Gendering Industrial Subcontracting Work: A Qualitative Study of Garment Ateliers in Istanbul

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Abstract

The result of the implementation of export-oriented industrialization strategies has been the impressive growth of garment production in Turkey. Supported by flexible production and subcontracting relations, family-owned garment ateliers have become the prominent location of production and have opened up the doors of the global markets. As family-owned businesses, ateliers draw on inexpensive and often unpaid, flexible, and loyal immediate and extended kin to provide labour. Garment ateliers operate informally on the outskirts of big cities, such as Istanbul, where rural migrant families comprise a cheap labour pool for enterprising migrant business owners. The role of women's unpaid and underpaid labour involvement in garment ateliers in Istanbul is a reflection of how these ateliers manage to integrate the social networks of extended kin relations into garment production. This study-through two case-studies-focuses on family labour and extended kin social networks to analyze the role of women's unpaid and underpaid labour in these garment ateliers.

Key words

Informal work, industrial production, gender, kinship relations, Turkey

Introduction

Turkey's export-oriented industrialization strategies, first implemented in the early 1980s, have dramatically increased the production and export of labour-intensive commodities, such as textiles, food, garments, and leather. The garment industry has been the leading industry and export champion of these strategies in which informal production of small-scale firms has created the competitive edge of garment production and opened up the doors of the global markets. The result has

been an explosion of small-scale enterprises, particularly those specializing in garment production - called ateliers (*atölye*) - that have mushroomed in immigrant neighbourhoods of Istanbul. Ateliers often operate informally, relying on the inexpensive or unpaid flexible labour of family and extended kin. The role of women's unpaid and underpaid labour involvement in garment ateliers in Istanbul is a reflection of how these ateliers manage to integrate those social networks of extended kin relations into garment production.

Women's participation in garment production is critically important. Women are not only a cheap labour source for these ateliers, but they also help to mediate the familial relations- including social networks of family, kinship, and neighbourhood-upon which the survival of ateliers in the very volatile market of the garment industry depends. The aim of this article is to investigate the significance of women's work in those ateliers and its contribution to the globalization of garment production in Turkey, where the culture of work is continuously geared towards making women's work invisible and pushing more and more urban women into informal forms of work. The focus is on the importance of family labour and the nature of family-based production in these ateliers. By revealing the relations governing industrial production in Turkey, this paper argues that women's labour-while often unrecognized or rendered invisible-is crucial to the survival of families engaged in the labour-intensive garment industry.

Theoretical Considerations of Women's Informal and Subcontracted Work

During the 1990s, the globalisation of the world economy contributed to the informalization of the workforce in many industries and countries. Although there are many forms of informal work, the focus of this paper is on informal work done for export-oriented industries characterized by outsourcing or subcontracting through global commodity chains. Despite its heterogeneity and its interlinkage with parts of the formal economy, the term "informal economy" is used to refer to workers and companies that are not recognized or protected under legal and regulatory frameworks and are characterized by a high degree of vulnerability (ILO, 2002). The informal economy replaces the previously used

term "informal sector," which was first put into use by the ILO in the early 1970s. While still commonly used, "informal sector" is now seen as misleading because it masks the diversity and complexity of these work arrangements and processes, and seems to imply (incorrectly) that such processes are limited to one sector or industry. The concept of a sector seems to suggest that there is a dichotomy between "formal" and "informal," while in reality, as the ILO notes (2002, p. 8), a continuum exists, with linkages between formal and informal via subcontracting arrangements. Chen, Jhabvala, and Lund (2001) define informal work as that done by all wage workers who work without a minimum wage, assured work, or benefits, whether they work for formal or informal firms, including employees of informal firms, domestic workers, casual workers, homeworkers, temporary and part-time workers, and unregistered workers.

Informality in Istanbul's garment industry, as De Soto puts it, is a way of life for the poor (De Soto, 1989, pp. 11-12). Many garment ateliers operate without licensing requirements, ignore labour requirements, and do not provide social security coverage to their workers. Indeed, the most common form of informality is to employ workers without reporting them to the Social Security Institution. In this regard, most interviewed atelier workers and home-based workers were informal workers whereas those workers in factories were formal, registered workers. However, the line between formal and informal work blurs when one considers that formal workers do piece-rate work for their factories to earn extra cash. For the garment industry, informality is a way of survival through which the formal rules are manipulated to tap into cheap labour resources. All these contribute to a globally competitive industry.

Increasing global integration and competition has fuelled a 'race to the bottom' in which multinational corporations may relocate numerous times in search of increasingly cheaper labour. Women in the informal economy form the weakest links in global value chains (Chant & Pedwell, 2008, p. 1). Worldwide, women's involvement in the informal economy has increased, as economic restructuring has reduced job opportunities in the formal sector as well as increasing the need for additional family income since the early 1980s (Delahanty, 1999; Beneria, 2003; Beneria & Floro, 2005; Chen, Vanek, Lund, & Heintz, 2005). In most places, associated with the increasing flexibility and casualisation of

labour markets, the forms of women's engagement in informal production has ranged from contract-based or part-time work to unpaid family work, including home-based industrial work (Standing, 1999; Pearson, 1998; Elson, 1996).

