

# Tackling gendered aspects of acculturation through Turkish migrant Women's experiences in Europe

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## Abstract

Gendered patterns and experiences in migration and acculturation research have recently started to gain recognition with the developments of intersectional and transnational/diaspora theories. Following advancements in the literature, the aim of the current study is to tackle gendered experiences of acculturation through readapting different social domains of RAEM (Relative Acculturation Extended Model) in making sense of the data from qualitative interviews with 24 Turkish migrant women across different European contexts. Findings suggest alternative lines in conceptualizing culture and thus, acculturation, in the case of Turkish migrant women, in addition to conceptualizing potential gendered peculiarities that may surface at the intersection of different positionalities across different social domains. Different consequences of how social domains intertwine in shaping women's acculturation strategies and the mismatch between their ideal and real strategies are discussed, with potential future leads and implications.

## Keywords

gender, migration, acculturation, migrant women, relative acculturation extended model

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In the field of acculturation psychology, the most notable and influential model has been the fourfold model for migrants' acculturation processes, with integration being the ultimate goal for the success and well-being of the immigrants in the host society (Berry & Sam, 1997). Within this approach, it is assumed that all individuals go through the same psychological process when adapting to the host society, thus making a universalist assumption regarding acculturating identities and practices. The model has evoked multiple criticisms by different authors (for detailed analysis see Gamsakhurdia, 2022, pp. 37–39). An interesting output of the criticism is an introduction of term *proculturation* which emphasizes a person-centered, dynamic, continuous developmental process of the intercultural experiences resulting from meeting foreign cultural elements at home or abroad (Gamsakhurdia, 2022). Accordingly, Gamsakhurdia (2020; 2021) utilizes dialogical self-theory (DST) which argues for the significance of considering how self is constructed through different *I* positions, referring to the interplay between personal and societal voices which in turn constitutes one's self-structure.

The original fourfold model has been critically evaluated by its author John Berry. As Grzymala-Moszczyńska and Anczyk (2021) point, Berry's latest publication (2019) recommends an eco-cultural approach, which includes considering migrants' adaptation to their ecological migration process as well as their contact with other cultures. Accordingly, an ethnographic approach is suggested, which would facilitate situating empirical findings in their broader sociocultural context. Furthermore, such approach would help acknowledging cultural anthropological arguments on the importance of observing the process of intercultural contact. Thus, those aspects of acculturation studies that are mostly associated with qualitative paradigms are stressed. Moreover, it is suggested that data collected through an ethnographic approach influences the ways quantitative tools are developed at a later stage. Lastly, Berry (2019) mentions that results of research conducted in Canadian society cannot be taken as a basis to generalize the interpretation of intercultural contacts taking place in other sociocultural contexts, due to the uniqueness of each context.

Accordingly, Chirkov (2009) argues that most acculturation studies in the literature have fallen short in terms of understanding and interpreting the unique and dynamic nature of acculturation as a social phenomenon by depicting it as a predictable and controllable group process. A critical approach in psychological research is necessary, through which more culturally informed and contextualized insights can be inferred on human behavior and experience (Toomela & Valsiner, 2010). This perspective sheds light to the significance of adopting a lens that is able to capture the complexities and nuances of psychological processes that are shaped by social, cultural and historical trajectories.

Structuring the transnational landscape by conceptualizing different social domains that surround migrants' lives is an important way of understanding migrants' sociocultural situations (Navas et al., 2005). By identifying social domains (religious beliefs and customs, ways of thinking, principles and values, social relations, family relations, work and politics and government) in which individual acculturation attitudes and strategies might differ, acculturation is understood as a dialectic process. Furthermore, by

considering sociocultural contextual factors in making sense of acculturative processes, RAEM establishes a dynamic and multidimensional understanding towards the transformation of one's self-structure. As [Gamsakhurdia \(2020\)](#) asserts, having this lens is elemental to challenge the predominant reductionist approaches relating to culture and related psychological processes. Within this line, RAEM distinguishes between acculturation attitudes and strategies, by which means acculturation is understood as a complex and relative phenomenon taking place on two levels: an ideal plane (attitudes, options that an individual ideally prefers) and a real plane (strategies, options that an individual ends up adopting in reality).

