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How Are Migrant Nanny Identities Materialized on Social Media? Migrant Nanny Identities on Social Media: A New Materialist Analysis Göçmen Çocuk Bakıcısı Kimlikleri Sosyal Medyada Nasıl Vücut Buluyor? Yeni Materyalist Bir Çözümleme

Abstract

Social media platforms are potent sites of advertisement, promotion, and communication in Türkiye's migrant nanny market. While parents resort to recruitment agencies' social media accounts to find nannies, agencies compete to attract clients through posts featuring candidates. Nannies also form their own online networks to share experiences. Drawing on the diversity of posts featuring manifold nanny identities, the article examines social media's role in producing fluid and unstable identity categories. Despite the growing significance of digital platforms, scholarship has paid limited critical attention to how they shape migrant nanny identities. Whereas much of the digital media literature approaches identity as representational, this study adopts Karen Barad's performative perspective, foregrounding the role of materiality. From a new materialist standpoint, we contend that digital materializations of nanny identities are dynamic boundary-drawing practices that construct, confirm, disseminate, or subvert dominant social and cultural norms. The study combines interviews conducted using snowball sampling with a purposive analysis of social media posts, showing how physical settings, visuals, and captions participate in forming migrant nanny subjectivities as contingent and continuously evolving formations.

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Öz

Sosyal medya platformları, Türkiye'nin göçmen çocuk bakıcısı pazarında reklam, tanıtım ve iletişimin güçlü mecraları haline geldi. Ebeveynler uygun bakıcı bulmak için istihdam ajanslarının sosyal medya hesaplarına başvururken, ajanslar bakıcı adaylarını öne çıkaran paylaşımlarla müşterileri çekmek için rekabet ediyor. Bakıcılar da deneyimlerini paylaşmak üzere kendi çevrimiçi ağlarını oluşturuyor. Farklı bakıcı kimliklerini ortaya çıkaran paylaşımların çeşitliliğinden hareketle bu çalışma, sosyal medyanın akışkan ve değişken kimlik kategorilerinin üretimindeki rolünü inceliyor. Dijital platformların artan etkisine rağmen, bu platformların göçmen bakıcı kimliklerini nasıl şekillendirdiğine ilişkin eleştirel çalışmalar sınırlı kalıyor. Dijital medya literatüründe kimlik çoğunlukla temsili bir çerçevede ele alınırken, bu çalışma Karen Barad'ın maddeselliğin rolünü öne çıkaran performatif yaklaşımını benimsiyor. Yeni materyalist bir bakışla, bakıcı kimliklerinin dijital maddileşmelerinin, baskın sosyal ve kültürel normları inşa eden, doğrulayan, yayan veya altüst eden dinamik sınır çizme pratikleri olduğu savunuluyor. Çalışma, kartopu örnekleme ile yapılan görüşmeleri amaçlı bir sosyal medya analiziyle birleştirilerek fiziksel düzenlemelerin, görsellerin ve metinlerin göçmen bakıcı öznelliklerini koşullu ve sürekli dönüşen oluşumlar olarak nasıl şekillendirdiğini gösteriyor.

Keywords

Migrant nannies, recruitment agencies, nanny employers, social media, new materialism

Anahtar Kelimeler

Göçmen çocuk bakıcıları, istihdam ajansları, çocuk bakıcısı işverenleri, sosyal medya, yeni materyalizm

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Introduction

Among domestic workers, migrant nannies have been in increasing demand in major Turkish cities since the 1990s, particularly in middle- and upper-middle-class dual-income households.¹ As the market expanded, recruitment agencies became key actors in organizing access to migrant care labor. More recently, digital platforms have played a critical role in reshaping how care work is found, framed, and experienced. Social media, in particular, has emerged as a central site for circulating information, constructing reputations, and establishing visibility. Parents increasingly turn to agency-run accounts to browse potential employees and evaluate profiles, while agencies use these platforms as marketing tools to showcase candidates. At the same time, migrant nannies participate in digital spaces by sharing experiences, seeking advice, forming support networks, and, in some cases, self-advertising their labor.

Despite the growing significance of digital platforms, existing scholarship has largely focused on physical sites of labor and face-to-face engagements. Migration and domestic labor, of which care work is a central component, have long been key concerns for scholars examining global care dynamics. A substantial body of poststructuralist research has shown how migrant domestic work is embedded in gendered, racialized, and class-based hierarchies of power (Rollins, 1985; Lutz, 2002; Parreñas, 2015). These studies illuminate asymmetrical employer–employee relations and the systematic undervaluation of care labor. They also demonstrate how migrant workers are situated within transnational regimes of labor control, emotional expectations, and gendered ideologies of care (Federici, 2012; Safuta, 2016).

Traditionally an emigration country, Türkiye became a major destination for migrant care workers following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and subsequent economic instability in neighboring regions. Since the 1990s, women from the Caucasus and Central Asia, and more recently from Southeast Asia and Africa, have migrated to Türkiye to work in domestic labor, drawn by wage differentials, geographical proximity, and relatively accessible visa regimes (Erdoğan & Toksöz, 2013). In later decades, this workforce diversified to include workers from countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Kenya, and Uganda, many of whom entered through recruitment agencies or personal networks. They are predominantly employed in urban middle- and upper-middle-class households, often in live-in positions that combine caregiving and household maintenance (Akalin, 2007; İçduygu et al., 2009).

Before the widespread use of digital platforms, recruitment and representation relied largely on informal networks, intermediary actors, printed advertisements, and face-to-face recommendations. During the 1990s and early 2000s, placement processes were mediated by personal referrals and small-scale agencies operating by telephone and in physical offices, limiting workers' visual and narrative self-presentation. The digitalization of care labor has significantly transformed these dynamics. Today, social media platforms enable the circulation of curated visual portfolios, short-form videos, and standardized narratives that render

caregiving identities continuously visible, comparable, and algorithmically distributed. By situating these digital practices alongside earlier forms of mediation, we show how digital infrastructures reconfigure visibility and access in care labor markets.

