

SUBJECTIVITIES OF WOMEN GARMENT WORKERS  
IN THE GAZI NEIGHBORHOOD

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SUBJECTIVITIES OF WOMEN GARMENT WORKERS  
IN THE GAZI NEIGHBORHOOD

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Subjectivities of Women Garment Workers in the Gazi Neighborhood

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## Thesis Abstract

Başak Can, “Subjectivities of Women Garment Workers in Gazi Neighborhood”

This thesis intends to develop ways to relate the structural transformation in the organization of garment work and subjectivities of women garment workers. How women give meaning to their work experiences, and contradictions inherent in this process were handled in relation to the hegemonic gender roles and leveling consequences of capitalist work which ignores differences among people. The purpose of this thesis is to understand the experiences of women without reducing them to various disciplinary mechanisms that are effective in the totality of their life experiences.

For these purposes, this thesis takes up three spheres through which work and life experiences of women can be better understood. The first one concerns the bodily consequences of working conditions, and how these influence the way women give meaning to their work and their bodily experiences, and contradictions inherent these processes. The second one concerns how daily and interpersonal encounters at the workplace embody contradictions caused by capitalist work order by influencing the processes in which women give meaning to their works and their position at work. Finally, how various patriarchal discourses and practices become effective in women’s daily lives at workplace and home in such a way to create more control over women’s acts, but at the same time to create some space for

women through which they raise various demands for themselves both at home and workplace.

## Tez Özeti

Başak Can, “Gazi Mahallesinde Çalışan Konfeksiyon İşçisi Kadınlarının  
Özellikleri”

Bu tez konfeksiyon sektöründeki yapısal dönüşümlerle bu sektörde çalışan kadınların özellikleri arasındaki ilişkiyi ele almaktadır. Kadınların kendi çalışma deneyimlerini nasıl anlamlandırdıklarına ve bu anlamlandırma sürecine içkin gerilimlere kadınların yaşamlarının genelinde etkili olan egemen toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri ve kapitalist işin insanların farklılıklarını yok sayarak değersizleştirme bağlamında yaklaşmaktadır. Bu tezin amacı kadınların deneyimlerini onlar üzerinde etkili olan çeşitli disipline edici mekanizmalara indirgmeden anlamaya çalışmaktır.

Bu amaçla bu tez kadınların iş ve hayat deneyimlerini anlamamızı kolaylaştıracağını düşündüğüm birbirleriyle ilişkili üç temel alana bakmaktadır. Bunlardan ilki çalışma koşullarının kadınların bedenlerini nasıl etkilendiği, bu süreçte kadınların kendi yaptıkları işe ve kendi bedenlerine yükledikleri anlamlardaki değişiklikler ve çelişkilerdir. İkincisi iş yerindeki son derece gündelik ve birebir karşılaşmalarda kapitalist çalışma düzeninin çalışanlar arasında yarattığı gerilimlerin kadınların işi ve işteki konumlarını anlamlandırma sürecinde son derece belirleyici olmasıdır. Son olarak da kadınlığa ilişkin pek çok patriyarkal söylemin ve pratigin kadınların iş yerindeki ve evdeki deneyimleri üzerinde etkili hale gelerek bir yandan kadınların daha fazla kontrol altına alınmasını ama bir

yandan da kadınların bu kadınlık statüsü üzerinden evde ve iş yerinde çeşitli talepler dile getirdikleri bir alana dönüşmesidir.

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## CONTENTS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....   | 1  |
| CHAPTER 2 : WORKING BODIES.....  | 10 |
| Occupational health and safety.....  | 15 |
| Capitalist work, structural violence and social suffering.....   | 27 |
| Laboring as a modern experience.....   | 30 |
| Witnessing labor, witnessing loss.....   | 33 |
| Tracing labor.....   | 36 |
| Laboring and experiencing loss.....  | 38 |
| Narratives of work related suffering.....  | 42 |
| CHAPTER 3 : STRUCTURES OF FEELING AT GARMENT<br>WORKPLACES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF WORKING SELVES          | 54 |
| The changing and unchanging dimensions of work .....   | 56 |
| The structural reorganization of garment work and everyday life at<br>garment shop floors.....             | 61 |
| The threat of dismissal and the feelings of anxiety.....   | 64 |
| Materialization of tension at various encounters at the workplace, and<br>the feelings of resentment ..... | 66 |
| Uniqueness of workers and invocation of the feeling of compassion.....                                     | 76 |
| Formation of working selves.....   | 81 |
| Dealing with discipline at work: jokes and laughter.....   | 85 |
| Courageous encounters with the boss.....   | 87 |
| CHAPTER 4 : SUBJECTIVITIES OF WOMEN GARMENT WORKERS IN<br>GENDERED WORK PLACES .....                       | 92 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Various public representations regarding women workers.....                    | 97  |
| Despotic workplace regimes, local mediations and familial sentiments...        | 99  |
| Engendering bodies at the workplace .....                                      | 109 |
| Formation of women’s subjectivities at the intersection of home and work ..... | 118 |
| Confronting on moral grounds.....  | 123 |
| CHAPTER 5 : CONCLUSION .....   | 128 |
| REFERENCES.....  | 134 |



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

(...)This is not the first time girls have been burned alive in the city. Every week I must learn of the untimely death of one of my sister workers. Every year thousands of us are maimed. The life of men and women is so cheap and property is so sacred. There are so many of us for one job it matters little if 146 of us are burned to death.(...) Public officials have only words of warning to us – warning that we must be intensely peaceable, and they have the workhouse just back of all their warnings. The strong hand of the law beats us back, when we rise, into the conditions that make life unbearable. I can't talk fellowship to you who are gathered here. Too much blood has been spilled. I know from my experience it is up to the working people to save themselves. The only way they can save themselves is by a strong working-class movement.

Rose Schneiderman

This quotation is taken from a speech<sup>1</sup> given by Rose Schneiderman, one of the prominent socialist and union activists of her day, at the memorial meeting for the 148 women garment workers who died during the fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory on March, 25, 1911 in New York. 94 years later, in 2005, 5 women garment workers burned to death during the night-shift in a garment shop floor in Bursa. Those women, who were living in different countries and different ages, were the victims of a common fate: They had to work under highly unfavorable conditions for long hours to support themselves and their families without any rights to social benefits. Today millions of women workers, who are deprived of basic wants and necessities, and who have no choice other than working in any available job offered to them, continue to suffer from the injurious and fatal consequences of their work

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<sup>1</sup> The speech was made in the Metropolitan Opera House on April 2, 1911, to an audience largely made up of the members of the Women's Trade Union League.

conditions. This thesis is about women garment workers who labor in closed and airless workplaces under dangerous working conditions despite being perfectly aware of all the fatal and injurious risks involved in their work.

As I listened to women garment workers' stories, and as I began to have an idea about the intricate web of relations within which they give meaning to their lives and their works, and deal with various kinds of difficulties, I decided to focus on the themes and concerns they stressed during the interviews instead of trying to elicit answers to my own questions. Thus, all the three chapters of this thesis deal with the different aspects of the question of subjectivity, and mainly revolve around the issue of how various larger structural forces such as capitalist work, manual work or patriarchy are implicated in the formation of the selves of laboring women. In other words, throughout this thesis I tried to understand the particular experiences of women workers with reference to the larger economic and social forces forging the material conditions these women are living in, and to the public representations regarding being a woman and a worker. This thesis is based on the belief that unless the subjectivities of workers are understood, an alternative to existing work relations cannot be imagined.

Before delving into the chapters, I want to raise some points about sweatshop work and women's labor with an attempt to provide a contextualizing framework for this thesis. Sweatshops are places where the indifference towards workers' histories, mental and bodily sufferings are much more visible and concrete in comparison to more protected and regulated work environments. Sweatshops can be seen as the open nerve endings of capitalist production. I find this analogy crucial in that it points both to the centrality and the vulnerability of the sweatshops within the framework of capitalism. Sweatshop workers generally constitute the most

unprotected part of the working class. The physical and mental damages workers suffer in such places are generally much more acute than those of other workplaces. However, not only the existence of sweatshops, but also the struggles and protests against the work conditions at sweatshops have an unabated tradition in the history of capitalism.

Then the question is what distinguishes the recent augmentation of sweatshops from the earlier phases of industrialization in western countries. Today working in a sweatshop is an inevitable destination especially for the most unprotected and weakest sections of the world population: the women, migrants and the children. Sweatshops absorb migrant populations who come from the third world to the western countries, and the women and children of both rural and urban origins who have to survive and support their families.

The new composition of the workforce in the sweatshops has various repercussions both for the organization of the work and the workforce. First of all, this process contributes to the further marginalization of already marginalized and weak groups. That is why one of the notions widely used in this thesis is the notion of vulnerability. This means that those who are already in a relatively disadvantaged position in various economic, social and cultural power relations, have to work in unpromising jobs which in turn contribute to and re-produce their plight. This situation has extremely negative consequences for workers' struggles. Secondly, especially the pervasive employment of women in manufacturing jobs seriously transforms the nature of the encounters among workers, foremen and employers.

The pervasiveness of sweatshops, their percentage in the general economy and the composition of sweatshop workers require *place and time specific* analyses, however it is a widely acknowledged fact that the recent globalization of capitalist

production has contributed to the augmentation of sweatshops all over the world. This is also valid for the organization of garment production. Due to the paucity of the records, we do not have the exact number of women workers in textile and garment industries in Turkey, but it is widely accepted that textile and garment shop floors are an indispensable destination for many women who are living in the peripheries of big cities. Most of the women I talked to during my fieldwork were also working in small shop floors which can easily be classified under the category of sweatshop, and the rest were working in relatively larger and regulated work places, which however, in terms of overall work conditions such as the lack of social insurance, trade-union or the so-called obligatory overtime, were very similar to sweatshops.

Especially with the liberalization of the Turkish economy beginning in the early 1980s, there have been unmitigated debates around the “future and importance of textile and clothing industries for the Turkish economy” and how these industries play a crucial role in absorbing urban and rural unemployment in Turkey. In other words, textile and clothing industries come into the public agenda only at the level of macro-economic dynamics. The mainstream motto of various capital groups is “to maintain the competitiveness of the Turkish textile entrepreneurs in the world markets.” This motto is voiced especially with reference to the unfavorable foreign exchange policy, high labor costs (especially in comparison to China), and the inability of the industry to jump into higher value-added sections of commodity production chains, such as design or branding. Despite differing policy proposals raised by different capital groups, associations and state institutions, they unite in reducing laboring people into sole inputs for production and disregarding unfavorable health and safety conditions. Moreover, despite the expansive

employment of women workers in textile and garment industries, and the indispensability of a cheap women labor force for the survival of these sectors; daily needs and wants of these women, and their work related accidents and illnesses are totally absent from public discussions.

My questions throughout the thesis are inspired roughly by two literatures which respectively concentrate first on the capitalist work and its distinctive modes of operation, and second on the women workers' rising employment in manufacturing in the peripheries of the global economy. The first line of questions concerns the operation of capitalist work relations: How are abstractive and flattening tendencies of labor materialized at garment shop floors that lie at the lowest sections of global production chains? What kind of knowledge do these local materializations provide for our understanding of the global operation of capitalist work, particularly if this knowledge is conveyed through the narratives of women workers? Secondly, I relied on the theoretical frameworks proposed by recent ethnographic works on women workers in global factories or free export zones to understand women garment workers' work experiences. These studies give us valuable insights to reflect on the ways in which gendered discourses and practices become indispensable for capitalist production and how these processes influence the construction of the subjectivities of women workers.

Here the questions I raise are the following: how do different patriarchal relations that are effective at the workplace and family interact with each other? Rather than situating work/public sphere and house/family/private sphere as opposites, how can we follow the circulation of patriarchal discourses and practices in the totality of women's life experiences? How are the formation of the subjectivities of women workers informed by this circulation, in other words,

through what kind of discourses and practices do these women try to carve more space for themselves, and what are the submissive and subversive consequences of these practices and discourses in their daily lives?

I decided to conduct my field work among women garment workers in the Gazi neighborhood where there are many small garment shop floors. The first reason for this choice was the relations I already had there, and I knew that there were lots of garment shop floors in and around this neighborhood. But on the other hand, I also wondered if living in a “politicized” environment like the Gazi neighborhood provided women workers with any practical or discursive tools that they could deploy to empower themselves. However, as I talked to the women, the picture got complicated in the sense that how the different identities of these women (being a worker, being a woman and being a Gazi dweller) interacted with each other did not reveal itself in an easy way.

I conducted deep and semi-structured interviews with 12 women living in the Gazi neighborhood. 6 of them were working in the shop floors outside the Gazi neighborhood and the rest were working inside the neighborhood. What was striking was that I met the women working outside Gazi not at their homes, but at the cafes in the neighborhood, but the women working in the shop floors located in the Gazi neighborhood preferred to meet me at their homes. In other words, those who work in places near their homes did not prefer to meet me outside their homes. This was especially the case for some young women who are sent to work in small shop floors next to their homes. They work in these workplaces from early in the morning till late in the evening but are not allowed to go out with their friends outside the neighborhood. However, for some other women who work outside the Gazi neighborhood, this was not the case. They met me in cafes that they are used to

going at the weekends. For these women these cafes are more than places to have tea or coffee, rather through the social relations they establish there, they create alternative social, and to a certain extent political, ties through which they feel they can “breathe.” This is maybe the most distinctive aspect of being a worker living in the Gazi neighborhood: Instead of the political atmosphere providing women workers with taken-for granted discursive strategies to challenge their conditions, the cafes become in women’s lives spaces where they can develop ties alternative to those of kinship and worker-employer relations. In other words, the availability of political cafes, alternative associations or the existence of many leftist political parties do not by themselves provide women with solidarity networks in which they are socially protected or through which they can resist against the deteriorating work conditions. Yet, such places provide women with alternative social space where they can engage in extra-work relations and thus can “breathe”.

Workplace relations, the task undertaken at the workplace, the harshness of working conditions, various familial obligations they have to meet as daughters or mothers or wives were the main topics of their narratives I collected. However, during my visits to Gazi neighborhood, I listened to many stories in which especially young people complained that they could not find jobs outside the Gazi neighborhood once they revealed that they lived in Gazi in job interviews. None of the women I talked to explicitly cited being a dweller of Gazi as a reason for staying unemployed as a garment worker. This has to do with the availability of garment jobs in the places they live. Nevertheless, they constantly emphasized how their access to better-paying and cleaner jobs was restrained through various factors including being a resident of the Gazi neighborhood.

In this thesis I tried to examine the various aspects of women workers' life experiences by organizing their stories around some concepts that I viewed to be useful in grasping the plurality of these experiences. I divided this thesis into three chapters according to these concepts and the themes that were evoked by women workers' themselves.

The first chapter tries to situate women's bodily grievances within the context of their work experiences and capitalist work relations. The leading themes of this chapter are the embodiment of manual work, the risks of manual work, bodily suffering and their narration. Accordingly, it aims at looking at the tension between the requirements and materialization of the logic of abstract labor on the one hand, and the living and embodied labor on the other in the case of women garment workers I talked to.

The second chapter follows women's narratives on work, worker identity and workplace relations. In this chapter I tried to outline the basic structures of feeling produced at garment shop floors. Thus, it is an inquiry into the meaning of being a worker under the conditions of flexible capitalism, and the contradictory subjectivity formations fostered by the intersection of various power relations such as flexibilization, competition, unemployment. The third chapter mainly focuses on the experience of being a woman at a garment shop floor, and how various gendered and patriarchal notions become part and parcel of production. How women workers construct their subjectivities at the intersection of various patriarchal practices and representations is also investigated in this chapter.

The overall purpose of this thesis is to convey the congenial sense of the work, and life stories of the women garment workers living in the Gazi neighborhood. These stories attest to the plurality of everyday life and give us a

critical vantage point to understand the work of capital relations and patriarchy at the everyday level.

## CHAPTER 2

### WORKING BODIES

When I first visited a garment shop, I remember having an uneasy feeling about the whole experience of shopping. I thought that the enthralling rush in shopping malls to find the cheapest and stylish clothes which I was often a part of, ironically duplicated the invisible and unpleasant hurry in apparel sweatshops. I recall thinking that the numerous sorts of clothes displayed in the polished and peaceful windows of shopping malls ostensibly bear no trace of the bodily sufferings of the workers producing them in dark, airless, sweaty and noisy basements. Consumption is divorced from production by rendering workers and workplaces invisible. The fancy clothes give the fallacious impression that the hands of workers never carried, handled, and touched them. It is through the erasure of the materiality and physicality of work that commodities gain their sovereignty. Yet, witnessing the daily sufferings of laborers bear the potential to unmake this sovereignty.

Garment workplaces testify the endless efforts of workers to make these clothes ready for sale in time: “Textile means time,”<sup>2</sup> say many employers. The higher the turnover rate of any fashionable cloth, the more the burden of being fast falls on the shoulders of the workers sewing, cutting, ironing, controlling, cleaning and packaging these garments. Machinists work incessantly to complete their tasks on a piece of cloth in time to convey it to the next machinist. *Ortaci*<sup>3</sup>s rush here and there to distribute the garments to the machinists quickly. Cleaners, controllers and

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<sup>2</sup> “Tekstil zaman demektir.”

<sup>3</sup> “*Ortaci*’s are usually the youngest and the least skilled workers -aged between 13 and 16- who carry out the basic and simple coordination and transmission between the machinists; they distribute the materials to them, recollect the product, help them if necessary, etc. All workers begin work life as *ortaci*” (Yörük, 2005).

ironers are rarely offered seats, and they have to stand on their feet at least 10 hours a day. All workers have to watch each other so that they do not drop back from the work rhythm. *Yedek atmak*<sup>4</sup> which is the indispensable consequence of an increasing work rhythm at any garment shop floor, leads to a tense workplace atmosphere. Therefore, the eruption of a quarrel among workers is not necessarily restricted to an exceptional moment, rather disputes and disagreements are part of the ordinary daily flow of garment shop floors.

Bodily exhaustion, languor and nausea turn out to be part of the everyday vocabulary in which women narrate their working experiences at the garment shop floors. This vocabulary, which has the potential to suggest a unique knowledge regarding laboring as a bodily experience, might override the sovereignty of commodities by revealing how workers' hands (both symbolically and literally) are implicated in their making. This chapter sets its aim as that of revealing how women workers make sense of the burden of manual labor that fall on their bodies. The question that triggers this chapter is how one can understand laboring as an embodied experience. I define embodiment, following Csordas (1994), as a "temporally/historically informed sensory presence and engagement," and I claim that temporal and historical presence and engagement of women workers are principally mediated by their laboring experiences.

One reading of Marx suggests that the notion of abstract labor lies at the heart of capitalist commodity production because it denotes how historical, cultural and social differences among individuals and their concrete labors are eliminated with

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<sup>4</sup> If one worker works faster than the worker following her, the rhythm of the work speeds up, and the garments pile up in front of the latter. This means that the next worker either has to speed up or work overtime. This is one of the primary sources of the tension among workers.

capitalist work and how this abstractive logic is materialized at different localities in different ways.<sup>5</sup> The process of abstraction materializes through various disciplinary practices that homogenize different labors and it is mainly the bodies of laborers that are the first and primary target of these regulatory discipline mechanisms at the workplace. However, the bodily experiences of workers are at the same time the principal witnesses to these regulatory processes and to the abstractive nature of capitalist production. In that sense how workers give meaning to their bodily experiences bear the potential to point out the incommensurability of living labor with abstract labor. Therefore, the tension between the materialization of the logic of abstract labor at the work place and the experiences of living labor will be at the heart of this chapter. Accordingly, the purpose of the first part of this chapter is to show the mechanisms through which the bodies of laborers are tried to be turned into productive cogs in the production process. In the second part the workers' embodied work experiences that do not totally belong to "the life process of the capital" (Chakrabarty 2000:66) will be investigated.

For these purposes, first I will deal with the issue of "occupational health and safety" to show how the state and capital act collaboratively to regulate working conditions to create a more efficient and productive labor force. The state is intrinsic to any working class experience because production takes place within a particular legal context in which the state authorities set the rules concerning working conditions. (Chakrabarty 1994) Occupational health and safety regulations bear witness to the logic of abstract labor in its pure form because they try to eliminate the bodily risks involved in the manual work through the classification of

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<sup>5</sup> I am mainly referring to the works of Chakrabarty (1994, 2000). See also Read (2003) and Postone (2003).

differences among people's cultural and social experiences according to a pre-determined schema. Here, I will particularly reflect on the discussions around the recently popularized issue of work accidents in Turkey to reveal how state authorities respond to the dangers and risks working people face everyday. I will argue that these responses are nourished by a particular understanding of modernity under the conditions of re-structuring global capitalism: I will claim that the disregard for workers' bodies and their conditions at work on the part of the state should not be conceived as an exception or a deviation from the modern ways of intervening in workers' lives. I will also try to trace the tensions arising from the passage from legislations that aim to provide social protection for workers to the ones that aim to guarantee the flexible employment of workers, especially in the case of textile and clothing industries. I claim that this transition is promoted by the conscious unwillingness of state officials to intervene in the working conditions and also by their willingness to pass amendments that guarantee the flexible employment of workers. All of these contribute to the depreciation and increasing vulnerability of workers.

The realization of abstract labor mainly has to do with the regulation of the bodily movements and necessities of workers at the workplace, especially through the elimination of local and particular experiences of workers. Actually the abstract category of worker itself is made possible by the realization of the logic of abstract labor at the workplace. In the second part of this chapter, rather than taking these regulatory mechanisms as the sole determinant of workers' bodily experiences, I will argue that there are alternative ways of conceptualizing manual work as an embodied experience. For this purpose, since it is in the workplace that sensory and bodily experiences of modernity become most visible in many senses, I

will first conceptualize work experience as part and parcel of modern experience. In this part my overall question is how we can conceptualize the bodily work experiences of workers beyond abstractive notions. Rather than relying on scientifically measurable criteria posed by the “risks and dangers” discourse which is in line with the notion of abstract labor, I propose to investigate the materialization of capitalist work relations at some local workplaces by following the indelible traces it leaves on laboring bodies. For this purpose, I will delve into the work stories of the women workers which divulge a corporeal and material content regarding the ambivalent but bodily-felt or bodily-mediated effects of being engaged in manual labor in a capitalist work place. This content reverberates throughout the women’s narratives, and hence enables us to link them with discussions on the laboring body, manual work, and their bodily-felt consequences for women workers. In this sense it can also be argued that the processes of embodiment are crucial in mediating subjectivity and social order (Lock 1993: 137), and thus women’s narratives on the body throw into relief the mediations between the globalization of capital, the state and the local work experiences of these women.<sup>6</sup> In other words, in this chapter we will deal with the tension between labor-

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<sup>6</sup> Harvey (2000) in his article “The Work of Postmodernity: The Laboring Body in Global Space” puts forth a similar argument. According to him, two recently popular discursive regimes, “globalization” and “the body” should be integrated. He investigates the implications of the recent globalization process for the laboring body and contextualizes the existing literature on the body with reference to the developments in global capital accumulation. In particular, he argues that Marx has a theory of the bodily subject under capitalism and “his (Marx’s) account, though limited, is nevertheless powerful as a tool for understanding the social production and reproduction of bodies and of subjectivities within the dynamics of capital accumulation” (p.39). Harvey (1998) also argues that the investigation of laws of motion of capital is a must for any argument regarding the body. He says “since we all live within the world of capital circulation and accumulation, this has to be a part of any argument about the nature of the contemporary body.” (p.405). In these articles, Harvey sees an opportunity for a radical critique in Marx’s distinction between the laborer (i.e. person, body, will) and the labor-power which circulates in capitalist production as variable capital. He proposes to investigate the implications of the latter for the former i.e. on the bodies, persons and subjectivities.

power and the laborer: While the logic posited by abstract labor reduces each worker into his/her labor-power, not all experiences of laborers can be subsumed under this logic. Read (2003) formulates this question as follows: “How is it possible to think of living labor and the subjectivity it entails, as fully immanent to capital (as both productive and produced by) without reducing it to a mute effect of capital?” The bodily experiences of workers reveal the most visible aspect of this tension.

### Occupational health and safety

The existing literature on occupational health and safety<sup>7</sup>, which emerged during the post world-war period through the cooperation of the International Labor Organization and World Health Organization, is nourished by a particular approach towards the bodily experiences of workers. According to this literature, risks, dangers and hazards that are part of the production process and work-related illnesses and incidents can be scientifically measured and legally regulated.

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<sup>7</sup> In ILO’s documents, occupational health and safety is defined as follows: “Occupational health and safety is a discipline with a broad scope involving many specialized fields. In its broadest sense, it should aim at: the promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, mental and social well-being of workers in all occupations; the prevention among workers of adverse effects on health caused by their working conditions; the protection of workers in their employment from risks resulting from factors adverse to health; the placing and maintenance of workers in an occupational environment adapted to physical and mental needs; the adaptation of work to humans. In other words, occupational health and safety encompasses the social, mental and physical well-being of workers, that is the whole person. Successful occupational health and safety practice requires the collaboration and participation of both employers and workers in health and safety programmes, and involves the consideration of issues relating to occupational medicine, industrial hygiene, toxicology, education, engineering safety, ergonomics, psychology, etc. Occupational health issues are often given less attention than occupational safety issues because the former are generally more difficult to confront. However, when health is addressed, so is safety, because a healthy workplace is by definition also a safe workplace. The converse, though, may not be true - a so-called safe workplace is not necessarily also a healthy workplace. The important point is that issues of both health and safety must be addressed in every workplace. By and large, the definition of occupational health and safety given above encompasses both health and safety in their broadest contexts.” Available at: <http://www-old.ilo.org/actrav/actrav-english/telearn/osh/intro/introduc.htm>.

In fact, it is possible to trace the legislations concerning the well-being of working people back to the Factory Acts<sup>8</sup> on which Marx (1990) eloquently elaborates with a detailed and critical reading of the reports of factory inspectors in England.<sup>9</sup> The governmental agencies and supervisors began to produce a specific body of knowledge to evaluate, regulate and reform the deteriorating working conditions. Foucault's (1991) following statement summarizes these tendencies of capitalist production: "The two processes – the accumulation of men and the accumulation of capital – cannot be separated"<sup>10</sup> (p.210). In other words, the dissemination of capitalist work relations parallels the production of a specific array of knowledge regulating, disciplining and controlling working conditions. Two main dynamics can be said to be effective in the emergence of legislations on occupational health and safety. On the one hand, they are the products of years of struggles of workers, and on the other they are indispensable for the reproduction of a productive and efficient labor force and the reproduction of capital relations. The struggle for humane working conditions has always been in the agenda of working people, because a healthy body is the sole capital of workers without which they cannot work and thus survive. Accordingly, health and safety conditions at a particular context have direct consequences for workers. However, how health and

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<sup>8</sup> "The Factory Acts were a series of Acts passed by the Parliament of the United Kingdom to limit the number of hours worked by women and children first in the textile industry, then later in all industries." Available at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Factory\\_acts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Factory_acts)

<sup>9</sup> In the section on "The Working Day" in *Capital* he illuminates how both workers' struggles for less working-hours and more humane working conditions, and the capitalists' submission to various regulations were substantial for the emergence of these Factory Acts. He argues that these Acts are indispensable for the promotion of an efficient working class and competition among capitals (Marx 1990, 340-471).

<sup>10</sup> Foucault (1991) continues as follows: "[...] it would not have been possible to solve the problem of the accumulation of men without the growth of an apparatus of production capable of both sustaining them and using them, conversely, the techniques that made the cumulative multiplicity of men useful accelerated the accumulation of capital" (p. 210).

safety conditions at capitalist workplaces are regulated and to what extent and how they become effective, change in different social and historical contexts.

Chakrabarty (1988), in his historical investigation into the working conditions in the Calcutta Jute Mills in India at the turn of the century, explores how discipline and surveillance are maintained in capitalist enterprises in India. He argues that the disciplinary techniques at those workplaces differ from the ones described by Marx. He says that the disciplinary regulations and the codes of encounters among workers, employers and state officials are mediated by many other cultural factors and extra-economic meanings. In other words, he proposes to read the absence of regulations including the absence of documentation regarding the working conditions not as an indicator of being traditional or non-modern. Rather, he underlines the fact that the discipline of the labor force is culturally and locally mediated.

Therefore in the following, instead of taking the regulations regarding working conditions in the Western countries as the norm<sup>11</sup>, we will trace the specificities of these regulations in the Turkish context. First of all, it can be argued that despite the existence of advanced legal regulations regarding occupational health and safety in Turkey (Yılmaz 2003; Bilir 2007), practices of state officials demonstrate a general disregard for the betterment of working conditions or an obvious unwillingness to intervene in employers' illegal employment practices. I argue that this attitude of

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<sup>11</sup> I should note that the recent globalization of capital has seriously deteriorated the application of health and safety regulations not only in Turkey but all over the world. Accordingly, there is also a discursive transition in the OHS literature from that of the "worker's health and safety" to "workplace safety." For some, this transition evidences the further depreciation of workers for capitalist production with the rising importance of technology. The discourses of Turkish state officials and new labor laws are also shaped under the influence of this trend. However, despite this new trend, we should bear in mind that the acts of Turkish state officials are also historically and locally mediated.

state officials can also be read as a neoliberal governmental technique that consciously tolerates exceptional spaces, relations, or practices (Ong 2006). In other words, the state passes such laws to directly or indirectly reinforce these “informal” and “unregistered” spaces, relations and practices. This in turn affects the garment production in Turkey in different ways. The clothing industry embraces an intensive labor content which means that it still absorbs large numbers of laborers. It is generally argued that the textile and clothing industries together offer employment for more than 2 million people including unregistered workers (Koçak 2006,7, Özar et. al. 2000).<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the rising income gap and high rates of unemployment render the textile and clothing industries centers of attraction for poor people, especially for women and migrants<sup>13</sup>. The majority of working people in Turkey are not registered, and thus are not covered by the Labor Law (4857 No)<sup>14</sup>. This situation is also valid for workers in the textile and garment industries. One basic

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<sup>12</sup> Due to the paucity of statistical records, there are different estimations. Seidman (2004) says that “By 1999, according to Ministry of Labor statistics, 505,152 employees worked in the formal textile and apparel sector. Union estimates of both unregistered and registered workers claim that there are 2 million in the sector or roughly 10% of the total labor force. It is likely that a large proportion of unregistered workers are in the apparel rather than the textile subsector.” On the other hand, trade-unions claim that “In Turkey around 5 million people are employed in this sector. Only 8 percent of this group is registered. The rest 92 percent is unregistered. The number of unregistered workers is around 700 thousand in Istanbul. They do not have any social insurance, they do not have any rights to the transportation service and to food.”(The head of Istanbul branch of Tekstil- İş Trade-union Kazım Doğan) Sabah 2008 02 02.

<sup>13</sup> See ILO’s(2006) report for a detailed analysis of employment trends in textile and clothing industries all over the world.

<sup>14</sup> TÜRK-İŞ declared that despite the fact that the number of workers in Turkey reaches 22 million, only 6,5 million workers have social insurance and this situation reveals that millions of people are employed illegally. (Her 6 saatte bir işçi, yaşamını yitiriyor Kaynak: Birgun, Toplum ve Siyaset, 2.02.2008)

repercussion of this is that the majority of working people cannot search for their rights even within the existing legal framework.<sup>15</sup>

In fact Turkish Labor Law<sup>16</sup>, which regulates not only the general principles of work relations but also the health and safety conditions at workplaces, obliges employers to take some precautionary steps to guarantee the well-being (health and safety) of workers, and stipulates sanctions for employers who violate these rules. However, these regulations and sanctions prove insufficient in practice. The indifference of state officials and employers towards the working conditions of workers is also reflected in the reasoned Labor Law (4857). The main idea behind this Law is totally in opposition to the main spirit of labor laws. Basically labor laws are expected to be built on the assumption that the relation between the employee and the employer is an unequal one, thus the former should be protected in his/her relation to the latter. The recent Labor Law paradoxically makes the claim that the importance of “labor” diminished with the advancement of technology, and the protective shelter of the worker has to be abandoned in favor of more flexible forms of employment. For example, according to the reasoned labor law, “knowledge replaced capital, and workers’ qualifications shifted from bodily work to mental

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<sup>15</sup> I should note that even registered workers encounter various obstacles when they seek their rights within the legal framework. Especially after the amendments in the labor law in 2003 the position of workers seriously deteriorated. These amendments were opposed by various workers’ organizations which argued that these changes legalized a range of flexible modes of employment, and weakened the existing bargaining power of workers by reinforcing the hold of employees on work relations. For example see Çelik, A. “İş Güvencesine Veda” Available at [www.sendika.org](http://www.sendika.org). Also see Ercan, F. 2006, “İş kanunu sermayeye ne kazandırdı?”, Available at <http://www.antimai.org/bs/fercan2.htm>. It should also be mentioned that in the case of textile and clothing workshops, the boundaries between “the formal” and “the informal”, “registered” and “unregistered” are so blurred that even a registered workshop might engage in a series of forbidden or informal practices. <http://fuatercan.wordpress.com/2006/05/25/yth-kanunu-sermayeye-ne-kazandyrdy/>.