As Gamsakhurdia's approach points, the person-centeredness is crucial when understanding a multidimensional and complex phenomenon such as acculturation or proculturation. The current research focuses on acculturation to explore the dialogical nature of acculturation as a process involving the adoption and maintenance of new cultural norms and practices by migrants in the host society. In the sense of underlying assumptions regarding acculturation process, Gamsakhurdia's approach supports RAEM since they both put importance to the subjective experiences of migration and suggest a more nuanced perspective in tackling culture and related processes.

While incorporating gender as an analytical category in understanding acculturation processes, conceptualizing gender is problematic as it is a matter that relates only to the household and the private domain and has led the migration literature to be gender-blind for too long ([Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2005](#)). As such, lately, many postcolonial feminist researchers have studied alternative ways through which gender, migration, culture and power are embedded in one another ([Hall, 2020](#); [Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2005](#)). This body of research has offered intersectional perspectives on understanding the transgression of public and private domains and has challenged gender norms and relations, negotiation and reconstitution of self and how these relate to the embodiment of new social practices and activities in the context of migration and acculturation ([Chirkov, 2009](#)). Considering the dynamic and interactive nature of acculturation processes, tackling women's experiences in the transnational context requires challenging the predominant acculturation research which has resulted in empirical and theoretical circularities where one discovered premise falsifies the other (such as integration being the healthiest acculturative strategy and integration can only occur in countries with multicultural policies) ([Rudmin, 2010](#)).

Accordingly, in all Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, women do most of the domestic work, with Turkish women being an example of this, spending a lot of their time on such domestic tasks ([Miranda, 2011](#)). Although there are divergences across countries, the way in which this pattern has been sustained in relation to the global intensification of migrant women's labour provides an overview of how the maintenance of gendered power dynamics is contextually and structurally bound and shapes migrant women's realities in different ways ([Davis & Greenstein, 2013](#)). Changes in migrant women's social practices, such as domestic and care work in their new context, constitute an important site in which to examine gendered aspects of different social domains, such as work and family, that play a part in the acculturation process.

Therefore, the current study provides an examination of Turkish women's migration and acculturation to various European countries, with a focus on the gendered values and practices surrounding unpaid domestic and care work.

## Reframing acculturation through intersectionality

Both gender and migration studies have fallen short in terms of addressing migrant women's particular voices and positions in the transnational context, through which migrant women were situated in a public discourse of "otherness" that was decontextualized from the gendered aspects of migratory processes (Lutz, 2010). With the contribution of intersectionality in both fields, gender, as one's "socially acquired and performed identity" (Lutz, 2010), started to be regarded as an analytical category. That is, gender asymmetries in different domains of life are starting to be understood as a product of the social structure rather than binary categories of sex assigned at birth demonstrated through statistical variations. Considering the significance of how different *I* positions are hierarchically re-organized in the migratory context according to the social representations and internal/external voices, understanding the role of gender asymmetries across different sociocultural domains are elemental in comprehending the uniqueness of migrant women's experiences (Gamsakhurdia, 2021).

Bhatia's conceptualization of acculturation with respect to historical and contextual trajectories draws on the literature on intersectionality in reuniting the social structure and agency (Bürkner, 2011). It provides an opportunity to understand the discursive appearance of transnational diasporas and consequent transnational experiences of acculturation, which cannot just be characterized by concrete national boundaries. Rather, as Bhatia and Ram (2009) discuss, understanding acculturation, as well as the formation of diasporic identities and practices in today's world, requires recognition of social and historical aspects of migration with respect to the changes in the individual voices and positions that take place (Hall, 2020).

Within this prospect, the relevance of different *I* positions migrants occupy in the diasporic context becomes relevant to their acculturative processes, whereby particular social and historical trajectories can be reconfigured in making sense of migrant identities and practices (Madureira, 2018). In doing so, social identities and practices are understood as boundary phenomena that are deeply rooted in cultural and historical paradigms and which have concrete outcomes on daily circumstances taking place across different social domains of life, specifically relating to the transformation of immigrants' self-structure (Gamsakhurdia, 2021). In line with this, comprehending how immigrants mediate among different hierarchical *I* positions and their changes within the context of newly formed experiences is crucial, since understanding these hierarchies provide space in tackling the process through which immigrants distance themselves to different foreign and native cultural discourses.