The feminist literature on women's informal work has emphasized the role of gender-based hierarchies and a gendered division of labour in employment and mobilization of women's labour. Patriarchal relations have kept women within the confines of particular activities in the informal economy, hindering women's financial and social gains through their paid work (Beneria & Roldan, 1987; Heintz, 2006). Women's informal work demonstrates the significance of gender relations and ideologies signalling the specific place and role of women in different societies. The range of informal jobs available for female migrants is gender-specific and reflects local gender ideology. Similarly, Elson (1999) analyses the workplace as a place in which the interactions of culture and economy generate a particular type of work culture. She argues that labour markets are not gender-neutral institutions since they become "bearers of gender" (Elson, 1999, p. 611). The social stereotypes about what is "man's work" and "women's work" and gendered expectations about who is supposed to have authority over others are embedded in the formal and informal rules of the work place and the operation of labour markets.

Women's informal work has been an integral part of the export success of certain industries in developing countries. Specifically, gender inequalities have been instrumental in the generation of export success, and women are integrated into export production through the mobilisation of women's labour and the ideologies that help to reproduce gender subordination. Hsiung's study of the Taiwanese "economic miracle" shows how women's labour was drawn into export production in small-scale, family-centred, export-oriented satellite factories in local neighbourhoods (Hsiung, 1996). By locating factory production either adjacent to or inside family living structures, proletarian men could become small factory owners by harnessing the productive labour of wives, daughters, and neighbourhood women. In promoting the satellite factory system in the 1970s and 1980s, the government provided low-interest loans to families to purchase homework machinery, and living rooms were converted into assembly rooms. This system also enhances

the power of fathers and husbands at home through the expropriation of the labour of women and has resulted in the intensification of gendered inequalities by tying married women to their husbands/employers.

Elsewhere the success of the exporting industries is attributed to their ability to generate a collusion with patriarchal relations that ensured profit to capital by maintaining the gender relations that subordinate women. Khattak (2002) shows that in Pakistan women's contribution to the national economy has been taking place in the informal sector in which home-based women's subcontracted work has been built upon the patriarchal control of women's labour. Social constraints on women's mobility and bargaining power lead women to accept the lowest paid jobs and keep these women outside formal and secure employment options.

While their work is informal, women use their work in the export industry as a way of building their identity and community membership. White (1994) highlights how women's income-producing activities, along with the more traditional labour of housewifery and motherhood, are viewed as an expression of their identity as "good" and hard-working Muslim women. The ways in which women represent their identity through perpetuating gender roles and identities in order to gain security and membership in the low-income neighbourhoods of Istanbul ultimately generate a low cost labour source for production to the global market.

Globalization of Garment Production and Women's Work in Turkey

The 1980s were the years of structural adjustment in Turkey and the beginning of the outward orientation of the economy under the strict control of the IMF and the World Bank. The main and immediate result of these policies has been rapid export growth in labour-intensive industries such as garments, leather, and footwear (Boratav, Türel, & Yeldan, 1996). Despite rising export incomes, the sustainability of Turkey's adjustment programme was compromised by low rates of investment and savings (Boratav, Yeldan, & Köse, 2000). The weakness of the programme has manifested itself in high inflation rates and continuous economic crisis, which first struck in 1994, and then again in 1998, with another major shake up in 2001. After the 2001 financial cri-

sis, Turkey introduced a new programme with IMF, addressing the fundamental weaknesses in the economy. This was followed by the election of a single party - the Justice and Development Party – into government in November 2002. The implementation of the most courageous neo-liberal agenda ever resulted in high-growth rates, but this was jobless growth based on the speculative financial inflow of hot money.

Wage earners have been facing increasing income inequality while at the same time the Turkish economy has been less successful at generating employment. Between 1980 and 2004 Turkey's working-age population grew by 23 million people, yet during that time only 6 million jobs were created (World Bank, 2006). As a result the employment rate was just 44 per cent in 2006, among the lowest level in the world. In urban areas, male labour force participation rate was 74 percent in 1995, 70 percent in 2000 and again 70.8 percent in 2006. The same rate for females was 17.1, 17.2 and 19.9 percent for the same sequence of years. Therefore, one in every five within urban labour force in 2006 was a woman (21.8). On the other hand three in every four not in the labour force was also a woman (73.0). Only one in every five women was in the labour force (19.9) (Toksöz, 2007, p. 20).

The state of income inequality, unemployment, and wage growth in Turkey indicates that the forces pushing women into garment ateliers and home-based work are strong. Therefore, low-income women are forced to enter the labour market and take up informal jobs. The number of workers remaining outside legislative and institutional protective measures, including social security, has reached a phenomenal level in Turkey. Looking at figures of registry with social security institutions in 2006, there are 10,827,000 persons working informally against 11,503,000 persons in formal status. Accordingly, 48.5% of total employment, 66% of total female employment and 42.3% of total male employment is outside any system of social protection (Toksöz, 2007, p. 35).