<sup>16</sup> The current Labor Law is composed of 9 parts, titled General Provisions, Labor Contract, Its Types and Termination, Wage, Arrangement of Work, Labor Health and Safety, Arrangement for Employment, Control and Inspection of Work Life, Provisions on Administrative Fines, Miscellaneous, Transitory and Final Provisions.

work.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, the new labor law is based on the idea that the importance of manual labor has diminished in relation to mental labor. Moreover, this law renders the contradiction between capital and labor invisible and reduces technological knowledge to an independent variable by abstracting it from the organization of work relations.

The number of occupational incidents that occur in a year in Turkey clearly shows how manual workers have to work under numerous dangers at various workplaces. In terms of occupational accidents Turkey ranks first in Europe and third in the world.<sup>18</sup> Ironically, according to the statistics the number of people who suffer from occupational diseases is very low in Turkey. However, unfortunately this only has to do with the existence of only three “occupational diseases”<sup>19</sup> hospitals” which are authorized to authenticate the correlation between the particular job undertaken by the worker and the disease.<sup>20</sup> This situation is an indicator of the state’s overall disregard for the physical consequences of work on workers.

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<sup>17</sup> “Üretimde bilginin öneminin sermayenin önüne geçmesi, çalışanların vasıf derecelerinin beden İşçiliğinden fikir İşçiliğine kayması, küresel rekabetin esnekleşme olgusunu zorunlu olarak gündeme getirmesi çalışma hayatını yakından etkilemektedir.”( İş Kanunu Ön Tasarısı Genel Gerekeçe, Şubat 2003. Available at <http://www.ekademi.org/incele.asp?konu=%C4%B0%C5%9F%20Kanunu%20%C3%96ntasar%C4%B1s%C4%B1&kimlik=1070535961&url=makaleler/tasari-2.htm>)

<sup>18</sup> “It is reported that Turkey ranks first in occupational accidents in Europe, third in the world. According to the research conducted by Türk Harb-İş Trade-union affiliated to Türk-İş, nearly 300 thousand occupational accidents including those not notified to SSK take place in Turkey” or “The public statement of Türk Tabipleri Birliği İşçi Sağlığı ve İşyeri Hekimliği Kolu regarding the Davutpaşa disaster manifests striking facts. According to the report [...] every 5 minutes an occupational incident takes place and every 6 hours a worker dies because of these accidents.” Available at : <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=108702>.

<sup>19</sup> According to Social Insurance and Health Law numbered 5550 (Sosyal Sigortalar ve Genel Sağlık Sigortası Kanunu) which was published in the official gazette on June 16, 2006, occupational disease is defined as follows: “temporary or permanent illness, physical or mental defect which is due to a reason repeated because of the work where the insured is employed or which the insured performs or due to the conditions of management of the work.”

<sup>20</sup> These three hospitals are in Ankara, İstanbul and Zonguldak.

Moreover, despite the betterment of the equipments in all sectors and the fact that most of the work-related accidents or diseases can be prevented, the number of workers who are injured due to their work is rising rapidly.<sup>21</sup> There has been a general silence about occupational incidents and diseases until recently when two fatal incidents drew public interest towards the working conditions in some sectors. Unfortunately only the death of large numbers of workers in such a short time rendered these “peacetime crimes” (Scheper-Hughes cites Basaglia, 1992, p.223) partially and legitimately visible for the public. However, the constant physical hazards, risks of mutilation and chronic pain workers suffer from each day in various workplaces are far from the public agenda.

The first incident that stimulated interest in the issue was an explosion in an unlicensed fireworks factory in Davutpaşa as a result of which 20 workers died on January 1, 2008. On the other hand, the rising number of deaths in the Tuzla dockyards in January and February, 2008 turned the issue into a public one. These accidents were called “work murders” by trade-unions and leftist groups. They argued that an accident is something that happens only after necessary precautionary steps are taken (Çelik 2008). In both cases the precarious working conditions were already known by the state officials, and no necessary steps had been taken.

The result of these incidents was a heightened emotional atmosphere of hastiness to do something for the supervision of working conditions, especially in dangerous work places. Below we will look at the state officials’ and capital

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<sup>21</sup> “Since 1945 - when Occupational Accidents, Diseases and Motherhood Insurance Law passed - we have the records of workers who are injured or died as a result of occupational accidents. The number of injured or died workers reached to the level of 200 thousand. The number of workers who died because of occupational accidents is 55 thousand, and injured 145 thousand. Every year 900 workers die as a result of occupational accidents per year! 30 thousand workers have died in the last 25 years. Moreover, these numbers include only registered workers” (Çelik 2008a).

owners' responses to these incidents which reveal substantial information about the relations between capital and the state in Turkey, and how laboring citizens are conceived and positioned in this matrix. The immediate statements of officials regarding the explosion in Davutpaşa show how the state is actually in conformity with a general disregard towards the regulation of working conditions. The public officials blamed local residents for workplace explosions, saying their failure to report these unregistered workshops made them responsible. They also held the employers responsible for operating such unregistered workplaces. For example, Faruk Çelik, the Minister of Labor and Social Security, talked as if he was not in charge of the supervision of work environment: "If their next-door neighbor does not know what they produce, how could we know? We should have been informed about the illegal status of that workplace."<sup>22</sup> In a similar manner, Muammer Güler, the Governor of İstanbul, declared "Apparently a mistake was made altogether, in building illegal settlements, producing without official authorization. This is a complex web of relations. We arrived to this day with mistakes; the costs of these mistakes are emerging today."<sup>23</sup> The Davutpaşa accident is depicted as the culmination of a series of mistakes made by various social actors. These initial reflexes are also indicative of the general unwillingness on the part of the state

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<sup>22</sup> "Üst katında ne yapıldığını komşusu bilmezse biz nereden bileceğiz? Bu iş yerinin kaçak olarak iş yaptığı bize ihbar edilmeliydi."

<sup>23</sup> "Hep beraber yanlışlık yapılmış. Kaçak yapı yapılmasında, ruhsatsız üretim yapılmasında, ihbar edilmemesinde. Hepsi içiçe bir yumak. Demek ki bugüne kadar hatalarla geldik, hataların maliyetleri bugün ortaya çıkıyor." Kadir Topbaş, Mayor of İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality, also says, "Our citizens should better squeal any place that is used as firework workshop and depot. It is not possible for us to know these workshops and depots around such a wide business area. But, we are expecting an auto-control, a duty of citizenship." (Vatandaşlarımız havai fişek, maytap gibi imalathane ve depo olarak kullanılan ne kadar yer varsa ihbar etsinler. Bu kadar büyük işyeri çevresinde böyle bir imalathane veya depolamayı bizim bilmemiz mümkün değil. Ancak bir otokontrol, yurttaşlık görevini beklemekteyiz.")

officials to intervene in favor of the workers or to keep track of “informality” in the economic sphere.

In a similar vein, the discourses about the occupational health and safety issues in the pamphlets prepared by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security also stress the importance of training the workers about these issues rather than the responsibilities of state officials or employers. The paucity of work inspectors<sup>24</sup>, the lack of documentation regarding registered and unregistered work places, and the ineffectiveness of inspections in Turkey are all in line with the above discourses of the state officials. After these accidents, various state institutions, primarily the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, suddenly took action to show its “determination” to fight against the violations of legislations concerning occupational health and safety. For this purpose labor inspectors were sent forth to Istanbul, Sakarya and Kocaeli to check if work places and workers were registered and if working conditions were in conformity with legal regulations. The main slogan of state officials was “fighting a battle against the informal economy” and “registering unregistered work places.” For example, Istanbul District Chief of The Ministry of Labor and Social Security, Atakan Tanış said:

We will enter each workplace in Istanbul. We will enter a street, we will investigate the workplaces there from its beginning to its end. They will not be able to escape from us. On February 25, the investigation of the workplaces in İstanbul will begin with around 800 inspectors. [...] There is a big operation

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<sup>24</sup> “570 work inspectors are assigned all around Turkey including administrative staff, this is the lowest figure in the history of our organization. The number triples in England and France, it is six times more in Germany. That we have a very low number of work inspectors was also criticized in ILO’s 2007 report.”(Türkiye çapında idari görevlerde çalışanlar da dahil olmak üzere 570 İş Müfettişi görev yapmakta olup, bu denetim örgütümüzün tarihindeki en düşük sayıdır. İngiltere ve Fransa’daki iş müfettişi sayısı Türkiye’dekinin 3 katı, Almanya’daki iş müfettişi sayısı ise Türkiye’nin 6 katıdır. İş müfettişi sayımızın azlığı Uluslar arası Çalışma Örgütü(ILO)’nün 2007 yılı raporunda da eleştirilmiştir.”) From the press statement of the Association of Labor Inspectors on the work accident in Davutpaşa. Available at: <http://www.ismufder.org/>

going on. This is not an easy issue. But at the end of it, an excessive informal economy will be revealed.<sup>25</sup>

Even if we leave aside the well-known arguments about the impossibility of the elimination of the informal economy in modern capitalist societies, the futility of state officials' statements are obvious given the macro-economic dynamics of the Turkish economy, and the previous state practices towards unregistered workplaces. For example, the Association of Labor Inspectors points out the hollowness of the statements of governmental authorities as follows:

As reported in the mentioned statement, to prevent the informal economy by inspection, or to render informal places formal by inspecting them one by one is not practically feasible. Even if we assume for a moment that such inspections are made, this approach will not solve the problem in the long run. It is estimated that there are more than 1 million workshops only in Istanbul. However, only 100 inspectors are employed in İstanbul Group Chief that is responsible from the provinces of Edirne, Istanbul, Tekirdağ and Yalova. Even if we accept that all these 100 labor inspectors conduct inspections only in Istanbul, this means that an inspector is supposed to inspect 10.000 workplaces. If we consider that only 15 workshops could be investigated in a month, an inspector needs 55 years to inspect 10.000 workshops just for once.<sup>26</sup>

During this period inspectors conducted visits to places where unregistered shop floors were widespread. That is why textile and exclusively apparel production sites in Çağlayan, Gaziosmanpaşa, Davutpaşa, Bahçelievler and Şirinevler were the

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<sup>25</sup> “İstanbul'daki bütün iş yerlerine gireceğiz. Sokağa gireceğiz, başından sonuna kadar hiç atlamadan tarayacağız. Hiç şansları yok. 25 Şubat'tan itibaren de yaklaşık 800 müfettiş ile Marmara Bölgesi'ndeki iş yerlerinin denetimi başlayacak [...] Şu anda büyük bir operasyon yapılıyor. Kolay bir hadise değil. Ama sonunda ortaya müthiş bir kayıt dışılık çıkacak.” 7.2.2008. <http://www.turkiyegazetesi.com.tr/HaberDetay.aspx?haberid=365609>

<sup>26</sup> “Söz konusu haberde ifade edildiği gibi, kayıt dışılığın salt denetimle önlenmesi, tüm işyerlerinin teker teker ziyaret edilerek kayıt altına alınması fiilen mümkün olmadığı gibi, bir an için gerçekleştiği varsayılsa dahi, böyle bir yaklaşım sorunu uzun vadede ve kalıcı olarak ortadan kaldırmayacaktır. Sadece İstanbul'da bir milyonun üzerinde işyeri olduğu tahmin edilmektedir. Buna karşın İstanbul, Edirne, Kırklareli, Tekirdağ ve Yalova illerini kapsayan İstanbul Grup Başkanlığında 100 İş Müfettişi görev yapmaktadır. Söz konusu 100 İş Müfettişi'nin tümünün İstanbul'da denetim yaptığı kabul edilse bile bu, Müfettiş başına 10.000 işyeri düştüğü anlamına gelmektedir. Mahallinde yapılan denetimlerde ayda ortalama 15 işyerinin denetlenebildiği düşünüldüğünde, bir İş Müfettişinin 10.000 işyerini sadece bir kez denetleyebilmesi için dahi 55 yıla ihtiyaç bulunmaktadır.” Available at : <http://www.davutpasayinutma.org/d/?p=148>

primary targets of inspectors. The governmental authorities are well aware of the fact that export volume in textile and clothing industries often breaks the records thanks to the long-working hours imposed on unregistered workers in these “informal”<sup>27</sup> workshops. These relatively small workshops that employ 20 to 50 workers are also well-aware that these supervisions are provisional. These shop floors develop various tactics to avoid inspection and fines.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, since subcontracting chains are extremely flexible<sup>29</sup> in textile and clothing production, most of the larger firms are said to have already relocated their orders from Istanbul to other Anatolian cities. These examples shed light on both the bigger capital groups’ ability to move within the country without difficulty, and the ineffectiveness of inspections at the level of small workshops. The state’s “struggle” against the informal economy appears to be no more than a pretension given the practical impossibility as declared by labor inspectors’ themselves. Therefore we can safely argue that there is no contradiction between the general unwillingness on the part of the state to govern the working conditions in favor of the workers and the recently agitated thrust for supervision. The emergence of the state upon these work incidents as the sole champion of workers’ rights or the proper working conditions is convincing neither for employees nor for employers. That the workers and owners

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<sup>27</sup> I am using quotation marks here because, these “informal” workshops most of the time are producing for bigger “formal” firms or factories which gain the largest surplus in the production chain and are exempt from these supervisions.

<sup>28</sup> For example, it is reported that many workshops have begun to work at nights since early March 2008, some employers sent away their workers for a while and closed their workshops, some replaced hidden cameras or watchmen in front of their shops to check whether inspectors were approaching, some took down the shutters and locked the door over the workers to create the impression that the shop was closed etc.

<sup>29</sup> For a detailed analysis of the intricate web of production chains especially in the clothing industry see (Eraydin 2000).

of small workshops collectively protest the Ministry of Finance due to these recent inspections plainly illustrates that.<sup>30</sup>

To sum up, these unregulated economic spaces have been consciously left to the disposal of capital and this trend was promoted both by recent labor laws and the practices of state officials. The absence or ineffectiveness of any social protection mechanisms continue to render workers more vulnerable against the arbitrary practices of employers. As I will explain in the following chapter this situation becomes clear in women workers' everyday life narratives in which the state never emerges as an entity women make claims to or demand from. Women mainly emphasize the effects of flexible production on their lives rather than making claims to the state.

The emergence and development of occupational health and safety regulations attest the centrality of workers' bodies for the proper functioning of capitalist work relations. However, it is not possible to understand relations in garment shop floors in Turkey through these regulations, rather the absence of such regulations and state officials' unwillingness to intervene in working conditions characterize these places. This contributes to the severity of the situation of workers in the sense that the encounter between labor and capital is not mediated by other regulatory mechanisms. I claim that workers' direct confrontation with the risks of capitalist manual labor and the scarcity of channels that they can deploy to oppose such working conditions contribute to their bodily vulnerability and disposability. In the

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<sup>30</sup> "Textile workers and employers in Okmeydanı protested the government because of the Finance Ministry's unexpected visits in the last week. Arguing that they are on the verge of stopping production due to the fines, this group burned textile materials and work schedules." "Okmeydanı'nda faaliyet gösteren tekstil atölyeleri çalışanları ve işverenleri, Maliye Bakanlığı'nın son bir haftadır yaptığı baskınları gerekçe göstererek hükümeti protesto etti. Kesilen para cezaları nedeniyle kapanma noktasına geldiklerini öne süren grup, iş yaptıkları tekstil malzemelerini ve bordrolarını yaktılar" (2008-03-07 Star newspaper).

following chapter, I will argue that this bodily vulnerability and disposability of manual workers characterize the work experiences of women garment workers. Rather than conceiving working bodies as inputs into the capitalist production process as posited by the logic of abstract labor, I will try to understand how women experience capitalist work, and the bodily and mental consequences of this embodiment of capitalist work for workers.

#### Capitalist work, structural violence and social suffering

Below, we will deal with the question of how workers experience the logic of abstract labor which reduces them to labor-power and the unregulated work environment which augments the bodily risks workers face at capitalist work places each work day. The narratives of women workers reveal that the distinctiveness of manual work lies in its indelible consequences on working bodies

I have already argued that legal regulations and statistical records of work-related accidents and diseases often disregard and even silence the voices of working bodies experiencing these accidents and diseases. Therefore to have a proper understanding of the bodily consequences of capitalist work, we first need a new set of concepts and analytical tools that can reveal the mediations between large-scale social forces, in this case capitalist work, and the daily bodily work experiences of people. For this purpose, I will make use of the literature on social suffering and structural violence which enables us to conceptualize the mediations between “capitalist work” and its embodiment by working people.

One of the contributions of the anthropology of violence literature is to show that large-scale social forces that produce social inequalities, material deprivation and poverty have also degrading, humiliating and devastating consequences for individuals and groups. (Kleinman, et al. 1997; Farmer 1996, 2004.) For example

Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2005) argue that everyday violence includes “the implicit, legitimate, and routinized forms of violence inherent in particular social, economic and political formations.” (p.21) According to them, “close attention to the ‘little’ violences produced in the structures, habituses, and *mentalities* of everyday life shifts our attention to pathologies of class, race and gender inequalities” (p.19). Various kinds of social injustice and the inequalities that are experienced daily by the majority of people does violence to the body to create a particular moral experience. In a similar vein, Kleinman (1998) argues that “local power relationships refract the force of economic and political pressure so that some persons are protected while others are more routinely and thoroughly exposed to the social violences that everywhere organize everyday life” (365p.). Social suffering, which denotes the permanent exposure to various social hierarchies, also “ruins the collective and the intersubjective connections of experience and gravely damages subjectivity” (Kleinman 1997).

Capitalist work is one of the most salient manifestations of the consolidation of social hierarchy, inequality and suffering in modern societies. Marx notes that “The establishment of a normal working day is [...] the product of a protracted and more or less concealed civil war” (Genova cites Marx 2006, p.244). It is no coincidence that Terkel opens his famous book on working with the following sentence: “This book, being about work, is, by its very nature, about violence--to the spirit as well as the body” (Terkel 1974). In a similar way, Kleinman (2000) also mentions “the social violences associated with work and the brutalizing compression of space and time under the regime of disordering capitalism” (p.239). What is the point in investigating unjust and hierarchical capitalist work relations as “violent” assaults on working people’s bodies and subjectivities? The concept of violence first of all

disrupts the givenness and naturalness of contract-based capital-labor relations by revealing how these relations contribute to the vulnerability of workers in relation to larger social forces in society. Moreover, conceptualizing capitalist work experience as violence introduces a different language which pays attention to bodies, emotions, affects, mentalities and lived effects.

I mainly argue that the erasure and the belittlement of the experience of manual work and its bodily and sensuous effects on workers contribute to the perpetuation of the social and economic injustices they have to bear, and leave them totally destitute of the public and political means of making claims for their lives. That is why in the following my purpose will be to turn our eyes and understandings from consuming bodies to the laboring ones, from macro-economic analyses to the everyday level experiences of workers. Beneath this attempt lies the belief that “laboring bodies harbor an epistemology, a way of knowing and understanding the world that comes out of the physicality of work” (Zandy 2004,p.5)<sup>31</sup> and I will argue that this epistemology introduces a critical vantage point to question taken-for-granted approaches to production, consumption, labor and body. And this is the challenge any investigation into the lives of workers has to face, because, as noted by Scheper-Hughes (1992) “It is easy to overlook the simple observation that people

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<sup>31</sup> Zandy (2004) explicates this point further as follows: “This is not to say that work identity equals human sensibility, but rather to draw attention to something that has been dismissed and ignored in what constitutes knowledge. If you use your body in a physical way year after year, the body speaks back not only in terms of sore muscles or swollen eggs, but also out of know-how. The laboring body speaks the language of fatigue and frivolity, of sacrifice and shared experience. It is a vocabulary of gestures, an idiom of collective experience. On noisy work sites, communication through the body is the grammar of safety. Bodies also contain an assemblage of familiar and inherited postures. [...] The architectonics of human bodies, the ways they lean, sit, walk, embrace, gesture, the masking and unmasking of emotion through the face, the imprint of work on the body inform the essays of this book.[...] But by examining the great symbolic weight of the human hand, by recognizing labor’s stamp on the body, we can begin to claim the complex epistemology embedded in the body” (p.5).

who live by and through their bodies in manual and wage labor ... inhabit those bodies and experience them in ways very different from our own” (p.185).

However, I will also keep in mind that the gap between this critical knowledge, coming through/from the bodily work, and the political mobilization and struggles of masses of workers cannot be easily surmountable. Rather, this undertaking mainly contributes to the idea that any political engagement that is blind to the bodily experiences of workers cannot succeed to be part of workers’ struggles.

#### Laboring as a modern experience

Below, our first purpose is to try to understand laboring experience as part and parcel of the experience of modernity. This will provide us with a unique approach that is attentive to the sensory and bodily experience of work. Modernity is characterized by the impoverishment of experience because the ability to “incorporate the outside world as a form of empowerment” (Buck-Morss 1992, p.17) decreases with modernity. Since the modern world is replete with the abundance of sensory stimulations in all spheres of life, and since the only way to reckon with them and survive is the work of cognition as a buffer against it, for Benjamin (1993), it is the shock that lies at the heart of modern experience. Modern individuals develop defensive reflexes to deal with sensory overstimulation and emotional impoverishment (Ganguly 2001:15), and that is why modern experience does not create traumas and deep breaches in one’s way of relating to oneself and to the outer world. Shock experience absorbs the alienation produced by the capitalist system. This underlying feature of modern experience restrains intellectual comprehension and the revelation of memory-senses which are indispensable for turning an occasion, an encounter or a moment into one’s own experience.

These characteristics of modern experience are generally understood with reference to the spheres of circulation or consumption. However, the social relations established in capitalist work places are also one of the most salient manifestations of the deprivation of experience in modern societies. In factory, Marx (1990) says, "workers learn to coordinate their own movements to the uniform and unceasing motion of an automaton" (p.546). It is the regulation of workers' bodily movements according to the rhythm of disciplined and scheduled work that leads Marx also to say that "factory work exhausts the nervous system to the uttermost; at the same time, [through specialization and the consequent privileging of the machine] it does away with the many-sided play of muscles, and confiscates every atom of freedom, both in bodily and intellectual activity. Even the lightening of labor becomes a torture" (Chakrabarty, 2000: 55). Therefore the work experience in modern capitalist work places can be viewed as a shock-experience to which workers are exposed every work day.

In short, it can be argued that Marx locates the bodily experience of workers at the heart of capitalist exploitation.<sup>32</sup> For example he describes the equalization of different labors during capitalist production as follows: "... tailoring and weaving, although they are qualitatively different productive activities, are both a productive expenditure of human brains, muscles, nerves, hands etc, and in this sense both human labor" (Read, 2003, p.74). However, this emphasis on the physicality of body and sensuous activity in Marx's writings should not be understood in a narrow biological way (Chakrabarty, 2000). Marx never makes a strict distinction between

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<sup>32</sup> Materiality of physical labor and the sensuous dimension of work are always at work in Marx's writings. Harvey (2000) emphasizes this point saying that "From the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* onwards Marx grounded his ontological and epistemological arguments on real sensual bodily interaction with the world."

senses and consciousness, rather he shows how these two are tightly related. “As soon as the working class, stunned at first by the noise and turmoil of the new system of production, had recovered its senses to some extent, it began to offer resistance, first of all in England, the native land of large-scale industry” (Marx, 1990, p.390).

The path opened by Marx and maintained in different ways and for different purposes by Benjamin, Chakrabarty and Susan-Buck Morris help us investigate capitalist work relations in terms of their detrimental and indelible consequences on the laboring bodies of workers. Capitalist exploitation is not only locally and culturally mediated, it is also bodily mediated and it has constitutively physical consequences for workers. Bringing the laboring body to the heart of the analysis of capitalist work relations is an important gesture to disengage from the abstractive understanding of exploitation and labor. The physical burden and material violation that working bodies have to endure, the tangible and intangible wounds they suffer due to work since their early ages surface in the narratives of the women workers I met.

Women’s narratives are organized around three themes, all of which express their bodily engagement with work. The first one is the sense-memories that arise from being a member of a working class family and witnessing manual labor throughout childhood. It encapsulates the earliest encounters with the dangers of manual work. The second one concerns the direct bodily experience of the evils of work, in textile and clothing workshops. The third and related dimension is the way these women narrate their bodily sufferings and how it is related to their understanding of work. These three interrelated themes reveal different facets of how manual work in textile is embodied by women workers.

## Witnessing labor, witnessing loss

The women workers that I talked to grew up in poor or working class families who migrated to Istanbul from various rural Anatolian cities at different times. Despite their different life trajectories, all were heirs to families in which manual work was the main source of familial income. The need of earning cash for the family, especially after the illness or death of the father, precipitated the passage from early childhood to adulthood for these women and made work life an early and imperious choice for them. Most of the workers I talked to said that they had abstained from working in a textile<sup>33</sup> workshop as much as they could with the hope of finding a better paying job with social security and better working conditions.

I argue that their desire to evade textile work first and foremost arises from the fact that they witnessed the laboring bodies of their mothers and sisters who would come home late and exhausted, and continue doing housework without a rest, without a sense of security. Sabiř, who is now 25 years old, has been working in various jobs, mainly in textile, since the age of 11. Upon my first question of how and when she started working, she replied as follows:

My mom was working in a thread factory. You have probably never seen these machines. They are so huge. She would take me with her to work when I was a child. She was always taking me to work. There were day and night shifts. My mom lost her two fingers in these machines and could not obtain any social rights. She could not demand any social rights. Her was caught in the machine and flew at my face, that finger of my mom. Maybe her life expired in those machines, but with no gain to her in the end. That is, they silenced her. If I were a little bit older at those times, if I were like what I am today, I would have stood up. Since my brother was also working there, they silenced my mother by talking to him. She could not demand any rights. Now, you are working at night, as a woman worker, and think how it would be if your finger cuts off in those machines. This accident happens to you under the roof of that workplace. They sewed her finger, but while she was

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<sup>33</sup> Throughout the thesis, if not mentioned otherwise, “textile” also stands for the apparel (clothing or garment) industry. This is the general usage among the employers as well as the employees I talked to.

lying on her back at home her compensation did not work, her salary did not work, they did not pay her insurance. They paid her insurance only 3 or 5 months later and they dismissed her in the end. She went through a bad period.<sup>34</sup>

This was her first encounter with manual work and how manual work endangers one's body. This is an occupational incident and the management is responsible for compensating her injury. However, what she witnesses is how her mother's experience of losing two fingers<sup>35</sup> was silenced by the collaboration of various patriarchal power relations. Her mother's loss of fingers marks her first involvement with manual work. This incident calls for multiple feelings, mainly the feelings of anger and regret. Her talk does not victimize her mother or herself, rather she blames the factory management and her brother's complicity with the management in silencing her mother. Sabiř imaginatively replaces herself with her mother by saying that "if I were like what I am today, I would have stood up," and emphasizes her present agency to intervene in such injustices.

I do not think that it is a coincidence that she opened the talk with this incident. This event embraces a unique moment in which the stigma of her mother's physical wound is etched on her memory along with the unique knowledge regarding the possible bodily consequences of textile work.

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<sup>34</sup> "Annem iplik fabrikasında çalışıyordu, o makinaları hiç görmemiřsindir, bilmiyorsundur. Boyları burdan buraya kadar. Ben daha küçükken beni yanında götürüyordu çalışmak için. Sürekli çalışmak için götürüyordu. Gece ve gündüz vardiyaları vardı. Annem iki parmağını o makinalarda kaybetti, hiç bir sosyal hak alamadı. Hiç bir sosyal hak talep edemedi. Parmağı ko-ptu benim yüzüme geldi, annemin o parmağı. Ömrü bitti belki o makinalarda ama ona hiç bir şey kazandırmadı. Susturdular yani. O zamanlar biraz büyük olsaydım. Şimdiki gibi olsaydım, savunurdum. Abim de orda çalıştığı için, patronuyla konuşup da susturdular annemi. Hiç bir hak talep edemedi. Şimdi gece çalışıyorsun, bir bayan işçi olarak ve senin düşün parmağın o makinalarda kopuyor. O iş yerinin çatısı altında bu kaza geliyor başına. Parmağını dikiyorlar ama evde yattığı sürece onun tazminatı çalışmıyor, parası çalışmıyor, sigortasını ödemiyorlar. Üç ay beş sonra sigortasını ödüyorlar sonra da çıkış yapıyorlar. Kötü bir dönem geçirdi."

<sup>35</sup> She also adds that one of the fingers was sewed to her hand after the incident, yet it lost its sensitivity.

The idea that memories are personal and private artifacts has long been abandoned. Zandy (1995) argues that especially the memories of the working-class prove that memories lie at the intersection of public and private histories. She argues that working-class people experience the feelings of insecurity due to unsafe and precarious jobs throughout their lives and this experience leaves its indelible imprint on the memories, especially of childhood.<sup>36</sup> Sabiř bore witness to her mother's loss, and this memory still holds a prominent place in her work narrative. Zandy, in her book "Hands" (2004), taking hands as a metaphor of manual labor, argues that throughout modern history hands became the symbol of the division between manual and mental labor. She notes that "the hands of a mother embroidering remain vivid to her daughter sixty years later. Hands are class and cultural markers. Missing fingers attest to the dangers of farm labor or factory work. Working-class hands are rarely still. They often embroider spoken language with subtlety and emphasis, anger and love" (Zandy, 2004, p.1).

As can be seen in Sabiř's account, witnessing the actual physical dangers of laboring furnishes an alternative way of knowing and understanding the world. This knowledge does not necessarily lead to the "proletariat class-consciousness," but rather comes along with a comprehension of deep-seated injustices working people have to live through, and of unequal exchanges these people have to endure by selling their labor-power and depleting their bodies.

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<sup>36</sup> Elaine Scarry (1994) in his article on Hardy's novels investigates the tension between immateriality of truth and materiality of labor, and argues that "if there is a general 'significance' to wounds-as-signs it is that the human being in work puts himself, by his very depth of engagement, continually at risk – that he alters the world only by consenting to be himself deeply altered" (p.56).

## Tracing labor

Work experience is something that affects the laborers' whole bodily senses and movements at least throughout 9 hours a day and 5 days a week. While narrating their first impressions of work, the women garment workers primarily emphasized the shocks they lived through when they first started to work in a garment shop floor. Sevda, who is the youngest child of her family, said how she and her schoolmates aspired to find jobs in the service sector and how they all failed in the end. She has been working in an apparel shop floor for 9 months. When I asked her primary impressions regarding textile work, she replied as follows:

It is really so weird...at least it is not like what I thought. For example, I used to say to my working siblings that they were not getting tired but now, after I started working and saw what was going on there, it is really something distressing, that is, workers are right to complain. I don't know, textile is the last job to work in...<sup>37</sup>

Other women also made similar remarks:

So, what is involved in textile, one cannot know from the outside until one enters, youngsters small as fists are working on the machines....<sup>38</sup> (Halise)

I will enter my eighth year this March. I am still in the same workplace. In the beginning we were deceived... We thought we would be working eight hours a day. But it did not go on like that, nothing is like the way it seems from outside.<sup>39</sup> (Dilber)

The work environment is like that, it's really like that ... you are now studying, you have never been in work life, you would not know. But the work environment is really something bad, truly. You are going there very early in the morning, coming back home around 7.30 pm. You don't actually have a

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<sup>37</sup> "Gerçekten çok farklı...en azından dışarıdan gördüğüm gibi değilmiş iş. Örneğin ben hep derdim, siz yorulmuyosunuz, ama şimdi gidip baktığım zaman gerçekten felaket bi şey, yani her çalışana hak verebiliyosun. Bilmiyorum yani, tekstil gerçekten çalışılması gereken en son iş..."

<sup>38</sup> "Ya neler var tekstilde, insan içeri girmeyince bilmiyor, dışarıdan ama, yumruk kadar çocuklar makinadalar..."

<sup>39</sup> "Şu an sekizinci seneme gireceğim martta. Halen oradayım çalışıyorum. Sekiz saat ilk başta aldandık ilk basta. Ama öyle olmuyor işte, hiçbirşey dışarıdan görüldüğü gibi değil tekstilde."

home, you arrive at home sometimes around 9.00 pm, you have your dinner and go to bed.<sup>40</sup> (Zeynep)

When they first started working in a garment shop floor, women were bewildered by the long working hours and exhausting work. In fact the phrase “nothing is like how it seems from the outside in textile”<sup>41</sup> in their narratives does two things. First, it points to the knowledge coming from being an insider, from being involved in and witnessing production. The labor trace in the commodities and the exhausting consequences of being a worker become readily visible and tangible for workers.