Additionally, it is very important to acknowledge women's active role in the meaning-making process of changes involved in the migration process. The concept of cultural *canalization* introduced by Madureira (2020) emphasizes the pro-active role of women in both kinds of relations to the new social environment and their own

new situation in this world. Women's relation to their new social environment and their newly formed self requires the consideration of temporal dimensions of cultural processes, whereby past and future experiences are bridged through the present immediate experiences (Gamsakhurdia, 2020, 2021). Women's understanding and practice of their environment and themselves translate into the reorganization of their categorization of certain concepts such as one's ethnic, racial and gender identity. Within this prospect, realizing how immigrants reinvent their selves across different power dynamics and sociocultural domains concurrently, is especially crucial while dealing with intersectional experiences in the transnational realm.

### *Relative acculturation extended model (RAEM)*

The domains that are introduced in RAEM (relative acculturation extended model) are valuable in terms of conceptualizing the different social domains of life (Navas et al., 2005) through which the complexity of migrant women's experiences can be examined. Accordingly, RAEM (Navas et al., 2005) mentions seven different domains in understanding migrants' acculturation strategies. The political and government system, work, economic, family domains and the ideological domain which is further divided into the subdomains of religious beliefs and customs and ways of thinking, principles and values. In turn, RAEM maintains a dialectic conceptualization of acculturation, where strategies adopted by migrants (as well as locals) depend on the negotiations they go through in the different social domains of life (Navas et al., 2005). In line with Gamsakhurdia's (2020; 2021) approach in considering socio-cultural contextual factors in the migration context, RAEM categories enable tracking the nuances and contradictions that might appear in women's reorganized *I* positions. Additionally, understanding acculturation through domain-specificity as RAEM is especially highlighted by scholars due to the assumption that acculturation processes vary over time and space, transgressing different life domains (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2006).

As one of the important contributions of RAEM's conceptualization of acculturation compared to the dominant fourfold model of acculturation (Berry & Sam, 1997), ideal and real planes of acculturation strategies align in constituting different experiences of acculturation positions in different domains, and/or multiple psychological positions of acculturation in one or more domains at the same time. The way in which this is analysed is one of the distinctive features of RAEM in distinguishing and making sense of acculturation attitudes and strategies. Within this prospect, acculturation is understood as a selective and relative process (Navas et al., 2005) that involves multiple mediations across different social encounters in the new context. Similarly, Arends-Tóth and van de Vijver's (2009) findings reveal how different ethnic identities' cultural diffusion into the mainstream society might be a predictor (and a consequence) of to what extent the members of an ethnic group are prone to adapting the mainstream familial and marital cultural values and practices. As Gamsakhurdia (2022) points out, research on immigrants' acculturative orientations require a rather nuanced approach and Arends-Tóth and van de Vijver's (2009)

findings give justice to the participants' specific features of identity. Therefore, it is possible to argue the benefits of using RAEM for the current research rather than the mainstream acculturation model by Berry, since RAEM focuses on the subjective experiences of acculturation, and the importance of individual agency and communication in shaping acculturation process.

Lastly, the exploratory and qualitative elements of RAEM is built up on the foundation that acculturation is not a linear process solely dependent upon behavioral or attitudinal changes, thus highlighting the importance of subjectivity and complexity when it comes to culture and acculturation (Navas et al., 2005). Rather, RAEM provides a more holistic perspective through which changes in the individual and larger societal context can be tracked. These exploratory and qualitative elements constituting RAEM, make it specifically fruitful for current research to capture particular changes and negotiations migrant women navigate during acculturation process.

### *Gendered acculturation*

As Kwiatkowska (2010) illustrates, in the case of women coming from oppressive countries, communities and/or families, migration can become a powerful tool in women's empowerment and reclaiming agency. Making it on their own, being independent and alone, may influence the ways women perceive themselves and their social practices, as well as their gendered perceptions attached to those practices. Thus, the whole migration process and the changes that accompany it demonstrate how gendered power dynamics are negotiated within the different social domains. Accordingly, the literature regarding the unequal distribution of unpaid domestic work and its repercussions on women globally (Antonopoulos, 2008; Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010; Miranda, 2011), as well as how migration challenges existing gendered power dynamics both in the public and private domains (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2005), show the importance of understanding migrant women's acculturation experiences by observing the shifts in their paid and unpaid work practices.

Accordingly, Espin's (1997) findings demonstrate how migration could end up in negative outcomes for migrant women and mentions the "self-appointed guardians of morality and tradition" within migrant communities, who feel entitled to act responsible for migrant women's "moral conduct" within the migrant community. In other words, migration may end up further limiting migrant women's opportunities (via the women's own migrant community in the host society, and/or perceived lack of support and discrimination received by the host society members). It may restrict the flexibility of their social practices, and push them to develop new strategies to negotiate the ways they perform their social practices in different social domains (Espin, 1997; Yakushko & Espin, 2010). Thus, the ways in which various contradictions and tensions form under different power axes such as race and gender are relevant to migrant women's experiences, in terms of how they make sense of their new cultural context and reorganize their identity and social practices (Gamsakhurdia, 2020; Madureira, 2020).