This study addresses the gap between research on domestic work and the expanding field of digital media studies. While digital platforms increasingly mediate labor relations and shape expectations in affective care economies, research has paid limited critical attention to how they shape migrant nanny identities in the Turkish context. We argue that nanny identities are neither purely self-produced nor externally imposed, but emerge through entangled relations between users, digital infrastructures, and socio-cultural norms. By attending to these entanglements, the study moves beyond representational accounts and foregrounds how subjectivities are materially enacted through socio-technical relations.

Drawing on an analysis of social media posts featuring migrant nannies, we show that social media operates as a performative space, in new materialist terms, where subjectivities are continuously produced, temporarily stabilized, and reconfigured. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok foreground relations between nannies, employers, and recruitment agencies, through which dominant identities shaped by gendered, class-based, and cultural norms are reinforced and, at times, reworked or subverted.

Aim and Methodology

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This study approaches materiality as constitutive of migrant nanny subjectivities on social media. Building on Karen Barad's new materialist approach, we examine how social media platforms function as sites where migrant nanny identities are materialized, circulated, and occasionally subverted through boundary-making practices.

To address this inquiry, we conducted semi-structured interviews with migrant nannies and employers located in Izmir. Methodologically, the study is situated within a post-qualitative orientation (MacLure, 2013; Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; St. Pierre, 2021), which prioritizes relational analysis over generalizable representation, focusing on processes of becoming rather than fixed categories. The analysis focuses on how migrant nanny identities become intelligible across digital and embodied contexts.

Izmir serves as the field site due to its significance as an urban context where migrant care labor is both visible and organized through formal and informal networks, making it a relevant site for examining the entanglement of digital mediation and everyday labor practices. The sample comprises 12 participants, including 9 migrant nannies—primarily from the Philippines, alongside participants from Kenya and Turkmenistan—aged between 33 and 42, and 3 Turkish employers aged between 31 and 44. This number was determined through an iterative process of data collection, with sampling continuing until sufficient variation across experiences was reached while maintaining analytical depth across cases. The sample size supports a detailed analysis of connections between nannies, employers, and digital environments.

Participant recruitment relied on snowball sampling through existing labor relations and social media networks. Initial contacts generated additional participants through referrals within these networks. Employers in the study include current or former employers of the interviewed nannies, enabling the analysis to capture perspectives from both sides of the employment context. Quotations in the study draw on these interviews; however, not all interviews are cited directly. Selections follow the criteria of analytical coherence and relevance to the study's conceptual framework.

Interviews took place face-to-face and via digital channels, including video calls and written messaging, depending on participants' availability and preferences. Participation remained voluntary, with informed consent in place and ethical approval in effect from the Ethics Commission Board of Yaşar University (No. 01, 21.10.2022). The study is grounded in the authors' positionality as non-migrant academic researchers. Access to the field was developed through social media mapping, professional networks, and direct contact with participants. Positionality functions as situated and relational, acknowledging that knowledge production emerges through engagements between researchers, participants, and methodological choices.

In addition to interviews, we analyze selected social media posts on Instagram and TikTok. We approach these platforms as distinct environments with different affordances, user dynamics, and modes of visibility that shape how subjectivities take form.

For the social media analysis, we adopt a purposive and exploratory approach. We identify posts through hashtags related to migrant nanny labor (e.g., #bakıcı [#nanny], #çocukbakıcısı [#childcare], #bakıcıarıyorum [#lookingforananny], #bebekbakıcısı [#babysitter], #yabancıbakıcı [#foreignnanny]) and through algorithmic recommendations that surface widely circulated content. The dataset consists of approximately 70 posts collected between 2022 and 2026 across Instagram and TikTok². We select posts based on their relevance to identity formation, engagement levels, and the presence of visual and narrative features that highlight connections between bodies, objects, and spaces. Developed over an extended research period, these materials function as analytically significant cases that inform the study's conceptual framework beyond their specific moment of publication.

We follow a theoretically informed interpretive approach in the analysis. Through iterative engagement between empirical material and the conceptual framework of new materialism, we develop analytical categories including idealization, actualization, and subversion. We analyze visual and textual elements in relation to spatial arrangements, bodily positioning, object relations, spatial settings, and platform affordances, paying attention to how these elements contribute to the materialization of subjectivities.

The Migrant Nanny Market on Social Media

The increasing demand for migrant nannies in Türkiye is linked to Turkish nannies' reluctance to take on live-in positions that extend beyond daytime hours (Bora, 2010).³ Driven by eco-

conomic instability in their home countries, women from neighboring former socialist regions, particularly the Caucasus and Central Asia, and more recently Southeast Asia and Africa, have migrated to Türkiye to work in the caregiving sector (Akalm, 2007; Turkish Statistical Institute, 2022). In response to this demand, recruitment agencies promoting migrant nannies have proliferated since the early 2000s (Deniz, 2018). These agencies act as intermediaries between employers and care workers by arranging placements and formalizing employment through contracts that offer legal protection.

Recruitment agencies highlight the quality of their services, the qualifications and experience of candidates, and the level of support they provide to families (Souralová, 2015). Today, social media environments, particularly Instagram and TikTok, have largely replaced agency websites, forums, and word-of-mouth channels in connecting candidates with potential employers. Their multimodal and algorithm-driven structures enable the circulation of visual profiles, short videos, and standardized descriptions. These features make them effective tools for organizing the nanny market⁴. Agency posts typically present individual candidates through photographs and lists of qualifications, which contribute to the circulation of an idealized image of a diligent and compliant worker. Employers participate by engaging with these posts and sharing their own expectations, while nannies' personal accounts introduce more varied and situated narratives that sometimes challenge these dominant portrayals.

The audiences addressed by agencies, employers, and nannies differ significantly. Social media algorithms (Cheney-Lippold, 2011; Gillespie, 2014) play a central role in directing content to specific groups and shaping which aspects of nanny identities become more visible. In this sense, identities take form within particular audiences and contexts. Social media environments thus support the circulation of multiple and shifting displays of migrant nannies, which vary depending on who produces the content and for whom it is intended.

Performativity and Identity Production

Academic work on performativity dates back to sociologist Erving Goffman's seminal work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Goffman, 1956). There, Goffman theorizes how individuals function as theatrical performers on the social stage, strategically producing their identity and managing their impression. His work is unmistakably based on the essentialist assumption of a core identity, which a person may consciously adjust and stage differently in various settings⁵. This viewpoint is powerfully challenged by social constructivists who address the complex layering of specific circumstances and power relations in identity production. The latter view identity as multi-layered, unstable, and fluid. Emphasizing the significance of repeated performances in the production of identities, critical theorist Judith Butler (1990) draws on the notions of regulatory power and discursive practices propounded by Michel Foucault (1975). Although Butler's focus is specifically on the gendered formation

of the subject, their work helps to understand the social and performative aspects of identity production within discursive frameworks and language/power dynamics.

The anthropocentric perspective of social constructivist approaches is challenged by such new materialist theorists as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987), Karen Barad (2003; 2007), Bruno Latour (2005), and Rosi Braidotti (2013), who emphasize the importance of matter, and its entanglement with material and discursive elements in the production of identities. While their emphases may vary, they all underscore the entanglement of matter and meaning, directing attention toward the intra-actions between the body, the self, and the world, and ask how matter contributes to the workings of power on one hand, and identity production on the other⁶. Contemporary scholars of digital media examine social media performances, emphasizing their crucial role in shaping self-representation (van Dijck, 2009; Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2011; Lasén & García, 2015; Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). However, both a new materialist perspective and a specific focus on identity production in the childcare labor market remain conspicuously absent in current scholarship.

Building on new materialist premises, our approach critiques essentialist views on the relationship between performativity and identity production. Engaging critically yet affirmatively with social constructivist perspectives, new materialist studies understand identity as not only dynamic and shaped by space-time-specific conditions, but also as emerging through intra-relations with matter (Coole & Frost, 2010; Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012). In other words, identities are constituted through performative acts that involve the intra-action of subjects, materials, and spaces, as well as a broad range of material-discursive forces and iterative reconfigurations of power relations (Barad, 2007). Performativity is thus intricately entangled with apparatuses of power, through which identities are continuously produced and reproduced.

As Barad (2007: 49) contends:

Performative approaches call into question representationalism's claim that there are representations on the one hand, and ontologically separate entities awaiting representation, on the other, and focus inquiry on the practices or performances of representing, as well as the productive effects of those practices and the conditions for their efficacy.

Extending this perspective, Barad (2007: 218) further argues:

There are different possibilities for reworking the material-discursive apparatuses of bodily production, including (but not limited to) acts of subversion, resistance, opposition, and revolution. The changes enacted will depend on the specific nature of the agential intra-actions (not all possibilities are open at each moment), which may include the distribution of agency across

human, nonhuman, and cyborgian forms, or rather the iterative (re)constitution of humans and nonhumans through ongoing agential enactments.

Barad's viewpoint underscores that identity production is not only iterative but also contingent, as specific configurations of agency shape which transformations become possible in particular contexts. Drawing on this anti-representationalist stance, we conceptualize nanny identities not as a priori entities to be represented, but as sites of ongoing intra-active becomings, continuously produced through complex agential intra-actions of multiple material-discursive practices (Barad, 2007: 206)⁷. We therefore examine how migrant nanny identities are performed and produced on social media, where they are continually reconfigured within specific material and discursive contexts.

From a Baradian perspective, we argue that social media posts function as apparatuses through which identities emerge and evolve via the "*entanglement of multiple material-discursive practices*" (Barad, 2007: 206). From this standpoint, such posts function as boundary-drawing practices, or apparatuses of bodily production. Our analysis of posts that feature migrant nanny performances shows that social media not only reinforces and produces idealized nanny identities, but also enables their diverse actualizations and subversions. In what follows, we focus on the performative possibilities of nanny identities.

Findings

We organize the findings around three analytically distinct yet connected modes through which migrant nanny subjectivities materialize on social media: idealizations, actualizations, and subversions. We do not treat these as thematic categories describing different types of nannies or as sequential stages of formation. Rather, we use them to identify distinct material-discursive apparatuses through which subjectivities emerge, stabilize temporarily, and undergo reconfiguration.

Idealizations refer to the formation of normative and aspirational nanny images through stylized and often exaggerated portrayals that foreground compliance, productivity, and emotional labor. Actualizations capture how these idealized forms become operational within standardized recruitment practices, where agency-driven formats translate abstract expectations into repeatable and marketable profiles. Subversions, in turn, describe practices through which nannies rework dominant formations by disrupting expected relations between bodies, objects, and spaces, often through playful, affective, or self-directed performances.

Drawing on Barad's (2007) conceptualization of apparatuses as boundary-drawing practices, in each subsection we examine how specific configurations of bodies, platforms, visual conventions, spatial arrangements, objects, and discourses intra-act to produce particular subjectivities.

Idealizations

My tasks as a nanny include caring for the twins, cooking, ironing, cleaning, and tidying. I learned Turkish cuisine here and initially felt anxious about managing both childcare and cooking. (Gulya, Turkmen Nanny, Izmir, 2023)

Our Kenyan nanny, Brenda, struggles with using household items correctly while cooking. My new high-quality kitchen products are now scratched. She uses metal spoons with a non-stick frying pan, for instance. She is not aware of the value of certain household items, leading to somewhat careless use of household goods. (Sera, Turkish Employer, Izmir, 2022)

In the above statements, both Gulya and Sera express their initial disappointment in their roles as a nanny and an employer, respectively. While Gulya struggles to fulfill the multiple tasks assigned to her, Sera is dissatisfied with Brenda's incompetence with household appliances, leaving Brenda feeling inadequate. It appears that neither nannies nor employers fully meet mutual expectations. The experiences of Gulya, Sera, and Brenda are not isolated instances. Many employers frequently change nannies, and many nannies are willing to change employers. Thus, nanny agencies' claims to deliver high-quality service through 'ideal matches' remain more a projection than a guarantee. How, then, is the figure of the 'ideal' nanny and employers' perceptions of it produced in digital media, and through which material-discursive entanglements?