For example Sevda says:

We are wearing these (jeans). Before I started working... We wear jeans, but we have no idea how these are produced, where they are produced, nothing. I was saying to myself that they are easily made and delivered. It turned out that this is not the case. Even for a small pocket of this jean, garment circulates at the shopfloor, moves from this machine to another, from that machine to the other, till this pocket becomes ready. Just to sew this liner, it circulates among big machines till a jean is completed. People perish, people are exhausted, people come to the point of uprising.<sup>42</sup>

Secondly, this phrase also indicates the difficulty these women have in expressing their lived experiences to me, i.e. to a person who is trying to understand work relations from the outside, and implicitly remind me of the boundaries of my attempt to understand their work experiences. Thus, my representations will be inescapably elusive and fragmented. I will shed light on the different facets of women’s bodily

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<sup>40</sup> “İş ortamında böyle, gerçekten böyle, sen dersin ki, sen şimdi okuyosun, iş hayatına girmemişsin, bilmiyorsundur da. Ama aslında iş ortamı çok kötü bir şey gerçekten bak. Sabahın köründe sekizde gidiyorsun, akşam yedi yedibuçukta evde oluyorsun. Evin yok ki zaten, akşam dokuz gibi geliyorsun, yemeğini yiyorsun yatıyoruz.”

<sup>41</sup> “Tekstilde hiç bir şey dışarıdan görüldüğü gibi değilmiş.”

<sup>42</sup> “İşte giyiyoruz, ben de girmeden önce, kotları giyiyoruz ama nasıl yapıldığı hakkında hiç bi bilgimiz yoktur, bunlar nelerle yapılır hiç. Ben de diyodum, herhalde yapılıp çıkıyor diyordum. Öyle değil gerçekten, şu küçücük cep için bir sürü şey gidiyor, o makinadan o makinaya gidiyor, o makinadan o makinaya, o cep hazırlanana kadar. Bi sadece şu astarının dikimi, koca makinalarda dolaşır artık o, bi pantol bütünleşene kadar. Mahvoluyo millet artık, var ya, yorgun, millet artık isyan ediyor.”

work experiences without forgetting my limits and with attention to and respect towards their insider knowledge.

### Laboring and experiencing loss

Beginning from their early years, women workers invest all their bodily energy into their work which over a period of time physically wears out their bodies. During this period textile work and the “hands” of women workers come to take on interlacing meanings for these women.

After the death of her father at 13, Sabiř started working in a textile workshop as a denim cleaner. However, since that workshop employed unregistered workers, and was illegally putting little children to work, the employers locked the doors of the basement store of the workshop where these children did cleaning. Sabiř did not want to be locked in this airless and close basement where the threat of occupational incidents was extremely high:

I did not want to be locked in, I cannot work while being locked in. Everything might happen, you are in a cellar, two or three storeys below, you cannot breathe, you cannot leave, our faces would lose faces. Seriously, I did not want to work behind locked doors. If something happens, only after someone comes and unlocks the door, could you get out of there.<sup>43</sup>

Following Serematakis, it can be argued that if we take senses as “witnesses or record-keepers of material experience,” their revelation provides an alternative and collective knowledge regarding everyday capitalist work. The attempt to grasp the interaction of various sources of social suffering, and how workers respond to and redress these sufferings requires an attention to the sensorial dimensions of work experience including olfaction, sound and touch. Because not only low-wages and

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<sup>43</sup> “Kilitlenmek istemiyordum yani ben kilit altında çalışmam. Yani nolur, bi bodrumdasın yerin iki üç kat altındasın, hava alamıyorsun, çıkamıyorsun, rengimiz soluyordu. Ben ciddi anlamda orda kilitli olarak çalışmak istemiyordum. Bir şey olsa, birisi gelip kapıyı açacak da çıkıp gideceksin.”

long working hours, but also the constant assault of poignant reek, the high volume of clangorous machines and dust, on the ears, eyes, noses and skin of workers (i.e. assaults on senses and limbs) characterize the harsh working conditions of these workers. Sabiř's statements bear witness to this fact.

Garment work requires women's close proximity to garments and fabrics.<sup>44</sup> Nearly all women I talked to mention the dust and mess at the workshop and the blue and black dyes of the fabrics covering their bodies, specifically, their hands and faces. In small and unregistered workshops, where nearly all occupational safety requirements are suspended, poor ventilation and the unavailability of overalls exasperate the dust problem.

This fusion of fabrics with women's bodies is what makes work something dreadful for these women. One can recognize textile workers from their hands; their nails and fingers retain the colors of the fabric produced, sewed, carried, ironed etc.:

Apparel environment ---which you don't know since you have never been there--- is such a pulverous environment that your hands, your face would be dyed with blue, it is disgusting when you touch your face. You have to watch yourself.<sup>45</sup> (Sabiř)

Textile is really a terrible place due to its dust and its filth. You work, and you become dreadful, your hands, your feet, your face, it is really something terrible.<sup>46</sup> (Sevda)

It was very difficult. I used to come home with my mouth and nose dyed black like coal. My face, eyes, hands and feet were as black as coal when I arrived home, I was in such a state.<sup>47</sup> (Hikmet)

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<sup>44</sup> I mainly talked to the women working at small sweatshops where garments coming from larger factories are cut and sewed according to a pre-determined model, and then cleaned, packaged and delivered to the larger subcontractors.

<sup>45</sup> "Konfeksiyon ortamı, hiç bulunmadığın için bilmiyorsun. Çok tozlu bir ortam, elinizim yüzünüzün mavi boya olduğu, iğrenç, yüzüne sürüyorsun, doğal olarak kendine bakmak zorundasın."

<sup>46</sup> "Tekstil gerçekten berbat bir yer, tozuyla, pisliğiyle, bir iş yapıyorsun berbat oluyorsun, ellerin, ayakların, yüzün yani berbat bir şey"

<sup>47</sup> "Çok zordu. Ağzım burnum simsiyah eve geliyodum. Yüzüm gözüm elim ayağım böyle siiiimsiyah eve geliyodum ben o durumdaydım."

It is confection, you have dirt, you have filth, you have everything, you have to accept it if you want to earn your bread.<sup>48</sup> (Halise)

It is not possible to beautify yourself in this work environment, dye, dirt, smoke, closed windows, everyone is smoking –for example I myself smoke 1,5 packets of cigarettes there – and imagine that you are within that smoke all day, there is dirt, there is dye. For example, you wear something white, and it turns to blue at the end of the day.<sup>49</sup> (Zeynep)

Besides dust, mess and smoke, the poignant reek and the high volume of sewing machines are also part of any garment shop floor environment.

There are these picot machines. When they are working, they make an unbelievable noise. Normally, it is better. But when picot machines begin to work, an unbelievable noise. Though you get used to it after a while. Actually, this noise does you serious harm.<sup>50</sup> (Dilber)

When someone enters, she covers up her nose. You feel the smell of lack of air each time you come in the morning.<sup>51</sup>

It is too noisy. There are machines. There are people. The environment is extremely noisy.<sup>52</sup>

I attended a workshop organized by Kadının İnsan Hakları Derneği<sup>53</sup> in a textile shopfloor in Sultançifliği which is near the Gazi neighborhood. The purpose of this workshop was to raise women workers' awareness of occupational health and safety. During this workshop I got the chance to listen to the long-term and injurious

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<sup>48</sup> “Burası konfeksiyon toz da olur, pislik de olur, her şey olur, bunu kabullenicen, ekmek parası kazanıyorsan.”

<sup>49</sup> “O iş ortamında da süslenmek olmuyo, boya, toz, duman, camlar kapalı, soba gibi herkes sigara içtiği için, mesela şahsen ben kendim orda 1,5 paket sigara bitiriyorum. Düşün bi de bütün gün o dumanın içindesin toz var, boya var. Mesela beyaz gidiyorsun oraya masmavi geliyorsun.”

<sup>50</sup> “Özellikle piko makineleri var. özellikle onlar açıldığı zaman. Inanılmaz bir gurultu. Normalde yine iyi de piko makinaleri açıldığında inanılmaz bir gürültü. Alışyorsun bir süre sonra gerçi. Sen fark etmiyorsun ama o gürültü sana çok zarar veriyor aslında.”

<sup>51</sup> “Disaridan gelen biri burnunu kapatıyor. Sabah gelince o havasizligi hissediliyor.”

<sup>52</sup> “Çok gürültülü, makinalar var, insanlar var. acayip derecede gürültülü bir ortam var.”

<sup>53</sup> This Association is established by independent feminist activists who try to create supportive channels for women workers. One of its projects was to give “occupational health and safety” seminars to women workers, therefore to raise awareness about the hazards in their jobs and to provide guidance about their legal rights at workplace.

bodily consequences of working in a garment work place from the women workers. After the opening talk, the instructor asked women workers to draw a body on the flip chart. A young woman worker of 14 stood up and drew a body. Then the instructor wanted all of them to put a cross on the body parts and limbs that were in pain, and to tell if they thought that there was a correlation between one's pain and task at the workplace. The result was surprising in that there was no single part of the body that was not influenced by work. Nurten, who is in her late 30s, stood up and began to make marks on the body on the chart saying: "Ache in my foot since I am working on a machine, in my back because of air conditioning, in my eyes because of doing controlling."<sup>54</sup> The rest of the participants followed her and, the body on the flipchart was filled with crosses. Arms, legs, heads, waists, backs, shoulders, eyes, ears, kidneys, respiratory organs; no internal or external part of the body escaped the pain caused by work.<sup>55</sup> Afterwards, they began to explain how even small changes regarding the organization of work could make a big difference to alleviate their pain at work. They said that the cleaners should be offered seats, and the existing chairs of the machinists could be replaced with more comfortable ones, or small breaks should be introduced in order for them to rest their legs. They also added that gloves and masks should be delivered to the workers to protect them from dust and reek.

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<sup>54</sup> "Ben simdi hepsini isaretlerim sen merak etme. Ayaktan, makinada calistigim icin, sirtim klimadan, gozlerim kontrol yapmaktan."

<sup>55</sup> The prevailing occupational risks and dangers to health and safety in small garment workshops can be summarized as follows: Low indoor air quality, inadequate ventilation, discomfort due to standing on feet all day or sitting on non-ergonomic chairs, performing rhythmic and repetitive movements in a constant position, contact with newly dyed fabrics, and inhalation of dust of cotton and flame retardants, and the lack of preventive equipment such as respirators, overalls and gloves.

## Narratives of work related suffering

In the following, I will elaborate on the work-related suffering narratives of women workers and ask questions about the conditions of their reiteration. The narratives of bodily suffering and illness loom large in the analyses of women's life stories. I believe this to be the case because suffering/illness narratives provide women with means to express the intersections of social inequalities and personal biographies, rendering the latter understandable within the context of the former, and vice versa. Many scholars agree that the narration of various illnesses during interviews emerges as a way to articulate a voice against the social injustices experienced on a daily basis. For example, according to Kleinmann and Kleinmann (1994) the stories of bodily complaint embrace a moral commentary on a delegitimated local world, and indirectly express social distress and shared criticism. Therefore rather than taking symptoms of suffering as abstract categories, we need to analyze the suffering narratives of women workers with reference to the local working conditions that shape these suffering experiences.

In the case of the women workers I talked to the stories pertaining to bodily sufferings were often peripheral in their narratives. They cropped up only occasionally. Each time a woman began to narrate the fatigue emanating from her work, she concluded her story by listing a series of necessities and obligations that forces her to work. I argue that as long as working is not a choice, but rather a familial obligation and a survival necessity, any complaint about bodily exhaustion seems to be in vain for these women. A similar point is also raised by Das and Das (2007, p.76) in their studies among the poor in India. According to them, one of the most important characteristics of the illness narratives of the poor is to explain their health disorders with reference to the "routine ups and downs of life" in such a way

so as to normalize their illnesses (p.73). They argue that this normalization of illness is graspable only in relation to the works these people engage in in particular, and the precariousness of their life conditions in general. They note that throughout their research they encountered this phrase so often: “as long as my hands and feet are moving, I have to work. The pain has subsided.” This means that the precariousness of life and working conditions prevents the poor from elaborating their illnesses. Therefore, they argue, to understand the normalization of disorder one should try to understand the illness experience within the materiality of working conditions or the prospects of work available for the poor. Below, to understand the illness narratives of women workers, I will first have a closer look at the daily flow of work at garment sweatshops.

In apparel workshops, production is organized according to the deadlines set by larger firms. This leads to an unmitigated pressure on the workers. The frequency of overtime perpetuates this situation. Although there is always a tension between the acceptability of harsh working conditions and the yearning for decent work in women’s narratives, the notions of “urgency” and “necessity” render their physical exhaustion explicable and acceptable for them. The following quotations best reflect this tension:

You enter the workplace at 7.30 in the morning; you stand on your feet, unceasingly, like chickens, moving your legs up and down under the desk. It must be done, his work must inescapably be ready in time, he must make his work ready so that he can pay us.<sup>56</sup> (Halise)

Three men together cannot do my present job. This job is much harder than the lathe work that I used to do. I deliver work to 180 people, to the assembly line. My arms move millions of time in a day.  
What kind of work is it?

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<sup>56</sup> “Sabah yedi buçukta giriyorsun akşama kadar ayaktasın, sürekli, tavuklar gibi bi ayağımızı indiriyoz, bi ayağımızı kaldırıyoz masanın altında. Mecbur iş yetiştircek, adamın işi yetiştircek ister istemez yani, o da işi çıkaracak ki para versin, mecbur.”

Let me tell you about it. The slacks that we wear do not come like this. These come to our shop floor cut. The front, the back, the pocket, counter-parts, seals of the garment come separately. I assign them size. I give their size using a machine. I give each a number. I rank all of them. I distribute the front pieces to the appropriate machines, the back pieces to the appropriate machines. I have to distribute all of them to the assembly line. I am doing this from 8.00 in the morning to 7.30 in the evening. And they come one after the other. All 100 pieces together. I lift all of them up and down one by one. My work is so hard, so so hard. I get tired. There are also night shifts added to this. If we cannot make them ready in time, we have to stay overtime and make them ready. You must stay. I am alone, there is no one else doing my job.<sup>57</sup> (Sabiş)

The bigger companies are better, at least they grant social insurance, workers can retire and have comfort in the future. At least they receive something in exchange for their labor. There is nothing like that here. Even if you become extremely tired, nothing happens. You go to the hospital by yourself and pay your expenses. When somebody is in pain, sometimes it happens that she has to endure it. But how could she endure, she is in pain. People are in pain. But, the work is urgent, it has to be done, there is something like that there. For example someone feels ill, she wants to get permission, but the work must be done, it is urgent.<sup>58</sup> (Sevda)

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<sup>57</sup> “Benim şu an yaptığım işi 3 erkek bir araya gelip yapamıyor. Benim yaptığım iş şu anda o tornadan çok çok daha ağır bir iş. 180 kişiye iş açıp, 180 kişiye banda iş veriyorum. Şu kollarım günde milyonlarca kere çalışıyor.

Nasıl bir iş?

Şöyle anlatayım. Giydiğimiz pantolon, böyle gelmiyor. Bize kesilmiş olarak geliyor. Önü ayrı, arkası ayrı, paçası, cebi ayrı, şu karşılıkları, contası hepsi ayrı ayrı. Bunların hepsini bedenliyorum. Makinayla bedenlerini atıyorum. Bunların hepsini numaralıyorum. Bunların hepsini sıralıyorum. Önleri gereken makinalara veriyorum. Arkaları gereken makinalara veriyorum. Karşı.. Hepsini teker teker bütün banda dağıtmak zorundayım. Sabah 8’den başlayıp rutin olarak akşam yedi buçuğa kadar o işi yapıyorum. Ve bunlar üstüste geliyor, 100 parça birden. Onları tek tek kaldırıyorum, tek tek indiriyorum. İşim çok ağır, çok çok ağır. Yoruluyorum. Bunun bi de akşam mesailerı var. Yetiştiremediğin takdirde akşama kalıp yetiştirmek zorundayız. Mecburen kalıyosun. Tek başımayım, benim işimi yapan kimse yok.”

<sup>58</sup> “Büyük firmalar o yönden biraz daha iyi, sigortaları var en azından, yarın öbür gün emekli olurlar, rahat ederler. Hiç değilse çalıştıklarının karşılıklarını alabilirler. Ama burda öyle bi şey yok. İsterse canın çıksın, yine yok. Kendin hastaneye gider kendi masrafını ödersin. Ya bazen öyle oluyor ki, birinin bir yeri ağrıyor, yok işte dayan. Ya ama gel gör ki nasıl dayansın sonuçta canın acıyo. İnsanların canları acıyor. Hiç orda öyle bi şey yok, yani iş acil, iş çıkacak öyle bi şey var yani. Örneğin biri rahatsız olur, izin ister, ya iş çıkması gerekiyor, acil.”

These quotations show that personal bodily fatigue turns into something unavoidable as well as acceptable whenever they begin to refer to the requirements of work. In addition, they themselves are dependent on paid-labor for survival.

Besides being and feeling obliged to work despite extreme fatigue, what infuriates women most is the lack of recognition of sickness or pain at the workplace. Nuray told me that when she does not feel well at work she talks to the foreman to get permission to discontinue work. The foreman delivers this request to the manager. Then the manager comes and listens to her problem. But he never lets her go directly home. He says that if she were really sick she should go to the hospital, and he proposes to take her to the hospital.<sup>59</sup> He says that since leaving work for home would change nothing (as if working does nothing to workers' bodily energies), she should either stay at work or go to the hospital. Therefore it is nearly impossible to get permission from the employer or the foremen to take a day off unless one is seriously ill and accepts to see the doctor. Some workplaces prescribe that workers do not leave the shop floor unless a doctor certifies the sickness. To get permission from the management to take a day off is crucial because if the worker cannot obtain permission, the deduction from the worker's wage is tripled. Employers apply this legal rule even if the worker is unregistered. Three days' pay is a substantial amount for workers given the extremely low wages.

All these examples indicate that the bodies of workers are rendered disposable and expandable at garment workplaces through various management techniques and the state's total disregard. Rather than exposing their vulnerability and disposability, most women workers talk about their obligations and necessities.

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<sup>59</sup> Relatively larger workshops make arrangements so that their sick or wounded workers benefit from a private hospital. However, even then the employer only pays for the consultation fee but not for the medicine.

I argue that this evasion of revealing one's bodily vulnerability is crucial, for it renders the ordinary flow of life tolerable for these women. For example Dilber, who talked about her bodily complaints at length during the interview, was totally confused about the meaning of her life, and the level of anxiety she felt was becoming unbearable. I met her after the week she underwent an operation. She had recently restarted to work. Her narratives on her recent operation and her relation to her illness illuminate her psychological mood.

Dilber dropped out of school at 12, and after working as a salesperson in a supermarket and as an *apprentice* in a small scale apparel workshop for 3 or 4 years, she heard about a job in a textile factory. She started working there at the age of 16, and she has been working there for 8 years. At the beginning, she was planning to quit the job after working for 6 months or so. After quitting she was planning to attend either computer or design courses which would help her find a higher paying and less exhausting job. But nothing went as she expected. Since she is the oldest child of the family and for that reason is expected to provide additional income for the school expenses of her younger siblings, bills, rent etc, she could not resign and attend these courses. Her father earns less than her, and her mother does not work. Initially the factory where she works attracted Dilber due to its shift-work system which means that a worker works at most 8 hours-a-day. But in a short time, it turned out that this was not the case, and workers frequently would have to do overtime work. Only 2 out of the 10 women I talked to had social insurance, and one of them was Dilber. Since she has social insurance, which guarantees old-age pension for her in the future, she did not dare to quit this job.

Putting workers to great inconvenience when they ask for sick-leave not only serves to guarantee the continuity of the labor force, but also creates a state of mind

(at least for the women workers I talked to) in which asking for permission would mean asking for gratitude. Dilber prefers to work rather than ask for permission. She thinks that asking for permission would be of no use. Management will not be convinced that she is ill until she faints due to over-fatigue and sickness. Dilber says she can compel her body to work if she really wants to. Dilber narrates what happened when management requested her to work overtime although she had recently undergone an operation:

I should not have stayed overtime actually. Then I told to myself that rather than feeling indebted to someone, I would prefer to stay overtime. I also knew that they would not let me even if I had asked for permission. I had also this in my mind. I did not want to put myself in such a situation. If I force myself, I can work. I have such a character; I did not want to fall into such a situation. I worked the following day. I got very sick again. You get up at 7.00 am in the morning to work. You come back home at 11.00 pm. In the morning I realized that my eyes were swollen. I was so tired, there were tiresome chores to do. Then the doctor came and sent me back home.<sup>60</sup>

Although overtime work is not obligatory according to the existing labor law<sup>61</sup>, the impotent position of workers in relation to their employers often renders overtime work as a norm in many apparel work places. Accordingly, there is no place for the legal in her narrative. She depicts management's demand for overtime as unavoidable, but what is interesting is that while doing this she also stresses her self-control and volition. In other words, to accept overtime stops being an indicator of submission in her narrative, rather it becomes a sign of protecting one's honor by refusing to plea for not working overtime. Dilber's response to the request for

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<sup>60</sup> "Kalmamam lazım aslında. Ben de dedim ki *minnet etmeyeceğim kimseye* mesaiye kalacağım. Zaten *söyleseydim de biliyorum vermeyeceklerdi*. Böyle bir durum da var. Böyle bir duruma düşmek istemedim. Ama inat ettiğim zaman geliyorum. Benim öyle bir yanım var. o duruma düşmek istemedim. Çalıştım ertesi günü. Yine çok hastalandım. Sabah yedide kalkıyorsun işe gidiyorsun. Akşam onbirde eve geliyorsun. Sabah bir baktım gözlerim şiş. Çok yorulmustum, çok yorucu işler vardı. Doktor geldi beni eve yolladı."

<sup>61</sup> According to the article 41 in 4857 Labor Law "The concession of the worker is required for overtime work."

overtime work illustrates her general pattern of relating to her bodily fatigue. When I asked her if her constant fatigue might be caused due to many years of harsh work, she says:

That's what I am saying. my body has been exhausted. I also think I am a stubborn person. In 1997 I felt ill, I got very sick. I went to the doctor, I used to take lots of medicine as part of the treatment and even under these conditions I did not quit my job. I worked feeling ill for one year. The employers said that I should better leave the job, I could continue working if I got better later. They persuaded me. I continued working as soon as I came to myself. I had to work, I was feeling well, I needed to work, I had to work, I was motivating myself saying things like that. I have to take care of the house, this responsibility is terrible, you have to take care of some people.<sup>62</sup>

Actually Dilber's determination to work despite her illness and exhaustion can also be linked to and explained at a more general level as a particular deployment of the dichotomy of body and mind. Her narrative aims at showing her mastery over her body through her commitment to work. Her commitment to work not only emanates from the pressures of capitalist work relations but also from the exigencies of her familial position. Whatever the source, the way women workers reflect on their laboring bodies is generally an ambivalent process. Forcing your body to work desperately in a repetitive, soul-destroying job, with a series of exigencies in mind, creates an ambivalent relation to one's own body. For example Dilber's narrative<sup>63</sup> regarding the sources of her illness straddles between two positions:

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<sup>62</sup> "Ben de onu diyorum beden yoruldu herhalde, bi de ben inatçıyım herhalde, daha önce de 97'de çok kötü oldum oyle. çok hastalandım. Doktora gittim poşet poşet ilaç tedavisi görüyorum ve ben işten çıkmıyorum o halde. Bi sene falan o halde çalışmıyordum. Patronlar dedi git sen dinlen toparlan. Ondan sonra iyilesirsen işine devam edersin. Onlar beni ikna ettiler. Ben kendime gelir gelmez işe devam ettim. Çalışmam gerekiyor, kendimi iyi hissediyordum ihtiyacım var çalışmam gerekiyor kendimi o şekilde motive ediyordum. Eve bakmam gerekiyor o yükümlülük çok kötü birilerine bakman gerekiyor."

<sup>63</sup> "Ben zaten kendimden anlıyorum, daha iyi hissediyorum. ben biliyorum gidip çalışmaya başlasam yine kötü olacağım. Herhalde o biraz çalışıyorsun, yoruluyorsun artık enerjin düşüyor, onunla ilgili. Doktorlar da söylüyor, senin çok hassas bir bünyen var diyorlar. Ufak bir ruzgara bile gelemiyorsun, farklı bir bünyen var. ben de anlamadım. bir sürü insan oturur mesela herkesin eli sıcaktır benimki buz gibi olur. Bak. Bu yine iyi hali." (Dilber)

I feel beforehand if I will feel bad or good. I know I will get worse if I start to work again. I think it has to do with the work, you work a bit, your energy goes down. The doctors tell me that I had a poor bodily constitution. “Even a slight wind is sufficient to make you sick; your physique is very vulnerable.” I don’t understand either. For example among many people it’s only my hands that are always cold. Touch them. Now they are rather well.

On the one hand, she uses the body-as-machine metaphor (Huges and Lock 1987) by saying “my energy is down,” and explicates how physical work wears out her bodily energies, but on the other hand, she attributes her illness to the inferior quality of her physique i.e. to some anomaly of her body. Rather than a contradiction, these two explanations can be viewed as the inseparability of one’s perception of body and one’s bodily work. Ngai’s (2005) investigation of the women factory workers in China indicates a similar point. Ngai in her analysis on the aggravation of menstrual pain of women workers after they started work in a factory argues that “[...] the splitting of the self from the body was a tactic for confronting unbearable pain. Such externalization formed a buffer that could prevent the complete disintegration of the body/self complex” (p.176).

In other words, one’s understanding of his/her body is mediated by the social violence emanating from the harshness of the capitalist system of wage-labor and patriarchy. One of the most important consequences of this mediation is the splitting of the self. This means that the patriarchal and capitalist control on women workers bodies can be endured only through the exteriorization of the body. Sheper-Hughes and Lock (1987) note that the division between mental and manual labor leads to “marked distortions of body movement, body imagery, and self conception” (p.22). The following quotation from Dilber’s narrative shows how she feels alienated from her hands:

They gave me blood medicines one day. I recently had an operation. So I could not take them. I have bassinets full of medicines. After a point, one’s psychology degenerates, as hospital, operation, this and that enter one’s life.

While walking with my sister, I said to her that I had an operation, from now on I don't feel like going to any doctor. For example, I brought to you a cup of tea just now. Ask how it feels to me, I am afraid of splitting it. My hands trembled incredibly. I was very afraid that my hands would tremble. It is something weird, you know? My hands can suddenly start trembling.<sup>64</sup>

I want to conclude this section with a quotation from Dilber's narrative. This quotation, with which she ended the conversation, is highly revelatory in terms of how this splitting of the self is actually embedded in the totality of her everyday life surrounded by the various constraints of capitalism and patriarchy. This quotation includes the tension between these constraints and her individual desires.

I was saying 'What did I do, why do I live through such evil, why do I have to endure all this?' I am suffocated by the many things I must deal with. You are saying to yourself 'what did I do?', I, I, I, I am also a human-being, I also have a life, I also have thoughts, I have a brain which also gets tired. And my body gets tired often. Sometimes I think that I behave foolishly, symbolically I mean, because everyone will continue their lives, they will establish their own lives. Your family, your siblings, all will establish their own lives, hopefully my siblings will continue their education, acquire some status, but in the end I will be the one experiencing hardship, I am fully aware of this. Because everyone sticks to his life. But you compromise for other people. There is no life for you.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> "Bir ara kan ilaçları falan verdiler. Yine Ameliyat dönemine geldi kullanamadım. Benim zaten böyle sepetlerim var. onlar hep ilaç dolu. İnsanın psikolojisi bozuluyor artık bir süre sonra. Hastane, ameliyat su bu derken falan derken. Dun kardesimle falan yururken ben bi de ameliyat gecirdim dedim. Artık doktora gitmek istemiyorum falan diyorum. Mesela ben çay verdim ya size az önce. Sen onu bana sor, korkuyorum dokmemek için. Ellerim acayip titredi. Çok acayip korktum ellerim titriyecek diye. Çok acayip bir şey biliyor musun. Birden bire sallanabiliyor benim ellerim."

<sup>65</sup> "Hatta ben sey diyodum. Ben ne yaptim da bu kadar kotuluk de bu kadar cekiyorum. Biktim artık bu kadar seyle bogusmaktan ugrasmaktan ben, naptim ki diyosun ben, ben, ben ben de bi insanim, benim de bi hayatim var benim de dusuncelerim var, bi beynim var yoruluyo herseyden once. Ve bu yoruluyo zaman zaman, vucut da yoruluyo. Sey diyorum ben bazen de aptallik yaptigimi dusunuyorum sembolik olarak cunku herkes kendi hayatina devam edecek kendi hayatini kuracak ailen de kardeslerin de kendi hayatlarini kuracaklar okuyacaklar insallah bi yerlere gelecekler ama olan bana olmus olacak bunun cok iyi farkindayim. Cunku herkes kendi hayatina devam ediyor ama sen hep kendi hayatindan taviz vererek yasamis olmaya calisiyorsun. Yasamak yok."

The overall purpose of this chapter was to reveal the interrelations between the individual body, the social body and body politics<sup>66</sup> by focusing on the experiences of laboring bodies. In the first part of this chapter, I tried to show the contours of the body politics that frame women's workings conditions by an analysis of state officials' attitudes towards occupational health and safety issues. I argued that the unregulated and unprotected work environment in the textile and clothing industries does not mean that the state is not implicated in women's work experiences. Rather, the conscious unwillingness of the state authorities to intervene in the unhealthy and unsafe work conditions and the reorganization of the textile and garment industries has injurious consequences for workers' bodily experiences. The productivity of the workforce is guaranteed through its disposability. In other words, in the case of the Turkish garment and textile industry, the reproduction of labor-power at sweatshops is not guaranteed through the provision of various health and safety conditions, but rather through their suspension.

In the second part of this chapter, I focused on how this trivialization of physical consequences of work is experienced by women workers. I tried to understand how women give meaning to the pain and injury involved in manual work. I mainly claimed that the dangers characterizing manual work and its bodily effects could be detected at three different levels in the narratives of women workers: childhood memories, work narratives, and illness narratives. The painful experience of manual work in capitalist workplaces is central to the everyday lives of women and how they reflect on their lives. By focusing on these three themes in

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<sup>66</sup> Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987) propose three perspectives from which the body may be viewed: "(1) as a phenomenally experienced individual body-self; (2) as a social body, a natural symbol for thinking about relationships among nature, society, and culture ;and (3) as a body politic, an artifact of social and political control"(p.6).

the narratives of women I tried to trace the harms, injuries and illnesses which are caused by capitalist work and which nevertheless are not found worth mentioning in many analyses of the textile and garment industries. Women workers' narratives on their bodily experiences bear a unique knowledge regarding the nature of capitalist work. This knowledge first of all underlines the sweat, blood and exhaustion that accompanies the production process, and secondly, it shows the constant fear and alienation women have to live with and make sense of as they react to what they experience and witness in the work place. The erasure and belittlement of this knowledge that rests on the bodies of workers make possible the smooth functioning of the capitalist system and widens the gap between the spheres of production and consumption.

In other words, the violence of capitalist work is not restricted to the unequal distribution of the means of production and property or the lack of various resources for working people. There are also constant bodily risks those people are exposed to at their workplaces i.e. implicit and invisible violences and sufferings that workers experience bodily each work day. This bodily experience of capitalist work emerges as the primary source for the feelings of resentment and desire for justice of the women workers. Rather than talking about their legal rights, women's work narratives express an uneasiness in relation to the constant violation of their bodily integrity at the workplace and I claim that this uneasiness and discomfort with the existing state of things bear a potential for an immanent critique of capitalist relations of production by emphasizing the invisible dimensions of capitalist work. These women's work narratives are crucial in the sense that they reveal how human flesh is brutally implicated in the production process even when that process does not produce death and/or terminal diseases or the exploitation of children. They also

shed light on the more ordinary sufferings of workers that are generally not addressed in popular public discourses. Women end up struggling with this kind of ordinary suffering all alone either by employing the well known body-mind split strategy that is part and parcel of capitalist and modernist subjectivities or by re-defining dignity as silence and self-control, or by reminding themselves of their familial obligations which necessitate them to work in the first place. However, I believe that the unregistered grievances of women workers about their bodily experiences potentially offer the contours for a collective anti-capitalist political discourse and practice. This language is the hidden language of the work experience and provides us with a vernacular vocabulary to bridge the macro-analysis of capitalism with the everyday of the working class.

