



**This postprint was originally published by
Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht as:**

Sarioglu, E. (2021). Faces of shame in contemporary Turkey:
Women feeling the hierarchies of class and gender at work.
*L'Homme: Europäische Zeitschrift für Feministische
Geschichtswissenschaft*, 32(2), 97–110.
<https://doi.org/10.14220/lhom.2021.32.2.97>

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Faces of Shame in Contemporary Turkey. Women Feeling the Hierarchies of Class and Gender at Work

This article uncovers the bodily and emotional costs of social hierarchies that working-class women bear by analysing women's embodied conduct inside the workplaces against the backdrop of Turkey's global capitalist restructuring. How do intersections of class and gender take hold of the working-class feminine body? Are there particular bodily states and emotions women experience at work as a result of the class and gender hierarchies? How do feminine bodies respond to the overlapping hierarchies of class and gender? My fieldwork among women without a college degree in Istanbul offers insights into these questions by carefully attending to women workers' everyday bodily modes of being, habitual modes of dwelling in the world, and mundane manners of approaching others.¹ The article highlights shaming as the affective practice that operates at the intersection of class and gender hierarchies. By paying attention to multifaceted dimensions of shame, I show that inside the workplaces where sexualised shame and shaming are ubiquitous, women workers adopt bodily modalities associated with rigidity, while rigidity as a bodily mode of being dissolves and women acquire bodily modalities of fluidity in those workplaces where sexualised shame is rendered relatively unnecessary.

In an intersectional analysis of class and gender that operates on bodies, my argument foregrounds fluidity to account for the embodied implications of shame and shaming at work. This article approaches fluidity as a defining characteristic of the body and bodily lived experience. Informed by critical phenomenological analyses of fluidity, it locates fluidity in the everydayness of bodily experience and examines the habitual

¹ This article draws on an ethnographic fieldwork among working-class women I conducted in Istanbul between 2010 and 2012. I carried out in-depth interviews with participants: thirty five saleswomen, four human resources employees from different retail companies, one Turkish retail council representative, and one union leader. Participant observation was another source of field data. Between May 2011 and August 2011, I worked as a cashier at a large supermarket, which generated insights into the gendered organisation of the labour process and the gendered dimension of workplace interactions.

Originally published in:

L'Homme: Europäische Zeitschrift für Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft, 32, 2021, p. 97

body, its everyday modes of moving in space, and the sense of self that it entails.² Closely associated with bodily habits, dispositions, and capacities, fluidity as a corporeal experience grants the body a particular style of movement, through which the self takes up space with ease and moves in an unconstrained and smooth manner. Such an understanding adds a different dimension to the scholarly conversation around fluidity, which often focuses on norms and identities, and their fluidity or stability. By using fluidity as a critical category, I provide a conceptual space to investigate the embodied and emotional costs of social hierarchies. My research on bodily modes of being feminine in workplaces highlights a loss of fluidity as the corporeal plight of working-class women, and suggests that fluidity as a bodily modality can become possible for women in Turkey with the flattening of broader gender hierarchies.

The global capitalist restructuring transformed not only Turkey's economic orientation, but also the employment opportunities available to working-class women in complex ways.³ Beginning in the 1990s, when Turkey embarked on a project of economic liberalisation, jobs in the garment industry and service sector emerged as important sources of employment for women. There are, however, significant differences between the service jobs and industrial production, mirroring the heterogeneity of the gendered dynamics that drive different women into various segments of the labour force in the global era. Sales floor is characterised by a predominance of young women with high school degrees working as cashiers and saleswomen while textile workshops, which flourished in the periphery of Istanbul with the renewal of subcontracting and outsourcing practices in global era, have absorbed underprivileged women into the workforce, turning these women into globalisation's new precarious workers. Sales floor and shop floor also have different gender norms and standards that women workers are subjected to at work. This affects not only the labour relations women are immersed in, but also the bodily habits, gestures, emotional attitudes and other embodied practices women cultivate as they cope with the pressures of gendered and class-based inequalities inside these workplaces.

² Here I refer to the phenomenological perspectives offered by feminist scholars who have critiqued Merleau-Ponty's concept of the body and bodily lived experiences, including fluidity, as neutral, universal, and ahistorical. For a detailed account, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Oxford 2013; Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies. Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Bloomington, IN 1994; Silvia Stoller, *Reflections on Feminist Merleau-Ponty Scepticism*, in: *Hypatia*, 15, 1 (2000), 175–182; Helen Ngo, *The Habits of Racism. A Phenomenology of Racism and Racialized Embodiment*, Lanham 2017.