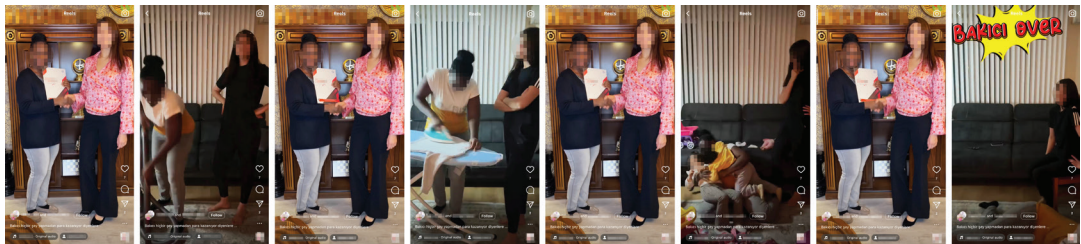
To address these questions, we focus on two videos published on Instagram and TikTok. Both based in Istanbul, the first was published on December 4, 2023, by a collaboration of two recruitment agencies, and the second on January 7, 2024, by an employer. Shot in domestic settings, both videos narrate imaginary situations involving the relationship between a nanny and her work environment. Although presented as light-hearted parodies of working conditions, we argue that they must be taken seriously in relation to the production of the ideal nanny figure.

The first video is a Reel that opens with and intermittently features an agency representative shaking the hand of an African nanny who holds the agency's folder (Figure 1). In three separate sequences, separated by the opening image, the Reel shows the nanny frantically cleaning, ironing, and caring for the children. In each case, she is deeply entangled with objects (i.e., vacuum cleaner, iron, toys) and subjects (i.e., two young children) as the agency representative stands aside, watching her from a couch in postures that unmistakably signal control, criticism, and superiority. Standing motionless, almost like a disembodied gaze, she is not physically in touch with any object in the room. The couch and the representative's body are detached from the nanny, who is literally turned away from them. Despite their relative proximity, the entanglement of objects with distinct bodies creates both physical and social boundaries. In the final scene, the nanny falls to the floor in exhaustion, while the agency

representative is seated on the couch with a smile of satisfaction. The flickering sign on top reads, *'The nanny is over.'* While the configuration of the floor, the ironing board, the vacuum cleaner, and the nanny's body produce signs of slavish labor, the couch and the agency representative's body produce those of authority and control.

Figure 1

Screenshots from a collaborative Instagram Reel by two recruitment agencies: *'This is for those who say nannies earn money without doing anything.'*



Source: Anonymized open-access Instagram post (2023), last accessed April 2026.

The fast-paced rhythm of the background techno music and the Reel caption, *'This is for those who say nannies earn money without doing anything. 🤔🤔🤔'* are likely meant to communicate the intended cheekiness of the post. Yet there is something deeply disturbing about the caricatured display of power, hierarchy, and control on the one hand, and the agency's use of the latter as part of a promotional Instagram account on the other. What is the agency communicating there? That they continuously check on the performances of the nannies whom they market? That the potential employers may expect a diverse range of duties to be performed by their chosen nanny? Are nannies and recruitment agencies in agreement in terms of exhaustive work performance? Is customer satisfaction guaranteed in the end, even if the nanny is 'over'? And what about the African nanny who is asked to play the role of a tormented worker in front of the camera? What does she have to say? Used as part of the recruitment agencies' marketing strategy, the Reel can certainly not be dismissed merely as a distasteful joke. As an apparatus, the video not only parodies but materializes the idealized nanny image by positioning bodies, objects, and gestures in hierarchical relation to one another.

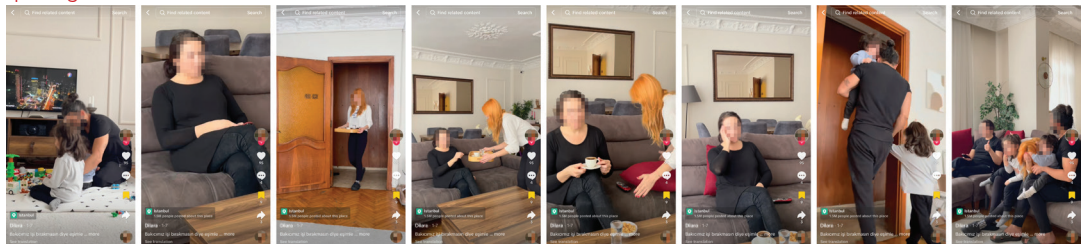
Research reveals that although nannies are initially hired for childcare, they are often assigned additional responsibilities (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003; Akalin, 2007; Parreñas, 2015; Kim, 2017). The line between nannying and other household duties can become indistinct in the childcare sector, as nannies are expected to manage the household seamlessly. The Reel shows that the ideal nanny image is not a pre-existing category but emerges through the arrangement of bodies, objects, and actions within the scene. The distribution of the subjects and objects in space, their position in relation to each other, sounds, and discursive elements intra-act in boundary drawing performances that produce not only the idealized nanny iden-

tity but also the so-called professionalism of the agency and the expectations of the potential employer all entangled in a web of power relations.

The second video post on TikTok, captioned, *'The performance we put on to prevent our nanny from quitting,'* is like a response to the first one, which parodies employers' belief that *'Nannies earn money without doing anything.'* The video opens with a scene portraying a father struggling to manage his two children, who are playing on the living room floor (Figure 2). His visible effort to care for both children at once hints at his challenge, while an ethnically marked nanny figure sits comfortably on the couch, casually flipping through TV channels with a remote control. The scene shifts as the mother enters the room, carrying a tray with Turkish coffee, snacks, and water. With a timid smile, she approaches the nanny and offers the treats she has prepared. Her service does not stop there as she carefully takes a pillow from the couch, fluffs it up, and gently places it behind the nanny's back to ensure her comfort.

As the nanny watches TV, the noisy children playing nearby irritate her. Frustrated, she dismissively exclaims, *'Ugh, you are giving me a headache, hey!'* The father, immediately apologetic, ushers the children out of the room, leaving the nanny to relax. The final scene shows the nanny stretched out on the corner seat, fully at ease, while the father, mother, and two children are seated on the adjacent couch. The father turns to the nanny and, with a tone of gratitude, says, *'We know how tired you are. So, before you even ask, we have decided to give you a raise this month. We hope this decision makes you happy. Thank you, we appreciate your service.'* The nanny, with her eyes fixed on the TV screen, gives the father a thumbs-up.

Figure 2
Screenshots from a TikTok post by a nanny employer: *'The performance we put on to prevent our nanny from quitting.'*



Source: Anonymized open-access TikTok post (2024), last accessed April 2026.

The post ironically reverses the expected roles of a nanny and employer, offering a hyperbolic portrayal of power relations within the domestic space. The nanny's position is constructed through her detachment from both domestic labor and caregiving responsibilities, while the parents' exaggerated attentiveness reconfigures them as service providers. Rather than dismantling dominant expectations, the video rearticulates them, highlighting the instability of this figure and the performative conditions through which it emerges. More than a humorous skit, this representation functions as an apparatus through which employers' expectations are materialized through domestic objects and spatial practices, consistent with

new materialist understandings of apparatuses as boundary-drawing practices (Barad, 2007). This configuration can also be read as an assemblage in which bodies, objects, and affects co-constitute one another (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). This role reversal exposes underlying tensions in the employer–nanny relationship, revealing how expectations promoted by recruitment agencies persist in the lived realities of domestic labor.

Posts on digital media platforms play an important role in shaping identities, expectations, and power hierarchies in paid childcare. They contribute significantly to the formation of the figures of the agency, the employer, and the nanny as distinct identities emerging through performative materializations shaped by the entanglement of human and non-human elements (Braidotti, 2013; Latour, 2005). From this perspective, agency circulates across heterogeneous elements, including digital interfaces, domestic objects, and visual formats, understood as forms of vibrant matter (Bennett, 2010). The Instagram Reel constructs the agency as a professional auditor guaranteeing the quality of nannies' work, the employer as a satisfied customer, and the nanny as a compliant and industrious worker. The TikTok video reinforces this construction by presenting employers performing the tasks they expect from the nanny.

We argue that these videos function as material-discursive apparatuses that materialize this figure beyond representation. Power operates not only symbolically but materially, through the spatial positioning of bodies, the distribution of movement and stillness, the alignment of objects with laboring bodies, and the temporal acceleration produced through sound and editing. These intra-actions (Barad, 2007) draw boundaries between authority and submission, professionalism and exhaustion, and satisfaction and disposability. This figure thus emerges as an effect of boundary-drawing practices, momentarily stabilized through the orchestration of human and non-human elements that render intensive care labor both normalized and marketable. Although both posts can conveniently be put aside as rather distasteful jokes, what is disturbing is their exposure of an open secret: What is caricatured there also portrays an idealization that produces a clear power hierarchy in tandem with the figures of the agency, the employer, and the nanny. The question that follows is to what extent these idealizations are actualized by nanny performances in agencies' promotional posts.

Actualizations

I am personally against the use of agency-made nanny advertisement posts. Due to the intense competition among recruitment agencies, these advertisements only tend to highlight the agency rather than truly showcase the nanny's skills and abilities. (Rose, Filipino Nanny, Izmir, 2024)
The nannies I worked with lacked any real knowledge of childcare. However, you would not know that from agencies' Instagram ad posts, where nannies try to come across as very charming, but to me, it feels fake. (Belma, Turkish Employer, Izmir, 2023)

Rose’s and Belma’s statements point to a tension between the standardized presentation of nannies and the lived realities of care work. Recruitment agencies mediate this tension by producing and circulating curated profiles across social media platforms. Their posts mobilize a professionalized vocabulary (such as “service,” “training,” “guarantee,” “support,” “legal,” and “skills”) that situates care work within a service-oriented framework (Figure 3). Through the selection of images, captions, and hashtags, these elements participate in the materialization of a professional and competent nanny subject aligned with the agencies’ institutional positioning, functioning as part of a material-discursive apparatus (Barad, 2007) that stabilizes particular forms of subjectivity as relational and emergent rather than fixed (Coole & Frost, 2010).

Figure 3
Recurrent terms in recruitment agencies’ Instagram content.



Source: Compiled by authors, 2025.

Recruitment posts typically feature photographs or videos in which candidates present themselves directly to potential employers, often in controlled, uniform visual settings. Candidates introduce their background, experience, and skills in concise, standardized formats, while captions reproduce this information. A typical example reads:

Novette is a 32-year-old married Filipino woman with two children aged 4 and 10. She previously worked in Saudi Arabia for two years, where she carried out household tasks and cared for children aged 4, 7, and 13. If you are interested in working with her, please get in touch. Reference number: 251605 #FilipinoNanny #ForeignNanny

Assigning reference numbers positions candidates as trackable units within a system of circulation, reinforcing a logic of standardization in which individuality is subordinated to efficiency and comparability. A similar approach prevails in the videos, where nannies typically provide an introduction dictated by the agency. This introduction includes basic details such

as their names, nationality, age, parental status, and childcare experience. Prior to filming, nannies are usually asked to visit the agency’s offices for an initial interview. Once deemed suitable, they are informed about the terms and conditions of employment and led to the video recording area. There, they stand against carefully manicured backdrops—often featuring large-scale corporate banners— and record their videos under professional lighting. These videos exhibit striking similarities. For instance, one agency features a banner displaying its name alongside the phrase *‘The right choice for personnel’*. Another adopts a similarly standardized visual format: candidates are presented against white backgrounds, wearing uniform green aprons, accompanied by written captions that include contact information and reference numbers (Figure 4). Many candidates begin their video introductions with a polite “*Good day to my future employer,*” signaling deference and professionalism.

Figure 4

Screenshots from two recruitment agencies’ TikTok and Instagram content: Nanny candidates in agency-produced video shoot settings.



Source: Anonymized open-access TikTok and Instagram posts (2023, left and middle; 2026, right), last accessed April 2026.

Agency profiles are also accompanied by structured templates presenting attributes such as age, nationality, experience, language skills, and salary expectations in bullet-point format (Figure 5). References to official affiliations, including İŞKUR (Turkish Employment Agency), further situate these profiles within an institutional frame. Together, these elements form a catalog-like arrangement in which candidates become visible and comparable through standardized presentation. As a material-discursive apparatus, these posts organize relations between bodies, data points, visual formats, and institutional signs.

Within this configuration, trustworthiness and docility emerge through alignment with ordered formats, quantified attributes, and institutional markers. Experience and skills appear as discrete and repeatable data points, making the subject readable and predictable, while the structured presentation situates the nanny as responsive to employer expectations. In this sense, nanny subjectivity materializes through the intra-action of visual order, spatial arrangement, and institutional framing, through which particular forms of conduct become recognizable and desirable.

Figure 5
Screenshots from a recruitment agency's Instagram content: Agency-produced social media templates.



Source: Anonymized open-access Instagram posts (2026), last accessed April 2026.

The visual dimension of these posts further contributes to this process. Candidates are often advised to wear modest and conservative clothing, presenting a calm and composed demeanor. As Arat-Koç (1990: 90) notes, “*the display of deference, obedience, and submissiveness can sometimes be as important or more important than the actual physical work.*” In this sense, recruitment posts participate in shaping not only the laboring body but also the expected personality of the nanny. The arrangement of clothing, posture, scripted speech, and visual framing contributes to the materialization of a compliant and disciplined subject aligned with prevailing expectations in the care labor market. As nanny Brenda points out,

It is crucial to note that in many agency videos posted online, nanny candidates are trained on what to say during the video shooting. Keep in mind that some candidates even lack experience working with children or providing care, but they simply see these kinds of generic videos as opportunities that have arisen and adjust themselves to those frames until they find a job. (Brenda, Kenyan Nanny, Izmir, 2022)

Brenda’s statement exposes a critical gap between the standardized representations produced by agencies and the lived realities of care work, revealing how candidates strategically adapt to these formats in order to secure employment. ‘*Until they find a job,*’ the nannies’ identities are predominantly produced by the material-discursive practices of the recruitment agencies, which involve not only subjects (i.e., agency representatives, potential employers, and nanny candidates) but equally importantly non-human elements (i.e., backdrops, frames) included in the video production processes. Social media posts are apparatuses that play a significant role in the production of the figure of the idealized nanny.

Although some agencies use photographs provided by the nannies themselves, the mechanisms of selection and control remain largely intact. Unlike the uniformity of studio

photographs, these images display a wider range of domestic and public settings, including cafes, shopping malls, coastal promenades, and recognizable urban landmarks (Figure 6). As Deniz (2018) notes in their examination of Filipino nannies' advertisements in Türkiye, agencies retain the authority to reject images that do not conform to socially acceptable narratives. Photographs with sexualized overtones, such as clothing that accentuates body contours or scenes associated with nightlife are omitted in favor of those that align with culturally valued representations, including images of nannies holding children or posing in respectable public and touristic settings.

This apparent diversity is therefore structured through processes of selection that organize how candidates become visible. These images take shape within relations that privilege respectability, care, and moral propriety. In this sense, identity emerges through the intra-action of visual settings, bodily presentation, and normative expectations, where certain forms of appearance become recognizable while others are excluded.

Figure 6
Screenshots from a recruitment agency's Instagram content: Nanny candidates in different spatio-material settings.



Source: Anonymized open-access Instagram posts (2026), last accessed April 2026.

Photographs selected by the agencies participate in the materialization of the ideal nanny in ways that align with conservative gender norms. This process operates through the arrangement of bodies, spaces, and visual cues that position the nanny within specific relations of care, discipline, and respectability. Recruitment agencies thus function within a market apparatus that includes employers' expectations, candidates' self-presentations, digital platforms, regulatory frameworks, and socio-cultural norms through which these expectations are organized.

Within this apparatus, repetition plays a central role. Similar formats recur across images, captions, scripts, backdrops, and hashtags, producing a stable and recognizable figure of the professional nanny. This stability remains contingent upon the configurations through which it is produced. What appears as coherence is the effect of repeated boundary-drawing practices

(Barad, 2007) that privilege uniformity, docility, and competence. Agency posts thus sustain the idealized nanny figure through repetition, even as individual trajectories remain varied.

Subversions

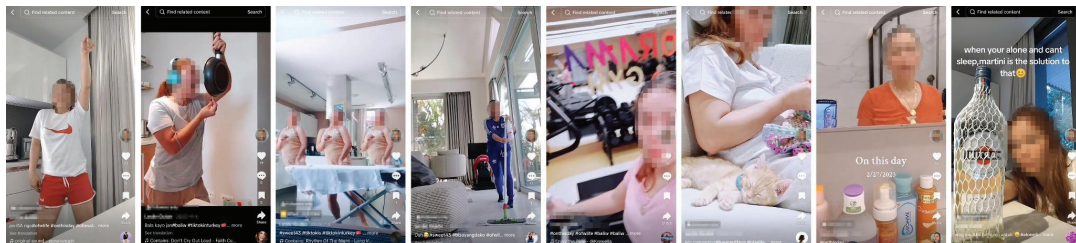
Always being home can feel monotonous and heavy for nannies. I think my fellow nannies, trying to escape isolation and homesickness, find joy in creating content and sharing their lives on social media to stay distracted and uplifted. (Rose, Filipino Nanny, Izmir, 2024)

When our nanny has free time in her room, she watches TikTok videos. She also produces her own videos, but we do not know her username because she prefers not to share it. She said that she has many followers. (Sera, Turkish Employer, Izmir, 2022)

Both Rose and Sera point to social media as a space through which nannies cultivate forms of expression and sociality beyond the constraints of employer–employee relations. The widespread availability of mobile devices and digital connectivity enables the integration of platform-based practices into everyday routines, allowing nannies to produce content centered on their personal experiences (Curran et al., 2012). In this sense, social media creates moments of relative autonomy within the material conditions of care work, facilitating the emergence of alternative subjectivities through everyday digital practices.

The TikTok posts of Filipino nanny Marina are particularly illustrative in this regard. Filmed in her employers’ home using her smartphone, these posts show Marina engaging with the materiality of her work environment in unexpected ways. In the first post, the kitchen, typically a labor-intensive space, becomes a stage for playful self-expression as Marina dances to a viral TikTok song, with counters and appliances functioning as meaningful markers of an unconventional use of the workspace. The following posts subvert the idealized nanny identity more explicitly: Marina uses headphones and a pan as a microphone, a triplet filter while ironing, and a mop as a dancing prop, evoking the aesthetics of musical performance. Through these performances, the intra-action between her body, household objects, and platform affordances produces an empowered identity that creatively reclaims the domestic space, remaining situated within it while simultaneously reimagining it through digital performance (Figure 7).

Figure 7
Screenshots from a Filipino nanny’s TikTok content: Marina’s everyday life at work.



Source: Anonymized open-access TikTok posts (2023–2025), last accessed April 2026.