### CHAPTER 3

#### STRUCTURES OF FEELING AT GARMENT WORKPLACES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF WORKING SELVES

This chapter will elaborate the question of how the flexible organization of garment production under the conditions of late-capitalism influences the way garment workers give meaning to their work experiences and their selves. One of the key concepts of this chapter is vulnerability. This term enables us to situate the seemingly individualistic affects and feelings of workers within a broader framework. Vulnerability actually refers to the deeply felt effects of being historically, temporally or spatially situated within a hierarchical web of relations such as class and patriarchy.<sup>67</sup> I prefer to deploy this notion because despite various infinitesimal ways of resistance through which these women contest and resist these social-forces (to protect their dignities, to carve personal spaces for themselves etc.); it seems that the ramifications of these acts are far from substantially ameliorating their vulnerable positions as workers, and as women (daughters, wives or mothers) in society. Rather, the result is generally the re-negotiation of their position (where only minor benefits are at stake), and the creation of new sorts of tension. Women remain in a state of transparency in relation to larger forces, and they are obliged to move in a series of contradictory, ambiguous and impermeable spaces in order to deal with these mechanisms. Accordingly, being in a vulnerable position within

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<sup>67</sup> The notion of “vulnerability” should be seriously taken in hand because its connotations embrace the risk of reducing the life stories of these women into pathetic melodramas, and of misrepresenting their sufferings as spectacular hardships. It also risks binding these women to submissive or subordinate positions. A further danger in deploying the notion of vulnerability is that it is seen to be source for an “authentic knowledge” about being in a subordinate position or being resistant subjects. However, in this chapter I use vulnerability basically to underline that the women I interviewed are constantly open to the negative effects of larger social forces, representations and images that are beyond and above their direct control. These forces include the disciplinary mechanisms at work, patriarchal forms of control in the family and society.

hierarchical power relations excites contradictory emotional responses and attachments to one's self and to one's environment.

In the case of the women workers I talked to there were three interrelated sources that locked them into vulnerable positions: being a worker, being a woman, and being a resident of the Gazi neighborhood. These identities, while leading them to be constantly implicated by larger social forces, also oblige them to continuously take into account the representations and imaginaries fostering them. As a result, I claim that it is not only the women's bodies that are always exhausted and in tension due to work, but also their emotional state, as their lives unfold without them feeling in control neither materially nor symbolically. For example, when I asked the women to tell their work stories, they told me what they considered to be the most touching moments of their lives. When I asked them what it felt like being women at a workshop, they talked about how they deeply felt the gaze of men on their bodies. When I asked them about the problems at the workplace, they first and foremost mentioned the humiliating treatments they faced vis-à-vis their supervisors and the lack of respect workers showed to one another. Their stories were often full of resentment, anger, embarrassment and repugnance.

In other words, experiences of economic exploitation, poverty and inequality were interwoven with individual and collective sufferings, vulnerabilities, misrecognitions and resentments felt in the infinitesimal vessels of everyday life in these stories. Thus, to understand these furtive layers of meaning and experience, and how women's subjectivities as workers are established at the intersection of different power and meaning networks, in this chapter I will be paying attention to the feelings, attachments, local and moral stakes that they emphasized in their narratives. Nevertheless, while doing this I will stick to the context of work and

workplace. I will focus on the leveling consequences of work on the emotions women express and show that these mediate not only the interpersonal relations at the workplace, but also the formation of the subjectivities of women garment workers.

#### The changing and unchanging dimensions of work

Many studies point out that with the changing status of work under contemporary capitalism, the workplace and labor are no longer sources of identity formation for workers and self-evaluation (Sennett, 1998). These studies also note that consumption has increasingly become the privileged site for the fabrication of self and society, of culture and identity (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000). All over the world, production sites have nearly lost their public visibility, and the gap between the spheres of production and consumption has never been this deep throughout the history of capitalist relations. Accordingly the notion of class, which is defined through the antagonism between labor and capital, and the resulting collectivity among workers at the workplace, has also ceased to be the source of political action and self-recognition for most of the working populations. However, the organization of social relations at the workplace still retains its distinctive characteristics which differentiate it from other social relations. A kind of hierarchical organizational structure, division of labor and more importantly the extraction of surplus value from laborers can be said to be the primary indicators of shop floors under capitalist relations of production.

Sennett (1972, 1998, 2005) in his books tells the stories of ordinary working people and explains the processes whereby social hierarchies are translated into personal characteristics. Especially in his recent work, Sennett (2005) sheds light on the intricate relations between the flexibilization of work, decrease in workplace

solidarity, changing occupational identities and the increasing role of technology in production processes. Following a particular trend in sociology, he is preoccupied with “an exploration of the new forms of consciousness emerging under conditions of late capitalism” (Ortner, 2005, p.4). This particular approach to late capitalism is primarily interested in how the subjectivities of people are constructed under post-fordist production characterized by the flexibilization of working time and a fragmented reality. (Ortner 2005, Odih 2003, Sennett 1998, 2005, Friedman 2007, Jameson 1984) For example, Odih (2003) argues that “Just-in-time production precipitates systemic disruptions in narrative construction of social time.” (p.295) In a similar way, Ortner notes that “The capacity for coherent self-narration is constantly under assault in the late capitalism, and must be preserved or restored” (Ortner 2005 : 44).

In this chapter, I will first claim that the notions of “respect, recognition or dignity” (Skeggs 1997, Sennett 2005) still provide us with unique entrance points to the daily experiences of workers because they enable us to reflect on larger social forces and local structures of feeling simultaneously. By using these notions we can investigate how being located in a set of hierarchical relations is experienced through interpersonal relations and how these experiences are mediated by a contradictory set of emotions.

Skeggs (1997) notes in her study among young women workers, that “[S]ocial and cultural positioning generates denial, disidentification, and dissimulation rather than adjustment.” (p.75) Thus, she concludes, we need “a study of doubt, insecurity and unease: the emotional politics of class.” In a similar vein Sennett (2005) notes that “[T]he moral burdens and the emotional hardships of class are the thorniest and most concentrated among manual laborers.” These writers

search for local structures of feeling which set the terms of workers' relations with both themselves and the outer world. The notion of "structures of feeling" is defined by Raymond Williams (1977) as "characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and inter-relating continuity" (p.132). Concerns and anxieties stemming from one's desire to be recognized and respected emerge as crucial structures of feeling among working people. Many studies consider class experience and formation of working selves together. Sennett and Cobb's (1972) study among mostly white, male blue-collar workers in the United States explores workers' complex handling of the issues of dignity, self-respect and recognition. Their search for manual workers' sources of vulnerability engages in the interpretative task of reading workers' contradictory and complex ways of dealing with their "lower" class positions in a highly classified society where the individual success is hegemonically perceived through the lenses of individual ability rather than that of structural inequalities. That Sennett tries to understand class conflict as an innerly felt class warfare gives to his analysis its power. According to Sennett the fundamental inner contradiction for manual workers is the following: "They are both angry and ambivalent about their right to be angry" (Sennett 1972, p.79). He argues that this is due to the fact that manual workers always tend to think that they, as persons, might be responsible for their social position.

First of all it must be mentioned that women's narratives on their schooling experiences provided them with an important tool to deny this responsibility. Because despite differences in the way they make sense of their work, all women workers I talked to produced similar narratives regarding the sources of their class

position, and their vulnerability both at work and at home. Rather than accusing themselves for their present situation, they feel deep regret for not being able to continue their education. In their narratives, education implicitly stands for the breach between mental and manual labor. Similar to what Sennett says about the workers he interviewed “all feel that they have never enjoyed the freedom to really develop themselves inside-the freedom that they think middle-class people have had,” (Sennett, 1972, p.118) the women blame their families, especially their fathers for the interruption of their education. Without any exception all the women I talked to mentioned their success or their aptitude for studying and doing well at school:

They wanted to make me bypass the first grade when I was in primary school saying that I was smart. They always wanted to have me start from the second grade. I was an ardent child, I was occupied with doing various things. I had a curiosity in me, I was capable of doing many things. Now my dad also regrets not sending me to the school. He says one of his biggest mistakes is not making it possible for me to be educated. <sup>68</sup>(Dilber)

Another job, for example, being a waitress in a café, a cleaner and neater job I would like to have, I am thinking of working in such a job. Though I am 45, I am still planning to study, if I have enough time and if I could succeed. In the past there were examinations for the secondary school, we were three children who won these examinations in our village. One of them became a teacher, the other a police officer. I also won that examination. But my grandmother did not let me leave the village to study. She said what is the point in letting a girl child study. My teacher wanted me to marry her brother to guarantee my education. But my parents did not allow this either. Not being educated is a source of distress for me, even now I would like to study. <sup>69</sup>(Halise)

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<sup>68</sup> Birdeyken ikinci sınıfa geçirmek istiyorlardı zeki bu kız falan diye. Hep sınıf atlatmak istediler. Deli doluydum, hep bir şeylerle uğraşıyordum. Merakım vardı herşeye yatkındım. Babam da pısmanlık duyuyor şimdi. Benim yaptığım en büyük hatalardan biri seni okutmamak oldu.

<sup>69</sup> Başka bir iş, nebileyim, çaycılık, daha düzgün temiz bir yer, isterim, düşünüyorum. Düşünmez miyim. Ama daha ileriye bir şey olsa, yaşım 45 olmuş ama benim yaşım... benim elimden gelse, zamanım olsa okumayı bile düşünüyom. Ortaokulu bizim zamanımızda imtihanla oluyordu, imtihanı 3 kişi kazındık biz o kadar çocuğun içinde bizim köyde. biri öğretmen oldu biri polis şu an. Ben de kazandım, beni göndermedi babaannem. Kız çocuğu okuyup ne yapacak diye. Öğretmenim kardeşine istedi beni, okuldan çıkan çocuğu ne yapacak, sırf kardeşine nişanlıyım da karışmasınlar, bizim gelinimiz, biz okutuyoz, desinler diye, kardeşine de mahsusuz vermedi, altına yapıyor, üstüne yapıyor dedi, vermedi, okutmadılar. Mesela şu an içime dert oldu, okuma şeyi, şu an bile içimden okumak geliyor.

Now since I dropped out after primary school, you cannot do a lot of things. That is, what can we do even if we quit this job, there is not another occupation that you can handle. I set my aim as to finish open university. I will not do anything else before finishing it. Beside this I am planning to concentrate on computer and attend some computer courses. Maybe I will also focus on English. At least these two things are important for me to find a job that is more comfortable.<sup>70</sup> (Hanım)

Me: In the beginning you said that to work is something bad, why? Mainly because of its hardship, but on the other hand I am saying that I am a lucky person. I really wished to study. Seriously I've always felt bad about not having a sufficient education, especially given that I am not a stupid and ignorant person, I know how to read and I like reading. While I was in school, there were examinations for secondary school, the state was going to finance the education costs of those who won the exam. 2 out of 2000 students won that exam in my school, me and a friend of mine. At that time the headmaster and our teachers said to my parents that I was granted a scholarship and would continue a boarding school in Ankara... I started writing stories long before I became literate. I still write poems when I have time, I write the stories of my co-workers as small anecdotes and read these to them, they would be surprised. The way I was pulled away from the school was awful. They said "no, we cannot let her go." Though they did not want me to live away from them, they let me being oppressed in the garment sector. This was the biggest injustice ever done to me ever. It has remained in me. I have to work in any case, even if I study or not, you have to work. Otherwise I cannot live as a leech.<sup>71</sup> (Sabiş)

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<sup>70</sup> Şimdi ilkokul mezunu olduğumuz için bilirsin yani çok bi şey yapamıyorsun yani çıksak ne yapabiliriz. İşte elinde her hangi bir mesleğinin olmayışı, başta en azında şu okulu bitirmeyi, önüme onu koymuşum. Onu bitirmeden hiç bir şey yapamam. Onu yanı sıra bilgisayar üzerine yoğunlaşmaya, kurs falan almayı düşünüyom. Zaten ingilizce kendi derste de var. onun üzerine belki biraz yoğunlaşırım en azından belki bu iki şey. hem daha rahat çalışabileceğim bir iş bulabilirsin, kullanabilirsin.

<sup>71</sup> "Zorluğunda bir de, ben belki şanslıyım diyorum. Ben okumayı çok istedim. Ciddi anlamda içimde hep eksiklik kaldı. Aptal ve cahil bir insan olsaydım, okumayı bilmeseydim, sevmeseydim. Benim okuduğum dönemde kendi okuduğum okulda anadolu liseleri sınavları vardı, devlet burs verecekti. 2000 öğrenci içinden 2 kişi kazandı, bir ben bi de bi arkadaşım kazandık. O zaman okul müdürümüz ve öğretmenlerimiz babamla anneme yatılı okuyacağımız, ankarada devlet bursu kazandığımı bu çocuğun geleceğini... ben daha okuma yazma bilmeden hikayeler yazmaya başlıyordum. Şiir yazıyorum hala fırsat buldukça, işyerinde çalıştığım insanların hikayelerini onlara küçük küçük anekdotlar halinde kendilerine okuyorum o kadar şaşırıyorum. gönderin demişti. Okulla o süreçteki koparılışım çok kötüydü. Hayır dedi gönderemeyiz dediler. Okutmak için onlardan uzaklaşmama katlanmadılar ama konfeksiyon çevresinde ezilmeme izin verilde bu bana yapılan en büyük haksızlıktı. O hep içimde kaldı. Onun dışında geçinmek için zaten çalışmak zorundayım okusam da okumasam da, çalışmak zorundasız. çalışmadığın takdirde, sülük gibi, yaşayamam zaten."

In a society in which getting a formal education seems to be and is the only way to have access to “respectable” and “comfortable” jobs, women workers’ emphasis on their misfortune clearly amounts to refusing the responsibility of working in a “disrespected.” Their social position was not the product of their failures or mistakes, but rather they were the victims of the forces that were beyond their control. Their narratives indicate that if they had been given a chance, they would have been doing something else. It might be claimed that this constant emphasis on their schooling success illustrates their inner frustration at being destined to do manual work since their childhood irrespective of their personal abilities. However, since they could blame their families for this interrupted schooling, telling stories of educational success on the other hand provides them with a discursive tool with which they can reconcile with their present class positions. Thus these women could to a degree exteriorize the responsibility for their social positions by denouncing their families.

In the following I will try to look at how these tensions regarding one’s class position materialize at the workshops by focusing on the recent changes in the organization of garment work.

#### The structural reorganization of garment work and everyday life at garment shop floors

Brennan (2004) asks a rhetorical question: who does not feel the atmosphere when he/she enters a room? According to her, people’s actions and feelings towards each other leave affective traces behind, which become readily available to the others involved. Various encounters and situations, such as a newly passed quarrel, a tense but unnamed relationship between two people or being frustrated by the environment, are generally deeply felt and known by all participants without

necessarily pronouncing them. The plurality of everyday life is made up of these layered ordinary affective states<sup>72</sup> through which people communicate. Needless to say, this communication is neither smooth nor without contradictions. Neither can we argue that the interaction of these affective states is the only way through which terms of encounters among people are negotiated. However, it seems that being properly attentive to the daily experiences of workers demands a greater concern with people's inner states of feeling, i.e. how these states are structured in relation to larger social forces, and how these states are also kneaded by other local worlds people are involved in. This attention also seems to be the only way to produce congenial stories, familiar as well as unfamiliar, but in either case tactile.<sup>73</sup>

In the following I will try to divulge the multi-layered senses, affects and meanings embedded in the everyday of garment workplaces. Because, even in capitalist workplaces, where the division of labor, specialization, rationalization, and accordingly the effacement of sensory memory is the norm, "sensory structure of the everyday life" still embraces "unmarked, unvoiced and unattended" (Seremetakis 1994 p.19) senses and affects that are circulating among people. "Factories are

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<sup>72</sup> According to Kathleen Stewart (2007) "Ordinary affects ... akin to Raymond Williams's structures of feeling, are social experiences in solution"; they "do not have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures." Like what Roland Barthes calls the "third meaning" they are immanent, obtuse, and erratic, in contrast to the "obvious meaning" of semantic message and symbolic signification. According to Stewart "they work not through 'meanings' per se, but rather in the way that they pick up density and texture as they move through bodies, dreams, dramas, and social worldings of all kinds. Their significance lies in the intensities they build and in what thoughts and feelings they make possible. (...) Models of thinking that slide over the live surface of difference at work in the ordinary to bottom-line arguments about 'bigger' structures and underlying causes obscure the ways in which a reeling present is composed out of heterogenous and noncoherent singularities."

<sup>73</sup> Taussig (1992) in his article "Tactility and Distraction", notes that the notion of "the everyday", which is foundational for the sociology of experience, risks erasing difference and the ability to sense other everydaynesses. Tracing Benjamin he underlines the importance of "everyday tactility of knowing" which is something that cannot be grasped by "optical, contemplative means." He proposes to assume "a distracted collective reading with a tactile eye" (p.141-148).

sensuous embodiments of productive power”, says Rofel (1992, p.103), which produce not only commodities but also various subject positions. Women’s narratives embody a substantial amount of affective mood and moment that I come to conceive as constitutive for their positioning of themselves both as women and as workers at work. Without focusing on this affective and emotional dimension neither these workers’ subjectivities, thus their potential for agency under the tight control of capitalist work discipline, nor the intimately effective functioning of capitalist work discipline can be understood.

The apparel industry is one of the few sectors in which the effects of late capitalism and the globalizing tendencies of production can be most visibly seen. That global production processes are mainly organized through buyer-driven chains in the industry means what, when, and how to produce will be determined by buyer companies (which are also mainly guided by consumer demands) and imposed on the local producers (Yörük 2005). There are complex networks among local and global actors in apparel production depending on the nature of the product produced and the size of the firm. However, irrespective of the profitability rate of a particular production chain or the distribution of the profit throughout this chain, the workers are always subject to a fluctuating working rhythm in their jobs. The seasonal changes in garment production, which are influenced both by the productivity of agricultural production and the changes in the fashion, the rising competition especially among middle and small scale companies and workshops, and the pressure to have the product ready in time for the subcontractor company contribute to the flexibility of the apparel production and therefore to the job insecurity of the workers.

Another important feature of garment shop floors is the long working hours. This sector by itself evidences the doom of workers' struggles for the eight-hour shift in the history. For the women textile workers, who are working both in small and middle scale companies, overtime works or night shifts are part of the ordinary flow of work, and workers generally do not know beforehand whether they will stay for overtime or night shifts. Extra- hours are generally announced on a daily basis. However, overtime work is far from being an issue of debate with the employer, because all workers know that there is no shop floor without it. Workers do not want to quit their jobs, especially if their wages are paid regularly in their present company, because they are unsure about whether another company would even meet that standard. That is why even if they are offered a higher wage they hesitate to change their jobs. They are too familiar with stories of how their mothers, fathers, sisters or friends worked for months without receiving any payment but just hoping to be paid in some future time. However, this situation, which guarantees the continuity of labor force for the employer, leads to a tremendous psychological burden for the employee because of the increased sense of insecurity at the workplace.

The work narratives of women mainly revolve around the issues concerning the degrading and exhausting nature of the work and workers' inability to intervene in the arbitrary acts of employers (such as arbitrary dismissals, revilements of workers, irregularities in overtime payments etc), and the feelings and emotions aroused by these acts.

The threat of dismissal and the feelings of anxiety

Dismissal is like the sword of Damocles upon garment workers, especially for those working in small and middle sized workplaces. If you do not have social security, or

close ties with the employer, or are not a highly skilled worker; you are always under the threat of dismissal. Especially during the times of recession in the sector, everyone knows and/or feels that some workers will be fired but no one exactly knows who will be next. During these periods, workers reflect on their previous deeds and their position in the company to guess whether the management can sacrifice them. This wait in the midst of uncertainty has extremely devastating psychological consequences for workers. The violence of an arbitrary dismissal and living under its constant threat is best exemplified by Sabiř, who works in a middle scale denim company as an *ortacı*. She describes the atmosphere in the workplace during the dismissal periods as follows:

I had read a story when I was a child: People were being tortured in Vietnam, a psychological war was also going on. They line 10 people side by side, they discharge their guns and kill 9 of them one by one. When it is the tenth person's turn, they shout "fire!", but the man dies of a heart attack without any fire. He falls down psychologically, even if he is not shot, he dies. We are in a similar situation, that is, even if we are not dismissed or sent away, we have to pass through those two weeks under a highly tense atmosphere. Because it is rumored that the list is being prepared and, it will be made public soon.<sup>74</sup>

For Sabiř, waiting for the announcement of the management's list of those to-be-dismissed is no less stressful than the dismissal itself. Sabiř also adds that some workers in her workplace decided to quit their jobs before the employer announced the list in order not to cope with waiting "like sheep to be slaughtered", and without even claiming their rights to severance payment. In many cases, being dismissed is regarded as an assault on one's dignity. Not only being fired, but also the feeling

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<sup>74</sup> "Küçükken bir hikaye okumuřtum, Vietnam'da insanlara iřkence yapıyorlar, psikolojik savař. 10 kiřiyi sıraya diziyorlar, birbirlerinin gözü önünde dokuzunu kurřuna diziyorlar. Onuncuda da tüfekleri boşaltıyorlar. Ateř diyorlar, adam olduđu yerde kalp krizinden ölüyor, hiç ateř gelmeden. Psikolojik olarak yıkılmış oluyor, öldürülme de ölüyo yani. Biz de öyle yani, kovulmasak da çıkarılmasak da o iki haftayı gergin geçirmek zorundayız. Çünkü kulaktan kulađa duyuluyor. Liste hazırlanıyor, çıkacak."

that your destiny is not in your hands does serious damage to one's self. Although feelings of anxiety and depression do not necessarily lead to a corresponding resistance on the part of the workers against the work conditions or employers, these feelings are constitutive of their daily life experiences at work. Larger forces of capitalist work that render the threat of dismissal an indispensable part of garment work have not only material consequences for the lives of workers, but also psychological ones. In other words, the violence capitalist work inflicts on people's sense of self is not restricted to their bodily exhaustion caused by harsh and intense working conditions; the emotional injuries they suffer in each work day are also an inextricable part of the working experience.

Materialization of tension at various encounters at the workplace,  
and the feelings of resentment

Since most of the tasks undertaken in apparel production are dependent on each other, it is crucial for workers to keep a similar pace of work. In apparel workplaces, either small or middle-scale, a number of foremen supervise the production process. These foremen constantly interfere in the working rhythm of workers by telling them to be faster, or by changing their tasks to expedite production. The pressure to catch up the rhythm of production creates a tense workplace atmosphere. This tension at the workplace is immediately palpable in the narratives of the women workers I talked to. They constantly complain about the way foremen and other workers treat them and the abusive language that is predominant nearly in all workplaces. Hanım's narrative throws into relief how the destructive effects of the new piece-work system and long working hours at her workplace are compounded by the humiliating treatment of the workers by the foremen:

For example, formerly there was no piece-work system, and we were producing happily. The environment was easygoing, everyone was working

in peace, more willingly. Now, under the pressure of this new system, people really don't work. They really don't work, their psychologies decay, people have arguments with each other. One week is enough for becoming suffocated. People are at the verge of outbreak. We are all together, it is only us who knows our state. Here wasn't a day when I worked willingly. Yet, I had to work everyday till 10.00 p.m. We went to work on Friday, we came today (Saturday 4.00 pm). Imagine, we went there on Friday, we had a break at 10.00 a.m. just for 10 minutes. Normally we take breaks in groups. Normally we had to take a break at 1.30 p.m., but we had lunch around 2.30 and only for half an hour. They asked us to come down immediately while we were still eating. We went down and worked. They gave our tea break at 4.00 p.m. They gave us dinner at 7.00 p.m. We worked till 2.00 a.m. without any further meal. We worked with only half bread till 2.00 am. This means that they totally ignore working people, it would be much more efficient if they treat workers like human-beings and think good things about them. They need to listen to and know workers.

The more comfort you provide him with, the more efficient this person becomes. How can that person work if you force her to her limits, if you do not give her what she deserves. She cannot be efficient. Isn't the foreman aware of these? Yes, he is aware of it. Textile is such a disgusting thing. For example, they cancel our tea and meal breaks and they laugh at it, as if they did something very good. Their laughs... what do you receive in the end if you behave like this, in the end you are a worker too. In the end they don't earn that much themselves. This divulges your personality. You laugh when we stay overtime. What did they achieve, what did they acquire? Workers experience serious depression. There is an overt disregard for workers. They regard workers as sheep, they think we will do whatever they want us to do.<sup>75</sup> (Hanım)

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<sup>75</sup> “Mesela eskiden sayılı olmasa daha güzel iş çıkıyordu, ortam sakin herkes daha rahat çalışıyordu, daha isteyerek çalışıyordu. Şu an onların verdiği sistem dayatmasıyla insanlar çalışmıyor. Gerçekten çalışmıyor, psikolojileri bozuldu, birbirlerine sataşmalar şu bu. Biz mesela bu haftayı zor geçirdik, illallah etik. Yani insanlar isyan etme sınırında. Yine birbirimiz içinde ama bunu bitek biz biliyoruz. Bu hafta hiç isteyerek çalışmadım. Hep 10'a kadar. Bugün de, Cuma günü gittik bugün (Cumartesi öğlen saat 4) geldik. düşün Cuma günü gittik bi 10 paydosuna çıktık bi on dakika, normalde bölüm bölüm çıkıyoruz ya bir buçukta çıkmamız gerekirken iki buçuk üç oldu, yarım saat yemek yedik, hemen inin. İndik, çalıştık. Dört paydosuna çıkartmadılar. Dört paydosumuzu aldılar. Akşam yedide yemek verdiler. Yedi saat. Saat bir buçuk oldu. Bi yarım ekmekle saat taa ikiye kadar. Bu insanları tamamen hiçe saymak, yani onlar işçilerini biraz insan yerine koyup onlar için iyi şeyler düşünseler o işçi daha çok verimli olur. Onu dinlemeleri, bilmeleri gerekiyor. Sen ne kadar rahatlık sunarsan, ne kadar rahat çalışmasını sağlarsan, o insan daha çok verim verir sana. Sen ona bir çok engel koyarsan, onun hakkını vermezsen o insan nasıl çalışır. Verimli olamaz. Usta bunun farkında değil mi, farkında. Tekstil o kadar iğrenç bir şey ki. Mesela çay, yemek paydoslarımızı alıyorlar, gülüyorlar, sanki çok iyi bir şey yapmış gibi. O gülmeleri... yani sen onu yaptın senin eline ne geçiyor ya sen de bizim gibi işçisin. Senin cebine hiç bir şey girmiyor. Senin kişiliğin ortaya çıkıyor, senin karakterin ortaya çıkıyor. Mesaiye kaldığımız zaman kakhaha atıyorsun. Sanki ne başarmışlar, ne elde etmişler, işçiler psikolojik bunalıma giriyor. Resmen hiçe saymak. İşçiler zaten koyun biz ne dersek onlar yapıyorlar.”

In this quotation, Hanım emphasizes how the acts of foremen coupled with the intense work rhythm contribute to the depression of workers, estranging them from their work and preventing them from attaching any meaning to their labor. Feelings of depression and anxiety arise mainly from the foremen's constant disregard for workers' physical and psychological needs. Actually being treated like objects or animals or being subjected to the humiliating attitudes of foremen are the main themes that regularly crop up in women workers' narratives. Accordingly women workers' narratives also embrace great resentment towards such attitudes. Because during the production process it becomes clear to workers that capitalist production constantly positions them as mere labor-power overlooking the differences among them. For example, Meliha tells lots of stories regarding the difficulties she experienced when she asked for an increase in her wage. She repeatedly says "as long as I am a donkey, anyone can saddle me."<sup>76</sup> When I asked Hanım what her biggest problem was at her workplace, she replied as follows:

There are many things that annoy me. For example, now I am on the brink of quitting the job, if I was not in so much need. Because they do not behave to you as a human-being, they do not give you what you deserve. They take everything you have. You work, you put all your labor in, you exert yourself like it's your own business but they disregard it. It is futile, either you do it, or excuse me, a dog does it, it makes no difference for them. That's how they perceive us.<sup>77</sup> (Hanım)

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<sup>76</sup> "Ben eşek olduktan sonra beni herkes eyerler." What is also interesting about this statement is that it implicates not only the worthlessness of one's labor at a workplace, but also one's power to leave that workplace exactly because of the same reason. Because while humiliating herself she also points out her potential to quit her job. Thus, the indifference shown towards her labor is transformed into a discursive bargaining tool while she is talking to her boss.

<sup>77</sup> "Bir çok şey var beni rahatsız eden. Mesela ben artık yani gerçekten çok mecbur olmasam bırakma derecesine gelmişim. Çünkü seni insan yerine koymuyorlar, senin hakkını vermiyorlar. Senin her şeyini elinden alıyorlar. Sen o kadar emek sarf ediyorsun, kendi işinmiş gibi çabalıyorsun ama onlar görmemezlikten geliyorlar. Boş yani. Ha sen yapmışsın, ha afedersin bi köpek yapmış. Onun gözünde odur yani."

Sennett, in his book *Respect*, while talking about his encounters with the youngsters in the ghetto, says that “In places where resources are scarce and approval from the outside world is lacking, social honor is fragile; it needs to be reasserted every day” (2005, p.48). These apparel workshops are exactly such places.<sup>78</sup> Women told me stories where even a slightly coarse gesture, mimic, gaze, or hailing ended up with a serious or violent dispute. People think that unless they react to the bad mannered behaviors of others at the workplace, they are under the risk of being considered as persons who comply with being disparaged and do not stand up for their honor. The increasing pace of work, hierarchical relations among workers, foremen and employers contribute to the scarcity of respect at the workplace turning each encounter into a conflict over dignity. The way workers deal with such situations changes from person to person depending on the nature of the encounter. More importantly, what I want to emphasize is that women’s responses are actually nourished by particular emotional states. These emotional states are revelatory for the way women experience and respond to capitalist work relations. The following quotations from women exemplify their feelings in moments in which they are humiliated by foremen:

He shouts at me to tell something, you know, he shouts at me. In any case, one day he said to me “draw this.” I drew it, then he told me: “it shouldn’t have been like that.” I said “this is how you showed me to do it.” He said, “No it is not the way I told you to draw it.” Then I said “why are you shouting at me? You are always shouting at me, Erdal abi, you are always doing injustice to me.” I said “you asked me to draw it this way and I drew it

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<sup>78</sup> Bourgois’ (2005) article on crackdealers in Harlem shows how the terms of encounters among the dwellers of this crime-laden neighborhood are shaped by various violent-prone acts which further contribute to the deterioration of community-based relationships. Rather than authenticizing intra-community relations as the primary source of their survival, he underlines how being subject to structural violence as a result of unemployment and poverty leads to the destruction of everyday lives. This idea in a way parallels with Sennett’s notion of “scarcity of respect” and its repercussions for interpersonal relations.

as you showed to me, why are you shouting at me?” Then Ali abi came. After that he took me to the upstairs. I said “abi, he is shouting at me.” I said “I am already in a depression, I am showing aggression to my children rather than love.” I came to this work place and I lost my psychological well being. I said “he is shouting for everything, no one can achieve anything by shouting, he should talk to me humanely.”<sup>79</sup> (Meliha)

But as I said, when someone throws stones at you, and you remain silent, then they think they have you under control, you are expected to do whatever they want, you are oppressed by them. That is why I never care what the employer or the foremen say. When they ask me to do something I do my work, but not in a hurried way, I do not bother to complete the job immediately. I would like the chores to be completed, in the end many people work for it, they are all exhausted. You work not to stay overtime, not to defer the chores. But when someone gives directions to you or tells you what to do, you become estranged to the work and you just don’t do it.<sup>80</sup> (Sevda)

One Saturday I stayed overtime, I completed my work. He then came towards me. He is the one sewing the back sides of the slacks. He asked me whether I delivered the back sides. He said ‘I will work, why didn’t you deliver them?’ I said, ‘Osman abi, if you had told me that you were going to work, I would have delivered them.’ ‘I now ask you to deliver them’ he said. I had completed my working hours, I was about to leave. ‘You will deliver, I will work’ he said. ‘You do it yourself then’ I said. ‘If I am going to deliver, what are you doing here?’ he said. His approach and the way he talked were disgusting. Then I went to the restroom to wash my hands. He came and said ‘when you come here on Monday, you will be extremely regretful; you will see what will happen to you?’ ‘How do you dare to say these to me, who are you?’ I said. ‘You have to deliver them’ he said. Then I said, ‘ok I am delivering,’ and picked up a machine part and threw it towards him full of anger. If he hadn’t bent down, - it was a very heavy part – he would have his head smashed, other people held both of us back with difficulty. After a

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<sup>79</sup> “Bir şey söylüyor, bağırarak söyleyiyor, tamam mı. Bağıyor bana. Neyse bir gün bana dedi ki, şunu çiz. Ben de çizdim, sonra bana dedi ki, öyle değil, böyle, sen öyle gösterdin bana dedim. Ben sana öyle çiz demedim. Ben dedim ki ne bağıyorsun sen dedim ya, her zaman bana bağıyorsun bana dedim. Erdal abi haksızlık yapıyorsun dedim. Sen bana bunu böyle çiz dedin, ben de çizdim dedim. Ne bağıyorsun ki dedim. Ali abi geldi. Ondan sonra, beni aldı yukarı götürdü. Abi dedim, bağıyor bana dedim. Ben zaten bunalım içindeyim dedim. Ben dedim çocuklarıma sevgi yerine şiddet gösteriyorum dedim ya. Bu iş yerine geldim, hepten psikolojim bozuldu benim dedim. Herşeye bağıyor dedim. Bağırmayla bir şey elde edemez kimse dedim, insan gibi söylesin dedim.”