³ For more information on how globalisation affects the working classes and women in Turkey, see Çağlar Keyder, *Globalization and Social Exclusion in Istanbul*, in: *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 29, 1 (2005), 124–134; Miray Erinc, *The Conflict between Education and Female Labour in Turkey: Understanding Turkey's Non-compliance with the U-shape Hypothesis*, in: *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 19, 5 (2017), 571–589.

1. Different Faces of Shame and Shaming

When Ela graduated from high school in 1993, the first McDonald's restaurants had just been opened in Istanbul, along with new shopping malls and supermarkets that were starting to dot the urban landscape. Some of her friends had already taken up jobs offered at these chain-restaurants, and the work environment seemed quite enjoyable. Perhaps because of that it never occurred to Ela that working at a fast-food restaurant could be considered shameful. This went on until Ela told her father that she planned on working at McDonald's. In response, her father made only a sarcastic comment "so you are going to fry potatoes," he said. She did not expect to receive such a devaluing judgement. "I felt humiliated," she said to me, describing her father's reaction.

Class shame, which scholars have shown to be one of the emotional effects of class oppression, is often experienced by the social groups located on the lower rungs of the class hierarchy.⁴ Individuals, for instance, might feel their self-worth undermined because of their class-position or occupation. For Ela, working at McDonald's in and of itself was not a source of shame. Nor were other saleswomen I spoke with ashamed of where they worked or what they did. They, however, faced class-shaming as women workers, receiving devaluing judgements from others because of their gendered position in class hierarchies. Often delivered by family members, these judgements readily depreciated the importance of their work. The family would question the dignity of working-class occupations in order to dissuade young women from working.

After the McDonald's incident, Ela told her father that a big supermarket had an opening for cashier position; again, he said no. Ela was struck by the reaction of her father, who never stopped Ela's sister from working. She protested against her father and brought up the fact that it was unfair that he prevented Ela from working, while at the same time allowing Ela's sister to work. Her father replied, "Don't compare yourself with your sister. She went to college and works at a bank." The way her father treated Ela was by no means uncommon. Parents tended to treat their own daughters differently depending on the level of education their daughters had received. They encouraged women in the family to pursue professional careers if women were college graduates, whereas they discouraged women from working outside the home if the jobs were in working-class occupations. The high value placed on having cultural capital, in marked contrast to having a job to support oneself, made it difficult for women to find something positive about their class positioning and often resulted in feelings of shame, inferiority, and disappointment.

That was also the case for Sena, a 28-year-old supermarket worker, who grappled with feelings of disappointment, bitterness, and inferiority upon realising that her

⁴ See for instance, Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, Cambridge 1972; Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender. Becoming Respectable*, London/New Delhi 1997.

college-educated sister was given favourable treatment by her father. "That was the most painful blow I got throughout my life. My own family throws the bitter truth in my face," she said. "If I had gone to college, I would have been free. If I was a doctor or teacher, everyone would treat me respectfully. But now I am single, working at a supermarket, and have only a high school diploma." Back when she started out as a young worker, her father was not discouraging at all. "My parents live in a small town, two hours away from Istanbul. Five or six years ago, my sister enrolled at a university in Istanbul. I moved to Istanbul to live with her and we rented an apartment together. Then, I started working at a supermarket," she explained.

Things, however, began to change for Sena shortly before her sister's graduation. Her father, once supportive of Sena throughout the years she lived with her sister in Istanbul, now, as she put it, "has already started pressuring me to leave work and move back to live with them". Sena's sister would move out of Istanbul for a teaching job at a public school in a different city. Sena, despite her father's insistence, was quite unwilling to move back in with her parents. "I don't want to go back. I have a life here," she said. After many quarrels with her father, one day she started crying and finally asked him why he was not forcing Sena's sister to go back and live with them but her. In response her father said, "Your sister went to college and she is going to be a teacher very soon, so, it is okay if she lives in Istanbul or moves to another city to work. But you did not go to college. It is not proper for you to live by yourself and work."