### *The connection between paid and unpaid work*

Antonopoulos (2008) examined the connection between paid and unpaid work, highlighting the role of cooking and cleaning as unpaid domestic work while it is also one of the most undervalued and unrecognized paid job sectors that are predominantly run by migrant women. This connection reveals various aspects of not just migrant women who have been recruited in the paid domestic domain, but also in which ways paid and unpaid work are interconnected in transnational context. The practice of unpaid work is directly related to various aspects of how individuals position themselves in paid work. Thus, examining migrant women's unpaid domestic work experiences offers a means to understand how gendered power dynamics are negotiated in various domains of life such as cultural norms and values, as well as family relations and social network.

### *Acculturating Turkish women in Europe*

Due to the complex migratory patterns along with the historical trajectory of migration from Turkey to Europe, the face of the Turkish migrant community has transformed drastically (Türkmen, 2019). Within this line, it was recently found that especially qualified and educated Turkish women are more likely to migrate than men, and Turkish migrant women are less likely to return to Turkey than Turkish migrant men (Elveren & Toksöz, 2017). Turkish migration to Europe is complex, and Turkish migrant women's particular reasons, motivations and well-being with regard to migrating to different European countries are quite diverse. Thus, a rich area is provided for understanding how migrant women's experiences of acculturation can be situated within the gendered paradigms of different cultural contexts.

Despite demonstrating the importance of considering different social domains when understanding acculturation processes, studies in the existing literature mainly focus on labour migrants and their following generations in their sample (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2003; Güngör & Bornstein, 2008). Standing outside the portrayed characteristics of the majority population constituting the European Turkish population, educated and skilled Turkish women with urban backgrounds and their negotiations in different social domains are a particularly fruitful example for understanding transnational appearances of different power relations. Therefore, by tackling the experiences of this group with different backgrounds and stories, it is an aim of the current study to address a very neglected group in the literature (Krummel, 2012).

### *Objectives and research questions*

The new cultural context can be a determinant in terms of influencing the ways in which women relate to domestic work and how their gendered perceptions are shaped regarding the change in their experience of different social domains. In line with this, understanding the changes in migrant women's unpaid domestic work practices provides a rich area for examining the ways in which different social domains might be interrelated in the transnational context.

In line with the theoretical framework applied, the first objective of the current study is to identify the gendered peculiarities in the experiences of migrant women's acculturation processes. Within this prospect, the study aims to tackle the ways in which different social domains are intertwined in shaping migrant women's acculturation processes. Furthermore, the final objective of the study is to ascertain the relation between the changes in the understanding and practices of unpaid domestic and care work in relation to the sociocultural context that surrounds the acculturation processes of Turkish migrant women.

Therefore, this research aims to explore the questions: (i) What are the gendered aspects of migration and acculturation in relation to migrant women's changing social practices? (ii) How are Turkish migrant women's acculturation experiences socioculturally shaped in different social domains? and (iii) How do women's understandings and practices of unpaid domestic and care work change throughout their migratory process?

## Methods

To answer the research questions, an exploratory qualitative approach was adopted for this study as suggested by many scholars for understanding how different voices and positions take place in the transnational context (Chirkov, 2009). Accordingly, qualitative analysis considers both participants' and the researcher's interpretations of the phenomenon that is at stake, which is often described as a dual interpretation process (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Among other qualitative approaches in the field of psychology, IPA (the interpretative phenomenological approach) is employed in the current research, whereby the researcher decodes the ways in which participants constitute their meaning-making processes of the social phenomenon. Thus, IPA allows the researcher to understand the particular experiences of individuals regarding an object or a social event. Through dual interpretation, the researcher attempts to interpret the phenomenon under question through the lens of the participants and herself, thus allowing an analysis that considers acculturation as a complex and multidimensional that is shaped through subjective experiences. In addition, it encourages the researcher to be involved in a series of interpretative activities to formulate a descriptive analysis of the uniqueness of a particular social phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2008).

The semi-structured interview questions are utilized in a way that should help understand various contradictions that might appear in women's narratives, as suggested by many scholars in the field (Bhatia & Ram, 2009; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2005). In return, the aim of the study was to explore gendered facets of various different social domains of life in the acculturation process while regarding Turkish migrant women's own narratives as their interpretation of their current environment as suggested by the phenomenological approach (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

The semi-structured interviews were composed based on a review of the existing literature regarding migration, acculturation and gender, as well informal face-to-face interviews in Lisbon, Portugal with Turkish migrant women, (e.g. "How are you experiencing country X so far?" "Would you describe some strengths and resources that you've developed to deal with obstacles because you are both a migrant and a woman?") along with the demographic questionnaire. With the finalization of materials, data



collection for the study was started after receiving the ethical approval from Iscte-IUL. After agreeing on participation by reading the informed consent form, semi-structured interviews with the participants were arranged and conducted using online tools, lasting between one and 2 hours.

### *Ethical considerations*

In finding the balance between “faking” relationships and establishing genuine rapport with participants, it is important to be aware of the ethical dilemmas that comes with professionalization, or the commercialization of rapport for the sake of feminist research (Duncombe & Jessop, 2014). Therefore, keeping in mind how establishment of sincerity becomes even more complicated and challenging when interactions happen via online tools (Lo Iacono et al., 2016), ethical considerations were important aspects throughout the study.

### *Sample*

The current study recruited 24 Turkish migrant women across different European countries, via the *Göçmen Kadınlar* (Migrant Women) Facebook group that consists of thousands of Turkish women living abroad, or who plan to live abroad. The criteria for joining the study were being a migrant from Turkey, having lived in a European country for more than a year, and identifying as a woman of adult age (>18 years). As such, participants were all university graduates with one exception; their mean age was 36 years old (age range 23–60); and they were from different European countries (five from Germany, three from Austria, three from the Netherlands, three from Portugal, two from France, two from Italy, one from Switzerland, one from the UK, one from Spain, one from Lichtenstein, one from Sweden, one from Greece and one from Switzerland).

### *Data analysis*

By following a dual interpretation process, the researcher aimed to decode the ways in which participants make sense of their environment. Taking detailed notes on each participant’s account resulted in clustering emergent themes under the potential RAEM domains. Each woman’s accounts were read multiple times in their own perspective following the premises of idiographic approach in IPA to see how the RAEM framework of social domains can be utilized better in exploring the existing data. Grouping the sub-themes to understand the patterns among the collected data resulted in merging the two subdomains in the original ideological domain, as well as merging the original work and economy domains. Therefore, the study re-structured and adapted the RAEM domains and formed new subdomains that reflect gendered facets of each domain for the current sample. In turn, sub-themes in each domain are grouped under five main social domains, and are further divided into detailed categories where applicable.

## Results: Readapted RAEM domains

### *Cultural norms, values and ways of thinking*

This domain mainly refers to the ideological domain in the original RAEM and concerns a wide range of values, norms and attitudes shaped within an individual's sociocultural world.

*Bargaining with different social expectations as migrant women & mothers.* Specifically referring to how women reconstitute and negotiate different societal expectations both inside and outside the household in the context of acculturation, this subdomain further distinguishes categories within and outside the household.

- (i) Within the household. Referring mainly to women's various negotiations within the household in the context of their acculturation, this category is conceptualized as constituting women's particular experiences of being expected to think or behave in a certain way due being a woman, in the boundaries of the private sphere. It mainly consists of conflicts with partners and/or family members, and/or the distribution and negotiation of domestic and care work constitute the category.
- (ii) Outside the household. Referring to a wide range of contexts such as work or social relations, this category aims to cluster women's negotiations outside the household. It includes how women negotiate their identities, values and practices in different social encounters such as interactions with locals, or experiences of social institutions.

*Cultural identity and feelings of belonging.* This subdomain conceptualizes how women relate to and position themselves in terms of cultural identity and feelings of belonging to their new context.

*Religion and making sense of the world.* This subdomain mainly refers to the ways in which women relate to their religious heritage and religion in general.

*Self-reflection and self-care.* An important mechanism that migrant women turn to in the context of acculturation, by which narratives of reflecting and caring for the self are conceptualized.

### *Family relations*

This domain includes both the family left behind, and family in the new context if applicable. Therefore, family relations refer mainly but not necessarily to migrant women's experiences of positioning themselves within the family.

*Power dynamics within the family.* Both the family in the homeland and host land are referred to in relation to migrant women's acculturation processes.