<sup>80</sup> “Ama diyorum ya, eğer gerçekte biri laf söyler hiç bir şey demezen sana çok çabuk dış geçirirler her dediklerini yaparsın, ezilirsin altlarında. Ben onun için hiç bir zaman ne patron, ne ustabaşı çoğu zaman takmadım. Şunu yap dedikleri zaman işimi yaparım ama aman hızlı hızlı yapayım da iş bitsin diye bi şey yok. İsterim iş çıksın, sonuçta o kadar kişi çalışıyor, yoruluyorlar, bi daha mesai olmasın, iş ertelenmesin diye yaparsın, ama biri gelip sana emir ettiği zaman şunu yapacaksın, bunu yapacaksın dediği zaman soğuyosun, yapmıyosun

while I was called by the employer and I said to my coworkers ‘goodbye’ – if they are inviting you to the upstairs, it means that you are going to be fired. When I went there I saw all foremen sitting there including our department’s. But I am so suffocated, so suffocated that if they had said even a word implying that they were right, I would have smashed everything and left the place. The boss said ‘Sabiş there is this situation, you have thrown this machine to Osman.’ ‘Yes,’ I said ‘if I had held something else, I would have thrown it too.’ ‘Human beings get along with each other by talking.’ ‘Yes, but human-beings, here nobody is the slave of anyone else’ I said. His attitude towards me is crucial. If he had said to me ‘Sabiş would you deliver some garments, though I know I didn’t tell you before but could you stay some more,’ I would have stayed overtime. I would have stayed till five or six. The way you talk to people is very important; you can have people do your work. I might be an ordinary worker, you might be a foreman, but this situation does not give you the right to dominate me. (...) They love the people that they can dominate. If they cannot dominate, they do not love you.<sup>81</sup>(Sabiş)

We were sitting next to the boss’ room, he said “those of you who work will stay, the rest sons of bitches better fuck off.” He talked like this. It was like boiling water is pouring down my head. I said “I am no longer working here.” (...) My sister’s brother-in-law had taken me to that place. This guy actually was a very good person. I said what kind of boss is this? There are women of 70 years old who are also his neighbors. If a worker did something wrong, you would call him to your room and say “this is your mistake, if you

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<sup>81</sup> “Bi Cumartesi mesaiye kaldım ben, işimi bitirdim. Bana geldi dedi ki, şu pantolonun arkalarını o yapıyor. Arkalarını açtın mı dedi. Dedi ben çalışıcam niye açmadın. Dedim Osman abi sen bana demiş olsaydın ben çalışıcam sabis arkaları ac ben calisicam acardim. Sana soyledim dedi ac. Saatim dolmuş kartımı basmışım gidiyorum. Açıcaksın dedi, ben çalışıyorum. Olabilir oturur kendin açarsın dedim. Ben dedi açtıktan sonra sen dedi ne iş yaparsın dedi. Bak dedim, bana yaklaşım tarzı konuşma tarzı iğrençti. Gittim tam ellerimi yıkıyorum. Dedi ki seni dedi süründürürüm Pazartesi günü, buraya girdiğine gireceğine bin pişman olursun. Sen dedim beni nasıl süründürürsün ya, sen kimsin ya. Açıcaksın diyorum sana dedi. Açıyorum dedim, ben de orda meta makinasının aldım o sinirle bir attım yani şu kafasını eğmemiş olsaydı, ağır bir şeydi. Şu kafası patlardı. Şöyle sıyırdı geçti şurdan. O anda bizi zor tuttular. Sen beni nasıl süründürürsün, sen dedi nasıl atarsın dedi. (...)Yukarıdan beni çağırdılar. Ben arkadaşlarıma dedim ki eyvallah, belli bir şey beni çağırıyorlarsa, baktım hepsi orda oturuyor. Şefimiz de dahil olmak üzere bütün ustalar. Ama öyle bir dolmuşum ki, öyle bir dolmuşum ki, bana en ufak bir onları haklı çıkaracak bir şey söyleseler orayı dağıtıcam gidicem yani sonuçta. Dedi ki sabiş dedi böyle böyle bir durum var dedi. Var dedim evet. Sen dedi osman abinin kafasına neto atmışın. Elime o geçti dedim, daha farklı bir şey geçseydi daha farklı bir şey atardım dedim. Yavrum dedi insanlar konuşarak... insanlar ama dedim. İnsanlar konuşarak anlaşılır burda kimse kimsenin kölesi değildir dedim. Bana yaklaşım tarzı çok önemli. Bana demiş olsaydı ya sabiş ben sana söylemedim ama kal bi saat daha bana biraz daha aç beni öğlene kadar idare edecek bir şey olsun. Bu şekilde söylemiş olsaydı öğleden sonra da kalırdım. Beşe kadar da kalırdım, altıya kadar da kalırdım, ben ona o işi açardım. Şu çok önemli insana yapmayacağı şeyleri de yaptırabilirsin dilin çok önemli. Hani seni bir usta olabilirsin. Ben de orda bir çalışan olabilirim ama bu bana hükmetme hakkını vermez. (...)Ezebildiği insanı seviyorlar, yani hükmedebildikleri insanları seviyorlar. Hükmedemiyorsa seni sevmiyorlar.”

repeat this mistake I will dismiss you.” Then you can dismiss him. You do not need to use bad language, what gives you the right to swear to people. He used bad language, and I left that place. Who are you, how could you swear at my mother. Those who could endure continue to work, the rest... But those who are in need continue to work. What else can they do, they have to pay rent... for example at this moment even if they curse at me in my present work place, I would have to continue working there.<sup>82</sup>(Halise)

All four women narrate different encounters with the foremen or the employer. They all say that the foremen like obedient workers who carry out the orders without questioning and opposing them. They differentiate themselves from this image of a docile, slave-spirited worker; on the other hand, they underline that they are not indolent, rather their criteria for doing extra-work or working rapidly is to be treated decently and humanely. They do not meekly conform to the rules imposed on them, or remain passive in the face of such humiliating behavior and orders. Rather, they develop various ways of responding to the foremen. According to the women, the foremen constantly breach the basic norms regulating interpersonal relations. I argue that this feeling of breach is best reflected in the feelings of resentment expressed in the women’s narratives. But these feelings of resentment fuse with other emotions. For example, Sevda disregards the foremen and does not carry out their orders as long as they order around in a coarse manner. She explains how at these moments she feels estranged from work. Meliha does not accept being yelled at, and responds

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<sup>82</sup> “Camlı patronun odasıyla temizleme masamız, biz de oturuyorduk. çalışan çalışsın dedi, çalışmayan orospu çocuğu siktirsin gitsin dedi, böyle etti. Hi, ay ben sanki tepemden aşağı kaynar su kuyuldu. Dedim ben burda çalışmam. (...) Beni götüren de ablamın damadının arkadaşı. O çocuklar da çok iyi insanlar. Dedim bu ne biçim patron. Orda 70 yaşında kadın var, komşuları bi de, onun yanındaki. Çağır, bir işinin suçu varsa odana çağırırısın, kardeşim senin hatan bu bu, bunu bi daha tekrarlarsan sen benim iş yerimde çalışma. Sen yoluna ben yoluma de, çıkar at. Küfür etmene ne gerek var. sen kimsin de küfür ediyosun. Küfür etti, ben ordan çıktım.yani o kim ki benim anama avradıma küfür edecek. Çalışan çalışıyo, çalışmayan.... ama mecbur ister istemez ihtiyacı olan çalışıyor. Ne yapacak, kirada olan var, şeyde olan var. aha şu an bana adamlar küfür de etse ben çalışmak zorundayım (Halise)”

to the foreman, loudly rendering his impolite behavior visible at the workplace. Sabiř on the other hand, does not abide by her foreman's order, rather she loses her temper and flings out a rocklike appliance to her foreman. She also talks about her deep repugnance towards the foremen. Halise tells how she left her previous workplace after her boss cursed at them. Consequently it might be argued that the relations with the foremen at the workplace are mediated by a series of emotions, primarily that of resentment. But I have to also note that workers' responses embrace a strong dimension of ambiguity in the sense that each of them emphasizes that if you are obliged to work to survive, you might have to accept various kinds of humiliations. We will dwell on this tension later.

Not only the relations between workers and foremen, but the relations among workers are also informed by various emotional states. First of all, women's statements about other workers reveal the feelings of insecurity and distrust among workers. The flexible mode of accumulation and its repercussions in the workplace such as piece wage and competition with other firms, brought the threat of unemployment and insecurity to the workplace, perpetuating competition and disaccord among workers. This situation seems to eliminate the possibility of the formation of fidelity and interdependency at the workplace. Here is an example of how the flexible mode of organization of work influences the relations among workers:

For example they come and ask you to accomplish at least 100 pieces. If the other workers can do it, you are also supposed to do it. If they cannot, you also cannot. I have to do it to insinuate myself into the boss's favor. Such disputes are common. Even when a smallest affair bursts up, they immediately accuse each other. The main problems are always related to the work itself, but workers accuse each other. For example, recently everyone is in bad terms, best friends turn into enemies. Sometimes I think that the problems are never personal but always pertaining to the work. Something like that. Someone says something, the other says another. Then they begin

to argue with each other without realizing that all problems are related to work. Sometimes serious disputes happen, always because of the work itself.

You think this situation has to do with the new systems of production like producing more or competing with our competitors?

They have also been highly influential. For example there was no piece-work production system. We were just working, producing as much as we could. Then there was no problem. No one was arguing with each other. No one had a problem with the others. But when the piece-work system entered, what happened? People began to have arguments with each other. That is, one succeeds to produce the required amount of pieces, while the other cannot and so she finds herself in difficulty. Such issues are reflected in inter-personal relations. It is because of the system itself. You might agree to produce a precise number of pieces, but people don't think about this, people try to produce the maximum amount and you would also be compelled to produce more.<sup>83</sup> (Halise)

Thus the feelings of offence and disappointment underline the relations among workers. All the workers I talked to castigated the workers that pretend to be superior, and such behaviors are almost always given as a reasonable cause for quarrel among workers:

He asks me to do something, but it is ambiguous whether he is telling it to me or to another, I have a name, don't I? He should rather call me "Meliha hanım" or "Meliha," but he never uses my name. He just says "give it to

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<sup>83</sup>"Geliyorlar mesela sen mesela 100 tane iş çıkartacaksın. O çıkartıyorsa sen de çıkartacaksın, o çıkartmıyorsa sen de çıkartmayacaksın. Patronun gözüne girmek için çıkartmak zorundayım. Bu tip çekişmeler oluyor genelde. En ufak bir şey olduğu zaman hemen şikayet, birbirlerine. Problemleri hep iş ama hep birbirlerinden çıkarıyorlar. Mesela bu son dönemlerde herkes birbiriyle küs, en iyi olan arkadaşlar şu an birbirlerine düşman sanki. Ben bazen düşünüyorum, sorunlar kişisel değil, hep iş. Öyle bir şey. O diyo o öyle yapıyor, öbürü diyo bu böyle yapıyor. Derken birbirlerini yemeğe başlıyorlar bunun farkında olmadan. Kırgınlıklar oluyor yanı sıra, ciddi tartışmalar, bağırmlar çağırmlar oluyor, ne hep iş yüzünde. Yani o ortam iş yüzünden.

Yeni sistemlerle mi oldu, biz daha çok iş çıkartalım, rakiplerimizle yarışalım gibi...

Onların da büyük bir etkisi oldu tabi. Mesela ilkin biz sayıyla çalışmıyorduk. Sadece sıradan çalışıyorduk. Herkes ne çıkardıysa, ne yaptıysa. O zaman hiç bir problem yoktu. Hiç kimse birbiriyle tartışmıyordu. Hiç kimsenin birbiriyle bir problemi yoktu. Ama sayılı iş verildiği zaman noldu. Hemen bunlar birbirlerini yemeğe başladılar. Yani diğeri çıkartamıyor, zorlanıyor. Diğeri çıkartıyor, adamlarını gözüne girmeye çalışıyor. Bu gibi şeyler yansıyor tabi. Sistemden kaynaklanıyor, düzenden kaynaklanıyor. Sen bu kadar, konuşup arkadaşlar 200 tane çıkartalım desen. Ama insanlar bunu düşünmüyor, bana ne ben bu kadar çıkartıyorum, diyor. Çıkartıyorlar senin de çıkartman gerekiyor."

me!” he just shouts at me. I said “at whom are you shouting, are you shouting at your father’s child?” No one said “How could you talk this way, there is a foreman, there is a boss in the workplace.” At whom are you shouting. He is a worker like me.<sup>84</sup> (Meliha)

Once she threw the piece towards the desk, it offends you extremely, I was offended. I am a cleaner, you are also a cleaner. You become seriously offended since she threw a piece towards you among other people. She treats you as if you were a child.<sup>85</sup> (Sevda)

The vexed disputes around *yedek atma* emerged in all conversations. Since nearly all tasks at the workplace are tied to each another, not only the foremen, but also the workers are forced to watch the others’ pace of work. These disputes reveal the tensions among workers arising from the increasing rhythm of work. No one admits that she works too fast and causes up extra-work for the next worker. It can be argued that their disavowal of this position is nourished by some moral claims positing equality and justice among workers. They abstain from being labeled as a worker who wants to ingratiate herself with the employer. The workers I talked to almost always mentioned the need for coordination and solidarity among workers during production. For example, Sevda charges Meliha with *yedek atma*, saying that she was piling the garments. Meliha passionately disallows this charge, saying “Am I such a dishonorable person to leave extra-work for you?”<sup>86</sup> This statement indicates that the relations among workers can only be grasped through some assumptions regarding what it means to be a proper, self-respecting person. Workers

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<sup>84</sup> “Bir iş istiyor, ben ne bileyim bana mı söylüyor, ona mı söylüyor, benim bir adım var di mi. Bana desin Meliha hanım desin, ya da meliha desin, hiç isim kullanmıyor, versene diyo bağıyor. Dedim sen kime bağıyorsun, babanın çocuğuna mı bağıyorsun, dedim. Orada diyen olmadı ki sen ne diyorsun ya, di mi, ustası var bunun patronu var, di mi, sen kime bağıyorsun kardeşim. O da benim gibi bir işçi.”

<sup>85</sup> “İşi elimden bi tuttu masaya fırlattı, düşünün o kadar zorunuza gidiyor ki, zoruma gitti, hani ben temizlemeciysen sen de temizlemecisin. Benim işimi kaldırıp fırlatması, doğal olarak o kadar kişinin içinde bi de, alay tavrıyla bi de ortalığa yansıtması daha bi zoruna gidiyor insanın. Çocukmuşsun gibi bi sey oluyor.”

<sup>86</sup> “Ben o kadar şerefsiz miyim sana yedek bırakayım?”

deny the accusations of *yedek atma* on the basis of moral criteria with which they can mend their injured self-esteem at the workplace.

To sum up, once the assaults on people's dignity reach a degree that begins to deteriorate the local moral stakes characterizing inter-personal relations; workers might decide to risk lots of things, including their jobs. They develop various discursive and practical ways to respond to this deterioration. These responses can be grasped only within an emotional economy that is regulating the terms of encounters at the workplace.

Uniqueness of workers and invocation of the feeling of compassion  
How could it then be possible for these workers to still be working in workplaces where they are paid very little, and the atmosphere is so tense? It is apparent that the families of the workers I talked to were mainly relying on the wages of these women. Thus economic necessities are the primary reason they give for why they cannot just quit their jobs despite the various humiliations from foremen, supervisors or other workers. However, there is another crucial factor that women workers elaborate upon as one of the primary reasons for their staying in their present jobs: It is the so-called "special" place they have in the eyes of their employers.

In her discussion of the formation of human identity, Cavarero (2000) argues that linguistic vulnerability is a constitutive feature of our selves in that it determines the relation between the self and the narration of his/her life story. Her point is summarized by Kottman (2000) as follows: "The pain caused by the word comes not simply from the fact that one is called a hurtful name, or not solely from the sedimented history or semantics of that name, but moreover from the feeling that who one is, is not being addressed, and indeed has no place in the name –calling

scene at all.” According to Caverero, the desire for being narrated by an-other is crucial for the formation of the identity. Caverero’s description contributes to our understanding of workplace relations among workers. For example, Meliha’s above quoted narrative (“bana mı söylüyor, ona mı söylüyor, benim bir adım var di mi. Bana desin Meliha hanım desin, ya da meliha desin, hiç isim kullanmıyor, versene diyo bağıyor”) reveal her strong urge to be called by her name. Thus her statements are indicative of how this linguistic vulnerability is materialized at the workplace. On the other hand, when she decides to quit her job, her employers respond by stating “we know what a good person you are” to persuade her not to leave. Accordingly, Meliha can display a coherent and proud identity while telling me her story. During the interviews I listened to various versions of such encounters with the boss were narrated. Here are some examples from the narratives of Meliha and Zeynep:

I wanted to quit, but they didn’t let me. That guy had shouted at me. And they didn’t tell him not to shout at me. I said ‘Battal abi I want to leave the job.’ ‘I will talk to him’ he said. ‘He is an asshole, he is a brute person, I want to quit, otherwise I can even stab him, I have to quit this job I said. ‘Nothing will happen, don’t worry’ he said, ‘you will work here, you are honest, you are faithful, we know you.’ He said, ‘We would not let you stay here, we would send you away if you had done something wrong, you will work here.’ Then I decided to stay there.<sup>87</sup> (Meliha)

He said ‘I know you, that is why you will not care anyone. ‘How can this be possible?’ I said, ‘everyone will shout at you and will give orders to you, and you won’t care.’ He asked, ‘you accept me as your boss?’ ‘yes, you are my boss’ I said. ‘then you won’t listen to anyone else, you will directly come to me if something happens,’ he said.<sup>88</sup>(Zeynep)

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<sup>87</sup> “Çıkmak istedim, çıkartmadılar beni ordan. İşte o kişiydi bağırın bana. Ve demediler ki sen ne bağıyorsun. Ben çıkıcam dedim battal abi dedi ki ben konuşurum onla dedi. Dedim ki o itin teki dedim, o hayvan dedim. Ben çıkmak istiyorum, ya yarın bir gün ya ona makası geçircem bigün dedim ya bu işi bırakmam gerekiyor dedim. Hiç bir şey olmaz dedi, sen çalışacaksın burda dedi. Sen namuslusun, sen dürüstsün abla biz seni biliyoruz dedi. Sen öyle böyle bir insan olsan zaten biz seni tutmayız dedi, göndeririz dedi. Ama seni biz biliyoruz dedi. Sen çalışacaksın burda dedi.o şekilde yine kaldım Başak.”

<sup>88</sup> “Dedi ki ben seni biliyorum dedi, o yüzden de dedi sen kimseyi kafana takmıcağsın. Kim takmıyacak ya dedim, sana önüne gelen dedim, bağırcak, çağırcak, emir verecek ki sen

In general the employer knows the worker before she starts to work in his workplace through familial or friendship ties. Irrespective of the level of acquiescence, whenever there is a quarrel, the employers draw upon a similar narrative. (It could be more appropriate to argue that workers' narratives on their encounters with the employers bear structural similarities.) All the women I talked to told stories in which the employer goes to the worker, or calls her in his office to talk upon a recent argument she had with other workers. During these conversations the owner of the shop floor tells her that he knows that she is different from other workers, and she is special in terms of her skills, her character or her attitude at the work place etc. Despite the fact that we can never be sure about the exact content of these conversations, it is certain that all the workers narrated incidents in which the employers told them why they were indispensable for that workplace. It seems that it is through these moments that the injuries and assaults on their personalities at work are mended. Their emphasis on these conversations in a way balances the humiliations and hardships they talked about in the rest of the interview.

Their narratives on how they bargain over an increase in their wage also reveal the workings of this mechanism. On the basis of this special treatment, the women argue, they can personally ask for some benefits from their bosses to improve their working conditions. This seems to be the only available way for the women to acquire some benefits for themselves. In other words, women rely on the benevolence and compassion of the boss in order to obtain what they see to be a privilege (wage increase). Benevolence and compassion prove that they are

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kafana bir şey takımıcağın. Dedi ki, sen beni patronun olarak görüyorsun. Evet dedim sen benim patronumsun. O zaman kim sana ne dediye kulak vermiyeceğın dedi, gelip direkman benim yanıma geleceğın.”

recognized as having a “unique character.” Most of the workers said that “in fact our boss is not a bad person, but our people don’t know how to talk to him.” or “foremen do not let us talk to him,” “I believe that he can do a lot of good for the workers.” In these phrases the boss emerges as the ultimate authority not in the sense of exercising power but in the sense of delivering a holistic identity to the workers. In other words, the employer figure stops being a representative of capitalist exploitation, rather he emerges as the figure in whose speech women’s self-narrative and identity are validated. That is why women’s attitudes towards him are characterized by an emotion-laden language. This situation should be regarded as an example of a particular local mediation of capital-labor antagonism. However, on the other hand, women workers are aware of the fact that management also manipulates these emotions for efficient production. Women emphasize that when a problem erupts among workers or when there is a rush order, the employers show compassion to the workers by behaving in a very kind manner:

Whenever a worker does something like that they just curry favor with us: ‘You are my dearest, you are so sweet.’ but in reality there is nothing like that. Those who believe in them are actually stupid.<sup>89</sup> (Zeynep)

‘Come on cleaners, come on cleaners, we have to make these works ready in time’, things like that, they tell you these things. Employers are soft-spoken people, when they want to have their work ready on time, they try to jolly us, ‘my dears please hurry, we have to complete these pieces.’ In that way they try to make you believe that there is nothing to get angry about or to shout at.<sup>90</sup> (Sevda)  
Factory meetings can be considered as another version of this management strategy.

In these meetings, which are held generally in middle or large scale factories,

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<sup>89</sup> “Ondan sonra geldiler yalakalık yaptılar. Zaten bir işçi böyle bir şey yapsın hemen yalakalık yapmaya hazırlanıyorlar. Canımsın, bir şey yok, cicimsin, vallahi öyle bir şey yok. Valla öyle bir şeyler diyenler salak.”

<sup>90</sup> “Hadi temizleme, hadi temizleme, bu saatte bu iş çıkacak temizleme, böyle yani, gelirler yani sürekli başında yap. Ha bi de patronlar tatlı dillidir, hani işleri çıkacak ya, biraz daha böyle tatlı sözlerle, biraz daha bastırıp gençleri, canlarım, ciğerlerim çabuk olun, iş çıkacak. O şekil, yani kızacak bağırarak hiç bir şey yok.”

managers convey problems regarding productivity, propose new production systems, inform workers about the situation of the company in the market and ask workers to express their grievances at the workplace. The following comments of women express the futility of those meetings for them. Upon my question of how often the company arranges the meetings, Hanım replied as follows:

When they are under pressure to ready the products in a short time, they organize a meeting. ‘You either comply with the rules, otherwise you fuck off,’ they say. For example, in our meetings they never ask about our complaints. Even if they asked, workers would not say anything. Sometimes the employer comes and asks ‘Do you have any problems, problems regarding the work?’ There is not a sound to be heard. But everyone knows that there are lots of problems. We constantly talk with each other about these problems. We distress each other. We create improper tensions in our relations. When the meeting is over, each worker begins to murmur. Then I tell them that I wish they had talked in the meeting. But on the other hand, whenever a person talks, he immediately draws the attention of the employers. There is also something like that.<sup>91</sup>

Or Sabiř says,

He says ‘I am organizing these meetings for you to raise your problems, the boss will arrive in a moment and I will convey your grievances to him.’ This is a chance that many workers are deprived of. There are monthly meetings with the workers. ‘Tell us your problems, about your salaries, overtimes, etc. I am going to tell the boss’ Then the boss would come and give information on the production criteria, our ranking among our competitors and then say ‘yes, I am listening to you.’ There is not a sound to be heard. He repeats, ‘Do you have any problems, grievances regarding your foremen, me, the working environment or anything else?’ No words.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> “Çok sıkıřtıkları zaman hemen bir toplantı. Uyarsanız uyun uymuyosanız kapı orda, çıkar gidersiniz. Yani siktir olur giderseniz. Bizim toplantılarımızda hiç demezler bu işçinin ne derdi vardır, gerçi söyleseler de hiç kimse dile getirmez. Geliyor mesela sizin bir sorunuz var mı, işinizle ilgili sorunuz var mı arkadaşlar. Çıt yok. Ama herkes biliyor çok sorun var. kendi aramızda konuşuyoruz, herkes şakır şakır konuşuyor. Ama birbirimizi üzüyoruz, birbirimizle olmayacak gerginlikler yaratıyoruz, birbirimizi öldürecek dereceye... toplantı yapılıyor, soruluyor onlara arkadaşlar sizin derdiniz, sorunuz var mı? Bir kişiden ses çıkmaz. O toplantı biter, herkes dağılır ya, başlarlar söylenmeye. O şöyledir, bu böyledir diye. Arkadaşlar diyorum toplantıda söyleseydiniz. Yani zaten bir kişi konuştuğu zaman bir kişi bir şey söylediği zaman o insan göze batar. Öyle de bir şey var yani.”

<sup>92</sup> “Adam diyo ki, bu toplantıları yapıyorum arkadaşlar, şefimiz geliyor diyo, birazdan patron, metin abi gelecek diyor, arkadaşlar diyo varsa sıkıntınız söyleyin diyor. Bakın diyo, orda böyle bir imkan da sunuluyor bizlere, çoğu yerde olmayan, işçilerle birebir toplantı yapılıyor ayda bir. Arkadaşlar diyor derdiniz varsa söyleyin. Şudur deyin, paramız gecikiyor deyin, mesaimizi niye zamanında alamıyoruz deyin. Bana söylüyorsunuz diyor. Ben diyo

This silence is indicative of their awareness that in fact there is no space in these meetings to express one's real work-related problems. As opposed to other women's comments regarding the familiar and friendly attitudes of employers, the ostensibly worker-friendly discourses of the employers or foremen are not convincing for the women working in larger work places.

#### Formation of working selves

In the rest of the chapter we will deal with the following question: How do these embodied feelings at the workplace become part and parcel of the processes through which women garment workers attribute meaning to their work experiences? I will also discuss how women's extra-work affiliations are deeply ingrained in the processes through which women make sense of their work experiences. For this purpose I will try to delineate how women working in different places, of different sewing skills and ages develop divergent and/or similar subjectivities regarding their attachments to work.<sup>93</sup> In other words, I will ask how the subjectivities of women garment workers are informed by extra-class dynamics such as family and gender.

One of the most important characteristics of the garment industry is that although technology plays a crucial role in the international organization of production and consumption patterns, this is not the case for most garment shop

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adama söylüyom, adam diyo ki kim söylüyor? Adam geliyor beş dakika içerisinde, işte anlatıyor o ayki iş kriterimizi, ne dikmişiz, kaçınıcı sıraya çıkmışız veya düşmüşüz atelyeler arasında, anlatıyor. Evet diyo arkadaşlar sizi dinliyorum diyor. Çıt yok. Arkadaşlar diyo sizi dinliyorum diyo, tekrarlıyor, var mı bir derdiniz, sıkıntınız, şeflerinizden, benden, çalışma ortamınızdan, herhangi bir sıkıntınız var mı diyor.”

<sup>93</sup> Sennett and many other writers note that working and middle classes have different attachments to their jobs. They argue that while middle classes easily identify themselves with their jobs, and prefer to tell their life stories around their achievements and commitments in their jobs, this is generally not the case for the working class people. For example, Linde (1993) says: “[...] many people and groups of people have little choice about their occupation, and consequently it does not play a positive role in their sense of self-definition” (p.54).

floors. This means that there is still a high labor component in garment production. At least for the workplaces that I came to know during my fieldwork, the increasing pressure of rush orders coming from national and international firms was daily experienced by the workers through direct physical strain. This situation invalidates the analyses that take the decrease in manual and physical labor with the rise of new production technologies for granted.

There are two types of workplaces that the women I interviewed work for. I talked to 6 women working in little sweatshop-like workplaces. The other 6 were working in relatively larger places which are generally affiliated with national or international garment firms. These workshops differ in terms of managerial techniques. The former can be said to be relatively flexible in terms of regulations. For example, smoking, leaving for the restroom or chatting during the production are generally allowed in the former, while in the latter these are negotiated between workers and employers. At the same time, the prospect of having social security is less prevalent in these small sweatshops. The higher labor-turnover in such places arises not only from the fact that these places operate at lower marginal profit rates and thus are more open to economic fluctuations, but also because of their worker composition. Relatively younger daughters who are not allowed to work outside their neighborhoods generally prefer to work in such small shop floors that are located on their streets. Another factor that differentiates workers from each other is their ages and accordingly their roles at home, despite the fact that for each age group it was primarily familial obligations which pulled women into work life.

The contradictions and tensions about work differ in content and form between younger and older workers. I claim that it is mainly the younger workers who deeply experience the contradictions of being engaged in garment work.

Experienced and older garment workers emphasize the harshness and difficulty of work as one of the reference points through which they can attach meaning to their jobs.<sup>94</sup> What differentiates these relatively “older mothers” from these “younger girls” is that they do not even imagine quitting garment work. There is no hope for upward mobility, neither for themselves nor their children, and this hopelessness regarding their futures also nourishes their attachments to their present jobs. Thus it is intelligible that they legitimize their anger towards the injustices at work with reference to the quality and harshness of their work because garment work is the only realistic and available option for them. That is not to say that they exaggerated their craftsmanship in garment production, rather it is the inevitability of working in a garment workshop that is emphasized by them. However, for younger workers, the vision of getting out of manual garment work has not evaporated yet.

Young women workers resent being involved in garment work. They constantly imagine ways of escaping from this ‘dirty and hard’ work. One of the exit strategies is to invest in themselves through some design or computer courses. In other words, the young daughters who are generally working in smaller shopfloors tend to imagine their futures outside of garment work. They do not want to conform to the idea that they are garment workers. For example, Sevda, who had been working for 9 months when I interviewed her, says:

‘For all I know, I can say I still haven’t gotten used to it. For example I have been working there for 9 months, but I cannot get used to anything about this work. Maybe it is because I don’t want to learn the work in detail. Most say that I should start working as a machinist, you can do it, but I have no enthusiasm in me. Because I feel that if I start using a machine, if I learn to use it, my life will pass here, among these people, in textile. I am afraid of

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<sup>94</sup>On the basis of the observations among bakery workers at different times, Sennett (2005) notes that with the introduction of new technologies into the production process these workers no longer talk about the harshness and difficulty of their jobs. For him, this prevents identification with the work and render the workplace relations shallow for them.

this. I'm sometimes afraid of this. I don't want to end my life in textile. Sometimes my siblings try to annoy me saying that 'Sevda you are a textile worker from now on.' I oppose them saying that I won't stay in textile work. (...) Think that you call yourself a free person but when you enter that small workshop your freedom is restricted.<sup>95</sup>

For example, I do not obey their orders. Who is he? How does he have the right to give me orders? But in fact this isn't the case. It's his own business and he can give orders as he wishes. But anyway I wouldn't carry out their orders. But textile work is so weird, so different, that is, it isn't like what it seems to be from the outside... for example my sister (who also works in textile shop floor) used to come home and want me to do something for her. I used to say to her 'what did you do? You went and sat there all day and then came home.' But after I started working, I began to think that they were right. Now when I come home from work, if they want me to do something, I refuse to do it saying I am too exhausted. I find them absolutely right. Moreover, most of them strive hard to support their families, they all have different problems. Some say that they feel sick when they enter the workshop, there are those who feel depressed at the work place; there are those who are sickened by work, who are in stress, that is, different kinds of people.<sup>96</sup>

According to Sennett (1972) the tension regarding the feeling of anger lies at the heart of manual work. Sevda's narrative clearly points out her alienation from

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<sup>95</sup> "Şimdi ne bileyim, hala bazen alışamadım diyebilirim. Mesela 9 aydır ordayım ama hiç bir şeye alışamıyorum. Ki belki benim öğrenmek istemememden. Çoğu diyor mesela işte neden makinaya geçmiyorsun, yaparsın edersin ama içimde hiç zevk yok, çünkü oraya geçtiğin zaman gerçekten diyorum ki, öğrensem belki hayatım burda geçecek bunların içinde, tekstilde, makinalarda falan biter. Korkuyorum, bazen korkuyorum, tekstillle sonlanmasın hayatım. Bazen zaten abimler falan kızdırıyor, sevda bundan sonra sen tekstilcisin. Git diyorum, ben durmam diyorum. (...)Ne diyim, özgürlüğünüz kısıtlanabiliyor. Düşün sen özgürüm diyorsun ama o küçük yerde özgürlüğün kısıtlanabiliyor."

