

RECONSTRUCTING THE EXPERIENCES OF LOWER CLASS WOMEN IN
URBAN TURKEY DURING WORLD WAR II

by

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“Reconstructing the Experience of Lower Class Women in Urban Turkey during the World War II,” a thesis prepared by Esra Sarıođlu in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree at the Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History.

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An abstract of the Thesis of Esra Sariođlu for the degree of Master of Arts from the Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History to be taken September 2004

Title: “Reconstructing the Experience of Lower Class Women in Urban Turkey during the World War II”

This thesis explores the work experiences and social lives of the lower class working women within World War II years in urban Turkey. The years of war witnessed almost doubling of the women workers in big cities. Labor relations were also reorganized so as to meet the demands of the war. This study reconstructs the work experience of women in the context where the work, family, and domestic duties conjointly relate. In this way, it is possible to show the work experience of the women shaped by the interconnected relations of the public and private spheres and the discrepancy between the government’s legal arrangements of labor relations and work experiences of the women workers. Moreover, the laborious efforts of women in domestic realm, which was devalued in market terms, are shown to be vital for the survival and gaining subsistence in the face of grinding poverty of the period.

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Esra Sarıođlu tarafından Eylül 2004'te teslim edilen tezin kısa özeti

**Başlık: II. Dünya Savaşı Dönemi Kent Türkiye'sinde Yaşayan Alt Sınıf
Kadınların Deneyimleri**

Bu tez, İkinci Dünya Savaşı Türkiye'sinde, kentlerde çalışan alt sınıf kadınların iş deneyimlerini ve sosyal hayatlarını araştırma amacındadır. Savaş yıllarında kadın işçi sayısı büyük şehirlerde yaklaşık iki kat oranında artmıştır. Savaş koşullarının Türkiye'deki etkisine mutabık olarak, çalışma ilişkileri de hükümet tarafından düzenlenmiştir. Bu çalışma kadınların iş deneyimini; iş pratikleri, aile ve ev içi emeğinin kesiştiği bir noktadan referansla inşaa etmektedir. Bu hatta ilerleyen bir çalışma, bir yandan, kadınların çalışma deneyimlerinin kamusal alan ve özel alan arasındaki organik bağ ve karşılıklı ilişki doğrultusunda çizildiğini gösterirken, diğer yandan da, hükümetin emek politikaları ile kadınların çalışma deneyimleri arasındaki derin açığı sergiler. Ayrıca, "ev içi" emeği olarak adlandırılan ve market değerlerine göre bir karşılığı bulunmadığı için görünmez kılınan kadın emeğinin, savaş döneminin yoksulluğu ve kıtlığı ile başa çıkmadaki canalıcı rolünü açıklamak da de bu tezin bir diğer önemli parçasını oluşturmaktadır.

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PREFACE

This thesis aims at delineating the work conditions and social lives of the lower class women workers during World War II. The epistemological linchpin of this undertaking draws back the criticism of the modernization theory voiced by both Marxist labor history and gender studies. British Marxist Historians' emphasis on the historical aspects of the class formation, which comprehends it as a form of human relationship and experiences shaped the route of this study. Secondly, women labor studies that emphasize the interrelatedness of work, family and domestic duties in the study of female labor that developed on the basis of the criticism of the separation of the public and private sphere helped the construction of the experience of women workers.

The primary sources used in this thesis are the archives of the Sümerbank Bakırköy Textile Factory, interviews with two women workers of the period, Ayşe Zaimoğlu and Mediha Özçelik, memoir of Zehra Kosova, also a worker within the war years, Republic of Turkey *Düstur* (Turkish Republic Book of Laws) so as to uncover laws and judicial arrangements, and periodicals of the war time period.

The archives of the Sümerbank Bakırköy textile factory, which was the most important public enterprise wherein most women worked, reveal the work practices

of women workers in many aspects such as work policies, discipline mechanisms, wages, social policies, punishments and women's social lives. The interviews and memoirs are made use of both reconstructing the work conditions and the mechanisms that the women developed so as to cope with the poverty of the period. Düsturs put forward the legal arrangements of labor relations and economic policies of the period. Periodicals and journals both give clues on the workers' work conditions and lives, and the public discourses constructed around the issues of labor relations, poverty and lower class women.

Introductory part of this study delineates the epistemological linchpin of this undertaking, voiced by British Marxist Historian and gender studies.