Beneath these remarks that evoked Sena's feelings of inferiority and bitterness lies a distinctly gendered and class-based understanding of work, which posits that working is only desirable for women if it is in a middle-class, professional occupation. The employment of college-educated women is habitually discussed using affirmative terms such as professionalism and career advancement, while the work saleswomen engage in barely grants them a decent income, let alone a decent status. Working-class women, unlike their male counterparts (whose occupations granted them respect and resources, allowing them, for example, to be the breadwinners for their families), were looked down on by their families because of their jobs.

That the intersection of class and gender diminishes underprivileged women's work, opportunities and social position resonates on a larger level too. For instance, in urban areas, women without cultural capital are less likely to join the workforce. Indeed, there is a strong correlation between women's educational attainment and labour force participation in Turkey. While women with very little education have the lowest labour force participation rates, women with greater levels of educational attainment have the highest labour force participation rates. In 2017, for instance, the labour force participation rate of women who had less than a high school education was 27,2 percent, while the rate for women with secondary school education was 33,6 percent and for

women with higher education, 71,3 percent. In short, the probability that a woman is participating in the labour force is lowest if the woman is illiterate (15,2 percent).⁵

For saleswomen, who were weighed down by their own families' devaluing judgments, equally upsetting were the obtrusive remarks delivered by the customers on the sales floor. Nihal, a twenty-six-year-old saleswoman working at a large supermarket, was one of the women who had to deal with unpleasant interactions with customers who offered her unsolicited advice. One day when she was carrying boxes around the store, a female customer stopped her and suggested that she should find a husband instead of working like a porter. Although Nihal felt humiliated, she was not hindered by these obtrusive customers. Working, in and of itself, gave her something she prized greatly: autonomy. "Financially, I am not dependent on my family. I received my first salary ten years ago and I have never asked my parents for money since then," she said.

1.1 Rigid Bodies inside the Textile Workshop

Throughout my fieldwork among young women from low-income families living in Istanbul, I met many women like Nihal who supported themselves by working as saleswomen. For many of them, long working hours and low wages were the downsides of the sales floor; nonetheless, they maintained that they would rather work there than in a textile workshop. Indeed, the differences between the sales floor and the textile shop floor came up several times during my interviews with the saleswomen, even though my questions did not make any reference to textile workshops. The undesirable conditions at textile workshops often arose in response to my enquiries about why the women preferred sales work or when discussing the pros and cons of working on the sales floor. As they described the adverse conditions that typified the garment industry and explained why they chose the sales floor over the industrial production, the women rarely brought up the physically challenging nature of the work or the long hours and irregular schedules demanded of workers. Rather, they all complained about the gendered nature of workplace interactions. They articulated these complaints using the language of the body and emotions, mentioning, for instance, how the workplace made them feel: stiff, uncomfortable, tense, and nervous.

These stories about the textile shop floor that the saleswomen relayed also revealed different facets of shame that working-class women had to struggle with. The experiences of women who previously had worked at textile workshops, in particular, highlighted a version of shame that is deeply tied to women's bodies and sexuality.⁶ Inside

⁵ Data provided by Turkey Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT), Women in Statistics 2017, at: <https://turkstatweb.tuik.gov.tr/HbPrint.do?id=27594>; access: 10 April 2021.

⁶ See Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination. Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, New York 1990; Ayse Parla, *The 'Honor' of the State: Virginity Examinations in Turkey*, in: *Feminist*

the textile workshop, women did not necessarily experience the painful affective intensity that the emotion of shame entails. Nor did they view themselves in an entirely negative light, which often is the case with feeling shame. Here, the problem stemmed from the incorporation of shaming as an informal disciplinary mechanism in the workplace. Management and workers alike used shaming as a punitive practice against women in the name of enforcing a particular understanding of gendered community standards. In other words, the practice of shaming inside the textile workshops had less to do with the fact that women were in working-class occupations than that they were allegedly violating sexualised codes of conduct in the workplace.

For the women who participated in my research, their day-to-day existence at work in the textile workshop was made considerably more difficult by norms around sexuality and gender. The meanings and norms around feminine body and sexualised behaviour, as various studies have previously pointed out,⁷ routinely pervade the workplace and are reinforced through face-to-face interactions and codes of behaviour that frame the relationships between staff and management as well as the relations among workers themselves. For women, the gender norms inside the workplace might be at odds with their own behaviours, actions and even their everyday bodily mode of being feminine. That was what Sena, who had previously held a job at textile workshop, discovered soon after she started working at a textile workshop. “It was such a domineering environment,” she told me.