Even through these data present a picture wherein women's informal work is increasing, it is not possible to capture fully the true extent of informal work in Turkey due to the gender biases and problems associated with measurement techniques during data collection. There are many low-income women who report themselves as housewives but engage in home-based piecework or other form of informal activities. Micro studies from the late 1980s and 1990s suggesting an increase of

women's participation in informal activities help to unveil the diverse nature and extent of women's roles in informal activities. My argument is that even though some women's work in garment production seems to be excluded from official statistics in Turkey, a confident conclusion can be drawn that a disguised feminization of the labour force is emerging among low-income women living in the suburbs of Istanbul, and that the role of women in export-related production is not only substantial but also diverse.

Cinar (1994) and White (1994) made a connection between garment exports and home-based piecework, although with no reference to other forms of women's informal work in the garment industry. Ecevit (2000) also suggests, without providing firm empirical evidence, that subcontracting to homes became the norm in industrial production in Turkey after the early 1980s. In her study of women home-workers for small-scale textile firms in Bursa and Istanbul, Cinar (1994) estimated that in 1989, 88,000 women were working from home for the ready-made apparel industry in Istanbul. This number corresponded to about 3 percent of the total female population of Istanbul in 1989. She also estimated that one in every four migrant women in Istanbul takes in piecework. In a recent study, Buğra and Keyder (2003) claim that women and children are the main ones to hold marginal urban jobs such as cleaning, garment work, and piecework, whereas men face a situation of declining employment opportunities, increasing unemployment, and deteriorating wage levels under the threat of eroding stable jobs.

The recent studies on women's home-based piecework have emphasised the linkage between textile and women's informal piecework and strengthened the findings of the existing literature on home-based work. Topcuoğlu offers a fresh conceptualisation of women's invisible informal work and applies the concepts of devalorisation by obscuring and deliberate concealment through which women gain no public and private recognition of their work (Topçuoğlu, 2005, pp. 139-150). In another study, Balaban and Sarıoğlu (2008, p. 39) show that pieceworkers regard themselves as housewives who just earn "pin money" and consider their work a contribution to the well-being of the family by covering weekly household expenses, paying bills and rent, and saving money for children's educational costs.

As in many developing countries, Turkey's garment industry has been

offering women a wide range of employment opportunities since it began its winning export performance in the mid-1980s. With the neoliberal turn in economic policies in the early 1980s, the garment industry became Turkey's most important exporter, initially based on increasing government support, falling cost of labour, and the renewed capacity of the textile industry to support the rapid expansion in the manufacturing of finished clothing (Eraydın & Erendil, 1999). By analysing how gender inequalities are instrumental in producing the export success of Istanbul's garment industry, this paper contributes to the empirical literature on women's informal export-oriented work. Similar to earlier studies, this study shows that women's work in small-scale family-owned establishments and in subcontracted production in Istanbul is an essential element of Turkey's export production. The dispersion of production into small family-owned ateliers where women's participation takes the form of unpaid/underpaid family work and of home-based work paves the way for women's integration into garment production. This form of organisation of production on the one hand helps the industry meet its low-cost labour needs by the mobilisation of low-wage female labour supply through kinship relations and the idiom of "helping," while on the other hand it reproduces gender ideology and norms through the patriarchal control of women's labour. Nonetheless, different from the above studies, the Istanbul case study suggests that the integration of women's labour into export production allows space for some changes in terms of gender subordination.

Gender Relations and Organization of the Turkish Household

A discussion of family and women labour as the central element of garment atelier production in Istanbul requires an examination of the organization of the household and how gender relations within and beyond it are produced and re-enacted in Turkish society. Gender is of crucial importance for understanding not only what the relationships within and beyond the household are, but also for examining how these relations are defined, reinforced, renegotiated, and challenged by men and women.

Unrevealing gender and family relations within working class families in Turkey's urban areas, especially those immigrant families living in the

outskirts of Istanbul is a way of characterizing working class, low income immigrant groups whose male members come to Istanbul with no skills and become manual labourers in the early years of their migration. As described by Kandiyoti (1988), the classic patriarchal family-in which women and all other family members are tied to a senior male head of the family, who shapes their labour and other activities-appears to represent family life in Turkey. Although it may vary in form and shape, the classic patriarchal family is the site where control over the labour and resources of the family and the subordination of women plays out. In an extended family, senior men have authority over all members of the household, including younger men. In the classical patriarchal family, the relationship between husband and wife is based on duty and obligation: men are the breadwinners responsible for the economic well being of the family; women are the caregivers confined to the domestic sphere by ideologies of mothering, caring, and nurturing. With this division of labour between sexes, an important way for women to attain status in the household and to gain economic security is to bear sons. For example, *süt hakkı* (the claim of a mother over her son owing to her breast-feeding him) represents this power. A son believes his mother has tremendous rights in decision-making and managerial power because of her efforts in raising him.