<sup>96</sup> "Ben şahsen öyleydim, yapmıyodum, emir ediyolar. O kim ki bana emir edecek. Ama öyle değil aslında adamın işi eder eder. (gülür) ama işte diyemiyodum, duruyodum. Ama işte çok değişik ya tekstil, çok farklıymış, hani hiç dışarıdan... ablam işten gelirdi, sevda şunu yapsana, hadi ya sen de ne yaptın diyordum, gittin oturdun oturdun geldin diyordum. İşe gidince dedim ki yok siz haklıymışsınız. Şimdi ben de geliyorum, bu işte dayımınki o evde çalışmıyo, biraz da annem rahatsız benim, beli falan ağrıyo, iş yapamıyo pek fazla, bu evde, işten geliyorum sevda şunu yapsana, ya git de yap, ben yorulmuşum zaten. Şimdi gerçekten aşırı derecede hak veriyorum yani, bi de düşünün yani, çoğu evini geçindirmek için yani, nasıl çaba içindeler, farklı çabalar, kimisi iş yerine giriyor diyor ki midem bulanıyor buraya girince, öyle bunalım geçirenler artık çalışmaktan bıkanlar, stress içinde olanlar, çok yani çok farklı insanlar."

garment work. It also reflects the tension between being angry about one's position and not being sure about being angry at all.

#### Dealing with discipline at work: Jokes and laughter

Many workers compared and contrasted smaller and larger garment workplaces also according to the degree one can chat with other workers. In small and generally unregistered workplaces located in small streets where people already know each other as relatives or friends, the rules regulating relations among workers are flexible. It is in the relatively larger workplaces that workers might not be allowed to talk to each other and interrupt their work. I listened to many stories regarding how young girls full of lively energy could not stand working in such places, and would go to relatively flexible places lacking 'discipline' in the above mentioned sense.

In the narratives of young women one frequently encounters the importance of having fun at the workplace. Laughter, chatting and jokes are important acts through which workers can to an extent feel that they overcome the tediousness of work and the physical exhaustion. That is why having congenial relations at the workplace was cited as an important element in choosing a workplace. Zeynep's narrative clearly illustrates this demand:

I used to work in denim production before; I have always worked in denim workshops. I once worked in a shirt atelier when I first came to Istanbul. It was nice too. It has a different atmosphere. For example everyone talked to each other, even the boss talked to you. But then I had another job in a different place. I couldn't work there for more than three days. No one even greeted each other. Everyone smoked at a different corner. I swear to you I am not such a person, I am a talkative, cheerful person and I like having fun, kidding with people. But when I entered that work environment, I said to myself I cannot work here.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> "O da kot, ben hep kotta çalıştım. Bir kere gömlekte çalıştım o da ilk İstanbul'a geldiğimde. İki ay gömlekte çalıştım, o ortam da çok güzeldi. O ortam da çok farklıydı mesela. Ne bileyim. Herkes konuşuyordu, patron bile senle konuşup gülüyordu. Ama bu işte 1 hafta çalıştım, diyodum ya, bir hafta değil 2 gün bile orda çalışmam. Düşün ya kimse

Willis, in his study among working class kids, argues that “having a laff” is crucial to fight against the alienation of work and the subsumption of labor to capital (Ngai 2005, p156.) At a more general level, Weeks (1996) conceptualizes irony as a way “to disengage from political strategies of polar opposition informed by the logic of resentment and the reactive conceptions of identity in which they are grounded.” This means that irony makes room for a more nuanced resistance.

In the following, I will try to explicate these arguments in relation to women workers’ experiences. When I asked Zeynep about the overtime work, it turned out that what led her to stay overtime is that it would enable her and her coworkers to create a congenial environment where no authority exists. Actually this way of laying claim to the workplace environment properly fits into De Certau’s (1984) description of tactic: “a tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has as its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances”(p.XIX). Similar to what DeCertau describes, this appropriation of workplace depends on time (which means overtimes), in other words, it depends on the constant manipulation of events (in this case overtimes) in order to turn them into opportunities. Here is an example of how Zeynep and her co-workers manipulate the fiancé of the employer, Mehtap, not to stay overtime so that they can have time for themselves without her watching over them:

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kimseye selam vermiyodu ya. Herkes alıyordu eline sigarayı başka bir köşeye gidiyordu. Yemin ediyorum ki ben öyle bir insan değilim. Ben konuşkan, ne bileyim, gülerim, dalga geçerim, şaka yaparım onlara tamam mı? Ben o iş yerinin ortamına girdim, dedim ben çalışmam orda, mümkün değil çünkü çalışmam.”

When you stay overtime with the others, it is not enjoyable at all. Because you bear the noise of machines and people all day. But when we stay overtime as girls, we turn on our tape, we laugh, have fun, chaff each other, talk about the films, then we gossip about people's acts. We send away Mehtap, we never let her stay, I swear. It is not possible, we say 'she can go we will finish the work.' She is always sick. Even if she is not, we make her sick and send her home. Because we don't want her with us. Especially if Hilal stays overtime, we would be deprived of any motivation to work. For example, on Saturdays, me, Sevda, Rukiye and Meliha. We like to work together. Actually Meliha is a very funny person. We do not complete the work on time on Fridays just to come on Saturdays and have fun. Ali, me, Sevda, Rukiye and Meliha we all go on Saturdays, we make tea, and we chat while we work. But when Meliha is there we never go to work overtime. We say to Ali that we will not be coming if Hilal and Mehtap are also coming. Why? Because they are really glum people. They do not talk at all, they are snobbish, they overestimate themselves, we don't want to talk to such people.<sup>98</sup>

### Courageous encounters with the boss

The women workers' narratives are also full of stories in which they face the boss courageously. In such narratives the women put themselves in opposition to the silent and coward workers. Especially the women working in relatively larger workshops separate themselves from their coworkers by stressing how they used to talk up to the boss and resist the inequalities and injustices they encountered. They constantly create counter-discourses that counterpose themselves against the submissive and subservient practices and discourses of others. The same pattern of

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<sup>98</sup> "Ama mesaiye kalmak, zaten komple kaldın mı hiç güzel değil. Çünkü bütün gün zaten makina sesi, ondan sonra ses, acayip ses, mesela kızlar kaldık mı açıyoruz teyibimizi, kapatıyoruz, gülüyoruz, eğleniyoruz, takılıyoruz birbirimize, filmlerden bahsediyoruz, sonra ne bileyim milletin hareketlerinden bahsediyoruz. Mehtabı da kovuyoruz, hayatta mehtabı bırakmayız. Yemin ederim. Mümkün değil, gidiyoruz diyoruz gitsin biz çalışırız. Zaten Mehtap çok hastadır, gitsin o. Yemin ederim kızı hasta yapıp eve gönderiyoruz. Ama çünkü istemiyoruz. Hele hilal orda oldu mu, insanın hiç çalışma hevesi kalmıyor. Mesela Cumartesi günleri benle sevda, rukiye bi de meliha. Meliha da aslında çok komik bir insan böyle. Sırf gırgır olsun diye, eğlenmek için işleri geç yapıyoruz Cuma günleri, çalışmıyoruz. Diyoruz ki Cumartesi gelelim diye. Gidiyoruz Ali, ben, sevda, rukiye bir de meliha, dördümüz geliyoruz, çayımızı yapıyoruz, oturuyoruz, hem konuşuyoruz hem çalışıyoruz ki mehtap orda oldu mu ne ben giderim, ne sevda gider, hele rukiye hiç gelmez, o derece. Meliha abla Ali abiye diyodu ki valla Ali abi hilalle Mehtap gelirse valla biz gelmeyiz. Niye? E onlar suratsız, gerçekten. Konuşmuyorlar, havalı böyle, zaten bir bok olsalar ben derim kendilerini bi bok zannediyorlar ki, biz de öyle bir insanla konuşmayalım."

an encounter with the boss repeatedly emerges in their narratives: She resists an unfair practice, either related to herself or others, and raises her voice. Then some authority (the boss, the manager or the foremen) accepts her demand because they cannot deprecate the soundness of her arguments. However, other workers remain quiet again, and leave her alone in the face of the authority. Then, she blames the others for being quiet, wants them to raise their voices like her. But at the end of the narrative she expresses her recent decision, which is not to “talk” against the employer any more, since she realizes that the others will not support her. Therefore, her struggle against injustices is silenced in the end and she end up identifying herself with the rest. Hanım says,

Since I was the one raising our demands to the employers up to now, I always attracted attention. I am the only one who is talking, who has been talking and who talked. Still I talk when it is required but it is not only up to me. If there is a common problem, they also have to raise their voices.<sup>99</sup>

Dilber says,

On the one hand they do not raise our salaries, but on the other hand they buy a new car for themselves. This situation was making some of us angry. The others also grumble about it, but they do nothing. We haven't been given decent wages for years. People use each other as a pawn. During that period, we talked to them, we also talked to them many times later, we used to go upstairs to express our grievances. Even if a small affair comes up, they used to come and provoke us. But now we will not be deceived. Because after a point, you realize that you have become the bad person. Despite this other workers would also exclude you. Then you ask yourself 'why should I bother?' They say 'salary rise month is getting closer, Dilber you talk to them.' 'No' I say 'It is me who always speaks out, now it is your turn to speak out and mine to listen.'<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> “Zaten ben hep söylediğim için hep göze battım bu güne kadar. Hep ben konuşuyorum, hep ben konuşuyorm. hep ben konuşurdum. Yine yeri geldiği zaman ben konuşuyorum ama sadece benle olmaz.Onların da sorunuysa onların da.”

<sup>100</sup> “Ama bir yandan da bize zam vermezken bi bakıyorsun, yeni araba alıyorlar. Bu bizi, belli kişileri çok kızdırıyordu. Diğer insanlar da söyleniyor ama hiç bir şey yapmıyorlar. Kaç senedir doğru dürüst zam yine almıyoruz. Ve insanlar piyon olarak hep birilerini kullanıyor. O dönem biz konuşmuştuk ondan sonra da pek çok kez konuştuk, yukarı çıkıyorduk. Mesela küçük bir şey olduğunda bile bize söylüyorlardı. Bizi kışkırtmaya çalışıyorlardı ama artık bu oyunlara gelmiyoruz. Ama gelmiyosun bi süre sonra bu oyunlara, bakıyorsun bi süre sonra hep kötü insan sen oluyorsun. Buna rağmen işçi de seni

Sabiş says,

If you look at workers in other workplaces, our working hours are much longer (...) It is not a situation that can change with the efforts of just one person. If only I or another protests this situation, nothing will change. (...) Now I decided to struggle as an individual. Maybe this is something bad, but I understood that I cannot struggle together with them. Now I am alone, and defending my own rights. I am speaking out about the things that annoy me, even those that do not annoy me.<sup>101</sup>

The subjectivities of women garment workers under the conditions of late capitalism was one of the triggering questions of this chapter. For this purpose, I tried to delineate the genres of work stories told by women garment workers, and focused on particular encounters taking place at the workplace. Taking these encounters as spaces through which women respond to various hierarchical and disciplinary work relations that are mediated by various emotions, I argued that factors such as age, skill, family roles and expectations inform the way women give meaning to their work experiences. I also argued that the fact that production is organized in line with the requirements of post-fordist management does not necessarily erase the possibility of attaching a meaning to the work. Because first of all, as noted above, garment work, different from textile work, still requires a substantial amount of manual labor, and the capital-labor ratio is relatively small in comparison to many other sectors. Especially for skilled and experienced workers this feature of the sector enables garment workers to identify themselves with their work. Another

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dışlıyor. O zaman niye yapayım ki diyorsun. Diyorlar ki zam ayı geliyor, Dilber sen konuşursun. Hayır diyorum hep ben konuşuyorum, biraz da siz konuşun ben dinleyeyim.”

<sup>101</sup> “Diğer işlere bakarsan bizim çalışma saatimiz daha çok. (...) Bi kişiyle değişecek bi şey değil. Benim tek itiraz etmem, başkasının tek itiraz etmesi bi şey değiştirmiyor.(...) Artık bireysel mücadeleye geçtim. Bu belki kötü ama onlarla mücadele edilmeyeceğini anladım. Tek başına artık kendi haklarımı savunuyorum. Beni rahatsız eden şeyleri de söylüyorum, rahatsız etmeyen şeyleri de söylüyorum.”

crucial thing here is that all narratives, which are full of statements of resentment due to the pervasiveness of feelings of disrespect at the workplace, end up with the idea that “nothing is gonna change at work.” This recurring theme concerns the unreliability and untrustworthiness of their coworkers in particular, and other people in general. They conclude by saying that they stopped doing something for the betterment of their working conditions and for the others, and they let matters take their own course. In short, the prevailing mood among women workers is “indifference” or “ending up being indifferent.” In other words, their responses to the flexible reorganization of the garment industry are nourished by the “moral critiques of the dehumanizing aspects of market relations” (Ong 1987), however since these critiques are not articulated by a collective political organization and a trade-union, they are experienced as big personal injuries. These narratives express how these women feel about the various violations of their dignity and humanity at the workplace, and how these violations are turned into opportunities by women workers in some encounters, or are used by the employers to further contribute to their vulnerabilities.

The more work becomes an indispensable choice for workers due to their familial obligations, the more workers identify themselves with their work. These women’s narratives tend to elaborate on their dexterity and assiduity at work and they tell in detail what they do at work. They think that they deserve respect for their hard work. The main source of their resentment is not only disrespect towards themselves, but also towards their work. In other words, while resenting the humiliating treatments at the workplace they also refer to the uniqueness or importance of the work they undertake at the workplace. On the other hand, those who, at least potentially, think that they can disengage themselves from textile work

do not narrate the work they undertake in detail. They rather emphasize they can be replaced with other workers, and they do not play a unique role at the workplace. The expression of their resentment seems to be reflected to rather personal issues other than work itself. The nature of their resentment is cultivated by their extra-work roles and other life chances. The influence of these roles, especially the gender roles, for women's positioning of themselves at the workplace will be clearer in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### SUBJECTIVITIES OF WOMEN GARMENT WORKERS

#### IN GENDERED WORK PLACES

[...]a sort of contrasting diptych, where the first panel represents the misery of everyday life, its tedious tasks, humiliations reflected in the lives of the working classes and especially of women, upon whom the conditions of everyday life bear the heaviest – child-bearing and child-rearing, basic preoccupations with bare necessities, money, tradesmen, provisions, the realm of numbers, a sort of intimate knowledge of things outside the sphere of material reality: health, desire, spontaneity, vitality; recurrence, the survival of poverty and the endlessness of want, a climate of economy, abstinence, hardship, repressed desires, meanness and avarice. The second panel portays the power of everyday life, its continuity, the permanence of life rooted in the soil, the adaptation of the body, time, space, desire; environment and the home; the unpredictable and unmeasurable tragedy forever lurking in everyday life; the power of woman, crushed and overwhelmed, “object” of history and society but also the inevitable “subject” and foundation; creation from recurrent gestures of a world of sensory experience [...]

Lefebvre, *Everyday life in the Modern World* (1985)

My first entry into a garment workshop was an uncomfortable experience to say the least. This place had two floors and I was waiting at the store-like entrance floor where there were piles of uncut denim at the corner waiting to be sewed. The rest of the room was divided by a screen into a kitchen with a small cafeteria on the one side, and a small office for the shop owner on the other. I was sitting at the dining table and chatting with the cook who is the mother of the shop owner, and waiting for the workers' lunch break. The workers walked out of the workshop which is in the basement. A group of women sat beside me and the mother introduced me to them. I remained mostly silent while they were eating their lunch, but I was pretty sure that eyes and whispers were directed at me. The owner of the shop floor let me in the basement after the lunch break and told the women to help me. After lunch,

from the moment that I was surrounded by the women asking questions and answering mine, till I sat in one of the chairs of the machinists at the shop floor, still surrounded by some women, many male workers, most of whom were very young, made a pass at me saying “come and talk to us as well,” “we can meet as well”<sup>102</sup> etc. The rest of the male workers were also staring at me. I felt that even the smallest movement of my body is being closely watched, and this feeling so pervaded my state of mind that I felt a stroke of pain inside. I always experienced the same uncomfortable feeling whenever I went to such work places.

This highly sexualized atmosphere of the garment shop floors becomes readily visible in women garment workers’ narratives. Then I began to think that there is more to investigating women’s work experiences than criticizing sexual division of labor at work, or women’s weak chances of getting a proper education and finding better jobs. Though these are profoundly important facts with concrete consequences for women’s participation to the labor force, we still need a more elaborate understanding of the meaning of laboring as a woman, being at the workplace as a woman.

This approach should embrace both the analysis of disciplinary mechanisms as gendered artifacts, and the way women experience, give meaning and respond to these gendered disciplinary mechanisms. I think the recent ethnographic studies on women workers (Fernandez-Kelly 1983, Ong 1987, Kondo 1990, Salzinger 1997, 2000, 2003, Ngai 2005) embrace such an approach towards the everyday experiences of women workers. The escalation of such studies beginning with the late 1980s seems to be nourished by two important developments that took place at different levels. The first one has to do with the reorganization of capitalist

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<sup>102</sup> “Gelip bizle de konuřsana” and “Biz de bulusabiliriz”

production relations since the late 1970s and the gradual demise of welfare regimes in the Western countries. Capital's search for cheap labor-power to compete in the global market is accompanied by the employment of large numbers of young women in global factories which are generally located in the free export zones of third world countries. Accordingly, the recent ethnographies on women workers take into consideration both the changing gender composition and the re-location of the working classes. The second one has to do with the deployment of new analytical tools to understand the notion of agency and subject, especially under the influence of post-structuralist writings. Post-structuralist theories mainly question the idea of the unity of the subject and instead emphasize the contradictory subjectivity formations of individuals at the intersection of multiple discourses and practices of power.

In the following, I will make use of this workplace ethnography literature which not only focuses on gendered disciplinary formations but also on women's subjective experiences of these processes, thus their potential for agency, to peel the layered articulation of gender-related issues in women workers' life experiences. In general, these studies introduce a series of gendered spaces, relations and control mechanisms to analyze capitalist work and deepen our understanding of the operation of capitalist relations.

Before proceeding into the gendered dynamics of the various encounters at the workplace, I want to make a few remarks regarding the theoretical sources of this chapter. Many scholars questioned the opposition between ideas and social institutions, theory and practice, culture and the material world in different ways and

with disparate purposes.<sup>103</sup> One of the questions that bothered these scholars is how to conceptualize domination and resistance without falling into the trap of reproducing this duality. That is why many scholars address the questions of agency, domination, resistance and subversion by making use of the notions of subjectivity and symbolic violence. “Subjectivity” enables one to reflect on how actors are “bound but choosing, constrained but transforming, both strategically manipulating and unconscious of the frames within which they move” (Luhman 2006, p.346). Bourdieu’s notion of “symbolic violence”<sup>104</sup> is also an attempt to transgress the opposition between persuading and coercive forms of power.<sup>105</sup> He argues that symbolic power manifests itself through various “bodily emotions” which “take place below the level of consciousness and will” (Bourdieu 2005, p.341). This means that neither submission nor resistance can be grasped solely at the level of consciousness and ideas. His understanding of the operation of domination, though it makes a relatively large room for structuring forces, is powerful in delineating the complex processes of submission and resistance. It seems that we can reveal a lot concerning the women workers’ subjectivities by tracing the effects of various

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<sup>103</sup> For example, Kleinman (1994) searches for ways of integrating meaning, relationship and bodily experience, and proposes to investigate the interaction between the social body and the physical body. In a similar vein, Mitchell (1990) argues that analyses of power and domination that oppose meaning to material reality, the ideological to the material, reproduce the larger forms of dualism through which domination is constructed. Weeks (1996) directs her criticisms against feminist scholars who restrict their analyses to discursive categories and cultural norms, and proposes to consider the concrete, everyday and bodily dimensions of existence as well.

<sup>104</sup> Bourdieu (2005) defines symbolic violence as follows: “The dominated apply categories constructed from the point of view of the dominant to the relations of domination, thus making them appear natural. This can lead to a kind of systemic self-depreciation, even self-denigration, visible ... in their adherence to a demeaning image of woman” (p.340).

<sup>105</sup> He talks about moving beyond “the forced choice between constraint (by forces) and consent (to reasons), between mechanical coercion and voluntary, free, deliberate, even calculated submission” (p.340).

symbolic powers because symbolic violence seems to be a significant power regulating many dimensions of women workers' life experiences.

There are three levels upon which the gender-related issues emerge in women garment workers' stories. Though these levels are interrelated in many respects, they can be separated from each other for analytical purposes. The first level concerns the public representations of women textile/garment workers. The operation of gendered discourses and practices, such as familial idioms, sexual harassment, gossip around the chastity of women workers, as a disciplinary mechanism at the workplace forges the second level. At this level my purpose will be to elaborate upon various disciplinary mechanisms at the workplace that operate through gender-related notions, spaces, and practices. In this chapter I will basically explore how and to what extent the family, female body and sexuality are inseparable to understand capitalist production relations, and how women's positioning at different work places is informed by similar and divergent cultural mediations of gender. The third level is related to women's submissive, subversive or contradictory responses to these techniques and representations, i.e. the construction of their subjectivities. The overall analysis of the interaction of these three levels in women workers' life experiences will show how the gender dimension is indispensable for any understanding of capitalist work relations. It will also reveal women's complicity with their subordination both in conscious and unconscious ways.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> There is a huge sociological literature on work and labor processes asking various versions of these questions such as "why do workers work?", "why do they work willingly or unwillingly?". Braverman's (1998) influential book *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* is about the operation of Taylorist management principles, which are based on the separation of manual and mental labor, at the workplace. By showing the management processes through which workers are deskilled at the production site, this book helps concretize the Marxist debate of alienation. However,

### Various public representations regarding women workers

Most recent works pertaining to global factories in the third world countries point out the proliferation of the discourses on the docility and malleability of women workers<sup>107</sup> (Salzinger 1997, 2000, 2003, Wright 2004, Elias 2005, Poster 2002, Lee 1995). These studies point out that these discourses are used as part of a managerial strategy to attract foreign capital to the country or to discipline the labor force. Such studies also show that such discourses aim at the creation of the image of docile third world women which can be employed and exploited easily. However, neither these images and discourses nor the promotion of these images by local and global capitalists materialize in the same way all over the world. As noted by Ong (1991), “in each locale, different modes of industrial and social domination promote certain cultural forms and identities, while undermining or suppressing the others” (p.295).

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this work was later criticized for being indifferent towards the experiences of workers. This criticism was taken into account by Burawoy. On the basis of a detailed ethnographic work in a US factory, Burawoy (1989) argues that piece-rate system is an effective strategy to guarantee the concession of workers to the managerial authority. These studies are touchstones in the literature, however both the changes in the organization of global production relations and the rising importance of post-structuralist approaches to work and identity, made some of their assumptions questionable. More studies turned their attention to the workers' implicit and explicit forms of resistance and the complex ways through which they deal with deskilling strategies of management. In addition, many studies arguing against the separation of production sites from other spheres of life, proposed to investigate the experiences of workers within the totality of their lives. Such an approach enabled these studies to integrate gender and race as an indispensable dimension of production.

<sup>107</sup> For example, Melissa W. Wright explicates how these managerial discourses become indispensable for the production of value at the factory. Her overall purpose is to “combine a poststructuralist interrogation into the production of subjects with Marx's insights into the reproduction of workers as variable capital.” She writes that “Everyday around the world, women who work in the third-world factories of global firms face the idea that they are disposable. This idea proliferates in the form of a story, told by factory managers in these facilities, that explains how the women represent a homogenous worker whose productive value inevitably depletes over time until she is worth no more than the value of her own replacement [...] These wasting women are not worthless, from the outset. They possess the traits of dexterity and attention to detail that have long been associated with ‘natural’ femininity ... the ‘disposable woman’ is a figure of capitalist dreams. She embodies the valuable traits of dexterity, patience, and docility as well as the sources of her own devaluation.”

In the case of women garment workers in Turkey, who work in small or middle scale work places, rather than free export zones, it is rather difficult to talk about such managerial discourses that are effective at the international level.<sup>108</sup> However, there are other effective discourses in public circulation, especially in the neighborhoods where there are many garment workshops. These discourses portray young female textile workers in extremely derogatory terms and in turn play a crucial role in disciplining them. First of all, young women workers in garment or textile production sites are generally perceived to be frivolous in terms of their attitudes and characters. They are assumed to be prone to having boyfriends easily, or to have a soft spot for men in general. Despite the fact that the prejudices against women workers are historically conditioned, recent pervasive employment of young girls in small garment workshops besides men seems to increase the circulation of such talks, perpetuating the prejudices towards working girls and women.

In the following we will see the material repercussions of derogatory value judgments regarding women garment workers at the workplace. These representations are crucial in that they restrain, shape and mediate the women workers' discursive and practical responses at their various encounters with male or female workers. In short, the significance of such talk does not arise from the question of whether it corresponds to a reality. But it is rather the women workers' narratives that betray the effectiveness of such discourses. Because, these attributes towards women workers, especially towards those younger women, are maintained

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<sup>108</sup> This situation has to do with the relatively high labor costs in Turkey when compared to many other third world countries, and the discursive commitment of the representatives of textile and garment employers to be competitive in terms of technology and design at the international arena rather than through labor advantage.

not only by employers or male workers, but also by the women workers themselves, though in a different way.

Women workers try hard to sustain the distance between this image and themselves, and their efforts to that aim are also constitutive for the gendered regulation of the daily encounters at the workplace. Below, we will deal with various aspects of these regulations and how they become an indispensable dimension of managerial control at the workplace and how women respond to these regulatory practices and discourses.

Despotic workplace regimes, local mediations and familial sentiments

As opposed to previous workplace ethnographies, recent workplace studies abstain from opposing despotic and hegemonic factory regimes<sup>109</sup> by emphasizing the importance of “local capitalist and cultural practices” (Ong 1987, p.70-71) and distinctive patterns of shop-floor policies (Lee 1995) including differing gender constructions at different places. These studies point out that it is not only the state regulations that determine the nature of factory regimes. They argue that the social organization of labor markets should also be taken into account for a proper theory of production politics (Lee 1995). This amounts to being attentive to the local networks and kinship ties which are always structured along gender lines. These local networks in which women workers are embedded influence the way they enter or drop out of paid work and make decisions over their life trajectories. These

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<sup>109</sup> The notion of “factory regime” refers to overall political form of production, including the political effects of labor process and political apparatuses of production. (Burawoy 1985:87) According to Burawoy’s analysis, the distinction between hegemonic and despotic factory regimes is mainly related to the degree of state intervention i.e. the nature of state . The lack of welfare support or insufficient regulation of industrial relations give rise to despotic and coercive factory regimes by entailing workers completely to their wages for survival. There are different forms of despotic factory regimes such as market despotism, patriarchal despotism or paternalistic despotism. (Mouzelis, 1986) Yet, Burawoy argues, the development of the welfare state gives rise to hegemonic factory regimes which are largely based on the consent of workers.

networks also inform the way management develops strategies at the workplace for efficient production.

As noted in the previous chapters, the women I interviewed were working both in small and middle scale enterprises. It can be argued that both types of firms practice despotic forms of regulation to maintain smooth and efficient production.<sup>110</sup> Though there are a number of differences in both places, all workers constantly talk about “being obliged to do something, not having enough time for one’s self.” These statements indicate that the chance of identifying oneself with the job and working willingly or with consent in these garment workplaces are extremely limited. This leads to a strong sense of aversion from work in women workers’ narratives, and despotic regulation of production plays a crucial role in the creation of these feelings.

On the other hand, the way this despotism is materialized at the workplace is something “negotiated and gendered” (Lee 1995:394). For example, the familial roles and responsibilities of women workers are influential in their workplace choices. But on the other hand, these roles are also picked up by the management consciously to legitimize and naturalize their strict production policies. Thus, in the following, I will attempt to reveal the intricate ways in which these despotic

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<sup>110</sup> I will bring together the cases that I already mentioned in the previous chapters to make clear why these shopfloors can be labelled as despotic. One of them is the impossibility of the leave of absence without the docking of wages both in small and larger workshops. The long and exhausting working hours is also an inseparable characteristic of garment production. Most of the time overtime shifts are not announced beforehand, which means that workers are subject to the arbitrary regulation of their life schedules. Moreover, there is no overall workplace policy regarding the determination of wages. This means that one’s closeness to the boss is crucial for the wage level. I also heard stories that foremen or boss try to use coercive force such as kicking or slapping especially against the younger workers. These are the common themes mentioned by all women working either in small or middle sized workshops. All of those suggest that despotic forms of regulation are pervasive in garment shop floors.

practices are deployed in small and middle scale workshops by tracing the narratives of workers.

As noted by Yörük (2005), there is a strictly regulated work and time discipline even in the small garment workshops. These are generally family-owned enterprises that employ unregistered workers. Young girls seem to be generally opting for these ateliers, because they can chat with their co-workers, visit the bathroom whenever they want to, smoke or eat snacks during production, or arrive a little bit late at the workplace. I heard lots of stories that young daughters could not stand working in a larger enterprise because of the tight regulation of the everyday life at larger workplaces. Here I will quote from Dilber's and Hanım's narratives:

I have three siblings. Two of us are studying, two of us are working. My working sibling is also a girl. She also works in textile. But she does not like to be disciplined, one of her friends opened a small denim shop floor. Her work is not as heavy as ours. She can smoke there. But she does not have a social insurance. Her wage is very low, the minimum wage. They have no rights there. They don't have the right to search for their rights.<sup>111</sup> (Dilber)

My younger sibling used to work with me, but she could not bear it. She had come to Istanbul to study, we experienced some problems during that time (...) She found this work very difficult, she could not endure it. She worked here for one year or so, then left. She began to work in bag manufacturing, saying it would be better. But it turned out to be wrong. Now she is working in my uncle's workplace, and at the same time she is trying to graduate from the highschool from outside. She does not have to work at weekends. She will soon have social insurance. Whenever she needs to get permission, she experiences no difficulty. At weekends, I go to play folklore with my siblings. When she asked our uncle for permission, he immediately let her go. Her workplace has such advantages, they are relatively flexible working conditions, but when I say that I want to get permission in my workplace, it always creates a problem.<sup>112</sup>(Hanım)

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<sup>111</sup> Dört kardeşiz. İkisi okuyor ikimiz çalışıyoruz. Çalışan da kız. O da tekstilde çalışıyor ama o disipline falan gelmiyor. arkadaşları var bi ufak yer açmış, kot üzerine bir yer. Onunki bizimki kadar ağır değil. O sigarasını içebiliyor. Ama sigortası yok, güvencesi yok. Ücreti de çok düşük asgari ücret. Hakları yok. Hak arama hakları yok.

<sup>112</sup> "Küçük kardeşim yanımda çalışıyordu ama yapamadı. O mesela zaten buraya gelişi okul için geldi, bir takım sorunlar yaşadık. (...) bu işe girmesi ağır geldi, tabi kaldıramadı. Bir yıl iki yıl şey yaptı ama yeter yapamıyorum dedi. Çanta işine girdi. Daha iyi olur dedi. Orada

In larger workplaces, leaving work for the bathroom or smoking, chatting or even chewing a gum might be a reason to get a scolding from the foremen. This means that only those young girls who are not a breadwinner mother or the oldest daughter of the family have the opportunity to quit their jobs to search for other jobs that have more flexible working conditions. But if you are or feel responsible for your family's survival, it is not easy to risk losing your job, even if it imposes extremely unfavorable conditions. This means that the more you are deprived of the channels that might support you in the face of managerial authority, the less you have the chance to quit the job. This situation inevitably deteriorates the bargaining power of most of the women at their workplace. The fact that women are generally designated to low-skilled tasks also contributes to their weakness in the face of the employer. Because, the more one is replaceable at the workplace, the more one loses her bargaining power.