The gender norms made women’s bodies susceptible to the shaming tactics employed by management and workers alike. Women who did not strictly comply with the norms were often morally rebuked by their co-workers. Sena further described how this gendered system functioned on the shop floor:

“While I was working at the factory, people would have considered us immoral when we talked to guys working there. There are strong taboos against close interactions between men and women in the factory. According to people over there, men and women cannot be friends. Men and women might get married and have sex but cannot be friends! And it is impossible to change their ideas. Especially, middle-aged factory workers are so strict. They would say, ‘Why would you be friends with men? Aren’t girlfriends enough for you?’”

Sena’s description renders the sexualised meanings of feminine embodiment at work visible. The woman’s body, which inhabits the space of the textile workshop, is never solely the body of a sexless worker defined merely by its capacity to produce commodities. As much as it is a body that expends labour power, it is, at the same time, a

Studies, 27, 1 (2001), 65–88; Luna Dolezal, *The Body and Shame. Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body*, Lanham 2015.

⁷ See Joan Acker, *Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations*, in: *Gender & Society*, 4, 2 (1990), 139–58; Eileen M. Otis, *Beyond the Industrial Paradigm: Market-Embedded Labor and the Gender Organization of Global Service Work in China*, in: *American Sociological Review*, 73, (2008), 5–36; Amy Hanser, *The Gendered Rice Bowl: The Sexual Politics of Service Work in Urban China*, in: *Gender & Society*, 19 (2005), 581–600.

pronouncedly sexualised body, watched and scrutinised by others for its moral failings, and depending on the circumstances, seen as morally flawed. Since the woman's body is simultaneously subjected to the logic of capitalist accumulation and the norms of feminine propriety, the labour process inside the textile workshop is intricately bound up with the moral universe that these gender norms evoke.

Sena's description also demonstrates that the textile workshop is indeed a deeply and rigidly normative space, in which the feminine embodiment is relentlessly policed. The woman finds herself in a workplace where rigid sexual mores and norms establish the standards of conduct, and it is against these norms that she must negotiate her behaviour and interactions with others. In this normative space, the practice of shaming takes hold, becoming an ever-present threat that a woman must manage, because if she fails to comply with gender norms, she is likely to encounter hostility and punishment from others. The possibility of shaming underpins her limited bodily agency, as well as the fact that she does not have full autonomy over her body and self.

All too often, this situation places tough demands on the women with regard to their embodied conduct and personal interactions in the workplace. The feminised body, in addition to toiling for long hours six days a week, bore the brunt of constantly adjusting her gestures, postures, and expressions to fend off and manage the gendered meanings and moralising accusations about her bodily conduct that were continuously projected onto her. This shared distress often led women to take up certain embodied attitudes, albeit unreflectively. The women, for instance, told me that at work they had to watch themselves all the time. They frequently put considerable effort into distancing themselves from male co-workers and withdrawing even from casual conversations in an effort to prevent possible harassment or gossip. In describing her own course of action at work, Sena said that she had to give up on even things that were very commonplace for her: "Even though it is perfectly normal for me to be friends with men, I couldn't dare hang out with the guys working in the factory because I did not want people to gossip about me. I kept my distance from the guys."

Nesrin was another saleswoman who had also worked in the textile workshops. When I inquired about Nesrin's experience on the shop floor, she replied, "Oh! That's hard." She was sitting across the table from me in the staff canteen. She leaned back in her chair, in order to illustrate how a women worker coped with working at a textile workshop, and held up her hand, bringing her fingers into a tight fist. "Look," she said, showing her fist to me. "As a woman you have to be like this all the time." When I told her I did not exactly understand the meaning of the hand gesture, she went on and explained: "You have to be tough, you see? Be firm and stern so you can keep people away from you or you'll be regarded as loose."