Through marriage, a young bride is brought from her family into another male-headed household, in which her husband's close female kin-mother, sister, brother's wife-exercise considerable power over her, as evidenced by the transferring of domestic household duties and, in rural areas, agricultural work to her. A bride needs to demonstrate that she is a hard worker and good mother by undertaking and managing all of the duties given to her. The hardship that younger women endure as new brides is eventually superseded by the control and authority they exert over their own daughters-in-law. The shifting power relations that a woman experiences through her life cycle in relation to other women in the household-specifically the mother-in-law and bride relationship-point to differing degrees of power and authority open to women, depending on age.

Although there are considerable power inequalities between young and old women, the lack of economic autonomy and authority in the household is mitigated as women manipulate the affections of sons and

husbands. Defined as "bargaining with patriarchy" by Kandiyoti, this is a strategy in which women gain long term patriarchal security and societal respect by manipulating their husbands' and sons' affections, which are in turn transferred into security and power in the household (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 280). While women of all ages are powerless in patriarchal societies, older women are able to achieve some standing in the social hierarchy by policing younger women's compliance with the patriarchal rules. In bargaining, women internalize the prevailing gender system rather than changing it, but they do so in ways that maximize the power available to them in the family, though this power comes at the expense of younger women. Because gender ideologies are constructed at multidimensional societal and institutional levels, bargaining also must be seen in a broader context in which a variety of complex relations take place, including those between relatives, *hemsehri*(*s*), and the community. As White (1994) claims, bargaining could be seen as a bargain between the individual and the group, of which the conjugal family is a subset. In meeting the moral and labour requirements of her roles as wife, neighbour, and mother, a woman signifies her willingness to participate in the web of reciprocal obligations on which group stability and security rests. Indeed, gender relations exist in a web of social relations, in which women and men are not just females and males, but are also fathers and mothers, daughters and sons, wives and husbands. White points out that, through kinship, women are enmeshed in a complex net of not only exploitative relations, but also relations of solidarity and reciprocity. These contradictory relationships can exist in the family, workplace, and community.

Women's paid employment often takes place in the informal economy, where kinship also plays a key role in mediating labour relations. In such a context, work relationships often adopt kinship idioms and values (White, 1994, p. 75). At the same time, community control of female sexuality in family-owned establishments requires the strict enforcement of "appropriate behaviour" that leads to women's submission to existing gender roles and ideologies, and close scrutiny of women's behaviour in private and public spaces (White, 1994, p. 75). As migrant women are prone to work as unpaid or underpaid family workers, household gender relations are thus transferred to the workplace. Moreover, unskilled immigrant women with little education are more

likely to work in arenas where relations and responsibilities are based on communal relations that strengthen existing gender ideologies. In such cases, paid work is difficult to conceptualize as liberating for women because constraining household relations remain intact.

Family-owned Garment Ateliers in Istanbul: Two Case Studies

This part of study aims investigate the significance of women's work in those ateliers and its contribution to the globalization of garment production in Turkey, where the culture of work is continuously geared towards making women's work invisible and pushing more and more urban women into informal forms of work. For this purpose, the result of two case studies of family-owned garment ateliers is presented here. The cases of the Timagur family and the Acar brothers, which were examined through a methodology of participant-observation situated in households and workplaces, revealed many of the economic activities of men and women and the day-to-day strategies of running a family establishment. The socioeconomic position of the two families is similar to each other as both are migrant families. Although they are not the poorest of the poor, it is difficult to label them as middle-class families. Limited financial security and constant fluctuations in the business do not allow the families upward social mobility, as incomes are invested back into the business rather than used to raise the consumption or living standards of family members.

Two commodity circuits dominating garment production in Istanbul are illustrated using these case studies, as the first family, the Timagur family's atelier, specialised in export production and manufactured trousers, skirts and suits, while the Acar brothers owned an atelier producing light garments for their shop in Laleli. The case studies are also significant in considering women's involvement in garment production. Not only as workers but also as family members, women play a pivotal role in the survival of these ateliers and the integration of their families into urban life.

The Timagur Family

The Timagur family resides in Gaziosmanpaşa, an area with many gar-

ment ateliers. They live in a three-floor building owned by the father, Hüseyin, who came to Istanbul from Bayburt, an eastern province, in the mid-1960s. He was and continues to be a construction worker, and Hüseyin built the house where the family now lives. There are many relatives and others from Bayburt who now live in Gaziosmanpaşa. Hüseyin and his wife, Nazire, have three sons and two daughters. Only the youngest son is single; the others are married and have children. The eldest brother, İsmail, and his younger brother, Yaşar, live in the three-floor house built by their father, each having a separate flat. The daughters are married and have moved out of the house. The third brother, Ali, is single and lives with his parents.

After gaining experience and garment-making skills in different ateliers in Istanbul, İsmail decided to open a small atelier in his neighbourhood, where the rents and labour prices were cheaper than in the neighbourhood where İsmail used to work. İsmail told me that as Istanbul received migrants and expanded toward its outskirts, garment ateliers and factories also began to move to the city's edges. The old centre of the garment business, which now hosts marketplaces such as Laleli or shopping centres and office buildings, is an expensive place for small garment ateliers. The atelier is located near the family house, allowing the family to easily carry garments from the atelier home and back again. Because the area is replete with the Timagurs' hemşehris and relatives, the family is also able to recruit workers from among their kin and neighbours when needed.