It is a well-known argument that economic relations under the guise of familial discourses, idioms and reciprocities contribute to the invisibility of exploitation of women's labor. But on the other hand, such familial relations are said to be operating also as a protective shelter against capitalist exploitation, especially during times of crisis or recession (Ong 1987, White 1994). None of the women workers I talked to were working in family workshops, however, the familial idioms were still the dominant and common form of speech among workers and employers. The workers call the boss and the foreman, who are almost always

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da olmadı. Şu an dayımın yanında. Hem de dışarıdan okulu bitirmeye çalışıyor. Orda atelye olmasına rağmen Cumartesi pazarı yok. Sigortaları da yapılacak. İzin alması gerektiği yerde hemen izin alıp geliyor. Hafta sonları kızkardeşlerimle folklore gidiyorum, çalışmalarını falan oluyor. Dayı benim folklorüm var, ya tamam git. O konuda zorluk çıkartmıyorlar o avantajları var. ya en azından daha rahat, benim işim var ben gidiyorum diyebiliyor. Ama benim işimde bunu söylediğin zaman sorun.”

male, “abi”<sup>113</sup>, even though they are much younger. The employers call relatively older women “abla” etc. The important question is whether the family sentiments are invoked at the workplace and if they are invoked, then the question is by whom, and for which purposes.

I will argue that in both types of workplaces, the bosses or foremen create moments and encounters in which they say to women workers that they expect them to be loyal to their firms. For example, Hanım works as a quality controller in a denim company. The boss invites her to his office to warn her about a group of workers who are turned out to be trying to form a workers’ union at the workplace.

‘I am going to tell you something that I don’t believe’ he said. ‘Tell me’ I said. ‘You know the recent developments your name is also on the list though I know that you are not one of them. You have been working with me for many years,’ he said. Apparently I inspired such confidence in him that he did not believe that I was involved in such things, even if my name was on the list. ‘You can confront us’ I said ‘Let us know who says this.’ I was thinking like that, let’s see what I have done, with whom I talked to. ‘No need for this’ he said ‘I know you, but do not go along with ignoble people.’ He talked exactly like that, do not get along with ignoble people. ‘Even if you do not think, they sink in your brain and make you think that way.’ What can you say in such a situation? You can say neither yes nor no. I said ‘I say what I know, I really have no idea what is going on. Just bring me face-to-face with these people.’ ‘There is no need to do something like that, we believe in you and we trust you’ he said ‘We just wanted to warn you about such ignoble people and do not let them mix up your mind, is that ok?’ ‘Ok’ I said. ‘If you have any problems, directly come to me, there is nothing that I cannot solve’ he said. He talked that way. I said ‘ok, I will come if I experience a problem, thank you.’<sup>114</sup> (Hanım)

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<sup>113</sup> “Abi” literally means older brother, and “abla” older sister.

<sup>114</sup> “Bir şey söylücem ama inanmıyorum dedi. Söyle dedim. Dedi ki biliyosun dedi son olayları, listede senin adın var. Ben dedi senin o olayların dışında olduğunu... Sen kaç yıldır benim yanımda çalıştın. Ben öyle bir güven vermişim ki, adam görse bile inanmıyor. Öyle bir şeyi var. Ben de dedim yüzleştirebilirsin. Kimse bilelim? Kafamdan öyle geçiyor, getir yüzleşelim. Hani ben kimle konuşmuşum, ne yapmışım? Yahu dedi gerek yok ben seni biliyorum, ama, dedi itlen köpeklen bir olma. Aynı bu şekilde itlen köpeklen bir olma dedi. Sen düşünmesen bile, kafana girer düşündürürler seni dedi. Yani ne söyleyebilirsin ki, öyle söyleyen yok, böyle söyleyen yok. Dedim ben bunu biliyorum, bunu söylüyorum dedim gerçekten haberim yok benim. Karşılaştı beni o zaman inanırım gerçekten kişiler gelip söylemişler. O da gerek yok dedi, biz sana inanıyoruz, güveniyoruz. Tamam dedi. Sadece biz uyaralım itlen köpeklen bir olma. Kafanı karıştırmasınlar falan filan, tamam mı abla.

Here the boss constantly invokes the feelings of loyalty and faithfulness. Therefore he softens the terms of the encounter with Hanım, as a worker, by depicting her as a loyal member of the company – as family – since she has been working in this company for a long time. Such attitudes are common in smaller enterprises as well. I will give one example. When the employer learns that Meliha visited another workplace to start to work for a higher wage, he goes to that workplace and says “She changed her mind and will not be coming here” even without talking to her. Then he sends her a message saying “I will do a favor for her.” This example shows the immensity of the employer’s ease to exert power over her decision. Meliha’s reply to her employer’s attitude is as follows:

I later learnt that they conveyed a message to this new workplace not to wait for me, that I had changed my mind and decided not to work there. They did not let me leave their place. You see. Though I could immediately start working in that shopfloor, I can find a work the day I quit this job. I said these to them. ‘Don’t think that I am a needy person, and bound to work here’ I said ‘Anyone could saddle me as long as I am a donkey. If we have a brother-sister relationship here, if we love and respect each other, do not abuse this situation. I have kids and when they want something from me and if I cannot buy it, I become depressed. Why could not I buy these things, I am both a mother and a father to them.’ They said ‘one of your children is also working.’ Yes, you are right. But even if he is also working, you have to give me my due. You cannot divert my money to your pocket saying that she is not in need of it. Am I wrong? It is totally foolish to say that your son is also working. My children are growing up, my son will go to the army in two years, maybe I will save money during that period, maybe for his wedding. My son might work, and you do not have the right to say this to me. You just give me my due, I will give my labor to you in exchange. Isn’t it the problem? <sup>115</sup>(Meliha)

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Tamam. Bir sorunun olduğu zaman gel dedi, benim yapamayacağım hiç bir şey yok dedi. Öyle şey de konuşuyo yani. Tamam dedim sağol dedim, olursa gelirim dedim.”

<sup>115</sup> “Bunlar da buraya söylemişler, ablayı beklemeyin abla çalışmaya gelmeyecek buraya. Beni ordan salmıyolar. Anladın. Ben burda hemen iş başı yaptım. Sen ne diyorsun. Yaparım ki ben bugün çıkayım, bugün de işbaşı yaparım, aynı gün de yaparım. öyle dedim hatta, zannetmeyin mecbur bu burda, muhtaç demeyin dedim. Ben eşek olduktan sonra herkes eyerler beni. Dedim ya burdan çıkayım ben hemen iş başı yaparım dedim. Burda dedim abi, kardeş gibi bir sevgi, saygımız varsa, bunda dedim suikast yapmayın yani. Benim de çocuğum çocuğum var dedim, benim dedim çocuklarım çalıştığım halde bir şey istediği

What is striking in this passage is that the terms of wage bargaining is entirely established on her familial relations. On the one hand, the boss refers to her working son, implying that there is another breadwinner at home and thus, he impolitely manipulates her familial relations to set back her request for a higher wage. On the other hand, she legitimizes her right to a wage increase with reference to the various necessities of her children. She refers to having a relationship like “older brother-younger sister” at that workplace and wants them not to abuse this relationship.

The invocation of the uniqueness of workers that we mentioned in the previous chapter takes place in a work environment in which the family relations of employees are used as an effective tool of manipulation by the employers. In other words, in some situations the employers invoke workers’ uniqueness to prevent absenteeism or to guarantee the continuity of the labor force and production, but in others they manipulate women’s familial positions for the same purposes. For example, when Zeynep decides to leave her workplace, the foreman says “your sister is also working here, you should not and cannot leave her alone here.” Such examples in which both employers and workers refer to various familial relationships are abundant in women workers’ narratives. These examples plainly show how the management makes use of various familial concerns of the workers to legitimize or naturalize the exploitative work. These cases are more prevalent in

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zaman alamadığım zaman dedim. Benim moralim bozuluyor dedim. Niye alamıyım ki ben dedim, ben hem anneyim hem babayım dedim. Niye alamıyım? Bunlar dedi senin çocuk da çalışıyor. İyi güzel söylüyorsun da kardeşim. Düşün kü benim işim var, düşün kü benim oğlum da çalışıyor, ben de çalışıyorum. Benim hakkım neyse sen yine bana vermek zorundasın. Bu kadının ihtiyacı yok diye, sen benim maaşımı kendi cebine indiremezsin ki. Di mi? Ne kadar mantıksız bir şey oğlun para getirmiyor mu? Benim çocuklarım yetişiyor. Benim oğlum askere gidicek 2 sene sonra. Belki askerde yatırıcım, belki onun evliliğine hazırlık yapıcım. Benim oğlum çalışabilir canım senin onu söylemeye hakkın yok ki. Sen bana hakkım olan hakkımı ver, ben de işini vereyim. Sorun bu di mi.”

small workshops where the employers know the workers well. On the other hand, these same concerns operate as local moral claims that the women use against the brutalizing nature of work and work relations. Hanım's idealized depiction of her previous workplace is also full of appeals to family sentiments such as affection, protection, feeling secure etc.

We had such a pretty environment there, full of love, compassion, respect just like in a family. That workplace was like that. Basak I could not find that environment in any other workplace. Textile work is really naff if the employer is not a nice person ... I am not saying something about my present employers, they are new in the sector, they are ignorant. But if you see that you earn money thanks to these working people, you have to make them happy, then you never go bankrupt. My previous boss used to tell me this. He also used to tell me 'Meliha, my daughter, if someone passes a word to you, tell me, even if he is the most talented machinist, I will dismiss him, I will not listen to him, we are brothers-sisters here.' There there was the value of the person, there was honesty, there was pride, there was honor. I do not see things like that here, I would like to go to that workplace again, do you get it? I would like to work in such an environment. <sup>116</sup>(Hanım)

Despite the prevalence of such familial discourses at many workplaces, in practice being a woman does not seem to be providing a protective shelter for workers. Ngai (2005) and Rofel (1992) cite examples from Chinese workplaces in which women workers "routinely cited family and female reasons for taking time off work" (Ong 1991:300) including menstruation pains or various familial obligations. Kondo, (1990) in her book on gender and power relations in a Japanese workshop, also observes that the continuance of familial roles of women in the workplace facilitates

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<sup>116</sup> "Öyle bir güzel ortamımız vardı ki, bir ailedeki sevgi şefkat, saygı nasılsa bizim işyerimiz öyleydi. O iş yeri öyleydi işte, ben o işyerindeki ortamı bulamadım. Başak hiç bir yerde bulamadım. Tekstil afedersin dandik dundik işler. Başındaki güzel olmazsa, ben bunlara bir şey demiyorum, bunlar daha yeni açmışlar, cahiller. Ama bir takım, ben bunu kazanıyorum, bu gittiği zaman ben iflas ederim diyip burdaki insanı güldürmezsen, sen iflas etmezsin, orayı toptan kaybedersin. Benim önceki patronum öyle diyordu bana, malatyalıydı. Diyodi ki, bak melahat kızım sana bir şey diyen olursa, bana söyle, en değerli makinacım da olsun ben kovarım, hiç dinlemem derdi, burada abi kardeşiz. (...) İnsanın değeri vardı, insanın koruması, dürüstlük vardı, gurur vardı, şeref vardı. Ben görmüyorum burda, ben yine o tarafa gitmek istiyorum, anladın mı şimdi. O ortamı istiyorum."

a certain degree of flexibility. For example, women workers can skive off work easily, and they are tolerated because their contribution to work is seen as secondary, and they are assumed to have other obligations outside the workplace. Although this approach perpetuates the patriarchal familial roles, it also offers extra-time and extra-flexibility for women workers that male workers are deprived of. For the women workers I met, being women or assuming familial roles at work did not relax the working conditions. On the contrary, the women I talked to mentioned how they came across extremely “egalitarian” discourses when they asked for special arrangements. For example when they or one family member gets sick, they hardly ever get permission for leave of absence from their foremen or the employer. Nearly all women have stories in which they desperately ask for permission, but the foreman or director does not let them go. If they miss a work day without the permission of the foreman, three days’ pay is cut from their monthly payments. For example, Meliha, widowed mother of 3, could not risk this deduction to take care of her 2 year old baby, who got sick<sup>117</sup>, and as a matter of course continued to work, being enraged at the foremen who did not let her go.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Meliha tells this event as follows: “Recently I again asked for permission. I was telling them that my child was ill, it is awful to be in need of something ... that day I was working, but I began to feel uneasy. I said to the foreman ‘I will go home, my son got sick, I have to go home immediately.’ He did not let me go home. [...] Even if your child gets sick, you cannot get permission. Though I know how to walk out, but if you walk out, they cut your wage, they threaten you with wage cut. Even if you do not work just one day, three days’ wage is cut.” (“Geçen gün yine birisi, izin istedim yine. Çocuğum hasta diyorum (...) ihtiyaç çok kötü. [...]. İş yerinde çalışıyorum içime bir şey düştü. Ben eve gidicem dedim. Ustaya dedim ki abi ben eve gidicem. Benim çocuğum hasta dedim, acilen gitmem lazım dedim. Göndermedi beni eve. [...] Çocuğun hasta hasta izin alamıyorsun. Ben o kapıyı vurup çıkmasını da bilirim. Ama vurup çıktığın zaman paranı kesiyorlar, gözünü öyle korkutuyorlar. Bir gün gitmiyorsun, üç gün kesiliyor.”)

<sup>118</sup> Halise tells a very similar story: “That is, for example when my mom got sick, he did not let me go, but I had to go. I went to see her on Saturday, she died on Sunday. If I had not gone to see her, I would not have seen her ever. I can find work everywhere, but my mom... I cannot find my mom again. I said “Either let me go or not, I will go in any case.” I begged to the foreman, in the end he let me go. I did not go to work on Thursday and Friday, they

Sabiş, who works in a middle-scale company, says that in her workplace women workers once asked the management to take their lunch before the men from the cafeteria so that they would not be crushed among men in the line. However, the management rejected their request on the grounds of “equality”. Women’s request to sit while doing quality control was also rejected by the management. Sabiş says that:

It is generally the women who do the cleaning and controlling. They stand all day during work, sometimes they want to sit during work saying that they are standing on their feet 12 hours a day. But their request was not accepted. They said that they will produce less if they sit. There are old people, moreover when you stand you want to go to the restroom more often. They suffer from chronic languor, but they could not voice this, they don’t voice this. Actually women are not weak at all in terms of the work they undertake, according to me, women work harder than men do, but they are not respected as much as men are respected. A man tells his problems easily, but a woman cannot. Women are more oppressed. When a man expresses his problems, he is listened to, but whenever a woman tells her problems regarding the work, she is regarded as a person who has problems. Her problems are associated with her being a woman. That is why a man can easily speak, while a woman cannot.<sup>119</sup>

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were supposed to cut two days’ wages, but it turned out that they cut five days’ wages. When I said this to them, they said “consider it as a deduction in exchange for the foods that you take from the kitchen.” We used to take the leftovers from the lunch, otherwise they go to waste. Instead of casting them away, we take them, even the bosses used to tell us to take them.” (“Yani her yerde şey yapıyorlar. Mesela 3 gün işe gitme rahatsızlan, benim annem rahatsızlandı mesela, hasta, bana izin vermiyor, gitmek zorundayım, Cumartesi günü gittim, Pazar günü annem öldü mesela, gitmesem göremiycem. iş her yerde bulunur, ama anne...aha annemi bulamıyorum işte. Beni ister gönder, ister gönderme ben istiyom, ne olursa olsun dedim. Şefe yalvardım yakardım, neyse şef git dedi bana, neyse gittim, ben 2 gün mesela, Perşembe Cuma gelmedim, iki gün kesilmesi lazım, 5 gün kesmişler, söyledim, söylediğim zaman dediler ki, mutfaktan götürdüğünüz yemeğe sayın. Hani yemek artıyo, eskilerden kalıyo ya, çöpe döküyo, mecbur çöpe döküyoruz, çöpe dökene kadar götürüyoruz, patronlar götürün diyor.”)

<sup>119</sup> “Temizleme, kontrol etme bunlarda bayanlar ağırlıklı çalışıyor. Ayakta çalışıyorlar sürekli, bir ara oturma talep ettiler, 12 saat ayakta çalışıyoruz diye, oturma talepleri kabul edilmedi kabul edilmedi. Oturarak daha az iş çıkaracaklarını söylediler. Yaşlı insanlar var... ayakta olunca tuvalete gitmek ihtiyaçları daha çok oluyor. Sürekli halsizlik gibi durumları var. Ama onu dile getiremiyorlar, dile getirmiyorlar. Dile getirmiş olsalar hani bayan zayıf değil aslında iş konumunda ciddi anlamda bayan daha çok azim gösteriyor, benim gözümde bi bayan daha çok azim göstermeye çalışıyor ama yine de bir erkek kadar saygı görmüyor. Bir erkek oturuyor derdini çatır çatır söylüyor ama bi bayan söylemiyor. Eziliyor, daha çok. Bi erkek gelip problemlerini anlattığı zaman daha çok dinleniliyor, bi bayan anlattığı zaman işte problemleri bir bayan oluyor. Bayanlığına vuruluyor. Problemleri bayan oluyorsun yani. Erkek oturup anlatıyor ama bayan anlatamıyor.”

As Sabiř's narrative clearly indicates, let alone citing female reasons for taking time off work, women fear to raise their problems at the workplace because their speech itself is considered something problematic.<sup>120</sup>

To sum up, in these garment workplaces, familial roles and obligations, and female-related problems do not provide women even with a discursive strategy to protect themselves from the harshness of work. Rather, the employers either manipulate these familial roles of women or disregard women's requests on the basis of the discourse of equality. The purpose is to ensure an efficient and docile workforce.

#### Engendering bodies at the workplace

The gendered construction of labor relations has implications not only for the maintenance of labor discipline, but also for the construction of gendered subjects. The idea that "it is not individuals who have experience but subjects who are constituted through experience" (Scott 1992) is widely appropriated by (mainly post-structuralist) feminists. But some other feminists warned that the analysis of experience should not be restricted within the discursive field. For example, Mc Nay (1999) says that "there is a tendency in certain theories of identity transformation to construe identity as a process of symbolic identification without considering its

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<sup>120</sup> When I asked Nuray if women could get permission when they have periods, she replied as follows: "No, you cannot talk about it. For example my sister had serious pains during her periods. Even the supervisors used to know that she has problems. One of the reasons of her dismissal was that. She used to take breaks so often. She used to not come to work one or two days in a month. She was suffering a lot. She was taken to the doctor many times. The bosses say that if a person is of no use, you should dismiss her. That is why many people are dismissed." ("Yok söyleyemiyosun, benim mesela kız kardeşim öyleydi. Müdür falan biliyodu sorunlu olduğunu. Kız kardeşim rahatsız o konuda. O yüzden çok rahatsızlanınca. Bi çıkartılma nedeni de buydu. Çok işe ara veriyordu. Her ay bir iki gün iş gelmiyordu. Ağrı falan da çok çekiyordu. Doktora falan da çok götürüldü. Patronlar da diyor bi insan işe yaramıyorsa çıkarın. Müdürler de ona uyuyor aslında. Çıkartıyorlar. O yüzden çıkartılmalar oluyor.")

mediation in embodied practice” (p.98). Many feminist scholars also emphasized the need for taking laboring practices, rather than signifying practices, as a point of entry into configurations of gendered subjectivity to better account for the coercion through which gender is embodied (Weeks 1996). It is also proposed that sex/gender relations should be investigated through the notion of the “lived body” which is defined as “a unified idea of a physical body acting and experiencing in a specific sociocultural context, it is body-in-situation” (Young 2003). The question that I want to dwell upon is how women workers embody gender identity at the workplace.

In the previous chapter, we mentioned the importance of workplace environment for the formation of the subjectivities of women workers. Being aware of the fact that they can be replaced with other workers or might be dismissed at any time, workers generally do not develop a deep sense of attachment to their jobs. But there is another factor that determines women’s level of attachment to their existing workplaces. This is the constant consideration of others’ attitudes and feelings towards them. Thus, the feelings of insecurity among workers that we have mentioned in the third chapter have actually another dimension that pertains directly to the experience of laboring as a woman. Women’s narratives embrace a strong self-reflexive dimension in that they constantly keep in view what other people at the workplace might be thinking of them. This means that women always feel that they have to think about how they walk, sit, look or walk at the workplace. Especially the young and unmarried daughters are always under the constant threat of being labeled as “flirtatious” or “frivolous.” Therefore each work day is experienced as an encounter with the local realizations of public prejudices against

women garment workers. This means that women are constantly pushed to account for their acts at the workplace, and to reiterate their chastity and decency.

All these add up to the emergence of feelings of ambiguity and contradiction on the part of the women. In short, the working experience of women cannot be understood without the feeling that their bodily presence at the workplace brings about the constant visual surveillance of male workers and foremen.<sup>121</sup> These ambiguities pertain to the construction of their gender identities in that they restrict their bodily movements and discursive strategies in line with the hegemonic symbolic power. This situation can be explained with reference to Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence according to which women in particular, subordinate people in general, though in different degrees, come to comply with the assumptions that designate them to a secondary and inferior position. Thus, women's susceptibility to male superiority is reproduced through daily encounters at the workplace by the women themselves as well.

Zeynep's narrative clearly illustrates the ambiguities and insecurities etched on women's bodies and feelings at the workplace:

Maybe they also talk about me in that way, but I know what kind of person I am, honestly I know. For example I know how people think about me. It is

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<sup>121</sup> Sabiř explains how she experiences this restriction upon her body and bodily movements as a psychological pressure as follows: "Seriously I dress freely where I live. I have never experienced any problems regarding the way I dress in my family. But in our workplace, I constantly bend down and stand up, there is such a big psychological pressure on me that I cannot work without wearing my apron and covering my back. I absolutely wear something on me. Because they look in such a way that I feel disturbed. They judge you according to your clothes." ("Ciddi anlamda ben kendi oturduğum çevre içinde çok rahat giyinirim. Benim ailemle öyle bir sorunum olmadı bu güne kadar. Ama çalıştığım yerde sürekli eğilip kalkan bir insanım, ama öyle bir kendi kendime psikolojik baskı olmuş ki, şu sırtıma önlüğümü bağlamadan çalışmıyorum, sırtımı kapatmadan çalışmıyorum. Üzerime mutlaka bi şey giyiyorum. Çünkü rahatsız oluyorum. Öyle bir bakış tarzları var ki, benim en ufak bi şeyim dahi olsa iş yerinde hiç bir zaman sıfır kolla çalışmam hep üstüme giydiğim bi şeyler vardır. Yaz da olsa, kış da olsa. Dışarıda istediğim kadar rahat geziyorum ama orda yapamıyorum başak. O rahatlığı bulamıyorum. Kıyafetle çok yargılanıyorsun ciddi anlamda yargılanıyorsun.")

better for a person not to enter an environment in which she feels what the others feel about her. You enter the shopfloor early in the morning, and everyone looks at you. Then it occurs to me what the others think about me. For example each of them are at my father's age, no one looks with an evil eye on me. The important thing is that if you are a decent person, the others behave to you decently. But if you are a tricky person, everyone says that she is a tricky girl. This is what I know and what I see. For example, I go to the workplace and I know pretty well who behaves how. If I were a bad person, no one but the men would talk to me. Men would say that she is a frivolous girl, and they would have affairs with her, and then give her a kick. But this is not the case, the workplace environment is crucial.<sup>122</sup> (Zeynep)

What is also interesting is that the derogatory terms used for women workers, such as *kaşar* are also used by the women workers themselves to describe some women.

Women workers use the same hegemonic male-dominated language to describe the acts of other women that they do not like and thus they contribute to the reproduction of the same male-dominated discourse at the workplace.

Below we will see that it is always women who suffer from the gossip about dating and sexual affairs at the workplace. Such gossip might lead to various destructive consequences for the lives of women workers. For example, if you are not married and talk to a male worker, you can easily gain a bad reputation at the workplace. Nuray says that upon the rumors about her and her boyfriend while they were dating, she had to marry him though she was sure neither about him, nor about marriage:

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<sup>122</sup> “Belki benim hakkımda da öyle konuşuyorlardır ama ki ben biliyorum nasıl bir insan olduğumu vallahi biliyorum. Milletin artık mesela bana hangi gözle baktıklarını ben biliyorum. Bir insan hissettiği zaman girdiği ortamdaki insanların ne hissettiğini o işin içine girmesin daha iyi olur. Bir iş yerine giriyorsun sabahın köründe herkes sana bakıyor. Ki aklımdan geçiyor bu insan benim hakkında acaba ne düşünüyor. Mesela hepsi babamın yaşında kimse sana yanlış gözle bakmaz, bakamaz da. Ama önemli olan sen efendiysen ki karşıdaki insan da efendidir. Ama değil de kaşarsa, her önüne gelen der ki bu kız kaşar. Öyle, öyle değil mi. Valla ben öyle bildiğim, gördüğüm için öyle söylerim. Mesela iş yerine gidiyorum, bana kimin nasıl davrandığını ben çok iyi biliyorum. Ki ben mesela kötü bir insan olsaydım bana kimse selam vermezdi. Verir miydi, vermezdi, erkeklerden hariç, o da derdi ki bu kız kaşar nasıl olsa, önüne gelenle çıkardı, tekmeyi atardı. Ama öyle değil işte bir iş ortamını gerçekten çok önemlidir.”

I decided to marry in a week after a momentary anger. We had been dating for a year in my present workplace, but there were lots of rumors about us. They were saying lots of things. Some people were jealous of us, then my parents heard it. My dad wanted me to marry but not him. He wanted me to be happy and comfortable. He said, ‘My girl is here, if she wants to marry, I will let her marry, but I do not want her to marry him.’ I broke up with him, I did not want to oppose my father, but he followed me around continually. Since he did not leave me alone, some problems emerged at the workplace due to his jealousy. Since I have been working there for a very long time, I had close relations with everyone there. I saw them as friends or brothers. One day he brought me home late at night. Then a quarrel burst out at home, I decided that day to marry. I went to their village that weekend. We used to love each other when we married. But the happiness did not continue. We talked of divorce many times. They kicked me out of the house.<sup>123</sup>

Her story vividly shows how various male actors are complicit in her disempowerment, leaving her little or no option to decide about her life. First, her father opposed this marriage but then he agreed. After marriage, she and her husband continually had arguments due to the jealousy of her husband at the workplace, and various problems arose between her husband and the other male workers. He transferred the quarrels that they had at home to the workplace as well. At the end she felt compelled to quit the job. She lived with her mother-in-law who behaved very badly to her. She was kicked out of the home several times and each time her father convinced her to return to her husband since she had a child. When her husband left for the military service, she went to her previous workplace to ask for a job. The boss said to her “how could you dare to come work after all that

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<sup>123</sup> Ben de yani bir anlık sinirle yaptım. Bir hafta içinde karar verdim evlenmeye. Ben işimle bir sene çıktım şu an çalıştığım yerde, orda çok dedikodular çıkıyordu. Çok seyler söylüyorlardı. Çekemeyenler oluyordu sonra benim ailemin kulağına gitti. Babam zaten onla evlenmemi çok istiyordu. İyi yerde olsun, mutlu olsun huzurlu olsun istiyordu. Kızım burda, yüzü burda, istiyosa evlensin, ama ben istemem dedi. Ben ayrıldım karşı gelmek istemedim ama bu peşimi bırakmadı benim. Peşimi bırakmayınca bir kıskançlık olayları oldu işyerinde. Ben de eskiden beri çalıştığım için herkesle bi samimiyetim vardı yani bi arkadaş olsun bi abi olsun. Beni eve geç bıraktı işte. Evde tartışma oldu. o gün ben karar verdim, o hafta sonu onların köyüne gittim. Kısmet işte çekeceğim varmış, severek şey yaptık. Ama mutluluk olmadı. Çok kere boşanma olayı oldu, beni evden kovdular.

happened,”<sup>124</sup> though he gave her a job later. Now, she is the only breadwinner of her family since her husband could not find a job after his return from military service. Yet, her problems at the workplace are not over, she complains about the continuing rumors and sexual harassments of male workers there.

I tell a man that I am a married woman, I have a child. He says ‘never mind. As long as no one hears, nothing happens.’ But you would feel bad inside. I have a child, a husband and you think that you are disregarding them. But men do not think that way, they think that nothing would happen to them in any case. It is the women and girls who suffer in the end, this is the case.<sup>125</sup>

In short, her life story is shaped through the agency of male co-workers and family members. They all have a say over what she is supposed to do and how she has to behave as a proper daughter, wife or worker. Her exhaustion was reflected in her voice, pale color of her skin and the rings around her eyes that bear the traces of her endless efforts to survive and construct a proper and decent gender identity among these authoritative male figures.

As we have mentioned before, women’s constant efforts to dissociate themselves from a particular image of the feminine garment worker actually has two consequences. First, women can deal with the highly sexualized environment of the workplace only through exerting symbolic violence on themselves and other women. One of the main topics of women’s gossiping<sup>126</sup> is some women’s indecent

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<sup>124</sup> “Onca olaydan sonra sen ne yüzle geldin çalışmaya.”

<sup>125</sup> “Ya diyosun ben evliyim çocuğum var. o da diyo ki nolcak, kimse duymadıktan sonra ne olacak. Ama nolcak diil ki, sonuçta sen kendin içinden. Şey hissediyorsun. Benim çocuğum var eşim var ona saygısızlık yapıyorum diye düşünebilirsin ama erkekler öyle düşünmüyor, nasılsa diyolar bize bi şey olmaz, nasılsa kadına kıza olur. Olan kadına kıza oluyor.”

<sup>126</sup> According to Gal (1991), “Gossip itself is women’s most powerful verbal tool, but it is two edged. It tends to subvert male-authority, by judging people in terms of values the male-dominant system rejects. But partly as a result of this subversion it is condemned and decried by the dominant culture. Moreover, it is seen by all as a negative form of power that makes or breaks reputations, causes conflict and disrupts relationships. It is negative in another sense too. As Harding reveals, women develop this genre for lack of other forms of

acts and behaviors at the workplace. On the one hand they feel compelled to adjust themselves according to the expectations of the male-gaze and on the other they evaluate other women on the basis of some criteria that are male-dominated: It is not good for a woman to have her mobile phone ringing so often at the workplace. Similarly laughing loudly is also not appropriate behavior for a woman. Making friends with male workers is seen as an indicator of a woman's frivolity. Thus, it can be argued that such feelings of women inescapably contribute to the production of sexuality at the workplace.

In short, the symbolic violence women exert on themselves and other women further legitimizes and naturalizes women's subordination to the male gaze and touch. The silence of women workers when they are harassed by male workers or foremen best evidences this.<sup>127</sup> The depiction of garment workplaces as totally sexualized spaces by both men and women further deprive the harassed women of the courage to raise their voices against harassment.

In fact, there is a hypocrisy underlining the attitudes of foremen and employers towards the women workers. On the one hand, they feel comfortable intervene in young girls' relations with boys, asserting that they cannot let them tarnish the company's name.<sup>128</sup> They also say that they would never let their women

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power, but they are trapped by it themselves: 'The sense, if not fact, of being under constant surveillance restricts the behavior of women and helps keep them in their place'(p.183).

<sup>127</sup> We can talk about an overall silence on the issue of sexual harassment in Turkey. However, the distinctiveness of sexual harassment at the workplace lies in its pervasiveness. The textile shopfloors are famous for being the sites of flirting, and women garment workers are considered to be appropriate candidates for engaging in sexual affairs. These wide-spread assumptions naturalize the sexualized femininity of women textile workers and turn garment workplaces into sexualized public spaces.