As Marina states,

Honestly... I mean, I am still doing the same job, in the same house, but when I turn on the camera... it just feels different. The kitchen, for example, is not only where I work... it kind of becomes a place where I can have fun, be a bit silly, just be myself. I grab whatever is there, like a pan or a mop, and... suddenly it is not really about cooking or cleaning anymore. For a moment... It feels like I can make that space mine. (Marina, Filipino Nanny, Izmir, 2025)

Her account highlights how domestic space is continuously enacted through situated practices. What appears as a stable site of labor is instead reconfigured through the alignment of bodies, objects, and digital forms of visibility. In this process, subjectivity emerges not as a pre-given identity but as an effect of material-discursive relations that temporarily stabilize alternative modes of being (Barad, 2007; Coole & Frost, 2010). Subversion here operates not through external opposition but through the reorganization of relations within existing conditions.

Within this reconfiguration, her identity materializes as a form of subversion. By reusing household objects outside their prescribed functions and engaging with the space through play, she disrupts expected relations between labor, space, and conduct. The alignment of her body with movement, humor, and self-directed performance produces a subjectivity that exceeds the disciplined and compliant figure typically associated with domestic work. Subversion here does not entail leaving the domestic space but reworking it from within, as alternative ways of becoming and acting become momentarily visible.

The final four posts are somewhat different. Although they are also shot within the gated community where Marina works, they do not feature any objects related to her job. Featuring her in front of gym equipment, knitting on the living room sofa, cuddling with a purebred cat, showcasing cosmetics, and peeking at the camera behind a Martini bottle, the camera produces new identity boundaries. The intra-action of her body with objects associated with the upper-middle class produces Marina in the image of a social media influencer.

Despite their differences, all these posts manifest a temporary rupture in Marina's nanny identity. In the absence of her employers, by recording the transformation of her body's relationship to its surrounding objects from that of work to play and leisure, the digital platform enables the publicly visible production of new identity boundaries for Marina. Yet the captions of the images clearly state that she is a Filipino nanny working in Türkiye. Hence, the act of subversion is publicized to a specific audience, enabled by the digital platform. The interplay of the body, its surrounding objects, and digital means materializes a migrant worker identity that navigates through work, solitude, humor, and digital connectivity. Marina's posts capture moments of everyday resistance, enabled by the subversion of the normative relationships between a nanny and her workplace.

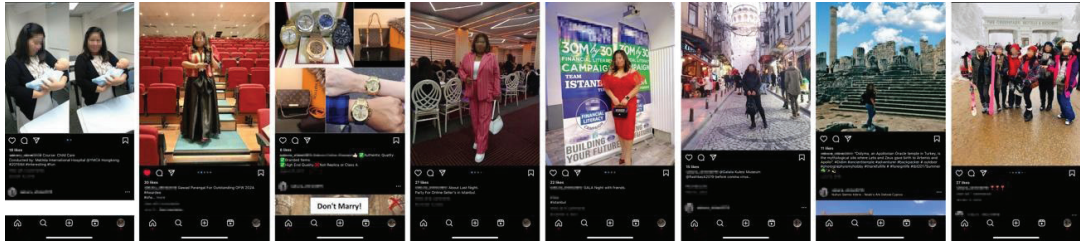
What is significant in Marina's posts is their production of subversive acts from within her working environment rather than outside it, making full use of the possibilities open at each moment during her shift as a nanny. Once shared, the digital traces of each moment revealed in TikTok posts become an archive of a fluid identity category, constantly co-produced through the entanglement of the body with the materials and spaces around it. Marina's posts are performative sites that continuously reconfigure and resist prescribed nanny roles through playful, embodied, and digitally mediated agential enactments. While such quiet forms of subversion may not always overtly challenge existing power structures, they contest them, offering alternative identity productions through contingent technological practices (Kim, 2017). The social media intra-actions of Marina produce a counter-narrative to the idealized portrayals of nanny work. Her posts amplify the role of digital media as an apparatus which produces an array of boundaries in identity production.

If Marina's TikTok posts explicitly foreground her nanny identity but subvert its idealized image, nanny Evangelina's posts utilize the idealized image but diminish its domestic associations. She states,

In Izmir, there are few social options for Filipino nannies, who often head straight to their boarding houses or meet their boyfriends. I do not have that kind of life. But in Istanbul, I am a butterfly! Some Filipino women encouraged me to sell trendy items from my small shop in the Philippines, which I legally import and sell on Instagram and TikTok. However, I heard that some nannies belittle my efforts, saying, 'Oh, Evangelina? She is just a nanny and a little online seller.' What they do not realize is that I have a degree in Business Management. I am not just a nanny; I am an entrepreneur! (Evangelina, Filipino Nanny, Izmir, 2024)

A series of images challenge the limiting narratives imposed on Evangelina-as-nanny by presenting a dynamic and evolving self, intertwined with professional, entrepreneurial, and exploratory identities. Each post not only documents her experiences but actively materializes different aspects of her life (Figure 8). In the first image, Evangelina poses with a baby doll during a childcare training session at a hospital in Hong Kong. The caption reads 'Course: Child Care' with the '#2015tbt' hashtag, highlighting her formal education and expertise in the field of caregiving. This image materializes her professional identity as a trained nanny, subverting the common portrayal of nannies as undereducated laborers. A digital performance of expertise, involving the intra-action of the baby doll, the formal spatial setting, and the caption produces an identity that emphasizes her knowledge and skill in caregiving.

Figure 8
Screenshots from a Filipino nanny's Instagram content: Evangelina's life in Türkiye.



Source: Anonymized open-access Instagram posts (2022–2025), last accessed April 2026.

The following post reinforces the earlier one as it captures the image of a successful professional, featuring Evangelina celebrating her receipt of the ‘*Outstanding OFW (Overseas Filipino Worker) 2024*’ award in Istanbul. Wearing the traditional Filipino attire, she proudly shares her moment of recognition, which was documented by her employer:

I received an award for my work as a domestic worker (nanny) in Istanbul, and here I am wearing a Barong Tagalog. I traveled to Istanbul from Izmir with my employer and her family, and my madam treated me to a salon visit for hair and makeup. She took videos and photos of me throughout the award ceremony. (Evangelina, Filipino Nanny, Izmir, 2024)

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This post subverts the invisibility often associated with domestic workers, positioning Evangelina as a visible and empowered worker who is recognized for her contributions. The intra-action of the elements of the award ceremony, the cultural significance of her attire, and the online documentation of the event materialize an identity that is not only professional but also bears strong cultural associations, accentuating her migrant status.