The adjective 'loose', when used to refer to a particular woman, potentially puts her at risk. Loose women, along with virtuous wives and timid young girls, are longstanding gender tropes that were dominant in Turkey during the twentieth century. The feeling of shame often advanced moralised divides among women. While the

chaste woman was defined by her capacity to feel and express shyness and embarrassment, her diametrical opposite, the loose woman, was seen as lacking this emotional capacity and often brought shame upon herself by committing moral transgressions. This was because shame and embarrassment as emotions, to a great extent, dictated bodily norms of feminine modesty in Turkey. For women, knowing how to carry themselves in public, how to make eye-contact with men, when to avert their gaze, and blushing have all been bodily expressions of embarrassment signaling their modesty and virtuous femininity. Embarrassment has also drawn moral weight from its proximity to the Islamic faith. Women enact this emotional virtue through their bodily and emotional practices of dressing, bodily comportment, and manners in order to cultivate a pious femininity.⁸

To be sure, modesty, piety, and looseness, far from being reified constructs, are also heavily mediated by both gender and class relations in Turkey. Working as a high-school teacher does not necessarily lead to stigmatisation of women, but working at a textile workshop does.⁹ Indeed, the stigma attached to industrial work in Turkey has historically deterred low-income women from working outside the home, lest they damage their moral record as chaste women.¹⁰ The saleswomen who had previously worked at textile workshops were aware of the stigma, although they did not agree with it. Likewise, Islamic piety rules were not to be of great concern to the women who participated in my research. Many of them observed and celebrated religious holidays and fasted during the month of Ramadan, but were not engaged in the project of self-constitution through Islamic modesty norms and did not wear the headscarf.¹¹ Nevertheless, the feminised norms made it somewhat difficult for them to navigate the workplace environment in the textile industry, since the norms entailed grave implications for those women who committed moral infractions.

Women were acutely aware of the ever-present threat of shaming and other forms of punishment that the prospect of moral infraction carried for them. This distinctly gendered concern has acquired a bodily dimension as women cope with the threat of shaming. In order to ward off possible punishment, women contorted themselves to fit

⁸ For discussions around feminine modesty, see Lila Abu-Lughod, *Modesty Discourses: An Overview*, in: Suad Joseph ed., *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures*, vol. II: Family, Law and Politics, Leiden/Boston 2005, 494–497; Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety. The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, Princeton 2005; Ebru Boyar, *An Imagined Moral Community: Ottoman Female Public Presence, Honour, and Marginality*, in: idem and Kate Fleet eds., *Ottoman Women in Public Space*, Leiden/Boston 2016, 187–229.

⁹ See Ayşe Arslan, *Kapitalist Ataerkinin Ablukasında Kadınların Sınıf Deneyimleri: İzmir Konfeksiyon Sektöründe Üretim Süreçlerinin ve Gündelik Hayatın Cinsiyetçi Yapısı [Class Experiences of the Women Besieged by the Capitalist Patriarchy: The Sexist Structure of the Everyday Life and Labour Process in Izmir Textile Sector]*, in: *Praksis*, 52, 1 (2020), 135–155.

¹⁰ See Yavuz Selim Karakışla, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Savaş Yılları ve Çalışan Kadınlar: Kadınları Çalıştırma Cemiyeti (1916–1923) [War Years and Working Women in Ottoman Empire: The Society for Women's Employment (1916–1923)]*, Istanbul 2015.

¹¹ That said, not all women who wear it adhere strictly to the codes of feminine propriety.

within gender norms, regardless of their actual commitment to them. Often, they put a lot of effort into making sure that they did not act in ways that would be considered transgressive by others. The pre-emptive and unconscious responses that the women developed lent the feminine body specific embodied attitudes like guardedness, defensiveness, and vigilance. In a sense, most of the pressure and anxiety the women experienced hardened into bodily habits, creating habitual, unreflective modes of being in space and time, to the extent that bodily modes like customary alertness and watchfulness become inseparable from an everyday bodily mode of being feminine. They had to invest their attention and mental energy into watching themselves constantly to check whether, for instance, their underwear was visible through their clothes, or if they were too close to a man on public transport. They even developed a particular gait, walking fast, hurrying down the streets, and avoiding eye contact; their whole body displayed a strong sense of direction to indicate that they were heading home without wandering around.