<sup>128</sup> Sabi's narratives reveal the hypocrisy of management: "Kadınlara, özellikle kadınları kovuyorlar. Kızla çocuk çıkıyor, paydos saatinde çocuk, ikisi de arkadaşımız, kızın omzuna atıyor, geziyorlar. Yemeklerini yemişler dışarda geziyorlar. Bunu gören bir kaç kişi söylüyorlar, köseoğlunun adı çıkacak onlar sarmaş dolaş geziyor." "Mesai saatindeyiz

workers engage in inappropriate behaviors at their workplaces. On the other hand, the employers and the foremen take the front stage in the stories of sexual harassment. Women mainly complain about the harassing acts of foremen or employers rather than their male co-workers. The point is that the male authorities at the workplace act as the sole authority over women workers' bodies, behaviors and sexualities. Even when the abusive acts of some foremen are criticized by some employers, in the end it is always the women who are stigmatized, disparaged or even dismissed from the workplace. Hanım's and Sabiř's narratives illuminate this situation very clearly:

For example there was a friend of mine. He was Sunni Kurdish, the girl was Alevi. They loved each other. But in the end both were dismissed. They said if you continue dating, we would fire you both. The boy said, "if you want to dismiss us, do it." They dismissed them in the end, but they themselves do everything. When a woman starts working, everyone looks at her. This is an appalling situation for me. There was a man dating a woman working there. Then the woman got pregnant, then she brought her baby and said "this is your child." Then they fired the woman. Her mother used to work in the cafeteria, they fired her too. Such an injustice is not conceivable, they did many injustices and no one said anything. There was a young lady, they dismissed her too. Apparently one of our managers molested her. Then one day she tells this to one of her friends, and she says "if you are annoyed about it, why do you conceal it, tell it openly." Actually people are afraid of not being believed in, like people will have bad thoughts about her, consequently she did not utter this situation. But she could not bear this situation and quit the work in the end. It is the women who suffer in the end, no one interferes in this, even if someone interferes they believe in men, not in women. Such horrible things happen, we are experiencing and have experienced such things, that is disgusting. <sup>129</sup>(Hanım)

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diyelim, ařađıda yedi buçukta, yukarı çağırıyor, gel řu işleri yap, gidiyor orda kızı seyrediyor. Elini tutuyor, kolunu tutuyor, kendi kendini tatmin ediyor bu adam. Bir yapıyor, iki yapıyor üç yapıyor. Peki dedim bunu dile getirmeye hazır mısın dedim. Bunu savunuruz dedim. Durdu, boş ver dedi. Bu adam seni taciz ediyor, boşver diyorsun. Ve bir çođu da boş ver dedi, söylemediler. Adam yıllarca içimizde ekmek yedi."

<sup>129</sup> Mesela bir tane arkadař vardı. O sünniydi yani kürttü, kız aleviydi. Bunlar birbirlerini sevdiler. Bu ikisini işten çıkarttılar. Böyle bir řeye devam ederseniz çıkartırız dediler. Çocuk da çıkartacaksanız çıkartın dedi. Çıkattılar.ama kendileri her řeyi yapıyorlar. Bir bayan geldiđi zaman herkes ona bakıyor yeni biri gelmiř, öyle düşünülebilir mi. Korkunç bir durum bence iğrenç. O adam bir bayan vardı onla çıkıyordu. Kadın hamile kalmıřtı, çocuđu olmuřtu getirmiřti. Bu senin çocuđu diye getirdi. Aldılar attılar. Annesi çalışıyordu yemekhanede onu da attılar. Böyle bir dengesizlik olabilir mi, bir sürü dengesizlik yaptılar

Yes, he gathered a meeting. He said ‘Some of you are behaving improperly, you know yourselves, I will not keep a record of these people. From this moment on I do not want you here.’ He said some people had improper acts, implying Meryem. She took the floor and said ‘Are you talking about me?’ ‘I will not see you around any more’ he said. He stigmatized her among everyone just because they went hand in hand during the break, this was the only thing they saw. Otherwise they would let her stay. If you do not defend yourself, they oppress you. It was an embarrassing moment. It seriously hurt me. The worst thing was that no one supported her. Some of us did not go to work to protest this practice. <sup>130</sup>(Sabiş)

Women’s narratives reveal that sexual harassment is not a deviant or extraordinary face of workplace relations. On the contrary, the prevalence of sexual harassment affairs at garment shop floors is directly related to the way women’s sexuality is conceived and produced at the workplace. The objectification of women’s bodies under the male gaze, and women’s complicity with this objectification naturalize the sexual harassment of women.

To sum up, it can be argued that the sexualized atmosphere of the garment shop floors and the constant interpellation of women workers as sexual subjects either using familial idioms or sexual designations, is part and parcel of the capitalist production process. Because, through these interpellations, women turn into

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kimse bir şey diyemiyor. Genç bir bayan vardı, onu da attılar işten. Bu müdür sarkıntılık etmiş ona. Geldi bir gün anlatmış bir arkadaşına, o da demiş rahatsız oluyorsan söyle. Niye gizleme gereği duyuyorsun, açık açık söyle. Hani şey korkusu var tabii insanlarda insanlar bana inanmayacak, bana farklı gözle bakacak, kendisini ifade etmedi. Baktı olacak gibi değil, ayrıldı. Olan kadınlara oluyor, buna hiç bir müdahale yapılmıyor, yapıldığı zaman da ben hiç zannetmiyorum. O insana inanırlar, kadınlara inanmazlar. Böyle korkunç şeyler oluyor, yaşıyoruz, yaşadık, iğrenç ya.

<sup>130</sup> “Evet toplantı yaptı. Uygunuz hareketleriniz var dedi, siz kendinizi biliyorsunuz ben sizin adınızı fişlemiyem dedi. Bugünden, şimdiden sonra burda istemiyorum sizi dedi. Yani bi tek meryemin üstüne yüklendi, uygunuzsun, şeysin. Kız çıktı dedi ki benden mi bahsediyorsunuz. Bundan sonra seni burda görmiyem dedi, o çıkınca direktman erkek arkadaşını da ben de çıkıyorum dedi. Ve herkesin içinde fişledi. Tek gördükleri arada elele dolaşmışlar. Ama öbür türlü onu barındırdı orda. Ve kendini savunmuyorsan eziyorlar. Çok utanç verici bir şeydi. Ciddi anlamda beni çok yaraladı. İşin kötü yanı, hiç kimsenin destek olmaması kötüydü. Biz kendi içimizde bir hafta işe gitmedik, protesto ettik.”

vulnerable subjects upon which employers can easily develop their management strategies such as arbitrary dismissal. However, I should also finally note that these processes do not take place against the will of the women workers, because for most of the time women's discourses regarding themselves and other women reproduce objectification and disempowerment of women at the workplace.

Formation of women's subjectivities at the intersection of home and work  
Up to this point I tried to show that women workers' position at the workplace is largely informed by their familial positions/idioms and various allusions concerning their sexualities. However, women's engagement in paid-work since their childhood has repercussions for their familial relations and their status as daughter or mother at home. Nuray's life story overtly evidences the futility of opposing home and work in any attempt to understand women workers' life experiences. Therefore, an analysis concerning the subjectivities of women workers had better try to trace the interactions and contradictions between their familial roles and obligations on the one hand, and their work experiences on the other.

The recent ethnographies on women workers in global factories assert that the massive employment of young daughters of rural origin in free export zones or in large cities gives rise to a series of tensions for these women. Most of these studies argue that the rising consumption culture with its seductive impulses creates desires for personal autonomy and self-realization in these young women. Moreover, these desires are generally in contradiction with their familial duties and obligations. I will argue that the women garment workers I talked to also find themselves entrapped between their familial obligations and personal desires. However, the way they experience this entrapment and develop strategies to deal with it changes according to their familial obligations, work status and age.

The incomes of the women I talked to were indispensable for their families. They all took pride in being in this position in different ways with different concerns: Sevda wants to meet her personal needs and help her parents pay the bills. Sabiř looks after her widowed mother and pays the rent and all the utilities. Dilber and Hanım, who are the oldest daughters in their families, want to ensure that their brothers and sisters continue with their education. Meliha tries to survive with her three children. Halise tries to balance her income and her debts. A closer investigation into these women's life narratives discloses that women express their sense of self mainly in two ways depending on their role in their families and on their ages. On the one hand, there are the narratives of young, unmarried girls which revolve around unfulfilled desires and postponed marriages<sup>131</sup>, on the other hand, there are the narratives of mothers, widowed or not, which emphasize their unending and conceited struggles to survive with their families, rather than their personal desires. Following this distinction, below I will try to trace the meanings women attach to their selves, to family, to marriage and to work. I will also search for the ways they position themselves at the intersection of various social roles and obligations and individual desires. The purpose is to disclose women's harsh "performative struggle(s) over the meanings of experience" (Riessman, 2000) by

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<sup>131</sup> Sabiř's narrative clearly illustrates this tension: "This is totally up to the household, supporting the household. This is a matter of need. I could never work as I wished. I could never spend my salary as I wished - for myself. I never had that luxury since I started working, now I am 24 years old. I will never have that chance after this point, I don't think so. Because I have to work, we don't have any other alternatives. I have brothers and sisters and they all got married, they all try to survive. They all have their own problems, and try to look after themselves." ("Bu tamamen evle alakalı, evi geçindirmekle alakalı, ihtiyaç meselem bu. Keyfime göre hiç bir zaman çalışmadım. Keyfime göre aldığım aylığı hiçbir zaman kendime harcamadım. Hiç öye bir lüksüm olmadı. Baştan beri anlattığım yaşlardan itibaren řu anda 24 yařındayım ve olmadı, olmayacak da bu saatten sonra da, zannetmiyorum. Çünkü mecburum, başka bir alternatifimiz yok. Ablalarım var abim var ama herkes evlenmiştir, herkes kendi geçimini biliyor. Herkes kendi derdinde, herkes kendi yađında kavruluyor.")

trying to grasp their presentation of self, and to understand their fluid and contradictory processes of identity formation, i.e. their subjectivities.

Despite the employers' discourse that young women are temporary laborers since they quit work after marriage, for the young daughters I talked to the idea of getting married does not seem to be an exit strategy from work. They do not describe the idea of marriage as a possible protective shelter against the brutality of working conditions.<sup>132</sup> Their witnessing the impotence of their fathers and the fear that they will continue to live the same oppression when they get married dominates their narratives. Moreover, they say that they have doubts about marriage because, if they marry and stop working, they cannot ask their husbands for money, as they are used to earning their own spending money since from their childhood. In short, they do not perceive marriage and work as contradictory spheres, rather their present vulnerability within their parental families and being obliged to work for the survival of the family for years combine to produce highly defensive stances towards marriage. The parental family's continuous need for their support perpetuates this stance.

The families of these daughters still tightly regulate their everyday lives. However, women develop some tactics to carve more personal spaces for themselves. The basic and most common tactic deployed by them is to lie to their families about their wages or work schedules. They want to spend more for their

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<sup>132</sup>For example Zeynep says: "One is afraid of getting married and living with husband's family. Since you have not seen something good with your family, you think does that your husband's family will be similar. I personally say that I will never marry, because one thinks of millions of things: if my husband doesn't work, if he doesn't take care of me."

"Ya koca evine gitceksin, insan ona da korkuyor, ailende deđişik bir şey görmediđin için diyosun kesin koca evi de böyledir. Şahsen ben diyorum ki evlenmem, valla evlenmem, çünkü diyom ya benim kocam da çalışmazsa, ya bilmem bana bakmazsa, ya da insan ne bileyim, insanın aklına türlü türlü şeyler geliyor." (zeynep)

personal needs or to spend more time with their friends etc. They complain about the scarcity of their personal expenses and monetary accumulation despite being engaged in paid-labor for years. Thus, their grievances regarding work and familial obligations constantly intersect in their demands to spend more time and money for themselves. It might be claimed that that is why they talked about investing in themselves through education or some extra-work affiliations as we mentioned in the previous chapter. The theme of doing something for one's self is crucial in their narratives. In an environment where neither the maternal family nor existing work emerges as a source of identification and support, they intend to develop themselves to get rid of garment work for a better paying and cleaner job. Despite the fact that the discourse of sacrifice is still an important discursive tool for them to deal with their present situations, their unfulfilled personal desires create strong feelings of resentment both towards work and family. At the same time the feelings of meaninglessness and predestination occasionally erupt in their narratives, undermining all the alternative prospects in their lives.

In terms of working conditions, it is very difficult to spare time for yourself. You cannot do it. You don't have weekends, we are off only on Sundays. We work all day long, moreover there are overtimes. On Saturdays we sometimes work till at 1.00 pm. sometimes till 5.00 pm. It changes. Since we are off only on Sundays, we cannot do many things. You cannot spare time for yourself. For example you wanna do many things, but you cannot. When you ask for off on Saturdays and Sundays, they do not accept this. They insist too much. Besides it is very difficult to get permission. Even if you get permission, they cut it from your salary. Under normal conditions they cut three days' wage if you don't go to work, if you get permission it is just one day's wage. But people cannot risk these deductions. This is an advantage for them. People have to regularly come to work. These are our working conditions. we work 11 hours a day. We start working at 8 a.m., stop it at 7.00 p.m.<sup>133</sup> (Hanım)

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<sup>133</sup> “Çalışma koşullarına gelince. Ortam olarak olsun, koşulları olarak olsun. Kendine bir şey yapmak istediğin zaman kendine zor vakit ayırabiliyorsun. Yapamıyorsun. Bunun hem hafta sonunun olmaması, bir Pazar günümüz var. Yani gün boyu çalışıyoruz zaten artı mesailer oluyor. İşte olmasa da Cumartesi bir olur, beş olur. Belli olmuyor. O yüzden bir Pazar günü olduğu için çok fazla bir şey yapamıyoruz. Çok fazla kendine zaman ayıramıyorsun. Mesela

I tell myself that people cannot do anything here. One cannot save one's life here let alone preparing something for the future. They are not covered by any social insurance that guarantees their survival when they are old. Bigger companies are better in terms of this, some people can retire in the future.<sup>134</sup> (Sevda)

Sometimes they [her younger siblings] say we love you more than we love our mother. We think of you as our mother, because you dedicate your life to them. You know, when you get your salary, you can buy something for yourself, you can establish an order for yourself. But when you begin to think of others, you stay at the back stage, you never think of yourself. You suspend your own life. What can I do? I am like this. I don't know to what extent this is right. I have only recently become involved in the theater. It is only recently that I have begun to do something for myself.<sup>135</sup> (Dilber)

As these narratives reveal, these young women's sense of self is determined by the trope of "not being able to do what one desires in this life, to realize one's dreams" either due to the strict time regulations of work, or the unending needs of their parental families.

On the other hand, there are the narratives of married women. The theme of sacrifice is also indispensable for these women's self-construction. However, as opposed to the young daughters, rather than emphasizing their unfulfilled desires, their narratives seem to be characterized by pride arising from being able to sustain

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istediđin bir çok Őey vardır, yapmak istiyorsun, yapamıyorsun. Cumartesi Pazar dediđin zaman bunu zaten kabul etmiyorlar. Çok fazla. Israr ediyorlar. Zaten izin alma Őeyi çok zor oluyor. Aldıđın zaman kesintilerin falan oluyor. Normalde üç yevmiye kesiliyor ama izin aldıđın zaman bir yevmiye kesiliyor. İzin alsalar iki yevmiyeyi göze alamıyorlar. Onlar için de bir avantajdır. İnsanlar mecburi gelip gidiyor. İŐte koŐullarımız zaten, 11 saat falan çalışıyoruz. Sekizde iş baŐı yedide paydos."

<sup>134</sup> "Őimdi diyorum onlar burda hayatta hiç bir Őey yapamaz ki. İnsan kendi hayatını kurtaramıyor, en azından geleceđe dair keŐke bir Őeyleri olabilse en azından bi sigortaları olsa, yaŐlandıkları zaman bi emeklilikleri olur hayatlarında, yaŐlandıkları zaman kendilerini geçindirecek bi güvenceleri yok. Büyük firmalar o yönden biraz daha iyi, sigortaları var en azından, yarın öbür gün emekli olurlar, rahat ederler."

<sup>135</sup> "Hatta Őöyle diyorlar biz annemizden çok seni seviyoruz. Seni anne olarak görüyoruz. Çünkü hayatını onlara adıyorsun. İŐte sen kendi maaŐını kendin için alırsın, kendine bir Őeyler alırsın. Kendine bi duzen kurarsın. Ama başkalarını düşündüđün zaman sen hep geri planda kalıyorsun, kendini düşünmüyorsun. Kendi hayatını erteliyorsun ne yapayım ben böyleyim işte. Ne kadar dođru bilmiyorum. İŐte böyle daha yeni yeni tiyatroydu, Őuydu buydu, hayatıma renk kattı. yeni yeni kendim için bir Őeyler yapıyorum."

the survival of their families. The unending calculation of debts and payments and how they try hard to spend as little as possible are the main topics of their narratives. Instead of lamenting their fates, they emphasize their effort and success to look after their family, and their ability to stand on their feet. Moreover, despite the economic hardships they endure (which are perpetuated by the unemployed or deceased husband) they constantly mention how they worked honestly to support their families and endured various difficulties at work.

I should note that this rough distinction between younger daughters and responsible mothers does not neatly fit into the real life experiences of these women. As Ong (1991) notes, “there is no such overwhelmingly class-determined cross cultural female figure, but rather a multiplicity of historically situated subjects at the intersections of particular local-global power structures who by engaging in local struggles define who they are in cultural terms.” This means that women tend to deploy contradictory and intersecting discourses to attach meaning to their work and life experiences, thus to their selves. I have just tried to depict two general patterns that might be useful to understand the meaning-making processes of these women workers.

#### Confronting on moral grounds

In the first section of this chapter we tried to show how gender is ingrained in the politics of production. This is materialized through the massive sexualization and objectification of women’s bodies at the workplace with disempowering consequences for women. However, there is a two-sided relation between work and gender roles in the sense that the latter is largely determining for the ways women engage in their work. Since these women are desperately in need of working for themselves and their families, most of the time their resentment against their work

takes the form of moral and ethical claims, or they oppose the employer on individual or ethnical grounds. Rather than confronting the employer directly or imagining solidarity among workers, they either develop highly individualistic tactics or moral criticisms against capitalist work.

Ong (1991) proposes to investigate cultural struggles of workers. She invites us to be attentive to “oppositional tactics, embodied desires, and alternative interpretations and images” (p.78) through which women reassess and remake their identities and communities. In a similar vein, Friedman (2007) focuses his analysis of resistance on “the complexities of human desire, cultural knowledge, moral understandings of the world and psychodynamic processes [...]” In a similar vein, Seymour (2006) underlines the importance of “internalized cultural understandings” to grasp the processes in which actors protest and resist hegemonic powers. She says that it is only through the everyday forms of resistance and small acts of defiance that large-scale cracks in the system become possible. That is why the actual thoughts and motivations of individuals when engaging in such small acts of defiance are crucial, she says.

The primary site of confrontation with the employer is the determination of wages. As noted before, one of the consequences of the flexibilization of work arrangements is the total abandonment of the notion of “equal pay for equal work.” The pay you receive depends not only on your skill level or experience, but also on the way you bargain with the employer. Women set forth various personal and familial reasons to ask for a wage increase and they do this in differing ways depending on the nature of their relations with the boss. For example, Sabiř writes letters to her boss whenever she thinks her wage should be increased. Her

parables<sup>136</sup> have moral consequences that are designed in a way to convince the employer for a wage increase. Hanım, Halise and Meliha, in their personal talks to the employer, explain in detail why their work deserves a higher wage. They make comparisons with other workers or other workplaces. Zeynep always watches for a moment to talk to the boss to tell him that she wants a wage increase.

What I want to emphasize is that most women raise their claims against their working conditions on moral grounds saying things like *ağlayandan gülene hayır gelmez*, or *sen bizi güldürmezsen, sen de batarsın*.<sup>137</sup> Women's narratives are kneaded with a series of moral claims that question not only unfair work relations, but also the injustices they constantly face in the totality of their everyday lives. They strive hard to maintain a self-respecting life and hold on tight to the virtue of being responsible family members and diligent workers. Unsurprisingly, this

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<sup>136</sup> One of her stories goes as follows: “There is an old man sitting on a stone looking around, then he sees a young girl carrying a bundle of wood on her shoulders, she is smashed under its weight, she is desperate. He calls the girl and says ‘my daughter, rest a little.’ ‘No’ she says, but she is close to tears, then she goes. He feels sorry for her, thinks inside ‘she has to have a problem.’ After a while, while the same old man is still sitting on the same stone, he sees the same girl again. But this time even though she is carrying a much bigger bundle over her shoulders, she is smiling and carrying it easily. He says ‘my daughter, come here sit by me, last time I saw you your bundle was less than half of this, but you were distressed, you were crushed, but now you are carrying a much heavier bundle, but you are smiling.’ Then she starts to tell ‘I used to work for a man who did not give my due to me though I had to support my family, but now in my present workplace, I get all my dues, my boss understands me and this bundle does not seem to me heavy.’” (“Bu yaşlı adam bir taşın üstüne oturmuş etrafını seyrediyor. Bir bakıyor ordan bir genç kız sırtında bir tomar odunla, taşıyor, ezilmiş, büzülmüş, böyle perişan. Kızı çağırıyor, diyor ki, yavrum diyor gel bir soluklan. Yok diyor, ağlacayak gibi, dokunsan ağlayacak gibi, gidiyor kız. Adamın da dikkatini çekiyor, üzüyor, kızın halini görünce. Kim bilir ne derdi vardır diyor. Belirli bir zaman sonra yaşlı adam yine aynı taşın üstünde oturuyor. Bu sefer gene o kızı görüyor, ama bu sefer o zamanki sırtındaki yükten iki kat daha üç kat daha fazla yük var ama, kız altında gülüyor. Onu rahat rahat taşıyor. Hiç böyle.. ya kızım gel buraya otur şöyle, şunu söyle diyor, o gün diyor gördüğüm yük diyor bunun yarısı kadar bile yoktu. Ama üzülyodun, eziliyodun diyo. Ama şimdi bir dünya yük taşıyorsun ama gülüyorsun. O da başlıyo anlatmaya, diyo ki, daha önce birini yanında çalışıyodum ama diyo, hakettiğimi alamıyodum diyo, ailemi geçindirmek zorundayım bunu alamıyodum. Şimdi çalıştığım yerde her türlü hakkımı da alıyorum, patronum da beni anlıyor ve bu yük bana ağır gelmiyor.”)

<sup>137</sup> “One cannot smile by making others cry”, “if you don’t make us happy, you will go bankrupt.”

constant struggle to deal with unjust work relations including sexualized claims and allusions, and the impositions of everyday necessities and duties, lead to incessant bodily and mental pressure upon these women. There are moments in which women stop talking about the harshness of their everyday lives. At these times, they imagine suspending the pressure of familial and work-related responsibilities even for a second. In these narratives women imagine themselves to be in a chimerical time or place where they have no responsibilities. They feel like staying alone, by themselves, talking to no one and bearing no responsibilities. These are embodied desires and subversive dreams through which women imagine themselves to be emancipated from the chores of family life and the pressures of capitalist work.

I talk to myself that if I die, I would leave behind lots of debts, and the children cannot pay them, I am also thinking this. I am thinking of suicide, lots of debts to many places. Who is going to pay them? Her brother will have to deal with them, their father would not get involved in them, he says “It is none of my business.” What is going to this girl [her daughter that is sitting with us] do? (Silence) I talk to myself sometimes that I wish they would take me to an endless and empty place and I stay alone there.<sup>138</sup> (Halise)

Sometimes I say I wish I did not come, but sometimes I say it is good that I came. [...] Both my work experience and my life have been full of injustices since I came here. I want to make many things for the good of the people, I am thinking that people should not live that way. In the end you work hard, but you suffer wrong, how could you endure these? But most of the people despite thinking all those, do nothing. Maybe this situation suits them, it continues like this. But it is difficult for me to bear all these. Sometimes I become an introverted person since I have passed through many things, many hardships. Sometimes I isolate myself from everything, from my life. I don't want to see anyone, you cannot do anything.<sup>139</sup> (Hanım)

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<sup>138</sup> “Ölsem diyom bi sürü borç arkamda kalacak çoluk çocuk nasıl ödeyecek, onu da düşünüyom. İntiharı düşünüyom diyom ki intihar edeyim bir sürü borç, oraya borç, buraya borç, kim ödeyecek, abisinin başına kalacak, babası ödemez, karışmaz, bana ne der çıkar. O çocuk evlenecek mi borç mu ödeyecek ne edecekk. Onu da düşünüyom. .... (sessizlik) bazen diyom ki beni diyom götürseler uçsuuuuuuz, böyle boşluk bir alana koysalar, kendi kendime tek başıma kalsam diyom.”

<sup>139</sup> “Bazen diyorum keşke gelmeseydim, bazen de diyorum ki iyi ki gelmişim. ben geldiğimden beri hem iş yaşantım olsun hem hayatım hep haksızlıklarla dolu. bir çok şey yapmak istiyorum aslında insanlar için olsun çünkü insan rahatsızlık duyuyor insan olarak insanlar gerçekten böyle yaşamamalı diye düşünüyorum. Sonuçta geliyosun, çalışıyosun bir

Actually you have to know the value of each day you live through. Today I am saying that I wish I was in my father's environment. Even though you work hard, you bear no responsibility there, you are free. They let no one oppress you.<sup>140</sup> (Meliha)

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sürü şey yapıyorsun, o kadar çok haksızlıklar yapıyor ki bunları nasıl söylemezsin. Ama insanların çoğu, bunu düşünüyorlardır ama bana mısın diyorlar. Ya da işlerine böyle geliyor, böyle sürüp gidiyor yani. Ama ben çok zorlanıyorum. Bu tip şeyleri çok yaşadığım, gördüğüm için bir taraftan bazen çok içime de kapanık oluyorum. Bazen her şeyden soyutluyorum, resmen bazen yaşamımdan soyutluyorum. Hiç kimseyle görüşmemek, ne bileyim bir şey yapamıyorsun.”

<sup>140</sup> “Aslında yaşadığın her günün değerini bileceksin. Bugün ben diyorum ki keşke babamın çevresindeki hayatım olsa. Sonra ne kadar çalışsan da ne bileyim yani sorumlu değilsin, serbestsin, özgürsün. Seni kimseye ezdirmezler.”

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

As I learnt more about the life and work experiences of the women workers that I had the chance to meet during my visits to the Gazi neighborhood; sociological categories, such as “inequality,” “patriarchy,” or “exploitation” that are used to explain women workers’ experiences in many studies mostly proved insufficient to evoke and understand the multilayered meanings and emotions that are crucial for the lived experiences of women workers. Rather than allowing such categories to lead me in my attempt to understand women garment workers’ experiences, I tried to follow the stories of the women. Each meeting with these women posed new theoretical and conceptual challenges to my existing analytical framework. Most of the time, these challenges remained incomprehensible to me until I read and re-read the transcripts of interviews before writing. That is why I was so often too late to raise some issues and ask them to explicate these further to me during the interviews.

At the beginning of my fieldwork I had no particular interest in the bodily experiences or work-related illnesses of those women. Unfortunately only towards the end of my fieldwork did I realize that there was no story which did not touch upon the bodily consequences of work they are engaged in. If I had realized it before, I could have asked them to tell me more about their bodily experiences including work related incidents and illnesses. Moreover, if I had been able to do longer participant observation in those sweatshops, my understanding of their working experience could have deepened from the beginning of my research. But the difficulty of entering such places except during lunch breaks, and my existing networks in the neighborhood which allowed me to access women garment workers

more easily outside shop floors, combined so that I did not search for ways of entering and staying in workshops for longer hours. However, even my brief visits to these work places which each time made me feel dizzy due to the heavy smell, dust and dirt, were an important experience for me to understand the assaults of capitalist work on the body. But it was the women's stories that made me aware of the indispensability of the bodily dimension for manual work. As I read the transcriptions of the interviews, I gradually understood that the women had told me their entrance into working life and the predicaments of manual work first and foremost in terms of their consequences for their bodies, like exhaustion, injuries, accidents, maiming, deformation or dirtiness etc. This is how I decided to form my first chapter. I wanted to focus on what working manually literally means for these women in terms of its bodily consequences, and what kind of analytical space we can open for this dimension in working class studies. For this purpose, I made use of a number of literatures that I thought would be useful to understand embodied aspects of work: the phenomenological literature on "embodiment," the studies on working-class memory, and medical anthropological works on the experiences of bodily suffering and the way how bodily suffering/illness is given meaning by the sufferers and how these processes are mediated by one's class position in the society.

In short, the second chapter investigates work as an embodied/physical experience using a set of analytical tools. I divided the rest of the thesis according to two main issues that stamped all the interviews: the first one is the question of the formation of "working-class identity", and the second the role of gender both in the formation of the subjectivities of women workers and during the production. After writing these chapters I realized that it is actually the wider understanding of the

notion of body that ties these chapters to each other. As concluding remarks here I want to suggest the importance of material and representational, individual and collective aspects of the body for working-class studies.

In the third chapter I mainly asked how flexible employment relations and leveling consequences of capitalist work materialize at the level of workshops, how they influence the relations among workers, and between workers and employers. Following classical working-class studies, I looked at how the identities of working people are constructed during those encounters, and I was also interested in seeing how other extra-work dynamics inform inter-personal relations at workplace level. I also claimed that despite the changing structure of production; the notions of respect, recognition and dignity still give an important insight into the processes in which people give meaning to their work and their status as working people. In garment workplaces where the possibility of collective bargaining is almost totally absent, especially given the high turn-over rate of employees, and the pervasiveness of informal employment; inter-personal encounters are the only viable space in which workers negotiate their resentment due to the harsh working conditions. It is through these emotion-laden encounters that the women try to carve some space to save their “self-respect” and “dignity” at work. However, the way they negotiate their resentment depends on many other factors: their domestic responsibilities, their bargaining power and skill level, and their life-prospects. In other words, tracking various structures of feeling that characterize various encounters at garment workplaces, I inquired into how living at the intersection of a set of hierarchical relations is experienced through interpersonal relations and how these experiences are mediated and alive with a contradictory set of emotions. Rather than asking questions regarding the existence of “working-class consciousness” or the

“resistance” or “submission” of workers, I attempted to shed some light on the infra-politics of emotions through which workers position themselves in relation to each other at the workplace, and develop some overt and covert tactics to counter the dehumanizing, and destructive consequences of work.

The fourth chapter aims to look at the gender dimension in the production. I suggested that not only the sexual division of labor or unequal pay, but also the gendered atmosphere of the work place is indispensable for the creation of a gendered and docile workforce. For this purpose I inquired into how public representations of women garment workers and various gendered discourses and practices become effective at the workplace, and how these inform the relations among workers. Following various ethnographies on women workers in global factories, I argued that gender-related issues such as familial idioms, the female body, and sexual harassment should be seen as part and parcel of the production process rather than as an ingredient. I also argued that women’s responses to these processes are extremely complicated in that in many cases women’s subversive conduct might mean the acknowledgement of gender hierarchy in a larger context, say, by invoking some patriarchal notions and practices to relieve their burden at the workplace. On the other hand for some women, their breadwinner status provides them with power at home and empowers them in the face of patriarchal domestic roles. Here I tried to emphasize not only the processes in which various gender norms are incorporated into production to guarantee a docile and an efficient workforce, but also the dynamic process in which women workers themselves internalize, consciously deploy or reject those norms to produce with various purposes. Rather than labeling the experiences of women as one or the other form of resistance or submission, I again suggested that we should look at the various

material and discursive limits and restraints informing the way women take on particular agency during different encounters.

I think the underlying attempt of these three chapters is to conceive subjectivity as an embodied process. The notion of the body enables us to reflect upon the material and representational; individual and collective aspects of working experience, without necessarily positioning them as opposites to each other. Thus, rather than solely looking at the representational or discursive aspects of the narratives of women, I also tried to look at, first, material environment that inform those narratives, second, how women and various communities in which they live represent and imagine working women, and third, how those representations become part and parcel of the production process in such a way as to determine the way women respond to harsh working conditions. At the level of workplace, both collective and individual body are subjected to various disciplinary schemas, however, women's experiences of their body at work as women and as workers cannot be reduced to the consequences of those disciplinary schemas. To try to understand capitalist work through its embodied and lived aspects provides us with a critical vantage point through which various emotional and bodily injuries caused by capitalist work become apparent.

We so often hear the voices of the representatives of textile and garment employers' associations through newspapers and television. They raise complaints regarding the tariffs and interest rates and how they barely survive under the conditions of competition against China and some East European countries. Though in many cases it is not possible to talk about a unitary voice of employers, different sections of employers are able to raise different demands in the public sphere. What is disappointing in this picture is the total silencing of workers' voices. The most

recent example of this is the situation of sand-blasting workers. Many who had worked in these garment shop floors are waiting for their death. They keep writing letters, trying to form solidarity networks to make the public aware of the conditions that they were forced to work in, to demand some social security for their families, and to bring to court the responsible employers. However, most of their attempts produced no effective result. This extreme example shows how workers are denied their most basic rights to live. Physicians' tardiness to detect the fact that the illnesses of those workers are directly related to their jobs, and the unwillingness of government officials to improve the health and safety conditions in those workplaces, and the silence about the daily sufferings of those workers contribute to the daily violations of even the basic human right to live. The attempt to consider the stories of women workers as tactile manifestations of the destructive consequences of capitalist work and patriarchal gender norms helps us to see the interplay of multiple structural forces in the daily lives of women. In short, to try to understand the experiences of women workers through the notion of the lived body enables us to see on the one hand how various hierarchical disciplinary mechanisms become effective and work through the body, and on the other how women experience, give meaning and respond to the most intimate and tangible consequences of these mechanisms.

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