*Support from the extended family left behind.* Specifically appearing in migrant mothers' accounts in terms of extended family being a support mechanism in child care, this subdomain also includes perceived support from the extended family left behind in other topics such as economic support.

#### *Upbringing of children*

- (i) Concern over children's well-being. Mostly arising in the context of migrant women being worried about their children due to the perceived downwards mobility ladder in educational institutions, this category represents migrant mothers' concerns over perceived systemic discriminations against their children or being discriminated against in front of their own children.
- (ii) Differences in practices of raising children. This category represents discrepancies which women express in practices of raising children due to various factors such as cultural, generational or religious differences.

#### *Social relations and social activities*

Concerning one's social network and environment, this domain also includes newly developed and/or embodied social practices in the new context.

*Interactions within one's own migrant community.* This subdomain was identified to conceptualize migrant women's experiences regarding their interactions within the Turkish migrant community in their respective host country, and distinguishes hindering or supportive outcomes for women.

- (i) Hindering factors for women.
- (ii) Supportive factors for women.

*Interactions with locals.* This subdomain further distinguishes four categories that group migrant women's particular experiences.

- (i) Seemingly positive or subtle forms of prejudice.
- (ii) Racialized femininities. This refers to the experiences of marginalization at the intersection of race and/or religion and gender.
- (iii) Feelings of trying to prove yourself. This category mainly refers to the feelings towards locals that stem from an attempt or urge to validate one's identity and to be distinguished from the mainstream image of "Turkishness" in Europe.
- (iv) Feelings of receiving support and empathy from locals. Positive feelings towards social encounters with locals are conceptualized within this category.

*Social activities and socializing practices.* This subdomain refers to a wide range of social practices, activities and hobbies, as well as migrant women's changing perceptions and practices of socializing and establishing their social network.

### *Work and management of economic means*

As a combination of the Work and Economy domains in the original RAEM, this domain involves women's experiences of unpaid and paid work, as well as their experiences regarding being economically dependent or independent.

*Economic independence.* This subdomain refers to migrant women's perceptions, negotiations and ideals in terms of being economically independent.

*Paid work.* This subdomain further distinguishes three identified patterns which are constituted by migrant women's perceptions and experiences of paid work.

- (i) Migrant women's entrepreneurship. This category is mainly constituted by migrant women's initiatives and/or dreams of building a platform where they can use their existing skills as both a means to adapt to the new context, as well as making money from them.
- (ii) Gendered patterns in paid job sectors hindering or facilitating acculturation. This refers to the identified gendered patterns in paid job sectors that may hinder or facilitate acculturation.
- (iii) De-skillization & flexibilization of migrant women's paid work. This category is constituted by women's experiences and/or perceptions of de-skillization and flexibilization of their work due to migration and/or gender.

*Unpaid work.* This subdomain conceptualizes migrant women's perceptions and experiences towards unpaid work practices.

- (i) De-skillization & flexibilization: consequences in the household. This category is identified directly in relation to women's experiences of de-skillization and flexibilization in the paid work subdomain.
- (ii) Gendered patterns in unpaid job sector hindering or facilitating acculturation

### *Politics and power relations*

This domain refers to the perceived political configuration of social order and positioning in social hierarchies in migrant women's acculturation experiences.

*Xenophobia and racism.* This subdomain refers to the instances of racism and/or xenophobia perceived by migrant women.

- (i) Discrimination over country of origin. This category refers specifically to the perceived prejudice, discrimination and/or violence towards Turkish migrant women due to their country of origin.

*Gender-based discrimination and violence.* This subdomain refers to women's experiences of feeling discriminated against due to being a woman in their context.

*Islamophobia.* This mainly refers to women's perceptions and experiences of facing negative prejudices and being discriminated against due to being Muslim (or due to being considered to be Muslim because of their Turkish background).

*Experiences of social institutions and policies.* This subdomain mainly involves general experiences regarding social institutions and policies, such as experiences in immigration offices, with the police or in hospitals, as well as perceptions towards policies such as maternal leave policies.

(i) Observations from migrant women & mothers regarding educational institutions.

*Residence and work permit.* This mainly refers to women's experiences and negotiations surrounding bureaucratic limitations of residence and work permits.

*Sociopolitical environment of Turkey.* The worsening situation of Turkish sociopolitical context has been identified as both a trigger for emigration from Turkey and a motivation to not to return to Turkey.

