

**Working for Family: The Role of Women's Informal Labor in the Survival of
Family-Owned Garment Ateliers in Istanbul, Turkey**

by

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Abstract

Since the implementation of export-oriented industrialization strategies in the early 1980s, small-scale firms have become increasingly important to Turkey's economy. In an era of flexible production and subcontracting, small-scale firms have been able to enter the global marketplace by cheaply producing and exporting labor-intensive commodities, such as textiles, food, garments, and leather goods. This paper investigates the changing nature of Turkey's manufacturing sector by investigating one increasingly prominent type of small-scale firm: garment ateliers (*atölye*) in Istanbul.

As family-owned businesses, ateliers draw on inexpensive (and often unpaid), flexible, and loyal immediate and extended kin to provide labor. Garment ateliers operate informally on the outskirts of big cities, such as Istanbul, where rural migrant families comprise a cheap labor pool for enterprising migrant business owners. These small-scale firms then depend on unpaid and underpaid labor, encouraged by large-scale manufacturing factories seeking cheap subcontracting linkages to take over the labor-intensive parts of industrial production. This paper—through two case-studies—focuses on family labor and extended kin social networks to analyze the role of women's unpaid and underpaid labor in these small-scale garment ateliers.

Biography

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Introduction

Turkey's export-oriented industrialization strategies, first implemented in the early 1980s, have dramatically increased the production and export of labor-intensive commodities, such as textiles, food, garments, and leather. These strategies have created an environment where small-scale firms are able to enter the global marketplace—through subcontracting linkages with larger firms—by cheaply producing these commodities. The result has been an explosion of small-scale enterprises, particularly those specializing in garment production—called ateliers (*atölye*)—which have mushroomed in immigrant neighborhoods of Istanbul. Ateliers often operate informally, relying on the inexpensive or unpaid flexible labor of family and extended kin.

Women's participation in garment production is critically important. Women are not only a cheap labor source for these ateliers, but they also help to mediate the familial relations—including social networks of family, kinship, and neighborhood—upon which the survival of ateliers in the very volatile market of the garment industry depends. This paper focuses on the importance of family labor and the nature of family-based production in these ateliers. In particular, the paper emphasizes the role of women's unpaid and underpaid labor involvement in small-scale garment ateliers in Istanbul and analyzes social networks of extended kin relations. By revealing the relations governing industrial production in Turkey, this paper argues that women's labor—while often unrecognized or rendered invisible—is crucial to the survival of families engaged in the labor-intensive garment industry.

Small-Scale Firms and Flexible Specialization: Changes in Global Production Patterns and Women as Labor Pool

To contextualize the Turkish case, I first shall consider the general development trajectory of small-scale industries in the Third World, especially those in the labor-intensive manufacturing sector. By establishing linkages between flexible production techniques and global commodity chains, I draw on theoretical arguments regarding flexible production and global commodity networks to examine the organization of production and labor in small-scale garment ateliers in Istanbul, with special reference to unpaid female labor.

I refer to small-scale firms in the manufacturing sector as “small-scale industry,” a term describing companies with fewer than fifty employees that engage in the transformation and processing activities of production, as well as the making, servicing, and repairing of tools and equipment (Teszler 1993). In other words, small-scale industry refers to firms specializing in the production activities of the manufacturing sector. I purposefully omit from this definition small firms in the wide-ranging service sector, which usually specialize in trading activities.

Third World involvement in worldwide industrial production has radically changed since the mid-1970s, when transnational companies (TNCs) first began locating labor-intensive parts of electronics, footwear, and garment production in low-wage countries with large pools of cheap labor. In many developing countries, free trade zones, often unprotected by labor and

employment legislation, have been established to attract foreign firms. As a result, Third World countries have increased greatly their production of manufactured commodities. This new form of worldwide industrialization has been termed the “new international division of labor” (Frobel, Heinrichs and Kreye 1980). In the pursuit of cost effectiveness, foreign firms have set up branches and subsidiaries in developing countries, often as joint ventures with local firms. Networking with local subcontractors has become the new pattern in international out-sourcing, as TNCs minimize their production roles as much as possible (Gereffi 1994).

In recent years, with the introduction of flexible production techniques in the manufacturing sector—which put small industries at the center of industrial development strategies—small-scale industry contributions to developing economies have received growing attention (Liedholm and Mead 1999; Piore and Sabel 1984). As a result, developing countries are increasingly focusing public policy on the creation and promotion of small firms, which have been hailed as engines for achieving self-sustained economic growth (International Labor Organization 1976) and creating income and employment opportunities for the urban poor (World Bank 1980).

The flexible specialization theory, as put forward by Piore and Sabel (1984), suggests that industrialization does not necessarily require large-scale enterprises; it can also be attained by flexibly organizing production in small-scale firms (Schmitz 1990). The result is a fragmented production process, where subcontracting and the “putting out” system prevail.