Now, all three brothers, Ayşe, who is Yaşar's wife, and İsmail's daughters all work together in the atelier, and all are skilled workers. Gül, İsmail's wife and the eldest bride of the family, contributes to production by doing trim work from home and by organizing family members to help out when there is a need for extra labour. Gül's mother-in-law usually looks after the family's young children while the wives are working.

The atelier mainly works on orders from export companies. İsmail's area of expertise, shirt sewing, is also the atelier's specialty, since this is the area where İsmail can have the most control over the production process. Quality is very important for export-oriented production, and İsmail stresses his workers' high skill levels. He emphasises that becoming a skilled worker in his business requires almost ten years of working

experience. His younger daughter, Semra, has been working with him for almost 6 years and needed, according to İsmail, 3 or 4 more years of experience to be a top-skilled worker.

Initially, the atelier subcontracted with İsmail's previous employer's firm, which supported İsmail in establishing his own business. Later, İsmail got to know many other firms, from which his atelier could also get work orders when needed. He told me that:

> If you are in the business long enough, you get to know all the firms. Subcontracting firms, which are those that give out work, have a good knowledge of small ateliers and are very well aware of who is good and who is bad at their work, although there are always new people entering this market (*piyasa*). In the beginning, these newcomers offer cheaper piece-rates, but you need skills to stay in the market. Working for cheap prices is not enough to survive here; that is why you have to have the required skills for the garment business.

The trajectory of İsmail's atelier has changed often, depending on the general conditions of the garment business in Istanbul, and he has adopted different strategies to keep his business running. For example, he has established partnerships with other small atelier owners, and has expanded his business by adding more partners from his former workplace. At other times, he has worked only with his brothers and immediate family members. As a subcontractor, İsmail's position literally shifts from employer to employee, depending on the requirements of production and the size of his atelier. As an owner-operator, İsmail's changing position had an effect on his family members, whether they helped in the atelier or went out to work for a wage in different ateliers or stayed at home.

The Timagur family's business is based on their garment-making skills, which depend on İsmail's expertise and skills. Because of İsmail's status as owner of the atelier and head of the family, the labour and financial contributions of other members of the family are under his control. He supervises the other members, manages business deals, and does the marketing. The gains from the business are distributed according to the contributions made by each family. As İsmail is the family

head and makes all the decisions, he and his family take the biggest share, on the condition that he is fair to all members in allocating the money. In our conversation, İsmail stated that each family-including his own-gets only a worker's salary, which he thinks is too low. Yet small-scale production does not allow for large profits.

The Acar Brothers

The second family I studied lives in the same area of Gaziosmanpaşa as the Timagurs. Four brothers from Adıyaman, the Acars, run a garment atelier located on the ground floor of their house. The house has four floors, each used by a brother and his family. The youngest and oldest brothers came to Istanbul 10 years ago, staying for a couple of years with their uncle's son, who was a garment worker at that time. Shortly after the youngest brother, Mehmet, started working with his uncle's son, the brothers bought their first sewing machine and began making coats and jackets for sale in the Laleli market.

As they were successful with their sales, they decided to open their own atelier. The other two Acar brothers came from Adıyaman shortly thereafter to take part in the business. All the brothers moved to a shared apartment in Gaziosmanpaşa, where they took advantage of being from the east of Turkey and tapping into the networks of labour and business deals. Since people from Adıyaman and Malatya dominate the Laleli market, the Acars were able to reach the informal business network and export channels just through the informal connections afforded by being from the same place of origin and ethnic group. After a short time, the eldest brother's wife migrated to Istanbul to do the cooking, cleaning, and washing in their shared household. She also helped in the atelier. The Acar brothers' atelier grew rapidly, and now has 14 machines and 20 employees.

The brothers have a division of labour based on seniority and skill level, which also reflects the hierarchical structure of the family, in which the eldest brother and his wife are the most respected. The eldest brother is in a kind of managerial position, making decisions on issues related to finance and the spending patterns of the family members. All of the brothers ask for the eldest brother's consent before making most decisions, from buying furniture for their home to making a business

deal. Structured around hierarchical lines, the Acars survive better in the garment business than others because they are able to access obedient and cheap labourers who devote their time and energy to maintaining the family business. The Acar brothers also have very intimate relations with *hemşehri(s)* and other relatives, offering yet another way to access informal business channels.

The Acar family lives on a single collective budget, rather than having separate budgets for each brother. The reallocation of household finances follows hierarchical lines, where the eldest brother is in control and makes sure the income is equally allocated between the households. This type of budget management is quite uncommon for families in cities and is mostly used in rural areas, where families might only have access to cash once a year after harvest and so need to watch expenditure closely. For the Acars, this type of budget control limits the family's luxury consumption and returns income back into the business. The corporate nature of budget control and labour discipline gives the Acar brothers a competitive edge.