In this light, Nesrin's hand gesture, a clenched fist, can be seen as a pointed allusion to the feminine body and its response to the normative space of the textile workshop. When she closed her hand into a fist, the gesture in a way replicated how a feminised body grows rigid under the pressure of the normative gender demands placed on it on the shop floor. The medium of the body reflects this pressure immediately: muscles tighten, the body stiffens, and habitual postures cease. On a corporeal level, the fluidity of the body is entirely lost. The body no longer moves in an unhindered way; losing its ability to comfortably dwell in space and to summon up its capacities when needed. In an environment where any sign of informality or casualness in a woman's manner can be taken as a sign of sexual licentiousness, the feminine body adopts an attitude of guardedness. Unlike a fluid body furnished with a sense of ease and smoothness, which is able to take on a relaxed demeanour when performing tasks, the body Nesrin describes functions like a bodily armour, which the feminine subject unconsciously assumes in an effort to make herself above reproach in the face of possible moralising accusations or sexual harassment inside the workplace.

The rigid body may thus be understood as the corporeal plight of women coping with the prospect of shame, which has its moorings in gender and class-based norms. When impeded by the threat of shaming, the working-class feminine body's relationship to the self and space unintentionally changes. The body's capacity to be fluid is severely compromised and rigidity becomes the body's default response, primarily manifested through bodily movements, manners of inhabiting the space, and comportment. She does not feel at ease or at one with herself in the (work)space and cannot move in space smoothly without a sense of hinderance. Her body grows tense and rigid, no longer inhabiting the space comfortably, but treading it vigilantly.

1.2 Bodies on the Sales Floor

Compared to the women who worked in the textile workshops, the women on the sales floor moved with greater fluidity, something evinced by the body's smooth and easy style of dwelling in space. For a saleswoman with prior work experience in the textile workshop, the difference was palpable. "I felt relieved after I started working here [at the supermarket]," said Sena, her remark illustrating how her body responded to working on the sales floor. On another day, I saw Nihal at work inside the supermarket. Her demeanour was confident. She carried herself with ease, feeling unconstrained in this space. Her interactions with male co-workers were relaxed and friendly, unencumbered by the anticipation of moral disapproval. When a customer asked for help in the milk section and kept her busy a little too long, Nihal showed no signs of impatience but dealt with the customer courteously. Because of the fast-paced nature of the work, she was often hurried, but was neither vigilant nor guarded.

On the sales floor women could drop their bodily armour or, more precisely, the constant need for it disappeared. The feminine body moved in space without a strong sense of hindrance. The fainter the threat of sexualised shaming became, the more a workplace could provide a sense of comfort and freedom for the women. Indeed, many of the saleswomen told me that they could earn more money as factory workers because their wages were comparable to, and at times higher than, those working in textile production. However, all argued that they would rather not work there because they found the environment restrictive for women. The women appreciated that sales work promoted face-to-face interactions between genders. They liked that gender mixing was the norm on the sales floor and they liked the polite and friendly interactions that characterised the sales work routine.

The gendered nature of the interactions on the sales floor had a lot to do with the dynamics of interactive service work. In contrast to manufacturing jobs, in which workers produce tangible products without encountering the people who buy them, sales work is defined by the interaction between workers and customers. Customers are a central part of the process, and the quality of the interaction with customers affects the quality of the service delivered. Service encounters were managed carefully, with principles of equality and courtesy underlying the service transactions. Sales workers were expected to pay quick and respectful attention to customers, deliver the services they requested through our words, gestures, and manners, and display both deference and enjoyment in their interactions. Paying equal regard to customers, making eye contact with them, being friendly, courteous, extroverted and sociable on the sales floor – all these were essential parts of their job.

These interactions not only relieved women of the need for bodily armouring but also furnished them with a sense of egalitarianism. Women treated relationships with their male co-workers and managers relatively casually, calling each other by their names but addressing one other with 'Mr.' and 'Mrs.' or 'Ms.' in the presence of

customers. During coffee and lunch breaks, workers spent time together talking and cracking jokes. They sometimes made fun of irate customers, imitating their behaviour and mannerisms, or chatted about the beauty products sold in the store. For some saleswomen, friendship was a perk of the job. Ela, for instance, told me, “in our environment, friendship between men and women is normal. We don’t even think about it; we take it for granted. We hang out together all the time. We go to movies, go to dinners together.”

1.3 Shaming on the Sales Floor

This, however, does not mean that shaming practices are fully banished on the sales floor. On the contrary, sales workers, at times, found themselves on the receiving end of verbal shaming at work. During my fieldwork, I was able to observe the particular ways in which sales workers were subjected to shaming practices. Especially when I carried out participant observation on the sales floor to collect field data and worked as a cashier at a large supermarket in Istanbul as a part of my ethnographic research, I acquired first-hand experience of how store managers, or at least some of them, used the practice of shaming to discipline and humiliate sales workers. The nature of shame in this instance was not rooted in women’s sexuality or sexualised behaviour, but was distinctly class-based. Stemmed from allegations of petit larceny, the shaming practices violated worker’s dignity and undermined their value as well as the rights to be treated with respect.