Trade channels between local firms and international companies are established as local firms become responsible for production while depending on multinational firms for markets, materials, and technical know-how (Mitter 1994:20). Relying on numerous local subcontractors enables international companies to respond lithely and quickly to changes in market demands, making this type of international industrial production more flexible than “traditional” production through foreign direct investments. Moreover, it allows multinational companies to avoid certain production costs, volatility of markets, taxes, and unexpected changes in local economic policies, while enabling them to move between different suppliers without additional cost. This form of international commodity production, usually called “Post-Fordist production,” depends upon cheap, flexible labor and local resources, and it generates a global hierarchy among those countries that produce technology and know-how, and those with cheap labor and raw materials. Flexible industrialization affects labor processes, resulting in more casual and part-time workers, with local small-scale firms able to directly access untapped and cheap pools of labor in ways that large TNCs cannot, as is discussed below.

In order to attract and keep the interest of large, TNCs, small-scale firms in developing countries depend upon informal and casual labor. By drawing heavily upon unpaid family labor in order to minimize production costs, these small-scale firms attempt to stay competitive in volatile markets (Pedersen, Sverrisson and van Dijk 1994; Levitsky 1989; Liedholm and Mead 1999). Family labor—and particularly female labor, which is considered the free property of family—gives these businesses, especially those that are labor-intensive, a competitive edge in the market.

Female employment is closely associated with the “flexibility” of labor markets, and women are the main recipients of casualized, instable, and insecure jobs (Elson 1996; Mitter 1994). This has led, some argue, to a global feminization of the workforce (Standing 1989). Household chores and childcare cause women to have looser relations with formal productive activities than men.

Their reproductive roles, which result in women entering and exiting the labor market, and the values attached to them make women very suitable for this type of informalized production. “Women have emerged as very desirable employees in these circumstance because their relationship to the labor market has traditionally displayed the characteristics of flexibility so much wanted in the current conjuncture” (Jenson, Hagen and Reddy 1988:10 in Elson 1996). In almost every society, women are seen by policy makers as an untapped pool of labor, which can be easily pulled in and pushed out of the labor market (Elson 1995).

Macro Settings and Development Trends of Small-Scale Industry in Turkey

To understand the dynamics underlying small-scale industry in Turkey, it is necessary to look at the country’s structural conditions. In the early years (1950-1960) of import substitution in Turkey, the state subsidized a variety of investment and trade regime programs to generate the capital necessary to produce previously imported commodities. These programs included establishing high tariff barriers for goods produced in the country, subsidizing national investment in manufacturing production, and later overvaluing Turkish currency (1960s-1970s). The government and the State Planning Institution hoped these programs would spur the development of small-scale firms, which would grow then to become massive factories, generating employment and producing goods for the country.

A policy shift in the 1980s, one favoring export-oriented industries, reversed these state tax benefits and tariffs protecting the national market. As industries were opened up to the world market and to price competition, the pressure to minimize costs and risks led large-scale manufacturing firms to increasingly subcontract labor-intensive parts of the production line to smaller firms. Subcontracting thus became a significant part of labor-intensive production in Turkey. Small-scale firms—especially those focusing on labor-intensive production, such as garment ateliers—became an important link in a subcontracting chain of manufacturing production, and their importance continues to grow. Subcontracting between large-scale and small-scale firms is especially widespread in the ready-to-wear industry. Since the 1980s, Turkey has become one of the world’s leading garment exporting countries (Dicken 1998).

Since the early 1950s, urbanization has been steadily increasing in Turkey. Migrants were spurred by the mechanization of agricultural production and the rising pool of marginal labor in rural areas, where agricultural production had been based on small-scale land ownership. Moreover, people were pulled to cities by employment opportunities generated by national industries, which characterized the import substitution period of the 1960s. Since then, the rural population has been declining in number, while Turkey’s urban population has doubled in size. Whereas 25 percent of the population was urban in 1945, an estimated 65 percent was urban in 1997 (TÜSIAD 1999).

Yet, at the same time that the number of urban migrants has been increasing, several policies with negative consequences for urban migrants have been implemented (TÜSIAD 1999; Yentürk 1997). Post-1980 neoliberal economic policies—including structural adjustment programs—have resulted in public spending cuts to education, health, and social security. These policies have had direct, adverse impacts on tight-budget, low-income families, who mainly live on the outskirts (*gecekondu*¹) of big cities. The share of education and health in the government’s social spending has dropped from 23.6 percent in 1992 to 11 percent in 1998, shifting more of the burden of social reproduction to the private sphere, thereby increasing women’s care-taking

roles and shortening years of schooling for children (TÜSIAD 1999; Boratav, Yeldan and Köse 2000). Moreover, high rates of child employment, or early age employment, are a long-term consequence of public cuts in education and healthcare spending, as is deteriorating income distribution in Turkey (Tunali 1997).

Low-income migrant families have been negatively affected by the downward pressure on wages and salaries generated by the combination of increasing domestic prices and high inflation. The share of wages in the manufacturing sector has dropped from 35.6 percent in 1977-80 to 20.6 percent in 1983-87 and to 16.6 percent in 1995-98 (Voyvoda and Yeldan 1999). Although this data captures only the formal organized manufacturing sector², it is possible that the declining rate of real wages is stronger in the informal sector, as wages in the informal economy are typically lower than in the formal sector.

In sum, a combination of demographic and economic factors, leading on the one hand to more and more people moving into cities and on the other hand to deteriorating living standards among these groups, has generated conditions where poor migrant families are often dependent upon informal activities for survival. The mass migration of people into cities, the reduction in the real price of labor, policies that increase the prices of goods, and the stagnation of real wages in a high inflation economy have converged to generate cheap labor pools for labor-intensive sectors, like manufacturing. The expanding manufacturing sector has accessed this available pool of devalued and migrant labor through subcontracting arrangements with the help of family-based production in small-scale firms.

Small-Scale Industry in Turkey

In Turkey's official statistics, many definitions of "small-scale" have been used. I use the State Statistics Institute (SSI) definition, which limits small-scale industry (*kuçuk işletme*) to firms with one to fifty workers³. In manufacturing sector employment, the overall share of small-scale firms employing fewer than ten employees is higher than all other firms combined. As seen in Table 1, the number of firms employing one to nine persons constitutes 95 percent of private manufacturing firms and employs 38 percent of total labor force. At the same time, Köse and Öncü (1998) provide evidence that the average annual cost of labor in the small-scale private manufacturing enterprises was below legal minimum wage levels throughout most of the 1980s and 1990s.

As the sub-sectoral distribution shows, small-scale firms are concentrated in labor-intensive production areas, such as food processing, textile, clothing, and wood products, and the wage level is lower than in larger-scale firms. As wages rise with the size of firm, labor productivity also rises (Taymaz 1997).

Table 1: Turkish Private Manufacturing Sector, 1994

Size of establishment	Number of firms	Number of employees (registered)	Wages*	Labor Productivity
1-9	188,138	279,313	0.097	0.416
10-49	6904	157,254	0.162	1.011
50-150	1835	157,411	0.438	1.434
151-250	423	81,135	0.324	1.826
251+	572	340,494	0.509	2.753
Total (+1)	197,872	1,015,607	0.316	1.562
Total (+10)	9734	736,294	0.400	1.997

* Wages are calculated in Turkish Liras (million) and fixed 1980 prices

Source: Köse and Öncü 1998

The annual Manufacturing Industry Statistics of SSI is the most elaborate statistical database on small-scale firms in Turkey, though it covers only public enterprises and formal employment in private establishments employing more than ten persons. Most scholars agree that there is an extensive and accelerated usage of marginal/unregistered labor in the Turkish labor market (Boratav, Yeldan and Köse 2000; Yentürk 1997; Bulutay 1995). The ratio of informal labor⁴ to total employment in the manufacturing industry was around 49 percent in 1994 and 44 percent in 1995 (Boratav, Yeldan and Köse 2000). Informal labor employment rates are higher in labor-intensive sectors, where small-scale firms have greater importance (Boratav, Yeldan and Köse 2000). As is seen in other developing countries, labor-intensive small-scale manufacturing in Turkey relies heavily on unpaid family and informal labor (Taymaz 1997).

Table 2: Small-Scale Manufacturing Industry (1-9 workers), Turkey, 1996

Year	Number of establishments (1)	Annual average number of employees (2)	Annual average number of persons engaged* (3)	% of total workforce officially employed (2/3)
1980	177,159	217,634	493,666	44.09
1985	183,106	258,073	526,436	49.02
1992	186,897	274,355	523,103	52.45
1993	189,268	282,641	509,014	55.53
1994	188,138	279,313	508,759	54.90
1995	189,456	302,258	526,850	57.37
1996	190,845	303,294	528,310	57.41

*Includes owners and unpaid family workers

Source: Small-scale manufacturing industry statistics, 1996, SIS

Identifying unpaid family workers' and owners' direct participation in production is crucial for understanding employment patterns in small-scale enterprises. As seen in Table 2, the number of people engaged in small-scale production dramatically increases when unpaid family workers are considered part of the work force. The pervasiveness of unpaid family labor suggests women might be more prone to be unpaid laborers, as "helpers" to husbands and fathers, a point illustrated by the case studies discussed below. However, no specific study examines the role of female labor in small-scale family-owned firms or the actual gender distribution of unpaid family labor.

Organization of Turkish Household and Gender Relations

To understand the relations governing labor processes in small-scale family firms, it is necessary to look at the organization of the household and how gender relations within and beyond it are produced and reenacted 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.

At the outset, I want to point out that my analysis of gender and Turkish women intends to shed light on relations within working class families in Turkey's urban areas. In particular, my paper analyzes a very specific socio-economic group: immigrant families living in the outskirts of Istanbul. Many different social classes and groups comprise Turkey's urban areas, which are often places of social stigma and conflict, as well as social confrontation. The gender analysis I undertake here is purposefully chosen to reflect the relations characterizing working class, low-income immigrant groups whose male members come to Istanbul with no skills and become manual laborers in the early years of their migration. These families usually live in squatter areas of Istanbul, and they comprise a large section of the immigrant population in Istanbul.

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 labor 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 labor 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 nurturing⁵. With this division of labor 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 breastfeeding him) represents this power. A son believes his mother has tremendous rights in decision-making and managerial power because of her efforts 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 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. Women do this, in part, by taking care of them when they are children and then later when they are husbands. Because they are socially ridiculed if they perform household duties, men are obligated to have women care for them, and since domestic

chores and child-care are the primary social responsibilities of women⁶, women do not ask for much “help” from their husbands. As mothers and wives, women gain status as they age and by keeping husbands’ and sons’ affections, which they transfer into security and power in the household. Power also comes from being “respectable” mothers and wives.

Kandiyoti defines this specific form of relationship as “bargaining with patriarchy” (1988:280). 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)*⁷, and the community. As White 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 labor requirements of her roles as wife, neighbor, mother, a woman signifies her willingness to participate in the web of reciprocal obligations on which group stability and security rests (1994:61).

Indeed, gender relations exist in a web of social relations, in which women and men are not just females and males, but they 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 labor relations. In such a context, work relationships often adopt kinship idioms and values (White 1994). At the same time, cooperative control of female sexuality requires strictly enforcing “appropriate behavior,” resulting in women’s submission to existing gender roles and ideologies, and close scrutiny of women’s behavior in private and public spaces (White 1994). 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 Small-Scale Businesses: The Case of Garment Ateliers in Istanbul

The brief introduction to society, gender, and small-scale firms in Turkey paves the way for analysis of garment ateliers in Istanbul. I offer two case studies⁸ to explore the linkages between family-owned business, subcontracting networks, and female labor. The case studies here present two different production circuits of garment production in Istanbul. Moreover, these two case studies demonstrate the opportunities subcontracting generates for migrant families.

Both ateliers I examine are located in squatter areas of Istanbul, which are known as *gecekondu* or, more recently, *varos*. These areas are sites where migrant families from different villages encounter each other and where different ethnic, cultural, and religious groups live together. As relatives living in the same neighborhood, *hemsehri(s)* support each other in finding jobs and provide access to business and financial networks. These relations of solidarity, usually based on familial and kinship networks, help new migrants initially to survive and then to integrate into city life. Until now, the communal solidarity structures and kinship networks of these migrant groups have been seen as temporary (Ayata 1989; Karpat 1976). Instead, I show how migrant families in the garment business utilize these solidarity structures and kinship networks as long-term survival strategies in Istanbul.

Organizing *hemsehri* networks into small-scale family firms, ateliers utilize two types of commodity circuits to integrate into Istanbul's garment industry. In the first and most common, large firms⁹ subcontract with small-scale ateliers to produce for export. Export-oriented garment factories that shift some part of their production to small-scale firms and firms working with the world's well-known brand names—such as Benetton—engage in this type of subcontracting. My informants often reported that subcontracting firms tightly control production processes and the quality of products in the ateliers.

Turkey's foreign trade regulations and tax laws allow firms recording high enough export performance to be eligible for corporate or income tax exemption. To take advantage of tax breaks, these large firms require subcontracted small-scale firms to report and invoice every item produced. Unlike these large firms, most small-scale atelier owners cannot deduct their own expenses from income taxes; as such, they complained to me of feeling unfairly burdened by high taxes. The way small-scale ateliers reduce this tax burden is by employing workers informally.

The second type of commodity circuit has small-scale firms—often operating informally¹⁰—manufacturing for the “domestic markets” of the ex-Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Commodities are sold either directly to foreign customers in Laleli, an area of Istanbul, or they are exported through informal channels to Eastern Europe and Russia. The quality standards are lower for these markets, since domestic customers there do not have as high per capita income as in Western Europe and the United States and so require cheaper products.

Specializing in the manufacturing and wholesaling of apparel and other consumer goods, Laleli is an important node of the shuttle trade. In the 1990s, coinciding with freedom of travel in the ex-Soviet Union, thousands of stores selling garments and leatherwear to shuttle traders mushroomed in the neighborhood. Immigration of ethnic Turks from Bulgaria and Kurds from southeastern Turkey generated an ethnic monopoly of shopkeepers in Laleli (Yükseker 2003). A person usually must be from one of these ethnic groups to open a shop in Laleli, where access to kin relations and financial resources are crucial for success.

Kurds, forced to leave their homes in the southeast since the late 1980s, comprise the largest group of entrepreneurs and workers in Laleli¹¹. The more resourceful, and those with start-up capital, have opened wholesale apparel, leather, and footwear stores to supply the shuttle trade; poorer migrants have become porters or other service workers in hotels and restaurants. In the absence of reliable migration figures, it is not possible to estimate the number of Kurdish entrepreneurs in Laleli. Nevertheless, bankers, landlords, and municipal officials who have

observed the development of the market from its inception have reported that at least two-thirds of the storeowners are Kurds from southeast Turkey (Yükseker 2003). The Acar family, a Kurdish family from Adiyaman, whom I discuss below, has a garment shop in Laleli and also produces garments in their ateliers for the Laleli market.

Establishing a garment atelier in one's own neighborhood does not require substantial start-up capital. The initial capital may come from a subcontractor firm in the form of sewing and other kinds of machines, or it may be derived from the savings of family members and relatives. As the garment atelier owners' narratives reveal, it is common for garment workers, once they have enough money and experience, to open their own businesses. Being a skilled garment worker, having some initial capital, and having family and friends willing to provide cheap labor often are enough to open a small-scale garment atelier in Istanbul. These are very favorable entry conditions for people looking to expand their income in the garment business. However, this does not mean that just anyone can open a garment atelier, a point illustrated by my case studies.

The Timagur Family

The Timagur family resides in Gaziosmanpasa, an area with many garment ateliers. They live in a three-floor building owned by the father, Hüseyin, who came to Istanbul from Bayburt 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 Gaziosmanpasa. 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, Ismail, and his younger brother, Yasar, 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 working in an atelier, Ismail decided to open a small atelier in his neighborhood, where the rents and labor prices were cheaper than in the neighborhood where Ismail had worked. Ismail told me that, as Istanbul received migrants and expanded toward its outskirts, garment ateliers and factories began to move to the city's edges, too. The old center of the garment business, which now hosts marketplaces such as Laleli, or shopping centers and office buildings, is an expensive place for small garment ateliers. Now, all three brothers, Ayse, who is Yasar's wife, and Ismail's daughters all work together in the atelier, and all are skilled workers.

Ali, the youngest brother, has been a worker for the family's atelier both before and after his obligatory sixteen-month military service. However, Ali's brothers do not consider him to be a partner in the family business, since he did not contribute financially to establishing the atelier. In contrast, Ali does not see any ownership differences between himself and his brothers, since he sees the atelier as a family business.

Gül, Ismail'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 need for extra labor. Gül's mother-in-law usually looks after the family's young children while the wives are working. The atelier is located near the family house, allowing the family to easily carry work pieces from the atelier to home and back again. Because the area is replete with the Timagurs' hemsehris and relatives, the family also is able to recruit workers from among their kin and

neighbors, when needed. Currently twelve of the twenty workers in the atelier are not family members.

The atelier mainly works on orders from export companies. Ismail's area of expertise, shirt sewing, is also the atelier's specialty, since this is the area where Ismail can have the most control over the production process. Quality is very important for export-oriented production, and Ismail stresses his workers' high skill levels. He emphasizes that becoming a skilled worker in his business requires almost ten years of working experience. His younger daughter, Seda, has been working with him almost six years and needs, according to Ismail, three or four years more experience to be a top-skilled worker of sewing.

Initially, the atelier subcontracted with Ismail's previous employer's firm, which supported Ismail in establishing his own business. Later, Ismail got to know many other firms, from which his atelier also could 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 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-prices, 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 Ismail'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, expanding his business by adding more partners from his former workplace. Other times, he worked only with his brothers and immediate family members. As a subcontractor, Ismail's position literally shifts from employer to employee, depending on the requirements of production and the size of his atelier. When he went into partnership with other ateliers and increased the number of non-family employees, the married women of his family were excluded from the work and stayed home. Being in a partnership meant having strangers in the workplace instead of only those who are known to the family.

These shifts in ownership generate a separation between household and workplace, sometimes 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 come and work. 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 sphere.

The Timagur family's business is based on their garment making skills, which rest with Ismail's expertise. Because of Ismail's status as owner of the atelier and head of the family, the labor and financial contributions of other members of the family are subjugated to him. He supervises the other members, manages business deals, and does marketing. The gains from the business are distributed according to the contributions made by each family. As Ismail 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 the other members in allocating the money. In our conversation, Ismail 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 Gaziosmanpasa as the Timagurs. Four brothers from Adiyaman, 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 ten 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 male coats and jackets for the Laleli market.

Selling every piece they made for Laleli, they decided to open their own atelier. The other two Acar brothers came from Adiyaman shortly thereafter to take part in the business. All the brothers moved to a shared apartment in Gaziosmanpasa, where they took advantage of being from the east of Turkey. Since people from Adiyaman and Malatya dominate the Laleli market, the Acars were able to access the informal business network and export channels simply by virtue of being from the same place of origin and ethnic group. After a short time, the brothers sent for the eldest brother's wife to do the cooking, cleaning, and washing in their shared household. She helped in the atelier as well. The Acar brothers' atelier grew rapidly, and now it comprises fourteen machines and twenty employees.

The brothers have a division of labor 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. For example, the eldest brother is in a kind of managerial position, deciding on issues related to finance and the spending habits 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. Indeed, the Acar family depends on a single collective budget, rather than on 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. It is more common in rural areas, where families might only have access to cash once a year and so need to closely watch who spends what. For the Acars, this type of budgetary management controls the family's luxury consumption and returns income back into the business.

It seems that families that are structured around patriarchal relations, like the Acars, survive better in the garment business than others because they are able to access obedient and cheap laborers who devote their time and energy to maintaining the family business. The Acar brothers also have very intimate relations with hemsehri(s) and other relatives, which offer yet another way to access informal business channels.

Household duties and child-care are the primary responsibilities of the female members of the Acar family. By transmitting domestic information and the private matters of individual households, 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. Female members of the family are strictly confined to the domestic sphere and their behavior is watched and controlled by other members of the family.

While the women of the family have weekly routines and work schedules, such as going to bazaar once a week, they also participate in atelier production when needed, by trimming garment pieces, cleaning the atelier, or, if they know how, 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. As such, the wife of the eldest brother works regularly in the atelier, while the two younger brides—who also have much experience working in garment ateliers—are called to participate whenever there is need for extra “help.” These two women do not see themselves as atelier workers, 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 the many aspects of production remain unrecognized by the family.

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 before they married. After she married, Nazire was not supposed to work at all. Yet, whenever I met with the family, Nazire was at the atelier. Nazire even left her infant son with her mother to go work in the atelier. 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 the family that fails to see the 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.

The Acar case is interesting because it demonstrates both the benefits and conflicts of extended family business. The advantages include having access to a ready labor pool, with its easy coordination of family support in times of crisis and need. But, 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 an issue 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 labor 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 into 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 individual interests, which may challenge the interests of the collective.

Mobilizing Resources: Comparing the Two Families

The two families discussed here have similar backgrounds. Both are rural migrants and low-income. The Timagurs are similar to the Acar brothers in their dependence on female labor and extended kin networks. But, they use different resources to manage their livelihoods. The Timagur family produces for European markets by relying on their skills as garment makers. The Acar brothers depend on kin networks to access domestic markets. Given these similarities and differences, the Timagurs and 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 into 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 more unstable and have fewer resources to invest. 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. But, 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 neighborhoods 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.

In the Timagurs' case, they established their garment atelier by drawing on family savings. Ismail'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, Ismail was able to invest in sewing machines and other materials needed for the atelier. Having extended family and hemsehris living nearby enabled Ismail to tap into a reciprocal safety network 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 mutuality is perpetuated by each party involved.

Families see gold jewelry, which is possessed by women, as a financial investment that can be converted to cash in times of financial difficulty. For the initial capital of the atelier, Ismail's wife, Gül, gave her own seven gold bracelets, which were bought for her wedding ceremony. 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 gave her relative power vis-à-vis other family members, in addition to that which came from her being the eldest bride in the family. This has resulted in Gül being more involved in atelier decision-making than she otherwise might have been.

The Acar family tapped rural resources to generate the initial capital necessary to startup their atelier. First, they sold land their father had 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 foodstuff sent from Adiyaman. For the Acars and many other urban families, material connections with rural areas are still of significant importance. Strong extended family structures are important resources, into which an individual can tap for business purposes. To do so, an individual has to be known to the community as reliable and trustworthy, important attributes 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 control of spending by family members. The tendency of urban family members to increase consumption and use more luxury goods is tightly controlled by the Acars' collective budgeting. Household spending is planned very carefully, and on a periodic basis shopping is done for all four households. The eldest brother decides the family's individual and collective needs. Each wife receives a small amount of money weekly 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, including bills, schooling expenses of the children, furniture, and the like, though these expenses are kept to a minimum.

When the youngest brother was getting 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 Lira¹² a week to buy fresh vegetables for the week's meals. The wife said that the other brides told 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 labor, have limited access to cash¹³, which is given by their husbands for foodstuffs and children's expenses. In order to have their own money, non-wage earning women must save it from their bazaar money, which is usually allocated for household goods or for their children's needs.

The Acar brothers' situation illustrates that initial capital is not always enough to maintain a business. In this case, spending by the family also has to be strictly controlled so that the family can invest back into their business.

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 laborer who taught them sewing and how to make business deals with other firms. Ismail also had a skilled brother, Yasar, who had begun atelier work after leaving primary school. By the time they decided to open a garment atelier, Yasar was a highly skilled garment worker who was able to help Ismail learn the business.

The very nature of the garment industry is fluid, with fluctuating order levels and shifting production deadlines. In order to meet constantly changing labor requirements, ateliers depend upon reserve labor pools of family and kin. This core labor force provides flexibility, allowing ateliers to easily draw laborers into and out of production. A reliable and loyal labor force willing to work long, 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.

Location of the atelier is also critical to accessing cheap and skilled labor. One atelier owner, Osman, told me that after he had moved his atelier from a neighborhood where hemsehri(s) and close friends lived to a neighborhood where he did not know anyone, he was forced to close the business. Osman, an ex-partner of Ismail, said that the employees in his new workshop, in a relatively better-off neighborhood, demanded higher salaries. He tried to recruit workers from the previous neighborhood by providing transportation to the new workplace. However, this did not succeed, and Osman's business did not last long before closing. For small-scale workshops, the location of workplace is vital to recruiting from among family, relatives, and neighbors, and to staying in business.

Such dynamics are not unique to Istanbul's garment industry, however. A large-scale survey of small manufacturing enterprises in Cairo, Egypt, found that slightly more than half of the labor-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 (Meyer 1986). Immigrants, in general, appear to rely heavily on family and female labor in order to survive in new environments.

Women's Labor in the Timagur and Acar Ateliers

As discussed, in garment ateliers labor is acquired through informal channels of familial, kinship, and neighborhood relations. In these circumstances, female labor is crucial for the maintenance and survival of businesses. Not only are women easily available, flexible, and a cheap source of labor, their labor also perpetuates the social relations on which the business depends. By mediating familial relations, women also signal to society that their workplace is a secure, family environment for women to work.

In the Timagur family's case, Yasar's wife, Ayse, is a full-time skilled garment worker; Yasar's mother looks after Ayse's young children. Ismail's two daughters, Seda and Canan, work full-time at the atelier, though his wife, Gül, does not. It is clear, however, since Gül is the eldest bride in the household, she has a degree of power in matters related to the business, including allocating her daughters to different jobs in the atelier and mediating relations with other family members. Her status as the eldest bride, as well as the sacrifice of her gold wedding bracelets, positions Gül with more authority in the atelier's functioning, despite the greater garment-making skills of her daughters.

Gül is also burdened with trimming and cleaning the garment pieces at home, and she is crucial to finding and organizing her neighbors and relatives to trim garment pieces, assuring the work is completed on time. She says that she herself sometimes works until morning to finish the pieces. As such, Gül not only contributes to the garment business through her own home-based work, but she also secures help from women family members or neighbors for home-based piecework, when needed. Gül also has drawn on her own family resources to provide financial support when Ismail's 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, neighbors, and friends, who are a source of information and aid. By managing her household work with actual atelier production and with the 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.

Drawing on Kandiyoti's (1988) understandings, the example of Gül and her daughters highlights the ways that women's bargaining power and social identities impact 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 greater age and status. Seda, 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.

Accounting for Gender in Garment Production

Garment ateliers can generate “gender appropriate jobs” for unmarried women, especially for young girls. Because ateliers are located in their neighborhoods and owned by a neighbor or relative, unmarried girls commonly start their first jobs in a garment-atelier. Opposition to a daughter’s employment is eliminated through strict surveillance and control of girls in the ateliers. For example, I have observed cases of mothers finding jobs for their daughters in garment shops owned by their neighbors. The mothers then make sure that their daughters are strictly watched by the managers or owners of the ateliers. Girls are warned by their employers that any improper behavior will be reported to their parents. In short, employment outside the home shifts the control of family honor from natal families to those operating garment businesses.

Through these first jobs, girls’ families become accustomed both to the idea that their daughters work to earn money and to the substantial income that daughters add to family budgets. These initial jobs then later lead, in some cases, to girls working for other companies and in different types of jobs. When families believe that their daughters are in safe hands, they are more eager to send them to work. While married women sometimes also follow these employment trajectories, their labor is more often closely tied to household needs and family business cycles.

For women, one important aspect of working in a relative’s atelier is the intimate connections they have with kin and friends working at the same place. In every interview, my women informants emphatically expressed that a family or friend connection helped them to get their current jobs. This suggests that women’s entry into the labor market is constrained to the places where they have acquaintances. Moreover, women always feel obligated to those who have given them job opportunities, and they feel obliged to keep those relational ties going. Women’s sense of obligation compels them to work hard and show dedication to their employers, demonstrating a commitment to the workplace, as if it were their home. As a result, women sometimes find it difficult to change jobs, even when they have better opportunities elsewhere. White (1994:47) 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 favor, such as offering a job or lending money. Employee and employer relations based on obligation and responsibility are double-edged swords, however, since employers also feel compelled to behave in certain ways toward family or kin employees in order to avoid damaging these relationships. I was told once that if you are a stranger working in a family atelier, you soon get to know that relatives get “relative’s treatment,” which is gentler and more polite.

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

Conclusion

Comprising 90 percent of all employment in the manufacturing sector, small-scale family firms are crucial to Turkey's export efforts, especially in the garment industry. Small-scale ateliers are the first units in flexible global production chains. Small-scale firms offer urban migrant families ways to integrate into and survive city life. The rise of these small-scale firms has coincided with the search by large-scale manufacturing factories for cheap subcontracting linkages to take over the labor-intensive parts of industrial production.

Small-scale ateliers in the garment industry are highly dependent upon immediate family labor, as well as other kinship and hemsehri 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 labor and resources in order to be competitive. In this context, female labor is essential to small-scale firms, not only because it is cheap and flexible, but also because it mediates social relations.

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, sometimes get to move to better paying jobs. In contrast, the contributions of married and unpaid family labor 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 laborer provides only a limited degree of empowerment. Yet, while their productive activities might be unrecognized, their dedication as wives and mothers is socially rewarded by approval of them as "good women" rather than workers. Moreover, by "bargaining with patriarchy" and perpetuating these primary roles as mothers and wives, women maintain and strengthen strong business and family relations. In the end, these activities can lead to some decision-making power in the home and workplace, as Gül's case illustrates.

Garment work also introduces the opportunities of the labor market to women and offers some women, in particular the young and unmarried, new ways of earning money. While I have shown that women's work in this context is a double-edged sword, it nonetheless does allow some women the chance to develop their self-esteem and enhance personal power.

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Notes

1. The term *gecekondu* means “houses built over a night,” and was used to indicate squatter areas in major cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, and Adana. Later, *varos* was used to denote these areas. *Varos* is different from *gecekondu* in that it refers to a more modernized form of housing. *Gecekondus* were built as detached houses with one or two bedrooms. These were later replaced by multi-floored apartment buildings. The term *gecekondu* captured the social changes taking place in Turkey, especially after the 1970s.
2. The data covers private and public manufacturing firms employing more than ten persons, although firms employing fewer than ten persons comprise 98 percent of employment in the manufacturing sector.
3. In Turkey, the definition of family-owned business overlaps with that of small-scale enterprises (SSEs) and different institutions adopt mutually incompatible definitions. For instance, People’s Bank (Halk Bank), which is the main financial lender to SSEs, defines enterprises employing from one to ninety-nine employees as small-scale firms, while the State Planning Organization (SPO) defines small-scale firms as those employing between ten and fifty people. These institutions each adopt different definitions of small-scale enterprise in order to meet differing organizational, regulatory, and financial needs. Although the importance of SSEs for economic development and employment generation is widely accepted in Turkey, the level of real knowledge about such firms is surprisingly low (Aktar 1990).
4. Informal labor is defined as the employed labor force that is not given self-employed or employer status in the labor force official statistics and not entitled to any social security coverage.
5. This is not to say that women do not perform paid work or other activities outside the household, but their place in society is restricted by their roles in the domestic domain.
6. For a detailed discussion of this point and of women’s strategies for gaining power by practicing their traditional roles, see Dedeoglu (2002).
7. *Hemsehri* is a person who comes from the same place of origin and with whom one has a common cultural background. *Hemsehrilik* is the name given to the relations and ties between *hemsehri(s)*. *Hemsehrilik* ties are subjectively and situationally defined and are also relational (Günes-Ayata 1991). When considered in the urban context, *hemsehrilik* not only denotes unknown people but also implies social network relationships, and organizational and associational practices developed on the basis of common and shared cultural features.

8. The data presented here derive from my PhD fieldwork, which was based in Istanbul, 1999 to 2000. I interviewed fifty women workers, and I visited fifteen small ateliers and five large-scale textile factories. I interviewed dozens of managers and atelier owners and classified 4000 garment firms operating in Istanbul according to size, location, and product specialty. I also conducted partial participatory research by living in one of the *gecekondu* areas of Istanbul, where two garment ateliers were located. There, I had the chance to do interviews and observe the daily activities of two family-owned ateliers. My fieldwork centered on the factors conditioning female labor supply and demand in Turkey, where official figures point to a decreasing rate of female labor force participation. Istanbul's garment industry was chosen for study, as this sector has the highest rate of female employment.

I analyze the families in the case studies from the perspective of the male family members, as my main interviews were with the male members. While I interviewed women, my aim here is first to highlight communal labor relations and then gender relations. While two case studies are not enough to make broad generalizations about any specific socio-economic group, these studies do provide important insights into the dynamics underlying production in small garment ateliers among working-class and immigrant families in Istanbul. In addition, the case studies demonstrate the importance of extended family ties and relations to establishing easy access to female labor in general.

9. Large-scale garment firms employ more than 100 workers, who are officially recorded and subject to formal social security coverage and fringe benefit payments. In addition, these establishments are independent agents that can establish backward and forward linkages with suppliers and customers, and they have the ability to export their commodities. There is also a division between shop-floor and administrative units, which differentiates them from garment ateliers. There is a tendency to focus on these organized workshops in official statistics.

10. In some cases, firms operate totally off-the-record. In other cases, firms are registered, but they informally employ workers or under-record their commercial activities (semi-informalization).

11. By the late 1980s, people started leaving the Southeast due to fighting between the military and the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party). Forced internal displacement grew in the 1990s with the evacuation of thousands of villages by the military, the PKK's intimidation of villagers who did not support it, and a general feeling of personal and economic insecurity resulting from the conflict. Between 65 to 85 percent of the Kurdish population in the Southeast—an estimated two to three million people—have been forced to leave their villages and towns. Although there are no sound figures, Istanbul might have received up to 1.5 million of these forced Kurdish migrants (Kirisçi 1998).

12. At the time of interview, 500,000 Turkish Lira was almost 1 US Dollar.

13. This is called money for bazaar (*pazar parası*), which is given to women to spend in the neighborhood bazaars held once a week.

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