The impact of World War II on the economic and social life of the Turkey is discussed in the first chapter. How the war was financed by the government and how the labor relations were reorganized so as to meet the demands of the war time is explored in this part. The legal framework of the labor relations, gendered legislations, and laws addressing the purview of women workers are delineated in this part.

The second part aims at reconstructing the work experiences of women workers in the period. Women workers have been studied under the categories of the public sector, private sector, and day laborers. The ways and motivations of women's participation of labor-force, their definitions and practices of work, their wages, the social policies they were supplied with, the disciplinary mechanism shaping their work conditions, the strategies they employed in relation to employers, coping with poverty and duty of domestic tasks, and how all these practiced in relation to collective gender identities which were produced and reproduced by women's experience of work and home in conjoined manner will be the focus of this part. The

public discourse that was constructed in relation to the women worker's lives as a part of social question to meet the demands of women is discussed.

The last chapter explores various aspects of lower classes social lives such as the exclusionary practices they experienced and the survival strategies they devised to overcome the scarcity and poverty of the period. In the exploration of these strategies, the practices of social reproduction that was conducted by women are uncovered so as to manifest the significance of social reproduction practices in dealing with the poverty and scarcity of the period.

This thesis directed to the reconstruction of women workers' experience within the period of World War II is built upon the premises of British Marxist historians and gender studies. The criticism of modernization theory trespassing both labor and some parts of gender studies sheds light the route of this undertaking. Studying the experience of women workers in this perspective both reveals how the public sphere and the private sphere are interconnected with each other ultimately and how the laborious of women transcending the public and private separation, is vital within the process of gaining subsistence in the war-time period.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:

SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON GENDER AND LABOR

Developments in feminist scholarship have transposed gender as an analytical category from the marginality of scholarship into the spotlight of historical inquiry. The various processes of economic, social, political and cultural transformations that had been in the focus of historical inquiry have been subjected to critical scrutiny via reconsidering these transformations through the lens of gender. All these studies of gender, demonstrated the constitutive role of gender in the formation of the totality of social practices and institutions. One prominent research area for gender studies relates to women's labor by which gender studies intersects labor history or working class history, which also clings to public vs. private sphere debate.

This study in its broadest sense undertakes exploring the conditions of lower class women working within the period of the World War II in urban Turkey through the lens of gender. The variety of theoretical frameworks and concepts that have been elaborated resulting from the gender study and labor history are drawn back as the sources that yield in the theoretical backbone of this study. In order to locate the route of this research it is important to elucidate some significant concepts and perspectives concerning labor and gender in their historical contexts.

The 1970s witnessed both the rise of gender studies and the new labor history. The pioneering work of E. P. Thomson challenged the orthodox labor history, which stressed the idea of economic determinism in accounting for the class consciousness and denied the role of agency in the making of the working class. His pioneering work, *The Making of English Working Class* criticized the history writing that views the working class created out of the means of production.

Thompson proposed that class is a historical phenomenon “that happens and can be shown to have happened in human relationships”.¹ According to Thompson, class, which is a historical phenomenon, is ultimately a phenomenon that is embodied in human relationships. He therefore emphasized the crucial role of experience in the making of class. In relation to this, “class can be uncovered via the search of human beings’ class experiences which is largely determined by productive relations into which men are born- or enter involuntary... class consciousness is on the other hand, the way in which this experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value systems, ideas and institutional forms.” as Thompson maintains.²

Arif Dirlik interpreted the illuminating perspective of *The Making* as a culturalist work within the context of Marxist epistemology that has been inspired by Gramsci’s critique of hegemony. Thus, the class experience and consciousness of working people that are amalgam of production relations, cultural forms of traditions and various values are shown to be central to the establishment of society with all of its institutions. Therefore the uncovering of the working class’ experiences via

¹ Harvey Kaye J, *The British Marxist Historians*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995. pp. 172-75.