I experienced this practice of shaming shortly after beginning my stint as a cashier at a large supermarket in Istanbul. One day, just before my daily shift on the sales floor started, I walked down the aisle carrying my cashier box with me and, before proceeding to the counter, got myself a bottle of water from the shelves. There were still a few minutes remaining until my shift began and I placed my cashier box over the counter before paying for my water. Upon seeing me by the counter, some customers quickly queued up at the check-out line, pressuring me to open my register a few minutes early. Just when I started to run my register, I was irked by the loud voice of our store manager yelling at me: “I can see that you have a bottle of water sitting over there. Are you going to pay for it or not?”

Surprised and confused, I glanced up at her to understand what her question really suggested. Having studied her face quickly, her eyes looking straight at me, brows furrowed, I became certain that she was not asking a benign question but talking down to me. Her accusation, as well as her aggressive and scolding attitude, made me very self-conscious and anxious. In an instant, the blood rushed to my cheeks and I felt on my face the burning sensation of shame her remark had induced. “Oh, yes, I will do that in a minute,” I said, trying to control my voice and putting considerable effort into keeping my composure. “I am checking out a few customers,” I continued, pointing at the

customers waiting at my counter. Flustered, I quickly took care of the customers and then paid for the water at the next cashier. A few hours later, towards the evening, when I began to feel calm again, a seasoned co-worker showed up at my counter. In a friendly voice she said, "I saw your cheeks went all red when she attacked you like that." I smiled quietly without saying anything. In a reassuring tone, she continued, "Please don't feel bad. Some managers are like this. I have seen her do this many times here with other workers. We are not potential shoplifters but store managers think that they can shame us like this. They think they have power over us, but they are just abusing their power."

Later on, during my research, I attempted to further inquire into the dynamics of employee theft to see whether it was an issue that impacted the supermarket where I worked. I did not find any evidence that it was a significant issue for the company. However, I heard different sales workers' accounts of witnessing situations in which managers made vague or direct allegations of theft against sales workers. It seemed like these shaming practices were performative, mostly carried out by store managers on the sales floor and in the presence of other workers. Questioning a worker's dignity, treating them as potential shoplifters, and calling them out in front of their co-workers inside the store were among the practices that some of the managers reportedly utilised in order to create pliant workers by making them feel degraded. The sales workers were disturbed by these shaming practices and experienced intense emotions of anger, embarrassment, and even shame when confronted with the accusations, but the shaming practice did not seem to have changed their mundane bodily ways of being. Their embodied habits, gestures, emotional attitudes on the sales floor, mundane ways of handling the commodities sold inside the store and their bodily mode of approaching others remained unaltered.

2. Life After Shame?

It is worth noting that the corporeal plight of women in Turkey is not confined to the workplace. Nor is the practice of shaming the only factor in it. Consider, for instance, public transit spaces where feminine embodiment is particularly susceptible to violence and attacks. For women across the country, sexual assault and harassment on public transport is by no means a rare occurrence, with aggressive comments, catcalling, staring, stalking, unwanted flirting, and public masturbation being just some of the forms of violence that women are likely to encounter. The anxiety and stress such a predicament entails often weighed down the women I interviewed. Even when still at work, they bristled at the thought of stressful bus rides. One day, after I heard Şule, a saleswoman working at the deli section, exasperatedly sigh, I asked her if everything was okay. "Yeah sure," she said. Then, with a wry smile, she continued, "It would be much easier if I was a man though." It was about 10pm, the closing time for the supermarket and we were getting ready to leave work. Şule particularly disliked the evening shifts

when she had to take the late night bus back home. “Oh, I hate those bus rides,” she told me. “It is a long trip back home and the bus is packed with men. Often I am the only woman on the bus and surrounded by men. I am not scared of them. I will fight back if someone tries to do something to me. But the feeling is so unpleasant, makes me feel tense.”

