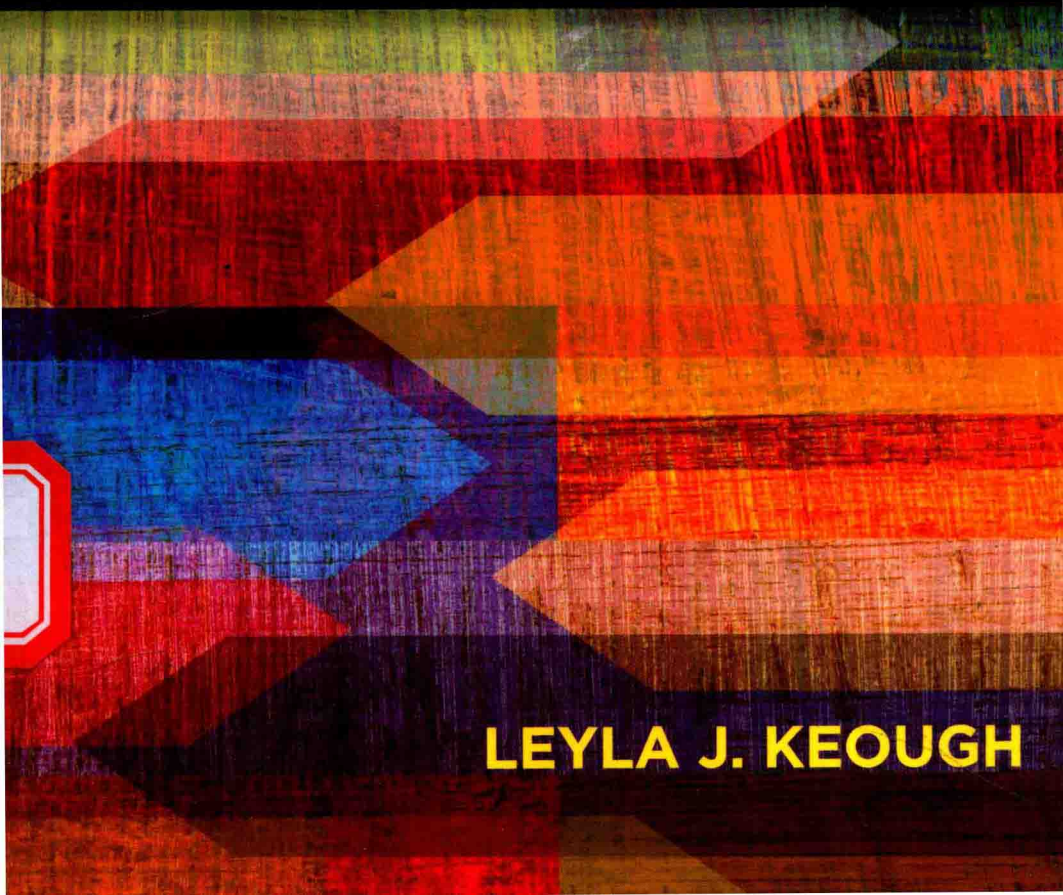
Worker-Mothers on the Margins of Europe

GENDER AND MIGRATION BETWEEN MOLDOVA AND ISTANBUL



LEYLA J. KEOUGH

Worker-Mothers on the Margins of Europe

Gender and Migration between Moldova and Istanbul

Leyla J. Keough

Washington, D.C.
Woodrow Wilson Center Press

Bloomington
Indiana University Press

EDITORIAL OFFICES

Woodrow Wilson Center Press
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
One Woodrow Wilson Plaza
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20004-3027
www.wilsoncenter.org

ORDER FROM

Indiana University Press
Office of Scholarly Publishing
Herman B. Wells Library 350
1320 East 10th Street
Bloomington, IN 47405-3907
Telephone 812-855-8817
iupress.indiana.edu

Printed in the United States of America

2 4 6 8 9 7 5 3 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data has been applied for.

ISBN 978-0-253-02088-8 (cloth)
ISBN 978-0-253-02093-2 (paper)
ISBN 978-0-253-02101-4 (ebook)

Worker-Mothers on the Margins of Europe

Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

The Wilson Center, chartered by Congress as the official memorial to President Woodrow Wilson, is the nation's key nonpartisan policy forum for tackling global issues through independent research and open dialogue to inform actionable ideas for Congress, the Administration, and the broader policy community.