While Evangelina resides in Izmir and works as a nanny, her biweekly trips to Istanbul during her off days enable a notable transformation. In these posts, the entanglement of her body with Istanbul’s chaotic and anonymizing urban environment produces an entrepreneurial identity. This is evident in images featuring branded goods offered for sale, her participation in online sellers’ meetings, and her presence at a financial literacy campaign, where luxury items and business settings intra-act to position her as a businesswoman beyond the domestic workspace. In her final posts, hashtags such as *#adventurer*, *#backpacker*, and *#foreignlife*, paired with images from Galata Tower, ancient ruins in Didim, and ski trips in Kocaeli, further frame Evangelina as an explorer. Here, language, landscapes, and digital platforms coa-

lesce to produce a fluid identity in which nannying appears as one occupation among many, detached from the domestic sentimentality of idealized nanny representations.

Marina's and Evangelina's social media posts illustrate how digital platforms open up possibilities for migrant nannies beyond the regulatory reach of agency and employer networks. Rather than rejecting their nanny identities, these posts undermine normative expectations of propriety by excluding signs of arduous corporeal labor. In contrast to agency and employer posts that emphasize hard work, independent content avoids domestic labor imagery; even posts featuring children are typically set in parks, malls, or playgrounds, where leisure is foregrounded over work. The frequent use of the nannies' mother tongue suggests that their primary audience is the nanny community itself, which these platforms both address and actively produce. As apparatuses of bodily production (Barad, 2007), digital platforms thus facilitate the proliferation of nanny identities beyond established hierarchies of control and supervision.

Importantly, these practices of subversion do not operate outside the nannying apparatus but emerge from within it. Marina's and Evangelina's posts do not reject their nanny identities; rather, they reconfigure the relations between bodies, objects, spaces, and platform affordances through which those identities are produced. Subversion here is not oppositional resistance but a re-routing of material-discursive relations that temporarily unsettles dominant norms of propriety, productivity, and visibility. In Barad's terms, these moments demonstrate how alternative boundary-drawing practices become possible within specific intra-actions, even when regulatory structures of power remain intact.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study demonstrates that digital media platforms play a central role in shaping the fluid, contingent, and performative nature of migrant nanny subjectivities in Türkiye's digital care market. Drawing on Karen Barad's new materialist framework, this study shows that these formations do not pre-exist social media but emerge through dynamic intra-actions between human actors, such as recruitment agencies, employers, and nannies, and non-human elements, including digital infrastructures, visual formats, domestic objects, and spatial arrangements. In this sense, social media operates as a material-discursive apparatus and as a socio-technical environment through which subjectivities are materialized, circulated, and reconfigured.

The findings point to platform-specific dynamics. TikTok appears to be more frequently used by recruitment agencies to connect with candidates, showcase recruitment processes, and circulate job opportunities, whereas Instagram is more often used to present curated promotional content aimed at employers. At the same time, these platforms are differently appropriated by nannies themselves. While Instagram tends to function as a more formal space of

self-presentation, TikTok emerges as a site for more informal, playful, and affective forms of self-expression. In this way, different platforms support distinct modes of visibility and participation, shaping how identities take form and are evaluated.

Within these digital spaces, recruitment agencies and employers play a central role in provisionally stabilizing idealized nanny figures through the circulation of marketable images aligned with dominant expectations of care, professionalism, and obedience. Such portrayals are sustained through recurring visual formats, narratives, and modes of presentation that render certain forms of labor and conduct desirable and legible. While nannies participate in these structured performances, their independent social media practices also generate variations that rework dominant expectations from within. These dynamics suggest that idealization, actualization, and subversion operate not as discrete stages but as overlapping configurations shaped through ongoing engagements between actors, platforms, and material conditions.


This study contributes empirically to research on migrant care labor in Türkiye's digitalized nanny market, theoretically to debates in digital labor studies, and methodologically to social media research by advancing a performativity-oriented analytical approach. The use of a Baradian lens shifts the focus from what identities are to how they come into being, foregrounding the boundary-drawing practices through which relations between actors, roles, and meanings are continuously configured. Rather than treating identity as a stable attribute or a purely representational construct, this study shows that subjectivities emerge as contingent effects of socio-material arrangements. In doing so, it highlights how digital platforms both mediate care labor and participate in producing the conditions through which labor, identity, and power are organized and contested.

- 1 See UNICEF (2011: 44).
- 2 Roughly two-thirds of the posts come from Instagram, while one-third comes from TikTok. Recruitment agencies produce the majority of the posts (around 75%), whereas nannies create most of the remaining content, along with a smaller number of posts by employers. This distribution reveals the visibility and accessibility of different actors within the digital care market, and we selected the posts based on their analytical relevance.
- 3 The limited participation of Turkish women in the country's live-in care sector is linked to their male relatives' disapproval in the conservative and patriarchal cultural context of the country (Özyeğin, 2001).
- 4 Although there is limited documentation on the rise of social media accounts for recruitment agencies in Türkiye, an examination of the Instagram profiles analyzed in this study suggests that they began using the platform in the late 2010s, while their use of TikTok dates to the early 2020s.
- 5 For a detailed critique of Goffman's essentialism, see Marabelli and Page (2018).
- 6 'Intra-action' is a term coined by Karen Barad (2007: 33) to challenge the traditional understanding of interaction. While interaction implies the existence of pre-existing entities that interact with each other, intra-action emphasizes the inseparability and mutual constitution of entities within phenomena. Intra-action recognizes that entities emerge and take shape through their entanglement with one another, and their boundaries, properties, and identities are not fixed or predetermined. It emphasizes the dynamic and the ongoing flow of agency and becoming, where entities are constantly co-constituting and reconfiguring each other through their intra-actions.
- 7 To elaborate on Barad's discussion of representationalism, see Markula (2023), who examines how agential realism enables the conceptualization of bodies in motion as both material entities and carriers of sociocultural meaning, and how physically active bodies materialize through performative intra-actions.

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