The corporeal plight of women is generated by social relations of power and domination. The body is embedded within a complex web of institutions, practices, and discourses that sustain gender, race, and class hierarchies and it responds to these hierarchies by adopting embodied habits and unconscious ways of being in the world. The body, nevertheless, is responsive to a flattening of the social hierarchies too. And when hierarchies are eradicated or unmade, the way women experience their bodies profoundly changes. The world, for instance, appears to woman like a place she can settle into without much strain and effort. She no longer experiences her body as a burden to be dragged along and vigilantly protected. Her body becomes a bundle of capacities that enable her to access the world and to seize the opportunities that are available to her.

Indeed, this is the emotional and bodily effect of improvements in gender equality for women in Turkey. Over the last few decades, the expanded education and employment opportunities as well as the legislation on gender issues that led to a new Civil Code and a new Penal Code, yielded structural improvements to gender equality. Despite the current government’s efforts to undermine gender equality in Turkey, these changes continue to impact women’s lives. In the realm of bodily life, these transformations affect women’s sensory and emotional habits, changing how they experience embodiment, move in space, and relate to others. The saleswomen’s complex bodily and emotional experiences serve as examples of these changes. The saleswomen I interviewed, to a certain extent, felt at ease in the workplace and moved comfortably in it without anticipating hostility, including acts of shaming. No longer forced to invest much of their attention in watching themselves to make sure that they avoid the threat of shaming, they were able to abandon embodied attitudes of vigilance and watchfulness.

Shame, as Silvan Tomkins put forth, is an emotion that not only inhibits interest and joy, but also thwarts contact and communication. After all, “shame is the affect of indignity, of defeat, of transgression and of alienation”.¹² When the predominance of shame, along with practices of shaming, is on the wane, different bodily possibilities for feminine existence emerge. The saleswomen’s work experiences and lifestyles illustrate some of the possibilities that are available to working-class women in the context of globalisation. But just as importantly, or perhaps even more importantly, their experiences demonstrate that fluidity as a bodily capacity is associated with and emerges

¹² Silvan Tomkins, *Affect, Imaginary, and Consciousness*, vol. II: *Negative Affects*, New York 1963, 133.

from the eradication of gender hierarchies. Once the feminine body is no longer inhibited by the conscious or subconscious constraints generated by gender hierarchies, women can regain the bodily states associated with fluidity.¹³

Such a change reflects a sensibility that is orientated towards interest, enjoyment, communication and curiosity. Not that a woman instantly has the world at her feet now. Rather, the world appears to her as a sphere ripe with possibilities as well as antagonisms. It is still a world full of dangers and hostilities, but encountering the world takes on a new meaning. She is now excited about and enjoys other human beings, her body, herself, and the world around her, while at the same time remaining vulnerable to the attacks, dangers, and the vicissitudes of life. Her gaze no longer constantly scans or watches out for potential threats. Now, her eyes meet other's, claim mutuality, contact, and communication.

3. Conclusion

Emotions, bodies and the hierarchies of class and gender are complexly yet discernibly linked. Just as emotions are felt in the body, so, too, are gender hierarchies and class-based inequalities manifested in bodily ways. In other words, the overlapping effects of gender and class are not only social, political, and economic, but also bodily and emotional. The concept of fluidity, as I argued in this article, helps identify and illustrate the emotional and bodily costs of intersecting hierarchies of class and gender. A concept that delineates the particular way in which the self utilises her own bodily capacities without hindrance, fluidity refers to habitual, bodily ways of being in space that facilitates the self's smooth interactions with the world and others. By applying the concept of fluidity, I illuminated a range of bodily and emotional experiences – including shame and sexualised as well as class-based shaming – that are refashioned by class and gender hierarchies. These social hierarchies, as the experiences of working-class women in Turkey illustrate, evoke particular emotions such as anxiety and shame, which undermine the body's capacity to be fluid, forcing women to adopt guarded bodily modes of being. Emotions, nevertheless, do not occupy the body forever. Just as they enter, they recede. An analysis of fluidity, in this sense, demonstrates that some of the conditions that support fluidity as a bodily modality can be enabled by the overturning of class and gender hierarchies.

¹³ It is important to underline that I take fluidity – and the desire for fluidity, for that matter – not as a universal that every-body always desires in every context. The desire for fluidity that the women workers who participated in my research expressed may not be embraced by other groups of women living in different circumstances. Fluidity, in this sense, needs to be historicised or contextualised, not hastily generalised.