² *Ibid.*, pp.175-80.

locating it at the center, historical process accompanies with a decentering process of ruling, hegemonic classes and their claims on history, as Arif Dirlik argued.³

The new labor history that is inspired by Thompson's work has shifted its focus towards the various experiences of working classes which produced a new understanding about collective action that encompasses the exploration of democratic and socialist movements and their ideologies, working class culture including work place relations, religion, sociability, leisure, religion, family and household.⁴

The new labor history has also fostered new possibilities for studies of women workers. Since the new labor history, by stressing workers' experiences that are in informal positions of power and studying workers within the context of community, there emerged the possibility of the study of women as family members and as workers which in turn contributed to the scholarly legitimate development of women's labor history as a realm of research.⁵

However, the early efforts in women's labor history can be labeled as "contribution" or "compensatory" history. This resulted from a basic theoretical presumption that captured the labor history. Studies of the labor history conventionally addressed the history of working men and their work. Male workers' experience of work, politics and various aspects of life dominated these studies that overshadowed the experience of women. Furthermore, working class historians

³ Arif Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism*. Colorado: Westview Press, 1997. pp. 32-6.

⁴ Laura Frader and Sonya O. Rose, "Introduction: Gender and the Reconstruction of European Working-Class History. In *Gender and Class in Modern Europe*, edited by Laura Frader and Sonya O. Rose, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996. p.2.

⁵ Ava Baron, *Work Engendered: Toward a New history of American Labor*. Ithaca and London : Cornell University Press, 1991. p.4.

subsumed women's experiences under men's, by which way the contest and conflict between men and women within family, community and workplace tended to be invisible. These studies usually studied family, community and workplace in sexually undifferentiated manner.⁶ Women studies therefore directed its effort towards "combating androcentric bias" within the social science studies via documenting and criticizing the absence of women as agents of history and studies written from male perspective, as Kandiyoti informed.⁷ Furthermore, labor historians pointed out the gender-biased construction and usage of concepts such as market, wage, skill and class in labor history studies.⁸

The women studies also referred differently located situations of men and women in family, community and etc. that in turn effectively shaped their diverse experiences of these practices and institutions. As Carrol Smith Rosenberg elucidates men and women experience, use and conceive of the family, religion, and work, public and private differently. The factory, for example, imposed distinctive burdens and offered divergent opportunities for men and women.⁹

This led to the emergence of a new agenda for women studies. In order to overcome marginal or compensatory role of the women studies that resulted from the gender-biased conceptual categories and assumptions about women, researchers

⁶ Ava Baron, Ibid. p.6, Scott, Joan. "Women's history." In *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, edited by Peter Burke, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991. p.50.

⁷ Deniz Kandiyoti, "Contemporary Feminist Scholarship and Middle East Studies". In *Gendering the Middle East. Emerging Perspectives*, Edited by Deniz Kandiyoti, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996. p.6.

⁸ Laura Frader and Sonya O. Rose, Ibid. 6., Laura, Frader. "Dissent Over Discourse: Labor history, Gender and the Linguistic Turn" *History and Theory*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Oct. 1995) p.217.

⁹ Daphne Spain, "Gendered Spaces and Women's Status" *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Jul., 1993) p.140.

reconsidered and elaborated concepts and frameworks that undermined the conventional history which viewed women as primarily wives, mothers, daughters and characterized them as transient members of labor force.¹⁰

Gender as a social relationship and as a category for social and historical analysis was elaborated and employed by researchers so as to include various aspects of human society, culture and relationships.¹¹ Gender initially has been conceptualized by the American feminists as one of the crucial dimensions of social organization beside class, race, and ethnicity.¹² The term primarily denoted the rejection of biological determinism in the employment of the conceptions of sex and sexual difference. In contrast to biological determinism, gender refers to socially constructed and historically dynamic relationships within society, cultural practices and meanings, and identities through which biological sexual difference become socially significant. Gender is conceived, on the other hand, not as structurally determined but as the outcome of women's and men's actions under historically specific conditions.¹³ What gender crucially characterizes is the systematic and social shaping of identities of men and women in the historical context, by rejecting their being individual characteristics that have resulted from biology or nature. In addition, gender which is constructed and reconstructed interactionally is institutionalized in

¹⁰ Kathleen Canning, "Gender and the Politics of Class Formation: Rethinking German Labor History," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 97, No 3 (Jun., 1992), p.740.

¹¹ Deniz Kandiyoti, *ibid.* p.8.

¹² Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis." In *Gender and the Politics of History*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998. p.29.

¹³ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Gender, Class and Power: Some Theoretical Considerations" *The History Teacher*, Vol. 15, No 2 (Feb., 1982), pp. 258. Laura Frader, *Ibid.* pp. 223., Kay Deaux and Mary. E. Kite., "Thinking About Gender" In *Analyzing Gender: A Handbook of Social Science Research*, edited by Beth Hess and Myra Max Ferre, London: Sage Publications, 1987. p.98.

families, schools, politics, culture and ideology the labor market and workplace.¹⁴ Therefore, the history of these institutions and the practices within these institutions is relevant to the history of gender in a significant sense.

In conjunction with this, gender is distinguished from the women's history in the sense that, it is built upon the assumption that women and men together created the totality of social life as agents of history and therefore any knowledge concerning women should be informative of men or vice versa. That is to say that the study of women implies the study of other as men. Conceptualization and employment of gender in such a way has a significant implication. It undermines the conventional idea of separate spheres which are defined in relation to each sex namely public and private spheres.¹⁵ By stressing the relation between socially constructed sexes crucial to gender, public and private dichotomy are shown to be transcended via the lens of gender. This idea has had many implications for the study of women's labor which would be explicated in a detailed way within my undertaking.

The employment of gender as signifying social characteristics that is a fundamental element of social relations remains impervious in explaining why these relationships are constructed as they are how they operate, promote change, and conserve the social order as it is. That is to say that, gender as a descriptive category or a subject of analysis cannot account for the subordination of women, production and reproduction of social hierarchies of gender in social life. Liberal, radical and socialist feminists dealt with the issue of the subordination of women via explaining

¹⁴ Josephine Donovan, *Feminist Teori*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1992. pp. 130-40. Alice, Kessler-Harris. *Out to Work : A History of Wage Earning Women in the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1982.

¹⁵ Joan Scott, *Ibid.* pp. 32.

it in relation to legal issues, the capitalist mode of production or patriarchy which was conceived as a universal system of male domination perpetuating the oppression of women as a group through the control of their sexuality and procreative capacity.¹⁶ This hot debate among various feminists produced fruitful results concerning gender studies. The term gender widened its scope so as to include the power relationships and was used to account for social hierarchies in relation to sexual difference by incorporating these debates. In this perspective, social institutions, practices, economic processes and cultural forms are conceived as the sites of power relations and political processes through which gender hierarchies are both created and contested. Families, educational institutions, the law, the market, the state, and the military contributed and are shaped by gender that produce sometimes contradictory effects rather than determined forms.¹⁷

One of the elusive conceptualizations of gender, including power relations especially incorporating the implications of linguistic turn¹⁸ is put forward by Joan Scott.¹⁹ The concept of power she employs rejects the notion of social power which is centralized, unified, and coherent and engrosses Michel Foucault's notion of power as dispersed constellations of unequal relationships, discursively constituted in social fields of force.²⁰ By incorporating power relations within the concept of

¹⁶ Gülnur Savran and Nesrin Tura, "Önsöz", In *Kadının Görünmeyen Emeği: Maddeci Bir Feminizm Üzerine*, edited by Gülnur Savran, Nesrin Tura, İstanbul, Kardelen Yayınları, 1992. pp. 10-7. Deniz Kandiyoti, *ibid.* p.9.

¹⁷ Deniz Kandiyoti, *ibid.* pp. 17.

¹⁸ Linguistic turn can be comprehended as a paradigm that emerged by the 1980 that alleges roughly the idea that social life could be more understandable by uncovering the cultural and symbolic forms. The scholars of Linguistic Turn emphasized the role of linguistic structures and normative symbols and cultural forms rather than the economic structure in the analysis of social life.

¹⁹ Joan Scott, *ibid.* p.38.

²⁰ Gary Gutting, "Michel Foucault: A User's Manula." In *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, edited by Gary Gutting, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. pp.20-2.

gender, the term denotes relationships of power that resulted from sexual difference in the production and reproduction of social life both materially and symbolically and gender becomes the lens through which the analysis of social institutions, cultural practices, and politics is realized. Cultural forms or normative concepts that operate in social life expressed in arenas of religion, education, politics, and work are subjected to a critical scrutiny by revealing out their gendered character. Furthermore, the practices and discourses of social life are shown to be historically and socially constructed. What is more is that all institutions, cultural practices and identities are shown to be shaped by the contests among living men and women as all of them being the actors of history.

Women's labor historians aroused new critical questions in examining gender and the work within the light of these intellectual developments. They explored the ways how the sexual difference is defined and manipulated concerning women labor. Moreover, they searched how sexual difference is articulated and incorporated into the structure of the work and into the strategies of employers and workers and of various groups of men and women.

Various labor historians presumed men's participation in the labor force as given while treated women as transient members of labor force. This resulted from an epistemological perspective that defines each sex with different a social sphere, as mentioned above. The notion of men's and women's separate spheres of paid work and domesticity led to the definition and exploration of women's experiences confined in private realm and men's experiences in public realm that imposed each sex some assumed behaviors, values, and activities. Women's labor historians demonstrated the existence of women in public sphere worked for wages and were

active in the labor struggles.²¹ In this way, they were able to view women not as passive victims of capitalism or patriarchy but as active agents who shape the work life. The nature of women's work and the sexual division of labor were the starting point for their analysis which involved the critique of separate spheres.

The public sphere was born out of liberal political theory as a realm of democratic participation, citizenship and public opinion. It was conceived as a realm in which market and political relations developed and articulated and in which autonomous individuals behaved as rational political economic actors. However, this account of public sphere is subjected to critical scrutiny by referring to the power relations embedded in the construction and conservation of public sphere. Public sphere is demonstrated to be not as a uniform arena but a realm of contested meanings and practices wherein different and conflicted groups struggled for the space and claim. Therefore, public sphere that is inclusive of economic, political, social and cultural forms of power is shaped by the exclusion of some groups such as women, working class, subordinate nationalities and etc.²²

One of the criticisms of public sphere and public-private dichotomy comes from women studies on the basis of the claim that the construction of public sphere is gendered. Scholars criticized this dichotomy, which identifies male activity with the public sphere of politics and the market, and female activity and femininity with the private, domestic sphere of the household and reproduction. For them, public sphere discourse arose on the basis of an idealized assumption of feminine private domain

²¹ Kathleen Canning, *ibid.* pp.750-60.

²² Geoff Eley, "Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century." In *Habermas and the Public Space*, edited by Craig Calhoun, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996, pp. 330-3.

as the essential support for male activity in the public world and as a panacea for the disturbances of capitalism. Therefore, private sphere and the activities of women defined in private sphere devalued as a secondary arena of social relations.²³

Numerous feminist historians and researches have directed their attention towards the sexual division of labor that defines and imposes certain activities and values to each sex both in household and work place. Subordination of women then was explained via the sexual division of labor that entraps women into the private sphere wherein labor of women was devalued and made invisible.²⁴ This issue was intensely debated within the frame of “domestic labor debate” in the 1970s by various feminists. Scholars criticized the sexual division of labor since it devalues women’s household labor because of assuming it “unproductive” in terms of the market. Karl Marx had distinguished the unproductive labor from the productive labor, which constituted the key mechanism for the operations of capitalism. He elaborated the productive labor, as which yielded a profit that could be invested in further capital, creating yet more profit. Marx’s distinction is additionally supported by Engel’s distinction between ‘the production of the means of existence ... and the production of human beings themselves’.²⁵ This distinction went hand in hand with public-private dichotomy in relation to separation of the family and work ahistorically. In order to overcome this gendered distinction, scholars have shown the necessity and usefulness of domestic labor to capitalism or patriarchy.²⁶ They also widened the scope of the notion of social production so as to put forward the

²³ Laura Frader and Sonya O. Rose. *Ibid.* p.12.

²⁴ Gülnur Savran and Nesrin Tura, *Ibid.* p.30.

²⁵ *Marxist Düşünce Sözlüğü*, edited by Tom Bottomore, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2001. pp. 610-2.

²⁶ Christine Delphy, *Baş Düşman: Patriyarkanın Ekonomi Politikası*. İstanbul: Saf Yayıncılık. 1999. pp.50-5.

significance of domestic labor by attempting to transcend the public-private sphere dichotomy.

The feminist usage of social reproduction refers to the activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, responsibilities and relationships that directly involved in the maintenance of life on a daily basis.²⁷ The notion is comprised of the activities of making food, housing, care, and socialization of children and social organization of sexuality. Social reproduction thus is conceptualized as inclusive of various kind of mental, manual and emotional work so as to provide the socially and historically defined as care necessary to maintain the existing life and to reproduce the next generation. In this usage of social reproduction, it involves more than production as Marxist theory defined it. Furthermore, feminist usage of the concept analyzes the production and reproduction of gender inequalities. The employment of the concept in such a way that is to say that conceiving it as a “work” allows the argument that unpaid domestic labor converts wages into means of subsistence. Furthermore, scholars via the notion of social production referred to the potentiality of domestic labor to transform into profit-making production by the development of capitalism such as the food industry, cleaning of homes and care of children at the expense of wages under the category of service systems.²⁸ In addition, scholars managed to show the economically, politically and ideologically shifting boundaries of public and private sphere in relation to gender.

²⁷ Barbara Lasset and Joanna Brenner, “Gender and Social Reproduction: Historical Perspectives,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 15 (1989), p. 382.

²⁸ Susan Thistle, “*The Trouble with Modernity: Gender and the Remaking of Social Theory*”, *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 18, No.2 (Jul., 2000), p. 288.

Scholars' attention to the private sphere revealed the fact that the household and family is rather than being uniform units of social organization are the sites of conflict, contestation, and politics.²⁹ In addition to gender division of labor in the household, families are shown to be the places of socialization and politicization wherein class and gender identities are produced and reproduced.³⁰ These arguments strongly demonstrated that the public and private realms are not independent or autonomous from each other but are shaped politically in relation to each other.

All these theoretical discussions concerning the division of labor, public-private dichotomy and the household led to arise of new perspectives concerning women labor and women workers. Initially, the unionist perspective that explores the conditions of women workers in terms of wage raise, rates of employment and social security began to dismantle. Gender as constituted through people's lived experience brought about redefinition and new perspectives of analysis of social activities and institutions of work. Gender is understood to be integral to production not outside of it. The categories of class, skill, market and wages are shown to be gender-biased through the exploration of production process by which the occupational structure is itself created. The exploration of the production and reproduction of gender hierarchies within the work process are made by demonstrating that gender is not a set of ideas developed separately from economic structure but built into the social relations of work.³¹ On the other hand, it was clarified in Thompson's *The Making* that the class experience and the class consciousness is a far more complex issue than

²⁹ Saniye Dedeođlu, "Toplumsal cinsiyet Rollerini Açısından Türkiye'de Aile ve Kadın Emegi" *Toplum ve Bilim* Güz, 2000. p. 145.

³⁰ Kathleen Canning, *ibid.* p. 758.

³¹ Ava Baron, *Ibid.* p.30.

orthodox Marxists proposed which claims the shaping of class consciousness largely by the production relations in its economic sense. Women studies scholars demonstrated that class experience were more complex than 'a shared consciousness of shared socio-economic position and it was shaped gender relations of that social order. What is more, the implication of this is the shifting boundaries of public and private spheres. Via a critical scrutiny of this dichotomy, scholars revealed the political fabric of the private sphere and the shaping of the public sphere in a direct relation with activities, norms and hierarchies of private sphere. This framework had an enormous impact on women's labor historians and the direction of their undertakings. Using the notion of gender, in exploring work and its various experiences, and struggles between workers and employers over the practices and meaning of work, scholars showed that both sexes contested over the practices of work relations by constructing definitions of masculinity and femininity via the interrelated practices of both public and private spheres.³²

Work identities focused on the multiple meanings that women and men derived from their experience of work. Central to this exploration of identities, as mentioned was the assumption that the work identities were embedded in, but not determined by, the structure of production. The comprehensive conception of work identity revealed in the ways in which workers sought to position themselves within and sometimes to distance themselves from the constraints of production. The importance of workplace in this process of identity construction as the location of individual and collective self-definition vis-a-vis employers, the state and other workers, implied shifting boundaries of work place experience and family or community. In this perspective, work identities were inclusive of an exploration of

³² Ava Baron, *ibid.* p.40.

the way identities were shaped by the continual intersections of family and work, public and private spheres.

Apart from the simultaneity of work place and household experiences in shaping the work identities, scholars explored the political activities through the lens of gender by dislocating politics from the realm of public sphere and discourse, and relocating these activities within the context of interrelated arena of the public and private spheres that challenged the conventional notion of formal politics. They uncovered the political fabric of the private sphere of consumption, reproduction and neighborhood networks for the reproduction of both gender inequalities and resistance to these inequalities. Canning, for example noted the importance of neighborhood networks, solidarity of female friendship, leisure time activities and even the clothing styles for women's enduring poverty and creating manners of resistance to factory male workers and employers. Furthermore, scholars stressed the role of motherhood and marriage as constitutive of women's work identities and political behavior.³³ In conjunction with these, family and household are shown to be a site of politicization and socialization wherein the sexual division of labor and class consciousness produced and reproduced and transmitted to the next generations.

The critical approach of women's labor historians that was developed along with these crucial questions, conceptualizing frameworks of work and politics in relation to gender, showed gender's crucial role in any analysis of the work and the economy. The inquiries conducted by women labor scholars showed that an integrated labor history requires transcending of the separation of the public and private spheres in order to

³³ Kathleen Canning, *ibid.* p.768.

incorporate analyses of the family, consumption, and social reproduction in discussing socio-economic structure and class relations.

My thesis addresses, in its general sense, the social, economic and political conditions of lower class working women in urban Turkey in the period of World War II. It draws back illuminating perspectives, critical questions, and theoretical frameworks that the gender studies elaborated.

As argued by scholars, war years in general bring about radical shifts in economies, politics and cultures of societies. With the upheaval of World War II, the countries that entered the war experienced radical transformations concerning the totality of social life. These transformations went hand in hand with the shifting of employment and experience patterns of the female workers and discourses about women's work. The phenomena of "feminization of social life" including increasing participation of women to the work force and public place activities emerged within the context of World War II. First, the boundaries between female and male works dismantled as thousands of male workers left for the military conscription and many women were transferred to the previously male sectors of occupations. The British, for example, adopted compulsory registration of women in order to solve the problem of increasing labor shortage that had resulted from war conditions. Women were conscripted into industry, administration, and the armed forces. The governments mobilized various resources to appropriate female labor for the conservation and reproduction of socio-economic order. They implemented social security policies in order to guarantee the women's participation into work force. The press allying with government encouraged 'public romances' supporting the recruitment of women to labor-force which idealized the women who worked in various occupations and found fulfillment and the admiration of desirable

men in performing such important work for the nation. They changed the conventional discourse of irreconcilable tensions between marriage and job to display how married women worked successfully by combining both family and labor responsibilities.³⁴ Then, as wartime economy became increasingly dependent on women, the state employers, factory inspectors and local officials joined to acknowledge the new discourse of women. Women's work was no longer 'secondary or detrimental to the family, to men's wages or to masculine work identities. It was imbued, at least for war period, with the esteem that had otherwise been reserved for skilled male labor. In a nutshell, war time conditions forced so many men to depart from their families, jobs, and unions and led women to participate in various parts of social life.³⁵

The Turkish State remained neutral in World War II, in the light of destructive impacts of the World War I on the Ottoman Empire. However, Turkey's socio-economic conditions were trapped within the disastrous effects of the war. The state-initiated development programs, social policies, economic and social investments were sharply interrupted by the war time austerities. Turkish economy of the war time period was characterized by the war time profiteering of informal traders, black market, and increasing unemployment that went hand in hand with poverty.³⁶ Government alarmed that the war time economy was widening its scope and implemented policies to deal with profiteering and poverty such as 'National Emergency Law of 1940' and 'Wealth Tax of 1942'.

³⁴ Marilyn Boxer and Jean H. Quataert, "Women in the Era of the Interventionist State: 1890 to the Present." In *Connecting Spheres: European Women in a Globalizing World, 1500 to the Present*, edited by Marilyn J. Boxer and Jean h. Quataert, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. pp. 248-50.

³⁵ Kathleen Canning, *ibid.* pp.765-6.

³⁶ Korkut Boratav, *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi: 1908-1985*. İstanbul. Gerçek Yayınevi, 1995. pp.64-8.

During the war, the number of women workers nearly doubled in big cities³⁷ As Ahmet Makal argues the official number of women workers was 56.930 of which reported number ignores many of working women since these reports are documented by the work places that registered to the bureaus of work ministry that failed to uncover large part of work places and workers.³⁸

My undertaking of the conditions of lower class working women in urban Turkey in the period of World War II aims at reconstructing the women's experience. Their behaviors and practices vis-à-vis the state, employers and males within both workplace and family-community will also be explored. First, the integration of women to work force will be studied within the context of the war. How and why women recruited to labor-force, how they were located within the job structure, in what way gender was constructed within policies and discourses of government of the war time period to trace the changes and continuities in the construction of gender practices and norms that imply the reproduction or transposition of discourses and policies concerning the gender inequalities, women, and the work practices in urban Turkey will be explored.