## Discussion

### *Tackling the mismatch between ideal and real planes*

*Point of reference in approaching one's cultural background.* Analysis of results was initiated with the first research question on how women's acculturation experiences are socio-culturally shaped in different social domains. Although there is not always a clear indication in women's narratives regarding the "ideal" as opposed to the real acculturation strategies, the themes which appear in each subdomain and the way in which they align in shaping women's strategies are noteworthy. Furthermore, reformulating culture and acculturating is discussed in relation to migrant women's "mismatch" between ideal and real planes across different social domains.

The only time I remember being harassed was in a bar, by a Turkish man! I was wearing something sexy, and I was in a small group, talking with friends. When he came over, he was a bit drunk. He tried to hit on me. I said no and told him that I am not interested. He turned to me and said, "you dress like this, open yourself everywhere, but you don't give it to anyone!" I was shocked, because I hadn't had such an experience since I left Turkey – it has been like 20 years. The owner of the bar was a friend of mine, so I went to him to tell the situation, and he kicked him out of the bar. This was the only incident I remember, and it was by a Turkish man! That's why I strongly believe it's easier to be a woman here than in Turkey. (Participant 23, 50 years old, Austria)

In the case of Participant 23, for instance, she mentions being verbally assaulted by a Turkish man in Austria, which she indicated was the first and last time she had ever been assaulted in Austria. Her experience extends to various domains, yet the most evident one appears to be in the social network domain, mainly concerning women's own migrant community within the host country. While describing being harassed and insulted by a Turkish man in a bar while she was having fun with friends years ago, she emphasizes how this is the one and only time she got harassed by a man in Austria in this way. Her experience is important in terms of demonstrating the importance and influence of one's own migrant community within the new country's context. As [Gamsakhurdia \(2022\)](#) points, change of various values and behavioural styles does not eliminate sense of attachment to native identity. In the case under discussion, it means sensitivity to the insult by compatriot.

This is not to say that gender norms and Turkish culture are globally oppressive or backwards. Rather, the point is to demonstrate the particular experiences of Turkish women when being confronted with certain cultural codes, as well as the reproduction and negotiation of those codes in the transnational context ([Ehrkamp, 2013](#); [Hall, 2020](#)). As such, it is important to recognize the ways in which Turkish men's racialized masculinities play a part in explaining this pattern of them as "moral guardians" who feel entitled to think and behave this way towards Turkish migrant women.

Participant 23, a woman who strongly detests Turkish masculine culture and rather embraces and promotes gender egalitarian European discourse, indicates that she has always felt this way due to the way she was raised, even before coming to Austria. Coming from an open-minded family in İstanbul, she mentions how the patriarchal cultural structure in Turkey was a strong factor in her decision to migrate to Austria. Therefore, her adopted strategy matches her ideal strategy, and it seems like this perceived match was one of the important determinants for her to migrate from Turkey and settle in a European country. Accordingly, her adopted strategies in the domains of social network and cultural norms, values and ways of thinking appear to be situated among integration and assimilation strategies. However, to be able to choose one strategy that best fits her situation, it is important to consider the point of reference of her cultural background; she indicates that she detested the gendered hierarchy in Turkish culture and that it was an important motivation for her to migrate in the first place. As [Gamsakhurdia \(2020; 2021\)](#) suggests, the temporal dimensions of immigrants' past, present and future become an important aspect through which women's cultural background and the (mis)match between their ideal and real strategies can be traced within the transnational context. Therefore, a different conceptualization of culture and cultural background of women with regard to specific gendered paradigms, such as the reconstitution and negotiation of autonomous related selves ([Kagitcibasi, 2002](#)) by Turkish migrant women, may reformulate the way migrant women's real and ideal acculturation strategies are recognized and conceptualized.

*Mismatches as reflections of contextual boundaries.* By discussing different examples of how the (mis)match between different acculturation strategies are determined in a certain domain ([Navas et al., 2005](#)), this subsection articulates how the (mis)match of

acculturation strategies gives insights into the contextual boundaries of particular domains and sub domains. Accordingly, the mismatch between women's ideal and real planes are found to reflect potential contextual boundaries and gender-specific stressors in the case of migrant women, thus pushing women towards negotiations across different life domains and transforming their self-structure. These findings contribute to the existing literature through a gendered lens in terms of reorganized *I* positions, social representations and internal/external voices in the migratory context (Gamsakhurdia, 2020; 2021). These boundaries and stressors include downwards mobility ladders in schools and negative prejudices against children of migrant descendants (Schiff, 2014), intensification of domestic and care work (of children) which has been more likely to be shared (with the extended family) in the home country (Gilmartin & Migge, 2016), challenged power dynamics within the household (Inowlocki, 2016), microaggressions from locals and "self-appointed moral guardians" within the own migrant community (Espino, 1997) and de-skillization and/or flexibilization of paid work.