The Acar case is interesting because it demonstrates both the benefits and conflicts of an extended family business. The advantages include having access to a ready labour pool and providing an easy coordination of family support in times of crisis and need. However, these relationships also generate conflicts of interest among individual family members, especially those higher in the family hierarchy. For example, the power to control the business has been source of some conflict among the brothers. Ali is the youngest brother, and he recently married Nazire. He has been in charge of the atelier's production and labour relations. After he got married, he wanted to have a more solid means of income, something he could possess himself. During my last visit, Ali told me that the property rights of the Laleli shop had been transferred to his name, and he was quite happy about it. Family relations are not free from conflicts or power struggles. Rather, members are aware of the benefits of working and living together, but they also are interested in advancing their own interests, which may challenge the interests of the collective.

Striving for Survival: Families Mobilizing their Resources

The two families discussed here have similar social backgrounds, being low-income and migrant families. In establishing and running their businesses, both similarly dwell on the resources brought by their families and immediate kin and are also heavily dependent upon female labour. For managing the ateliers, the Timagur family relies on the family members' garment-producing skills for European markets while the Acar brothers depend on kin networks to maintain their business and to have easy access to domestic markets. Given these similarities and differences, the Timagurs and the Acar brothers have mobilized in unique ways the resources necessary to become and succeed as atelier owners, as discussed below.

Investing in an atelier, even one engaged in informal and small-scale activities, is generally based on the capacity of a household to invest an increasing part of its income and savings in productive activities. As Pahl (1984) points out, relatively high-income groups are more likely to generate income through informal activities than low-income groups, which tend to be unstable and have fewer resources to invest in informal activities. Indeed, the families investigated here are not the poorest of the poor in Turkish society. They are from working-class backgrounds. These families managed to channel their savings into a garment atelier. However, owning a garment atelier does not significantly elevate their social status or catapult them into the middle or upper classes. Rather, it makes them a better-off segment in the working-class neighbourhoods of Istanbul. In other words, informal activities are open to the better-off segments of the urban poor, those who are able to achieve some savings through hard work and a frugal existence.

In the Timagurs' case, they established their garment atelier by drawing on family savings. İsmail's father provided his sons with a house where they could live rent-free. By living with his parents for several years after getting married and having children, İsmail was able to invest in sewing machines and other materials needed for the atelier. Having extended family and *hemşehris* living nearby enabled İsmail to tap into reciprocal assistance networks whenever extra resources were needed. When they are in need of money, the Timagurs borrow from people who earlier had borrowed from them. The availability of mutual help

and solidarity between family members and kin exists as long as the reciprocity is perpetuated by each party involved.

Gold jewellery in the possession of women is seen as a financial asset that can be cashed in at times of financial difficulty. For the initial capital of the atelier, İsmail's wife, Gül, contributed her own seven gold bracelets, which were bought for her as wedding gifts. By using her gold bracelets to support the business, Gül proved herself a good wife and mother by showing sacrifice for the well being of the family. This lifted her relative power vis-à-vis other family members, in addition to her seniority as the eldest bride in the family. This has resulted in Gül being more involved in atelier decision making and having the right to observe her husband's business more closely than she otherwise would have been able to do.

The Acar family tapped into rural resources to generate the initial capital necessary to start up their atelier. First, they sold land their father owned in order to buy their first sewing machines. Second, they cut expenses on food consumption and other items by not buying luxury goods and by having foodstuffs sent from Adıyaman. For the Acars and many other urban families, material connections with rural areas are still of significant importance. Strong extended family structures can also be important resources, which can be utilised for business purposes. To do so, an individual (or family) has to be known to the community as reliable and trustworthy, an important form of social capital in urban Turkey. In return, then, the community benefits by having a socially successful individual, who is able to provide-through job opportunities and financial credit in times of need-many externalities.

In the Acar family, the survival and success of the family is closely linked to the strict control of spending by family members. The tendency of urban families to increase consumption and use more luxury goods is eliminated by the Acars' collective budgeting. Household spending is planned very carefully, and shopping is done for all four families on a periodic basis. The eldest brother decides the family's individual and collective needs and each wife receives a small weekly allowance (pazar parası) to buy fresh vegetables for cooking; the amount given is calculated according to how many children the wife has. The eldest brother also pays all other expenses for the family, such as bills, schooling expenses of the children, and furniture, though these expenses

are kept to a minimum.

When the youngest brother got married, the family bought everything necessary to set up his household, from refrigerator to television. The provision of all the items his home needed also set a limit for its level of consumption. After the marriage, his wife got 20 million Turkish Lira[1] a week to buy fresh vegetables for the week's meals. The wife said that the other brides advised her to save some money for the future; since she did not yet have any children, she would not need to spend that much. In Turkey married women, especially if they are not engaged in wage labour, have limited access to cash, called "money for bazaar" (*pazar parası*), which is given to women to spend in the neighbourhood bazaars held once a week, and is provided by their husbands for foodstuffs and children's expenses. If women want to have their own money, they need to save it from their weekly allowance, which is usually allocated for household goods or for their children's needs.

Skill is the second component necessary for becoming an atelier owner. When families do not themselves have the necessary job skills or experience, they draw on the expertise of extended kin. In the early years of their business, the Acar brothers were able to learn from their uncle's son, a skilled worker who taught them sewing and how to make business deals with other firms. İsmail also had a skilled brother, Yaşar, who had begun atelier work after leaving primary school. By the time they decided to open a garment atelier, Yaşar was a highly skilled garment worker and became a helping hand to İsmail in dealing with the business.

Due to the fluid and fluctuating nature of incoming orders, shifting production deadlines, and constantly changing labour requirements, ateliers depend upon a pool of reserve labour of family members and relatives. This core labour force provides flexibility, allowing ateliers to easily draw labourers into and out of production. A reliable and loyal labour force willing to work long and unstable hours is vital to keeping the business running. This is why female members are so crucial to the garment atelier's success; women always have their homes and domestic responsibilities to look after when there is no atelier work.

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[1] At the time of interview, 500 thousand Turkish Lira was almost 1 US Dollar.

Locating the business within a short distance of the home of the owner is vital to recruiting from among family, relatives and neighbours, and to staying in business. In one case, Osman, an ex-partner of İsmail, after moving his ateliers away from a neighbourhood where *hemşehri(s)* and close friends lived, had to close down his business. In the new neighbourhood, which was relatively better off, workers demanded higher salaries and his family members could not easily commute to the new place, resulting in the atelier's closure. However, such dynamics are not unique to Istanbul's garment industry and resemble case studies in Egypt (Singerman, 1995). A large-scale survey of small manufacturing enterprises in Cairo, Egypt, found that slightly more than half of the labour force consisted of the owners, their immediate family members, and other kin. Moreover, immigrant owners were much more likely than those born in Cairo to employ members of their immediate family and other relatives. Immigrants, in general, appear to rely heavily on family and female labour in order to survive in a new environment.

Women's Labour in the Timagur and Acar Ateliers

As discussed above, in garment ateliers labour is acquired through informal channels of familial, kinship, and neighbourhood relations. The importance of female labour for the maintenance and survival of businesses is not only due to the fact that women are easily available, flexible, and a cheap source of labour, but also because their labour presents an articulation of the social relations on which business success depends. Acquiring women's presence in these ateliers signals to society that their workplace is a secure family environment for women to work in.

In the Timagur family's case, Yaşar's wife, Ayşe, is a full-time skilled garment worker; Yaşar's mother looks after Ayşe's young children. İsmail's two daughters, Semra and Canan, work full time at the atelier, though his wife, Gül, does not. However, Gül is quite engaged in matters related to the business. Her status as the eldest bride, as well as the sacrifice of her gold wedding bracelets, invests Gül with more authority in the atelier's functioning, despite the superior garment-making skills of her daughters. Her roles in the atelier include allocating different jobs to her daughters and managing the labour of other family members.

Gül is also burdened with trimming and cleaning garments at home, and to finding and organizing her neighbours and relatives to trim garments, ensuring that the work is completed on time. As such, Gül not only contributes to the garment business through her own home-based work, but also secures help when necessary from women relatives or neighbours for home-based piecework. Gül has also drawn on her own family resources to provide financial support when the business was in financial difficulty.

Gül's case is a good example of what Sharma (1986) calls "household service work," in which domestic tasks extend beyond meeting the physical needs of household members to providing and maintaining particular ties with kin, neighbours, and friends, who are a source of information and aid. By combining her household work with actual atelier production and with organization of that production, Gül plays a vital role in connecting the arenas of production and reproduction. Yet the Timagur family, and Gül herself, consider her to be just a housewife.

The example of Gül and her daughters highlights the ways in which women's bargaining power and social identities impact on how they participate in garment production, with daughters' and mothers' perceived contributions differing according to their relative positions in the family. So, while Gül's contributions to the atelier are not considered "work," she still has authority in the workplace because of her seniority and status. Semra, on the other hand, does "work," but she has marginal power. In this context, women's invisibility in productive work comes through the social values assigned to women's roles in the family, their marital status, and their status in the family hierarchy. Interestingly, the greater a woman's relative social status, the less her "work" in the atelier is socially visible.

In the case of the Acar women, household duties and child-care are the primary responsibilities. Each of the wives occupies a strategic position mediating relations between the brothers, who must maintain close relations at home, as well as in the atelier, by transmitting domestic information and the private concerns of individual households. Although the women of the family are strictly confined to the domestic sphere and their behaviour is watched and controlled by other members of the family, all the women have garment-making skills.

Besides having weekly routines and work schedules, such as going to

the bazaar once a week, they also participate in atelier production by trimming garments, cleaning the atelier, or sewing at the machines. A wife's involvement in production varies according to how many children she has and her prior experience with garment work. The wife of the eldest brother works regularly in the atelier while the two younger brides-who have experience working in garment ateliers-are called to participate if extra "help" is needed. These two women do not see themselves as atelier workers and do not acknowledge their work as contributing to the business, nor do they think of it as "real work." As the wives of the atelier owners, they are just helping their husbands. Likewise, the women's contributions to many aspects of production remain unrecognized by the family and themselves.

