
ARMENIA: LIFE IN A SUITCASE

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29.09.2016

28 Sep 2016

Al Jazeera World

A look at the poignant stories of two Armenian women in Turkey, trying to support their families far from home.

Filmmaker: Ahmet Seven

As the Armenian economy continues to struggle, so do its people. Around a third of the country's population lives below the poverty line and the price of everyday items is often too high for many people.

Over the years, hundreds of thousands of Armenians have emigrated in search of work and a decent living. There is tension between Armenia and Turkey and the border with Turkey has been closed since 1993. But this doesn't stop many Armenians, often women, making the journey via Georgia, either to live long-term or making regular trips, buying cheaper goods in Turkey to sell back home.

This film tells the poignant story of two Armenian women unable to survive at home and who leave their families to join the many economic migrants, hoping to find jobs to enable them to support themselves and their dependents.

Getting old doesn't mean dying... I'll live as long as it takes to reach my goal of helping my children.

Anahit Donoyan first lost her husband when he was only 50 - and then 30 family members in the Armenian earthquake in 1988. She moved to Istanbul and did a series of manual jobs to survive.

"I worked in a factory and at a restaurant. I cleaned hallways at night. I took care of babies. I would steam corn and sell it by the sea. Then I was a housekeeper. All kinds of work. I'm not ashamed because I was providing for my children," says 73 year-old Anahit.

Now, too old for physical work, she makes a living selling Armenian food products to other immigrants in Turkey, out of a suitcase on the streets of Istanbul.

She has lived and worked in Turkey for more than 18 years, managed to avoid trouble with the authorities - and still tries to find a little bit extra to send back to her family in Armenia and Russia.

"I've been setting up a stall and selling my goods here for five years. No one's ever asked me what

I was doing here. Never. Everyone's fond of me and I'm fond of them."

Karine Galstyan is also Armenian and came to Turkey looking for work in 2004. After marrying a Turkish man, her residency and work status are a lot more stable, allowing her easier transit between Turkey and Armenia.

"It was very difficult for me. I would lie in bed at night and my mind was in Armenia with my children. But, as a mother, I suffered to make sure my children were taken care of," she remembers.

Karine buys cheap clothes in Istanbul and takes them in a suitcase to sell in Armenia a couple of times a month, earning around \$300 a trip. With shoes costing over \$20 in Armenia but as little as \$2 in Istanbul, Karine has seized the business opportunity, buying in one place to trade up in the other.

Despite the distance from their families and the tough existence they're forced to lead to make ends meet, the two women are driven by the need to support the ones they love. Their desire to provide and care trumps their separation from their families.

"I love Istanbul. People love a place if they have a good life and are making a good living," says Galstyan.

Kaynak/Source: