

# INVISIBILITY, STRUGGLE AND VISIBILITY

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WOMEN WORKERS' STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL  
IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR

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## ABSTRACT

Across the world, women constitute the bottom segments of the informal labour market hierarchy, and the story is no different for Turkish women, except they are further constrained by a patriarchal family culture and corporatist welfare state structure which favours high-skilled workers in full-time employment. A reading of the literature on the reasons for participating in the informal sector suggested that workers either end up in the informal sector as a result of structural factors, such as high unemployment, horizontal and vertical labour market discrimination and limited job opportunities for the low-skilled and low-educated, or they actively *chose* to participate in the labour market to seize the opportunities it provides, such as evading tax and/or bureaucratic costs, or testing out business ideas. However, this dichotomous understanding provided little scope, if any, to understand why women also entered the informal sector, in ever growing numbers and what the gender-specific constraints and opportunities in the informal sector are. Against this background, this thesis aims to show that this dichotomous theorisation of the informal sector is an exaggeration of reality, and that women workers position presents a middle ground, in which they recognise the constraints on their ability to improve their lives but they are also not powerless. Hence, by focusing on the variety of survival strategies used by women workers in the informal sector, the thesis attempts to show the choice among these strategies, including the conditions in which these strategies can be adopted and the barriers to do so.

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## CHAPTER 1: INVISIBILITY, STRUGGLE AND VISIBILITY: WOMEN WORKERS' STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR

Across the world, there is a renewed interest in the informal sector. This is because contrary to the predictions of the early theorists about the informal sector in the 1960's, informal economies have not been replaced by formal ones, but instead emerged in new forms and places (Chen 2014). Despite the changing nature of the informal economies, the majority of the literature blindly focused on the debate about whether individuals take part in the informal sector as a result of having no access to formal labour market (*necessity*) or see the informal sector as a venue to test their entrepreneurial ideas (*choice*). In this overarching account of the informal sector, women workers have been largely analysed through the lens of "necessity", trapped in a vicious circle of invisible and vulnerable employment, with no possibilities of exit. Breaking from these accounts of women in informality as powerless actors, a good number of academic works brilliantly demonstrated that employment in the informal sector might equip women with strategies and responses to the very conditions that make their work invisible and vulnerable (Dannecker 2002; Seeley et al. 2006; Kabeer and Kabir 2009; White 2010; Kabeer 2002; Kabeer 2011a; Kabeer 2011b; Hossain 2012). Following this new thinking, this thesis aims to show how even low-skilled and low-income women in the informal sector and in patriarchal societies with disadvantageous working and mobilisation conditions employ a variety of survival strategies to improve their lives. By analysing how personal and socio-economic circumstances could be influential in women's abilities to negotiate their position in the labour market, this thesis argues that women develop a series of strategies in the informal sector, ranging from subtle, hidden and non-confrontational ones, to those where they actively challenge the circumstances which put them in a vulnerable position in the first place. In doing so, I aimed to move beyond structuralist debates about the

exploitation of women workers in the informal sector to a more grounded analysis of the lives of women workers who have been drawn to the informal sector so as to be able to understand their motivations, and what their jobs meant for them (Kabeer 2002b, xi).

Turkey presents an intriguing case for the study of women in the informal sector. To date the low rate of female economic activity in Turkey in comparison to most regions of the world (e.g. EU and Turkey, 65% and 28.8% respectively) was explained by the country's shift from an agricultural to an industrial/service economy in the past three decades in line with the global economic restructuring (Tansel 1997; Tansel 1999; Tansel 2005; Bulutay 2000; Özdemir, Yücesan-Özdemir, and Erel 2004; Aydın, Hisarciklilar, and Ilkkaracan 2010; World Bank 2009b; Ercan 2011). Recent studies, however, pointed out the invisibility of women's informal employment in Turkey as one of the important reasons behind the seeming low levels of female employment recorded in official statistics (Atasü Topçuoğlu 2005; Dedeoğlu 2008a; Kümbetoğlu, User, and Akpınar 2012; Salem and Bensidoun 2012). My objective is, therefore, to examine how the structural socio-political and economic shifts that took place in the last three decades pushed women into the informal sector, and the gendered culture of work that made women's work invisible and unvalued.

With that in mind, Turkey emerges as a particularly interesting case study because despite the legal and institutional reforms that provided gender equality on paper, women's position in the labour market and family are still governed by strong patriarchal norms and traditional gender roles in practice. This gendered culture of work has an added effect on the invisibility of women workers in the informal sector, because women's paid labour is seen as a continuation of their unpaid carer roles at home, and not "work" per se. In other words, in urban Turkey, women's informal employment is not invisible only because of the structural shifts in the labour market, but also because it is the accepted form of employment for low-

income, low-educated migrant women, given their traditional gender roles as mothers, wives and daughters (White 1994; Dedeoğlu 2008; Kümbetoğlu, User, and Akpınar 2012). Against this background, informal sector offers them the possibility of juggling their gender roles and paid work at the same time, especially when they face severe labour market discrimination due to educational, ethnic, religious and patriarchal barriers. These strategies help women workers get by everyday ordeals or overcome some of the pressures they face in their family relationships or labour market experience. The questions of why and how some women adopt certain strategies, when others adopt others constitute the focus of this thesis. These differences not only present important clues about the “structural constraints” on women’s employment, but also their agency in navigating through these constraints.

This chapter provides an introduction to the thesis as a whole, which begins by laying out the overall aims and research questions that have guided the research. This is followed by the presentation of the thesis outline and a review of each of the main chapters.

### ***1.1. Research Aims and Theoretical Framework***

In the past four decades, informal employment has been a contentious issue in the literature, which has gradually transformed from being categorised as the survival activities of the poor in developing countries (Lewis 1954; Hart 1973) to everyday reality of the subordinate groups across the world (Sassen 2001). Two contrasting schools of thought emerged from the literature; the “necessity” argument which argued that individuals entered informal employment when there was no other alternative for employment in the formal sector (Bienefeld 1975; Simon 1984; Redclift and Mingione 1985; Benería 1987), and the “choice” argument which drew attention to the agency of the workers entering the informal sector to seize a variety of opportunities, from overcoming bureaucratic and institutional costs in the formal sector, to evading tax (Balán 1973; Hart 1973; de Soto 1989; Maloney 2004). This

dichotomous understanding of informal employment has produced only a partial view of the options available to workers and the choices they made in the informal sector. In other words, the variety of constraints workers faced in informal employment and their everyday strategies for altering their circumstances were mostly overlooked. Moreover, the “choice” arguments were largely based on empirical studies of highly entrepreneurial, self-employed men, and these studies excluded wage workers and women (de la Rocha and Latapí 2008). Recent thinking on women’s employment in the informal sector called for a re-assessment of these studies. More specifically, Chen (2014) noted that in order to understand whether the same opportunities also applied to women workers. This is because across the world women constitute the bottom ladders of the informal sector hierarchy and majority of them are in wage work (Ibid). However, intriguing as these various insights into the reasons why women workers entered the informal sector, they were predominantly focused on the structural push and pull factors that withdrew low-skilled, low-income women into informal employment. They did little to illuminate the “supply side” of the picture and why women stayed in the informal sector, and what influences this employment had, if any, on their lives. Thus, in comparison to the detailed attention paid to the macro-economic and labour market structure reasons in employers’ decision to hire less-skilled women workers, women workers were treated as “undifferentiated, homogenous, faceless and voiceless” (Wolf 1992 in Kabeer 2002, 7). It was to fill this gap that the research for this thesis was initiated, and women workers’ own accounts of their labour market experience in its totality were explored.

The thesis presents an original conceptual framework for understanding women’s everyday coping strategies in the informal sector: Invisibility-Struggle-Visibility. This frame focuses on women’s strategies from subtle and non-confrontational ones to those where they actively challenge the circumstances that put them in a vulnerable position in the labour market

context. Throughout their labour market experience women navigate between these strategies in response to specific life events or changes to their socio-economic status. Invisibility refers to those strategies where women try to cope with or get by their circumstances through making small changes that would not alter the inherent dynamics of their labour market or family situation. In contrast, visibility refers to women's active strategies to challenge and change their circumstances. Struggle is used as an intermediate category between visibility and invisibility, by which women consolidate their autonomy through questioning their situation and actively seeking alternative options for their position. However, unlike visibility, here women do not directly challenge their constraints. In this regard, Invisibility and Visibility constitute the two end points of the continuum for women's strategies for everyday survival in the informal sector, distinguishing women's strategies based on the conditions under which they form. It is common for women to shift across these different types of coping strategies over time, in response to specific life events or changes to their socio-economic status. The empirical sections document the complexities of "constraints" and "opportunities" of informal employment for low-income, low-educated women workers in the peripheries of Istanbul. Different sectors of the informal sector are studied, ranging from home-based work, garment production to domestic work. The sectors in which women are employed in are strongly shaped by women's familial circumstances and their relationships with the wider community, which in return influence the kinds of strategies they develop, and the level of visibility they demand. This thesis, therefore, offers a contribution to the literature on women, gender and informal employment, and addresses critical questions about women's constraints and opportunities in the informal sector, and their agency for navigating through these constraints through a variety of individual and collective strategies.

Building on semi and unstructured interviews and ethnographic observations, the thesis gives an extensive analysis of the wide range of strategies women used in the informal sector as everyday coping mechanisms. An eight-month long fieldwork was carried out in the peripheries of Istanbul for investigating the lives of women in informal employment in a variety of sectors. Istanbul presents a good lens through which women's informal employment in Turkey could be analysed, as informality governs the economic, political and other social relations in the peripheries of the city, and it is in these peripheries pressures for making ends meet, as well as patriarchal domination are felt most strongly. Istanbul also demonstrates how informality can appear in different places and guises, as all low-skill employment options have a certain level of informality about them. Three most important forms of demand for women's informal employment in Istanbul have been home-based work, domestic work/subcontracted cleaning work and manufacturing work. This thesis explores the factors which channel women into the lowest segments of the informal employment hierarchy, and the range of responses and strategies they develop in order to get by or improve their material and social circumstances.

## *1.2. Research Questions*

This thesis aims to provide an overall examination of women's strategies for altering their social and material circumstances through their labour market experience in the informal sector. More specifically, this thesis was guided by three central questions:

1. Why do women enter informal employment? And what are the constraints they face in the formal labour market?
2. What are the risks and opportunities women identify in the informal sector?
3. What are the strategies and responses women develop to survive and/or improve their circumstances in the informal sector? Under what conditions are these strategies developed? How and why are these strategies adopted?

In order to find answers to these questions, three contexts in which women's labour remains invisible became critical to understand: Family Culture, Labour Market and Community Culture. The thesis focused on these contexts as women's entry into the informal labour market was heavily influenced by their family circumstances, including the patriarchal and religious barriers they faced to their employment, their marital status and care responsibilities. In the labour market, the strategies they adopted were both influenced and shaped by these family circumstances, in addition to the more structural factors that influenced low-skilled and low-income women's labour market participation, such as the welfare structure, availability of free and affordable childcare, horizontal and vertical labour market discrimination. Community Culture refers to the constraints on women's collective organisation in the informal sector, despite the fact that collective strategies carry the potential for making women workers more "visible" to the public gaze and help them access legal and labour protection. Lack of clear "worker identity" in the informal sector, combined with women's treating their informal labour as temporary and subsidiary for their families carry over to their *choosing* to seek help from their own social networks and less visible forms of collectivisation against the risks they face in the informal sector. In short, family culture, labour market and community culture were selected as three interdependent constraining contexts that shaped the variation in choices of strategies women workers used throughout their employment in the informal sector.

### *1.3. Thesis Outline*

The thesis is divided into six subsequent chapters, each of which serves a particular function with regards to the overall aims of the thesis. The structure and content of these chapters reflects the fact that the thesis is aiming to show the variety of everyday survival strategies developed and used by women workers in the informal sector, who presumably were

constrained by similar familial, labour market and community-level constraints but gave different responses to these constraints. While all women engaged in jobs that carried some elements of informality, some women were able to negotiate better working conditions in the labour market, some were able to negotiate a stronger say in the household decision-making as a result of their paid employment and some sought to seek wider level collectivisation through trade unions and other organisations, whereas a significant majority of women's employment remained invisible both in the labour market and in their familial contexts. Part of the reason for this was structural: high unemployment rate and high surplus labour decreased the value of women's labour and made it invisible. However, the underlying premise of the research presented in this thesis is that women's employment in the informal sector is not merely an artefact of these structural reasons, they are also shaped by the individual responses of the workers (and their households) to perceived opportunities and constraints in the informal sector. In this light, this thesis investigates the factors which led women workers, with presumably similar family and community culture constraints and similar labour market barriers, to respond to their employment in the informal sector in different and to some degree, counter-intuitive ways. The next six chapters deal with the theoretical, methodological and empirical material that prepared the grounds for the arguments made in this thesis.

**Chapter 2** presents the theoretical underpinnings of the thesis as a whole. The chapter presents an analysis of the two main arguments made in the literature in the context of workers' participation in the informal sector; namely, the necessity and choice arguments. The chapter outlines the main schools of thought and empirical studies to draw attention to the invisibility of women workers from the mainstream discourse on studies on the informal sector. Against this background, the chapter looks into studies on women's agency in the

informal sector to understand the different sets of constraints and opportunities women workers identify in the informal sector. It also includes a brief introduction to the informal sector in Turkey, and how the macro-economic and social changes that have been taking place since 1980s had certain implications for low-skilled and low-income women's participation in the urban labour market. It shows how and why women were channelled into the informal sector in urban Turkey and why this employment failed to receive any public recognition.

**Chapter 3** presents the research design and the methodology utilised to investigate women's informal employment in the peripheries of Istanbul. Accordingly, the chapter outlines the reasons that guided the adopted research design and qualitative methods. This is followed by the data collection methods and the study sample of the research, including the twists and turns in the research design that took place during the fieldwork process. Subsequently, a critical analysis of the fieldwork experience is presented through the insider/outsider researcher perspective. The chapter concludes with an overview of the data analysis and the presentation of analytical construction of the empirical chapters of the thesis, the Invisibility-Struggle-Visibility conceptual framework.

**Chapter 4** analyses the patriarchal and familial factors that channel women into the informal sector, especially to its most "invisible" segments, as some women develop strategies to hide their paid work from their families and neighbours in order not to overshadow their roles as wives and mothers. After detailing women's own understanding of the "patriarchal barriers" to their labour, the chapter explores the complex and multiple forms of strategies they develop to get by or overcome these barriers. The Invisibility-Struggle-Visibility conceptual framework is applied to discuss the complex relationship between women's informal employment and their family circumstances. The main argument of the chapter is that women actually strategically exploit the invisibility of informal employment to their advantage, when

their entry to or participation in the labour market is severely constrained by patriarchal norms about women's appropriate place in family and in society and by their domestic responsibilities. However, this means that in the long run their labour continues to remain unrecognised and hidden from the public gaze. It is noted that many women "struggle" to change their circumstances, but radical changes rarely take place, as these often require "burning all the bridges" with their families, which is too great a risk when women lack access to social and financial resources of their own and protection mechanisms outside of their family networks. The interplay of four conditions seem to influence women's seeking more visibility in their families, and have a say in the household decision-making: 1) the stability of their employment in the informal sector, 2) the stability of their husband's/ father's employment, 3) support network outside of their own families, 4) having access to examples of women who either challenged their circumstances, are living in more egalitarian households (e.g. middle-class women employers of domestic workers) or provide advice on gender equality (e.g. women's associations, trade unions). Throughout the chapter, it is shown that the "bargain with patriarchy" is not one-off, but a continuous process; and women need to constantly re-negotiate their participation in the labour market and say in the household decision-making, when changes occur to the household and family structure.

**Chapter 5** investigates why women give different responses even when they face similar constraints/risks in the informal sector. The main argument of the chapter is that women's strategies for survival in the informal sector are shaped by their 1) autonomy in the employment relationship, 2) possibility of having direct contact with the employer/owner of production, 3) ease of replaceability as a worker. More specifically, women who have a high degree of autonomy in their jobs, greater level of contract with their employers and who are not easily replaceable as workers are more likely to choose confrontational strategies in the

workplace in order to demand better work conditions. It is then argued that family culture often have intervening influence on women's ability to choose more confrontational strategies, that women who had a hard time negotiating their access to the labour market with their families or women who established certain conditions with their employers which other employers would not necessarily provide (e.g. bringing their children to the workplace) are more constrained from choosing confrontational strategies, even when their work conditions need improving.

**Chapter 6** explores the constraints on women's collective mobilisation in the informal sector by looking at women's position in their communities. Incorporating the analyses presented in the two previous chapters, and adding the community culture to the analysis, the chapter argues that women's patriarchal constraints on their physical mobility and ascertained gender roles limit them to seek help from neighbourhood-level, fictitious kinships and organisations, as patriarchal limitations to their mobility go beyond their immediate families and are also ascertained in the communities in which they live in. Lack of "worker identity" in the informal sector, and women's seeing their paid work in the informal sector as "temporary" and "subsidiary" to the male household members further restrict their capabilities for engaging in collective mobilisation in the informal sector. A complex interplay of familial and labour market conditions help women join collective movements for demanding their rights: 1) facing severe injustice in their employment (e.g. work accident, unlawful dismissal, non-payment for a long period of time), 2) they learn about their rights (either through other workers or associations/unions campaigning in their workplace/sector/neighbourhood), 3) their families (at least initially) support their joining collective action. Access to women's organisations or trade unions in the vicinity of their neighbourhoods or workplaces seem to play a key role in

women's learning about their rights, as does having examples of workers who joined collective action and received material and social returns to their participation.

**Chapter 7** serves the purpose of the conclusion chapter. The findings of the three empirical chapters are compared and the research questions that are presented in this chapter are answered in detail in light of the preceding empirical chapters. The chapter highlights the main goal of the thesis, that even low-skilled and low-income women in the informal sector and in patriarchal societies working under risky labour conditions find strategies to improve their lives. These strategies are further discussed to reveal how the family culture, labour market and the collective action contexts both present important constraints on women's abilities to improve their lives, and which women are able to overcome or work within these constraints to make changes to their familial and labour market circumstances.

## CHAPTER 2: INFORMAL EMPLOYMENT AS A NECESSITY vs. CHOICE: STRUCTURE AND AGENCY IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR

In this thesis I am primarily concerned with explaining how even low-skilled and low-income women workers in the informal sector in patriarchal societies who face a variety of constraints on their mobility, labour and other forms of participation in the social life find strategies to improve their lives. In order to formulate some hypotheses as to which women are able to overcome or work within those constraints, I will present a discussion of the main accounts put forward in the literature to explain why individuals enter and continue employment in the informal sector, focusing in particular on those that explore women's entry and participation patterns. The discussion will be organised around the two extreme versions of these theoretical approaches: the necessity and the choice arguments. The first argument presents a macro-analysis, focusing on the properties of larger social structures for explaining why individuals end up in the informal sector, ranging from global commodity chains to the shift from agricultural to service labour. The latter argument on the other hand focuses on the individual and explains informal employment as a result of workers' agency in their attempts to evade bureaucratic and financial costs incurred in the formal sector. Recent feminist thinking, however, drew attention to the gender-blindness of both of these theories and suggested a middle ground where the emphasis is on the everyday strategies of survival of women workers which alter women's "weak winners, powerful losers" status (Kabeer 2002a). In the rest of the chapter, the constraints and opportunities associated with employment in the informal sector are examined through changing production, trade as well as socio-economic and family relations. Later, gender, patriarchy and household factors conditioning women's entry to and their participation in the labour market are analysed to explore how and why women constitute the "middle ground" between the two extremes of the necessity and choice debate.

## 2.1. *Informal Employment in a Global Perspective*

Various labels have been used in the literature to refer to the “informal economy”<sup>1</sup>, including but not limited to shadow, black, gray, subterranean, parallel, submerged, underground, clandestine and cash-in-hand (Henry 1982). The evolution of the concept of the informal economy evidences how it has been adapted to the changing circumstances of the labour market and the global economy as a whole<sup>2</sup>.

It was widely assumed during the 1950s and 1960s that low-income economies were largely “informal”, comprised of petty-trade, small-scale production and a range of casual jobs, which would develop into modern capitalist “formal” economies, once they acquired the right mix of resources and applied the necessary economic and infrastructural policies (Chen 2012, 2). Also known as the “Lewis Turning Point”, it was argued that a time would come when traditional economies would become sufficiently developed to generate enough modern jobs to absorb low-pay subsistence ones in the informal economy (Lewis 1954). The successful reconstruction of the European and Japanese economies in the aftermath of World War II and the subsequent expansion of mass production in Europe and North America in the 1950s and 1960s were presented as examples of how this transformation could take place. Nevertheless, in sharp contrast with the development trajectory of industrialised countries, this unabated fast growth soon became synonymous with widespread unemployment in developing countries, including the ones that were growing economically (Chen 2012). As Singer (1970) explained this unexpected turn of events:

It is at least arguable that the very forces which are set in motion by the rapid growth of the richer countries – specifically the development of ever more sophisticated, costly and capital-intensive technologies, and of mortality-reducing health improvements and

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<sup>1</sup> There is an ongoing debate in the literature whether or not to include criminal activities in the economic activities in the informal sector. This thesis follows Williams and Round (2007)’s definition of the informal employment and only includes economic activities “unregistered by, or hidden from the state for tax, benefit and/or labour purposes, but which are legal or would be legal in all other aspects” (2322).

<sup>2</sup> See Peattie (1987) for a review on the impossibility of a definitional consensus on informal employment.

disease controls – are such as to create forces within the poorer countries – specifically a population explosion, rising unemployment and inability to develop their own technological capacities, which may in fact assure that they will not have the time needed for the continued maintenance of current growth rates, let alone their acceleration, so as to result in acceptable levels of development. (...) Thus the acceptance of even extraordinarily high rates of unemployment – far from being an irrational sociological feature of ‘Eastern’ society in under-developed countries, becomes completely understandable (66-67).

With this in mind, the concept of the “informal sector” became a major area of investigation in the 1970s. Several employment missions were carried out in 1970s to developing countries by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to study the unanticipated growth of informality. However, it was British anthropologist Keith Hart (1973) who popularised the term “informal sector” in academic circles, referring to the economic activities of the poor that are outside the reach of any form of state regulation, in order to generate enough income to meet their everyday needs (e.g. food and shelter). Hart (Ibid) studied the economic activities of the unskilled migrants from Northern Ghana in Accra, the capital city, who could not find formal wage employment. He was to conclude that the informal sector provided opportunities for “generating incomes” in the face of external constraints and capitalist domination. The informal sector provided opportunities for growth and escaping poverty in a context where formal jobs were scarce and unemployment was common.

Nevertheless, the idea that the informal sector was an emerging and ever-expanding economic reality received mixed reviews in development circles (Chen 2012). Some described it as low productivity, petty trade and very small-scale production in illegal and/or unregistered enterprises which would disappear once the necessary development levels were reached. Others argued that industrial development in developing countries would follow a different pattern than it had in developed countries as a result of different socio-political and economic circumstances (For reviews see; Weeks 1973; Meyer, Boli-Bennett, and Chase-Dunn 1975; McKinnon 1973).

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the debate on informal economy took a different turn when the sociologists Gershuny (1979) and Pahl (1984) transferred the concept to the British context. In his pioneering work, *The Divisions of Labour*, Ray Pahl interpreted informal economic activities as alternative sources of income for those who lost their jobs due to recession and the long term unemployed. Pahl also pioneered the idea that the distinctions between the informal and formal sector were less clear-cut than what was argued in the literature, and the bottom ladders of the formal sector were in fact very similar to informal employment (Ibid). Gershuny and Pahl (1979), however, treated informality as a problem of rural employment, rather than an urban phenomenon. It was the sociologists Alejandro Portes, Manuel Castells and Saskia Sassen who linked informal employment to the disadvantaged workers in the urban context (i.e. immigrants, women and children). They contended that the informal sector played a vital role in global cities, including New York, Los Angeles and London, in its capacity to absorb the increasing immigrant population who could not find employment in the formal sector (Portes and Sassen-Koob 1987a; Castells and Portes 1989; Sassen 2001). The assumption that the informal sector was just a concern for the developing economies was increasingly contested.

In this period, changes that were occurring in the organisation of production and labour force were also incorporated into the informal sector debate. Increasingly, in both North America and Europe, “flexible” work arrangements were replacing regular employment, and production was being reorganised into small-scale, decentralised production units (Piore and Sabel 1984; Hakim 1987; Hakim 1989; Harvey 1989; Ong 1988; Pollert 1991; Gilbert, Burrows, and Pollert 1992). Simultaneously, the labour-intensive production was being outsourced to countries in the Third World with a large reserve of cheap and unskilled labour (Lash 1987; Fröbel 1981). This process of outsourcing was facilitated by tax free zones and loose

enforcement or non-enforcement of labour laws (Sayer and Walker 1992), which essentially turned the informal sector into a global phenomenon (Standing 1989; 1999; Wood 1991; 1994; Benería 2001).

During the 1990s, economic globalisation led to the wider informalisation of the workforce in many industries and countries (Amin 1994; Gereffi 1994; Pearson, Ruth 1998; Standing 1989; Amin and Thrift 2000). The geographical relocation of the industrial production to Third World countries with a large cheap and low-skill labour force reserve (also referred to as the *New International Division of Labour*) led to spatial divisions of labour in and across the world, with labour relationships in the Third World becoming increasingly organised through outsourcing and subcontracting (i.e. *Global Commodity Chains*) (Sayer and Walker 1992). This is because formal firms became extremely pressured to reduce their production costs –in the face of fierce global competition- and they outsourced their production systems and other services to other smaller firms and/or countries (Rodrik 1997). These processes of expanding informalisation of the labour force and production systems made possible the connection of production between formal/modern mass production in the Global North, and the small-scale sweatshop and home-based production in the Global South (Portes and Schauffler 1993). Consequently, the definition of the “informal sector” was updated once more in the 1993 ILO Conference on Informal Economy, where it was defined as “small-scale productions with rudimentary organizations in which it is difficult to distinguish between work and capital as factors of production.” This definition was re-formulated in 2002 to incorporate the increasing flexibilisation of the labour market as a result of the global economic restructuring. In this new version, informal sector was defined as consisting of:

units in the production of goods or services with the primary objective of generating employment and incomes to the persons concerned; and sharing specific characteristics, such as being small in scale, with a low level of organisation, little or no division between labour and capital, and labour relations based on casual employment, kinship, or personal

and social relations rather than on contractual arrangements and acquiring skills outside the formal school system (in Temkin 2009, 136).

This definition, however, was criticised for its inability to successfully include the wide variety of jobs and work arrangements in the informal sector, and for focusing too much on the business establishments, rather than the workers per se (Husmanns 2004). Hence, in 2003, the 17<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) broadened this definition by focusing more on the work arrangements, rather than establishments. More specifically, the ICLS re-defined the concept as “informal employment” instead of work in the informal sector as the following:

...employees are considered to have informal jobs if their employment relationship is, in law or in practice, not subject to labour legislation, income taxation, social protection or entitlement to certain employment benefits (advance notice of dismissal, severances of pay, paid annual or sick leave, etc.) (in Husmanns 2004, 6).

Subsequently, most recent literature derives their concept of informal employment from this definition, and includes all activities aimed at generating some sort of income despite not meeting terms of legislation and regulation requirements in the formal sector (Portes 1994; Kloosterman and Rath 2001; Williams 2006; Temkin 2009; Jütting and de Laiglesia 2009; Johnston-Anumonwo and Doane 2011; Adom and Williams 2012; Carré 2013).

In sum, there is growing interest in the informal economy worldwide. This is because the informal economy has continued to grow and emerge in unexpected forms and places, and the changes to the global economy just sped up this process. Informal employment characterised by atypical non-standard work arrangements in the developed world and precarious work arrangements which are not formally recognised, protected or regulated in the developing world constitutes more than half of non-agricultural employment (Vanek et al. 2014). If data on agriculture were included in these estimates, the proportion of informal employment in total employment would be even higher in agricultural countries (Ibid). In the

next section, I will look into the main theories about employment in the informal sector to disentangle why individuals enter and continue their participation in the informal economy.

## *2.2. Women in Informal Employment in Turkey*

Since 1980s Turkey has gone through serious structural adjustment and change. This is not only because Turkey followed a series of structural adjustment programmes as recommended by the IMF and World Bank, but also because socio-economic transformations as a result of decrease in agricultural employment, urban migration, liberalisation of economic policies and EU-accession were taking place simultaneously (Dedeoğlu 2008, 40). The liberalisation of the labour market structure in line with the neo-liberalisation of the economy and socio-economic changes to the family structure have together shaped a new role and place for women in the labour market. This role, however, has often been discussed in the literature through the “employment puzzle” of Turkish women. More specifically, against the global trend of increasing female participation rates, over the past decades, there has been a severe decline in female labour market participation in Turkey. Though comparative statistics are not available at the global level for the past fifty years, female labour participation in Turkey has been suggested to have declined from 73 per cent in 1955 (Özar 1994) to 36 per cent in 1990 and to 22 per cent in 2008 (TURKSTAT 2008). Despite slight increases in the past few years, at 26 per cent (TURKSTAT 2012), Turkey still stands to be one of the bottom 12 countries in the world with the lowest level of female labour participation, closely followed by much less-developed countries in the Middle East, such as Iraq, Algeria, Syrian Arab Republic, Lebanon and Egypt, where there is more imminent cultural, religious and legal barriers to female employment (World Bank 2014).

Two structural reasons have been stated in the literature to account for this puzzling decline; the transition from an economy based on agriculture to service economy and mass migration

to urban areas following the erosion of work opportunities in agricultural sector (Aran 2008; World Bank 2009a; Dayıođlu and Kırdar 2009). The main argument behind these two reasons is that women, who used to be previously employed in the agricultural sector as unpaid family workers found themselves unqualified for the jobs in the urban cities they migrated to and became housewives. Indeed, being a housewife emerges as the major reason for non-participation in the labour market of Turkish women (71 per cent of women stated that they were not seeking to participate in the labour market because of their duties as housewives) (TURKSTAT 2012). However, what is observed in the realm of women's informal work tells another story (Dedeođlu 2008, 40).

Recently, more and more studies have started to associate women's disappearing from the labour statistics with their increasing engagement in informal employment, rather than leaving the labour market per se (Çađatay and Özler 1995; Atasü Topçuoglu 2005; Dedeođlu 2008b; Kümbetođlu, User, and Akpınar 2012). These studies contend that women disappear from official statistics because the kinds of jobs they are often found engaged in the informal sector, such as home-based work, domestic work and garment production work in small ateliers are rarely accounted for in official statistics. Though the reasons of this invisibility is multifarious, one of the most important reasons is that the questions of the national labour force survey, the *Household Labour Force Survey*, are directed towards household heads. In Turkey, less than 1 in every 10 household is headed by a woman (Ilkkaracan and Tunalı 2010a), which means that the main respondents of these surveys are men. Keeping mind the still prevalent stigma of female employment in Turkey, the choice of male household heads as respondents is bound to under-estimate female employment. In addition, (Özar 1994) adds that men hide the employment activities of women living in their households to emerge as the *sole breadwinners* of the household and preserve their statuses as the *household heads*.

Similarly, Dedeoğlu (2008) notes that the household labour surveys are bound to underestimate female employment in Turkey owing to the fact that it is often very difficult to access private households in Turkey and the surveys are carried out in local café houses (*kıraathane*), which makes it even more difficult for men to admit to their wives or daughters' working.

Despite limitations of under-estimation, TURKSTAT Household Labour Surveys are a still important source of information for understanding women's informal employment. The following results show the increases in home-based and domestic work (Table 1). The results reveal that the percentage of women who engage in low-skilled work that does not require hand crafts increased by 166 per cent and percentage of women engaged in unskilled work at home increased by 219 per cent between 2004 and 2011. It should hereby added that according to the latest statistics of 2011, 98.2 per cent of women engaged in home-based and domestic work do not have access to social security, and their economic activities are not regulated. The real numbers of home-based and domestic workers are expected to be much higher than 235 thousand specified in the TURKSTAT surveys. For instance, IMECE, the Domestic Workers Union of Turkey, estimates that there are at least one million domestic workers in Turkey, 300 000 of whom work in Istanbul. The union also underlines that in low-income neighbourhoods of Istanbul at least 1 in every 4 women is engaged in home-based work for the production sector, with varying time and work commitments.

**Table 1 Home-based and Domestic Workers (15+, 1000 persons)**

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Low-skill work that does not require hand crafts	39	53	52	56	56	69	87	104
Unskilled work	41	60	57	47	44	75	115	131

Source: TURKSTAT Household Labour Surveys, adapted from Erdođdu and Toksöz (2013)

Part-time employment is also common among Turkish women (up to 30 hours per week). The social security benefits of those engaged in part-time work are calculated based on the number of working hours, and the workers are expected to cover the remaining hours, if they wish to benefit from social security entitlements (Article 5510/80, Social Security Law). The full working month is calculated based on 30 days of employment, despite the fact that the same calculation allows for 4 to 5 days of paid holiday (weekend) for those in full-time employment. Weekends are not taken into consideration for part-time workers, and even when they complete 120 hours of employment in one calendar month (equivalent of full-time work), they are reported to the Social Security Institution as having worked 16 days (14 days less than full-time workers) due to this discrepancy between working hours and non-calculation of weekend days (Karakoyun 2007). As such, women in part-time work face significant discrimination in the labour market, if they would like to benefit from social security entitlements. Consequently, women who are not able to cover the remaining days for social security entitlements often do not report their working, and carry out their work informally. According to 2009 TURKSTAT Household Labour Surveys, 79 per cent of women in part-time jobs work informally.

Another form of informal work is casual work which takes a variety of forms, such as daily, monthly or seasonal employment. This form of employment is usually carried out in the production sector in urban contexts, and agricultural seasonal work in rural areas. Informality is especially widespread among casual workers, since casual work is *de facto* excluded from the Social Security Law. Consequently, 100 per cent of women engaged in casual agricultural work, and 92.9 per cent of women engaged in casual non-agricultural work are excluded from social security entitlements (TURKSTAT 2009).

Turkish Labour Force Surveys estimate informal employment rate in Turkey to be 44 per cent (Ibid). However, given the large level of invisibility as a result of patriarchal barriers but also lack of reporting of such work by women and/or their employers, Toksöz (2007) predicts female informal employment rate in Turkey to be as high as 66 per cent, which means that almost 7 out of 10 women in Turkey are engaged in low-skill, low-pay jobs in the informal sector. With increasing rates of flexibilisation and casualisation of work-arrangements, it has been documented that informality has become the norm rather than the exception for majority of women workers in urban Turkey (see for an extensive review, Kümbetoğlu, User, and Akpınar (2012).

Despite a dynamic and growing informal economy and women's growing participation in the informal sector, Turkish women's participation rate in official statistics has shown a declining trend until 2010, and has only slightly increased since (Female Labour Participation Rate is 29.5 per cent) (TURKSTAT 2013). This establishes Turkey as a puzzling case in the literature which would expect growing female participation rates in developing countries that adopted neo-liberal market policies. Although more structuralist arguments have been in place to explain this puzzling account as discussed earlier, such as the decline of the agricultural sector and rural-urban migration, my argument is rather that women's employment remains hidden in the informal sector. Although part of this invisibility seems to result from measurement problems and biases in the national statistical surveys, this thesis aims to explain the factors conditioning women's invisibility in the informal sector as an outcome of the blurry line between women's unpaid carer roles at home and paid economic activities in the labour market which are also seen as an extension of their domestic duties. In doing this, the focus will be on the structural factors that condition low-income and low-educated women's entry

into the informal sector, but also their agency when they are navigating through different sectors, jobs and informal employment and collectivisation arrangements.

### ***2.3. Is Informal Employment a “Necessity” or a “Choice”? Theories of Employment in the Informal Sector***

#### **2.3.1. Necessity by Structure: Exploited workers of the Informal Sector**

According to Bienefeld (1975) and Benería (1987), the informal economy exclusively served the interest of the capitalists by decreasing the cost of labour, and eliminating the cost of providing stable employment, social protection and a secure work environment for the workers. “The needs of capital” determine the rules of the economic production, and there is little, if any, scope for the exercise of individual choice for workers. Accordingly, for those at the bottom of the economic ladder, labour ceased to provide a long-term livelihood (Mingione 1981; 1983; 1995; Redclift and Mingione 1985), but became at best a temporary refuge during times of extreme economic strain or long-term unemployment. As Simon (1984) noted, workers entered the informal sector because “subsistence is preferable to starvation, and underemployment is better than unemployment” (570).

In this regard, Keith Hart’s work *Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana* (1973) has been acclaimed for its presentation of informal employment as a more dynamic form of employment which responded much more quickly and appropriately to the emerging labour needs of rapidly changing economies. Based on his extensive study of urban migrants in Southern Ghana, Hart sought to expose low income workers’ “autonomous capacities” for generating income during what he called a time of “price inflation, inadequate wages and increasing surplus to the requirements of the urban labour market” (61). In particular Hart contended that informal employment emerged as a response to the “inadequacy of urban wages” because it provided “duplication of wage employment within

the organised labour force” (65-66). He pointed out that workers used several strategies to “get away” with their informal work; some agreeing with timekeepers “to turn a blind eye to his disappearance after mid-day in order to work on an afternoon job”, others sleeping on their night shift, whilst holding daytime jobs (Ibid). Hart’s examples indicated the strong willingness of workers to put in long hours on a variety of occupations or take up multiple jobs in order to improve their living standards, despite the fact that their labour lacked long term stability and security. Through a careful examination of formal and legitimate and illegitimate informal income generating activities available to workers in urban Southern Ghana (Nima in particular), Hart argued that those who entered informal employment as a result of a failure to obtain a job constituted only a small part of the urban informal employment structure. Accordingly, he interpreted the informal economic activities of these workers to signal “a rational motive” because “despite the paucity of formal employment opportunities, and the low ceiling wage remunerations”, they could turn to the informal economy to seek alternatives for generating income (88). In his words:

A comparison between the wages paid unskilled workers and the earnings of traders shows that the same migrants can attain to more profitable situations... In a month or two a *kayakaya* (market porter) can hope to become a truck boy and make 10s a day... Finally the migrant has all around him the encouraging example of the great success of his comrades (cattle, timber and transport operators). One can understand why the emigrants try as quickly as possible to amass a small nest-egg in wage earning employment so that they can also enter into trading careers (67).

It is important to highlight that Hart interpreted employment in the informal sector as a “secondary” form of employment, which was not desirable on its own but became a means for survival when there was no other option in the formal sector. Accordingly, Hart contended that once the necessary structural developments took place, workers would eventually be transferred to the formal sector.

Several authors made similar arguments for the secondary economies under state socialism (Kemeny 1982; Manchin and Szelenyi 1987) and for the export-orientation period in Latin

America in 1980s, where the “primary” or formal economy was geared towards exports and import substitution, and the “secondary” or informal economy towards survival activities of the poor (MacGaffey 1987; Marsden 1990). As Marsden put it: (Informal employment) “provides opportunities for disadvantaged groups such as women and the poor”, responding to their immediate needs and constraints they faced (Ibid, 2).

Often referred to as the Structuralist School, it was argued that informal employment emerged as a survival strategy of the poor, which individuals ended up as a result of “necessity” rather than active choice, as it lacked formal social security mechanisms. But the absence of social security also created its own dependency, pushing workers to rely on their informal relationships for protection and informally sold goods and services (Mingione 1983). By creating its own mechanisms -for social protection, essentially- informality acted as a “quick fix” to absorb the excess labour, and benefited the state’s budget (less demand on social security) and capital’s interests (labour became cheaper). In turn, workers became much more dependent on their income from their informal employment, as their capacities for leaving their low-pay jobs to look for work in the formal sector were significantly reduced (Ibid).

The Structuralists saw a complex relationship between informal economy and the capital, with both being dependent upon each other. On one hand, workers were stated to be effectively dependent on the capital to sell their labour to earn a living wage. On the other hand, capital was considered to be dependent on the informal sector for its sustainability, as it provided access to a cheap labour reserve. Notably in this relationship, while workers were argued to see their employment as a transitory phenomenon until the circumstances and constraints that led to it were eliminated, the capital saw the informal economy as a more lasting arrangement for its long-term growth<sup>3</sup> (Brusco 1982; Portes and Sassen-Koob 1987; Castells

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<sup>3</sup> This theory is also referred to as “The Alternative Labour Market Theory”

1983; Peattie 1987). Accordingly, it was argued that the informal and formal economies were intrinsically connected through the interests of the capitalists and workers' dire need to make ends meet. Pellissery and Walker (2007) recently drew attention to the fact that through low wages and evasion of social security contributions, informal employment created a vicious cycle of poverty, whereby informal employment emerged as the only way to take the edge off destitution, and the very reason for it.

Hence, the informal sector was seen as a buffer between those not working and not making ends meet and the formal sector, even though informal sector jobs may be inferior in terms of pay and conditions (Lewis 1955; Singer 1970; Souza and Tokman 1976). Especially popular with the World Bank, ILO and other development agencies such as the Latin America Regional Employment Program in the 1970s, the theory held that the informal labour market expanded during economic downturns to absorb increased unemployment, and constituted a "secondary" economy in addition to the formal economy with few (if any) linkages between the two. Nevertheless, it was optimistically assumed that informal economies were structurally different than the formal economies, and once the developing countries reached the necessary stages in their industrial development, they would be incorporated into the informal economy, which did not take place. As Guy Standing (2011) has recently shown, across the world the distinctions between the "formal" and "informal" economies have become severely blurred through "precaritisation" of the workforce, whereby zero-hour contracts, casual work arrangements and labour not providing stable and secure income has become the norm, rather than an exception for explaining the status of low-educated, low-income individuals who cannot access employment in the formal sector.

More importantly for the purpose of this thesis, however, the necessity argument gave priority to structure over agency, to the extent of leaving very little scope, if any, for the

exercise of individual agency of workers entering and staying in the informal sector. Explanations of individuals' entry patterns in the informal sector have been largely economic, overlooking the possible constraints of culture, gender, ethnicity and other socio-economic factors on individuals' decision-making in the labour market. Although Hart's (1973) account partially examines individuals' strategies of survival in the informal sector, it does so to show how individual action is merely a re-enactment of the structural limitations of the labour market. However, as I will be arguing in this thesis, individuals' decision-making in the labour market has to be located and understood in relation to other forms of inequality in the society, including gender, family and community culture.

### 2.3.2. Choice by Opportunism: Exploiters of the Informal Sector

At the other end of the spectrum to explanations of participation in the informal sector is the increasing emphasis on individual workers weighing the utility to be derived from employment in the formal sector and in the informal sector subsequently, before deciding on the sector of employment. Using Rational Choice Theory, various scholars investigated the calculations of individual workers in taking up informal employment and contended that they were not pushed into informal work by "necessity", but were "choosing" to participate in the informal sector for the opportunities it provided (Balán 1973; de Soto 1989; Maloney 2004). General characteristics of the informal sector, e.g. flexibility, lower bureaucratic costs and the possibility to evade all or some of the tax requirements were noted to demonstrate that it offered a much more preferable environment to start and run a business (Ibid; Bosch and Maloney 2007). In his famous work, *Informality Revisited*, William Maloney (2004) argued as follows:

Levenson and Maloney (1996) treat "formality" more generally as participation in the numerous institutions of civil society: federal and local treasuries, governmental programmes such as social security (including pensions and health care), the legal system,

the banking system, health inspection, firm censuses, trade organisations, etc. These, of course, have costs in terms of compliance with legal norms which very small firms can choose to avoid in many developing countries. Small firms are anchored in social networks of family and immediate neighbourhoods that allow them to enforce implicit contracts, insure against risks, etc. while participation in the formal institutions of civil society is needlessly expensive (1168).

Hence, with alternative sources in place for social protection, it was argued that the relative “benefit” of formal employment was compensated with the relative ease of entry and lack of bureaucratic and financial costs to establish a business in the informal sector (Ibid). De Soto (1989) offered a striking example of a similar calculation. He noted that it would take 289 days and \$1231 to start a small business establishment in Peru, explaining that these financial and time costs would not be affordable for majority of small business entrepreneurs. Recently, Djankov et al. (2001) tested this theory on 85 countries, and found a high correlation between high entry costs (tougher entry requirements) and a large informal sector.

Furthermore, in a recent World Bank report corruption was emphasised as a reason for distrust in government institutions in Argentina and Peru, decreasing the value of the benefits associated with government regulation and social insurance schemes (Djankov, Freund, and Pham 2006). The report noted that when formal protection was of poorer quality and expensive, individuals resorted to the informal sector where they could initiate their own social protection mechanisms and run their businesses without incurring the costs associated with the formal sector. Thus, it was commonly argued that the combination of the rigidity and inflexibility of institutions and added costs of time and taxes (and corruption of the institutions) drew individuals to *choose* in the informal sector voluntarily.

However, using rational choice theory had the much more restrictive meaning of “choice” in the context of the informal economy, especially for women workers. As Kabeer (2002) put it, “... as economists began to focus on women’s labour supply patterns, it became clear that the decision about use of individual labour time could not be treated as the act of an isolated

individual, nor could it be reduce to a simple choice between work and leisure” (18). This is because women workers’ decision-making was embedded in the household, and to understand their paid economic behaviour, their unpaid domestic activities would have to be incorporated to the choice calculus. On the other hand, just focusing on the household decision-making for understanding women’s labour market participation carried the risk of “aggregating individual preferences into a single welfare function for maximising purposes” (Ibid, 19), since this type of argumentation overlooked that individuals (i.e. women) could have “very differing, perhaps conflicting, calculations of what constituted joint household welfare” (Ibid).

Attempts to critique such sweeping claims have led to an alternative “middle ground” which aimed at explaining the structural barriers to *choosing* for workers in the informal sector, and their strategies for navigating through, if not overcoming, some of these structural barriers. In the remainder of the chapter, I will be focusing in greater detail to this middle ground group which are of particular relevance for women workers in the informal sector, for whom the specified structural barriers –which are largely economic – do not capture the totality of constraints they face in the informal sector, and the opportunities highlighted for business-oriented entrepreneur men.

### 2.3.3. Women in the Informal Sector: Qualifying Choice and Necessarily non-Decision Making

We can see why the extremes of necessity and choice arguments in studies of the informal sector have not been particularly helpful in understanding the structure and agency problems of women workers in the informal sector. One portrayed individual actors as self-motivated entrepreneurs looking for every opportunity to over-ride the state and all bureaucracy for own profit, the other presented the labour market decisions of the individuals as a total outcome of the structural constraints, blurring their perceptions of what constitutes a constraint

(necessity) or an opportunity (choice) for them in the context of the informal sector. In addition, and most importantly for the purposes of this thesis, the two extreme accounts of the informal sector have been blind to the influences of other kinds of inequalities, such as gender, race, ethnicity, on individuals' decision-making in the informal sector. In this review on women in informal employment, I will explore studies that provide a more "situated" understanding of women's decision-making in the informal sector to "appreciate the 'conscious, deliberative aspects of human agency', to ask what actions of individuals reveal about their purpose and 'explore the ways in which calculations of economic consequences may influence their decisions'" (Folbre 1994 cited in Kabeer 2002, 47). This "middle ground" understanding of the informal sector attempts to move away from focusing solely on economic constraints on individual agency but pay attention to individuals' capacity for "invention within limits" (Ibid). One of the valuable aspects of this middle ground is that it provides a perspective that integrates structure and agency in their mutual interdependence, rather than dichotomy (Ibid). Individual action is recognised to be shaped by structural factors, but social change is possible through the mediation of individual responses. It is these individual responses of women workers in the informal sector this thesis aims to discover. In this section, I will first provide a gender-critique of the necessity and choice accounts presented in the literature, and then focus on building the "middle ground" for the thesis as a whole.

#### 2.3.3.1. *Whose Structure? Whose Agency? Feminist Critiques of Theories of the Informal Sector*

I have noted earlier that the statistical definition of the informal sector was expanded to focus from *enterprises* that are not legally regulated to *employment relationships* that are not socially protected (Chen 2012, 8). This change of lens helped to make the differences between

wage earners and the self-employed in the informal sector more visible (Husmanns 2004; Carr 2004). In particular, it was increasingly emphasised that the opportunities and constraints associated with informal employment for the self-employed and wage workers were substantially different. As put by Kantor (2009), although lack of government control and regulation might be interpreted as “business opportunities” for the micro-entrepreneurs, it actually signalled irregularity, lack of social protection and a risk for falling into (or deeper into) poverty for informal wage workers, majority of whom were women workers. This first criticism highlighted that employment in the informal sector was not a homogenous category, and overlooking the important differences of various types of employment ran the risk of over-interpreting and underestimating the structural constraints and individual opportunities.

Accordingly, Chen, Vanek, and Carr (2004) argued for a two-tier segmentation of the informal labour market: self-employment and wage employment; the first being usually taken by entrepreneurially inspired men, and the latter by women as an everyday strategy for survival. More specifically, Chen (2005) grouped various strata of informal employment as follows:

#### Informal self-employment<sup>4</sup>:

- Employers in informal enterprises
- Own account workers in informal enterprises
- Contributing family workers (in informal and formal enterprises)
- Members of informal producers’ cooperatives

#### Informal wage employment:

- employees hired without social protection contributions by formal or informal enterprises
- paid domestic workers by households
- casual day labourers
- temporary or part-time workers
- contract workers

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<sup>4</sup> Note that there is now an increasing trend in the informal economy literature to refer to all informal women workers as “self-employed”. Jejeebhoy (1997) explained that this re-assessment of categories was necessary because “it is contradictory and unjust to describe such a large and dynamic workforce in terms that relegate it to a peripheral position” because essentially workers assumed all the risks of their businesses. SEWA (Self-Employed Women’s Association) in India is based on this definition of informal employment.

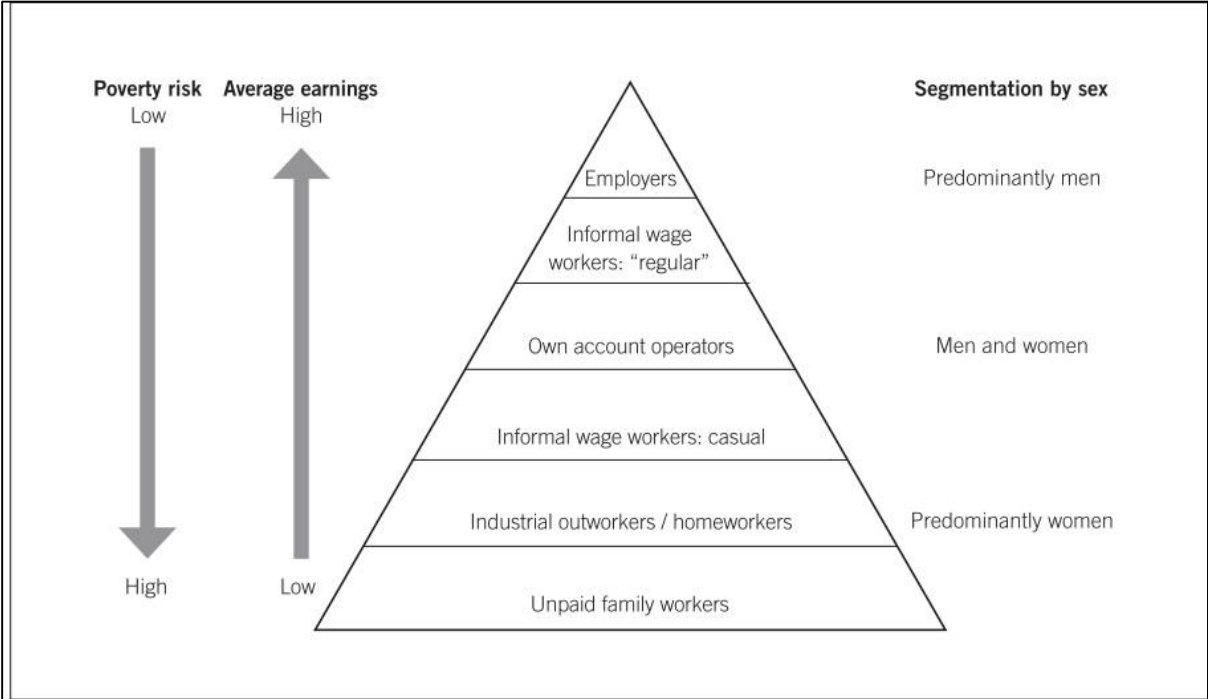
- unregistered or undeclared workers
- industrial outworkers (home-based workers)

Johnston-Anumonwo and Doane's (2011) review on the African informal sector revealed the importance of understanding this hierarchical segmentation of employment in the informal sector. The review demonstrated that women tended to remain stuck at the bottom of the informal employment hierarchy without their own organisations, trade unions or any other form of representation, whereas self-employed men usually enjoyed a wide range of informal benefits, including but not limited to guild associations and craftsman unions. Similarly, Carr and Chen (2004) noted that the global race to the bottom of wages -as a result of increasing global competition for reducing production costs- did not affect the self-employed who had their own businesses and capital as much as it affected those at the bottom of the informal employment hierarchy.

This two-tiered approach on informal employment further revealed that even among the self-employed and wage workers, there were different levels of access to social protection and pay, which influenced workers' capabilities of escaping poverty tremendously (Carr and Chen 2004). For example, Lora and Mauricio (1998) pointed out that skilled and unskilled informal employment had different outcomes for workers. Several authors argued that women were usually excluded from the skilled informal jobs, such as those in the construction and IT sector, but were largely employed in low-pay service, petty trade, street vending and piecework jobs (Carr, Chen, and Jhabvala 1996; Johnston-Anumonwo and Doane 2011; Kantor 2002; Chen 2006). Hirata and Humphrey (1991) added that whereas skilled workers had the choice of exiting their informal employment and take up formal employment at the end of a recession or a period of unemployment, exit was less of an option for unskilled women workers in informal employment whose chances of finding formal employment was limited by their familial obligation and educational limitations. Consequently, whereas for skilled workers

informal employment was noted to be a “temporary refuge” in times of financial strain, for unskilled workers it was an entry into the vicious circle of poverty, low-pay jobs and more poverty Kantor (2009). Accordingly, Chen drew a model of the informal employment hierarchy as follows:

Figure 2.1 Chen’s Model of Informal Employment: Hierarchy of Earnings & Poverty Risk by Employment



Source: Chen (2005: 12)

Chen’s model demonstrated that the “poverty risk” was especially higher for lower segments of the informal hierarchy, where the workforce was comprised of predominantly women. Whereas poverty was described as the reason for entry into the informal sector by the necessity argument, how informal employment created its own vicious circle of poverty as a result of dependency on low-paid, temporary and irregular employment was not discussed. Similarly, poverty did not constitute a major concern for those discussing the opportunities in the informal sector. Against this background, it is worth mentioning that several studies demonstrated that low-skill, low-status and low-pay informal employment was generally taken up by women from the poorest strata (Kazi and Raza 1990; Kantor 2009; Carr, Chen, and Jhabvala 1996). This backdrop was not coincidental, because a variety of gender-specific social

and cultural factors were argued to constrain women's opportunities in the labour market (Pellissery and Walker 2007). In this regard, recent thinking (Vanek et al. 2014) stressed the importance of gender in understanding the relationship between informal employment and poverty. Such modifications to our understanding of the interaction between gender, poverty and the informal sector in how women make their decisions to enter the informal sector and continue their participation in it gives the idea of "structural constraints" a far more grounded status in the analysis of women's economic behaviour, and also allows to explore which women take different decisions and why. In particular, it helps us distinguish between preferences which would be individual to the person and higher order preferences which are a result of "conscious reflection" (Hirshmann 1985 in Kabeer 2002, 23).

Consequently, the second criticism made for the necessity and choice arguments was that the gendered division of labour at home and women's limited resources (both economic and time) were not incorporated to the theories. More specifically, it was argued that the kind of activities women engaged in the informal economy were similar to their reproductive activities- which they would normally do free of charge at home, and this resulted in the perception that their labour was unskilled and inferior, and hence were unvalued and paid less in the labour market (Williams and Windebank 2003). Others noted that cultural attitudes and lack of education and/or training opportunities for women restricted their opportunities to those of culturally assigned ones, such as "mother" and "housewife", or their reflections in the labour market: nanny or domestic worker<sup>5</sup> (Rakodi 1995; Leach 1996). Dumas (2001) pointed out that this continuum between women's unpaid carer roles at home and low-paid

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<sup>5</sup> Similar arguments have been made for the Middle East, see Kandiyoti 1988; Kabeer 2000; Kantor and Nair 2003; Shaheed 1989; Carr and Chen 2004; Carr, Chen, and Jhabvala 1996.

jobs in the informal sector led to the general perception that informal sector was (at best) an inferior alternative to the formal sector, and women were especially marginalised in it.

In the same vein, it was argued that women's assigned carer roles might also restrict their physical mobility outside the household, which might limit their access to the formal labour market in the long run (Downing 1991a; Boris and Prügl 1996; Parasuraman and Simmers 2001; Mayoux 2001; Kantor 2002). For instance, Menzies (2004) argued that the decision to participate in the labour market was frequently seen as a decision between two choices: to work or not to work. When the formal sector failed to accommodate women's household and care responsibilities, the decision was made in favour of the informal sector (Ibid).

The idea that women are non decision-making but only acting in accordance to their gender-specific, cultural and religious norms and values is of particular relevance for the concerns of this thesis, because it is deeply imminent in studies which deal with Third World women, and even more so with Muslim women (Kabeer 2002, 34). There are understandable reasons why social norms and values should play a prominent role in understanding women's economic behaviour in these societies. But as Kandiyoti (1988) argued, although shared understanding of rights and obligations within the family shaped women's behaviour in society in general, these rights and obligations did not always mean the same thing in different societies, and hence "created different sets of gender interests in different social contexts and very different possibilities for pursuing those interests" (Kabeer 2002, 42). She used "patriarchal bargain" to explain women's different strategies in different cultural contexts. She noted that in contexts where women had some degree of access to economic opportunities or resources, they used more overt bargaining with the male members of their households. In contrast, in contexts where the patriarchal domination on women is strong, women resorted to more covert

strategies, seeming to acquiesce with the cultural norms and appropriate roles. It is these differing strategies in different contexts, this thesis aims to unravel.

Third, informal social protection mechanisms which were assumed to provide, if not replace, social protection against the vulnerabilities of informal employment, were contested for their ability to replace formal social protection. Several authors emphasised the crucial importance of social networks and support systems for the everyday survival of the working poor, but they also added that such informal social protection mechanisms could rarely provide effective protection against long-term financial or health risk (Meagher 2005; de la Rocha and Latapí 2008; Meagher 2013; Meagher 2014). Moreover, as de la Rocha (2001) explained, informal social protection mechanisms are based on reciprocity and mutual social exchange, and when individuals fail to fulfil these “social obligations” (often due to shortage of resources), they run a risk of becoming socially excluded (39), resulting in a loss of any informal social protection mechanisms they might have. Also, the informal social protection from kin networks was argued to come “at a price” for women, as they often required conformity to female seclusion and traditionally ascribed gender roles (Kantor 2009). Accordingly, Kantor (Ibid) demonstrated that where male approval was not granted to work outside, women’s “choices” of employment were limited to “working from home”<sup>6</sup>. Consequently, Carr, Chen, and Jhabvala (1996) stated that informal employment might present a vulnerable livelihood for both men and women, but there are women-exclusive and/or women-intensive challenges that do not affect men to the same extent. As de la Rocha and Latapí (2008) put it:

For voluntary behaviour to take place, it should be possible to have chosen otherwise. This is the case for both women and men but we would argue that gender differentiates the basis on which women and men are able to choose between formal and informal work. Age, domestic responsibilities, marital status, having children or being childless along with educational levels, all combine to constrain women to informal employment to a greater extent than men (38).

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<sup>6</sup> We see similar arguments raised by Shaheed 1989; Kantor 2002; Kabeer 2002; Carr and Chen 2004.

In explaining the informal protection mechanisms and its characteristics (i.e. intermittency, irregularity and inadequacy), Mercedes Gonzalez de la Rocha (2001; 2007) in particular argued that the need to “reciprocate the favour” (the protection) pushed workers to seek protection only when they were absolutely sure that they would be able to return it. In doing so, workers were argued to enter into a cycle of uncertainty, marked by their underemployment in the informal sector and their dependency on their informal relations for goods and services. Whilst providing an immediate option for getting by, with little possibility of exit, informal employment became a constraint in reaching better employment.

Against this background, it is important to emphasise Cain, Khanam, and Nahar (1979) “patriarchal risk” which stands for “the likelihood of abrupt declines in their [women’s] economic welfare and social status should they find themselves bereft of male guardianship” (Kabeer 2002, 42). The risks and uncertainties attendant on women’s dependent status especially in patriarchal societies shape women’s capabilities of challenging male dominance or norms about women’s role and place in family and in society. Where women without men face a particular risk of poverty, destitution and social isolation, women would have greater incentives to comply with or conform to male domination (Ibid).

Fourth, several studies on women’s informal labour pointed out that women in general had less access to productive resources such as tools and equipment, credit and information, new technologies or education and training, which limited their upward mobility chances to jobs with higher pay, establishing their own businesses or growing them (Downing 1991b; Koper 1993; Spalter-Roth, Hartmann, and Shaw 1993; Van der Wees and Romijn 1995; Mayoux 1995; Carr, Chen, and Jhabvala 1996; Levitsky 1997; Mahot 1998; Carter and Kolvereid 1998; ILO 1999).

This focus on “feminisation of poverty” raised a question whether informal employment could at all provide *empowerment* for poor women (Kabeer 2008; Kantor 2009; Holmes and Jones 2010; Amuzu, Jones, and Perezniето 2010; Chant 2011). One such critical study explored the impact of economic crisis on women in informal employment, and found that women’s informal employment generally took the form of petty trade, with little returns (Vuorela 1992). The same case study also emphasised that informal employment in the long run, was unlikely to empower women, since women were largely employed in low-status jobs in poor working conditions and earned only subsistence-level incomes, without any access to formal social protection or political representation. It was also highlighted that at the outset of market saturation and increased competition, women were willing to accept longer working hours for lesser pay, provided that they retained their employment, and this meant that informal employment provided only immediate survival, not empowerment in the long run (also see Cusack and Manuh 2009; Mupedziswa and Gumbo 2001).

On the other hand, some scholars argued that there were unique opportunities for women workers in the informal sector. Focusing on informal female entrepreneurship, the idea that informal employment was a synonym for exploitation was challenged. Instead, an effort was made to demonstrate how informal employment for women was actually “an incubator for business potential and a transitional base for accessibility and graduation to the formal economy” through which many women informal workers would show “real business acumen, creativity, dynamism and innovation” (ILO 2002). Theorists of this tradition commonly argued that women’s informal entrepreneurship was far more complex than the limited understanding of male-centric small business ownership (Chen 2006), and though women might enter informal employment out of necessity, this did not mean that they also stayed in informal employment out of necessity when their circumstances changed (Adom and Williams

2012). Notably, Dasgupta (2000) showed that although some women were compelled to enter informal employment to make ends meet in times of extreme financial strain, throughout their employment experience they actively sought to expand their prospects in the informal employment. In exploring how the search for better opportunities in informal employment was performed, Prentice's (2012) research into the Trinidadian garment workers indicated that workers actually interpreted their informal activities positively. Notably, sewing was viewed as a practice through which women were able to "make the move, do things" and "have real money" (410). As Prentice noted:

Neoliberal economic actors are made, not born. ...although acquiring technical skills has helped women "into the sewing" sustain livelihoods in the garment sector, the modes through which they learn have been equally important to their success. By eagerly embracing skilling opportunities with an enterprising spirit, Trinidadian garment workers consistently conform to the changing demands of a neoliberal economic environment in which workers must be opportunistic, flexible, and self-reliant. Their educational pathways prepare them for fragmented livelihoods that will see them seizing opportunities, withstanding economic uncertainties, and finding pleasure in what otherwise could be grinding and tedious work (411).

Hence, women's agency as actively seeking opportunities to expand their skill set and better employment options were noted, along with the argument that "informal employment had the potential to turn everyone into viable entrepreneurs" (Demirgüç-Kunt, Klapper, and Panos 2011; Yeboah et al. 2015). A recent study by Williams and Martinez (2014) asserted that women entered informal employment to test the viability of their business as men. More specifically, the authors showed that in the context of the UK, 66 per cent of men and 53 per cent of the women traded in the informal sector to test the viability of their businesses. Though the share of women small business owners was much smaller than that of men's (13 and 22 per cent respectively), the study still revealed that viability was also a reason for women to enter the informal sector. Further, recently, Ghani, Kerr, and O'Connell (2014) argued that when states supported women's entrepreneurial economic activities, they not

only helped them reach better financial outcomes, but also allowed them to gain a voice and access political participation (also Ghani, Kerr, and O'Connell 2013).

Recent literature emphasised that “greater independence”, “flexibility”, “being one’s own boss” were also just as important qualities of employment for women. In Adom and Williams's (2012) study on Ghana, one women’s dressmaker was quoted:

This is a very good business where the youth, especially girls, can go into to make their life better rather than relying on the government to give them jobs when there are none. Even though higher education is good in this modern Ghana, government work is hard to come by regardless of one’s qualifications and thus, the informal economy is the best option for everyone (12).

Stressing women’s growing capacities to strategically alter conditions of employment so as to improve their social and material circumstances, Ulysse (2007) documented, women traders often argued: “There isn’t a foundation that doesn’t have a crack in it... We will find it and we will go right through it.” Similarly, research conducted on women working as informal agricultural traders in Dominica highlighted that women’s “entrepreneurial savvy” enabled them to become creative agents ready to exploit all available opportunities (Browne 2005; Mintz and Price 1976).

Despite this trend, several scholars noted that exploiting the opportunities in informal employment required distinct entrepreneurial skills, which not all women *de facto* possessed. Demonstrably, Greene et al. (1999) argued that women were averse to risk and tended to avoid financial and social risks as much as they possibly could (also see; Watson, Gatewood, and Lewis 2014). It was noted that risk-taking requires a range of skills and qualities, e.g. self-confidence, good communication skills, leadership qualities or self-motivation, which the low-income, low-educated informal workers did not necessarily have (Lairap-Fonderson 2002; Temkin 2009; Ronoh et al. 2014). Derera, Chitakunye, and O'Neill (2014) also highlighted that women did not enjoy the same opportunities as men in accessing capital as they often

struggled to prove their financial credibility to lenders due to their limited or lack of track record and/or properties that could be used as collateral for the loans (Manolova et al. 2006; Adenugba, Helen, and others 2014). The authors added that this was one of the main reasons why women workers generally took up wage work in the informal sector rather than self-employment.

Other studies pointed out religion as a determining factor of women's capabilities of engaging in self-employment in the informal sector. It was noted that some religions particularly disapproved of women handling money, and other religions severely limited women's physical mobility and public visibility (Baughn, Chua, and Neupert 2006; Fuad, Bohari, and Hin 2011; Audretsch, Boente, and Tamvada 2007). Yet other studies drew attention to the traditional and patriarchal family structure which asserted certain levels of social segregation and limited access to social networks for women. These studies affirmed that as a result of the dominant patriarchal norms women were either not able to engage in self-employment, or engaged in the most invisible kinds of it (home-based outwork) (Manolova et al. 2007; Aidis et al. 2007; Smith-Hunter and Leone 2010; Ivanova Yordanova and Alexandrova-Boshnakova 2011; Karki and Bohara 2014<sup>7</sup>).

Against this background, it was noted that women's opportunities for independent entrepreneurship was severely limited, and when women did engage in self-employment, they ended up investing their personal savings from previous employment or relying on financial support from their families (Rouse and Jayawarna 2006; Nieman and Nieuwenhuizen 2009; Alam, Jani, and Omar 2011; Boateng 2014). This severely limited the survival rate of most businesses owned by women (Kuzilwa 2005; Sengupta 2011). It was underlined that

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<sup>7</sup> Several studies actually stress this point particularly in the Middle Eastern and South East Asian contexts. See (Ufuk and Özgen 2001; Minniti and Arenius 2003; Fletschner and Carter 2008; Al-Alak and Al-Haddad 2010; Al-Dajani and Marlow 2010; Singh et al. 2011; Singh 2005).

women faced extreme difficulties in entering non-traditional sectors or traditionally male-dominated sectors (Ibid), which reinforced horizontal segregation, in the market (Verheul and Thurik 2001). This latter point demonstrates the complexity of women's informal employment, and the difficulty of categorising it as necessity or opportunity-driven.

#### *2.3.3.2. Constructing the Middle Ground between Structure and Agency: Women's Everyday Strategies of Survival in the Informal Sector*

It will be clear from the discussion in this section that there are several and competing accounts for why low-income, low-educated women enter informal employment, why they end up in particular forms of employment in the informal sector hierarchy and what their employment means for their status as subordinate actors in patriarchal societies. For structuralists, labour market constraints push and pull workers into the informal sector as a means for survival when all other options are exhausted in the formal sector. For voluntarists on the other hand, individuals enter the informal sector as a result of comparative advantage considerations, the weighing up of marginal returns from informal and formal sector, uses of time, resources and bureaucratic costs. In this thesis, I aim to find a "middle ground" which would expect to see labour market, family and social structure influencing women's decisions to enter and participate in the informal labour market, but explore how this influence is mediated by a complex interplay of women's personal, household-level and other considerations, depending on their cultural, educational background, employment history and social networks.

Moreover, as much as the impact of paid work on women's lives is concerned, neither structuralists nor voluntarists pay much attention to the transformatory potential of women's employment. However, as studies presented in this section have demonstrated women obtain important levels of "bargaining with patriarchy" as a result of their employment. Although

paid employment might be a “necessary but not sufficient” condition for women workers to challenge intra-household hierarchies (Kabeer 2002, 50), processes through which women earn their income also influence these bargains and women’s status in family in general.

However, as we have shown, critics of both traditions have pointed towards the importance of integrating a “middle ground” to our analyses of women’s informal employment, in which their agency can be recognised without underestimating the constraining structures within which they exercise their agency (Kabeer 2002, 47). This perspective also gives the constraints and choices highlighted by the structuralists or voluntarists a much more grounded and situated interpretation, emphasising the individuals’ decision-making process in their entry to and continuing employment in the informal sector, rather than macro constraints on their labour market behaviour or specific personal preferences for profit maximisation.

Consequently, this thesis focuses on women’s everyday strategies for survival for getting by and improving their circumstances in the informal sector. I benefit from Giddens' (1984) definition of structure, that is: “the rules and resources recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems” (377) and Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) definition of agency: “the capacity of actors to critically shape their own responsiveness to problematic situations (971)”. Following Giddens, and the discussions presented in this chapter regarding women’s informal employment, I argue that both structure and agency are connected and they both shape each other through social interaction of the individual (Coe and Jordhus-Lier 2010). This middle ground accepts that individual agency is socially constrained, but also notes that social and structural constraints on individual behaviour are also shaped by individual practice, since it is the individual who put these constraints (including institutions, values and norms) into practice (Kabeer 2002, 47).

An important starting point for discussing women's everyday strategies of survival calls for an examination of women's relationship to structures of the family, labour market and the state, which together shape their entry to and existence in the informal sector. In this regard, "constraints" become intertwined with the difficulties women face in their everyday life, which are not independent of gender regime dynamics (Connell 2000; 2014; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). As mentioned earlier, writing on women's coping strategies in classical patriarchal societies, including Turkey, Kandiyoti (1988) for instance revealed how forms of silent resistance such as subservience and manipulation might help women "bargain with patriarchy". These individual strategies are usually different from collective movements described in the Western literature (Mohanty 1997; Ong 1988) and instead are centred on more contextual and *silent* responses to the constraints women face on a day to day basis. In this regard, Scott's (1990) "Domination and the Arts of Resistance" is exemplary for detailing the formation, accumulation and application of silent acts of resistance. More specifically, Scott demonstrated how peasants under the oppressive rule of the Malaysian elite managed to shift the power dynamics in the village through hidden acts of insubordination which did not immediately threaten the ruling elite, or aimed at seizing state control. Instead, peasants collaborated through "passive" and "hidden" conditions of practical resistance (191). As Scott put it:

What permits subordinate groups to undercut the authorised cultural norms is the fact that cultural expression by virtue of its polyvalent symbolism and metaphor lends itself to disguise. By the subtle use of codes one can insinuate into a ritual, a pattern of dress, song, a story, meanings that are accessible to one intended audience and opaque to another audience, the actors wish to exclude. Alternatively, the excluded (and in this case, powerful) audience may grasp the seditious message in the performance but find it difficult to react because that sedition is clothed in terms that also can lay claim to a perfectly innocent construction. (158)

Scott revealed how metaphoric language and polyvalent symbolism constituted subtle and hidden forms of resistance, which the dominant classes would not see a reason for

suppressing. By doing so, Scott argued that behind these “hidden transcripts of resistance” laid an active struggle imbued with meanings, values and aspirations of the subordinate classes.

Building on Scott’s “hidden transcripts”, it seems clear that non-confrontational or non-conflictual forms of opposition, which do not immediately try to challenge or change exist power relations constitute a crucial means for coping for individuals facing a variety of constraints on their decision-making. Although Scott’s account has been challenged for “romanticising” the constraints faced by subordinate groups and over-emphasising their value for resisting inequality (see Abu-Lughod 1990), it is still very valuable for understanding the relationship between structure and agency as one of duality, of mutual interdependence, rather than dichotomy (Kabeer 2002, 47) and for showing how “Structure is always emergent from practice and is constituted by it” (Connell 1987, 94).

However, it is also important to understand “degrees of resistance”, and how individual agency differs even when the constraining circumstances might be similar. In this regard, Cindi Katz’s (1994; 2001; 2009) framework advances our understanding by providing a more nuanced understanding of resistance. Writing on two contrasting communities in Sudan (Harlem and the village of Howa), Katz demonstrated the variety of responses the villagers gave in situations of subordination, oppression and control, as well as the changing power dynamics as a result of more macro forces, e.g. global economic restructuring, excess labour supply, etc. Katz grouped the responses of the local villagers into three groups: “resilience”, “reworking” and “resistance”. Resilience stands for the small autonomous acts of getting by that help individuals cope with their everyday circumstances, without necessarily challenging the constraints that lead to these circumstances. In this regard, it is similar to Scott’s aforementioned “hidden transcripts” that individuals do not attempt to alter but adapt to

their circumstances, whilst attaining the resources which might help them achieve a better living or status in their communities. Reworking refers to individuals' efforts to materially improve their conditions progressively through the recalibration of power relations or redistribution of resources. In this sense, even when individuals do not agree with the system or the structure itself, they do not directly aim to change it, but try to redress some parts of it for their own advantage. Resistance stands for directly challenging the social, cultural or economic relations that create the unfair and oppressive structure and involve direct confrontation of the conditions of oppression. The strength of this three-tiered framework stems from its recognition of contextuality of individual responses, modified by individuals' own sets of constraints, resources and aspirations. Thus, Katz's framework provides a good analytical tool for interpreting different coping strategies in different contexts, however it is unclear why some individuals choose more covert strategies whereas others resort to more overt ones.

In that regard, Kabeer (2002) "the power to choose" framework provides us a grounded analytical framework for understanding how women's labour market decisions are actually made and how a combination of individual, household and community (societal) constraints shape women's labour market behaviour. Studying Bangladeshi women workers in London and in Dhaka, Kabeer explored different levels of agency and different responses to women's decisions to enter the labour market. More specifically, she grouped women into the following four categories: 1) Passive Agency, Consensual Decision Making, 2) Suppressed Agency, Conflictual Decision-Making, 3) Negotiated Agency, Conflictual Decision-Making, 4) Active Agency, Consensual Decision-Making. Women who were grouped into the first category suggested a "passive" form of agency because they seemed to have thoroughly internalised the preferences of others that "choice" and "constraint" have become indistinguishable in

their accounts. This group of women was categorically differentiated from women who could not exercise their agency due to educational, childcare or other constraints. Rather for instance, the choice of working outside was made by their families, and women identified with that choice. The second group of women attempted to exercise agency but this was suppressed or led to conflicts in their households. The third group of women negotiated their agency through a variety of “tactics” (248), although sometimes they had to rework their wishes and capabilities. The fourth and last group of women were based on an active consensus between women’s agency and that of their families. In this category, women had the unilateral power to take their decisions as male heads of household were generally absent from the picture. This four-tiered perspective integrating both individual and household-level constraints and opportunities highlighted by women workers and their families presented a much more situated understanding of “Qualifying choice” between individual preferences and the social context that shaped women’s decision-making and a more “realistic evaluation of the scale of effort, information and cognitive capacity” of women workers (21).

Against this background, this thesis aims to show how even low-income and low-educated women in the informal sector and in patriarchal societies with disadvantageous working and mobilisation conditions exercise their agency, through everyday survival strategies to improve their lives. It attempts to show how both the arguments from structure and choice are exaggerations of reality, and that women recognise the constraints on their ability to improve their lives and adapt to them to bring about social change. They are not powerless, but also they do not have the complete power to make their labour market decisions in a vacuum. On one end of the spectrum, their power is disguised in “hidden acts of resistance”, on the other end of the spectrum, they find means to confront inequalities and injustices with respect to their employment. Building on this “middle ground”, this thesis attempts to show the choice

among these strategies, which women can adopt which strategies, what conditions enable the adoption of these strategies, and why some women give different and often counter-intuitive responses.

## *2.4. Conclusion*

In this chapter, I have attempted to bring together the “necessity” and “choice” arguments in the literature for individuals’ participation in the informal sector in order to achieve a number of objectives. The first objective is a straight-forward one. It is to understand the evolution of the understanding of “informal employment” from a secondary, parallel, submerged, underground economy to the everyday reality of labour market in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, characterised by zero-hour contracts and “precaurisation” (Standing 2011). The second objective is more theoretical in nature and to ground this thesis in the existing literature on women’s work and gender studies through a review of the theoretical accounts of why and how women workers make the decision to enter and continue their employment in the informal sector.

Finally, I had a third objective in this chapter, and that is to go beyond the current analyses of women workers in the exiting literature which implicitly or explicitly disregard women workers’ decision-making and agency, and focus more on the structural constraints (both economic and social) on their economic behaviour. However, women’s own accounts of why they engaged in employment in the informal sector were largely absent from these accounts. For this reason, I proposed to follow a “middle ground” for this thesis as a whole, arguing that the extremes of constraints and opportunities argument put forth for explaining individuals’ economic behaviour in the informal sector have not proven particularly useful in understanding the differing and at times counterintuitive decisions of women workers in the informal sector. One of the valuable features of this theoretical middle ground is that it

explores the relationship between structure and agency as one of duality and interdependence rather than a dichotomy (Kabeer 2002, 47) and allows for understanding the interplay of social, cultural and economic factors on women's decision-making. In the next chapter, following from this "middle ground" approach, I will detail the methodological approach adopted for this thesis.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. *Introduction*

This chapter outlines the research design and the methods used to investigate the research questions the thesis sets out to examine. It includes the reasons for adopted methods of inquiry, and more complex issues regarding the fieldwork experience, issues of representation, validity and reliability. The chapter also lays out the twists and turns that became necessary throughout the field research to adapt to the irregular nature of informal employment, and also to the cultural and labour market barriers to accessing women workers.

The chapter begins by laying out the research strategy and the epistemological underpinnings of the chosen methods. This is followed by a discussion on data collection methods, and the study sample that informed the material presented. In the subsequent section, the fieldwork experience is discussed. In light of these, the next section presents the conceptual framework utilised throughout the thesis to set the analytical ground for the following empirical chapters. The penultimate section presents a summary of the chapter and concludes.

### 3.2. *Research Strategy*

Despite growing interest in the informal sector, women's informal employment remains grossly invisible in "Big Data" (Chen 2014). The *Decent Work and the Informal Economy* Report by the International Labour Organisation (ILO 20 02) contended that across the world "women are more likely than men to be in those informal activities that are undercounted, such as production for own consumption, paid domestic activities in private households and home work" (12). The report also pointed out that domestic workers, home-based workers and women working in family-based atelier production are often *de facto* excluded from labour

force or household surveys<sup>8</sup> due to the blurry boundaries between their reproductive and productive work (11). In Turkey, the data limitations are further curtailed by patriarchal norms and values about women's place in family and society. Correspondingly, women workers and their kin tend to under-report women's work (White 1994; Özar 1994; Dedeoğlu 2008; Beşpınar 2010). Furthermore, Çağatay and Berik (1994) pointed out the possibility of gender bias in the Household Labour Force Surveys, since they are often directed to "the head of the household", a role traditionally attributed to and assumed by men. Recently Dedeoğlu (2008) also emphasised this point, adding that labour force surveys tend to be carried out in coffee houses in Turkey, due to cultural barriers that limit male interviewers' (or strangers) access to private households where women could be interviewed. The author argued that these coffee houses are traditionally male-dominated areas where men might be particularly cautious to give detailed information about the economic activities of their female kin, so as to not face the stigma of inability to provide for their families. Therefore, collecting my own data on these otherwise invisible groups of workers proved crucial to understand the connections between gendered relations of power surrounding women's informal employment, and their impact on family, labour market and socio-political structures (Chant and Pedwell 2008, 11).

Against this background, my broader methodological concern related to the need to investigate the "why" questions about women workers' entry to, participation in, and/or exiting the informal sector. This meant obtaining in-depth information about women's own ways of interpreting the risks and opportunities in the informal sector and giving them a "voice" to tell their own stories (Cornwall 2003; Vaillancourt-Laflamme 2005; Chant and Pedwell 2008). Accordingly, qualitative methodologies were most fitting for this research, as

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<sup>8</sup> Karadeniz (2011) and Erdoğan and Toksöz (2013) emphasised that in Turkish Household Labour Force Surveys, domestic work and home-based work are not treated as a separate category of work, and this leads to the underestimation of numbers of informal women workers in Turkey.

they would offer the needed depth and detail to make sense of women's everyday strategies in the informal sector (Moser 2007; Kabeer 2008; Kantor 2009). In particular, an ethnographic research design was adopted to develop a detailed and contextual understanding of the research context and observe the day-to-day lives of women in informal employment (Fielding 1993; Fetterman 1998; Burgess and Bryman 1994; Atkinson 2001; Hammersley 2007a).

The philosophical underpinnings of my choice of ethnographic methods come from the understanding that both structure and agency are connected to each other (Emirbayer and Mische 1998) and individuals possess the capacity to critically alter their world through their subjective responses to the situations they defined as problematic (Coe and Jordhus-Lier 2010). Nussbaum (2000) conceptualised women's "power" or "skill" to change their circumstances as their "capabilities". In applying this concept to women workers in the informal sector, Glover and Nussbaum (1995) argued that capabilities differed from "opportunities" because although the sets of opportunities available to women might be limited and barriers to their employment multi-faceted, women still attempted to change their circumstances when they possessed or acquired the necessary skills and abilities (Ibid). This "agency" perspective has several advantages when exploring women's unrecognised and under-recorded work. There is no doubt that women face multiple forms of social exclusion in the labour market, and that their employment is further eclipsed by patriarchal norms that effectively limit their labour force participation trajectories (Domosh 2001). By recognising women's capabilities to "act on their own interest" (Gills and Piper 2002, 109), as opposed to just seeing them as "trapped" into informal employment with no possibilities of exit, we can move beyond the "myth" of "victimised, ignorant, poor, tradition bound, domestic and family oriented" analyses of women in informal employment (Franck and Olsson 2014).

To this end, I aimed at a “holistic” gender perspective that treats women’s informal employment as a “learning curve” to discover the ways in which women identified sources of exclusion in their everyday lives and their capabilities of exerting influence to alter them. This required a careful analysis of, informal women workers’ position in the family, labour market and in society in general. In doing so, gendered inequalities were treated as “contingent and amenable to transformation and change” (Chant and Pedwell 2008, 8) and how women actors themselves led to this transformation and change was explored.

Throughout the data collection process, in-depth, open-ended and semi and/or non-structured interviews were utilised. In particular, open-ended interviews were shown to be especially suitable for gaining insights into people’s experiences and capturing their decision-making processes (Borland 1991; Edin and Kefalas 2011). It was also noted that these interviews had the potential to build rapport between the researcher and the researched when the researcher is interested in the totality of the participants’ everyday experiences (Berger 2013). The rapport, in return, is suggested to encourage participants to speak openly about their experiences (Lee 1993; Johnson 2001). Accordingly, the interviews were based on broad themes, rather than a pre-established list of questions (Silverman 2010) to open room for the rich accounts of women’s experiences in the informal sector (McCracken 1988).

### *3.3. Fieldwork and Primary Data Collection Methods*

My initial plan to operationalise the research design and methodology was to access women in informal employment through their workplaces and conduct a workplace-based ethnography. Accordingly, during the initial phases of my fieldwork, I visited factories, schools and childcare centres in order to reach women in informal employment. I had planned to support this access strategy by a snowball approach, hoping the informal women workers I meet in the workplaces would then introduce me to home-based and domestic workers.

However, this strategy revealed the unwillingness of employers to share any information regarding their informal workers. This became particularly obvious when I was only presented with the lists of formal workers, or when I found out that the workers I interviewed had been warned to tell me “there are no informal workers in this workplace”. Moreover, I was given 5-10 minutes during lunch breaks to conduct my interviews, which would not be sufficient for any in-depth interview or ethnographic observations. Some women also had the wrong impression that I was working for their employers and was interviewing them to decide whether or not to terminate their employment. As Small (2009) pointed out fieldwork is an ongoing process, and the research questions as well as the ways to formulate these questions “evolve” throughout fieldwork. Having realised the aforementioned limitations of my initial research plan, I changed my access strategy from workplaces to neighbourhoods in which women in informal employment lived. This allowed me to “generate data which give an authentic insight into people’s experiences” (Silverman 1993, 91), while at the same time taking the social context into account (Levy 1981). For this purpose, gaining in-depth personal knowledge of the research setting and research population proved necessary.

### 3.3.1. Research Setting

As shown in the previous chapter, informal employment is largely an urban phenomenon, and more women than men are employed informally (see Table 3.1). In Turkey, almost 1 in every 2 women is working in the urban informal sector and more often than not they are employed as wage workers. More specifically, only 15 per cent of the self-employed are women, whereas they constitute 26 per cent of all wage workers. Furthermore, Karadeniz (2011) demonstrated that 92 per cent of home-based workers are women, of which 98 per cent work informally. Erdoğan and Toksöz (2013) added to these findings that at least 150,000 women are employed as domestic workers in Turkey, of which 97 per cent work informally.

Table 3.1 Urban informality rates by gender

	Women	Men
South Asia	83	82
Sub-Saharan Africa	74	61
Latin America and the Caribbean	54	48
Urban China	36	30
East and Southeast Asia (exc. China)	64	65
Middle East and North Africa*	47	35
Turkey	49	28

Source: Regional statistics are based on Vanek et al.(2014). \*Authors' note: in the Middle East, more men than women are employed, and this also reflects in the informal employment rates. Statistics on Turkey are author's own extraction from TURKSTAT 2014, Household Labour Force Survey.

Urban ethnography has been noted for its ability to study those who remain outside of protective mechanisms as a result of migration, employment, housing, gender or minority status (Denzin 1997). It has also been acknowledged that urban ethnography is particularly suitable for investigating individuals' strategies for dealing with the multi-faceted nature of social exclusion in the informal sector (Edin and Lein 1997; Sassen 1999; Venkatesh 2006; Edin and Kefalas 2011). My interest in understanding women's decision making process throughout their informal employment experience led me to locate my study in Istanbul, a big city environment, where informality formed the fabric of the city (Keyder 1999; Eraydin 2008; Pinarcioglu and Işik 2008). Low-income and high-income neighbourhoods co-exist side by side (Keyder 1999) and the communities of these neighbourhoods are connected to each other in intricate webs of relations, as a result of the constant migration flows to the city and the gentrification processes (Soytemel 2013).

Indeed, Istanbul has become a "megacity" (Sassen 2001) in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a result of these migration flows, with the population increasing more than ten-fold<sup>9</sup>. Consequently, the city was pushed beyond its physical boundaries<sup>10</sup> to accommodate the increasing number of newcomers. This expansion process took place simultaneously with

<sup>9</sup> According to Turan (2011), Istanbul's population grew exponentially in the past five decades: 983,000 in 1950; 1,466,000 in 1960; 2,132,000 in 1970; 2,772,000 in 1980; 7,620,000 in 1990; 10,923,000 in 2000; and 13,256,000 in 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Kiray (1972) calls this process of expanding to the outskirts of the city, *urban fringe* [sacaklanma].

*gecekondu-isation* (ghetto-isation) in the peripheries (Karpaz 1976), *gecekondu* literally meaning “houses built overnight” for those unable to afford formal housing. Emergence of *gecekondu* neighbourhoods in the peripheries entailed that the problems related to housing, education, public transportation or health and care services were solved by informal methods, since the government services were unable to attend to these problems fast enough (Erder 1996). For example, Şatıroğlu and Tüfekçioğlu's (2012) study on *Bayramtepe* illustrated that “underground” organisations filled the power vacuum left by the absence of government services in the neighbourhood, running their own informal versions of most services (transportation, housing, care services)<sup>11</sup>.

Urban sociologist Enzo Mingione (1981) demonstrated that urbanisation and industrialisation lead to the constant emergence of “new peripheries” in cities, as “old peripheries” become incorporated into the city centres through gentrification and flight of production zones to the outskirts. Subsequently to incorporate the changing nature of the peripheries to my study, I decided to locate my fieldwork sites in two peripheries in Istanbul; namely Esenyurt, a relatively new periphery, and Kağıthane, an old periphery (Figure 3.1).

Esenyurt and Kağıthane are residential areas for low-income urban migrants in Istanbul, and both neighbourhoods are characterised by “off the record” businesses, informal housing arrangements and large populations in informal employment (both men and women). Esenyurt as a new periphery continues to attract new flows of migration from within and outside of Istanbul, whereas Kağıthane attracts intra-provincial migration of middle and upper-middle classes as a result of widespread gentrification projects<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, though

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<sup>11</sup> This point has been made by several studies on *gecekondu-isation* of big cities in Turkey: Ayata 1996; Erder 1997; Kazgan et al. 1999; Buğra 2000; Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2001; Kurtoğlu 2004; Şatıroğlu and Tüfekçioğlu 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Esenyurt and Kağıthane's development has been similar, in that both districts initially emerged as industrial production zones, which later became increasingly residential areas as a result of attracting domestic migration. Esenyurt, however, has a different demographical composition, as a consequence of the forced migration of Kurds from the eastern provinces of Turkey (see Üstündağ 2005), whereas Kağıthane's demographic composition



2011). These personal introductions provided vital access to a diversified group of women in informal employment, including women working for small garment ateliers, domestic workers and subcontracted cleaning workers. After these introductions, I developed close relationships with some of them, and they later became my key informants in the neighbourhoods. I then benefited from the “snowball method” to access more women in informal employment and across various segments of the informal sector. The snowball method is considered to be particularly suitable for accessing hidden populations (Atkinson and Flint 2001; Sifaneck and Neaigus 2001) and generating a type of social knowledge that is emergent, political and interactional (Noy 2008, 327), as it allows the researcher to observe the connections and power dynamics in the researched group (Schönberger 1992). Nevertheless, the use of the snowball approach created a number of concerns with regards to the material generated, which is important to mention here. While I was happy to accept to interview everyone my respondents introduced me to (Bryman 2008) refers to this as “convenience sampling”), I was aware of the impact this can make on the final data produced, i.e. limit the variance in the study (Edin and Lein 1997). To help counter this issue, I tried to gain multiple entry points to the neighbourhoods and spent lengthy periods of time in fieldwork sites. My thought process on this matter ensured that gradually my acquaintances and number of informants started to expand and women with a variety of backgrounds and experiences in the informal labour market became informants of this study.

Furthermore, I developed close relationships with various trade unions, labour offices and associations working in these neighbourhoods. In Esenyurt, IMECE (the Domestic Workers’ Union); BATİS (Independent Textile Workers Union); SODAP (Socialist Solidarity Platform); Yeşilkent Cemevi (Yeşilkent Alevi Religious Centre) connected me with women in informal employment. Recognising the potential bias in contacting interviewees through activist groups

(Hertog 2009, 12), I also contacted government offices; Esenyurt Municipality; the Association for Housewives and the Disabled, offices of village headmen (*muhtarlık*) and Labour Placement Offices to reach local, low-income women in informal employment. Similarly, in Kağıthane, village headmen, Kağıthane Municipality, the Kağıthane Official Employment Bureau, fellow townsmen associations (*Hemşeri Dernekleri*) as well as some local newspapers and TV channels were important institutions that introduced me to my participants.

Interviews were chosen primarily to understand the rationales and motivations of women workers in entering and staying in informal employment. I also inquired about their intentions to exit the informal sector, and their capabilities to do so. I supported these interviews with lengthy observations in field sites, to contextualise women's own accounts of risks and opportunities in the informal sector, and their responses to get by or overcome its problematic aspects.

The fieldwork for this research took place between January and September 2012 over eight months in Istanbul. Subsequent field visits were also carried out in January 2013; April 2013; June 2013 and February 2014. Ethnographic studies usually recommend researchers to locate themselves in their study sites so as to be able to “fully immerse oneself in the flow of daily life” to obtain deeper insights into the desires, beliefs, habits and motivations of their study communities (Plowman 2003; O'Reilly 2012). Being a single woman, however, it was not culturally appropriate for me to live alone in my fieldwork sites, and it could potentially be unsafe. For this reason, I lived in a different neighbourhood, and carried out daily visits to the fieldwork sites and spent lengthy periods of time with my respondents. This proved useful in associating with the locals, friends and acquaintances of women workers, and building up rapport in the community. Living outside the fieldwork sites also had a practical benefit in that

it enabled me to write down my field notes and organise my thoughts on an everyday basis, during the long bus journeys.

### 3.3.2. Data Collection Methods and the Study Sample

A variety of methods was used to collect the primary data for this thesis: interview data, observational data and data drawn from the analysis of the magazines and fanzines published by the informal workers' unions and associations I worked with. The collection of the primary data was guided by the aim of achieving "good ethnography", that is, a synthesis of a wide variety of data which contextualises the research setting and the day-to-day lives of the respondents (Coffey and Atkinson 1996; Wai-chung Yeung 2003; Silverman 2011). Such synthesis helped me produce "thick" type of knowledge (Noy 2008).

I define "the study sample" or "the study community" as the entire population of women in informal employment and in precarious job arrangements, and some of their husbands, family members and family business owners I interviewed. These people constitute the *gecekondu* fabric of Istanbul. This does not mean, however, that they are a homogenous group. There are significant differences between their lifestyles, beliefs, reasons for migration, adaptation to urban life in Istanbul and reasons for engaging in paid work. The study sample was composed with the aim of furthering theoretical insights into the nature of women's agency in informal employment, and their strategies for survival in the informal sector. To this end, I was not looking for a "representative" sample from which generalisations about women in informal employment could be made. Rather, I intended to compose my sample on the basis of job categories and concepts that are relevant to the study (Glaser and Strauss 1965). At the same time I did not seek *especially* un-representative or unusual employment cases of women in informal employment. Each case was broadly chosen as a lens through which Istanbul's informal employment landscape could be captured.

The focus of this study is on “low-income”, “low-educated” women, as they form the bottom end of the informal employment hierarchy (Chen 2010). The women I interviewed shared similar characteristics to the extent that they were mostly first or second generation migrants to Istanbul with less than a high school diploma, and were employed in the informal sector or low-level, subcontracted jobs with little or no access to basic social services in the formal sector.

Two approaches to defining “low-income” and “low-education” emerge from the literature, based on formal benchmarks or the use of subjective self-evaluations. The formal benchmark, for instance, measures low-income through monetary criteria alone (Dedeoğlu 2008) and low-education through the number of years spent in formal education. More recently, the use of subjective self-evaluations have been argued to present a better approach for understanding individuals’ own perceptions of their deprivation and social exclusion. Pellissery and Walker's (2007) study on the poor, informal workers in Bangladesh for instance, revealed that the meaning of shame attached to one’s poverty is related to people’s own perceptions of what they feel they are lacking, rather than how much they have in economic terms. (Nussbaum 2007) also noted that low-income should not be read as merely economic deprivation, as people have different views on what they are really lacking. Accordingly, in this study, I relied on people’s own perceptions of low-income and low-education as this could influence their reasons for not seeking formal employment, or the particular strategies they developed in trying to overcome the problematic aspects of informal employment. In the end, my sample included some vocational and high school graduates and women with no formal education, and women who lacked basic literacy skills (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 Educational variation of women in informal employment

Educational attainment	Complete Illiteracy	Basic Literacy	Primary School	Middle School	High School or Equivalent	2-year college	Total
Number of women	11	10	47	11	10	1	90
Percentage of women	12%	11%	52%	12%	11%	2%	100%

Source: Author's interviews. \*The main group of women in this study are primary school graduates. This was expected, given that 48% of women in Turkey have only a primary school diploma, and almost 70% of women lack high school level qualifications. \*\*One woman considered herself as low-educated because she considered university education to be the minimum education required for formal desk jobs.

Similarly some women defined low-income as less than minimum wage<sup>13</sup>, when others did not see minimum wage sufficient for making ends meet, and considered themselves as low-income if they did not earn at least 1000 TL a month (334 GBP) (Table 3.3). At the time of the research, minimum wage was 701 TL (234 GBP). Considering that the hunger threshold for a family of four was stated to be 974 TL (300 GBP), and poverty threshold 3171 TL (973 GBP) it can be inferred that minimum wage does not necessarily guarantee decent life standards in Turkey. In fact, according to the Clean Clothes Campaign's 2014 Report, minimum wage in Turkey equals to only 27 per cent of a living wage<sup>14</sup>. Women, however, almost always noted the various low-income categories in informal employment, with home-based work paying the lowest rates, and live-in domestic work the highest rates. Indeed, whereas on average a woman working full-time as a home-based worker in the textile industry would make somewhere between 110-220 lira a month (37-74 GBP), a domestic worker working 5 days a week could make around 1800-2200 lira (600-740 GBP)<sup>15</sup>. Using women's own definitions of low-income and low-education also provided an opportunity to explore the different

<sup>13</sup> Here I include only the income levels of women, as women constitute the primary study participants for the thesis. The household income levels of the participants were broadly similar.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.cleanclothes.org/resources/publications/stitched-up-1> Accessed on 6 February 2014.

<sup>15</sup> This is based on 2012 rates of home-based excess thread cleaning work, which paid 5-10 lira a day and domestic work which paid around 80-100 lira a day. Rates are taken from my interviews. However, the monthly calculations are only suggestive for comparison, as both of these employments are never stable to last for a full month.

strategies women developed to improve their work and pay conditions, depending on what they felt they were not able to afford and how much they feel they needed it.

**Table 3.3 Income variation of women in informal employment based on women’s paid work**

Income obtained from employment	< Minimum wage	=~Minimum Wage	> Minimum Wage	Total
Number of women	17	32	18	67
Percentages of women	25%	48%	27%	100%

Source: Author’s interviews. Minimum wage (net) for year 2012 was 701 TL (234 GBP). \*These values are only women’s earned income and not their total household incomes. Given that women’s capabilities to exit their constraining circumstances are measured by their paid employment (Kabeer 2004; Kabeer, Mumtaz, and Sayeed 2010), I only included women’s earnings here. Note that 23 women refused to give information about their wages or simply didn’t know.

My sample reflected the heterogeneous and hierarchical nature of informal employment. Empirical studies on women’s informal employment have a tendency to focus only on one type of informal employment, such as garment production, home-based or domestic work. Although, these studies provide in-depth accounts of the particular informal employment sector they focus on, they have been criticised for overlooking the fact that many women engage in a variety of informal jobs, sometimes simultaneously (Carr and Chen 2002; Chant and Pedwell 2008). Therefore, I did not focus on only one aspect of informal employment in this study. Sketching out the variety of informal jobs in Istanbul in year 2012 was a challenging part of my fieldwork, since there were no reliable sources of data on the kinds of jobs in which women were employed informally. There were also no reliable sources of data on the sectors or firms that employed informal workers. Moreover, the four categories of informal employment derived from the international literature (especially Carr and Chen 2002) -home-based workers, domestic workers, garment workers and the self-employed- were not able to capture the informal employment spectrum in Istanbul, as self-employment (including vending) was uncommon among women in the neighbourhoods I conducted my fieldwork in, but casual work arrangements in industrial and service sectors was very common. My interviews with women’s associations and trade unions helped me discover the informal job

arrangements in my fieldwork sites and in Istanbul in general. These interviews also helped me explore the variety of informal jobs women undertook in Istanbul.

**Table 3.4 Women’s Informal Employment by Age**

	17-25	26-35	35-45	45+	Total	Percentage in total sample
Home-based work	0	7	2	3	12	14%
Domestic Work and Care Work	1	5	6	4	16	18%
Subcontracted and Other Cleaning jobs	2	3	14	1	20	22%
Production Sector (Textile, Food)	11	10	2	5	28	31%
Other jobs	1	6	2	2	11	12%
Housewife	1	2	0		3	3%
Total	16	33	26	15	90	100%
Percentage of Age Group in the Sample	18%	37%	29%	16%	100%	

Source: Author’s interviews. Note that some women were engaged in multiple jobs, especially domestic work was common among subcontracted cleaning workers. Odd jobs include seasonal agricultural work, own-account workers who produce and sell handicrafts, jams and pickles in the markets. Helpers in offices include tea ladies, nursery workers, and cleaning workers. These workers do a variety of jobs including printing, cleaning, serving tea, distributing mail and answering phones. The housewives included here engaged in ad-hoc home-based work, whenever they could access them.

Keeping the discussion on the variety of definitions used for “informal employment” in mind, this study took both the “wider” and “narrower” definitions of informality into account. In the wider sense, all women were engaged in jobs that can be categorised as informal, as most of them involved informal elements to their employment and their contracts lacked clear beginning and end dates. In the narrower sense, registration of employment with an official institution and receipt of social security based on employment were used to define informality. According to this narrower definition, 28 women worked in low-skilled jobs with some form of benefits (formal employment), 54 women worked in informal jobs, that were not registered by any government institution and 8 women worked in jobs that could neither

be categorised as formal or informal<sup>16</sup> as they were engaged in casual or part-time work, and the registration of their employment with official bodies was intermittent and uncertain. All of these women had a history in informal employment, which helped me trace the opportunities and constraints women associated with both informal and formal employment, as well as the enabling conditions to switch from informal to formal work. Also, interviewing women with various levels of informality in their job arrangements was important to understand how women negotiated the terms of their employment with their employers, and how these negotiations evolved throughout the “learning curve” of their informal employment experience.

Table 3.5 Marital Status and the Number of Children

Marital Status	Number of Children				Total	Percentage of women based on Marital Status
	none	1	2	3 and above		
Single	21				21	23%
Married	9	9	25	17	60	67%
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	2	1	4	2	9	10%

Source: Author’s interviews

As mentioned earlier, my first access strategy to women in informal employment was through their workplaces and then I adopted a neighbourhood approach. This shift in access strategy meant that I spent lengthy periods of time in my field sites. Spending long periods of time with women and observing their day-to-day lives revealed the importance of marital status and the number of children women had on their participation in the labour market. On the demand side, marital status played an implicit but strong role in employers’ recruitment decisions. While single women were preferred in the industrial production sector, married women with

<sup>16</sup> These women were employed on a casual basis, and sometimes their employers paid their social security premium for one day’s worth of work, and sometimes they did not. The respondents were also unsure whether they were covered by any social security scheme at the time of the interview.

school-age children were preferred for domestic and care work for their experience in managing a house and raising children.

In addition, I also interviewed a limited number of men. These were mainly unstructured, unrecorded spontaneous, informal conversations ranging from short chats during a picnic or on a bus ride, to more lengthy and involved discussions over cups of tea in local teahouses or in the houses of some of my key informants. I particularly had lengthy discussions with men who would give me a lift to the nearest bus station, when I was working late in the neighbourhoods. Men were often interested in my research, although some thought I should have been interviewing men instead. Some asked me “What would they know” (*Onlar ne bilecekler?*), signalling that labour market is men’s territory, and should be discussed with men only. Others warned me to not give the wrong impression to women that their employment is something positive (*Dikkat et iyi bir şey sanmasınlar kadının çalışmasını*). Finding about men’s hesitations and attitudes to women’s employment has been particularly important in contextualising women’s responses to the familial and patriarchal constraints on their access to the labour market, and their capabilities of escaping these constraints completely.

Furthermore, I interviewed a small sample of 10 women who were not in employment, to understand their differences and similarities to women engaged in paid work in their neighbourhoods. These women were usually the female friends and relatives of my informants, whom I met during women’s tea-days (*gün*), in the local teahouses and women’s associations, or when I visited the houses of some of my informants. These interviews were again unstructured, open-ended and unrecorded daily conversations, which included a discussion of not only their employment, but all aspects of their life.

Lastly, I had more structured interviews with 8 employers of informal workers to understand how they accessed women looking for informal employment and what criteria they employed

to recruit them. 2 of these employers were managers of middle to large sized textile factories in Güneşli and Merter. Given that the factories often denied employing informal workers in their own workplaces, I interviewed them on their subcontracting and domestic work arrangements. I interviewed 3 employers of domestic workers in Istanbul and 2 intermediaries between home-based workers and factories. I also tried to access and interview subcontracted cleaning and domestic work/childcare agencies. I found the names of these agencies through newspapers and internet searches, as well as personal referrals from the employers I have interviewed. After calling more than 100 agencies<sup>17</sup>, I managed to interview only 1 of them, as the other agencies refused being involved in the study without specifying any reason. I believe the semi-legal status of many of these agencies was the main reason why nearly all of them refused to be interviewed.

I taped most of my interviews with full agreement of the participants, and took extensive notes after the unrecorded interviews (Hammersley 2007). During the unstructured interviews, I constantly kept my research questions in mind, sometimes initiating the topic but more often allowing the conversation to flow naturally (Wai-chung Yeung 2003) to issues of informality, women's employment and difficulties of making ends meet. These were everyday small-talk topics the locals would talk about, and hence I was lucky to be able to join in the conversation. As Hamill (2001, 8) noted, asking too many questions may lead monosyllabic "yes" or "no" answers or "I don't know"s. Dedeoğlu (2008, 103) has remarked that women in informal employment are also inclined to give too many "I don't know" answers, as "a result of their valuation of their own experiences and lack of self-esteem". The personal relationships I have established with women throughout my fieldwork have been particularly helpful in this regard (Valentine 2007). Shifting the interview structure from only questions about

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<sup>17</sup> Contacting the agencies via the phone was the only method of contacting them as in the newspapers they only specify a phone number and no address.

employment to broader issues of family life, poverty, children and life in Istanbul helped me to establish more intimate relationships with my informants, and worked quite well to understand women's own interpretations of why they entered informal employment, and how they managed their work and family lives. Accordingly, the interview schedule was designed to explore women's backgrounds and their household conditions before and after they entered informal employment. Key events in their lives, such as marriage, birth of children, migration to Istanbul or the death/inability of the main breadwinner in the household were main questions to highlight women's decision to enter informal employment. Women's labour market histories were especially scrutinised to understand the transitions between formal and informal employment throughout their lifecycles.

In relation to women's entry into informal employment, there were questions investigating the constraints they faced when they attempted to engage in paid work, and how they overcame, if they did, those constraints. There were also questions about how they heard about available jobs in the neighbourhood, and how they chose between them. Given the highly precarious nature of informal employment, these questions often involved lengthy discussions of ensuring safety in the workplace or ascertaining their payment and continuity of their employment. I also asked about the women's experience in informal employment and their own understanding of the differences between formal and informal employment to investigate the particular risks and opportunities they associated with their employment experience. In addition, issues of balancing work and family life, and women's role in family (and in society) were investigated to understand women's decision-making when they were choosing jobs in informal employment.

### 3.3.3. The Fieldwork Experience

#### 3.3.3.1. *Insiderness/Outsiderness*

The unequal power relationships between the poorer informants and more educated researchers that tend to develop throughout the course of ethnographic studies have been well-documented in the literature (Gluck and Patai 1991; Sidaway 1992; McDowell 1992; Lal 1996; Rose 1997). In order to overcome this power imbalance, various authors emphasised the importance of being an “insider” researcher, that is, familiar with the research environment (Ong 1988; Kanuha 2000; Labaree 2002; Dwyer and Buckle 2009), as the “outsider” status of the researcher may prevent respondents from being “open” and “up-front” (Herod 1999; Sabot 1999). Utilising the feminist standpoint and theories, Naples (1996), however, argued that “insiderness” and “outsiderness” are not fixed or static positions, but dynamic processes that continuously shape the researcher’s positionality in her relations with the informants.

Subsequently, my position in this research was beyond the insider/outsider researcher dichotomy. Although I shared a similar cultural background to my informants, I came from a different class background and was not familiar with the neighbourhoods in which my informants lived. Moreover, though I shared a migration background to Istanbul, my parents were from the urban centres in the Western Region of Turkey (more developed and secular) in contrast to the majority of my participants who migrated from the rural areas of less-developed regions. My educational background was one of the most distancing factors, in neighbourhoods where even high school graduates were rare. Hence, I was both an insider and an outsider to the research context. This duality was constantly reshaped during my fieldwork: I became an insider when I found shared experiences in our family backgrounds with women, similar hopes and worries in life; and other times I became an outsider, when

women noted that I had the possibility of exiting these neighbourhoods whenever I wanted and that I was just “researching” their life, not “living” it.

The importance of acknowledging the inequalities insiderness/outsiderness creates in ethnographic research, and how these inequalities might influence the representation of informants has been reconfirmed repeatedly in many studies (Gilbert, Burrows, and Pollert 1992; Naples 1996; Best 2003). Therefore, in each interview, I recognised that I was both an “insider” in that I shared some of my participants’ experiences, but also an outsider. Accordingly, at the beginning of each interview, I made clear that I was carrying out research for my doctoral studies at Oxford University, in England. Oxford’s name was known to all women<sup>18</sup> but doctoral studies did not mean anything to most of them. I explained that I would become a university teacher, and this is my homework<sup>19</sup> to obtain my degree. Although this explanation proved useful and mostly satisfactory, they were puzzled as to how come my parents allowed me to go to a different country to “study” and now all the way to these neighbourhoods to do this “research”. Other women questioned the worth of this research, saying: “No one would ever read that book”. I tried to overcome these altitudinal barriers by stating that my research might help to make their voices, experiences and lives more visible in Turkey and abroad, which might lead future governments to acknowledge the problems and difficulties they face.

Throughout all my interviews with women, I tried to be as honest as possible, in order to limit the inequality my dual identity as an insider and outsider researcher might create. For the first time in my life however, I was interrogated on my ethnic and religious identity and social

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<sup>18</sup> Ibrahim Tatlıses, a famous Kurdish arabesque singer from Urfa, had explained in an interview why he did not have formal qualifications: “Was there an Oxford (University) in Urfa, and I did not attend it?” Soon, this became a famous quote among the low-income, low-educated people in Turkey to explain why they were lacking formal qualifications, blaming the inability of the state to provide accessible and good quality education to all.

<sup>19</sup> Term work is a kind of homework in secondary and high schools for which the students make a research and write a report on a given topic.

background very specifically. In Istanbul's poor neighbourhoods inter-personal connections dominated the everyday life, which the anthropologist Jenny White (1994) called "fictitious kinships", referring to the more traditional relationships in which everyone referred to everyone as brother, sister, uncle or aunt, even when they were not related in anyway. White's analysis demonstrated that this kinship is integral to the informal labour market of Istanbul, where verbal rather than written promises would rule the economic and social relations. Similarly, throughout the course of my fieldwork, I discovered that through interrogating my background very specifically, my informants were seeking some kind of common ground which would eliminate my outsider status. Having dark skin and curly hair, people often told me that I looked like I was from Tunceli (a city in the East of Turkey, where majority of the population are Alevis). Given the big Alevi population in the neighbourhood, being Alevi could have been one common ground we could be sharing. When I instead told them that I was born in Izmir, and both of my parents are from the West of Turkey, I was often met with a silent disappointment<sup>20</sup>. Perhaps for this reason, I had to spend much longer time in the neighbourhoods to establish links and make the people I met feel that I really cared about our relationships, to establish specific "research bargains" (Bryman 2008).

Notwithstanding, these fictitious kinships sometimes made it difficult to conduct the interviews in privacy. Although both in Esenyurt and Kağıthane I could often interview women when they were alone, our interviews were sometimes interrupted by other family members, or interviewee's friends or neighbours. Sometimes these people were also invited to join the interviews by my informants, stating: "Oh we do not hide anything from each other". These interruptions might have led some of my interviewees to hide some information from me in

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<sup>20</sup> There are significant regional differences in Turkey, the West being significantly more developed, more educated, more financially stable and the East being particularly hit by the ongoing Kurdish conflict for more than three decades, resulting in less financial investment and worse education.

the presence of additional individuals. Nevertheless, in the presence of additional individuals, I observed that my interviews turned into spontaneous group discussions, in which women informants transformed into interviewers to ask similar questions to their families and friends about their employment experiences, family issues and what they hate and love about their (informal) employment. Group discussions have been particularly helpful for me to crosscheck information I generated through my interviews, and also gain further insights and knowledge about my respondents and their communities (Mosse 1994; Johnson 2001). These discussions have also proved useful as a means of “member checking” the emerging findings of my research (Baxter and Eyles 1997).

During my fieldwork, I was also often questioned about my marital status. Soon after I started my interviews, I realised that unmarried and childless women were not given much credit, and matchmaking was one of the most important reasons why women met new women in the neighbourhoods. In other words, women considered everyone they met as a potential spouse for someone they knew. This emerged as a real pressing issue for me, as women apparently were accepting to be interviewed, just so that they would get to know me better, before they introduced me to their sons, cousins, nephews, friends, etc. What is more, having a long-time boyfriend was not considered to be a legitimate relationship without a proper engagement or a definite wedding date on the horizon. In the end, I found the solution in a fake engagement ring. Though I am aware of the certain biases this fake ring might have introduced to my study, it produced useful benefits for my research. The ring situated me in between single and married women, as I was still single, but soon to be married. This intermediary status helped me communicate with single women workers, who shared similar restrictions on their private lives enforced by their parents and relatives; but also married women, as they gave me important “advice” about managing work and family life, and married life in general, which

helped eliminate some of the distancing factors (Du Bois 1983) with my interviews and myself. Engaging in personal relationships with women also allowed me to gain access to more personal aspects of women's life, including issues of domestic violence, sexual harassment and marital conflicts, although these were most often released in the form of gossip or something that happened to someone they knew.

In sum, throughout my fieldwork, my status as an insider and an outsider researcher shifted constantly, guided by my socio-economic, cultural and educational background. My extended presence in both of my fieldwork sites enabled a friendlier atmosphere to conduct my interviews and achieve in-depth accounts of the experience of low-income and low-educated women in informal employment. At the end of each interview, I always asked my informants whether they had anything to add, and whenever I came across them in the neighbourhood, I followed up on our interview and asked about their employment, family and life in general to see if anything changed.

#### *3.3.3.2. Issues of representation, validity and reliability*

Several feminist scholars have identified ethnographic methods as ideal methods of inquiry to explore women's own experiences, without the limitations of quantitative large-scale surveys which have been stated to be designed by rather male-dominated scholarship (Du Bois 1983; Stanley 1983; Stacey 1988; Reinharz 1992). Other scholars, however, noted the potential risks of manipulation and betrayal by the ethnographer, which might jeopardise the representation of the research participants (Stacey 1988; Abu-Lughod 1990). As Stacey (Ibid) put it:

...ethnographic method appears to (and often does) place the researcher and her informants in a collaborative, reciprocal quest for understanding, but the research product is ultimately of the researcher, however modified or influenced by the informants. With rare exceptions it is the researcher who narrates, who 'authors' the ethnography. In the last instance, an ethnography is a written document structured primarily by a researcher's purposes, offering a researcher's interpretations, registered in a researcher's voice (23)

A number of scholars suggested voicing informants' own words as much as possible to overcome this problem (Kvale 1989; Creswell and Miller 1997); others noted the importance of reflexivity, that is being aware of one's researcher position and thought process (Hertz 1996; Davies 2008). Lawless (1992) in her article named "I was afraid someone like you... an outsider... would misunderstand" argued that no matter the amount of time spent in building rapport with the informants, researchers remained outsiders, and their ability to recognise their status determined how much they could bridge reality and representation in their written account of the fieldwork experience. Hence reflexivity, combined with voicing informants' own words were suggested to be useful strategies to overcome problems of representation (Ibid).

In line with these suggestions, to overcome the possible limitations of representation in my research, I adopted a variety of strategies. One of these was to share my interpretations with my informants and ask them their opinions about these interpretations throughout my fieldwork (Baxter and Eyles 1997). In addition, to the greatest extent possible I tried to provide women's voices throughout my thesis, with the help of direct quotations. Studying women's coping mechanisms and strategies, however, entail that sometimes these strategies are unconsciously made, and the women in my research might not call all of the strategies I detail in this thesis as "strategies" per se, but simply as ways of getting by. Moreover, the "constraints" I talk about in this thesis might not be considered as constraints by all the women I interviewed, as some of them never tried any other employment than informal employment, or did not meet anyone with a different employment experience. I recognise that these parts of my thesis are more interpretive in nature, and they are based on my own understanding of the constraints and opportunities.

Issues of representation are also closely related to the validity and reliability of the data produced (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). Validity of ethnographic studies is assessed by the extent to which they can effectively represent empirical reality and human experiences (Pelto and Pelto 1978; Hansen 1979; Hammersley 2007). Reliability on the other hand refers to the degree to which other researchers can also come to the same conclusions, if they replicated the original researcher's study design (Hansen 1979). In qualitative research, some authors claimed that there is a trade-off between reliability and validity of studies; and studies that try to achieve better representation of individual experiences of their informants often sacrifice the replicability of their studies, given the impact of the researcher's identity, fieldwork environment, fieldwork context in the specific period of time the fieldwork was carried out on the data produced (Kaplan and Manners 1972; LeCompte and Goetz 1982; Plummer 1983). Attaining absolute validity and reliability is an impossible goal for any research (LeCompte and Goetz 1982) and it is impossible to fully assess how the role as an insider/outsider researcher influences the data generated from the fieldwork (Miles 1994). Therefore, in writing this account of the women workers' strategies for survival in informal employment, I have attempted to combine a variety of data in order to give a rich and detailed account of my informants that is descriptive and analytical. As such, I recognise that my dual identity as an insider and an outsider researcher might have influenced the data produced, which might have sacrificed the reliability of the study. Nevertheless, the rich data generated from the fieldwork has enabled me to map out the various risks and opportunities associated with informal employment in the peripheries of Istanbul by low-income migrant women.

### ***3.4. The Analysis of Data and the Conceptual Framework***

After completing my fieldwork in September 2012, I was left with the arduous task of transcribing, analysing and making sense of the data produced. This time-consuming process

covered the transcription of a total of 58 recorded interviews, and typing of 32 unrecorded interviews, as well as field observations. At this stage, I anonymised all the transcripts of interviews, and field notes. In order to synthesise these large amounts of data and discover distinct patterns of women's strategies for survival in the informal sector, I adopted a grounded theory approach, with the aim of constructing the empirical chapters "inductively" through a reflexive and recursive analysis process (Glaser and Strauss 1965; Glaser 1967; Glaser, Strauss, and Strutzel 1968; Strauss 1998).

In sorting out the masses of data, I benefited from qualitative analysis software package (NVivo 9), which helped me bring together all my notes and transcripts for a comprehensive textual analysis. Of course a mere statement of "fieldwork data were analysed" would not provide sufficient information to the readers as to how this analysis was carried out. As Miles (1994) noted, qualitative researchers need to give a detailed account of their analysis process for the reader to understand how they drew conclusions from their data. Accordingly, to make my analysis process more transparent, I did three main rounds of analysis in order to organise emerging categories and explore the relationships between these categories (referred to as "hierarchical indexing" by Richards and Richards (1994) or "Axial coding" by Strauss (1998)). In the first round, I attached very specific labels (*nodes*), describing the individual constraints, opportunities, risks and responses as voiced by the participants (e.g. My husband objects to my employment, Textile work is not suitable for women, I live too far to get a job in a school, I do not have time for union activities, etc.). In the second round, I assigned general shorthand labels to categorise the specific labels from the first-round analysis (e.g. family, employment, neighbourhood, immigration). In the third round of analysis, I compiled similar labels together for a more substantive analysis of the data (e.g. issues of vulnerability, issues of access, etc.). This third-round analysis then enabled me to focus my attention on unpacking the relationship

between these codes and the concepts and theoretical insights developed from the literature. This in turn helped me construct the empirical chapters based on the salient findings from my data and their relationship to the literature in general.

Notwithstanding, in the analysis process, I was aware of and acted according to the important warning of Morison and Moir (1998):

With the proliferation of software packages it is easy to be convinced by the salesmanship of computer enthusiasts into thinking that contemplating qualitative data analysis without enlisting the services of a computer is like ignoring the invention of the motor vehicle and choosing to make one's way rather inefficiently and uncomfortably in a horse-drawn cart. (114)

Hence, I used NVivo as a practical tool for sifting through my data, but tried to maintain a more iterative approach during the later stages of the analysis, incorporating the concepts from the literature to the emergent themes in the data itself. In this regard, the use of "emic categories" (codes derived from the interviewee's own words-"code in Nvivo" function in the software) and "etic categories" (codes derived from the researcher's understanding of the subject matter- "code at new node" function) (Morse 1994; Lee, Saunders, and Goulding 2005) helped sustain a good balance between informants' subjective interpretations of "risks" and "opportunities" and their responses to the risks and ways of attempting to improve their material and social circumstances, wherever they can.

During the analysis process, I began noticing a recurring pattern among the strategies women workers used to get by or overcome some of the constraints they faced in their family relationships or in the labour market context. Some of these strategies were more implicit, hidden and non-confrontational ways of getting by or adapting to their circumstances, and some were directly attacking the agents of oppression in order to change their situation radically. Majority of women, however, were engaged in strategies that were "in between" the two. The women in the middle category neither completely made an attempt to change

their circumstances, nor were they satisfied by small changes/improvements to their situations. Following Emirbayer and Mische (1998) definition of agency: “the capacity of actors to critically shape their own responsiveness to problematic situations” (971) and Giddens' (1984) definition of structure: “the rules and resources, recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems”, I categorised women’s strategies into three main groups, Invisibility, Struggle and Visibility. Each of these strategies were shaped and influenced by different sets of rules and opportunities for accessing important resources, and in turn they demonstrated different levels of responses to problematic situations.

In this regard, invisibility refers to those strategies where women try to cope with or get by their circumstances through making small changes that would not alter the inherent dynamics of the labour market or family situation. Women who engaged in home-based work when their husbands did not give them permission to work for instance were included in this category. Although these women did not directly challenge the fact that their physical mobility and access to labour market was constrained, they nevertheless adopted to this constraint by engaging in home-based work. In contrast, visibility refers to women’s active strategies to change the circumstances which put them in a vulnerable position in family, labour market or society in general. For example, women who engaged in collective action against unlawful dismissals or other forms of employer abuse were included in this category. Struggle is used as an intermediate category between invisibility and visibility, by which women consolidate their autonomy through questioning their situation and actively seeking alternatives, but without necessarily confronting their agents of oppression all together. These women were always on the lookout for better jobs in the informal sector and through their labour market experience acquired several important skills to navigate through the “worst jobs”, but they did not directly challenge the labour market structure, or patriarchal domination. In this

regard, invisibility and visibility constitute the two end points of the continuum for women's strategies for everyday survival in the informal sector, distinguishing women's strategies based on the rules and resources that shape them. It is important to emphasise that women workers constantly shifted across these different types of coping strategies, in response to specific life events or changes to their socio-economic status. Also challenging one aspect of oppression in their lives did not always translate into challenging all constraints to their livelihoods.

### *3.5. Conclusion*

This chapter has provided an overview of the research design and the adopted methodological approaches that inform the thesis. As opposed to relying on workplaces to study informal employment, the research design identified the need to adopt a neighbourhood-based research design for overcoming certain biases the workplaces might introduce to the data collection process and the final data produced. For this reason, two major peripheries of Istanbul were selected as the primary areas to carry out the fieldwork, and the majority of the participants of this study were accessed through these neighbourhoods. The bulk of the research data was accumulated through ethnographic observations, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. The data collection process was analysed through the lens of insider/outsider status of the researcher.

## CHAPTER 4: THE QUESTION OF FAMILY CULTURE

*How patriarchal family structure makes women's informal employment invisible*

### 4.1. Introduction

In the early hours of the morning, women with plastic bags in their hands travel from the squatter neighbourhoods of Istanbul to more affluent neighbourhoods. In these bags, they have their work clothes to change into; a T-shirt and a long skirt. Once familiarised with this dress code, one cannot help but notice how many there are, how omnipresent they are. These women constitute the “invisible” cleaners of Istanbul. This invisibility of domestic workers from the public gaze gets carried over to home-based workers whose workplace is hidden in their private homes or garment workers working in small underground family ateliers in the peripheries of Istanbul.

Across the world, women are engaged in the most “invisible” segments of the informal sector (Carr and Chen 2002; Abramo and Valenzuela 2005; Reinecke 2006; Vanek et al. 2014). Research done on women in informal employment in Turkey shows a similar trend; women's labour is often unrecognised and hidden (White 1994; Özar 1996; Erman, Kalaycioğlu, and Rittersberger-Tılıç 2002; Dedeoğlu 2008; Beşpınar 2010). Although the global economic restructuring processes and informalisation of labour is an important factor in explaining this invisibility [as will be shown in Chapter 5], in Turkey this is also partially the result of strong patriarchal norms and traditional gender roles.

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the patriarchal and familial factors that channel women into the informal sector, especially to its most “invisible” segments. After detailing women's own understanding of the “patriarchal barriers” to their labour, the chapter explores the complex and multiple forms of strategies they develop to get by or overcome these barriers.

The conceptual framework presented in Chapter 3, Invisibility-Struggle-Visibility is applied to discuss the complex relationship between women's informal employment and their family circumstances. The main argument of the chapter is that women actually strategically exploit the invisibility of informal employment to their advantage, when their entry or participation in the labour market is severely constrained by male consent and the ideology of being the wife/daughter of the household. It is noted that many women "struggle" to change their circumstances, but radical changes rarely take place, as these often require "burning all the bridges" with their families, which is too great a risk when they lack access to social and financial resources of their own and protection mechanisms outside of their family networks. The original contribution of the chapter in terms of the overall literature on gender and informal work, but especially in regard to Turkish literature, is that previous studies have all demonstrated that women's work in the informal sector is invisible and women usually do not make distinctions between their household duties and paid work. In this chapter, I show that women develop strategies to hide their paid work from their families and community in general in order not to shadow their roles as wives and mothers, but by doing so women actually connect their paid work to the hidden nature of informal economy. I also show women's strategies of making their financial contribution more visible and recognised within the constraints of their traditional roles in differing and sometimes counterintuitive ways.

The chapter is organised as follows. The first section begins with an overview of women's position in the Turkish society. The second section presents an assessment of the recent policies related to women's labour market participation in Turkey. The third section gives a detailed analysis of how women's entry into the informal sector is shaped by their familial circumstances in particular, and the patriarchal family structure in general. This is followed by women's strategies for dealing with familial and patriarchal constraints. The chapter finishes

with a discussion on why women do not demand more “visibility” of their informal employment from their families, and how this sustains the invisibility of their labour.

#### 4.2. *Women in Turkish Society*

To the foreign observer, Turkish women constitute an anomaly. In contrast to all Muslim societies, Turkish women have enjoyed a wide range of social, political and legal rights since the foundation of the Republic in 1923, and do not face any legal barriers to their education or employment. Moreover, Turkey institutionalised secularism and accepted European family and labour laws, as a result of which equality of men and women before law was recognised, and common practices under the *shar'ia*-based Ottoman rule, such as bride-price, polygamy, *talaq*<sup>21</sup> were all outlawed (Tekeli 1990; Cinar 1994; Kandiyoti 2011; Akman and Tütüncü 2011). The country was also one of the first countries to provide universal suffrage and the right to be elected to women. Hence, it can be argued that all steps were taken to achieve gender equality before law.

Nevertheless, the beneficiaries of these reforms and rights were mostly the urban, educated, middle and upper class women, a tiny percentage compared to the vast majority of low-educated, low-income and rural women in the country (Tekeli 1992; Akman and Tütüncü 2011). Kandiyoti (1988), thus, called Turkish women “emancipated but unliberated” because though the modernist reforms provided the legal infrastructure for women to be equal with men before law, the traditional gender roles and patriarchal norms continued to govern the lives of the majority of the female population. In this regard, Turkish women’s labour market

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<sup>21</sup> *Talaq* (in Turkish: *boş ol*) is the Islamic divorce. The Muslim husband initiates the divorce by pronouncing the *talaq* three times. The first two times *talaq* is pronounced, the husband has the right to withdraw it, given the wife’s good behaviour. When it is pronounced for three times, it cannot be withdrawn. In Islamic countries, where polygamy is allowed, men do not need to wait after *talaq* to get married. Women in contrast need to wait for at least three months to be able to remarry (Rehman 2007).

status presents a good lens through which their “unliberated” status can be explored (Dedeoğlu 2013).

A recent report by the World Bank (World Bank 2009a) demonstrated that despite the fact that Turkish women are becoming more educated, are having fewer children, marrying at a later age, and there is increasing social acceptance of women’s employment, female labour force participation in Turkey remains very low by international standards (25 per cent in Turkey, 65 per cent OECD average, OECD 2010). Moreover, as presented earlier in Chapter 2, female labour force participation (FLFP) in Turkey has actually shown a declining trend. In 1955, FLFP was 72 per cent, but this fell to 22 per cent in 2002 and went slightly up to 29 per cent in 2012 (TURKSTAT 2013). This decline was previously explained by structural factors, such as urban migration from rural areas [as a result of the declining agricultural economy], lack of educational skills of migrant women to qualify for the urban labour market jobs which are heavily stratified for the educated (Özar 2000; Dayioğlu and Kırdar 2009; World Bank 2009a; Ilkkaracan 2012), and the insufficient capacity of the Turkish labour market to create enough jobs for women to also take up employment during global economic restructuring (Selim and Ilkkaracan 2002). A decline in female labour force participation rates was actually experienced by several countries at different transition periods (see Fortin 2005 for the transition economies in Europe and Asia, Fuchs-Schundeln (2008) for German reunification and Barrientos, Kabeer, and Hossain (2004) for East Asian economies during global restructuring). What differentiates the Turkish case from their peers in other countries is that the decline in FLFP rates has continued for more than four decades. Indeed, current employment statistics reveal that 73 per cent of Turkish women identify themselves as “outside the labour market” and “housewife” (TURKSTAT 2012). Recent studies, however, have shown that women registered as “housewives” in the official statistics can actually be

found in the informal sector, and the continuous decline in female employment can actually be explained by women's invisible labour in the informal sector (Atasü Topçuoğlu 2005; Dedeoğlu 2008b; Kümbetoğlu, User, and Akpınar 2012). Thus, in order to understand Turkish women's invisibility in the labour market, an investigation of their gender roles is necessary (Durakbasa and Ilyasoglu 2001).

Turkey has been situated in the "patriarchal belt" that expands from sub-Saharan Africa to East Asia, referring to the geographical span of male dominance over female autonomy in governing of the family structure (Kandiyoti 1988). This entailed strong adherence to traditional gender roles; women being ascribed the care and domestic duties in the private sphere, men being the "breadwinners" and "household heads" employed in the public sphere. To discuss the roots of patriarchal family structure in Turkey is beyond the scope of this chapter. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that there is lack of consensus in the literature as to why patriarchal norms are still very prevalent in Turkish society. While some authors emphasised the role of Islam in creating and sustaining these gender roles (Moghadam 1993; 2004; Abu-Lughod 2001; 2002) (others objected the argument that it was Islam per se that led to a patriarchal family structure, as patriarchal gender roles were also dominant in a majority of Mediterranean societies, all of which were not influenced by Islam (Schneider 1969; 1971; Blok 1981; 2001). Yet others noted that the top-down legal emancipation of women did not translate into questioning the roots of patriarchy and led to its continued power in governing family relationships (Tekeli 1991). Although the roots of patriarchal dominance are uncertain, three points can be made to demonstrate the prevalence of patriarchal values and gender roles.

First, it has been noted that the codes of shame and honour shape women's participation in the public realm, including the labour market (White 1994; Kalaycıoğlu and Rittersberger-Tılıç

2001; Ozyegin 2010; Dedeoğlu 2008b). A reflection of these codes of shame and honour can be traced in 2008 TURKSTAT Domestic Violence Statistics which found that 1 in every 4 women in Turkey was forced to quit her job or that her partner did not give her permission to work. Almost half of these women stated that this was a recurring problem and their partner forced them to quit their job or withdrew permission to work multiple times (44.8 per cent). A significant group of women who were in gainful employment noted that they faced this pressure constantly (49.5 per cent).

Table 4.1 Housework distribution rates in Turkey (urban)

Activities	Men	Women	Collaborative effort
Cooking	1.8	86.7	9.8
Ironing	2.3	84.8	9.8
Laundry	1.8	88.8	7.7
Washing up	1.9	86.9	9.9
Basic sewing	1.9	89.1	6.9
Setting and cleaning up the dinner table	2.4	72.2	24.6
General house tidy	2.3	79.1	17.3
Daily shopping	63.9	20.3	12.1
Basic mending, fixing around the house	67.0	7.1	6.7
General house care- painting etc	35.6	7.9	12.0
Average	18.0	62.2	11.6

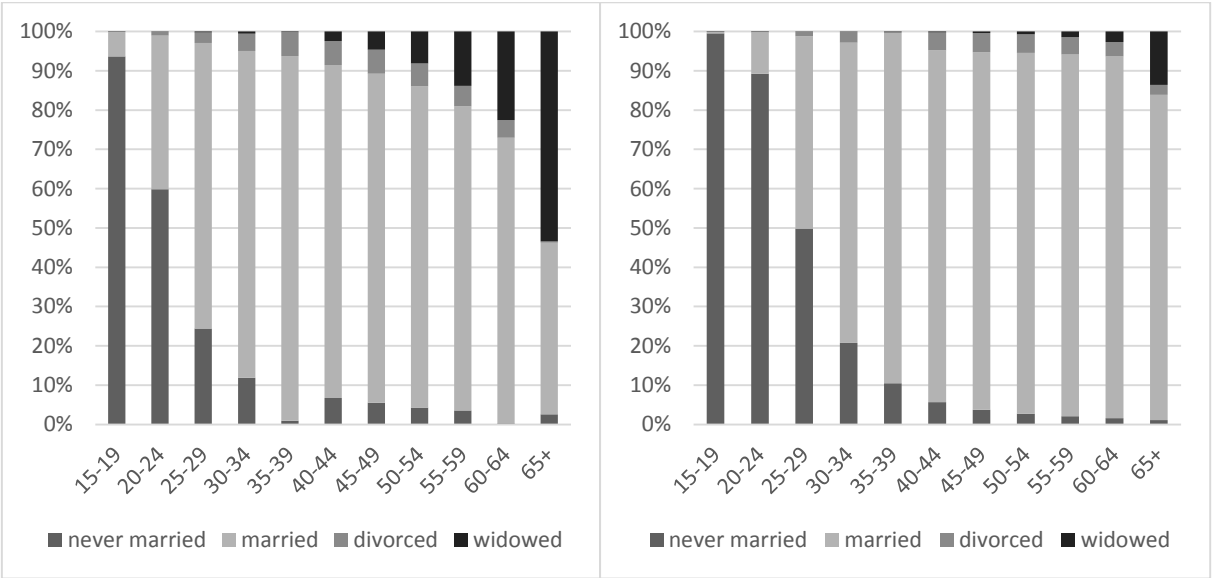
Source: 2006 TURKSTAT Family Structure Survey

Second, traditional gender roles continue to be very influential. For example, according to the findings of the most recent World Values Survey<sup>22</sup> in 2007, in Turkey 52.1 per cent of the population agreed to the statement that men should have more right to a job than women and 74 per cent of the population expressed that being a housewife is just as fulfilling for women as paid employment. The same survey also showed that 96.5 per cent of the population agreed with the statement that a child needs a home with a father and mother and that 87.8 per cent of them would disapprove of women becoming single mothers. In line with these patriarchal values, the 2006 Family Structure Survey evidenced the stark contrast between the amount of housework done by women and men and the traditional division of

<sup>22</sup> The statistical findings presented in this chapter are author’s own, unless noted otherwise.

labour at home; women are engaged in the majority of domestic and care duties, whereas men handle jobs that involve money and/or fixing around the house (Table 4.1). In terms of the overall time spent on these activities, the 2 006 Time Use Survey revealed that while women were engaged in housework on average for 5.28 hours a day, for men the same activities occupied only 24 minutes of their time. The same survey also found that while women spent on average 1.13 hours on gainful work every day, men spent almost four times as much time on paid economic activities (4.45). Hence, the traditional distribution of household chores puts the burden on women, and actually leaves only limited time for paid work.

Figure 4.1 Turkish Population by Marital Status, and Age Group (left: women, right: men)



Source: 2012 TURKSTAT Address-based population statistics

Third, marriage statistics show that women marry early and that divorce is rare. According to TURKSTAT Divorce Statistics, the crude divorce rate in Turkey in 2012 was 1.6 per cent. Although there has been a slight increase in divorce rates since the beginning of the 2000s (in 2001 it was 1.3 per cent), divorce still seems uncommon. This means that women’s social existence is defined through their being unmarried daughters or married wives. Özar and Yakut-Cakar's (2013) recent article on “women without men” in Turkey demonstrated that

divorced/widowed/separated women not only faced severe social isolation and risk of poverty, but also a higher risk of violence from their ex-partners, families or strangers. According to the compiled statistics from 2013 on violence against women by an online newspaper called Bianet in Turkey, women were often subjected to violence from their partners and ex-partners (66 per cent), and 15 per cent of those who were subjected to violence did so because they wanted to get a divorce (in t24 2014).

Moreover, for many women, marriage is synonymous with domestic violence. According to the 2008 Violence against Women Statistics, 61.5 per cent of women reported that they have been subject to physical or sexual violence from their partners at some point in their life. The same statistics also revealed that in addition to physical or sexual violence, women faced various levels of psychological violence from their partners (Table 4.2).

**Table 4.2 Psychological Violence against Women (Controlling Partners)**

	Percentage
Controls what I wear	34.8
Demands knowing where I am at all times	68.8
Threatens me with abandoning if I don't comply with his rules	14.9
I am not allowed to see my parents without his permission	8.8
He does not give me permission to meet with my friends	12.4
Gets angry when I speak to other men	44.1
I need to ask permission for going to the doctor	30.8
I need to ask for permission for working	23.4

Source: 2008 TURKSTAT Domestic Violence Statistics

Although women's status in society is largely determined by their family status (whether an unmarried daughter or a wife), women expressed "being on their own" if they sought help about their violent husbands. More specifically, 55 per cent of women noted that no one would help them, and less than 1 in 5 thought their own families would help (16.7 per cent). It is important to highlight that the percentage of women who thought that their neighbours could help (8.3 per cent) was actually higher than the women who thought their husband's

family would help (7.4 per cent). It can be inferred that women do not trust the state/police when it comes to dealing with domestic violence (since they did not mention it), and also feared their families might abandon them, particularly their husband's family. The lack of institutional social protection for women who have been subjected to violence can be observed in the insufficient number of women's shelters in Turkey (120 shelters for a population of 37 million women) (Milliyet 2013). According to a recent report by Human Rights Watch, it was noted that the Turkish institutions fail to protect women in vulnerable family relationships, and that resorting to institutional help actually increases women's likelihood of being subjected to violence. As the writer of the report Gauri Van Gulik (2011) noted:

The Turkish police give priority to the preservation of the family union, and instead of starting criminal investigation or providing women with protection, the police forces women to make up with their husbands who inflict domestic violence on them. But when husbands find about women's attempts to seek help from the police, they increase the dosage of their violence. If police sends back the women who ask for help, not only those women face a heightened risk of domestic violence, but also other women give up on resorting to the institutions for help, as they do not think they will be helpful. (30)

It can be inferred that, the risk of social exclusion and violence as a means of punishing those who do not abide by the cultural norms and practices push women to accept their conditions and not resist them, especially when institutional support and non-familial social protection is limited.

In sum, Turkish women face a variety of patriarchal pressures regarding their participation in the labour market, and they worry about their place/social status in society at large. A woman's position in her family and in society is defined through her ascribed gender role, and lack of conformity to this role or the attached codes of shame comes at a price, as demonstrated by the pervasiveness of violence against women.

#### ***4.3. The Janus face of policy-making in Turkey: Increasing female employment and strengthening women's traditional roles as mothers and wives at the same time***

Despite the modernisation attempts, the traces of patriarchal family structure could always be found in the Turkish welfare state (Dedeoğlu and Elveren 2012). Turkish women's dependent status (on men) was officially recognised until Turkey's EU candidacy in 1999. More specifically, the former Civil Code, Article 154, read that "the marriage is legally represented by the husband, assigning the man as the head of the household"; Article 159 noted that women required men's permission to be able to engage in paid work. The clearest reflection of this dependency was in the healthcare system, in which unmarried daughters and wives of insured men were entitled to healthcare benefits- regardless of their age- as long as they remained outside of the labour market. The same right was not given to unmarried sons, or the unemployed husbands of insured women (Kılıç 2008, 492). Even when the Constitutional Court amended this article as part of the EU gender *acquis*, women were still required to attend to "the harmony and welfare of the marriage union ... when choosing and performing a job or profession" (Labour Code, Article 5510, amendment 01 October 2008). Several authors noted that despite appearing like improvements to women's status, these legal developments still assumed women to be dependents of men, rather than equal citizens per se (Buğra and Keyder 2006; Özar and Yakut-Cakar 2013).

Turkey's never-ending struggle to be a member of the European Union (EU) has pushed the country to make several governmental and legislative reforms in recent years (Dedeoğlu 2013). One such reform area has been women's participation in the labour force. However, recent policies related to women's labour market status were in fact founded upon an imminent contradiction: on the one hand they attempted to increase female employment rates, on the other hand strengthen women's traditional gender roles. In order to understand

the underpinnings of this contradiction, a recent overview of the country's political and socio-economic transformation is necessary.

The Republic of Turkey was established in 1923 with the ideals of the Kemalist modernisation project. This project aimed at curbing the influence of Islam in politics and society, and restructuring the newly founded state on ideas imported from European liberalism and modernisation. In this period, the state's role in regulating both economic and social life was acknowledged, especially concerning gender relations and private life (Kandiyoti 1997). Between 1923 and 1950 the single party rule of Mustafa Kemal's founding party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), took various measures to improve the status of women in the society. As mentioned earlier, universal suffrage, equal educational opportunities for both men and women and abolishment of *sharia*-based practices were made in this period. However, this process of what I call "secularism-by-force" began to change when Turkey entered its multi-party politics era in 1945. Turkey's first opposition party, the Democrat Party (DP) was supported by a prevalently rural population which sought to restore the influence of Islam in the everyday life of citizens and politics in general. For example, in this period the Islamic prayers reverted back to being performed in Arabic, whilst in the Kemalist era they were in Turkish, in line with the nation-building and secularisation project. Up until the 1980s, the influence of Islam in politics continued to grow. It was after the military coup of 1980, however, Islam became an ever more important factor in politics and governance of gender relations and private life.

The military coup of 1980 was initiated against the growing power of the left in the country. Resultantly, between 1980 and 1983, all trade unions were outlawed, wages were frozen, and the rights to strike, engage in collective action and demonstration were taken back. Instead, Islam was introduced as a "unifying" factor for a society which was strongly divided along the

right and left side of the political spectrum (Sakallioğlu 1996; Öniş 1997; Yavuz 1997). Although some attempts were made (by the military) to curb the ever-growing influence of Islam in party politics and social life, after the 1980s Islam became a powerful factor in governance of the country. With the mildly Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) coming to power in 2002, the influence of patriarchy on policy-making -in line with the conservative worldview of the party- has become ever stronger (Kandiyoti 2003).

With increasing international attention to the low levels of female labour force participation in the country, increasing female employment has become one of the most important areas of policy-making for the AKP government. However, government's discourse on women's gender roles has so far demonstrated a strong patriarchal stance. The following quotes from prominent AKP ministers demonstrate this point.

- Why would women want to work? Do they not have enough to do at home? (Veysel Eroğlu, Minister of Forest and Water Management, 2009)
- The unemployment rate is increasing in Turkey because women also look for jobs (Mehmet Şimşek, Minister of Economy, 2010).
- Honestly, I do not believe in the equality of men and women (Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, 2010)
- The [economic] crisis is over. Women can stop working and go back to their homes (Ali Babacan, Chief Advisor to the Prime Minister, 2012).
- We are working on a new labour market policy which is prepared carefully to allow women to raise healthy generations and preserve our youthful population, and at the same time join the labour market on a flexible basis (Faruk Çelik, Minister of Labour, 2013).
- It is not appropriate for women to work in public spaces according to Islam (Yücel Barakız, Governor of Bingöl, 2014).
- This is my word to you young women. Get married immediately when you can, do not be too indecisive, and then have five children (Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan 2014).

Recent social policy developments related to women's labour market participation perpetuate the same gendered thinking on women's appropriate roles in society. Four recent policies are especially important to mention here. First, the government introduced a policy in which the government would pay the social security premiums of female workers for up to five years, if

employers were willing to employ them. Women's training expenses, in order to take the burden off of the employers' shoulders, were subsidised by the government, and finishing these programmes successfully guaranteed a position (Öksüz 2007). Although the policy aimed at making it more "attractive" for employers to hire women workers (Labour Code-Article 5763<sup>23</sup>), in fact it gave many mixed signals. Various women's rights organisations noted that the policy implied it was disadvantageous to employ women for employers (hence they needed subsidies); and women's labour was not as valuable as men's (TEPAV 2011, 47).

The second important policy change during the AKP period aimed at supporting women's part-time employment through the reconciliation of family and work life. Also known as the "Birth and Three Child Policy Package", a new policy in 2013 proposed to extend the 16 weeks of paid maternity leave to 24 weeks, and give women the right to work "flexible" or "part-time" after this period for up to six months, with full-time payment<sup>24</sup>. Because the policy mainly targeted women, it was heavily criticised for reproducing the patriarchal ideologies and women's carer and domestic roles in society, for it was only women who were assumed to need balancing their work and family life, and the option for "paternity leave" did not even make it into the government's agenda (KAGİDER 2013). It was also noted that flexibilisation of women's employment would just reinforce women's dependency on men, since the wages from part-time work would not be sufficient to afford a life on their own (Ibid).

The third policy related to women's labour market participation gave women the right to quit working in the first year of their marriages and seek severance payment if their husbands did not want them to work, or if they had difficulty balancing work and family life (Labour Code

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<sup>23</sup> The policy grants that the social security costs of the female employee will be covered by the state: 100% in the first year, 80% in the second year, 60% in the third year, 40% in the fourth year and 20% in the fifth and final year.

<sup>24</sup> Full-time payment is only for the first two months, afterwards the pay decreases according to the hours of work.

1475-Article 14). The same entitlement, however, was not made available to men. This policy was evidently contradictory to the government's intentions to increase female employment, since it financially encouraged women to leave the labour force after marriage and become housewives instead.

The fourth policy allowed women to seek financial assistance from the government if they are the full-time carers of their disabled child or relative who is in need of full-time care. The same policy also granted the right to early retirement in order to "enable women to devote their time to taking care of their disabled child or relative, rather than divide it between paid work and care responsibilities" (Labour Code 5510). Recently, this policy has been expanded to provide all women up to 4 years of early retirement, provided that they have at least two children. Further, currently it has been proposed to extend this policy to "two years early retirement per child, with no upper limit" meaning that a woman who had five children could seek 10 years of early retirement. These policies should be considered together with the fact that so far the government has not made any attempts to provide free or affordable care services (KEİG 2014).

In sum, it can be argued that though the AKP government has taken female employment as an issue that needs improvement, its discourse and recent policies seem to rather reinforce the patriarchal family structure, and assume women to be dependents of men. Consequently, it is fair to assume that, women's assigned gender roles as mothers and wives continue to play an important role in their participation in the economic life and their entry to the labour market. Faced with structural constraints (e.g. lack of affordable care services) and their ascribed gender roles by the patriarchal norms and values embedded in society and the welfare state structure, it should come as no surprise that women are oriented towards alternative forms of participation in the economic life in Turkey: informal employment.

#### 4.4. *The role of family in women's entry into the informal sector*

As mentioned earlier, several studies on women's informal employment in Turkey stressed the importance of patriarchal norms and traditional gender roles in *pushing* women into informal employment, in addition to the more structural labour market barriers (Kümbetoğlu 2001; Ilkcaracan 2002; Atasü Topçuoglu 2005; Dedeoğlu 2008; Kümbetoğlu, User, and Akpınar 2012). In my study, it emerged that a combination of family status, household duties and patriarchal values related to women's appropriate role in the family channelled them into the informal sector.

Women often related their reasons for seeking employment to financial difficulties, and expressed that if their financial circumstances would be different, they would not seek employment. "A woman's place is her home" (*Kadın evine yakışır*), "What kind of a married woman would like to work out of pleasure?", "Of course I would not work if our financial situation did not oblige me to" were among some of the common expressions used to illustrate this point. Some women even described their employment experience in a regretful tone, implying that because of paid work, they could not properly see their children grow and instead had to leave them behind at home or put them in someone else's care. The strong values attached to being "a good mother and a wife" undoubtedly played an important role in women's emphasis on regretting not being able to devote all their time and attention to raising their children and fulfilling their domestic duties. Though financial circumstances were a common reason for women to seek paid work, two major constraints shaped their entry into the informal sector: the amount of care burden they had and the patriarchal values about women's place in family and in society.

Due to the lack of affordable child and/or elderly care services in Turkey (see Ecevit 2007 for a review), most of my interviewees mentioned that their care and domestic duties constrained

their choices of looking for formal employment. The importance of gender roles in pushing women to the informal sector was most apparent when women began discussing the employment options available to them, based on their marital status. A strong contrast was made between single and married women in terms of their house and care work load, and the level of patriarchal pressures they faced. It was highlighted that single women would “surely” have more chances in the labour market because they could work longer hours, take less leave from work [no childcare responsibilities] and not care about what to cook for dinner that night simply because they did not have a husband who would expect them to be at home before him with food prepared, children fed and house cleaned. Single women also would not have anyone “poke his nose” into the demands of the employers for extra working hours, or staying up late at work. As Lale, a 29 year-old subcontracted cleaning worker put it:

A single woman can do whatever she pleases to, but once you are married, it is all over. Then all the problems begin, you are constantly limited, constantly constrained. You also limit yourself, even if your husband does not say anything. Then the children come and they limit you. Even when they grow old and are able to manage themselves, you cannot leave them and go somewhere. You deal with their sicknesses, you deal with their schooling. It is endless.

It was interesting to find out that this contrast between single and married women’s house and care work load was made even when single women were the primary caregivers in the family. Gizem, a 27-year-old home-based worker, who had 10 years of experience in textile ateliers, seemed to be well suited to find formal employment in the major textile factories in Esenyurt. Nevertheless, like the majority of my interviewees, she had care responsibilities she was expected to attend to, and there were no affordable care services available to her. In her words:

I can never find employment which would cover the cost of my mother’s care and all other costs. And what would others think? She leaves her mother at home and goes to work? Therefore, I need to stay at home and try to get by with things like these (piecework).

One explanation why marital status is seen to be a major determining factor in women's employment opportunities might be that while single women viewed their care work as temporary, until their family member's health situation improved (or finalised), for married women, care and housework were thought to be everlasting duties.

Although a deep resentment was expressed by many women for such "outright discrimination" between married and single women in the labour market, women were not convinced that sharing the housework load would change their employment possibilities, since housework responsibilities were integral to patriarchal values which also restricted where, with whom, how much or when they could work. Nevertheless, women were also not convinced that men would be able to or willing to take up housework, implying some level of acceptance of their gender roles.

(Would you consider allocating some of the house work or care work to your husband/brother/father/other household member?)

No, because they would not even bother. -referring to her brothers  
Irem, 29, textile worker

My husband sometimes intends to do it. But he is so cack-handed (*elinden gelmiyor*).  
Rabia, 39, subcontracted cleaning worker

Impossible! You would come home, and see there are no clean glasses and plates. They would all be lined up on the kitchen counter.

Busenaz, 41, subcontracted cleaning worker

These women noted that they would spend the money they earned from their informal employment on "helping the family budget", "helping out with kids' schooling" or "getting some groceries", activities in line with their carer roles. It is worth mentioning that a desire to become equal earners in the household, or share the care duties with the male kin to take up long-term employment was absent from the narratives of these women. Kümbetoğlu, User, and Akpınar (2012) interpreted women's not seeking to allocate some of the household duties to male members of the household as follows: "Women understand and know that they will not be able to influence their husbands or change them and hence avoid any type of conflict

in the household. This is actually a method for actively solving the problem (of household duties) at home but is often overlooked. So women are forced to become super-wives in order to avoid conflict in their households” (256).

Seen in this light, informal employment was expressed to be an attractive alternative for women, which provided *flexibility* to juggle care and paid work. Flexibility came in various guises, and women often actively tried to *bend* their work arrangements according to their circumstances. For instance, Öykü, a 51-year-old domestic worker, used to bring her daughter to work with her when she was small; an option that would not be possible in the formal sector. Similarly, Menekşe, a 41-year-old tea lady, mentioned that during breaks, she could often “pop by home” and “check on the children”, and her employer would “overlook it” if she was late. Or Edibe, a 27-year-old home-based worker stated that she was receiving government benefits for taking care of her disabled daughter, and since she was always at home, she was also doing piecework to “pass the time, and make money on the side”. Many women also expressed that the flexibility that they could stop working any time, and take up work again when they wished to do so, gave them great manoeuvrability, which they would not have in formal employment. Though such flexibility depended on the good will of the employers in general, the sheer possibility that workers could also benefit from it seemed to incline women to see flexibility as a desirable quality of informal employment. Also the possibility of working at home, and not waste time or money on transportation or childcare was counted as the other “flexible” characteristics of informal employment (Beşpınar 2010) that made it particularly attractive for low-income women. Indeed, it was mainly the possibility of altering the circumstances of employment according to one’s needs that led women to actively seek informal employment. Nevertheless, because women’s work came to be seen as a continuation of their unpaid carer roles at home, and just an additional income

to the household, their dependent status in the family [on male kin] was not altered. This meant that their labour remained invisible and unrecognised in the family.

#### 4.5. *Strategies for Survival in the Informal Sector*

The above discussion demonstrated that women's entry into the informal sector is shaped by the amount of care burden they had and the patriarchal values about women's place in family and in society. To overcome some of these constraints, institutional changes are necessary, such as the introduction of free or affordable quality child, elderly or other care services for women. When such services were unavailable, women faced particular difficulties in seeking formal employment, which often required employees to commit long working hours and adapt to the heavy workload. In the remainder of the chapter, I will look into these constraints in further detail in order to explain women's strategic action to improve their lives, and which women are able to overcome or work within those constraints to become more visible in their families.

##### 4.5.1. Invisibility

###### 4.5.1.1. *Male permission*

Delaney (1991) stated that "Authority, except for the elder men...is always outside of the self" (172). Accordingly for most women, male permission was a major obstacle to their economic activities. As Beşpınar (2010) noted male members of the family had the authority to make decisions about the organisation of women's daily life, including if, when, how much and where they could work. In this regard, a steadily employed husband would reduce a woman's need to earn money (Ibid, 525). According to the women whom I talked to, their husbands were afraid that earning money would give them some economic independence, and might lead to disobedience and rebellion (*Gözüm açılır diye korkuyor*). In rare cases, some women

reported that their husbands went so far as to state that they would prefer starvation to giving them permission to work.

The few male informants of this study associated their disapproval of women working with “male pride” and “women and men’s proper roles in the family”. Men’s perceptions about their breadwinner roles in the family also seemed to reinforce their objection to women’s paid employment, which they often expressed by saying “I would not let others say he makes his wife work” (*Ben karısını çalıştırıyor dedirtmem*). When inquired about whether they would change this attitude if they ever faced extreme poverty, some of them, especially first generation migrants, noted that nothing would change their opinions, and argued that men should take multiple jobs and “carry stones over their back, if needed” (*Gerekirse sırtında taş taşıyacak*). Some second generation men were more sympathetic to the idea. They stated that, although women’s employment was not “ideal”, if the family needed the additional income, and women’s employment was “of the honourable kind”, it could be tolerated.

For women, permission to work was always a contested issue. They constantly had to bargain for where, when, how much they could work, and re-negotiate the permission when their familial and care statuses changed with the birth of a child, or a relative becoming sick in need of full time care. Against this background, it is worth discussing how women coped with the need for permission to work.

For women who experienced male objection to their paid work, a common day-to-day response came through exploiting the “invisibility” of informal employment, by keeping their paid economic activities hidden either physically and/or discursively. Alev, a 38-year old subcontracted cleaning worker explained her strategy when she used to work as a pieceworker:

I was staying at home. I was staying at home with nothing to do for instance. I was doing bead-work (embroidery). My husband was against it, he was saying 'don't bring this home, I'll burn it if you do.' I was doing it secretly, unbeknownst to him. (...) So, I was putting it away when he came home, and hiding it. I was thinking at least I get something we need with the money, a loaf of bread, if nothing. My husband thought that we were spending his money. He didn't realize, because he was giving me money for groceries. I was just adding what I made to that (*Ben de onun arasına kaynaştırıyordum işte*).

In Alev's case, hiding her employment (and her income from it) had a dual function: her husband was not only unaware that she was working, so she did not visibly challenge his decision to not let his wife work, but he was also not aware that his income was not sufficient to sustain the family, giving him the feeling that his role as the sole breadwinner of the house was protected. Several women noted that home-based work made it easy for them to physically hide their employment from their husbands if they were against their employment, due to the fact that they could do it "in the comfort of their homes". But other women, who engaged in *ad hoc* cleaning jobs, casual textile work or domestic work, also mentioned that "if needed", they could hide their employment thanks to its irregular and temporary nature.

Hiding employment physically was especially common in families with strong patriarchal values, and in most cases this was a reflection of a combination of religious background and ethnicity. Kurdish Shafi<sup>25</sup> women's physical mobility was heavily constrained by male resistance to their public visibility. These women's employment options were already severely limited due to language barriers, and male rejection of their working in public further decreased their options, limiting them to home-based work deliveries to their streets from nearby factories and small ateliers. Alevi<sup>26</sup> women, in contrast, usually did not face such a strong resistance to their working, although they did feel pressured not to challenge that men would continue their statuses as household heads.

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<sup>25</sup> Shafism is a sect in Islam which holds strong views about female seclusion.

<sup>26</sup> Alevism is a sect in Islam which is considered to have a much more liberal and gender-neutral interpretation of Islam, hence women are encouraged to study and take active roles in society.

Hiding employment physically greatly depended upon the discretion of those who were aware of the employment relationship (e.g. neighbours, employers and children). Consequently, women's small solidarity networks in the neighbourhood played a pivotal role in helping them "get away". Accordingly, finding jobs through an established solidarity network, or arranging with the employer to be discrete about the employment arrangement were some of the strategies used. In some cases, these solidarity networks also established permission for women's employment. In the tightly-knit communities of the peripheries of Istanbul, "X's wife is also working" or "Y's daughter is also working there" were some of the common justifications used against a male kin refraining to give permission women to work.

Even when physically hiding the employment was not necessary, for many women workers hiding it discursively or presenting it in a way so as not to challenge male kin's breadwinner status in the family was required. One way of doing this was not referring to informal employment as "work" (*iş*) but as a hobby, or an activity to pass the time (whilst making money on the side). To this end, some women presented their paid work as a continuation of their domestic roles. Gülin, a 32 year-old domestic worker, for instance, noted that as a woman, one is born with the skill to do domestic work and care work, and so she believed that domestic work was appropriate for women and could not be called "work" per se:

Domestic work is a good job (*temiz iş*). You are inside [the house] like you would be in your home. Your workplace is clean, and you are doing cleaning like you would do at home. So, it is a perfectly good job. It is just the right job for me as a woman.<sup>27</sup>

Many women shared the idea that women did not need additional training or qualifications for the kinds of informal work they usually get. For home-based work, women were expected

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<sup>27</sup> Some women noted that they found cleaning jobs degrading and humiliating. These women, too, however swiftly added how they justified their continued engagement in such jobs. As Busenaz, a 41 year-old cleaning staff in a nursery told me "I think to myself: you are working in an honest environment, and there is nothing inappropriate in what you do. It is exactly like when I take care of my children home. I clean up after them as well. I always tried to console myself like this."

to have knitting, embroidery and other piecework skills, for service jobs, they were expected to be able to cook and clean, for domestic work and care work jobs, they were expected to be able to understand the art and craft of home-making. Similarly, Nur, a 37-year-old domestic worker noted that:

Housework is your work, so one does not see it as work, and the husbands also do not see it as allowing their wives work.

The undervaluation of women's paid work served the purpose of its becoming "invisible" to their male kin, as men often interpreted such activities as "women's stuff" and did not oppose it<sup>28</sup>. Some women kept the money they earned to themselves or spent it only on themselves or the children to make sure that their husbands did not feel threatened by their additional income. As several women told me, their husbands' income would still be spent on rent, bills and food; theirs would be on the "trivial stuff", like new clothes for the children or the things they would need around the kitchen. Though hiding employment physically was widespread in the more conservative households, hiding it discursively or at least undervaluing it (by varying degrees) was common in all households.

For women whose husbands were against their employment on the grounds that employment would impede their "main duties at home", gaining permission for employment was possible through becoming a "superwife", that is, "proving that" they could manage both productive and reproductive work (see also Beşpınar 2010 and Kümbetoğlu, User, and Akpınar 2012). Several women stated that when they first mentioned their idea of possibly getting a job, their husbands almost unanimously asked the same question "What about the children?", even when their children were grown up. As Zeynep, a 37 year-old cook in a nursery told me:

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<sup>28</sup> Domestic work is slightly different in terms of getting permission from the male kin, in comparison to home-based work which is carried out in one's own home. If women need to go to unknown places, neighbourhoods or households, men usually oppose domestic work for fear of sexual harassment or being blamed for theft. I will discuss this issue in the vulnerability chapter.

When I first told my husband, I found a job, he said “No, you cannot go.” I asked why, he said: “What about the children?” Then I said: “What about them?” One of them is 10, the other is 16. They can take care of each other.

For women whose children were at schooling age, women used the argument that they would work only until their children would come back from school, or they would seek help from a relative or a neighbour. While making these arguments, women also assured their husbands that “nothing would change at home.” This often entailed that women did two shifts a day; one at home and one at work. Sevim, a 34-year-old domestic worker, started her first job when her daughter was six years old. She emphasised that she did all the cooking (the night before), cleaning and dealing with the school responsibilities of the children, while her husband just warmed the meals and made sure the children were under supervision. Sevim reiterated frequently that without her constant efforts to “keep everything in order at home”, her husband would not let her get a job.

#### *4.5.1.2. Maintaining honour, and paid work*

In addition to the need for permission from husbands and fathers, for many women maintaining their “honour” or “reputation” in the general community played a pivotal role in gaining access to and retaining paid work activities. Dedeoğlu (2008) noted that female textile workers suffered from bad reputation, owing to the fact that women and men would work together in small, closed environments for long hours. She explained that for some women a history in textile ateliers could hinder their opportunities in the marriage market, or it could bring shame to their families. The consequence of “dishonouring the family” was emphasised to be very high, including but not limited to domestic violence, and losing family support leading to social isolation. This point was frequently expressed by the women I interviewed, and was shared by women across sectors. Consequently, women not only felt a pressure to conform to the “appropriate” behaviours that were expected of them, but were also pushed

to accept a heightened level of control in their neighbourhoods and workplaces during their paid work.

Ensuring a “safe” (*temiz ortam*) workplace environment which would not harm their reputation emerged as the most important concern, and also as a strategy to enter and continue paid work. As Alev, a 38 year-old subcontracted cleaning worker told me:

If I lose my job, I cannot just go get any job. I ask people I know, people I trust, saying that I am looking for work. I cannot just take anyone’s word for work. I need to truly know the person. Because I need to make sure that.... I mean, is the place s/he advised me gonna be a safe environment, would it harm my reputation? For instance, they say textile work is not good for women, all mixed up, men and women, working side by side. I have never tried textile work, but that’s what they say, and I would not want to go work in a place like that. After all, we are women. Just imagine, you did something wrong, and a guy misunderstood your smile, or your gesture. That would cause such big trouble. People would start talking behind my back and all that.

Indeed, many women expressed a preference of workplaces where a majority or all workers are women. Childcare centres, schools, or home-based work were found appropriate for women in this regard. Suna, a 24-year old helper in a nursery told me that her husband was very “jealous” and she was “lucky” that her job was in a nursery, “where the clients are children, and the workers all women”.

There were also some women who provided a more literal interpretation of the “safe” workplace environment, making an inference to the high rate of verbal and physical abuse against women in workplaces, to which employers usually remained silent or indifferent. Others noted that in some cases male managers expected favours from women in return for keeping their position. Didem, a 23-year-old worker in a food factory, explained the safety of a workplace as follows:

What does a safe workplace mean? You see, there are places where women and girls are constantly verbally abused. And you are not able to say anything, because the managers usually do not care, and they just laugh at it saying, ‘Ignore them, they are just clowns’. But (in a workplace) I actually go look at women’s environment, because sometimes really terrible things take place. Sometimes women, just to be able to keep their employment, feel the need to do some favours for the managers, bosses or foremen.

In response to the male managers' expectation of favours from female staff, some women noted that "although they would not delve into others' matters", if a workplace was renowned for "particularly loose behaviour between men and women", people could assume that they would also participate in such relationships, which could lead to slander and hurt their reputation in the long run (*çamur sıçrar*). Hence, such workplaces were commonly referred to as "corrupt" (*yoz*).

Although textile and industrial production work were mentioned most frequently as "corrupt" due to men and women working side by side, many women (including some of the subcontracted cleaning workers) emphasised that they would never take up domestic work, due to its being "unsafe". As Gönül, a 47-year-old cook in a shopping mall told me:

I have never done domestic work. I have never even considered it as an option. And even if I was offered domestic work, I would not take it. (Why?) It is because I do not like house work. I mean I would do cleaning work if it is outside, or if there is a cleaning company or something, that would be okay. You go and do your job in the morning or something. But people's own private homes? You cannot trust that. I mean, how can you trust it? Anything could happen there. I mean God forbid. You do not know the person (the employer). Your workplace is someone's home after all. And you do not know them. I would not take such work even if I knew the employer. Because you can get blamed for stealing stuff if the employer loses something or there might be men in the house with bad motives... That is why I hate domestic work, and I would not do it, even if I became unemployed.

In order to find safe workplaces, women actively sought employment through their friends and relatives, and expressed a strong distrust towards newspaper ads or the ads that were distributed around their neighbourhoods in the form of leaflets or ads on bus stops. The idea that their contacts would act as intermediaries during a dispute with an employer, or grant some level of work safety for the jobs they connect them with, was prevalent. Indeed, if women realised that the workplace was unsafe after they started working, and that their contacts did not warn them about "the potential dangers", relationships would be broken and those intermediaries would be isolated (and shunned) by women and their kin. De la Rocha (2001a) argued that social isolation constituted one of the biggest risks for the poor, as it

would hinder their access to informal social protection mechanisms, and consequently it was not a risk low-income individuals would be willing to take. Similarly, in the context of the peripheries of Istanbul, intermediaries acted especially carefully when sharing job information about informal employment, so as not to risk being shunned.

Another form of ensuring the “safety” of the workplace came through “visiting” (*geze geze iş bulmak*) the workplaces and asking the workers (especially women workers) on the general “atmosphere” (*ortam*) of the workplace. Although this method of job search was also used to ensure that the workplace/factory was running and was able to provide long-term employment and pay wages on time, many women still stressed that “seeing the workplaces with their own two eyes” would ensure that it was a safe environment for women to work in.

Another coping strategy was working with kin, including family members, friends and neighbours. This was often described as a “shield” against gossip and slander, as they would have a “witness” who could tell their side of the story, if anything happened and their reputation was questioned. Women also noted that working with kin ensured that they were not easily approachable for men, and hence their honour would be protected. Such “assurances” to the family often enabled women’s access to the labour market, albeit with varying levels of control exercised on them by the family members and friends they worked together with.

Hence finding a safe work environment was connected to women’s need and desire to maintain their reputation. Indeed, maintaining a reputation of an “honourable woman” was given utmost value by women’s families and often constituted the first criterion in the acceptability of a woman’s getting a job. As Dedeoğlu (2008) noted, when a low-income woman looked for a job, the main concern of her family became protecting her *namus*, which can be roughly translated as *sexual purity* or *honour*. Several authors demonstrated that

*namus* ascertained if, where and under which conditions women might access employment and which kinds of punishments they would face, if they failed to adhere to these conditions (Özar 1994; Tucker 2007; Erman 2001; Akpınar 2003). *Namus* set different norms to abide by and codes of behaviour for married and single women in the labour market context (also different codes for widowed and divorced women). For instance, in some families, while single women were allowed to work, married women were not. Siyabend, a 24-year-old textile worker told me why she was “allowed” to work, while all the (married) women in her family were not:

Well, it is sort of like this. When you come to look at it, the family does not favour making women work at all. But what will she do, if she stays at home? It is also an additional income. You know, they did not see the money I earned like.... She is just a girl, you know.... It is not like a male child... Also, they thought, he is (the employer) someone we know. And then when they received the money, the money was sweet, you know? Then they allowed me to continue working.

I then asked Siyabend how a girl child is different from a male child. She told me that:

Girls are expected to be married off. That is why they also do not care whether or not they work with social security (formal employment). They think her husband will be her security. So, whatever the girl child brings home is seen as something extra.

Like Dedeoğlu (2008), I paid close attention to the idioms women used to describe their circumstances. “Girls are the enemy of the spoon” (*Kızlar kaşık düşmanıdır*) was one of the common idioms single women used to describe how their families saw them. The idiom meant that girls would become part of another family when they get married, in line with the patriarchal tradition, whereas the male children would preserve the family lineage. In this sense, girl children would not be able to “pay the family back”, hence whatever they consumed in their paternal home would be considered a loss. Siyabend argued that in order to compensate for the “loss to the family”, daughters would be allowed to work.

It is also important to note the circumstances in which such permission was granted. Siyabend worked initially under the close supervision of her brothers and then her veiled sister, in a

family-run textile atelier that was very close to their house, where her mother could pay unannounced visits. Although she was allowed to work, her reputability in the neighbourhood was protected through the heightened control. Kandiyoti (1988, 283) called veiling a “traditional modesty maker”, which signalled a woman’s modesty to family members and to society in general. Accordingly, Siyabend was forced to wear the veil not only by her family, but also the other workers in the atelier<sup>29</sup>. Indeed, veiling or being forced to adopt “more appropriate” attire in order to be granted permission to work was common among all my interviewees, but especially the single ones. As Beşpınar (2010) stressed, the push to adopt more modest clothing was a common strategy for many families to ensure their daughters’ reputability and chances in the marriage market.

On the other hand, Eylül, a 20-year-old textile worker related *namus* to a more literal understanding of sexual purity. She emphasised that for single women, there was always the option of “virginity tests” to prove that “her *namus* was intact”, while this was not possible for married women. Virginity tests were frequently carried out in Turkey up until the end of 1990s (for a review, see Cindoglu 1997). While Eylül was not sure whether such tests were still practiced, she emphasised that the sheer possibility of it pushed many single women not to “dare” challenge their prescribed boundaries. Subsequently, the strict constraints *namus* brought on what was deemed appropriate and inappropriate for women made finding and sustaining employment for divorced women extremely difficult. Güliz, a 24-year-old textile worker recently got divorced and moved back to her parents’ house. She explained this difficulty:

I used to be able to work in factories further away than this. Now my parents constantly control what I do, who I talk to. Not that it was any different before I got married, but now they tell me, you’re a divorced woman now, everything has changed, the environment is bad (*ortam kötü*). They also constantly remind me that he (ex-husband) was from this

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<sup>29</sup> As will be discussed later in this chapter, though Siyabend initially gave in and wore the veil, later she refused and took it off. At the time of my interview, she was no longer veiled.

environment. And that no good husband comes from these ateliers. They make sure that I work with women from the neighbourhood, otherwise they don't let me.... In all the factories I go, I try to hide the fact that I am divorced. My friends in these jobs also help me hide it. But this is a small neighbourhood, and eventually they find out. Then I have to put up with men who try to take advantage from it<sup>30</sup>. So I change jobs constantly....

Güliz's case is a telling account of the patriarchal pressures she experienced as a young, divorced woman, who was perceived to be an "easy target" for men now that she was no longer married and also not a virgin. In this situation, there were usually three choices available to women: 1) not work 2) only work from home 3) hide the divorce. Divorced women also noted that they started to veil or wear longer and more modest clothes, "in order not to give the wrong image of an 'easy woman'". Several women I interviewed expressed that the lives of divorced women were the most difficult and that would be the main reason why they would not completely challenge or go against their husbands, even when they were having difficulties in their marriages. These women, however, then swiftly added that divorce could be considered in extreme cases, where there was a problem of alcoholism, drug abuse or gambling<sup>31</sup>.

Two women in my sample only had religious marriages, which are not legally recognised in Turkey. When such marriages failed, women were left in a particularly precarious situation, as they were not able to claim *nafaqa* (subsistence allowance), nor they could claim any other rights from their ex-husbands. Nur, an illiterate, 37-year-old domestic worker was forced to marry by her father when she was 19 years old. Her mother-in-law, however, did not approve their marriage, as she was Kurdish. Therefore, she explained that they only had the religious

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<sup>30</sup> Here, Güliz refers to a common understanding among men where the perception of not being a virgin is taken as an open invitation for further promiscuity.

<sup>31</sup> In Güliz's case, her divorce was found acceptable by her family because her ex-husband was a drug addict.

marriage<sup>32</sup>, and for this reason she could not claim any rights on her three children, whom she did not see for four years. In her words:

When we first broke up, my children were with me. Then their father came and kidnapped them. One of them was 9, the other was 7. He deceived me that he was going to send the kids to school, that we were going to get back together. Now I don't have a home. I live with my brother, I sometimes stay at my uncle's. Here and there in the relatives' houses. And I am not able to do anything legally. I cannot even see my children.

Nur was between jobs when I interviewed her and that was why she did not have an address of her own. She explained that “under normal circumstances”, she would work as a live-in maid and stay in the employers' house. She also explained that normally she did not wear the headscarf but because she was unemployed and divorced and was staying with her relatives, she felt the pressure to veil whenever she went outside so as not to cause any gossip or slander (*laf söz olmasın diye*). Many women believed that modest clothing and veiling would protect women against verbal and physical sexual advancements in their communities and subsequently protect their reputation.

All divorced and separated women in my sample underlined that they were left in a particularly vulnerable situation. Not only did they mention how relatives, though being against their employment, stopped “helping out” once they realised the women would not be able to pay back but also that the benefits and aid they received from the local municipalities or village headmen (*muhtarlık*) were extremely irregular and insufficient. As Özar and Yakut-Cakar (2013) showed in their study on “Women without men” in Turkey, once women lost the support from their male kin, they faced extreme patriarchal pressures in society to their general physical mobility, but also struggled financially. De la Rocha and Latapí (2008) also emphasised the importance of the informal support network of immediate relatives and kin,

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<sup>32</sup> Religious marriage mentioned here is Islamic marriage, which is not legal in Turkey. The partners are not able to claim any marriage-based rights from each other. In this case for instance, her husband did not have the custody of their children, and her children were initially registered as out of wedlock. Only later on did he register the children under his name and then was able to take their custody.

which many women in informal employment could not risk losing, as social isolation would lead them into extreme poverty in the long run. Similarly, when women divorced and lost the support they would expect from their husbands, they returned back to their maternal households and accepted their control on their lives, including decisions regarding their employment. In fact, all women I interviewed emphasised that “they could not risk losing their families’ support.” As Siyabend expressed it:

You cannot risk being shunned by your family and losing their support. Because you would either end up as a drug addict or a prostitute” (*Ya bağımlı olursun, ya pavyona düşersin*).

Therefore, it can be concluded that women developed various strategies to “get by” without challenging their relationships with their families, since they could not risk losing the informal social protection they received from their families. These strategies can be categorised as “acquiescence” or “compliance” with the constraints imposed on women’s general physical mobility and labour market participation. Women in general accepted that their say in the household decision-making was limited (or non-existent) and they would face further pressures on their lives if they these constraints. However, these women used the “invisibility” of informal employment strategically as a way of finding their way into the labour market. They exploited the fact that they could hide their employment physically or discursively when needed, and achieve their desired ends, be it extra income for the household or extra budget for their children’s or own expenses.

Nevertheless, because their labour was invisible, they also received little or no voice in the household decision-making and their labour remained unrecognised and hidden. Poor women with extreme care responsibilities (e.g. married women with small children) who would face particular vulnerability in their families and communities for breaking their relationships generally complied with these constraints, when women began to engage in higher income generating activities, more regular employment and start to broaden their social networks

beyond their immediate family and kin, they also began to seek more “visibility” in their families and household decision-making.

#### 4.5.2. Struggle

Dedeoğlu (2008) noted that:

Women’s internalisation of the patriarchal system by conservative choices that cannot be seen as a simple act of women’s lack of autonomy and power vis-à-vis men is a way of constructing women’s role as active agents of their own social environment in affecting the framework in which the patriarchal system is practiced and negotiated (114-115)

Hence, though women might appear as if they are abiding by the norms and codes of behaviours set for them, they constantly look for ways to challenge these norms and behaviours, albeit in a subtle manner, but in the long run, these subtle challenges to the patriarchal system have the potential to transform how it is practiced and negotiated. In tandem with this approach, women strategically used their employment experience as a subtle means to “loosen” the boundaries of what was considered acceptable and appropriate for them. In this regard, the characteristics of informal employment that were often described in the literature as constraints, such as the irregularity of employment, wage insecurity, heavy workload of informal employment or its invisibility were strategically exploited by women in order to loosen the control on their actions. Elmas, a 25 year-old casual textile worker, for instance, moved from a job where she was working under the close supervision of her brothers on the grounds that her workload was too heavy, to another job where she could work with her sister:

In this new workplace, my sister was working upstairs. She would not come to my floor that much. Brothers are different. Even my brother’s friends were acting like they could tell me what to do (*abilik taslıyorlardı*). The worst were my brother’s friends actually. Constantly asking me what I was up to, where I was going, telling me when to go home and stuff. I am sure my brother treats their sisters like they treated me too. But it was too much for me.

Later that year, Elmas changed her job once more, this time to work with a friend. She explained that because she did not “do anything wrong” when she was working with her siblings, she “loosened” her parents into letting her get work with her friends. Similarly, Siyabend, a 25 year-old textile worker discussed earlier, explained how “in time”, she “started doing her own thing”:

In our work (informal employment), frequent job change is common. I changed loads of jobs as well. In the end, I guess, they [her family] could not keep track. I mean I generally stayed in a job for a year, two years, or maybe three years maximum. I have been working for 13 years now. The job change was frequent, and I proved that I would not do anything wrong to them. Though I did! [laughs] They just did not know. Once I was off their radar, they could not keep track. I entered this “corrupt” workplace on purpose. I found it interesting. For instance, after work we were going to cafés. It was such a corrupt environment, in the workplace the bosses were constantly yelling at us, but we did not care. For instance, I started smoking then, I knew some people who did drugs, too. They used ecstasy. I was hanging out with them. But I did not do drugs. At some point, the atelier stopped paying me. But I did not tell my parents, I still kept on working there. For instance, we were six friends, we constantly hung out together, went to work and back together. It was nice. No one bothered us, no one tried to control or anything. My sister was not there too, nor did I have any relatives watching over me and reporting to my parents. There was no such control. We were working all day, and going to cafés after work. Sometimes we were out and about until the morning, and then going straight to work again. You constantly have overtime in informal employment, and hours are crazy. I was just telling my parents, I was at work. Even on days when we worked until lunch time, I told my parents I was at work but I was hanging out with friends. When I claimed overtime constantly, my parents started asking about the overtime money, then I would just work a bit extra, on Saturdays and stuff, and would give them that money. That freedom was sweet.

Although cases of exploitation of the “invisibility” of informal employment to such an extent was uncommon, all single women noted that their families were used to their working overtime and “once in a while” they used overtime as an excuse to their parents for being late, though they visited shopping malls, cafés or cinemas instead (or met with their boyfriends). Nevertheless, they also noted that such visits would only be possible if they worked overtime earlier, as their parents would expect a certain amount of money every month from them (usually their full one month’s wage). Each of these practices attempted to form (though small) means of overcoming some of the constraints and pressures related to women’s access to the labour market, and physical mobility in general.

In addition, women developed a “wait and see” strategy, making a subtle change in their usual routine and waiting and seeing if and when their husbands/families would accept this change. This strategy was noted to be very reflexive, continuous and contextual as women would go back to the “usual” if they faced resistance from their families. The following two cases are noteworthy. Alev, a 38-year-old subcontracted cleaning worker discussed previously told me the story of how she started working outside after many years working at home as a home-based worker:

I have been working for 4 years now. My husband did not let me work. There was a friend working here, the daughter-in-law of the wife of my husband’s brother. I told her, get me a job, so she did. My husband first gave me an attitude and he stopped talking to me. I said silently to myself ‘Oh what the hell, don’t talk if you like. Eventually you’ll talk to me anyway.

Alev’s husband finally gave in and accepted her working outside the house, though she noted that it took almost a month for him to “loosen up”. She also added that if it took longer, she would “probably go back” to home-based work, and working in public would not be possible for a while. In other cases, the “wait and see” strategy did not work. As Gulseren, a 38-year old domestic worker explained the story of her friend:

I have a friend. She does home-based work. She works from dusk to dawn. What she does is cleaning the extra threads off of t-shirts. She gets 1.5 lira (50 pence) for all day’s work. Think about it, 1.5 lira! She has four children. She can only earn the money for a bare, plain loaf of bread. So, I told her, come, come and start with us. I mean, domestic work.... But her husband does not give her permission to work. He does not even let her go out alone. She said, my husband is jealous, he would not let me go to work. Somehow she convinced her husband after my push (*benim gazımdan sonra*). He apparently gave his permission but only on the condition that she comes to work with me, to the same place... I mean, he gave his permission that we go to the same house together. You should have seen her, she was just so happy, she was over the moon. At first I could arrange a job in the same housing complex I was going to, but that was only for a few days, when their domestic worker- my friend- was sick. Then I found her a job in another neighbourhood, but she says, I cannot go alone, my husband only gave his permission to go with you. Then we started meeting in the morning as if we were going to work together, and at night in the bus stop, as if we were coming back together. I told her in time slowly but surely we’ll loosen him up to the idea that you can go to work alone. But once I was gonna take her to Yeşilköy, it is so far away and she cannot go there alone. But I was so sick. But I knew she was waiting at home. So, I asked my husband, can you bring her? So he goes over to her house, his husband thinks I’ll go pick her up for work. In fact, I cannot even get up from the bed. My husband taps the window silently and says: hurry up we’re late. Of course, she did not say my

husband would take her to work, nor she was working alone. So her husband opens the curtains and sees my husband, gets back in and beats up the woman. She did not go to work that day. In fact many other days... Her husband beat her terribly. Now she is back to piecework stuff. Maybe later we'll try again.

The “wait and see” strategy demonstrates the implicit *skill* and continuous *struggle* involved in adapting to different contexts, and constraints. While some women took “big steps” and attempted to alter their circumstances drastically, many women seized their opportunities and followed more hidden, covert and non-confrontational ways to achieve their goals. For both women, however, going back to where they started from was the only option, when faced with active resistance from their husbands (and families). Nevertheless, this usually did not stop them from trying in the future. Kandiyoti's (1988) *bargaining with patriarchy* is a useful concept in this regard, as it specifically refers to women's constant struggle to manipulate and circumvent the patriarchal constraints exercised on them, in order to achieve their goals, including access to employment, and lessening the control and pressure on them. Women found ways of “getting by” and “getting around” in ways that gave them personal and material gains. They used the possibility to hide informal employment physically or underreport how much they earned from their informal jobs; its irregular hours and workload allowed the much needed space for women to negotiate their access to and terms of their employment with their families “bit by bit”. These acts represented women's active “struggle” to recalibrate their circumstances. Crucially, these day-to-day acts for getting by were known to all women, and women developed important and strong, albeit small, solidarity groups in their neighbourhoods and workplaces, and helped each other get by or overcome some of the patriarchal constraints they faced. Against this background, informal employment provided women an adaptable work arrangement, which they could start and stop any time, and take up as many or little hours needed to negotiate the boundaries specified for them.

What differentiates the “invisibility” category from “struggle” is that women in the second group tried to change their constraining environments instead of just complying with them to achieve certain ends. Kabeer (2002) rightfully notes that the distinction between having internalised certain patriarchal and gender norms and values and hence not resisting the constraints on women’s everyday livelihoods and women’s trying to alter their circumstances but not being able to do so due to structural and familial resistance is an important one to make. Hence, although the women who were categorised in the “struggle” group did not always achieve their goals in having a stronger voice in the household decision-making or their ability to choose where, when and how much to work, their strategies were categorically different than the women who used “invisibility” as a strategy to the extent that instead of working within their constraints, they actively took advantage of opportunities to engage in strategic action to improve their lives and lessen the constraining factors in their lives.

#### 4.5.3. Visibility

While in the previous section, women’s general ways of coping was through accepting a level of invisibility of their employment, this section turns to the small group of women who actively challenged and confronted the patriarchal constraints they faced. Despite coming from similar circumstances, these women emphasised that the “invisible” strategies would take “too long” to change their subordinate status in their families, and women’s status in society in general. Rather than reverting back after facing resistance from their families, these women confronted their agents of oppression. Although most of them faced the “risks” of being shunned or domestic violence, these “punishments” did not stop them from confronting the constraints that hindered their social and economic opportunities. It should be noted that although these acts of active resistance for gaining “visibility” of their labour and status in the family were not common, but they provided important inspirational examples in the

neighbourhoods, showing that “other lives were possible” and women could exit the “family-bubble” if necessary.

Women who actively confronted their families shared one thing in common: “The oppression became unbearable”. These women noted that, for the most part, it was a lengthy and painful process, and their idea was not to “Burn all the bridges” initially [meaning break relationships with their husbands or families]. Nevertheless, having faced “heightened oppression and control”, they realised they “had to do something about it”. Yasemin, a 47-year-old domestic worker is a telling example. Coming from an extremely religious family, she could not remember a time when she had not worn the *burqa* (*kara çarşaf*) and everything was decided for her, including her marriage to her cousin and migration to Istanbul from Erzurum, a city in the East of Turkey. Yasemin started observing the differences between the women she worked for and her life and came to the realisation that hers was “surrounded by four walls” and “there were women who had it differently, who could choose and decide for themselves”. Initially her day-to-day coping strategies were similar to the women presented earlier; hiding some of her income, telling that she was at work, though she was with friends or at a women’s association meeting. But in the long run, these “hidden transcripts of opposition”(Scott 1990) proved to be unsustainable for her, as she faced violent resistance from her husband whenever she tried to negotiate a new job, an employer in a different neighbourhood, going to a women’s association or altering her dress code, which instead of suppressing her led to her resistance. She stated that:

He tried to suppress me with this violence. But the more of it I faced, the more I drifted away. The more he told me “don’t go out”, the more I wanted to and I did.

At the time, Yasemin was heavily involved in political and women’s associations in Istanbul, and she was surrounded by a support network composed of these associations, as well as her employers. She noted that the availability of a support network other than her husband or

parents enabled her to “challenge” her husband, the way she did. However, breaking her relationship with her husband was still not easy. In her words:

In this period, I was not fully there yet. So, I started to even abide by some of his prohibitions. I had contradictions in me as well, you know my own family was pressuring me, saying that I could not leave, and also because ours was an arranged marriage between relatives, after all, he is my cousin from both my mother and father’s side. I got extremely scared that we would end up having a bigger conflict in the wider family. I got scared, so scared. I thought to myself, no, I cannot get divorced. There is only one way out, either he dies, or I die. But, life goes on. You don’t die. He is healthy, I am healthy. And this is endless. (...) During the ’99 protests in Turkey, a friend from the neighbourhood told me to run for the local village headman position. (...) In the elections, I got 545 votes. I came last but got this number of votes, it is not that small. I also got to know many people. I said to myself, maybe one can also do things alone, when one tries. I had so many people supporting me, when I became a candidate. I realised, I could do this, without the support of my husband. I was subjected to extreme violence in 2000. Then I decided to file for divorce.

Yasemin emphasised several times that she needed to “discover” that she could do things alone, that she could stand on her two own feet without her family or her husband. She also noted that through challenging her husband, she gradually started to demand that her efforts in paid and unpaid work be recognised, in other words, she demanded more “visibility” in household decision-making. Eventually, she stated that she acquired a say on how the money was going to be spent and that she could make the decision with respect to her employers, hours and wages without consulting her husband. But because these were gained as a result of her long resistance and long spells of domestic violence, breaking her relationship appeared to be the only option for her.

Economic freedom, a reliable support network and a socially acceptable reason for breaking the relationships were counted as the necessary enabling factors of resistance. Lack of one of these factors pushed women back into “adapting” to or “compliance” with their circumstances. Ayten, a 34-year-old informal worker in a wedding organisation company, for instance, explained why her attempt to “burn all the bridges” ended up being “unsuccessful”:

I had a very good job, working at a wedding organisation company in the affluent neighbourhoods of Istanbul. For the kind of people who have money and education, classy people. I was making such good money, too. My husband is a street vendor (*pazarci*) in

local markets. I was making much much more than him. I got my training, a driving licence and experience in the business. Soon we started to have problems in our marriage. I went to my parents' house and told them I wanted a divorce. They asked me, why? I told them he was not able to provide for the family, and he did not try hard enough like me. I told them I could give my son a much better future on my own. They asked me: What do you need to put your relationship in order? I told them, a house, thinking that they would agree with me that he would not be able buy a house. I did not expect them to buy a house for us, so that's what I said. But when they bought us a house, and told me "not to break off my nest" (*yuvanı bozma*), there was not much I could do... Soon, I was pregnant with the second child.

Ayten explained that divorce was not possible anymore because it would no longer be socially acceptable for her to leave, especially after having the second child. But she noted that, because she considered divorce as an option previously and actually acted on it, she taught her husband "a lesson", that, she could consider it again, if he failed to fulfil his role as a husband and a father. She also noted that once her second child was one year old, she planned to start working again and "This time, he (her husband) cannot say much about it". Hence, unlike the "invisible" strategies for getting around certain constraints, for women who have shown active resistance, even if they did not break their relationships in the end, they ultimately succeeded in making their situation "visible"; their families became aware of the oppressing conditions and that they were not willing to abide by them. They made it clear that for the relationship to work, serious adjustments should be made.

For single women, breaking away from their family was stated to be near-impossible, given the lack of any other reliable support network and the possible risk of social isolation. Despite these concerns, three single women in my sample attempted to run away from their families "to prove a point". Derin, a 17-year-old garment worker, for instance, ran away from home after being forced to attend a school she did not want to. However, this resistance was short-lived:

I ran away with my friends. We hung out all night. But when the morning came, some of my friends went to work, some of them to school. When I was left there all alone, I realised there was not much I could do on my own, but go back home. So I did.

Derin explained that living alone as a single woman was not sustainable in the long run, given the society's prejudice against women living alone. She also added that for her part, she "taught a lesson" to her parents, and that "should have been sufficient for them to stop forcing her into things" she did not want to do. The same point was shared by Siyabend, a 24-year-old garment worker discussed earlier, whose parents and brothers, but mother in particular, exerted great oppression on her wearing the headscarf and limited her mobility outside the household. She left behind a letter to her brother, in which she stated that she sold her mother's cell phone for a bus ticket and she was not going to come back, if "they did not change their ways". In the evening, her family called her arrange a meeting, where they would "sit together and speak properly". She described this meeting as follows:

I came back home. I did not speak at all, only he (brother) spoke. He described what he had been through. Then I told him that I was overwhelmed with the pressure on me. They constantly show me someone else's daughter as an example. I told them I do not want to work for a while. But perhaps because of all the stress that day, I had a heart spasm. Since then I have had arrhythmia.

Siyabend stated that her health condition helped ease some of the work-related pressure on her, but it was her running away that really altered the pressure exerted on her life. When I interviewed her, Siyabend did not wear the headscarf and was able to decide where and how much to work. Hence, it can be argued that running away/the potential to run away helped some single women re-negotiate the constraints exerted on them by their families. However, because she ran away and resisted her family in wearing the headscarf, Siyabend told me that she became an "outcast" in her family circle, and added "nobody would even consider marrying me. I am off the [marriage] market."

For some women and their families, being shunned in their family and neighbourhood networks to such an extent was too great a risk, and all steps were taken to prevent it. So, through conversations with their families, a number of women reworked the "boundaries" of

what was considered appropriate for them. Unlike the previous examples of hidden and silent coping strategies of “invisibility” and “struggle”, however, these women engaged in open conversations with their families, and stressed that they could consider “exiting” their relationships as an option, if their circumstances did not change. They asked to have their unpaid and paid work recognised, to have a say in the family budget and how it is spent, to distribute some of the unpaid work among the members of the household, as well as to acquire a say in choosing their workplaces and work arrangements. This served to erode some of the agents of oppression on women and also attacked the general contention in the majority of the households that “if women resisted, the solution would be more oppression”. The stories of women who challenged their statuses in their families successfully were widespread in both of the neighbourhoods of this study and these stories were used by the more conventional women to undermine their oppressive family members from time to time. Aygül, a 37-year-old pieceworker, for instance told her husband who was against her employment, that:

As a woman, I have the right to decide whether I want to work or not. So, if I want to go out and get a job one day, you do not have any right to say much about it. If you try to do so, I have the right to divorce you, and again, you do not have any right to say much about it.

For the more conventional women, however, the stories of women who have shown overt acts of resistance were utilised to test the boundaries of what was considered acceptable for them, rather than actively challenging these borders. So, when Aygül’s husband became angry at her response and asked her where she gathered that “nonsense” from, she replied: “TV”, and did not prolong the argument. She also did not mention that she was now a frequent visitor to a leftist women’s association in their neighbourhood. She noted that:

He was sufficiently shocked by my response. He gathered that I was not gonna be easily suppressed any more (*Artık kolay lokma olmayacağımi anladi*).

In summary, though “visibility” is an overt resistance strategy, it is utilised in protest to the heightened control and oppression some women face. For many women, however, “burning the bridges”, that is breaking their relationships with their families, was not possible for various reasons, including economic freedom, existence of social support networks and the social acceptability of the reasons for breaking their relationships. But even when breaking the relationships was not possible or not desired, “teaching a lesson” emerged as an important strategy, in which women threatened with the breaking of a relationship and then negotiated their circumstances. These overt acts of resistance proved important for not only the women who engaged in them, but also for women in the neighbourhoods at large by making them question their own oppressive circumstances and challenging them.

#### **4.6. Discussion and Conclusion**

Despite an emerging school of thought that views informal employment as a process through which women actively seek opportunities to improve their circumstances, much of the literature on women and work presents a one-dimensional perspective of the exploitative aspects of informal employment, in which their efforts remain invisible, unrecognised and unvalued, and the agents of their patriarchal and familial oppression unchallenged. This chapter has argued that women often felt both stressed and constrained by their traditionally ascribed roles as mothers and wives (and abiding daughters), and the undervaluation of their efforts for both paid and unpaid work. Subsequently, I have argued that women utilised invisibility, along with the *flexibility* of their informal work arrangements, as a strategy for reshaping the constraints they faced. I used the Invisibility-Struggle-Visibility framework to show the differences in women’s strategies, and noted that depending on the level of patriarchal domination and household duties, women utilised these strategies to access the labour market. However, the chapter also noted the contextuality of these three forms of

resistance. The majority of these strategies did not reveal overt acts of resistance, or did not aim to alter women's given circumstances radically. In other words, the majority of women demonstrated coping strategies to "get by" or "get around" the specific constraints, through making their labour "invisible" to their families, or "struggling" to change their circumstances slowly. A small number of women, however, resorted to more overt acts of "resistance" on the grounds that the oppression they faced was "unbearable". The enabling factors for moving towards more overt acts of resistance were having a support network outside of immediate family and kin, some level of economic self-sufficiency through regular and stable employment in the informal sector and having experienced "standing on one's own two feet" without (or despite the lack of) male support.

As such, the chapter has moved beyond the perspective of taking informal employment, and invisibility in particular, as an *a priori* constraint for women, and instead demonstrated that invisibility, and informal employment's various characteristics such as its irregular and flexible nature were carefully exploited by women to gain flexibility not only in their economic activities, but also life in general. Most importantly, for many women informal employment was a process through which they acquired various skills and access to other social networks than their immediate family. However, given the small number of women who made "radical" changes to the familial and patriarchal constraints they faced, it can be argued that because much of women's strategies for survival composed of "invisible" ways of getting around the constraints they faced, the main acts of oppression were not directly challenged. Though the small changes women were able to introduce to their lives were important for improving their everyday circumstances, more structural [and institutional] changes are in fact necessary to eliminate the familial and patriarchal obstacles to women's gainful participation in the economic and social life.

## CHAPTER 5: THE QUESTION OF LABOUR MARKET

### *Women's Strategies for Survival in the Informal Sector*

#### **5.1. Introduction**

So many times I thought I was wronged. So many times. I do not have any bad in me, but everyone tried to harm me one way or the other. I understand he [the employer] is also feeding himself. Nobody gives anyone anything without a profit. Even the employer would not employ a person without knowing he will have a profit. So I pray to Allah that he gives us whatever is good for us. (Asuman, 39, home-based worker)

When I first started working here, I did not say a word to the employers because I really needed the job. But then things started to change, my workload increased. I am certain I am good at my job. For this reason, I laid my cards on the table. I told them I cannot work this much for this amount of money. He could have fired me at that moment, saying you have a job, be thankful for it. I took that risk. (...) This is because I was not aware of much of my rights before. Maybe X tells me about them, or I find out about them on the job through another worker. One way or another I learn my rights. But once I learn about them, I do everything to take them. (Elvin, 40, office helper)

Both of the quotations above present a kind of response women gave to their employment in the informal sector, albeit from very different standpoints. The first is from a home-based worker, commenting on how she “hoped” that in the future God would give her better employers who would not deceive her, and the second from an office helper who admits she does not know her rights very well, but once she learns about them she will seize all measures to take them.

This chapter investigates why women give different responses even when they face similar constraints/risks in the informal sector. The main argument of the chapter is that women's strategies for survival in the informal sector are shaped by their 1) autonomy in the employment relationship, 2) possibility of having direct contact with the employer/owner of production, 3) ease of replaceability as a worker. So women who have a high degree of autonomy in their jobs, greater contact with their employers and who are not easily replaceable workers in the workplace are more likely to choose confrontational strategies in

the labour market. It is then argued that though these strategies safeguard women against the more precarious and “dangerous” kinds of informal employment, they are far from providing social protection in the long run, for which legal and institutional steps should be taken.

The chapter is broadly divided into four sections. The first section details the fluid boundaries between formal and informal employment as a result of the ongoing informalisation of the formal economy through “non-standard work” arrangements, and then explores what “vulnerability” of employment means in the informal sector (Carr and Chen 2002; Temkin 2009). The second section explores the Turkish context and presents how a welfare system built on the principles of full-time formal employment is not responding to the needs of a largely informal female labour force. The third section presents women’s strategies for survival in the informal sector using the Invisibility-Struggle-Visibility framework. The fourth section presents a discussion of the findings and concludes.

## ***5.2. Bottom of the Value Chain: Non-Standard Work***

Across the world, labour is no longer a stable source of security (Standing 1999; Leonard 2000; Kabeer 2004; Carr and Chen 2004; Chen 2008). This is because “non-standard work” -irregular, non-contractual and casual employment- has become the norm for millions of low-income, low-skilled workers in both the Global North and South, regardless of the formal or informal work arrangements in place (Mingione 1983; Kabeer 2003; Pellissery and Walker 2007; Kantor 2009; Wood 2004).

Moreover, there is increasing acceptance that the differences between informal and formal employment have now become much more blurry, as a result of the continuing process of informalisation of the formal economy through the non-standard work arrangements (Carr and Chen 2002). This argument was supported by scholars who demonstrated the wide variety

of informal employment arrangements, some of which were not necessarily underpaid or exploitative in comparison to their formal counterparts; and some formal employment arrangements which were similar to informal employment in terms of payment and work conditions (Williams 2008; 2012; Williams and Martinez 2014; Cichocki and Tyrowicz 2010). Accordingly, it was argued that the labour market was fractured along a number of lines, including sector, skills, educational attainment, and gender (Chen 2005), and it was those at the “bottom of the value chain” that would face a wider range of uncertainties and risks (Chen 2014). Since it was mostly women who ended up in the bottom rungs of the employment hierarchy, they faced a higher risk of poverty (Vanek et al. 2014).

Recently, the probability of falling into or deeper into poverty due to an exposure to these uncertainties (e.g. external economic, familial and other risks<sup>33</sup>) has come to be referred to as *vulnerability* (Chambers 1988; Chambers 2006; Moser and McIlwaine 1997; Holzmann and Jorgensen 1999; Kantor and Nair 2003; Rakodi 2002). As Lund and Skinner (1999) explained, vulnerabilities are the risks which not only adversely affect the income flow of the worker, but also simultaneously raise expenditure on her lowered income (31).

Nevertheless, several scholars also pointed out informality-specific risks. Temkin (2009) emphasised that the consequences of working informally went far beyond income dimensions of poverty, because informal employment also violated certain human rights principles, and led to social exclusion. For example, lack of access to formal social protection services<sup>34</sup> in spite of facing greater exposure to work-related contingencies (e.g. work accidents, dangerous

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<sup>33</sup> Hereby, risk is defined as uncertainty of outcomes or probability of loss (Siegel and Alwang 1999) to include a range of factors including the source of risk, household characteristics, individual status in the family but especially employment-related risks (Lund and Skinner 1999).

<sup>34</sup> I remain conscious of the broad use of the term “social protection” in the literature to include both the formal and informal social insurance mechanisms in place. However, because protection may also include small social funds, schemes and broader promotional and preventative measures introduced by local municipalities, religious and other charitable organisations as different *insurance* mechanisms than the informal social protection mechanisms in place provided by the family, or kin, it is a better fit for the Turkish context.

or hazardous work environments, unlawful dismissals, employer abuse, non-payment of wages, gender discrimination in the workplace) was argued to put workers in a particularly vulnerable position (Rakodi 2002; Dannecker 2002; Canagarajah and Sethuraman 2001; Kabeer 2004; Carr and Chen 2004; Nelson and De Bruijn 2005; Brown 2010; Johnston-Anumonwo and Doane 2011). Taking these points into consideration, Wood and Gough (2006) coined the term “informal security regimes” to

...describe institutional arrangements where people rely heavily upon community and family relationships to meet their security needs to greatly varying degrees. These relationships are usually hierarchical and asymmetrical. This results in problematic inclusion or adverse incorporation, whereby poorer people trade some short-term security in return for longer-term vulnerability and dependence (1699).

The concept of informal security regimes highlights the inability of the poor to turn to formal institutions to access social protection, and subsequently how the relationships in the family and community take central roles for delivering security (Kantor and Nair 2003, 164). Nevertheless, Gonzalez de la Rocha (2001b) argued that although both informal and formal institutions might provide social protection, they provided different substantive goods and services. She noted that while a poor family might receive food from relatives and friends when in need, it was highly unlikely for relatives to be able to provide specialised medical care (Ibid). In the context of the informal labour market, Hale (1996) argued that informal security regimes would not be able to resolve disputes with the employers or contractors.

In sum, despite the similarities between informal and formal employment in terms of “non-standard work” arrangements, informal employment presents a higher likelihood of vulnerability, given its work-related contingencies and lack of social security coverage. This led to the understanding that workers would depend on their social ties for protection against the various risks they faced even though such protection mechanisms are unlikely to provide long-term protection.

### 5.3. *The Turkish Context: The Legacy of Inegalitarian Corporatism*

The social protection system in the Ottoman Empire was founded upon charitable organisations and good-will of the citizens. In this sense, the Turkish Republic did not inherit a developed welfare state structure from the Ottoman Empire (Makal 1999). In the early years of the Turkish Republic, the new Constitution of 1924 established the foundation for the future development of the concepts of citizenship, benefits, and state's responsibility to oversee its citizens (Buğra 2007). Between 1936 and 1946, first steps were taken to institutionalise a social protection system, as it was laid out in the first Labour Code of 1936. This period was a fertile ground for initiating an organised social protection system in the country, because as a result of the state-led policies for industrialisation, the number of registered workers had increased and legal barriers to unionisation were [somewhat] lifted (Gökbayrak 2010). Between 1946 and 1950, various laws gradually began to grant social protection to citizens, mostly based on their employment status<sup>35</sup>.

In this period, however, there was little tolerance for ideas about class and labour movements, such as lockouts or strikes, were severely limited. These rights would only be granted after the *coup d'état* of 1960, which introduced a more progressive Constitution in 1961. Crucially, this new constitution stated that the Turkish state was a welfare state, and accordingly all citizens had the right to unionise, strike, collective-bargaining (Buğra 2007). It was within this heyday period of 1960 to 1980 that the two main social security institutions emerged: "Social Security Organisation" (*Sosyal Sigortalar Kurumu- SSK*) for wage earners and "Pensioner's Fund" (*Emekli Sandığı*) for civil servants and military personnel. Another fund was introduced ten years later for the Self-Employed, Artisans and Independent Workers (*Esnaf, Sanatkarlar ve*

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<sup>35</sup> For instance, in 1946, Article 4772 of the Labour Code granted protection against work accidents and occupational diseases; in 1949, Article 5417 ensured working persons against old-age and in 1950, Article 6900 established protection against disability and death as a result of employment (Gökbayrak 2010, 145).

*Bağımsız Çalışanlar Kurumu- Bağ-Kur*). All three of these social security institutions, however, were established on the idea that social protection would be granted to only those in full-time and formal employment [and their dependent family members]<sup>36</sup>.

For those outside of the labour market, without any family members whom they could depend on, additional offices were established for providing welfare. For instance, in 1976, those above the age of 65 were granted a right to seek poor relief [means-tested], in 1986; this benefit was expanded to all those in poverty [means-tested]; in 1983 a charitable fund was established for orphan children, and in 1992, the “Green Card” scheme was introduced for citizens in extreme poverty- those whose monthly income was less than one third of the national minimum wage<sup>37</sup>(Gökbayrak 2010).

After the 1980 coup, the Turkish state changed its orientation from welfare to market in line with the global economic restructuring. The financial liberalisation policies guided by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, under the close supervision of then Finance Minister, Turgut Özal, replaced the Import Substitution and State-led Industrialisation Policies of the pre-1980 period with export-orientation<sup>38</sup>. This policy shift entailed that the Turkish Lira would be devalued, and the fixed exchange currency rate abolished. At the same time, price control on agricultural and industrial production was eliminated, and a more flexible tax

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<sup>36</sup> These three insurance schemes were the main provider of social security until 2006, when they were all combined under the roof of “the Social Security Organisation” (*Sosyal Güvenlik Kurumu- SGK*).

<sup>37</sup> The Green Card Scheme was abolished in 2012.

<sup>38</sup> The Turkish economic development is in many ways similar to those of Latin American countries, which started with import substitution and then replaced with export-production and finally liberalisation. Escobar-Latapi’s analysis of the shift from formal employment into informal employment in Mexico during the 1980s and 1990s demonstrate that women and youths constituted the majority of those who had no option but informal jobs or self-employment, as a result of not only dropping household incomes but also more personal constraints such as level of education, marital status and age (Latapi and de la Rocha 1995, 72). Gonzalez de la Rocha (2007) argued that formal employment in manufacturing turned to younger married men and women with limited educational qualifications as they were more willing to work for lower wages, and informality rose especially with respect to female unpaid family workers. Although no similar data exists for Turkey, it is fair to assume that urban informalisation took place particularly in the 1980s and 1990s in Turkey throughout the export-production and market liberalisation.

system was introduced to turn the Turkish economy into a free market economy (Sayan 1992). It was in this period that “flexibility” of the labour market became a political mantra (Özdemir, Yücesan-Özdemir, and Erel 2004), and the jobs on offer became progressively non-standard (Altuğ 1994; Ilgın 1999). In other words, “easy fire and easy hire” policies replaced long-term job security in line with the increasing demands to remain competitive and adapt to the global shift from fordist to post-fordist production (Yavuz 1997). This new production scheme entailed that the number of core workers would be gradually decreased, and the labour demand would be sustained through having a “numerical flexibility” of unprotected workers who would be subcontracted via smaller production establishments when needed (Hacer Ansal 1997; Altug, Filiztekin, and Pamuk 2008). This comprehensive package of reforms helped Turkey become more economically competitive as a result of which export-rates and foreign investment in the country increased (Dedeoğlu 2013).

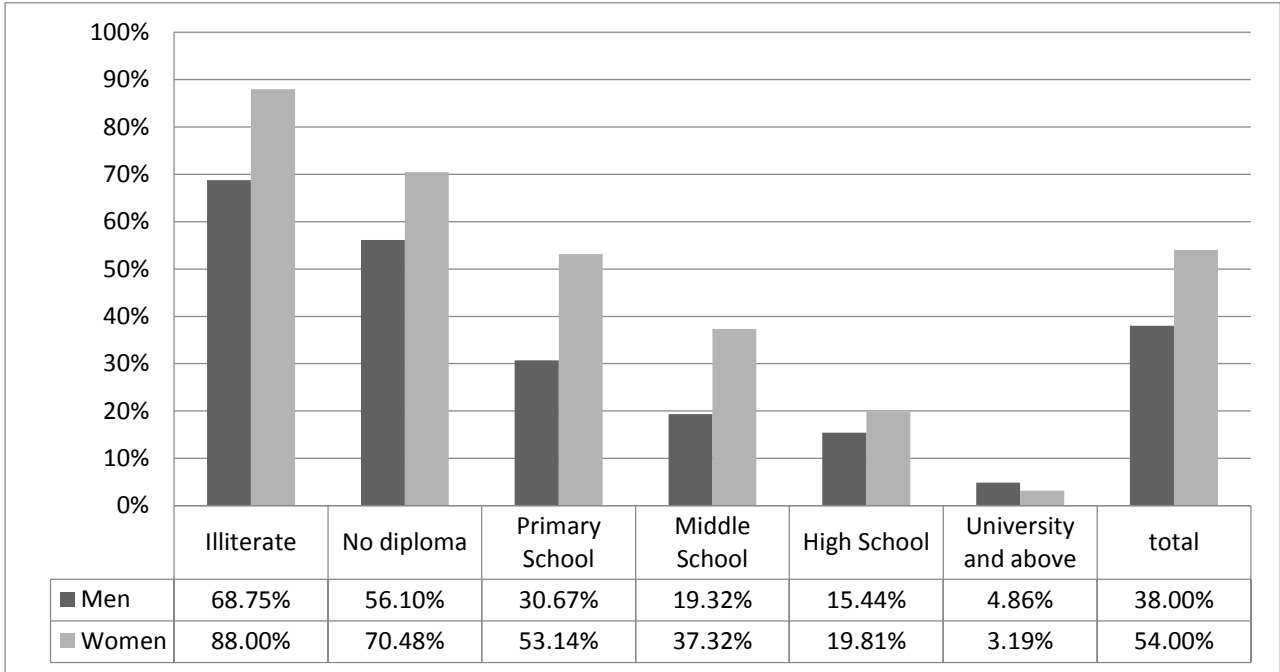
Several authors writing on the emergence of informal employment in Turkey demonstrated a strong link between retaining competitiveness in export orientation and rising informal employment rates, as the former often entailed cutting back on the costs of social security premiums of the workers, or workplace standards (Ilkkaracan and Tunalı 2010b; Onaran and Aydınler-Avşar 2006; Ilkkaracan 2012; Ilkkaracan and Selim 2003; Selim and Ilkkaracan 2002). Also the insecurities and risks in the global market were transferred to the workers through non-standard work arrangements (Karadeniz 2011). As a consequence workers were not able to retain long-term employment that guaranteed a stable income (Kapar 2007).

As discussed in Chapter 2, women’s informal work in Turkey is rarely visible in official statistics. This makes it difficult to trace back the informalisation of the female labour force, which until 1980s was largely employed in the agricultural sector (Ilkkaracan 2012). Nevertheless, a high rate of informalisation is predicted with economic liberalisation and the flexibilisation of the

labour force (World Bank 2009a; Başlevent and Onaran 2004; Karakoyun 2007; Ilkcaracan and Tunalı 2010b). This is because women workers are more easily hired and fired (Temiz 2004) and they accept lower levels of pay than men (Sapançalı 2005) [owing to the fact that they are not seen as the primary breadwinners in the family].

Despite the fact that labour no longer seems to constitute a stable source of income and security, all social security institutions in Turkey are still tied to occupational contributions. Ağartan (2008) hence defined the Turkish welfare system as “inegalitarian corporatist” because a large portion of the population remains excluded from the formal social security benefits (see also, Buğra and Keyder 2006; Elveren 2008; Buğra and Adar 2008; Buğra and Candaş 2011). As illustrated in Figure 5.1, informal employment is heavily stratified by education, and low-educated women (and men) face a particular risk of vulnerability, as they are deprived of public health, pension and childcare benefits.

Figure 5.1 Informal Employment by Education



Source: TURKSTAT Household Labour Force Survey 2013, Calculations are based on urban rates of informal employment.

Moreover, there seems to be a strong correlation between poverty and non-standard work. Individuals may end up in poverty as a result of their non-standard work arrangements, but can also enter non-standard work due to poverty (Temiz 2004, 66). A reflection of this correlation can be found in the study of Karadeniz (2011) who demonstrated that 78.9 per cent of women (67.5 per cent for men) employed in non-agricultural and non-standard work arrangements are earning less than the minimum wage (94). The author also noted that 82.8 per cent of women in part-time employment earned less than the minimum wage (76.5 per cent for men) (95). As noted earlier, the minimum wage in Turkey is calculated to correspond to only 28 per cent of the living wage (Clean Clothes Campaign 2014). This means that women working in non-standard work arrangements would not be able to survive on their own.

The AKP government has started to acknowledge female informal employment in Turkey in the past few years, as a result of both international pressure (especially after becoming a candidate member to the EU) and financial pressure to retrieve the potentially lost taxes for the state. For instance, in 2011, the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced that his government was aware of the scale of informality in the textile sector, in which only 350-400 thousand workers out of the 2 million workers were employed formally (Yeni Şafak 2011). In other words, Mr. Erdoğan noted that 80 per cent of those working in the textile sector were working informally without any access to social protection. The PM then went on to denounce employers for allowing informal employment in their enterprises, calling informal employment “exploitation”. Later in the same year, an updated strategic action plan was launched to tackle the informality problem in Turkey (update from 2008-2010 Fight against Informality Strategic Action Plan). Such a special government effort to tackle informality could be regarded as the first of its kind in the Turkish history since it indicated an active

responsibility of the state to protect its citizens against the vulnerabilities of informal employment.

Notwithstanding, there have been relatively few attempts to legally recognise the traditionally “female” types of informal employment, such as home-based or domestic work. For example, Turkey has not ratified any of the Home-Based Workers’ or Domestic Workers’ Conventions of the ILO. This is despite the fact that in 2003, the AKP government passed various laws granting flexible work arrangements, including working from home and remote working as alternative employment arrangements to be utilised by employers (mostly women) (Labour Code Article 4857). It was announced that flexible work arrangements would “ease women’s entry into the labour market” and increase female employment (Turkish Ministry of Finance 2013). In the same paper, the situation of home-based and domestic workers was not discussed.

Currently, the Social Security and General Health Security Law (Article 5510) establishes that those in non-standard work arrangements can seek social security. However, despite the legal possibility, for poor workers of the informal sector, this remains a practical impossibility. This is because the law requires those in non-standard work arrangements to cover the social security payments for the days they were not employed. To illustrate, a domestic worker who is employed for five days a month is required to pay the social security premiums of the remaining 25 days of work to be entitled to benefits. Also, there is the added discrimination that, although the social contributions of full-time workers are calculated based on 5 working days a week, therefore 22 days a month, for those in non-standard work arrangements, the social premiums are required to be paid in full for 30 days. Thus, the law indirectly hinders women’s possibility to access formal social security services.

The AKP government has taken a slow turn to provide some benefits to those who have been excluded from the contributory social security scheme either due to unemployment, death of a family member [widowed women who were previously dependents of their husbands] or destitution. Nevertheless, as (Buğra and Keyder 2006, 213) stated, these reforms have been “an amalgam of neo-liberalism with social conservatism”, with the government policies emphasising Islamic values and a return to the idea of the family as a cushion for economic and social contingencies. The recent policy reforms [discussed in the previous Chapter] which provided women to seek financial compensation if they are the full-time caretakers of their disabled or ill children [or relatives], can be seen as a reflection of this return to the idea of family acting as a cushion for social and other contingencies.

In the absence of formal social protection mechanisms in place, the risks of poverty and social exclusion are attempted to be dealt with voluntary initiatives<sup>39</sup>, especially NGOs acting on the discourse of Islamic philanthropy (Buğra and Keyder 2006; Buğra and Candaş 2011). Several poverty relief funds have been established at the local level, most of which are run by municipalities or other government agencies (Metin 2011a).

One such voluntary initiative has been led by the Municipality of Ankara (governed by the AKP), distributing a variety of foods, cleaning equipment, coal and clothes for the poor (Metin 2011b). However, as (Yıldırım 2009) recently demonstrated, such initiatives come at a price, as they require involvement and participation in various clientelistic networks, and those outside of such networks are not able to seek these “help packages”. In other words,

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<sup>39</sup> It is important to differentiate the clientelistic social protection mechanisms from those discussed by Ferrera (1997) in the South European context, related to the generous granting of means-tested old age and disability benefits as part of a broader electoral campaign. Two reasons have been specified for this difference; 1) historically, such benefits have not been important in the Turkish social security system; 2) in the Turkish context, agricultural subsidies and support policies shaped the electoral politics in the rural areas, and in urban areas, informal access to public land or land without proper building permits (Buğra and Adar 2008).

conformity to the party practices and ideology is required in order to qualify for these packages.

Nevertheless, so far these initiatives have not provided any protection against work-related contingencies. For instance both of the municipalities discussed in this chapter, Kağıthane and Esenyurt, were governed by the AKP, and they both had a series of “help packages” for those in need. In these packages everyday food and cleaning supplies were included, as was coal for the winter months. There were also more expensive assistance schemes, for instance free in-vitro fertilisation treatment for married couples who cannot have children. Nevertheless, although both neighbourhoods had large populations of informal workers, there were no initiatives to provide social protection against the usual contingencies of informal employment, such as non-payment or work accidents.

In sum, the Turkish social welfare system follows a corporatist model, and provides benefits only for those in full-time and formal employment. Considering that female labour force remains largely informal, it can be argued that the current welfare structure is not responding to the needs of women informal workers. The current “voluntary” initiatives aim to provide social protection for those outside of the employment relationship, however they rarely provide protection against work-related contingencies.

#### *5.4. Vulnerability of Informal Employment for Women Workers*

As discussed in earlier chapters, recent scholarship on Turkish women in informal employment pointed out that women entered the informal sector as a result of a structural shift from an agricultural economy to an industrial/service economy, which pushed women who were employed as waged-workers or unpaid family workers in agriculture to become “housewives” once they migrated to urban centres, as a result of the educational stratification of the urban labour market (Ozar and Gunluk-Senesen 1998; Dayioglu 2000; Pancaroğlu 2006). It was also

added that lack of affordable and quality care services hindered women's participation in the labour market (Dayioglu 2000; Ecevit 2007).

In addition, women in my study noted that they could not participate in the formal labour market even if they wanted to. These women enumerated a mix of demographic factors, such as educational levels, age barriers and the neighbourhood in which they lived in, but also labour market factors, such as discrimination based on ethnicity, religion and marital status as constraining their access to the formal labour market. Istanbul's labour market was suggested to heavily favour those women with at least high school qualifications, young, unmarried and without children, also of Turkish ethnicity and Sunni Muslim. Those not fitting these criteria were pushed into the different segments of the informal employment hierarchy, depending on how close or far they were from fulfilling these criteria.

I met Binnaz, a 32-year old unemployed woman, in front of the Esenyurt Labour Agency (ISKUR). She told me that because she was Alevi and uncovered, the employers never got back to her after the initial interview. In another interview, Sevcan, a 30-year old subcontracted cleaning worker in a private school told me that her employment required her to uncover her hair, and this was a precondition for her to continue her employment. In yet another case, Nedret, a 33-year old Roma woman told me she faced multiple barriers to entering the formal sector. Pointing to her *shalwar*, she stated everyone could see that she is Roma, and "on top of that" because she was completely illiterate, she would not even bother to look for work.

Although these stories reflect different forms of discrimination in the labour market, the common theme existing in all women's accounts was that formal employment per se was the ideal form of employment but given the discriminations they faced, informal employment emerged as the only option. In other words, women noted that informal employment was "better than no employment" though it was also not ideal due to its many risks. Considering

Kabeer's (2002b) “power to choose” argument discussed earlier in Chapter 2, one can infer that low-income women in Istanbul’s labour market had severe constraints on their entry to the labour market, and these constraints channelled them into the informal sector not as a result of their personal choice, but as a result of structural factors.

In order to understand vulnerability of informal employment, I studied three main groups of women: home-based workers, domestic/service workers and manufacturing workers. I have de-segmented these workers into further nine categories to detail the differences and similarities between the vulnerabilities of their employment. Table 5.1 presents the comparison of the difference segments of informal employment discussed in this chapter based on the most common “risks” of informal employment mentioned by women workers.

Table 5.1 Vulnerabilities of Informal Employment by Sector

	Service Sector					Manufacturing Sector				
	workers domestic employer single	workers domestic employer multiple	workers domestic live-in	workers cleaning contracted	Sub labourers	casual day helpers	workers other	machinists	workers home-based	
non-payment		*		*		*	*	*	*	
irregularity of work		*		*	*	*	*	*	*	
low-pay	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	
No access to health care	*	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	
worker abuse	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	
sexual harassment			*			*	*	*		
work-related illnesses	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	
work accidents	*	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	

Source: Author’s interview data. <sup>1</sup> Other Workers include: Operators, Quality Inspectors, Ironing, Folder/Finishers. The shaded boxes do not mean women engaged in this type of work do not face the particular risk, but just that in comparison to other women, they express that it is less likely in their job.

The table demonstrates that women in informal employment face similar risks, even when they are engaged in the different segments of the informal sector. The table also shows that some segments of the informal sector are more “risky” in comparison to others. In the next section, I will give an account of women’s strategies for survival in the informal sector to “get by” or overcome some of these risks in the informal sector. The main argument of this chapter

is that women's strategies are heavily influenced by their 1) autonomy in the employment relationship, 2) possibility of having direct contact with the employer/owner of production, 3) ease of replaceability as a worker.

#### 5.4.1. Invisibility

##### 5.4.1.1. *"God willing, we will have whatever is good for us": Home-based workers*

Yasin Durak's (2011) recent study on the poor manufacturing workers in Central Anatolia investigated the role of religion in accepting or not resisting vulnerable employment. In his book, one of the respondents was quoted: "All is from Allah... He tests the employer with wealth. That's his test, and this is mine, poverty." Durak called this acceptance, *tevekkül*, or in other words, trusting that God will arrange things for the best. This was a common response in the peripheries of Istanbul as well. Women who were particularly discouraged in the labour market believed their future was in God's hands (*Allahlık*) and that only God could change their situation.

Home-based work is considered to be the bottom segment of the global commodity chains, satisfying the need of local producers and exporters to minimise their labour costs and maximise their profit in a world of fierce global competition and a constant "race to the bottom" of production prices (Gereffi 1994; Benería 2001). This often entails that home-based work is the most poorly paid segment of the informal sector (Chen 2008) with employment heavily depending on the fluctuations in export demands (Peck 1992). The case of women's home-based work in the peripheries of Istanbul illustrated a wide variety of activities across various manufacturing sectors. For instance, in the food production sector, picking fruits, or packing and labelling end products were subcontracted to home-based workers in nearby neighbourhoods. Similarly, in the garment sector, embroidery, thread cleaning, and quality control were heavily subcontracted. As one reporter from a leftist magazine, *Ekmek ve Gül*,

told me, in Bağcılar a factory employed 1000 men as workers, but outside of the factory 3000 women were employed as home-based workers.

It comes as no surprise that for women who faced extreme levels of poverty and patriarchal constraints to their working, the main concern was to make ends meet at the end of the day in a way that would not challenge their household dynamics; all other concerns, such as social protection or work security, were secondary. For these women, any employment was better than no employment, and any amount of income was better than no income. Accordingly, their strategies in the informal sector were built around the principle of not losing their job whilst at the same time being able to hide their employment physically or discursively from their male kin. Essentially this interaction between women's patriarchal constraints to their labour and compliance with these constraints pushed them to also comply with being invisible in the labour market.

Home-based workers often mentioned they were in God's hands, as there was simply nothing to protect their employment. Withholding payment was common, and low pay was standard. For example, in 2012, packing 100 chewing gum boxes paid 1.5 Lira (0.4 GBP), or wrapping 1000 small toys for chocolate eggs paid 4 Lira (1.30 GBP). Such jobs usually amounted to 10-12 hours of women's time, and yet the payment they received was barely enough for buying a loaf of bread. Because home-based work was so poorly paid, only those women who were in dire need of extra income accepted it. One such woman was Sacide, a 20-year old home-based worker. Sacide had recently moved to Esenyurt from Batman, a city in the south-eastern part of Turkey, and was having trouble adapting to the big city environment. Her husband was working as a casual day labourer in construction sites, but their income was uncertain and they had trouble paying the rent. In addition, she had a 6-month old baby who needed care. Sacide told me that whenever they delivered home-based work to their street, she would take

it, and do it at her own pace and time. She stated that “it is probably not worth it”, but she was still thankful to God for it (*Allah buna da razı olsun*).

Having no direct relationship with the employer/owner of production, women usually had limited/no bargaining power over the piece rate, work completion deadlines or the number of pieces they could get each time from the contactors<sup>40</sup>. Realisation of the given situation and the perceived difficulty of changing it led some women who were relatively more mobile to take the initiative and arrange the conditions of work with the factories. These women were called “the intermediary women” (*aracı kadınlar*) and they would negotiate and make concessions with the factories on piece rates in return for assured quality-checks of the final products. These women, however, often charged home-based workers for their service, pushing them into a tough choice between having a local intermediary between the factories and earning even less, but with some kind of security of payment in the future, and continuing with the factory deliveries with the usual rate, albeit at the risk of non-payment.

Doing piecework on demand was the most sought after kind of home-based work. Even women who were usually not engaged in other kinds of home-based work stated that “when the opportunity arises”, they would consider it. However, opportunities were scarce as there was little demand for the results of such work. Piecework on demand would be sewing, knitting, embroidery, needle work or loofah-making for middle and upper-middle class women living in the nearby neighbourhoods. Women usually heard about these jobs through their social networks, and found them relatively more secure, since “if you do the job well, you get paid” (see also Atasü Topçuoğlu 2005). Nevertheless, many women noted that with cheap textiles available in almost every shop, middle-class women started to demand lower

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<sup>40</sup> This would help women estimate how much they would be making each time they took in home-based work from the delivery van.

prices than the shops, making such work “no longer worth it.” For instance, Seyhan, a 36 year-old home-based worker, knitted loofahs for the local women in Esenyurt. She noted that with industrially produced bath sponges being available for 1 lira (0.3 GBP) in every shop, there was now very little demand for her handmade loofahs, whose production cost to Seyhan was 5 lira (1.4 GBP), excluding her labour. As a result of little demand for her loofahs, Seyhan made an agreement with a local shop which sold her loofahs as “100% handmade, 100% cotton” for customers interested in specialty products. The problem, however, was that for every loofah sold, Seyhan was paid 6 lira (1.7 GBP) (1 lira for her labour), when the shop actually sold them for 15 (4.20 GBP). In Seyhan’s case, her deal with the shop provided some protection against the risks of her employment: some kind of a customer base, some regularity of employment; and some payment security. But just like in the previous cases of intermediaries, the cost of having this protection was high, and her labour was undervalued.

Lastly, it is important to note that the demand for subcontracted home-based work has started to decrease with the emergence of casual day labour. For instance, in Kağıthane, the old periphery, home-based work was rather scarce in comparison to Esenyurt. In the newer peripheries where the factories have been located to (such as Çerkezköy, Çorlu, etc.) home-based work was especially common among women. Moreover, factories have now started to prefer to subcontract work in their own workplaces as it ensures quality and time control. While some women adapted to this change and expressed that they would “go to the factories, whenever they could”, other women with mobility, literacy and care constraints mentioned that the emergence of casual day labour might put an end to the home-based work in their neighbourhoods, and might make it more difficult to make ends meet in the future. These women noted that their fate was in God’s hands (*Allah’a emanet*), more than ever,

suggesting further that *tevekkül* would continue to shape their responses to this labour market vulnerability.

#### 5.4.1.2. “So that I have an Occupation”: Low-skilled workers in the Manufacturing Sector

In Turkey, the manufacturing sector is heavily stratified by experience in the industry, hence investing time and energy to gain skills is central to improving one’s employment status. On the factory floor, machinists (*makinacı*) had the highest status, helpers (*ortacı*) the lowest; with ironing and folder/finishers (*ütü-paket*) and quality inspectors (*kalite kontrol*) in between. All women workers in the manufacturing sector started as helpers, then transferred to other positions depending on their experience and skills.

The high status of machinists entailed that these positions were the most sought after, and paid the most. On the shop floor, they also had significantly more bargaining power than other workers. As Eylül, a 22-year-old machinist, who was working in the garment sector for over 10 years, stated:

If you’re a machinist, you are okay. You can choose where to work, how long to work. You have the command on the shop floor.

Eylül then added that the helper period was a painful but temporary process until one became a skilled machinist. In other words, in order to have an occupation in the manufacturing sector, one had to suffer through it. Because all other positions on the job floor could easily be replaced by other unskilled workers, they were not considered to be occupations per se.

In fact, this “suffering through” one’s employment until it became an occupation was common among all sectors which required a certain level of training. For instance, Devrim, a 28-year old hairdresser told me that when she first started as an apprentice in a hair salon in Avclar she was required to work 15 hours a day, for 7 days a week, yet she did not receive any payment. She also noted that she was constantly bullied and humiliated by her employer.

Devrim stated that she bore with her employer until she acquired the necessary occupational skills to switch workplaces and introduce herself as a fully-qualified hairdresser.

Consequently some women kept their voices down strategically in the informal sector in order to learn the trade, acquire skills and understand the inner workings of the informal labour market in general in order to access jobs with better conditions in the future. In this period of “apprenticeship”, which was especially common in the manufacturing sector, women hoped that their “invisibility” would pay off in the future, that it was a temporary process one would need to “suffer through”. In this regard, this group of women were actually categorically different than women who just accepted their position in the labour market as “God Given” and showed *tevekkül* in their internalisation. Instead, women in this group were aware of the vulnerabilities and had active desires to change their status, however they were aware that they needed to strengthen their position in the labour market, and this would be possible only through becoming skilled workers who would offer specific skills and hence become less replaceable.

5.4.1.3. *“Weighing the costs, it is better than any other employment out there”:*

#### *Subcontracted cleaning work*

Since 1980s, it has not only been the manufacturing sector that has become highly flexible, subcontracted and outsourced in Turkey (Taşkıran 2011). The service sector has also been increasingly subcontracted to smaller, private agencies, called *taşeron*. In Istanbul, only a minority of cleaning workers remained full-time employees of enterprises, as cleaning services were increasingly subcontracted to *taşerons*. Sema, a 38-year old subcontracted cleaning worker was working with a *taşeron* in Kağıthane. She noted that she was working from 6am-12pm in a nearby shopping mall, and between 16pm-20pm in an office. Unlike many women in informal employment, she had some sort of a stable income and some health benefits from

her job. Nevertheless, although she worked more than full-time hours, she was paid part-time, and her benefits were calculated based on her part-time pay. Sema stated that her *taşeron* was giving the rest of her payment cash-in-hand. She noted that weighing the costs, it was better for her to work with a *taşeron*, because her job opportunities in the labour market were limited, and at least in this job, she had some sort of social and financial security.

Suzan, a 37-year old cleaning worker, however, questioned this social and financial security. She noted that *taşerons* were constantly going bankrupt, and when they did, they constantly needed to look for new jobs with new *taşerons*. She also noted that some *taşerons* cared more about their immediate profits than having a long-term existence, and this meant that their wages or premiums were not paid and then the *taşeron* declared bankruptcy. She told me that her strategy to “test” the *taşerons* was to check her online social security balances constantly, and switch employers if they delayed payments even for a day. She added that she realised this was not possible for many women workers who were not computer literate or did not have internet access. Although cash-in-hand was common across all sectors, in the manufacturing sector it was reported to be especially widespread. All workers were paid the same rate to their bank accounts, and the differences in payment due to different skill levels, overtime, etc. were paid in cash. This method enabled the employers to reduce the amount of social security premiums they had to pay for their workers, but also decreased their tax costs (see Standing 2011 for an overview of “pracarisation” of labour). This process, in a way, is blurring the imaginary boundaries between formal and informal sector, since even the registered workers did not receive full entitlement to health and pension benefits. It also meant that even the registered jobs had a certain element of informality about them.

Women who resorted to “*taşerons*” for seeking remedy against the vulnerabilities of informal employment were categorised along with other women who resorted to invisible strategies

because instead of questioning the risks they tried to avoid in the informal sector, they introduced another medium in order to navigate through these risks. However, as the participant Suzan has argued above, *taşeron*s themselves put women into new and unexpected forms of risk. Many women working with *taşeron*s instead of trying to avoid them, or start their own initiative to contract with employers, navigated between bad and good *taşeron*s. This has contributed to their “invisible” strategies which also rendered them invisible in the informal sector, as they were often very easily replaceable by *taşeron*s – as easily as they replaced the *taşeron*s they worked with for different subcontracting arrangements.

It can be argued that, women who mainly used “invisibility” as a strategy to get by the vulnerabilities of their employment gave priority to everyday survival to formal social security, even in cases where there were no formally employed members in their households through which they could access health care. Subsequently, when asked what women did during illness or poor health, many women responded by saying “We just don’t get sick” or “Not much we can do. So we try not to get sick.” Thereby, one might infer that social and economic security provided by the family constituted an essential tool for survival for such families. Using a relative’s ID for a medical examination or to buy medicine at the reduced rate was common practice. Nevertheless, it was mentioned that such “swaps” have become increasingly difficult with the hospitals starting to have computer-based data and personal identification systems, and doctors refusing to see them with a false ID-card, with pressure from the government against “improper exploitation of their authority.” Accordingly, borrowing money to buy medicine when a child was sick or using each other’s left-over medicine against common illnesses were widespread.

When illnesses or economic constraints lasted longer than usual<sup>41</sup>, women noted that, the family and kin might “turn their backs” on them, because “they realise you will not give it back” (reciprocate the favour). As 55-year-old home-based worker Mediha stated, such help was only given for short term:

They come over to help you once, perhaps twice. The third time you peek out from your door to look for their help, you see them closing their doors, pulling down their blinds.

Although some women noted that their kin would not be able to help them in the long run, due to their own limited resources, other women stated that their families, even if they are in a much better financial situation, would not help because: “they would think we would constantly ask for more.” Hence, weighing the evidence, it seems that although family and kin-relationships are seen as an essential survival tool against sudden shocks, they do not seem to provide support in the long run. It can be argued that the lack of social protection mechanisms which women could rely or fall back on constituted a barrier for them to seek more “visible” strategies for survival in the informal sector.

#### 5.4.2. Struggle

##### 5.4.2.1. *“Set your boundaries with the employer beforehand and [try to] stick to them”:*

###### *Domestic Workers*

Domestic workers differentiated between three work arrangements, 1) live-in employment with a single employer, 2) live-out employment with a single employer and 3) live-out employment with multiple employers. The difference between these employment arrangements determined women’s autonomy in the employment relationship, and ease of replaceability as a worker. As Gülseren, a 38-year old domestic worker put it:

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<sup>41</sup> Women gave different answers to what constitutes a “usual” period for illness or economic insecurity, ranging from a week to a season (four months). In general, however, a period longer than a month was described as “too long”.

When you go to a workplace only once a week, as you do when you have multiple employers, you have to finish all the tasks on that day. It is a harder job. Because you do the harder tasks, such as swiping the carpets, wiping the sofas, cleaning the windows, and so forth. If you are a regular, you can also leave on time, because you know what else has to be done, and you say you'll do them tomorrow. Also, the work is not that tiring, because you adjust it to your strength and time. You do not clean the windows, wipe the sofas and swipe the carpets every day after all, instead you do more detail work... you do stuff like laundry, cooking, washing up, ironing... If you are not a regular worker, you don't do these things, you do not cook, do not do food prep, you do not iron. In the multiple-employer work, the employer does not learn your style, your cooking, your way of tidiness. So if she does not like something, you are fired much more easily. She can find another domestic worker just like you anyway. But when you are a regular, you build a relationship, a relationship of trust. That is more difficult to find.

Nevertheless regular employment with a single employer did not always guarantee autonomy, or a stronger relationship with the employer. The most prominent example of this was live-in domestic work. As Nur, a 37-year old live-in domestic worker told me, live-in domestic work entailed being on duty literally 24/7, and anything and everything around the house was her work. Nur added that because she was in a direct relationship with the employer all the time, there was little room, if any, for negotiation about the work load, or even the order of doing things around the house. Hence, she considered to be a "deal with it, or leave it kind of job". Due to its heavy workload, live-in domestic workers were selected among women who had no family or other obligations. Nur explained this selection process:

They ask you about your marital status, and whether you have a boyfriend. They won't give you the job even if you just have a boyfriend. Because they want your life to be just work and nothing else.

Though it paid the highest rates, live-in domestic work was the least preferred employment, and it was also the most uncommon among Turkish women. This is because living in a stranger's house was not an option for most of them, primarily because of the male kin's opposition. Conservative patriarchal values, as discussed in the previous chapter, necessitated women to live under the close supervision of their family and kin. Women also believed that living in a stranger's house, even for work purposes, was "dangerous" and risky, since "anything could happen" in an unknown environment. While some women related the danger

of live-in employment to the possibility of sexual harassment, others indicated that it would not be appropriate for a “respectable” (*namuslu*) woman to live under the same roof with male strangers (employer’s husband or male family members), stressing the patriarchal constraints on their employment arrangements with their families. Consequently, many women associated live-in domestic work with immigrant women from ex-Soviet countries, expressing that with no other home to go to in Turkey, and a desperate need to send money to their children and families back home, live-in domestic work would be more appropriate for them, rather than Turkish women.

This is why the majority of the domestic workers I interviewed were live-out domestic workers, with single or multiple employers. These women noted that they often tried to set the boundaries with their employers before accepting a job, and tried to stick to these boundaries as much as they could. Gülseren, mentioned earlier, explained this point:

The work load starts to increase secretly in domestic work. As you begin to get to know one another, you build a relationship, a sister-like relationship. And she starts asking for favours. Can you cut that onion? Can you prepare the beans? And next time, I am very busy today, can you cook the beans? And all of a sudden, you realise that job (cooking) has become your job too...it has become part of your work... You are not able to say no after that point. Why can’t you say no? Because you are close now, you led her on to believe that you can do all of it in a day. So one should say no earlier on. Set limits as early as possible.

“Safe work” (*güvenilir iş/ sağlam iş*) was one of the most commonly recurring themes in all of my interviews. However, domestic workers stated that safe work entailed something else in their work, expressing that they felt socially and economically secure when their employment satisfied some or preferably all of the following conditions:

- no male presence at home during their work hours
- no interference with their style of cleaning or order of doing things
- no interference with their dressing style (including their veiling or non-veiling)
- no last-minute jobs
- no separate meals/cutlery/ bathroom for them
- no unexpected reduction in the agreed payment

- no changes to agreed work schedule or duties

In addition to these conditions, all domestic workers noted that they were “fed up with the cheap tactics” of employers to test whether they would steal anything from them. Putting money or expensive jewellery in a place the worker was bound to come across and then acting like they lost them was stated to be “the cheapest” of these tactics. Many domestic workers indicated that they were used to these tactics, but if an employer started to use them too frequently, that workplace would become “unsafe” for them, because as Yasemin, a 41-year old domestic worker of 16 years told me: “One day they might actually lose something and then blame you for stealing it”.

Women’s ability to negotiate their workload, payment, or pay raise was dependent on their “sister-like relationship” (*abla-kardeş ilişkisi*) with their employers. As Ozyegin (2001) argued in her study with domestic workers in Ankara, this sister-like relationship was highly fictitious and contingent, and more useful for employers in proving their middle-class status to their social networks, rather than for the domestic workers. In my study, Yasemin, a 41-year-old domestic worker of 16 years expressed this as follows:

That closeness is a sensitive matter, easily broken. Once something goes wrong, she (the employer) is no longer your sister, or anything else. She just goes back to being your boss.

This contingency significantly reduced domestic workers’ ability to resort to more visible forms of resistance. Instead, in Scott's (1990) terms, more “silent resistance” mechanisms which conveyed subtle messages to the employers about workers’ discontent or unhappiness with the job were used. In what Ogasawara (1998) called the “power of the powerless”, these symbolical messages hinted or dropped to the employers carried the information about women’s limits to how much work load they could handle as well as the kind of treatment they would call for. For instance, Yasemin explained her strategy for asking for a raise:

They see the money they give to you is too much, they think your labour is not worth it. I was telling her (the employer) to give me a raise, as it had been a year, but she had been saying "Your brother (the employer's husband) is having financial issues these days. It was New Year's time. She came back from shopping, her arms full of presents. She showed me the new pair of shoes she got for herself to wear at the New Year's Party. But the house is already full of shoes. It did not look like she cared much about those financial difficulties. This time I did not ask for a raise. I just mumbled out loud, as if just to myself, after seeing the price tag on the shoes she got: "I cannot buy these shoes even if I worked for three years!"

Yasemin's case shows the power of putting things in perspective for her employer. This strategy was used by many women in different contexts. One similar strategy was to ask the employer to calculate how much time she spent prepping and cooking food and then letting her make the calculation whether cooking could also be expected from them, given their already assigned tasks. A second one was related to the unexpected requests by the employers at the end of a work day, to clean one more thing, or to do one more task. In this situation, a majority of the women noted that "complaining would harm the relationship" and hence more subtle responses were adopted, such as telling the employer: "Your house is clean now, your food is cooked. Your children are fed and washed. I have another home to do all these in after this".

"Playing it to her (employer's) friends" was also stated as another form of silent resistance. Almost all domestic work is advertised informally and is usually found through the networks of the employers; e.g. her friends and family. When a domestic worker has had multiple employers from the same kin network, she acquires an advantage in being able to compare the work load, wages, and the employer's attitude towards her, and test their sister-like relationship. A small group of women noted that this "gives a good edge to get them all to the same standard level you like." In Öykü's case for instance, she convinced all her employers that she would leave at 4pm, bring her child to work, and she would choose the days of work (rather than vice versa). Some women, however, found this strategy very risky, in Gülseren's

words: “They are friends after all. You’d wake up one day to see that they are all together, and you’re out.”

It can be inferred that women’s *ex post* resistance to the constraints of their employment is rather limited. Hence, *ex ante* strategies to find the most “secure” employment emerged as the most desirable. Establishing a “trial” period with the worker, in this regard, was widespread. Fulden, a 40 year-old domestic worker, explained this strategy as:

The employer wants to try you out to see whether you’re good at your work. Well, I tend to try the employer to see whether she is a trustable person, whether she would give me my money on time. I do a few interviews, and then I am not new to this business after all. I understand from their faces, even before we speak. I look at the house, estimate the work load. I ask how many people live in the house. Now the mess left behind by 2 people is not the same as the one left by 4 people. But then these things also vary, that’s why I keep my trial longer than just one time. You see sometimes they are 4 people in the house, but create a mess for 6 people...Then you talk about the wage, and decide whether it is worth it.

Another strategy was to look for stable employment with a single employer, even if it might not provide full-time work, and pay less than working for several employers. Selin, a 41-year-old domestic worker, explained:

I worked in many houses, with many employers. When I was offered this job, though it pays much less compared to how much I used to earn, I took it. I work three days a week, and get 650 lira (205 GBP) a month. I am aware that I am too cheap for the market (*Ucuza gittiğimin farkındayım*). But at least my job gives me the option to be able to rest my feet, when I am tired. I can take a break whenever I need. That is why I feel alright. She tells me sometimes what to do in a day, but I do them according to how much she pays me (*verdiği para kadar*).

Selin had rheumatic problems with her legs, and she was not able to stand up for too long. She added that she was no longer able to do the “hard tasks” every day, as one would be required in work for multiple-employers, and hence working for a single worker gave her the option to “do the things at her own pace, with rests in between.” Other domestic workers also stressed that working for a single employer gave them the freedom to work as fast or as slowly they liked, and leave as early or late as they deemed necessary.

5.4.2.2. *“One should always be on the lookout for better opportunities, better conditions”*: Manufacturing workers

In response to the job and wage insecurity associated with informal employment in the manufacturing sector, the most common strategy was “always being on the lookout”. Accordingly, women workers visited various factories and ateliers and inquired about the workplaces through the current workers constantly, even when they were employed. These visits were to ensure that they were “not missing any opportunities”.

In addition to asking the current workers about their work conditions, women explained that they would compare the number of manned and unmanned machines (to test the productivity of the workplace), and would try to see their delivery vans (to test the amount of orders the workplace received) in an attempt to check whether the workplace would provide them with a stable employment and wage.

Many women also suggested that working for a kin provided wage and employment security in the manufacturing sector. In the peripheries of Istanbul, small family establishments were common, as labour-intensive parts of export production were usually subcontracted to small ateliers to cut labour costs (also see White 1994; Dedeoğlu 2008). As Ziyinet, a 28-year old machinist stated, “You know that, he (the employer) could not make you work for months and then run away if he is a kin. He feels obliged to pay.”

Nevertheless, other women pointed out that working in family establishments created its own risks. Siyabend, a 24-year-old machinist started at the age of 9 in her uncle’s textile atelier as a helper. She explained that during the economic crisis, her uncle made her work for months without pay, even when other workers were laid off. She also told me that she was always required to work the longest hours, her uncle reportedly telling her “This is our job, if we

succeed, we succeed together.” Siyabend then described the employer-employee relationship as follows:

A relative does not make a boss. Because they become a boss when they have the money, they become a relative when they don't.

Against this background, women found the best arrangement was to work on a casual basis with the relatives or kin to both receive the security of having a kin as one's employer, while at the same time protecting themselves against working without pay during times of financial downturn.

Abuse in the workplace was another risk voiced by women employed in the production sector, and was expressed to take various forms. While some women defined “abuse” as employers' or foremen (*ustabaşı*) shouting at them or verbally humiliating them in front of other workers, other women expressed a deep resentment to the long work hours and heavy work load required in the manufacturing sector. In another case, women associated abuse with being required to clean up the workplace after working hours, after male employees left for home. Eylül, a 22-year-old machinist stated that because cleaning was seen as women's work, female employees were required to stay overtime to clean the workplace after work hours with no pay. Women noted that whatever its form might be, abuse took place more frequently in smaller establishments, in which a majority of informal employees worked. As Sevinc, a 17-year old helper described it:

In smaller establishments, you see abuse much more... I cannot work when someone constantly shouts at me 'Don't talk!' or 'Be silent'. I feel as if I am under constant pressure, and it makes me angry. I resent being silenced like that.

Some women associated workplace abuse with lack of formal social protection of their work. Women who were active in trade unions or women's organisations stated that lack of formal social protection gave an unchecked authority to the employers, that they were not only able to hire and fire as they pleased, but also “write their own laws for the workplace”.

Some women also underlined that mobbing, sexual harassment and/or assault took place in smaller establishments, and such “abuse” was less reported and discussed, though experienced by many women in these work places. Simay, a 24-year-old machinist told me that when she was sexually harassed by the foreman in an atelier, she reported it to the owner of the establishment, who then responded to her by asking: “Why would you not accept what he wants from you?” Threatened by being reported to their parents for being “loose women” and for fear of being shunned by their families and their communities, women’s choices were limited to staying silent and continuing their job, or leaving it. Therefore, silent resistance measures, for example, acting as if not hearing an abusive comment, playing a grievous song that expresses the worker’s discontent audibly to the employer or the foreman, cutting all verbal communication with the employer or the foreman, or using idioms which described that one day their roles might change (*Gün gelir devran döner; Bu dünya ne sana kalır, ne bana*) or making inferences about the afterlife and the Judgement Day, when the “cruel” employers/foremen would be held accountable for their behaviours (*Öbür dünyada hesap verecek zalimler*), were suggested as common individual responses women gave.

Women who worked with female friends and family members (sisters, aunts, cousins, etc.) also developed collective silent resistance strategies in response to the employers and foremen. These strategies were argued to be more *passive* and *hidden*, because as Ceylan, a 24-year old garment worker noted “saying it out loud in the shop floor carries the risk of being blamed for it” and “saying it out loud at home carries the risk of not being allowed to work again”. Hence, a variety of creative strategies were used instead, such as threats to tell the employer’s or foreman’s wife, writing an anonymous letter to the “bigger bosses”, or refusing to work when there is a tight delivery deadline. These responses were noted as “ways to make a point” and prevent future harassment and assault.

Another risk associated with informal employment in the production sector was work-related illness (including work accidents). Stories of workers losing limbs in the machines were frequently reported, as were work-related illnesses such as respiratory problems due to breathing hazardous chemicals, or other illnesses due to working in environments with no access to clean water, toilet or ventilation. Women often complained that when a work accident took place, the workers were required to “not call it a work accident” and not report the workplace or the employer to the police if they wished to keep their jobs. In return for not reporting them, the employers would cover the medical costs of the accident. If the injury prevented women from ever working again, it was informally resolved with the employer, as reporting it to the police would yield no material gains, since women were not able to document their working. All the women in the production sector I interviewed emphasised that “such accidents could happen to anyone at any time” and all they could do was “nothing but hope that it would not happen” to them. One might infer from this that the lack of formal protection mechanisms situated women in a particularly vulnerable situation, because with no legal recognition of their employment and no formal evidence of their working, they were unable to prove that the injury or the illness happened due to their employment.

#### *5.4.2.3. Flexibility in return for more Vulnerability? Casual day labour*

In the last couple of years, a new form of employment arrangement emerged in the production sector: casual day labour, or as it is referred to in the Turkish language, “daily work” (*günlükçü*). In most cases, large groups of workers [both men and women] are organised by an intermediary (*simsar*) who supplies a daily workforce to the nearby factories, or workers gather at designated spaces to wait for contractors hiring people for production sector work. Daily work was particularly desirable for employers. First, factories would hire employees based on their orders, and would not be liable to supply them with work in the

long term. When they hired them on a daily basis, they were also not required to pay for their social security premiums or even offer them lunch. Second, because the work took place in their establishments, they could ensure quality control, and supervise the workers. This type of informal employment arrangement has also been documented to increase in other countries as a result of the flexibilisation and casualisation of the labour force (Chen 2006; Hussmanns 2004).

The two main risks in the manufacturing sector were job and wage security. “The fear of losing a job” was widespread, as was “the fear of non-payment.” Stories of workers who have not been paid for up to six months were commonplace. This vulnerability was reinforced by the vicious circle of non-payment and not quitting a job: workers who were not paid would sometimes be disheartened to quit their work as quitting would imply renouncing their due payments so far, and as long as the workers did not quit, the employers would “promise” to make the payments in the upcoming month. Low-income women and their families are dependent on the wages they receive from their work to make ends meet, and as Efnan, a 25-year-old machinist, stated, their wages provided the means for immediate day-to-day survival (*Biz günlük yaşayan insanlarız*). When asked about why they would still continue their employment, despite being unpaid, Efnan noted that:

In small ateliers, you sort of relate to the employer. He is like... someone like you... Maybe a bit better off... But in general, he lives in the same neighbourhood and all that. So you think he would also understand your situation. You also think, if I don't work, he will not be able to make it on time for the exports, and won't get his money and hence he won't be able to pay me. So in the first few months, you either borrow money from somewhere, or go live with your in-laws or something to cut your costs. Once I sustained this for three months. But the moment you cannot borrow anymore, and everyone in the house looks at your hands for money, then you leave. Even if leaving means you also leave your three months of work with that employer.

Women stated that they started to prefer casual day labour over working for a factory or home-based work, because it promised at least a fixed daily rate at the end of the day/week.

As Eylül, a 22-year old machinist, who was working as a daily worker when I interviewed her explained her reasons for switching from working in a textile atelier to daily work:

There are a few agents, you know all these people from the neighbourhood. You know their house, their families. If something happens, he is there. You go and ask for your money. Also, you work for a week and see whether he pays you. If not, you move on to another agent. It is not like factory work, where you work and work hoping that you'll be paid one day, and then you cannot quit because if you do, all your past payments will also be gone.

Siyabend added that she could work 3-4 days a week in casual day labour and would get the same amount of money she would get working 6 days in a regular job in a factory. Because the pay was significantly higher, women with care responsibilities were also increasingly switching from home-based work to casual day labour. As Nuran, a 34-year-old home-based worker stated:

Lately, I have been going to the daily work instead. It pays more and you only work one day and get your money. Because my children are small, I cannot take up regular employment. But this [daily work] gives me an opportunity to go, whenever I can... Whenever someone can watch my kids...

Nevertheless, casual day labour was noted to have its own risks, and women noted that it required being constantly "on the lookout". The intermediaries that arranged work for women took a commission from their wages (e.g. for every 50 lira (13.5 GBP) earned, 5-10 lira (1.30-2.60 GBP) would be paid to the intermediary as a commission) in return for arranging employment and transportation. But because the factories would notify their pre-arranged intermediaries, eliminating them was not an option for women. As Siyabend stated:

This is the price you pay for getting that day's work. But imagine an intermediary earning 5-10 lira per head every day from 50-100 people. This is basically exploiting us, but what can we do?

Women expressed that they were not able to overcome this "dependency" on the intermediaries, referring to the fact that factories gave the job information only to their "own men" and not to individual women workers. Various levels of patronage relationships were

reported between factory owners and these intermediaries, some based on ethnic ties, but most based on religious-community (*cemaat*) ties.

Moreover, some women questioned whether daily work was “flexible work” or whether it was merely “squeezing 2-3 days’ worth of work into one”. Sevinç worked in a large cosmetics factory as a daily labourer. Her work involved putting the brush on individual mascaras. She estimated that a regular employee would be responsible for putting together 200-300 mascaras together, whereas as a daily worker she was assigned 700-900 mascaras each work day. Similarly, Eylül, who worked in casual day labour noted that:

You don’t get to have a tea break or lunch break like the other workers. You have your job and you need to finish it. They can leave at a certain time in the evening, but you cannot, if you did not complete your assigned tasks.

Still, the ability to change jobs when they did not like a “workplace environment” (*ortam*), or when they were faced with abusive employers or foremen, as well as having immediate wage security attracted women to take up daily work. Albeit not providing a stable and predictable career option, my interviews suggested that faced with such great risks in the manufacturing sector, having an easy exit option without incurring further economic and social vulnerabilities to their families, made daily work a preferable option. Ultimately, it was acknowledged that workers were able to exercise a higher control over their decisions of where, when and how much to work, which was not a possibility in other manufacturing jobs.

#### 5.4.3. Visibility

Labour market experience is important in the transition from silent strategies to more visible forms of resistance. The symbolic meanings hidden in the passive strategies get replaced by outright demands for rights and resistance against obvious acts of abuse or humiliation. The desire to withhold women’s social security benefits is challenged both on the grounds of

labour market discrimination and human rights. In this part of the chapter, I will give an account of how women tried to voice their discomfort in their employment relationships.

#### *5.4.3.1. Teaching a Lesson to the Employer*

For some workers, simply claiming rights from the employers was not enough, but the employers should be taught a lesson so that “they could start seeing through their eyes” and understand why they demanded changes to their employment relationship. Workers who were in direct contact with their employers expressed that sometimes the subtle messages would not be sufficient to tell the employers that they were not happy with their employment, or that they felt certain aspects of their employment were discomforting. Teaching a lesson to the employer ultimately carried the risk of dismissal, but workers thought that it was still an effective strategy, since it at least suggested some changes for their future workers. Şule, a 25-year old manufacturing worker told me her experience of live-in domestic work.

The pay was more than the triple of what I am getting now as a quality inspector, and I was not spending a penny from it. I ate, slept, did everything in their home, so everything is great, I thought in the beginning. But then things started to change. I was not a maid, not a sister, not a cook, not a nanny, not a gardener, not this, not that. I was everything. It was a three-floor house, and I was expected to attend to all three floors. When I simply could not, I was getting yelled at, and humiliated. And I do believe I was doing a good job. It is just that I cannot be omnipresent. I do not have four arms and four legs. I asked the employer to decrease my workload a bit. Each time I asked she humiliated me even worse. Oh, you ignorant people, she told me, you cannot accept the fact that you are slow, and you don't know how to run a house. That was it for me. This employer was not gonna get it. So I decided to teach her a lesson. I left the house at 4am without any notice, so that she would wake up to find the house a mess, children crying, laundry in the washing machine and everything. I basically told her, you run your house now. She called me many times after that, apologising. She said I was a good worker, and she did not understand how difficult I had it. I said, I am not coming back, but if you do not want to lose yet another worker, be nice next time.

Şule explained that because of her experience she would not go back to domestic work ever again, she did not mind what the employer would say, or whether she would be able to get a job as a domestic worker again. For other workers, hurting their reputation as a worker was too great a risk. In the peripheries of Istanbul, information of informal employment was

distributed via social networks. “Having someone in between, whom both parties (the employer and the employee) trusted would make sure that the employer would pay the workers on time, and treat them in a decent way”. Those employers and workers with a bad reputation would, thus, be excluded from the information flow. Accordingly, one of the other ways of teaching a lesson was to give the employer a bad name.

In the peripheries of Istanbul, gossip formed the everyday means of social interaction among women. Although women were aware that not all the information they received via this gossip was accurate, they nevertheless believed that at least some of it would be genuine. The job information gathered in this way was surprisingly detailed. Women inquired about the workplace, the number of workers, the level of pay, working hours, as well as information about who the other workers are, where they are originally from, etc. The level of detail in job information entailed that bad reputations of employers would spread fast, and such employers would be particularly avoided. In some cases this strategy was so powerful that some small family ateliers had to close down in these neighbourhoods and move elsewhere (because of inability to find regular workers), or that employers of domestic workers would not be able to hire anyone from the nearby neighbourhoods.

#### *5.4.3.2. “I realised all these years of work added up to nothing”*

Some writers pointed out that women workers accepted working informally because they were able to access health care and other benefits as dependents of their husbands and fathers (Erman 1997; Gündüz-Hoşgör and Smits 2008; Beşpınar 2010). Out of the 90 women I interviewed, only 17 benefited from the social security benefits of their husbands and fathers (16 and 1 respectively). This meant that for a majority of women workers in the informal sector, if they did not have access to formal social security benefits through their employment,

they faced a heightened level of vulnerability, as other members of their family were also in informal employment.

Women workers felt the need for formal social security the most intensely when a family member became ill. Elvan, a 39-year old domestic worker for instance noted that because of lack of access to health care, she ended up paying all her monthly wage to the doctor. The frequency of having to pay doctor fees when a family member had a chronic condition, or a long-term illness pushed women to start demanding social security protection from their employers. As Yasemin, a 41-year old domestic worker put it:

We used to be very close back then [with the employer], like sisters. Then I started telling her to register me for formal social security. That my husband is working informally, I have two children and they are sick. When I need to, I cannot bring them to the doctor. She had told me, yes. But two years passed, and she did not do anything. Then I told her I wanted to quit. Because I needed social security for health costs, and my income from this job was not sufficient for me to keep giving it to the doctor. She told me that she was taking care of my kids, protecting them. I laughed secretly. Protecting my children is not giving them a few pieces of clothing from time to time, and sending them food, I said to myself. In that house, the kind of stuff the dog was eating, my children had never seen in their lives... I took her dog to the dog hairdresser one day to get it cleaned, its haircut and nails trimmed. I paid 300 lira for that. Back then, I was only getting 150 lira for a full week's worth of work. That was my realisation. When I got back home, I told her, I quit. But she knew I was a trustworthy employee, and she could not easily give that up. So, she registered me.

For some women, demanding social security benefits from their employers started with their realisation that at the end of their working years, they were not going to have any pensions of their own, or when they tried to apply to a formal job, they were not able to prove that they had the necessary work experience. In other words, women began to come to the realisation of the invisibility of their informal employment. Elvin, a 40-year office helper told me about this process:

Back then I was doing domestic work. Then I worked in a school canteen serving food. Then back to domestic work again. But as I was going from one job to another, I decided I wanted a job with a social security. Why? How? Well, I came to the realisation that years are passing by. I cannot go to the doctor when I am sick. Sometimes you need to go see a doctor, but I cannot. Because I do not have social security. I do not have anything. I work and work, but it is all meaningless. I realised all those years working added up to nothing. If I started my work life with social security, I would have been retired by now.

The ease of replaceability of women workers with other unskilled workers entailed that most often women workers were given false promises. Eylül, a 22-year old machinist illustrated this point:

I told them was going to continue working only if they registered me for the social security benefits. They said, all right, no problem. I waited for a month, then two months. They kept on saying, Oh, we are in the process of doing that, Oh, and we'll do that this week. I realised at that point, it was just not gonna happen. I decided to quit. But then our financial situation at home was pretty terrible. I was gonna cause a lot of trouble at home. And they told me, look, we'll do it, just give us some more time. I gave them a year, and they did not register me. In the end I could not take it anymore. I had a terrible eye condition and I was not even able to go see a doctor. So I said no matter what, I will go find a job that will give me the benefits. And I did.

It can be argued that women's labour market experience played an important role in beginning to acquire a worker identity, and claiming rights accordingly. Nevertheless questioning informality did not always translate into immediate demands from the employer, as for most women the utmost priority was making ends meet, and some could not risk losing their jobs. In the simple cost-benefit calculation women made, the benefit of payment at the end of the month always outweighed the benefit of having social security benefits one might need [or not need] in the future. This calculation changed only when access to benefits became a much more urgent need than payment, such as when the workers or their family members became ill.

Women's perspectives on the importance of social security benefits changed starkly when they faced a work accident. Work accidents in the informal sector often remained invisible by the employers' efforts of hushing the workers. Ayla, a 46-year old domestic worker fell from a window three years ago whilst cleaning it, and was badly injured:

I nearly died that day. The hospitals issued me a report that I was no longer able to work again. My employer has never called me a single day after the incident... Apparently the government issued a fine to the apartment I was working at- 45 thousand lira- (14 300 GBP), for not being safe. But what about me? The government did not do a single thing about my security and other rights. I did not receive any money or compensation.

Ayla's employers refused to pay for her hospital expenses because they believed that she fell due to a mistake of her own. She tried to report the accident to the police as a work accident, but she was refused on the grounds that domestic work is not one of the categories of "work" in the legal code, and she did not have a formal employment contract which would prove that she was in that apartment for work purposes. Ayla noted that her work accident made her realise the importance of social security benefits, not only for regular check-ups in the hospital, but also for protection against employment-related contingencies. Accordingly, she joined a collective action group for supporting the rights of domestic workers, and for pushing the government to formalise domestic work in Turkey. It should be noted that though a majority of work accidents remained invisible, the ones that became public were very powerful for sending across the message that work accidents could happen to anyone and workers had to seek formal social insurance against the contingencies of their work.

#### *5.4.3.3. Once you know your rights, there is no going back*

For women workers, the reason why some employers could "deceive" them "so well" owed to the fact that they simply did not know about their rights. The technical language of the legal code, the lack of places where they could go and ask for information regarding their employment or social security status discouraged these workers, and led them to accept their jobs "as they were". But labour market experience helped many women inquire and find out about their rights. One such woman was Leyla, a 32-year old garment worker.

I found out about the fact that I have the right to refuse overtime work. How did I learn this? Well, this labour lawyer has an office in our neighbourhood. A friend of mine from the factory was going there to ask her something, so I went with her. There I witnessed her telling a worker that she had the right to refuse overtime. I stopped at that moment, and asked her, Is that really my right? I learned all the details about this right from her that day. There was this period when we were required to stay overtime every day, and I was really overwhelmed. That day I said I am not staying tonight. First the foreman came over to my work table, I said, I am not staying. 5 minutes later they called me to the management floor. I went to the manager's office, he started yelling at me, asking me how dare I was refusing to stay for overtime. I kept my calm. I told them, first, you have no right to shout at me, second, I found out that I have the right to refuse overtime. I am now using

my right, because I am tired, and you don't pay my overtime hours anyway. They threatened me with firing me. I told them, it would be "unlawful dismissal". They made fun of me, saying, "Do you have a lawyer or what?" I said, yes, I have a lawyer. They told me, they would fire me and the lawyer would get all the compensation money. I told them, it is better than you getting the money. I stood there firmly on my two own feet, because I knew my rights. It has been two years now, and they have yet to fire me. It is because they also know I had the right.

Leyla expressed that the fear of dismissal held many [women] workers back from voicing their discontentment in their employment. She added that women feared their employers because they did not know their rights very well. However, many workers in the informal sector were actually not covered by any "rights". The Turkish Legal Code, for instance, excludes domestic workers specifically from the "worker" definition, and only partially includes home-based workers. This legal invisibility pushes many women workers to set their own standards in informal employment.

Throughout their work experience, women expanded their social networks beyond their immediate family and next of kin. Having a social space where they could discuss work-related problems enabled women to find out about their rights, or simply the work conditions in other jobs. It was common practice to compare wages, working hours, work conditions, and the benefits. In fact, this is how the wages were established in the informal sector. For instance, in 2012, women asked for 80-120 Lira (22-32 GBP) for daily domestic work. If women in their neighbourhoods accepted lower wages than this range, they were warned about "decreasing the market value", and if they managed to find employers who paid more, than workers started to pressure their employers to increase their wages, according to "the market value". Similarly, women in home-based work refused certain intermediaries in the peripheries if they tried to pay significantly less than other intermediaries.

As will be demonstrated in the next Chapter, women workers also learned about their rights from women's organisations or trade unions that are active in their neighbourhoods. These organisations encouraged workers to engage in collective action to demand their rights on a

much wider scale than just seeking small improvements in their jobs. Although not all women participated in collective action, it can be argued that the sheer fact of learning about rights, and other workers' conditions of work helped many women to become more aware of their own situations, and how they might be improved.

### *5.5. Discussion and Conclusion*

This chapter set out to examine why women give different responses even when they face similar constraints/risks in the informal sector. Investigating the relationship between the sectors in which women were employed in and the kinds of employment arrangements they were in led to the conceptualisation that women's strategies for survival in the informal sector are shaped by their 1) autonomy in the employment relationship, 2) possibility of having direct contact with the employer/owner of production, 3) ease of replaceability as a worker. This means that women who have a high degree of autonomy in their jobs, greater contact with their bosses, and who are not easily replaceable as workers are more likely to choose confrontational strategies in the workplace.

Home-based workers had the least control on the piece-rates, amount of work they received, or the regularity of work, due to having almost no possibility of direct contact with the employer/owner of production. Home-based work was also subcontracted as the most unskilled work, which meant that workers were easily replaced when they did not meet certain deadlines, or refused the set piece-rates. Accordingly, home-based workers constituted the most invisible segment of the informal sector. This invisibility was reinforced by the fact that home-based workers usually had substantial constraints to their employment because of lack of male permission or heavy care responsibilities. Similarly, unskilled workers in the manufacturing sector were not able to voice their discontentment with their employment arrangements without risking losing their jobs due to the fact that they were

easily replaceable, and these workers happened to be young women (also children) who were put in the labour market to provide income to the family for the “loss” they are causing the family budget. Their wages were immediately taken by their parents/ male kin and they were given little, if any, say on household decision-making. Their lives were under strict control by other family members or kin in the workplace, and this control carried over to their ability to voice their concerns in the family and in the workplace.

Domestic work entailed that, women workers engaged in one-to-one relationships with their employers. Although this relationship was based on a fictitious sister-like relationship, when a certain level of familiarity was established, women workers found the option to ask for improvements to their employment relationship. Domestic workers who worked for single employers were able to exercise a great level of autonomy in their employment, and were considered to be not easily replaceable, as a strong level of trust was invested in them.

Across all sectors, however, part of the “struggle” for dealing with informal employment required being “on the constant lookout”, constantly investigating new job opportunities, but also inquiring about the conditions of employment from other women workers. Labour market experience entailed that women workers’ social networks expanded beyond their immediate family members and next of kin, and it was through these networks that women set the standards of their informal employment, such as the wages, but also learnt and developed ways for engaging in more overt strategies in the labour market. Through these connections, women also found about ways in which they can challenge some of the patriarchal constraints they faced. This point connects to one of the central arguments made in this thesis that women’s positions in the family and the labour market are not static, rather shaped constantly with changes to their marital status, care responsibilities, employment arrangements and their husbands’ employment arrangements.

The implications of these conditions for the ways in which women tried to get by or overcome some of the vulnerabilities of their informal employment is most explicit in their transition from the hidden and “invisible” to more “visible” acts of resistance. Challenging the employers directly, and claiming “visibility” of their employment requires a long-term labour market experience, and coming to the realisation of what invisibility of their labour means for the workers. Women, however, usually come to this realisation the hard way, either through incurring the costs of a long-term illness, or having a work accident. Also, the fact that women are not able to claim benefits [pensions] even after working for many years push women to question the effectiveness of informal employment as a means of making ends meet. This is because lack of pensions entails that women are required to continue their informal employment until the end of their lives.

Nevertheless, I argued that in some sectors, even when women came to the realisation of the “invisibility” of their labour, they were not able to claim rights from their employers due to the fact that such rights are not recognised in the Labour Code. To illustrate, the visibility of domestic workers and home-based workers is constrained by the fact that the current Labour Code excludes these workers from the “work” definition, which makes these work arrangements particularly risky and vulnerable. Against this background, women’s individual strategies for survival prove insufficient in safeguarding women against the more precarious and “dangerous” kinds of employment and protecting them from work accidents or other work-related contingencies. This calls for a major reform in the legal and institutional framework which excludes these “female” sectors of informal work.

## CHAPTER 6: THE QUESTION OF COLLECTIVE ACTION:

*“Organising the Unorganised”*

### *6.1. Introduction*

The previous two chapters examined the individual responses women in informal employment gave to get by or overcome the vulnerabilities of their employment and patriarchal family structure. In doing so, the discussion has shifted from the dichotomous perspective of women entering the informal sector as a result of a necessity or a choice, but instead focused on their strategies for survival. This chapter builds on this perspective, but steps back from women's individual responses, to explore how and why they begin to develop and utilise collective responses. So the main constraint problematised in this chapter is: Why do women workers in the informal sector not organise? Why does collective action not take place? What are the factors that limit their organising? By applying the “Invisibility-Struggle-Visibility” conceptual framework, the chapter explores the kinds of collective strategies of women workers in the informal sector and why these collective strategies do not turn into more visible forms of collective action. The main argument of the chapter is that women workers in the informal sector present new forms of organisation shaped by their persistent marginalisation and uncertainty in the informal sector. However their family and labour market constraints carry over to their decisions about the kind of organisations they participate in, and their level of involvement in collective action. Lack of “worker identity” in the informal sector, and women's seeing their paid work in the informal sector as “temporary” and “subsidiary” to the male household members shape this involvement. A complex interplay of familial and labour market conditions help women join collective action for demanding their rights: 1) facing severe injustice in their employment (e.g. work accident, unlawful dismissal, non-payment for a long period of time), 2) they learn about their rights (either through other

workers or associations/unions campaigning in their workplace/sector/neighbourhood), 3) their families (at least initially) support their joining collective action. Access to women's organisations or trade unions in the vicinity of their neighbourhoods or workplaces seem to play a key role in women's learning about their rights, as does having examples of workers who joined collective action and received material and social returns to their participation.

The chapter is broadly divided into four sections. First, the literature on organisations in the informal sector is discussed. Second, the Turkish context is presented to illustrate why the institutional and legal rights of workers do not necessarily translate into wider range of collectivities in Turkey. Third, women's collective strategies for survival in the informal sector are presented. Fourth, the empirical findings of the chapter are discussed to unravel why some women workers made the transition from invisible organisations to visible ones, and others did not.

## **6.2. *Women's Informal Work: Organisation and Voice***

Until recently, the literature on organisation in the informal sector has been dominated by studies detailing why collective responses to the vulnerabilities of informal employment did not emerge. While some authors emphasised the financial barriers to organisation for poor workers in the informal sector that time spent away from work entailed money lost for the working poor (Feige 2007), others drew attention to more practical barriers to organisation, such that the workers often lacked a common "worker identity" in the informal sector, or that the trade unions failed to include informal sector workers under their roof (Hensman 2009; Sen 2014). Further, the gender-specific barriers to organisation were pointed out, that women workers had trouble getting their voices heard in male-dominated trade unions, or that the "dual shift" after unpaid and paid work activities did not leave time or energy for collective action (see for a review, Kabeer, Sudarshan, and Milward 2013). Yet other scholars spelled

out, women workers in the informal sector were unaware of how collective action could be useful for them (Bonner and Spooner 2011).

The changes in the world economy based on the hyper-mobility of capital meant the flexibilisation of the labour force, or in other words, its informalisation, whereby irregular, ad hoc employment arrangements devoid of any social benefits and rights became the norm. Multi-national companies could relocate or use the possibility to relocate as a disciplinary measure against collective action (Chen and Skinner 2014). Consequently, with changes to the labour market structure, organisation of workers also changed, i.e. participation in the traditional forms of worker organisations, trade unions, declined (Table 6.1).

**Table 6.1 Unionisation Rates of Selected Countries, 1980-2010**

	Unionisation Rates (%)			
	1980	1990	2000	2010
US	22.3	15.6	14.9	11.3
Germany	35.6	32.9	24.6	18.6
France	17.5	9.8	10	7.9
UK	50.4	39.1	28.8	25.8
Italy	49.3	38.8	34.8	35.5
Japan	31.1	25.4	24	17.9
Turkey	--	10.6	9.9	9.6

Source: Author’s Compilation from ILO Trade Union Membership Statistics- Industrial Relations Indicators and OECD Trade Union Density Statistics. Statistics not available on women’s membership in trade unions.

While these studies provided a good lens through which we could understand the added difficulties of organisation in the informal sector, the capacity of informal sector workers to organise themselves were also notoriously underestimated. There is mounting evidence that across the world informal sector workers are increasingly becoming organised (Lourenço-Lindell 2010; Roever and Linares 2010; Theron 2010; Benson and Vanqa-Mgijima 2010; Bonner and Spooner 2011; Carré 2013; Budlender 2013; Chen and Skinner 2014; Chen 2014; Samson 2010). In some cases existing trade unions are reaching out to informal sector workers. In other cases, non-government organisations are extending a helping hand. In yet other

instances, informal sector workers are building on their solidarity networks to form grassroots-level organisations. A common recurring theme across all these studies is that the informal sector workers are a heterogeneous group with few commonalities apart from persistent marginalisation and uncertainty. But organisations that aimed at enabling the working poor in the informal sector to escape from poverty has been powerful in bringing this heterogeneous group together, or in other words, "organise the unorganised" (Chen and Skinner 2014).

In this regard, Bayat (1997) argued that "quiet, atomised and prolonged mobilisations with episodic collective action" (57) began to replace traditional forms of political engagement as more "silent, patient, protracted and pervasive" way of getting by the hardships of everyday vulnerabilities in the informal sector. The small informal solidarity networks of the poor replaced the wider range of collectivises of the formal sector, such as trade unions or labour movements.

Nevertheless, not all organisations in the informal sector have been "silent" or "protracted" as Bayat (Ibid) argued. In fact, there are examples around the world of less atomised forms of collective action, which Chen and Skinner (2014) named "Membership-based organisations of the poor" (MBoPs). MBoPs adopt an "integrated approach" to dealing with the everyday problems of their "members", the working poor of the informal sector (Ibid). Unlike traditional trade unions which centre their activities only on employment-related issues, MBoPs try to "fight life's vulnerabilities" in all aspects in order to help the working poor improve their economic and social wellbeing (Bhatt 2013). SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association in India) is a prominent example for MBoPs. Founders of SEWA identified the roots of vulnerability for women workers in informal employment in India, and organised their initiative around helping women workers overcome some of these vulnerabilities, such as

negotiating piece-rates with employers, teaching workers new skills for better employment opportunities, educational programmes, as well as providing access to health and child care. Several other organisations in the informal sector followed SEWA's lead in mobilising the "invisible" women workers of the informal sector<sup>42</sup>. Hence it can be argued that when the traditional means of organisation did not respond to women workers' needs for engaging in organisations, they rather built their own.

Regional alliances of informal workers have also presented new approaches to collectivities in the informal sector, as they attempted to go beyond the confinements of national borders and connected the struggles and aspirations of the informal workers around the world. The recently founded International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF), the Latin American Waste Picker Network (LAPWN), the network of street vendors in Asia (StreetNet) and Home-based workers (HomeNet) are prominent examples. In addition, Women in Informal Employment Globalising and Organising (WIEGO) has emerged from these movements in the informal sector to provide a global network of women informal workers organising for better economic opportunities and rights in the informal sector, and for influencing local, national and international policies.

In short, new forms of organisations have emerged in the informal sector which attempt to go beyond the traditional governance structures of trade unions. These organisations point at novel ways in which informal workers can come together and fight for their rights. These novel forms of collective action also act as a channel to carry the voice of its members to policy

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<sup>42</sup> Some examples: Women Fisheries Workers Build in India (SNEHA); Brazilian Domestic Workers Trade Union (FENETRAD); Caribbean Domestic Workers' Union (CONLACTRAHO); Karnataka Domestic Workers' Union (KDWU) in India; Waste Pickers' Union in India (KKPKP), in Argentina (ARB), or the national associations of home-based workers in Bangladesh, Philippines and Thailand.

makers (Chen and Skinner 2014) and in turn influence national and global policies (also (Crowley, Balaram, and Lee 2012; Theron 2014).

### *6.3. The (im)possibility to organise women workers in the informal sector in Turkey*

A brief look at the history of industrial relations in Turkey reveals that workers' right to organise has been accepted as an idea, but less so as a practice. As discussed earlier, until Turkey became a multi-party democracy in 1946, it was forbidden to organise around the ideas of class-politics. The multi-party rule outlawed this premise and enabled workers to unionise, and/or engage in collective action (Işıklı 1979). Accordingly, in 1947, the first Unionisation Law was accepted (Article 5018). However, this law did not allow workers to engage in "strikes" or "other political activities", arguing that the State would act as an intermediary for solving any problems that might arise between workers and the employers (Kalaycıoğlu, Rittersberger-Tılıç, and Çelik 2008).

In the 1960s, the increasing industrialisation rates meant that the worker population was increasing and the current laws were not responding to the needs of the workers (Savran 1992). Hence, in 1963, the law was expanded to include the rights to strike and collective bargaining. This was also a progressive period for worker rights, as the new Constitution after the 1961 military take-over allowed and actually encouraged worker mobilisations. Hence, in the 1960s, several trade unions emerged and workers enjoyed a wide range of rights.

However, this "golden age" of trade unions was short-lived, as the subsequent governments and the military regimes were not as sympathetic to worker mobilisations. The military leadership that grabbed power in 1971 took back several of these rights, and even banned certain trade unions (e.g. trade unions for civil servants and other public employees) (Kapar 2007; Kalaycıoğlu, Rittersberger-Tılıç, and Çelik 2008). With the coup d'état in 1980, further

measures were introduced “to smash the left and nail down the trade unions” (Nichols and Suğur 2004, 151). Although the Constitution introduced by the military government in 1982 kept many of the rights specified in the 1961 Constitution, these rights were effectively “de-politicised and restricted” (Fougner and Kurtoğlu 2011, 356), that labour unions were only able to engage in collective bargaining, and their participation in political activities, or formal or informal relationships between political parties were banned (Ansal et al. 2000).

The same law specified a condition that a trade union “must represent as members both a minimum of 10 per cent of employees working in the industry where it is active]” and “more than half of the employees in the establishments, where it ends to conclude a collective agreement” (Dereli 2006, 297) in order to be able to engage in collective bargaining. The Trade Union Act of 1983, which established a dual union structure so as to curb the influence of trade unions, followed the Constitution’s lead in making collective action difficult for workers. The Act specified 28 industries in which workers could engage in collective action, and Confederations made up of at least five unions operating in different industries (Ibid: 357). The Act also contained rules and regulations regarding who can become a member, how the unions will be audited and inspected, and how their relationship will be with other unions and confederations (Yildirim, Calis, and Benli 2008). Though in 2001 these rules have been somewhat softened, certain sectors still lack the right for collective bargaining and strikes (e.g. civil servants) (Gülmez 2002), which means that on a theoretical level, the workers have the right to engage in collective action, but it remains difficult to put this right into practice<sup>43</sup>. A reflection of this difficulty is that labour participation rates are extremely low in Turkey. Among 12 million 287 thousand 238 registered workers, only 1 million 1889 thousand 481 are

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<sup>43</sup> In 2012, further reforms have been made to this Article, but the legacy of anti-union attitudes continues in the new Law as well (Çelik 2012).

members of trade unions, in other words, less than 10 per cent of workers are trade union members (Sendika.org 2014) .

As discussed in the earlier chapters, Turkey changed its orientation from welfare to market in the aftermath of the 1980 military rule. Informalisation of the labour market went hand in hand with the rolling back of key rights for worker mobilisations (Koç 2007). Furthermore, “brutal anti-union harassment, including dismissals” intimidated workers from joining in collective mobilisations, and state authorities have been tolerant of such anti-union behaviour (Fougner and Kurtoğlu 2011, 358). When organisation of formal workers present such difficulties, it is inevitable that workers in the informal sector face a heightened level of barriers to mobilisation.

The current labour union structure does not respond to the needs of “invisible” workers in the informal sector. This is because labour unions have traditionally been male-dominated in Turkey, and have not been able to come up with solutions for the problems women workers encounter in the informal sector. The fact that women workers required support with child care or domestic work in order to be able to find the time for union-related activities was overlooked (Erendil 2003; Urhan 2009). Also, labour unions have not been successful in raising awareness among women workers in the informal sector as to why they should participate in collective action, or how they could do so (Toksöz and Erdoğan 1998; Toksöz 2008).

Moreover, the seeming contradiction in the Labour Union Law- which grants the right to engage in worker mobilisations, but not the possibility to practice it- seems to continue in the informal sector as well. In Turkey, unionisation and other collective rights of those in non-standard work arrangements are granted by Article 4857 of the Labour Code. However, the same Code specifies that those who would like to exercise this right must have a national insurance number. Considering that majority of workers in the informal sector do not have

access to formal social protection through their work, they also do not have a national insurance number. Moreover, the condition, that workers should be employed in the industry of their trade unions creates further complications. Home-based workers for instance are not appointed an industry, and domestic workers are appointed to the General Services Industry. Therefore, while home-based workers face a practical impossibility to form a union, domestic workers need to satisfy the conditions of unionisation under the General Services Industry. This means that, a domestic worker union should mobilise 10 per cent of the registered workers in the General Services Industry, which of course is a practical impossibility. This inherent contradiction in the law hinders the possibility of informal workers to form and participate in unions.

These practical barriers to collective action push informal sector workers organise into cooperatives and associations. Such as MNoPs discussed above, these informal organisations aim to support poor workers of the informal sector to escape from poverty. To this end, legal support with respect to work-related issues, awareness as worker rights, educational and occupational training programmes are provided, as well as support with access to health care or housing (Selçuk 2002). But because these organisations rarely acquire legal status, their visibility beyond the neighbourhoods in which they are active remains rather limited, and their capabilities to influence policy-making constrained (Eşim 2000; 2001a; 2001b; 2003; Bergan 2009; Urhan 2009).

Overall women workers in the informal sector in Turkey face serious constraints in participating in collective action. The legal framework is contradictory at best, granting certain rights for worker mobilisations, but then setting conditions which make exercising those rights practically impossible. This pushes the workers to engage in informal organisations, in the form of cooperatives and associations, but without legal recognition of their efforts, these

organisations are not able to provide effective solutions for improving the social and material circumstances of informal workers.

## 6.4. *From Invisibility to Visibility: Organising the Unorganised*

### 6.4.1. Invisibility

#### 6.4.1.1. *Women`s solidarity-networks to provide solutions to everyday problems*

March and Taqqu (1984) argued that among the studies of informal employment, solidarities among women had been particularly misunderstood, often obscured by misconceptions about gender, and disconnected from their political meaning and public purpose in non-western contexts (11). The authors pointed out that a reconsideration of the value of women`s informal solidarity networks is necessary to understand the purposes of these organisations: women`s solidarity networks could adopt *defensive* strategies, to protect themselves and/or deal with shared adversities, as well as *active* strategies, whereby they would pool resources of their own to create real alternatives (34). It is through this perspective that in this Chapter I will explore women`s solidarity-networks as “invisible” and covert forms of collective action. In doing so, I aim to demonstrate why some women are able to engage in more visible forms of collective strategies – social and institutional ones – to improve their lives, when a significant majority remain embedded in these local, community and kin-based social solidarity networks.

For women in informal employment, both reacting against shared deprivations, as well as pooling and managing resources for a better job alternative constituted important reasons for coming together. Usually shaped around women`s disadvantaged status and experiences in the labour market, family imperatives and community dynamics, women`s small, neighbourhood and kinship-based solidarities helped them deal with or overcome a range of difficulties in life. Regardless of their participation in any other more visible forms of collective

action, all women tapped into these local solidarity networks, albeit in varying degrees and with different expectations.

For low-income women living in the peripheries of Istanbul, solidarity networks provided at least a temporary refuge when they faced financial, social and other difficulties in life. Hence, majority of women spoke favourably about such networks, noting that without them, life would be even more difficult than it already is.

Women sought help from these networks to meet a wide range of difficulties in life, from taking care of the children of those who go to work, to pooling ingredients to cook together when many of them are struggling to make ends meet, from helping each other disguise their informal employment, to convincing their sceptical husbands and fathers about women's paid work. Such relationships also acted as important protective mechanisms in the workplace, when no formal social protection existed. To illustrate, Derin, a 17-year old, textile worker noted the importance having a close friend to work with in the workplace in case the employer would accuse her of anything or dismiss her for no apparent reason:

I do not see her as merely a neighbour, someone that lives close by anymore. She is now my friend. If anything happened in the workplace, she knows my situation, but she would not go and tell it around. She would not even tell her mother. I would not tell anything [to anybody], either. If now, one of us gets fired or decides to leave this [work] place, I would leave with her and go look for jobs with her. I would never wanna be left on my own.

Indeed, women noted that the implicit threat in telling the employers that they would quit altogether all at once was an effective strategy for bargaining with them. Especially in export delivery periods, employers needed a stable worker-base in order to make the deadlines. Hence, in these periods employers could not risk upsetting the workers too much, because if they left, the employers would face a particularly difficult situation of not making the promised deliveries and losing money. Some employers were aware of this potential "power"

of workers and had a policy of not allowing friends, relatives and close kin to work together in their establishments.

However these solidarity-based relationships were also built on the factory floor between workers, which the employers could not prevent. Especially ethnic and religious minority women reported that when they started a new job, they always look for “their people” (*kendi insanımız*), so as to shake off any intimidations or discriminations in the workplace. For instance, Siyabend, a 24-year old garment worker told me that when she spoke Kurdish on the phone with her mother, she was humiliated numerous times by other workers on the factory floor, so she tried to find other Kurdish workers to work together in order to shake off such intimidations and humiliations.

Women’s solidarity-based networks also helped them connect to and pool resources from men’s networks. When Gonca, a 42-year old cook lost her previous job as a helper in an office, she utilised her neighbourhood network to enquire about job opportunities:

I became unemployed. One week, two weeks, three weeks went by without a job. I just could not get something myself. Then I started telling it to the women in my neighbourhood. I told this woman I am very close with. I kept saying to her, please, I beg you find me a job. And then she apparently told her son, that please find her a job. And then he asked around his friends, and found me this job.

All women used their networks to access jobs at one point in their employment history, and most of them expressed a particular level of distrust against any other methods of finding employment. Many women stressed that their employment was possible only when they worked with or found work through their networks, and outside such networks they would feel misplaced. Elvin, a 40-year old helper in an office for instance noted that:

I would always want to find work through the people I know. Never trusted newspapers ads or ads of that sort. I did not hear good things of those ads. [Such as?] For instance a friend of mine found an ad and went to the workplace, and came across something really bad. Hearing this was enough for me to ditch all ads of all sorts. [What did she come across?] The place had been advertised as an animal shelter, but apparently it turned out to be a massage parlour. This was a young girl, can you believe? I would be scared of this

stuff. I mean I think I would wanna find work from my own network because I would actually not want to leave my neighbourhood. Maybe outside [of this neighbourhood], I would be afraid to work. I might be weak in such an environment. It would be different, because I know my way around this neighbourhood, and so, I can find my way. But in another place, I may not be able to be the same person. I guess it is because I do not have much education, I would fear that they would deceive me much more easily out there, if I do not know anyone.

In the peripheries of Istanbul, some women had never left the vicinities of their neighbourhoods. For these women, the big city life sounded terrifying, and they imagined the city being full of people trying to deceive them. For this reason, they believed that only their closest kin would connect them with the most secure jobs.

It has been documented in the literature that this solidarity among *hemşeris* (people who migrated from the same hometown) or ethnic and religious minority groups (such as Kurds, Roma and the Alevi) often provided some help for new migrants to find a place to settle and get their initial jobs (Rittersberger-Tilic and Kalaycioglu 1998; Atasü Topçuoglu 2005; Dedeoğlu 2008b; Belkıs Kümbetoğlu, User, and Akpınar 2012). In the informal employment context, such networks ensured some level of job security. This led to certain informal employment sectors being dominated by particular ethnic groups, or by migrants from a specific city in Turkey<sup>44</sup>. However, in the process of employment, such solidarities did not always provide long-term protection from the vulnerabilities women faced in the context of informal labour market. Arzu, a 34-year old, cleaning worker, decided to never work with *hemşeris* after a long period of non-payment.

You work with *hemşeris*, because you think the job will be more secure, and they will protect you or something. (...) I got paid the first month, did not get paid for the other five months I worked with this distant relative of mine from our hometown. In the beginning it was good, I mean he was always a bit temperamental in that he paid me sometimes, and sometimes he did not, but in the end I used to get it all. Then he started not to give me anything at all. He constantly told me, wait a little, I'll give it a bit later this month... I got my money the first month, but not the second or the third or the other months. I told him

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<sup>44</sup> For instance, people from the city of Tunceli dominated the metal waste-picking sector, whereas people from Malatya dominated the street food sector in Istanbul. Roma people were subcontracted for musician and gardening jobs; whereas Kurds had a particular monopoly over the underground textile ateliers.

I quit, he said “your choice”. I thought he would protect me from such things happening, he did it himself.

In this regard, although solidarity-based social networks provided some level of protection against unforeseeable risks women and their families encountered, they also ran the risk of exploiting the women, especially in the context of the informal sector. This is because, as all women acknowledged, “everyone was trying to make ends meet” (*Herkes iki yakasını bir araya getirmeye çalışıyor*) and exploitation was perceived as part of the employment experience, especially at the bottom ladders of the labour market. Although women expressed that they became “especially upset” when their trusted networks exploited them, they also quickly added that “they understood why”. I categorised women who resorted to their community and kin-based solidarity networks for help when needed in the group in the “invisible” strategies category, because they did not question or attempt to alter the exploitative aspects of this relationship. This is because although women took active responsibility to improve their circumstances through reaching out to their communities and organising material and social resources, they generally complied with, or have shown acquiescence in their labour market positions and the risks associated with those positions.

#### *6.4.1.2. Who has access to informal social protection?*

Women’s solidarity-networks were also seen as a source of financial stability and social protection against the various forms of vulnerabilities poor women living in the peripheries of Istanbul experienced. Women resorted to these networks [mostly to the closest kin and relatives] when they needed to borrow money. When the sum they needed to borrow exceeded the amounts their kin could realistically give, they still preferred to borrow from friends and family, and pooled the resources of a variety of individuals and households together. For instance, Eylül’s (20 year-old, garment worker) family recently bought a house with mortgage. When inquired about how they were making the monthly mortgage payments

which exceeded what she, her two brothers, and father were earning in any given month, she noted that each month they borrowed money from a relative, and would also borrow from other *hemşeris* (people from their hometown) just so that they would not need to “deal with the banks”. At the time of the interview, they were indebted to eight different households for their mortgage payments.

Reciprocity was the key in gaining entry to and for continuing participation in these solidarity-networks. Some networks also required women to conform to their socio-cultural imperatives. Hence three groups of women faced a substantial barrier to gain entry to these networks. The first group was women who were in extreme poverty in the neighbourhood. Because it was believed that they would not be able to “pay back” any favour they received from the solidarity-network, they were implicitly excluded. Gülay, a 35-year old casual day labourer told me how she noticed this:

I am the poorest in our neighbourhood, and everyone knows it. Sometimes my neighbours used to help us but then they stopped. They started gossiping behind me. So now even if I starved to death, I would not go and knock on their doors.

As discussed previously, gossip formed the means of everyday social interaction in the peripheries of Istanbul (see Dedeoğlu 2008; Kümbetoğlu, User, and Akpınar 2012). This meant that those who did not pay back were easily identified, and ticked off from the solidarity-network. However, the lack of a support network pushed women in poverty deeper into poverty. As Elvin, a 40-year old office helper told me:

When I got divorced, the worst part was that everyone heard it. Everyone heard it, unfortunately. I was so sorry about it. I was struggling financially and there was no one to help, not a single soul. You may ask, not even your neighbours? Not even your relatives? You know what? When they hear it for the first time, they come all together, and then, you don't see any of them ever again. They all run away. [Why?] So that you cannot ask for money. That's right. I have also seen those I used to call “friends” [stress emphasized]. Of course nobody is obliged to help or anything, I know their [financial] situation as well. (...) But I struggled a lot, this debt, that debt. I struggled.

Accordingly, the second group who were implicitly excluded from the solidarity-networks was “women without men”, in other words, divorced, widowed or unmarried women living alone [due to death of parents]. It was believed that women without men would not be able to “pay back”, unless they had a certain income of a certain kind from their deceased husbands or fathers. Elif, a 37-year old housewife, told me that her husband’s brother supported her when her husband was sent to prison. She later told me that once her husband was out of prison, her brother-in-law handed him with a detailed spreadsheet of all the money Elif borrowed from him, but also all the favours he made, including the number of loaves of bread he bought for Elif. Such expectations of immediate returns drove women out of the solidarity-networks, and look for employment in the informal sector, no matter how little the pay may be.

The third group of women who felt left out from the local solidarity-networks were women who did not conform to some [or all] socio-cultural imperatives of their networks. These women either directly challenged the gender norms specified in these networks by not conforming or indirectly. Young women who refused to wear the headscarf even when all other women in their extended family network were covered or women who engaged in “inappropriate behaviour” such as having boyfriends or staying out late in the evenings were some examples. Some women indirectly challenged these norms by engaging in a behaviour that is “unexpected” from them, such as engaging in party politics or trade union movements. As will be also illustrated later in this chapter, although women’s participation in organisations was permitted, their participation in wider level organisations was not by their male kin, as the latter was considered to be a male domain, hence inappropriate for women. Nurten, a 34-year old garment worker described how her extended family disapproved of her participation in a labour strike.

Now they see us as fallen. I have been on this labour resistance for two months now. My sister-in-laws, we used to be close, very close. My father-in-law used to live with us. When

I decided to join this resistance, he packed his stuff and went away. When he lived with us, he'd give us his pension for household expenses. (...) They are kind of against my participation in this resistance. They ask me, why are you going there, why are you doing this? It is because I am a woman, because we are here side by side with male workers. Other than that, all my sisters know it, they all heard it. They know that we are in real hard up. I mean you cannot say anything, you cannot ask for money, they would not give it anyway. But we could not ask for it, either. They don't even pick up the phone and call us to ask, how are you, what are you up to? They used to call me all the time when our [financial] situation was not like this. You know what they say? If you have money, everybody would be a slave for you. (*Varsa pulun, cümle alem olur kulun*) (Nurten, 34, textile worker)

In short, although women's solidarity-networks provided access to important information and resources for everyday survival, participation in these networks was contingent on many imperatives, such the ability to reciprocate a favour, or conforming to the value-systems of the community. This has entailed that women who were excluded from these solidarity-networks were pushed further into poverty, and informal employment was usually their only means of survival. However it is important to note that when women were not able to seek help from their family and kin solidarity networks, they tried to form new relationships either through their employment or active trade unions and/or women's associations in their communities. In the remainder of this chapter, how women who lost the "approval" of their families as a result of breaking off a marriage/engagement, participating in collective action or not conforming to the patriarchal rules specified by their families are more likely to resort to more visible forms of collective action. This is because they attempt to broaden their networks and opportunities through which they can seek protection, tap into social and economic resources, when these are not provided by their family and kin networks.

#### *6.4.1.3. Clientelism and Politics of Solidarity-Based Networks*

Political favouritism in Turkey and its impact on the organisation and day-to-day implementation of economic activities has been a topic of interest for more than three decades (Göle 1986; Erder 1996; Durak 2011). During the AKP rule in the past decade, it became public knowledge that the party provided [mostly informal] financial help to the poor

in return for votes. AKP's organisation at the neighbourhood-level ensured that those who would really keep their promise would get access to the aid packages. The AKP's neighbourhood-level organisations usually benefited from local women willing to contribute to their political agenda. This has led to the politicisation of many solidarity-networks in the neighbourhoods, as many women sought to build direct relationships with their village headmen, mayor, or district governor) to hear about the help packages, when they would be distributed and what they would include. Though there was a precondition that no same household would receive help packages from three offices, having a close relationship with the office workers (or women working for the party in the neighbourhoods) sometimes proved effective in reaching multiple help packages or securing other benefits.

Nejla, a 47-year old worker doing odd jobs, told me that after her divorce, she realised she was not going to be able to make ends meet, even with her married daughter's help. She heard about the meeting days with the mayor, the headmen and all other AKP offices in her neighbourhood, Esenyurt. At first, she started going to these offices to hear about the aid packages, but then she visited these offices on a daily basis to hear about the odd job opportunities, or any other favours. Though she was not disabled, she managed to secure 50 per cent disability benefit scheme through these networks, which constituted her main monthly income. Birce, a 26-year old municipality worker, too, secured her job with the help of participation in AKP's local women networks. Previously she was declined jobs due to her disability [infantile paralysis].

Within neighbourhoods marked by poverty, it was usually women inquiring about aid packages, or financial help options, since they were deemed responsible for maintaining the household. For instance, when men's income was not sufficient for all the household expenses, it was usually the women who were blamed, for over-spending husband's/father's

hard-earned money (*hazır yiyiciler*). Consequently, women saw it as their responsibility to tap into the party network to find opportunities to earn a little extra income, get some help with the finances or at least some storable goods (coal, storable food, flour, rice, detergents, etc.). It is important to emphasise that women's participation in these networks were allowed only under the condition that they remained in their own communities and neighbourhoods and their participation provided economic and other returns to the household. And it is important to emphasise that women participated in the "female" aspects of the political networks: either the party's women networks, associations or through seeking women-related needs, although as mentioned above this involved making the most of household's income and/or providing to it.

It goes without saying that such political organisations were not limited to only the AKP. Other political or religious organisations in the neighbourhood also acted as powerful networks through which women could reach the resources they needed. In the Alevi districts of both Esenyurt [Yeşilkent] and Kağıthane [Gultepe] for instance, participation in the religious and social gatherings were considered a "must" for continuing informal social protection. In Yeşilkent Cemevi, women were able to consult the religious authority (*Dede*) about their familial or financial problems. The Dede inquired the rest of the Cemevi community for finding a solution to the problem, without disclosing women's names. This secrecy enabled women to seek help in private matters without risking stigmatisation. Similarly, the Kurds and the Roma had their own political organisations in the neighbourhoods, though these organisations were more male-dominated [like the *hemşeri* associations], and women's participation was permitted only in the presence of their male kin. Still it is necessary to note that they proved to be important resources when households were struck by misfortune.

Nevertheless, sometimes participation in these non-AKP networks conflicted with women's desires to be more active in the local AKP-network, which provided more direct financial help and job opportunities. Some women noted that it would not be appropriate for them to join any other political network than that of AKPs, when they and/or their husbands found jobs through the party<sup>45</sup>. When participating in a multiplicity of networks created a conflict of interest, such as when the two offices in the neighbourhood (mayor's and village headman's) were run by two different parties, women chose the one that provided most immediate and tangible returns.

Lastly it is important to note that seeking assistance from these political networks required regular participation. When and how much support would be provided was uncertain, hence being involved in the internal dynamics of the organisations ensured women would "not miss out". Despite this involvement, a change of the village headmen in the local elections, even when the governing party actually did not change, would necessitate women to re-start all their efforts of proving their needs to the authorities from scratch.

The reason the women who participated in these local political networks are categorised as pursuing "invisible" strategies is because women's strategies were usually hidden under the rubric of "contributing to the family" in line with women's assigned gender roles. Also patriarchal domination discussed in the earlier chapters entailed that women's participation in these networks and collective action were limited to women's associations of the political parties and their own communities and neighbourhoods. This participation was further negotiated with the male members of the household, in that women would not participate in the political organisations/associations/networks their husbands or fathers would be against

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<sup>45</sup> Alevis whose religious orientation is diametrically opposite to that of AKP generally did not participate in the local AKP organisations.

ideologically. To illustrate, Alevis who are known to support the opposition parties would not participate in the local networks of AKP, even when they provided the most frequent and substantial aid packages for the poor. Because women's collective action is heavily mediated by their male kin and patriarchal gender roles, and women accept these constraints on their political participation and mobility, and instead try to achieve their desired ends within these constraints, their strategies remained "invisible".

#### 6.4.2. Struggle

The limitations of personal networks in helping women escape poverty and/or cope with the vulnerabilities in the informal sector pushed them to look beyond these networks. Neighbourhood-based woman's associations aimed to fill this gap, by strengthening the economic and political position of women in their families and workplaces. Some of these associations were initiated by women in informal employment to gain some bargaining power against their employers (especially home-based workers), and others were started as a result of the mobilisation efforts of activist or feminist groups knowledgeable about the difficulties experienced by the low-income, low-educated women in the peripheries. There were also other informal women associations in the neighbourhoods which were started by the charitable business owners, but which reinforced the patriarchal norms and labour market conditions that led to women's vulnerability in the informal sector. The main difference of women categorised in the "struggle" category is that they attempted to alter their conditions in the labour market through engaging more visible forms of collective action. These women actively recognised the constraining conditions on their lives (either patriarchy, labour market discrimination, etc.) and engaged in collective action to remove some, if not all, of these constraining factors to the recognition of their work in their households and/or seeking better employment conditions in the labour market. In this section, an example of each type of

women's informal associations will be presented through three case studies<sup>46</sup>. These case studies show how women decided to start or participate in these associations, and what kind of problems they encountered.

#### 6.4.2.1. *Neslihan and Nezihe's Home-Based Workers Initiative in Esenyurt*

Neslihan (31) and Nezihe (32) both resided in Esenyurt, an area where home-based work was still largely subcontracted by the nearby garment and food production factories. Neslihan recently moved to Istanbul, as her husband was not able to get a job in Tunceli, an eastern province of Turkey, and their in-laws were no longer able to provide for them. Nezihe moved to Istanbul from Elazig, an eastern province of Turkey, two years ago, again for similar reasons. Neslihan had 4, and Nezihe 2 children, and they both argued that because of their childcare responsibilities, they were not able to “go and look for proper work”. In addition, Neslihan noted that even if she looked for work, because she did not even have primary school leaving certificate, she would not get anything. To this, Nezihe replied “I have the primary school diploma, don't worry it does not make any difference”. Both of the women's husbands were employed in the nearby postal delivery factory with minimum wage<sup>47</sup>, and the families desperately needed any other additional income the women could bring.

Neslihan had been involved with home-based work since she moved to Istanbul. However, she often depended on factory intermediaries to bring the jobs to her neighbourhood. As discussed in Chapter 5, the intermediaries charged women a fee for their services for bringing and collecting the jobs. The intermediaries also exercised an unmatched power as to how much and when women would be paid. Some of these intermediaries paid less than the

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<sup>46</sup> All of these case studies are based on women's associations in Esenyurt, as in Kağıthane, home-based work was not common, and so were home-based women's informal associations.

<sup>47</sup> According to a recent report by Clean Clothes Campaign, minimum wage in Turkey equals to 28% of the living wage for a family of four in Turkey. It can be argued that the percentage might be even lower for Istanbul, which is considerably more expensive than other cities of the country.

initially agreed rate, arguing that some jobs would not pass the quality-check of the factory, and some disappeared right after collecting the completed jobs and never returned to pay the women. After having been “deceived” many times by these intermediaries, and gaining sufficient experience in a variety of home-based jobs to build confidence that her jobs would pass the quality checks of the factories, Neslihan decided to eliminate the intermediaries and go and get the jobs directly from the factories herself. However, she realised that she would not be able to physically carry all the jobs herself from the factories, let alone finish them in the required time on her own. She teamed up with Nezihe from her apartment building, whom she knew also took in home-based work on a regular basis. They started going to the factories together to look for jobs and negotiate the piece rate. They did the jobs together in each other’s house on a rotational basis (so that they shared the expenses of electricity, water, etc. while doing the work) and they also equally shared the money they received from the factories.

Other women living in their neighbourhood noticed Neslihan and Nezihe’s attempt to eliminate the factory intermediaries to home-based work. They wanted to join their initiative, however, not all of them were physically able to walk to and carry the job loads from the factories (and also carry the finished jobs back afterwards). They asked Neslihan and Nezihe to bring some jobs for them from the factories as well, in return they could do the jobs in their homes (so that Neslihan and Nezihe would not need to pay for the electricity and other infrastructure costs), and during their factory visits, they would take care of their children. The women accepted that Neslihan and Nezihe were not able to bring back jobs for everyone on a routine basis, as the home-based work supply was still in the hands of the factories’ own intermediaries, and factories still preferred to do business with their own intermediaries, rather than women directly. So Neslihan and Nezihe could only get the jobs these

intermediaries did not take that day (either due to their difficulty levels, or because their cars were already full), and their bargaining power was shaped by the difficulty of the task, and the time given to finish it. The more difficult the job to be finished in a short amount of time, the higher the piece-rate they could negotiate.

At the time of the interview, Neslihan and Nezihe were the only regular employees of their initiative, but on and off basis, they provided work to more than fifteen women in their neighbourhood. They ensured quality control across the jobs done by different women, and also that everyone received their fair share. In other words, Neslihan and Nezihe did not charge other women workers for their services. Eight months into their negotiations with various factories, they became known faces to the employers. Neslihan told me that they could become equals to the other intermediaries, but because the other intermediaries were men and they had their own cars to transport the jobs, they still had lesser bargaining power with the employers.

Neslihan and Nezihe's neighbourhood initiative was not always successful in getting jobs directly from the employers. Weather conditions, seasonal shifts in demand for home-based work, and their (or their family members') health situations often interfered with their ability to continue their initiative on a regular basis. In such times, they noted that they would still get work from the other intermediaries in the neighbourhood, but because they also knew the employers now, the intermediaries were not able to "deceive" them as they used to do.

Neslihan also told me that factories were relocating to further peripheries than Esenyurt, and those factories that remained were subcontracting work more and more to casual day labourers. This meant two things. First, the volume of work subcontracted to home-based workers was decreasing. Second, the piece-rates were decreasing, because factories subcontracted only the inferior quality products to home-based workers, and the quality

products were being manufactured in their own establishments (by casual day labourers). These two changes to the organisation of home-based work in their neighbourhood limited their initiative to turn into a bigger collective, because “home-based work did not have a future” in the neighbourhood. Accordingly, Neslihan noted that once her children became old enough to stay at home on their own, she would transfer to casual day labour<sup>48</sup>.

In Neslihan and Nezihe’s account the reason why their initiative did not turn into a bigger collective movement for seeking better work conditions for home-based workers is that women “hid away” in their homes when it came to actually engaging with employers (who happen to be generally men) and making demands on their employment conditions. They explained that women considered such “demands” male activities, and they tried to stay away from conflict as much as possible. It was noted that most women feared that they would lose (even) their access to home-based work if their husbands realised they were dealing with stranger men, and actually “arguing with them like men”. In other words, women’s patriarchal constraints about their place and status in the place carried over to their decisions to engage in collective action. Neslihan and Nezihe considered their home-based work as a necessary means for the survival of their households. Their husbands were also not against their employment. In that regard they faced less pressure on their working and engaging in this collective action to negotiate their own terms with the employer. They, however, emphasised that because other women did not participate “actively” in their initiative, their bargaining power with the employers remained limited and they could achieve “only so much”.

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<sup>48</sup> In a way, Neslihan and Nezihe’s collaboration is similar to those women networks studied by Lynn Stephen (1991) in her work with Zapotec weavers in Mexico, in that women choose the members they work with from the women they participate in social activities together, such as church or other neighbourhood activities.

#### 6.4.2.2. *The Solidarity Association of Housewives (and the Disabled<sup>49</sup>) (HANEDER)*

The second informal association I studied was started in 2009 with the aim of providing public assistance to the unfortunate (*kimsesizler* – literal translation: people who have no one) and the disabled in Esenyurt. However, due to inactivity it was repurposed into an association of housewives by a local business owner, with the aim of “gaining unproductive forces staying at home and ameliorating their sociological [sic] position”. The head of the association, H.O., noted that they expanded their network of home-based workers as they gained infrastructural help from the municipality for their efforts to “help poor women make ends meet”. Their efforts were also recognised by the factory owners in the municipality, the mayor and the AKP office in Esenyurt, and within a year, HANEDER managed to increase its home-based work portfolio up to 400 women, and at the time of interview, they had about 1700 women in their waiting list who would like to receive work.

HANEDER operated purely on a non-profit basis, and all the money paid by the factories was given back to the women. H.O. noted that eliminating the intermediaries between the factories helped women secure substantial amounts of income for women workers. She told me that “a hardworking woman who would spare 10 hours of her time on this work, can earn up to 15 TL (4 GBP) a day, which equals to a very good amount in our day and age<sup>50</sup>”. H.O. noted that unlike other intermediaries, they did not require women to overwork themselves by giving them a workload they would not be able to complete in the required time, instead they asked the women themselves to pick and choose the kinds of jobs they would like to do, and its amount. HANEDER liaised between the factories and women, and ensured quality

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<sup>49</sup> Disabled individuals were not yet given any home-based work, but H.O. told me that once they had a working system of collection, distribution and re-collection of jobs, they were going to be included in the association as well.

<sup>50</sup> It is important that a woman earning 15 TL a day would earn less than half of the minimum wage in a month.

control across the board. Women who did not complete the tasks on time, or who made more than three mistakes at a time were not given a job again.

HANEDER highlighted that as much as home-based work was crucial for the survival of urban poor, it was also crucial for the Turkish businesses to be globally competitive. Another managing director of the association who requested to remain anonymous told me that:

The kinds of firms we do business with are export-oriented firms, which require a high level of quality in their jobs. Damaged goods would be no good for such companies. So, we need to ensure quality at competitive prices for them, otherwise they would also locate to cheap labour countries in Asia or Africa. But if these companies could ensure similar levels of cheap labour, quality labour too, in their own countries, they would also choose that. Because our association is non-profit, we provide them with rates that are competitive with the Asian rates.

It is important to emphasise here that HANEDER did not acknowledge women as workers but housewives, and their economic activities were not acknowledged as “work” per se, but women’s efforts of helping the family budget. As H.O. noted:

Home-based work is ideal for housewives, because they are able to do their domestic tasks at home, take care of their children, or the sick, and in their spare time, they can get this work done. They can work for 1 hour or 10 hours a day. The whole idea is about flexibility, because housewives are not able to go anywhere else. When they are sitting at home with their in-laws, they can also share the workload with them and do it together. If they have children, they can make them join in, and work together with them, too. That is why it is ideal for them.

The women who received home-based work from HANEDER were mostly first-time workers, who did not have any other labour market experience. They all heard about HANEDER from a woman they knew in their neighbourhoods, who told them that “the job is easy and the pay on time”. For many of them home-based work was their only way of entering the labour market, either because they lacked reading and writing competency which would constitute the bare minimum requirement for any job, or because they had small children, sick or elderly family members they had to care for.

When inquired about whether they had any plans for formalising their workers, HANEDER claimed that home-based work was the best possible option for housewives who were able to benefit from their husband's (or father's) social security benefits. They added that, the main problem with home-based workers was not formal social protection, but that their productivity levels were low. The managing director of HANEDER who requested to remain anonymous told me that:

Because piece-rate in home-based work is very cheap, women need to do thousands, millions of pieces to get a small amount of money. But how many pieces of garments can you do by hand? The speed is slow, consequently the productivity is low. We are currently planning a project which will involve providing women with sewing machines, so that they can do the work faster in their homes, become more productive and earn more.

The HANEDER case is interesting because it demonstrates both how women can benefit from non-kinship based associations for work stability and payment security in informal employment, and how women are interested in joining bigger collectives to achieve these ends but also how the same association might reproduce the very conditions which made the women's labour unvalued, underpaid and invisible. On the one hand, many women [though first time workers] noted that they were knowledgeable about the vulnerabilities of home-based work such as non-payment or no-show from the intermediaries, and expressed positive attitudes about what HANEDER was doing for them. On the other hand, they also acknowledged that the "big bosses" were just "using the fact" that women were not able to "go out for work" and were making large profits thanks to them [*Bizim sırtımızdan para yapıyorlar*]. It was however rather interesting that none of the women who found work via HANEDER questioned its role in arranging business for them. When asked if HANEDER could perhaps try to negotiate with the businesses, or the big bosses so to say, to raise their piece-rates, all the women unanimously stated that HANEDER would have no such power, and they were "thankful enough" that they were not being charged for the service.

The reason HANEDER did not turn into wider level collective action can be explained through the fact that women workers in this network did not actually “own” the collective movement but treated as a medium for tapping into better work conditions. Women’s participation in HANEDER, however, was still different than their neighbourhood-based solidarity networks because women workers were aware that their work conditions should be changed and were willing to participate in networks which would enable this change, although they did not necessarily want to be the driving forces in this change.

#### 6.4.2.3. *From Women Research and Solidarity Centre (KADMER) to IMECE: A Grassroots*

##### *Women’s Solidarity Organisation in Esenyurt*

In the late 1990s, a group of socialist feminist women organised themselves into a self-managed women’s association, namely, KADMER (The Women Research and Solidarity Centre – *Kadın Araştırma ve Dayanışma Merkezi*) to “resist women’s oppression on a daily basis”. KADMER started as a small solidarity network in Esenyurt organised by women for women. Esenyurt emerged as a suitable location for two reasons. First, women’s informal, underpaid and invisible labour was abundant. Second, because Esenyurt was substantially far away from the city centre, low-income and low-educated women of this neighbourhood were not able to participate in women’s or other political organisations whose offices and activities were generally in the city centre. Serpil Kemalbay, one of the founding activists, told me the story of KADMER.

We wanted to achieve something else with this organisation. We realised that we needed to reflect on the changes in feminist activism, and that low-income women workers living in the peripheries of the big cities like Istanbul were becoming a more and more prominent issue. Our aim was never to go into these neighbourhoods and organise women around our leftist principles, but to come here and struggle together on an everyday basis with them. You can call Esenyurt the shanty town of Istanbul, its edge, or its periphery. Though in the past two decades the façade of the buildings improved, when you scratch the surface the poverty is there. Women in these neighbourhoods are not able to go and participate in the women’s organisations in Taksim [city centre]. They do not have the time or money for it. Also, some would not be allowed by their male kin. That’s why we came here.

KADMER had a long battle in Esenyurt to establish itself as a woman's association. Several strategies were adopted to recruit members, as well as for not losing the present ones. Serpil Kemalbay told me the process of introducing KADMER to women in Esenyurt:

We rented a little office in one of the main business centres in Esenyurt, and started a three-monthly magazine, writing on issues of poverty, patriarchy, and labour. But we soon realised Esenyurt women actually did not read our magazine, and did not ever stop by our office. When they saw our stands in the farmers market or in the neighbourhoods, they were often suspicious about us and were asking: What are you selling? So we rented a new place in a residential street and started organising the local women from there. Then we began to build our organisation together with them. They wanted us to act as an intermediary for homebased work because the factory intermediaries were abusing their power, so we did. They wanted us to have a little woman's café, somewhere they would be able to go freely without male or financial restrictions, we got some funds from the local municipality, and opened up a café. Some of the women wanted literacy courses, we found voluntary teachers to give the courses and organised the classes. For the children of poor women, we organised after-school classes to help them with their school work, or the university entrance examination. We exercised direct democracy, and the condition to participate in all of our free activities, was to attend our weekly assemblies. We wanted to make sure that everything was bottom up, and that women themselves shaped this organisation for women like themselves.

In 2000s, women's informal employment in Esenyurt began to change as the neighbourhood evolved from an industrial hub to a nearby neighbourhood of luxurious gated communities such as Başakşehir, Bahçeşehir and Ardıçlı. These gated communities created a huge demand for domestic workers, which was supplied by the low-income women workers in Esenyurt. This change was simultaneous with KADMER's name becoming IMECE. Serpil Kemalbay explained what IMECE means in Turkish and for their organisation.

In fact, we did not come up with the concept of IMECE, as it is one of the most defining characteristics of the veteran history and culture of women of this land [Turkey]. Before modern production, when production for the market and the household was still one and the same, the biggest part of production for the community was done in a cooperative way through a division of labour. Women, even after migrating to the city, still do these tasks IMECE-style, that is, they share the tasks when they make *tarhana* (a type of soup made from dried yoghurt), when they wash their carpets in side streets, they preserve their winter vegetables, or pickles this way. So IMECE means "Today we do what you need to do, tomorrow you help me do what I have to do". We adopted the name IMECE to show that women will not only come together to finish a daily task, but to struggle against the difficulties of life together, and make their labour visible both at home and in the labour market.

Overall, KADMER [then IMECE] introduced a novel form of organisation to women workers in Esenyurt. This organisation tried to enable women cope with or overcome the vulnerabilities they encountered in their family life or in the labour market. It also aimed to facilitate their access to important resources, such as literacy programmes, occupational trainings, educational assistance, and provide legal and social support. However, unlike Neslihan and Nezihe's initiative which was a "bottom-up" organisation, KADMER remained a "top-down" organisation hence although women found its assistance helpful, not all women embraced it to the same degree. In 2012, when I was conducting my fieldwork in Esenyurt, participation was still a big issue for IMECE. Some women were registering an interest but not showing up in any of the events (or demonstrations), others were cancelling their participation after their first visit. Some gave an explanation that their husbands/fathers (or other family members) did not think IMECE was a useful organisation for them. Some noted they did not have the time to spare for IMECE. This made it extremely difficult to survive as a self-managed association. Since all staff was working on a voluntary basis, IMECE often lacked people to man the office, or run day-to-day management of the association. The amount of projects that could be done and the success of the projects also suffered due to no-show or lack of participation. Moreover, Serpil Kemalbay noted that some women in the neighbourhood had a rather pragmatist perspective on the associations in the neighbourhood, and they participated as long as they offered "*freebies*". For instance, she noted that when KADMER was distributing home-based work, they had significantly more participants. T.K., an IMECE activist, added that women resorted to IMECE to solve their problems, when other political bodies could not, but when they did not have an "acute problem" they were not very interested.

### 6.4.3. Visibility

As discussed above, for women in informal employment, familial, kinship and neighbourhood-based relationships constituted the main collective strategies against the shared vulnerabilities. The solidarity networks and women associations presented so far are similar to the extent that they are spatially limited to certain neighbourhoods, or certain sectors. However, these small neighbourhood-level collectivities were rarely sufficient to gain the necessary visibility for demanding legal rights and formal social protection for informal women workers. They were also rarely powerful beyond their immediate locations, or arrangements. The investigation of women's transition to collectivised action not only explains the situations when women's otherwise invisible strategies remain insufficient, but also provides important insights into the gender ideologies that shape women's mobilisations beyond their immediate familial, kinship and neighbourhood networks. Gender ideologies exercise a powerful influence over how women's collectivities can become visible, and under which conditions they can drive change. Participating in these wider collectivities signals to the employers and the state that informal work indeed is in need a big sector for low income, and low-educated women, and certain steps should be taken to formalise this sector. It also signals to women's families that women's informal work is not just a continuation of their unpaid roles at home, but productive and important source of income for the household budget. In this section, I will review women's decisions to join wider collectivities, labour movements, and women's cooperatives, as well as their reasons for avoiding such organisations. These answers will help us identify the constraining factors or environment to women's collective strategies turning into collective action.

6.4.3.1. *Transition to Collectivised action: “We need to do something about it, this cannot go forever”*

For women workers in the informal sector who experienced long time non-payment, reduced payment or unlawful dismissal, a usual response was changing jobs. It was also common for women to tell their co-workers to quit working with them so as to slow the production, and “teach the employer a lesson” that without their labour, they could not make the export delivery dates. However, these were usually responses when women were individually laid off, or had individual disputes with the employers. When several workers were laid off at the same time, or not paid for a long time, these responses began to change. Employers were aware of this possibility, hence they often tried to lay off workers gradually, or in times of downturn, they followed a strategy of paying the workers on a rotational basis, so as to ensure that not all workers were unpaid at the same time. But the length of this period was crucial, because many workers were dependent on their wages on a day-to-day basis, and they did not have savings to fall back on. The longer the period the workers had reduced or non-payment, the higher the chances were that some workers would start to raise their voices. If the employers solved the payment problems in this period in a fast and efficient manner, they could prevent the workers’ voices becoming louder, by –usually – dismissing the workers who attempted to mobilise other workers to come together and resist the employers’ practices. If the payment problems were not solved, and started to affect the lives of more and more workers, collective action began to develop. A strike in one of the garment ateliers in Istanbul in 2012, presented a good example for the emergence of such collective action. As Kezban, a 46-year old garment worker told me about her joining the resistance movement:

He [the employer] did not pay us for one month, then the second month. We work here, we need to get what we deserve and we need it. He kept saying, “OK Friends, we’ll get this money from x-place and then pay you”. Third month is over, the same thing. (...) That is how we were deceived for a long time. First he stopped paying our overtime, and then started to not pay at all. It has been going on for three years! He [the employer] was telling

us, overdraft some money from the bank, try to get by. But if I don't get paid here, how am I gonna pay the bank back? What about the interest rates? He pulled all of us to the bottom. Everyone waited, hoping it is gonna get better today, tomorrow, or the day after that. Some of us were left with no option but quitting work, since they could no longer afford this ad hoc work style. Then he started laying off people, in groups of fives, or sevens, then tens. Seeing this, some of the workers went to the union, and they became union members- just so that when laid off, they could get some of their money back. In the factory, these people [the unionised ones] started to tell us to join them as well, telling that the boss was going to lay off the rest of us. (...) You know when did it all start? When we were hitting the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> month of non-payment. Because we were sinking by the speed of light. There was Ismail in our production line, he was unionised at the time. He told us, "We need to do something about it, this cannot go forever". That's how we began to join our forces.

Women who participated in labour movements, however, noted that, they were sceptical at first, and they needed the push from other workers to "prove them that it was going to be worth it". Many women workers also expressed that they were scared of being left alone, as it was usually the case on the factory floor that "these ideas were discussed and then people would chicken out". This is because "being left alone" often meant that they could easily be fired (*fişlenmek*), and then would lose their jobs. Hence, the support from an established collective, either a union or a group of people with a history of collective action was sought. In this regard, it can be argued that being exposed to unions or labour cooperatives played an important role in women's transition to collective action from *struggle*, from their neighbourhood-based small collectivities.

As Kalaycıoğlu, Rittersberger-Tılıç, and Çelik (2008) observed, there was also lack of trust in the trade unions, as effective platforms through which workers' rights could be negotiated. Some women emphasised that the available unions were "Puppet Unions" (*Sarı Sendika*) which protected the rights of the employers more than the employees. These ideas were however easily changed when workers found "good unions" and received legal support in their cases, and especially when the workers secured financial or other compensations through the assistance of labour unions. Nevertheless, this still required some level of exposure to unions, which the majority of women workers in the informal sector did not have.

It is important to discuss how having “worker identity” contributed to women’s making the transition from invisible forms of strategies to visible collective action. As discussed in this section, women who engaged in collective action had a constant working relationship with other workers in their sector (e.g. manufacturing sector), and they shared a “common enemy” in that they either had the same employer/ factory they were working for whose work conditions they would like to challenge/ alter or that they were in the same sector and were aware that they all experienced similar problems. Majority of women in the informal sector, however, did not have this “worker identity” as often they changed jobs frequently and their jobs involved work in different sectors and sometimes without any contact with other workers who also experienced similar difficulties. For instance, one of the most important barriers home-based workers faced (as we have illustrated in the case of Neslihan and Nezihe) is that home-based work takes place between closed-doors in the private houses of women under the close scrutiny and patriarchal domination of male kin. Although women generally know which of their neighbours are engaged in home-based work, they still consider them (and also themselves) as housewives contributing to the family budget. This undervaluation of their work as non-work also contributes to their not seeing themselves as workers, and hence to their non-participation in collective action. It is also important to emphasise that women in home-based work usually do not work for the same employer/same sector and do not think their work conditions are similar, or that they have a “common enemy” in the labour market to fight against. This point was especially apparent in the interviews of domestic workers who worked for private households, hence different employers. Majority of domestic workers I interviewed thought of the difficulties they encountered with their workers were unique to themselves, and other workers with different employers would perhaps have different problems, but not the ones they experienced. Hence when women worked in isolated environments and in different work arrangements, unless they came together through some

level of mediation (e.g. women's associations, meeting at a bus stop waiting for the same shuttle for domestic workers, etc.) they did not develop this "worker identity", and this created a major constraint on their invisible strategies for survival in the informal sector to turn into collective action.

#### 6.4.3.2. *"If the government does not see us, we'll show them": Home-based and Domestic Workers in Turkey*

The second push factor that drew women workers in the informal sector into wider collective actions was their realisation that the solutions provided by their small neighbourhood-based organisations were merely short-term. The home-based workers of Neslihan and Nezihe or the neighbourhood-based solidarity associations did not provide long-term and sustaining changes to the lives of poor informal women workers. Most of these initiatives remained limited to immediate economic returns and did not go far on providing social protection or solutions to the everyday vulnerabilities of their work such as work accidents, unlawful layoffs, non-payments or employer abuse. In other words, women workers continued to remain invisible in politics and law. In this section, I will explore how home-based workers and domestic workers made a transition from these less-visible forms of organisations, to those ones that are visible both at the national and international level.

#### *HomeNet Turkey*

Home-based workers in Turkey have been organising for the past twenty years in order to gain equal rights with other workers. Initially starting as the Home-based Women Workers Cooperative in Istanbul (*Sınırlı Sorumlu Avcılar Ev-Eksenli Çalışan Kadınlar Küçük Sanat Kooperatifi*) to eliminate the intermediaries in home-based work, the organisation grew into a large collective by joining forces with other small home-based workers collectives across different neighbourhoods in Istanbul and other cities of Turkey (Muğla, Van, Aydın, Sivas). The cooperative followed two strategies for gaining wider participation. First, home-based

workers tried to organise fellow home-based workers in their immediate neighbourhoods; and second, the cooperative attempted to link these small organisations into a wider network of home-based workers of Turkey. The cooperative joined HomeNet, the global network of home-based workers in 2008 to gain wider visibility of home-based workers in Turkey and lobby against the extremely low-rates of piecework, especially in the garment sector. As stated in the press release of their 2<sup>nd</sup> National Home-based Workers Conference in 2009:

We are workers. Workers whose work is invisible, whose labour is deemed void. Workers who are not recognised as workers. When they do not even accept that we are working, of course they also do not grant us the rights we should have as workers. We do not have social security, we do not have social protection. The only difference we have from workers who have social protection is that we work at home. Other than that, we are also working to make ends meet just like other workers.”<sup>51</sup>

The Cooperative, which was formally recognised as a Trade Union Initiative in 2009, holds the status of first rights-based union (initiative) for home-based workers in Turkey<sup>52</sup>. Gaining visibility to the risks and vulnerabilities of home-based work is the main priority of the initiative, along with gaining social rights and protection for the workers.

Despite the initiative’s gaining wider public visibility in the past decade, the organisation’s success in changing the legal status of home-based workers has been limited. Home-based workers’ legal status in Turkey continues to be ambiguous, and there are considerable contradictions between various Codes regarding the status and rights of home-based workers. For instance, Article 4857 of the Labour Code does not recognise “those members of a family and relatives (up to third degree) coming together and doing piecework and handicraft at home” as workers. But this means that those engaged in handicraft, embroidery, beadwork are excluded from the law, but those working for the garment industry in packaging, thread cleaning, quality control, or the food sector are included. As stated in Chapter 5, home-based

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<sup>51</sup> [www.bianet.org/rtext/file1/112872/evkesenlicalisnlar\\_bildirge.html](http://www.bianet.org/rtext/file1/112872/evkesenlicalisnlar_bildirge.html) Accessed on 13.10.2012.

<sup>52</sup> At the time of writing this thesis, home-based workers were excluded from the Trade Union Law, and hence their initiative was still not recognised as an official trade union.

workers do not generally work for only one sector or do not engage in only one type of work. Instead they engage in a variety of sectors and a variety of jobs, determined by whatever is available in the market. The Labour Code's attempt to distinguish workers on a rather ambiguous premise fails to improve home-based workers' status in the country. Moreover, home-based workers noted that the current Labour Code viewed them as "entrepreneurs", rather than as workers, so they did not benefit from the same rights as workers for mobilisation or other collective organisation rights.

Given the Turkish government's unwillingness to prioritise the rights of home-based workers, home-based workers in Turkey shifted their focus to international law to pressure the Turkish government for change (Bergan 2009). They currently lead a project for pressuring the government to sign ILO C177, the ILO Convention for Decent Work for Home-Based Workers. Though this shift in focus has gained Turkish home-based workers much needed visibility, the social protection of home-based workers and regulation of home-based work still do not reflect this visibility.

#### *Domestic Workers Unions in Turkey: EVID-SEN and IMECE-SEN*

There are currently two unions for domestic workers in Turkey; EVID-SEN (*Ev İşçileri Dayanışma Sendikası*) and IMECE-SEN (*İMECE Ev İşçileri Sendikası*). Both of the initiatives have played an important role in gaining public visibility of domestic workers in Turkey. However personal conflicts between the leadership of the two organisations constrain the initiatives from becoming a national and international institution that defends the rights of domestic workers in Turkey.

#### *EVID-SEN*

EVID-SEN started as a grassroots organisation in 2009 with the initiative of a group of domestic workers. Between 2009 and 2011, the initiative recruited more domestic workers to its member-base, and organised a variety of activities and assistance for domestic workers,

including legal, financial and psychological assistance to domestic workers who were subjected to employer abuse and violence; job information for those looking for domestic work and awareness campaigns to make the conditions and vulnerabilities of domestic work more visible. In 2011, in order to expand the Istanbul-based activities of the initiative, the domestic workers in the leadership of EVID-SEN decided to form a trade union. However, the initiative's application was rejected on the grounds that "domestic work is non-profit work" and that "domestic workers have not been appointed any Industry in which they can unionise"<sup>53</sup>. Since 2011, EVID-SEN has been leading various campaigns to raise awareness about the invisibility of domestic workers from the public gaze, and acts as a lobby group for improving the social and material conditions of domestic workers.

#### *IMECE-SEN*

As mentioned earlier, the efforts of a small neighbourhood-based women's cooperative transformed into a domestic workers collective as a result of the changing needs and aspirations of the working poor in Esenyurt. The collective benefited from the recent reform to the Trade Unions and Collective Bargaining Law in 2012 (Article 6336) and made a formal application for trade union status. IMECE's application was successful, and IMECE became the first formally-recognised Domestic Workers' Union of Turkey in 2014.

The union has become particularly known for their campaign for Fatima Aldal, a domestic worker who lost her life as a result of falling from the window on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor, when she was cleaning it. A lobby group was formed to push the government to make the necessary amendments to the Legal Code which excludes domestic workers from the "worker" definition. Until IMECE's Campaign, domestic workers who had work accidents (whether fatal or not) were treated as Common Law cases (involuntary injury), but Fatima Aldal's case was

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<sup>53</sup> <http://evid-sen.blogspot.co.uk/> Accessed on 08 August 2014.

accepted as a Labour Case, and labour inspectors were appointed to look into the work accident. The verdict was that Fatima Aldal, a domestic worker, had a work accident, and the employer was guilty for not ensuring the necessary conditions for work safety. The campaign, which lasted for more than two years gained enormous public attention to domestic workers and their invisible status in the Legal Code in Turkey.

Fatima Aldal's case and IMECE-SEN and EVID-SEN's continuous lobbying have earned important gains for domestic workers in Turkey. For example, in 2014, a new draft bill has been prepared by the government to formalise domestic work in Turkey and enable domestic workers to benefit from health and retirement benefits; and protection against work accidents and hazardous work conditions. As Fikriye, a 29-year old domestic worker who has been an activist for IMECE since 2010 put it: "If the government does not see us, we'll show them", implying that IMECE would continue its fight until domestic workers were given equal rights and benefits as other workers.

Although both unions have been very successful in mobilising domestic workers and gaining public attention to the vulnerabilities of domestic work in Turkey, the personal issues between the leadership of the two organisations seem to constitute a barrier to their gaining wider visibility and recognition nationally and internationally. The International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) accepts only one member union from each country, and the unwillingness of IMECE-SEN and EVID-SEN to join their forces hinders their participation in IDWF, which is the single most effective international lobbying body for domestic workers in the world. Moreover, at the national level, the battle to claim "first place" entails that both organisations lose power when they lobby the government.

## 6.5. Conclusion

So far I have demonstrated the mounting evidence that women in informal sector are increasingly becoming organised. These organisations imply a move away from the assumption that women in informal employment lack a definite worker identity (since they work for several sectors in a variety of work relationships) to organise themselves. Lack of “worker identity” in the informal sector, and women’s seeing their paid work in the informal sector as “temporary” and “subsidiary” to the male household members shape this involvement. A complex interplay of familial and labour market conditions help women join collective action for demanding their rights: 1) facing severe injustice in their employment (e.g. work accident, unlawful dismissal, non-payment for a long period of time), 2) they learn about their rights (either through other workers or associations/unions campaigning in their workplace/sector/neighbourhood), 3) their families (at least initially) support their joining collective action. Access to women’s organisations or trade unions in the vicinity of their neighbourhoods or workplaces seem to play a key role in women’s learning about their rights, as does having examples of workers who joined collective action and received material and social returns to their participation. However, there are still important barriers to women’s organisations in the informal sector to reach wider participation.

The financial costs of participating in collective action were widely emphasised in the literature (Lourenço-Lindell 2010; Kabeer, Sudarshan, and Milward 2013; Meagher 2014; Chen and Skinner 2014). It has been noted that unlike trade union memberships, where workers are required to pay membership fees, the financial costs of collective action in the informal sector are shaped by time spent away from work (Feige 2007). For informal workers, to go to a labour rally or attend a workers’ meeting means money lost, since it entails valuable time spent on non-paid activities. As Sebahat explained, not everyone was able to afford resistance.

What they want from us is to quit, give up [resistance], because that's what everyone else has done so far. When we first started, we were tens of people here, and now look at how few of us is left. We did not surrender. Instead we joined our forces and became stronger. But I do not hold any grudge against those who left. Actually I understand them. Not everyone can afford resistance. And everyone has different thresholds for how long they can last. If some of them need to leave for work, that's understandable. We would be disappointed if everyone left all at once, because that would hinder the power of our resistance. But we are all workers, we need to feed ourselves, pay our rent and that's not for free.

For Sebahat, who has been on strike for over three months, resistance meant that her two brothers and she were becoming poorer every day and unable to afford even the most basic necessities in life. Her two brothers were working night shifts for her to continue the resistance (all three were laid off unlawfully from the same factory), but for other workers who did not have any relatives or savings to fall back on, continued resistance and time away from work proved impossible.

Financial costs were also not limited to time spent away from work. Many women workers had care responsibilities which they already struggled to balance with their paid-work. As outlined in Chapter 4, becoming a superwife was one of the primary strategies for (and conditions for access to) employment. Consequently, even when women wanted to engage in organisations, their care responsibilities limited them to their neighbourhood-based associations or informal solidarity networks. These smaller collectivities provided a possibility to engage in discussion with other women workers to improve their statuses, while at the same time be able to attend to the needs of their children, sick, disabled or elderly relatives.

For some women, engaging in collective action beyond their neighbourhoods was simply not possible due to patriarchal constraints on their physical mobility. Some women were not able to leave the vicinities of their houses without their male kin's permission and some women, though they were more physically mobile, faced stark opposition from their male kin to participate in collective action. This opposition can be explained by the fact that nationwide collective action is still viewed as male territory in Turkey. Trade unions as well as political

parties remain largely male-dominated. Although women's organisation at the neighbourhood level is permitted, there seems to be an "invisible wall" that limits women from joining more visible forms of collective action. As one home-based worker's husband in Esenyurt told me:

I am not against my wife's helping her other friends and neighbours. They come and do their thing [work] together. But I heard you were asking about unions and stuff. That is too much. I would say Hold on there. Let's not go that far.

When asked about why women should not go "that far", he noted that there are politicians [*devlet büyükleri*] who would surely think about workers, but that her wife was engaged in home-based work "just to pass the time", so a workers' union would not be a place for her. Hence, the trivialisation of women's informal work as "non-work" by their male kin also carried over to women's capabilities of joining collectivities beyond their neighbourhoods.

Lastly, the scepticism towards collective action and the fear from its potential outcomes seemed to scare away informal women workers from engaging in trade unions or movements. It has been a widely known fact that employers in Turkey consider trade union membership a reason for dismissal. A garment factory Human Relations Manager told me that though it is against the law to ask about trade union membership, and they knew that it is a constitutional right, they nevertheless asked about it and carefully eliminated "anarchists". The fear of losing a hard-to-find job makes workers less likely to seek membership in trade unions or other visible forms of resistance. What is interesting is that, this holds true across all sectors in the informal economy, including domestic workers. An employer of a domestic worker in Istanbul told me that she would not hire a domestic worker engaged in collective action, as the last thing she would like to see in her home would be a worker "arguing for her rights".

A second group of women who made a transition from invisible to visible forms of collective action were those who were already familiar with political resistance. For instance, the four

leading activists of IMECE were already active in other political movements before joining IMECE. Elmas, a 52 year-old domestic worker for instance was an active trade union activist in the 1970s, when she was working in the garment sector. Melike, a 47-year old domestic worker from Tunceli whose parents were active in the Dersim resistance, had a long family history for engaging in Alevi resistance movements. Similarly, Yasemin, a 47-year old domestic worker told me that she always wanted to be a “revolutionary” and she made this revolution in her own life by divorcing her husband [as presented in earlier chapters], but she also wanted to revolutionise other lives. Accordingly, she took an active role in the Kurdish movement since the 1990s (including the hunger strikes) and at the time of the interview was also an adamant member of the People’s Democratic Party (HDP).

Therefore, there seems to be two ways in which women can make the transition from invisible forms of collective action to more visible ones and adapt a “worker identity”. The first is when women “hit the bottom” and exhaust all other options to cope with their circumstances. The second is shaped by women’s personal and familial history, in that having an experience in activism, political movements or trade unions help women build on their previous experiences to also engage in collective strategies for improving their labour market conditions in the informal sector.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

This thesis is about women's survival strategies in the informal sector. Informal employment constitutes the everyday means of making ends meet for majority of women living in the peripheries of Istanbul, who face severe barriers to entering the labour market. Even when these women take up formal employment, their job arrangements carry important elements of informality in them, such as reduced access to formal social protection, or lack of protection against work-related contingencies. And in the informal sector, they face several risks that push them into [or deeper] into poverty as a result of reduced income or lack of access to social protection. Therefore the central aim of the thesis has been to demonstrate how women get by, challenge or confront the agents and/or circumstances that push them in a vulnerable position, in the family, labour market and in society in general. Three constraining environments have been chosen for exploring women's strategies for everyday survival: family, labour market, and collective action. Family and Labour Market contexts presented important barriers and vulnerabilities related to women's access to and participation in the informal sector. The Collective Action context explored why poor women workers in the informal sector do not engage in more visible forms of collective action.

In doing so, the thesis presented an original conceptual framework for understanding women's everyday coping strategies in the informal sector: Invisibility, Struggle and Visibility. The framework explored women's strategies along a continuum, based upon the processes through which they were formed and sustained, and examined key internal and external factors that led women to navigate between them. Invisibility referred to those strategies where women tried to cope with their circumstances through making small changes. In other words, invisibility referred to women's hidden and non-confrontational strategies to get by some of the difficulties in their family life, labour market or when trying to make ends meet.

In contrast, visibility referred to women's active strategies to challenge and change their circumstances, by way of directly confronting them or taking the necessary measures to change them radically. Struggle was used as an intermediary category between invisibility and visibility, to specify women's actively seeking alternatives that better suit their familial, financial and labour market circumstances. However, unlike visibility women did not directly confront their agents of oppression, and unlike invisibility, they demanded some level of recognition. In this regard, invisibility and visibility constituted the two end points of the continuum for women's strategies for everyday survival in the informal sector, shaped by the conditions under which they form. It is important to emphasise that women workers often shifted across these different varieties of strategies over time, in response to specific life events or changes to their material and social circumstances.

This research located itself in a wide body of literature on women, gender and informal employment, addressing critical questions about women's constraints and opportunities in the informal sector, and their capabilities of navigating through them. Despite the changing nature of the informal economies in the past three decades, the majority of the literature still focuses on the dichotomy about whether individuals take part in the informal sector as a result of having no access to formal labour market (*necessity*) or see their employment as a venue through which they can test their business ideas (*choice*). In this overarching account of the informal economies, however, women workers, majority of whom are employed as wage workers, have been analysed through the lens of "necessity" as victims of global economic restructuring and global shift towards the flexibilisation of the labour force. Instead, this thesis followed recent thinking in the literature which called for a more "contextual" approach to exploring women's work in the informal sector (Kabeer 2002b; Kabeer 2011b; Kabeer 2011a; Seeley et al. 2006; Kabeer and Kabir 2009; White 2010; Hossain 2012). In responding to this

call, exploring women's strategies for survival demonstrated the heterogeneity of constraints and opportunities in the informal sector for women workers, and their ways of dealing with these constraints. This approach enabled a critical understanding of women's strategies, which did not victimise women workers, but also did not "romanticise" the opportunities they had in the informal sector. More specifically, this thesis has argued that women in the informal sector are neither trapped nor empowered by their informal work experience. Both notions are exaggerations of reality. Instead, this thesis has shown that women recognise the constraints on their ability to improve their lives but they adapt to these constraints and attempt to bring about some change.

In the agenda of understanding women's strategies and responses to the constraints they faced in the informal sector, the role of ethnographic study proved crucial. My broader methodological concern related to the need to investigate the "why" questions about women workers' entry to, participation in, and/or exiting the informal sector required obtaining in-depth information about women's own ways of interpreting the risks and opportunities in the informal sector and giving them a "voice" to tell their own stories (Cornwall 2003; Vaillancourt-Laflamme 2005; Chant and Pedwell 2008). Accordingly, conducting an ethnographic research in the peripheries of Istanbul offered the needed depth and detail to make sense of women's everyday strategies in the informal sector (Moser 2007; Kabeer 2008; Kantor 2009). Giving voice to women's accounts has revealed that on the one end of the spectrum women's power is disguised as acquiescence or compliance when they are in fact engaging in acts to alter their circumstances. These acts remain rather "invisible" because women do not want to engage in conflicts with their male kin or other oppressors on their physical and social mobility. But subversive acts constitute their ways of confronting injustices. On the other end of the spectrum, women have found, through their employment experience

and encounters with other women and organisations, more “visible” forms of challenging their oppressors. This thesis shows which women adopted which kinds of strategies in dealing with these constraints and how and why.

The chapter is divided into two main parts. The opening section provides a summary and synthesis of the main empirical findings, and presents a discussion of the main empirical chapters (4, 5 and 6) in relation to the main aims of this thesis. In answering these questions, the section presents the bigger picture of the changing dynamics of the Istanbul’s informal labour market and women’s strategies for survival in the peripheries. The next section then builds on these empirical findings to provide a critical assessment of the theoretical and empirical contribution the research has made to the literature. Moreover, this section discusses whether the Invisibility-Struggle-Visibility conceptual framework could be applied to other contexts than Istanbul’s informal sector, and the segments of the labour market and the contexts discussed in this research.

### *7.1. Summary of the Main Findings*

My interest in understanding women’s strategies for survival in the informal sector entailed a close investigation of the constraints women workers identified in the informal sector and choices they made when they were navigating through these constraints to improve their lives. Essentially the thesis was guided by three broad research aims outlined in the Introduction in the form of research questions. The following section will provide answers to each of these questions so as to synthesise the main findings of the thesis and present the “big picture” in which the thesis is located.

1. Why do women enter informal employment? And what are the constraints they face in the formal labour market?

With regards to supply and demand factors that push and pull women into the informal sector, it is undoubtedly the case that women living in the peripheries of Istanbul faced a variety of patriarchal, financial and labour market constraints that hindered their possibilities of accessing the formal sector jobs. In this regard, each chapter detailed certain barriers women faced in accessing the formal labour market, but these constraints were especially discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

Chapter 4 demonstrated how a combination of family status, care responsibilities and patriarchal values related to women's appropriate role in the family channelled women into the informal sector. It was highlighted that lack of affordable child and/or elderly care services in Turkey (Ecevit 2007) constrained the choices of many women in looking for formal employment. In this regard, the importance of gender roles in pushing women to the informal sector was demonstrated through an analysis of the kinds of activities women engaged in the informal sector through their marital status. A strong contrast was made between single and married women in terms of their housework and care work load, and the level of patriarchal pressures they faced. Single women were seen as having an advantage in the labour market because they could work longer hours, take less leave from work [no childcare responsibilities] and worry less about housework. Correspondingly, it was noted that women with small children and full-time care responsibilities were particularly channelled into the most invisible segments of the informal sector, because they were pressed with time, physical mobility outside of the house, and burden of care work.

Chapter 5 explored labour market stratification as a reason for women workers entering the informal sector. A mix of demographic factors, such as educational levels, age barriers, neighbourhoods of residence and labour market factors, e.g. discrimination based on ethnicity, religion and marital status were specified as hindering women's accessing formal

sector jobs. More specifically, it was reported that the formal labour market of Istanbul was heavily stratified for women with more than high school degrees, between the ages of 18-35, unmarried and without children, Turkish and Sunni Muslim. Those not fitting exactly to these criteria were pushed into the different segments of the informal employment hierarchy, depending on their closeness to fulfilling these criteria. For instance, Kurdish women with limited Turkish language skills had few job alternatives than home-based work.

In this chapter, the changing structure of the Istanbul's labour market was also presented. More specifically, it was noted that the factories were constantly relocating to further peripheries of Istanbul, which meant that home-based work and manufacturing jobs in the current peripheries were decreasing. Instead, new forms of informality were emerging, e.g. majority of subcontracted jobs carried both elements of informal and formal employment, such as reduced formal social security benefits (Standing 2011).

## 2. What are the risks and opportunities women identify in the informal sector?

A variety of risks and opportunities were identified, though it was emphasised that informal employment presented more risks than opportunities for low-income, low-educated women in the peripheries of Istanbul. The risks were shaped by the sectors in which they were employed in, and their access to formal social protection mechanisms. Chapter 4 identified the opportunities in the informal sector for women workers, and Chapter 5 discussed the risks in general.

Chapter 4 explored how patriarchal and familial factors channelled women into the informal sector, especially to its most "invisible" segments. After detailing women's own understanding of the "patriarchal barriers" to their labour, the chapter explored the complex and multiple forms of strategies women developed to get by or overcome these barriers. Against this background, informal employment emerged as an attractive alternative, which provided the

necessary “flexibility” to juggle care and paid work, or hide the employment arrangement physically or discursively from their male kin, in order to access the labour market. Since women rarely earned enough income to challenge men’s breadwinner status at home and generally engaged in the types of employment that were considered to be “female jobs” e.g. domestic work, care work or home-based work (handiwork), they managed to secure an access to the paid economic activities. The “flexibility” of informal employment, as an ad hoc, irregular and invisible form of employment helped women “bend” their work arrangements according to their circumstances. Therefore flexibility emerged as the most important opportunity that the informal sector provided to women.

The main argument of the chapter is that women actually strategically exploit the invisibility of informal employment to their advantage, when their entry to or participation in the labour market is severely constrained by patriarchal norms about women’s appropriate place in family and in society and by their domestic responsibilities. However, this means that in the long run their labour continues to remain unrecognised and hidden from the public gaze. It is noted that many women “struggle” to change their circumstances, but radical changes rarely take place, as these often require “burning all the bridges” with their families, which is too great a risk when women lack access to social and financial resources of their own and protection mechanisms outside of their family networks. The interplay of four conditions seem to influence women’s seeking more visibility in their families, and have a say in the household decision-making: 1) the stability of their employment in the informal sector, 2) the stability of their husband’s/ father’s employment, 3) support network outside of their own families, 4) having access to examples of women who either challenged their circumstances, are living in more egalitarian households (e.g. middle-class women employers of domestic workers) or provide advice on gender equality (e.g. women’s associations, trade unions).

Throughout the chapter, it is shown that “bargain with patriarchy” is not one-off, but continuous; and women need to constantly re-negotiate their participation in the labour market and say in the household decision-making, when changes occur to the household and family structure.

Chapter 5 focused on the risks of informal employment. The chapter pointed out that women faced a heightened risk of vulnerability in the informal sector, with their incomes rarely providing a stable source of security, and limited access to the formal social protection mechanisms. It was emphasised that informal security regimes provided only short-term security, and they were not able to provide protection against work-related contingencies. In this regard, three segments of the informal sector were compared and contrasted: home-based work, domestic work/subcontracted cleaning work and employment in the manufacturing sector. The most common risks reported by women workers were

- Low-pay
- Non-payment
- Irregularity of work
- No access to health care
- Worker abuse
- Sexual harassment
- Work-related illnesses
- Work accidents

Women were exposed to these risks at varying degrees depending on the sector in which they were employed. For instance, even though women in home-based work did not face a particular risk of sexual harassment from the intermediaries or subcontractors, they reported non-payment, irregularity of work and low pay as very prominent risks they faced in making ends meet. Similarly, different levels of risks were emphasised among domestic workers, with live-in domestic work arrangement paying the most, but running heightened risks of worker abuse.

3. What are the strategies and responses women develop to survive and/or improve their circumstances in the informal sector? Under what conditions are these strategies developed? How and why are these strategies adopted?

The “contextual” understanding of the circumstances of poor women workers was analysed through the strategies they adopted to get by everyday ordeals or overcome some of the pressures they face in their family relationships or labour market experience. In so doing, the thesis aimed to go beyond the dichotomous presentation of informal workers in the literature as pushed into the informal sector as a result of constraints, or pulled into it as a result of the opportunities it provided. Instead, the central aim of the thesis was to demonstrate how women’s labour market experience in the informal sector might equip them with strategies and responses to the very conditions that constrained their access to the formal labour market, and their ways of creating opportunities for them in the informal sector (Dannecker 2002; Seeley et al. 2006; Kabeer and Kabir 2009; White 2010; Kabeer 2011b; Kabeer 2011a; Hossain 2012). In this regard, all three empirical chapters of the thesis examined women’s responses and strategies in different contexts: Chapter 4 Family, Chapter 5 Labour Market and Chapter 6 Organisations. Each chapter was structured around the conceptual framework of Invisibility, Struggle and Visibility, in detailing how women got by or got around some of the constraints in these three contexts.

Chapter 4 focused on women’s strategies for survival against patriarchal domination and traditional gender roles in the family as mothers, wives and daughters. It was emphasised that women’s marital status and care responsibilities shaped their entry into the informal sector, but also their strategies for survival. In this section, three main familial and patriarchal constraints which pushed women into adapting to “invisible” strategies for survival were discussed: [lack of] male permission to access the labour market, the burden of care and housework, and conforming to patriarchal norms about women’s honour and appropriate

place in family and society. In this regard, women exploited the invisibility of their informal employment discursively and/or physically as a means of accessing paid work, even when male permission was not granted. Most women were not able to share their housework and care burden with the male kin in their family; hence in order to be able to access the labour market, they became “superwives” who ran two shifts a day, one at home and one at work. Maintaining honour and conforming to the “appropriate” behaviours of women were ensured through finding a “safe” workplace environment, where women could work with friends and kin, and through wearing modest clothes to shake off any slander or gossip about them.

Struggle referred to women’s strategic use of their employment experience as a subtle means to “loosen” the boundaries of what was considered acceptable and appropriate for them. In this regard, women strategically exploited the characteristics of informal employment such as its irregularity, wage insecurity, heavy workload or its invisibility to “make room” for themselves against patriarchal domination. For instance, some single women used their working overtime as an excuse for being late, though they visited shopping malls, cafes or cinemas instead. Women also used a “wait and see” strategy through making small changes in their usual routine and assessing whether their husbands/families would accept this change. Women would go back to “usual” if they faced resistance from their families, or “loosen” their boundaries more, if the changes they made were accepted.

Despite coming from similar circumstances, some women confronted their agents of oppression in family directly. These women noted that the “invisible” strategies would take too long, and their “struggle” so far had been futile in improving their circumstances. These women were aware of the risks of seeking visibility, such as being shunned by their families or society, or facing “punishments” in the form of domestic violence. Nevertheless, women who sought “visibility” pointed out that “the oppression became unbearable” and they “had to do

something about it". For some women, gaining visibility in their family required "burning all the bridges" with their families, meaning breaking relationships with their husbands or families, or "teaching a lesson" to them in order to demonstrate their discontentment in their relationships. These women, however, noted that breaking their relationships with their families would not be possible, if they did not have access to an informal or formal social support they could rely on. Although the number of women who used "visibility" as a strategy was limited these overt acts of resistance proved to be critical for women, who would not "dare challenge" their family statuses, in questioning their oppressive circumstances.

In sum, each of these strategies attempted to form ways of overcoming the familial and patriarchal constraints women faced in their participation in the labour market. Women constantly shifted between these strategies in dealing with the constraints they faced in family, but for many of them "burning the bridges" was too great a risk, as they could not risk losing the informal social protection they received from their families. However, this dependency meant that their labour continued to remain unrecognised and hidden from the public gaze in the long run.

Chapter 5 investigated why women gave different responses even when they faced similar constraints/risks in the informal sector. The central argument of the chapter was that women's strategies for survival in the informal sector were shaped by their 1) autonomy in the employment relationship 2) possibility of having a direct contact with the employer/owner of production, and 3) ease of replaceability as a worker. The argument built throughout the chapter was that women who have a high degree of autonomy in their jobs, greater contact with their bosses and who are not easily replaceable are more likely to choose confrontational strategies in the workplace.

In this chapter, invisibility referred to women's acceptance of the risks and vulnerabilities of informal employment, because given the familial and labour market constraints they faced, informal employment emerged as their only alternative for making ends meet. Three types of responses were analysed for invisibility. The first one was *tevekkül*, trusting that God will arrange things for the best. In the low-income peripheries of Istanbul, women, who were particularly discouraged in the labour market believed that only God could change their situations. The second response was to accept/believe that their exposure to the vulnerabilities of the informal sector was temporary, until they became skilled workers, or acquired an occupation. The third response was based on a quick cost and benefit analysis women often made in the informal sector. These women decided that their current informal employment arrangement was better than having no employment at all or jobs with worse conditions in the informal sector. Therefore they accepted the constraints of their current employment.

Women who utilised "struggle" as an everyday strategy for survival in the informal sector adopted a variety of responses to change their circumstances in the labour market. These responses ranged from setting their boundaries with the employers before embarking on a job so as to prevent worker abuse in the future, finding "safe work" environments that would enable them to enjoy a level of autonomy in their work, or some level of security against the major risks in the informal sector, such as non-payment or abuse.

Some women resorted to "visibility" to challenge the labour market risks and constraints they faced. Accordingly some women workers tried to "teach a lesson" to their employers so that they would treat their future workers better, or they actively demanded formal social protection from their employers, even at the risk of losing their jobs. This latter point became a major concern for women especially in the following circumstances:

- When they became ill
- When a family member became ill
- When they had a work accident
- When they realised they will not have pensions for retirement after long years of work
- When they were not able to prove that they had work experience when they looked for jobs in the formal sector

In this regard, labour market experience and having a social space where they could discuss work-related problems helped women find out about their rights, and demand them from their employers. However, women's capabilities of improving their employment circumstances depended on their 1) autonomy in the employment relationship 2) possibility of having a direct contact with the employer/owner of production, 3) ease of replaceability as a worker. To illustrate, home-based workers had the least control on their employment relationship, and seldom had direct contact with the owners of production. Since home-based work was counted as unskilled, home-based workers were considered to be easily replaceable. This meant that home-based workers were the least equipped to be able to voice their discontentment without risking their jobs. On the other hand, domestic workers often engaged in one-to-one relationships with their employers, and they enjoyed a certain level of autonomy in their work, since most of the time they were the only workers in the workplace. When a certain level of familiarity was established with the employers, this ensured a trust-based relationship with the employers and consequently they were considered to be not easily replaceable. This meant that domestic workers could potentially demand some improvements in the employment relationship, and a certain level of "visibility", e.g. access to formal social protection.

In some sectors and work arrangements, even when women came to the realisation of the "invisibility" of their labour, they were not able to claim rights from their employers, owing to the fact that such rights were not recognised in the Labour Code. In other words, the visibility

of domestic workers [who did not have regular employment arrangements with a single employer] and home-based workers was constrained by the fact that the current Labour Code excluded these workers from the “work” definition, rendering their work arrangements particularly risky and vulnerable. Against this background, women’s individual strategies for survival proved insufficient in safeguarding them against the more precarious and “dangerous” kinds of employment and in protecting them from work accidents or other work-related contingencies.

Chapter 6 explored women’s collective strategies for survival in the informal sector, and more specifically why women in the informal sector do not engage in collective action. The main argument of the chapter is that women workers in the informal sector present new forms of organisation shaped by their persistent marginalisation and uncertainty in the informal sector. However their family and labour market constraints carry over to their decisions about the kind of organisations they participate in, and their level of involvement in collective action. Lack of “worker identity” in the informal sector, and women’s seeing their paid work in the informal sector as “temporary” and “subsidiary” to the male household members shape this involvement. A complex interplay of familial and labour market conditions help women join collective action for demanding their rights: 1) facing severe injustice in their employment (e.g. work accident, unlawful dismissal, non-payment for a long period of time), 2) they learn about their rights (either through other workers or associations/unions campaigning in their workplace/sector/neighbourhood), 3) their families (at least initially) support their joining collective action. Access to women’s organisations or trade unions in the vicinity of their neighbourhoods or workplaces seem to play a key role in women’s learning about their rights, as does having examples of workers who joined collective action and received material and social returns to their participation.

In this chapter, invisibility referred to women's solidarity-based networks in their neighbourhoods and workplaces. Usually shaped around women's informal employment experiences, family imperatives and community dynamics, these solidarity networks helped women access important resources to deal with or overcome a range of difficulties in life. Hence, women participated into these networks regardless of their participation in any other organisations.

It was emphasised that some of these solidarity networks were politicised, and some were only limited to certain ethnic and religious communities. Clientelism constituted the fabric of these networks. In order to access the assistance programmes or help packages, women sought to establish direct relationships with those in a powerful position in these organisations. When participating in multiple networks created a conflict of interest, such as when the two solidarity networks were ideologically different, women chose the ones that provided the most immediate and tangible returns. In other words, women had a pragmatic approach to these networks, and whichever network helped them better in making ends meet, they joined them.

The limitations of personal networks in helping women escape poverty and/or cope with the vulnerabilities of employment in the informal sector pushed them to look beyond these networks. Neighbourhood-based women's associations aimed to fill this gap by strengthening the socio-economic position of women in their families and workplaces. I referred to these organisations as "Struggle" because they reflected women's active mobilisation efforts to change their circumstances in the informal sector. Some of these associations were initiated by women in informal employment to gain some bargaining power against their employers (especially home-based workers), whereas were started by activist or feminist groups to enable the low-income, low-educated women in the peripheries to escape poverty and raise

awareness about violence against women, gender roles and patriarchy. There were also other informal women associations in the neighbourhoods which were started by charitable business owners, but these reinforced the patriarchal norms and labour market conditions that led to women's vulnerability in the informal sector, because these organisations also sought to protect the interests of the business owners by providing them cheap and quality labour.

However, these small, local organisations were rarely sufficient to attain the necessary "visibility" for these women to demand legal rights and formal social protection. They were also not very powerful beyond their immediate locations or arrangements. When women "hit the bottom" in the informal sector after a work accident, a long spell of non-payment, or unlawful dismissal, they began to form more "visible" organisations in order to make their voices heard and challenge the labour market structure. Some women resorted to organising into national or international unions or networks of informal workers, some engaged in collective acts of resistance, e.g. strikes. Women's transition from invisible forms of collective strategies to more visible ones were shaped by their familial and socio-economic circumstances, as low-income women workers often did not have the financial resources or time to spare for organisations beyond their immediate neighbourhoods. This transition was also influenced by women's own personal and familial histories, in that women who had experience in collective acts of resistance or have been exposed to such acts in their families made an "easier" transition to visible collective strategies.

In conclusion, women's informal labour market experience played an important cognitive role in acquiring a worker identity and claiming rights accordingly. This "awareness" also carried over to their family contexts, where women struggled to gain recognition for both their unpaid and paid labour. The primacy of making ends meet often curbed women's transition to

“visibility”, as they feared losing their access to informal social protection from their families, or finding another job in the informal sector. For instance, the benefit of receiving a pay cheque at the end of the month often outweighed the benefit of having formal social security benefits one might need [or not need] in the distant future. This calculation changed only when women needed the social protection much more urgently than payments, e.g. after an illness or a work accident, or when their family circumstances became so oppressive that there was no other alternative than “burning the bridges”.

## *7.2. Contributions and Reflections*

The clearest theoretical contribution of the research has been the Invisibility-Struggle-Visibility conceptual framework which provides a contextual and nuanced understanding of the constraints women workers faced in the informal sector, and the choices they made when they try to improve their lives and adapt to these constraints to bring about some change. This framework is not a linear one, though invisibility and visibility are taken as the two ends of a continuum. This is because all of the survival strategies co-exist and women navigate between them depending on their material, social and familial circumstances. In other words, women who participate in collective acts of resistance may well be engaging in less overt acts of resistance in their families. Equally women might decide to “revert back” from visibility to invisibility or struggle, if they believe they have overcome certain constraints that were limiting their physical and social circumstances. This comes in contrast to traditional assessments of women’s work in the informal sector, which have tended to see them as passive “victims” of global economic restructuring, trapped into low-pay, low-skill jobs with no possibility of exit. This has also been a useful means of “un-romanticising” the kind of opportunities the informal sector provides. To this extent, the empirical focus of this framework could be expanded by incorporating new informal sectors and employment

arrangements so as to provide a fuller picture of how workers cope and try to improve their material and social circumstances, given the constraints they face in their families, or in the informal sector. In this regard, the thesis makes a unique and significant contribution to studies on gender and informal work, but especially on the Turkish literature on women’s informal work which tended to focus on the macro-factors conditioning women’s entry to the informal sector but overlook women’s own ways of navigating through these factors so as to show their choices among these strategies.

A second contribution of the thesis is empirical. Majority of studies on women, gender and informal employment focus only on one segment of the informal sector, or provide macro assessments of the informal sector. Against this background, this study showed how women’s informal employment is strongly related to their familial circumstances and the labour market barriers they faced. Also, the relationship between women’s life course stage and the informal labour market segments in which they could find employment were demonstrated. Although the small number of participants in this study does not allow making assertive claims, Table 7.1 illustrates women’s shift through different segments of the informal sector throughout their life course. Further research on women’s informal employment might investigate this relationship in further detail.

Figure 7.1. Women’s Life Course and Informal Employment

10-15	15-20	25-30	30-35	40-45	45+
Manufacturing					Home-based work
	Home-based work				
		Domestic work			
			Subcontracted jobs		

Source: Author’s interview data.

The third contribution of the thesis is again empirical. The thesis explored “casual day labour” as a new segment in the informal sector that provided flexibility to women workers to choose the days, hours and places of employment. Factories preferred casual day labour because it

enabled them to subcontract workers only when they needed them, and without needing to provide formal social protection, or any other facilities (lunch, tea break etc.). This led to a decrease in demand for home-based work, as factories also preferred casual day labour for quality and time control, or further decrease in home-based work piece-rates, since the factories only subcontracted the lowest quality items to home-based workers. For women workers, casual day labour meant avoiding the risks of long spells of unemployment, unlawful dismissals or working with abusive employers/foremen, since they were able to change their workplaces easily without any financial costs. However, casual day labourers were required to complete more tasks than regular workers, which meant that this “flexibility” they enjoyed came at a price. Also, in the peripheries of Istanbul, the organisation of casual day labour was heavily shaped by the clientelistic relationships between the intermediaries (*simsar*) and owners of production. These relationships were male-dominated and although women accessed casual day labour as workers, they faced serious barriers to becoming intermediaries themselves. In 2012, when I was conducting my fieldwork, casual day labour was newly emerging. It would be interesting for future studies to investigate how casual day labour changed the structure and organisation of the informal sector in Istanbul [and in Turkey].

## CHAPTER 8: BIBLIOGRAPHY

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