Conclusions or opinions expressed in Center publications and programs are those of the authors and speakers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Center staff, fellows, trustees, advisory groups, or any individuals or organizations that provide financial support to the Center.

Please visit us online at www.wilsoncenter.org.

Jane Harman, Director, President, and CEO

For anneanne, mom, and Sinan.

Maps and Figures

Maps

Figures

Acknowledgments

This book was made possible through the generosity of many individuals and institutions. Its first iteration emerged from a phenomenal nine months in 2007–8 as a Title VIII Research Scholar at the Kennan Institute of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. My fellow scholars and friends at the Kennan Institute, and at the Wilson Center more widely, helped me develop my arguments and find the right pitch so that a broader public could hear them. I am also indebted to critical engagement with this work by two anonymous reviewers, Jennifer Patico, and the editorial staff at the Woodrow Wilson Center Press. The last's meticulous work has made the book ring with a clarity that I could not have accomplished alone. That said, I take full responsibility for any notes that remain off-key.

The research on which the book is based was funded by IREX, the Institute of Turkish Studies, and the University of Massachusetts Amherst European Field Studies Program. I would like to thank the UMass Anthropology Department and particularly my advisors, Jackie Urla, Julie Hemment, Joya Misra, and Andrew Lass, for their intellectual guidance, enthusiastic

encouragement, and insightful suggestions on my research, writing, and career over the years. For their suggestions on this work and their collegial rigor, I would also like to extend my gratitude to the group of scholars represented at the "Bessarabia Conference" at the Max Planck Institute in 2005, New York University's Gender and Transition Workshop in December 2005, the Social Science Research Council's Dissertation Development Workshop in 2006, and the Five College Women's Studies Center where I was a resident scholar in 2006. I would also like to thank my fellow members of SOYUZ (the Postsocialist Cultural Studies Working Group) and the Graduate Association for the Anthropology of Europe at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst Anthropology Department. Dmitry Tartakovsky, Elizabeth Anderson, and Corey Patterson helped get me through fieldwork in Moldova. Dr. Hülya Demirdirek and Dr. Luba Chimpoesh provided many contacts and advice on Gagauz Yeri, which proved crucial to my research and for which I am deeply grateful. I would also like to extend my appreciation to the staff at the International Organization for Migration in Moldova and Turkey for their interest in my research and the time and assistance they gave me, especially Tatiana Jardan for her careful translations from Russian into English.

I am lucky enough to have spent a good portion of 2005 doing research in Istanbul, and in 2008–9, I was graciously hosted as a visiting researcher and lecturer in Cultural Studies at Sabancı University in Istanbul. My time there allowed me to hold more extended conversations with scholars in Turkey—Ayşe Parla, Didem Danış, Ayşe Akalin, Deniz Yükseker, Levent Soysal, Selmin Kaşka, and Mine Eder, among them. I'm grateful for their continued insights into this area of study. I'd like to thank Riva Kantowitz, Esra Başak, and Işık Özel for making my stay at Sabancı not only fruitful, but fun. I extend warm appreciation to all my family in Istanbul—especially Ferruh Iskenderoglu and Beral Madra—for all their help while I lived there. My time in Turkey ended with my participation in the 2009 Hrant Dink Memorial Workshop, where Ayşe Gül Altınay, among other scholars and activists working on behalf of social justice and diversity in the region, showed me first-hand how a small group of people really could make the world a better place. Back in the United States in more recent years, I have been similarly inspired and motivated by Hampshire College's vibrant and dedicated community of concerned citizens and scholars.

I could never have completed the writing of this book without the encouragement of my dear friends back in the "happy valley" of western Massachusetts and in Washington, D.C. They have been there through thick

and thin, helping me keep it all in perspective: Kate Wellspring, Sanjiv Gupta, Emily West, Kevin Anderson, Amel Ahmed, Chris Golden, Kenan Ercel, Ceyda Oner, and especially Yahya Madra. A special shout-out to Elizabeth Heath, Lisa Modenos, and Milena Marchesi for their continued friendship through the journey of graduate school and well beyond.

I want to thank my entire family—in the United States, in Turkey, and in Pakistan—for their love and support, but especially my mother, Birsan Iskenderoğlu Clark, for always being there for me and for the transnational family life she created for us between the United States and Turkey; my *anneanne* (grandmother), Leyla Iskenderoğlu, who inspired my interest in this topic, and whose kind inner calm and limitless generosity I do my best to remember in the spirit of everything I do; and my father, Bill Keough, whose poetic instructions for me on life, love, and writing are ever-present.

My greatest thanks goes to the migrant women I write about in this book, whose fortitude I continue to find awe inspiring. More broadly, I am grateful for all the individuals in Istanbul and Moldova who patiently answered my questions and generously offered stories and opinions about their experiences, whether through outspoken objections or whispered confessions.

While completing this book, I began a journey of my own into novel transnational spaces and worker-motherhood, one that I realize is very privileged. Ultimately, it was the steady support and persuasive argument of my husband and best friend, Salman Hameed, that dreams really can be achieved, that convinced me that I could complete this book. I am so very grateful for our son, Sinan—the product of our Turkish, Irish, American, Pakistani conglomerate—whose own power of observation never ceases to amaze me. He teaches me new things every day about the meaning of being a working mom, and about joy.

Leyla J. Keough
Amherst, Massachusetts
July 2015

Worker-Mothers on the Margins of Europe

Map I.1. Map of Moldova.

Map I.2. Map of the Black Sea Region.

Contents

Introduction

It's the same with everyone, the same problem. . . . Nobody here, not even doctors—not even other educated and experienced people with stable jobs—can look after themselves on their salaries. US$50 a month is the highest salary here. You can't get by on that. It isn't even enough to pay the electricity and phone bills!

—Tatya, migrant worker, October 2004[1]

You can tell the people who have worked abroad: they hold themselves in a different way, they have self-respect now, they were drowning and now they are able to keep their heads above water.

—Tzina, daughter of a migrant worker, November 2004

There really *is* domestic work in Turkey?

—Iris, International Organization for Migration staff, October 2004

[1] All names used are pseudonyms. All translations are the author's own. Moldovan spellings have been used for places in Moldova, including locations in Gagauz Yeri.

It was early fall in 2004, and Tatya, Lana, and I were sitting at a white plastic table on the patio of a new market café. I had spent the day with Tatya in her home in the Gagauz Yeri region of the post-Soviet state of Moldova, interviewing women—teachers and administrators at a local elementary school—who had migrated illegally to Turkey for short periods to work as domestics. While walking through the center of town we had run into Lana, a friend of Tatya's who had also gone to Turkey to work, so we all decided to sit down and talk about her experiences as well. It was toward the end of this final interview of the day that Tatya, in a sad and exasperated manner, commented on the meager wages available even to professionals.

In conversations over the course of fourteen months of ethnographic research in the villages and cities of Moldova and in Istanbul, I listened to women from Gagauz Yeri, an autonomous region of Moldova, describe the effects of the end of socialism with the fall of the Soviet Union. The political and subsequent socioeconomic upheavals had left *everyone* unemployed, underpaid, and underserviced, and had changed long-familiar status distinctions—between white-collar and blue-collar workers, between doctors and farmers, between urban and rural populations. At the same time, neoliberal capitalist restructuring, which emphasizes the retraction of public services and the strengthening of the private sector, had prompted a need for money to pay for basic necessities that once had been taken care of by the state but now were the responsibility of individuals—and were very expensive.[2] As a result, up to one-third of Moldova's population, including half its working-age population, now labored—and labors—abroad (World Bank 2004, 2005; Lücke et al. 2007; Migration Policy Centre 2013).

Most of these migrant workers "commute" back and forth in the margins of Europe, working abroad for six to twelve months at a time to support their families. Many "shuttlers" from Moldova are men who travel to Russia or Italy to work in the construction industry. But women, especially mothers, make up more than 40 percent of these transnational migrants. Some go to Italy and Russia, but many go to Turkey. Known as a sender of *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) to Germany, Turkey has become a recipient of migrant workers from the formerly socialist countries that surround it—especially

[2] By neoliberalism, I mean what is commonly known as "structural adjustment policies," which encourage state withdrawal from social welfare programs and fiscal conservativism and which put less pressure on the state to support populations and more pressure on individuals to support themselves (see Harvey 2005). For the ways in which these policies have variously affected different states in Europe, including examples of postsocialist states, see Joya Misra, Jonathan Woodring, and Sabine N. Merz (2006).