### *Interrelatedness of different social domains in explaining gendered experiences of acculturation*

Below, the intersection of different social domains in determining the gendered and contextual paradigms that shape Turkish migrant women's experiences are discussed, with an example from the experience of one of the participants.

I'm married to a Turkish German and I have experienced something regarding domestic violence. But I didn't report it to the police, because I was intimidated by my husband. There's an association here for cases like this, so I asked for their help. They even had Turkish-speaking consultants. I saw a Turkish consultant there, but we couldn't intervene with some stuff due to bureaucratic boundaries, because I didn't have a permanent residency permit back then, which was limiting under those conditions...

...Unfortunately, I only have an intern salary, so being the maid in this house is my role in exchange for not paying rent (Participant 4, Germany)

Participant 4, who describes having faced domestic violence at home, mentions not officially complaining about the situation due to the fear of complicating her residency process in Germany. Thus, she keeps living with her husband so as not to risk the chance of gaining permanent approval to live in Germany. Because her residency depends on a family union, she expresses the limitations of her situation, which do not necessarily result in a discrepancy between her ideal and real strategies. Rather, her experience illustrates an example of how the (mis)match between different acculturation strategies, although depending on personal stories and factors, is strongly bounded by contextual paradigms.

Furthermore, by mentioning the intern salary which is not enough to sustain herself at the moment, she indicates how her economic dependency influences the power dynamics and the way she negotiates unpaid work within the household. Thus, she negotiates her economic dependency in return for mainly providing unpaid domestic work in the

household, through which she aims to stay long enough in Germany to get permanent residence without her husband and to be able to afford to live by herself. Her marital dynamics show how culturally shaped male role got transferred and it contributes to acculturation options available for her during migration process. At the same time her immigrant experiences change the original meaning and emotional values of particular native cultural practices (wife's subjugated social role in the Turkish marriage). She is clearly denying such a role but remain in the union due to harsh economic realities of the situation in the new country (Gamsakhurdia, 2022).

The literature states that Turkish women feel more obliged within the private sphere to be considered and feel "good" as women and mothers (Sunar & Okman Fişek, 2005). The way in which the transnational emergence of this pattern might become a further source of vulnerability in the case of non-European migrant women is illustrated by the findings. Accordingly, constraints of residence and work permits (Aichberger et al., 2015), feelings of not being wanted due to one's racial/cultural/religious background and risks of de-skillization appear to contribute to shaping how migrant women may use unpaid domestic work in negotiating economic dependency and consequently, residency. These findings further illustrate how the transformation of self-structure is heavily related to the newly formed power dynamics women need to navigate in the migratory context.

## Limitations

Despite the contributions of the current study and the findings, having to use online tools could be considered as one of the limitations; online interviews make it more difficult to establish rapport and thus, ensure reliability. Although the interviewer speaks Turkish, communicated in the same language and comes from the same country which have potentially facilitated data collection and interpretation, these might also have been limiting factors in hindering professionalism, thus threatening the reliability of the data. Additionally, the drawbacks of qualitative data and methodology are applicable to this research. On the other hand, adopting a qualitative approach enabled a fruitful examination of the nuances in the gender-specific aspects of experiences and social phenomena.

## Conclusions

Offering a conceptual framework in situating experiences, the study attempts to tackle the interrelatedness of different domains through women's narratives. In turn, the ways in which different domains and subdomains are linked to one another provide valuable insights in terms of the how gendered power dynamics are negotiated in different social domains in the case of Turkish migrant women. By taking a gender as an analytical category in this study, it was possible to ascertain how the interrelatedness of different domains demonstrates different power hierarchies in which Turkish women's gendered experiences of acculturation are situated. In doing so, an attempt was made to understand migrant women's changing perceptions and practices of unpaid domestic and care work in relation to identified global patterns and cultural discourses that surround unpaid domestic and care work, gender and migration. Further studies could explore the dynamic and



shifting symbols which help Turkish women in migration to distance themselves from their (at times) difficult positions while retaining their cultural identity (Valsiner, 2007).

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