For example, the youngest bride, Nazire, is the most experienced worker among the female family members, having worked for more than seven years at her husband's atelier. After she married, Nazire was not supposed to work at all. Yet, whenever I met with the family, Nazire was at the atelier. Even after having her first baby, Nazire left her son with her mother to go and work in the atelier. However, none of the family members consider Nazire to be a garment worker, and not simply because she is not paid for her work. Rather, it is because she is married and has a child; she just happens to be helping her husband from time to time. It is not only society or their families that fail to see women's contributions to atelier production. Women's unpaid family work-masked by their roles as mothers and wives-is unrecognized by the women themselves.

Accounting for Gender in Garment Production

Family enterprises are characterised by a labour hierarchy. Positions within the family translate into working identities both for men and women, and family members usually participate in the family business by offering services that directly or indirectly contribute to the success of the family business. In return, some are unpaid family workers while others receive payments for their contributions. Women's contributions encompassed within their domestic roles and identities usually remain unpaid, invisible, and unrecognised by the family and community.

Garment ateliers can generate "gender-appropriate" jobs for women

in the local community. This is especially beneficial for young girls. Because ateliers are located in their neighbourhoods and are owned by a neighbour or relative, unmarried girls commonly start their first jobs in a garment atelier. Families' opposition to a daughter's employment is eliminated through strict surveillance and control of girls in the ateliers. Before sending the girls to work, families make sure that their daughters will be strictly watched by the managers or owners of the ateliers. Girls are warned in advance that any improper behaviour will be reported to their parents. Consequently, employment outside the home shifts the control of family honour to those families operating garment businesses. Through these first jobs, families become accustomed to the idea that their daughters bring a substantial income to family budgets. Thereafter these girls keep working in other companies and in different types of jobs.

For married women, atelier jobs have a different trajectory from those of young girls, as their labour is more often closely tied to household needs and family business cycles. If a family business closes down women go back to their homes and children, or if the business expands through partnerships with other ateliers and increases the number of non-family employees, the married women are excluded from the work and stay home. These shifts in ownership generate a separation between household and workplace, leading to the exclusion of married women from the workplace. As such, these partnerships draw attention to the line between the public and private sphere activities of women in Turkish society. As long as the workplace is conceptualized as an extension of the household, and as long as family members outnumber unrelated workers, the atelier is safe and secure for women to go and work there. Although a workplace is generally considered a public domain, its occupation by family members and relatives creates the illusion of a private sphere, freeing women to operate there as if it were a private domain.

For women, working in a family-owned atelier perpetuates the existing gender and social relations based on kinship. The intimate connections with kin and friends working at the same place are maintained outside the home. In every interview, my women informants emphatically expressed that a family or friend connection had helped them to get their current jobs, suggesting that women's entry into the labour market is

constrained to the places where they have acquaintances. Moreover, women always feel obligated to those who have given them job opportunities, and to keeping those relational ties going. The sense of obligation and respect compelling them to work hard and show dedication to their employers creates a form of work ethic and commitment to the workplace, as if it were their own home. As a result, women sometimes find it difficult to change jobs, even when they have better opportunities elsewhere. White (1994) calls these social relations based on reciprocity and trustworthiness the "power of debt," which allows people to feel obligated to one another in return for a favour, such as offering a job or lending money (p. 47).

In sum, the increasing number of garment ateliers has generated new employment opportunities for women, who comprise a pool of readily available, cheap, and poorly organized labour crucial for firms to remain competitive in the market. As mentioned, women participate in production directly, either by engaging in full-time work at ateliers or by doing piecework from home. However, women also contribute to production indirectly by maintaining social ties with kin and neighbours.

Conclusion

Turkey has been one of the leading exporters of garment products. The industry has played an important role in economic growth, industrialization, and employment generation in Turkey. The high numbers of unregistered operations and informal workers is the main characteristic that allows the industry to be globally competitive and to remain flexible in its operations. This globally strong industry is supported by the extremely low-paid labour of women and children, whose work, under certain conditions, is unpaid or generally underpaid.

Running a family atelier in Istanbul requires access to a rich pool of immediate family labour, as well as other kinship relations. By providing flexibility in production, these social ties enable firms to survive volatile and uncertain market conditions. While perpetuating social relations and networks based on mutuality, solidarity, and trust, firm owners exploit their own and their family's labour and resources in order to be competitive. In this context, female labour is essential to atelier production, not only because it is cheap and flexible, but also because it

mediates social relations in establishing ties of reciprocity and obligations among community members.

Employment opportunities for women in small-scale firms are diverse. They offer some women a degree of independence and increased bargaining power at home. Young girls, even though restricted, are sometimes able to move to better paying jobs. In contrast, the contributions of married and unpaid family labour are often "invisible," masked by their socially approved roles as dedicated wives and mothers. Since both women and their communities consider their participation as "help" and render it invisible, being an unpaid family labourer provides only a limited degree of empowerment. Yet, while their productive activities may go unrecognised, their dedication as wives and mothers is socially rewarded by approval of them as "good women" rather than workers. Moreover, by opting to improve their bargaining positions by perpetuating these primary roles as mothers and wives, women maintain and strengthen strong business and family relations. In the end, these activities can increase decision-making power in both the home and the workplace, as the case of Gül illustrates.

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