The connection between the construction of gender in the war time and the experience of women is the main focus of this study. The exploration of women's experiences is inspired by feminist scholars' critique of separate spheres that aims at transcending public private dichotomy to analyze gender inequality in a comprehensive manner. This perspective challenges the 'modernization theory' that alleges the separation of work and home in relation to the development of the public and private

³⁷ Celal Dinçer, "Kadın İşçilerimiz, Kreş ve Çocuk Yuvası İhtiyacımız", *Çalışma Dergisi*, Vol. 8, Temmuz 1946, p. 28.

³⁸ Ahmet Makal, *Türkiye'de Tek partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri: 1920-1946*. Ankara, *İmge Yayınları*, 1999. p. 310.

spheres distinctively as an essential and universal marker of modernization and blooming of it in its fullest sense.³⁹ The political fabric of private sphere that is to say the importance and implications of practices that has been identified with household 'work' such as cooking, child care, sewing, and washing will be analyzed in relation to the feminist usage of social reproduction. It conceives domestic labor as waged labor which is converted into means of subsistence for reproduction of social life that shapes and is shaped by gender hierarchies. This study incorporates the role of this activity as a mechanism for women in dealing with the war time poverty. To elucidate this point, women's informal networks of solidarity among community, neighborhood, and relationships with relatives will be analyzed as sites wherein the collective gender identities are produced that either produce challenging practices to gender hierarchies or reproducing consent to the conservation of gender inequalities while women coping with poverty. In this way, multiply constructed gender identities will be connected to the experience of the women either to challenge hegemonic discourse on women or to deconstruct the existing discourses.

The simultaneity of work and home in the construction of gender identities will be taken into consideration to reveal women's experience of work. The ways and motivations of women's participation of labor-force, their definitions and practices of work, the strategies they employ in relation to employers and male workers and how all these practiced in relation to collective gender identities which were produced and reproduced by women's experience of work and home in conjoined manner. In this way, the activities of women conjoins the work and home will be an inquiry aims at focusing on the role of women in the social construction of division of labor which is an arena of

³⁹ Kathleen Brown, "Brave New Worlds: Women's and Gender History" *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., Vol. 50, No. 2, *Early American History: Its Past and Future* (Apr., 1993) pp.315-7.

social conflict, of which outcome shapes the political, ideological, and economic contours of the society as a whole. That is to say that, how women's practices influence the complex relationship between public and private spheres as allegedly gendered domains of human activity that was articulated and rearticulated with the economic shifts and changes in social and cultural practices that took within the context of the World War II in urban Turkey is the ultimate focus of this study.

This perspective may also concern the articulation of informal politics wherein the formal politics of left had been largely banned by the government of the period. In relation to this, the shifts in division of labor and job structure may affect patriarchal power, as Susan Thistle argued.⁴⁰ Men may have lost the secure base upon which patriarchal power was built by the shifts in division of labor. Their privileges then rests on gradational difference sustained in scattered sited through the remnants of old social networks and cultural practices. This makes the emphasis upon the multiple and fragmented sites of power, perception of culture and discourse as key arenas for the exercise and preservation of privilege.⁴¹ Viewing women's experiences and collective identities on the basis of this perspective may open the ways how difference between masculinity and femininity constructed in both workplace and home via various agents including state, women, men and employers that yield in power relations either to produce gender hierarchies or to resist them.

Reconstructing the experiences of the women workers in the war time period could be useful for the comprehension and formulation of the present conditions of the women workers. It was forbidden that women workers could be made to work more than

⁴⁰ Susan Thistle, *ibid.* p. 284.

⁴¹ Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital" in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by John G. Richardson. New York: Greenwood Press. p.245.

7.5 hours at night shifts on 9 August 2004. The implementation of this law foresees that women workers will be supplied with the transportation facilities at night shifts. Moreover, it was disallowed that pregnant women could not be made to work at night shifts.⁴² This meant that women workers have been left alone in the face of the problems resulting from the working at night shifts, transportation and pregnancy, till now. Moreover, women workers still suffer from reconciling domestic duties with work conditions. At this point, the reconstruction of the experience of the women workers of the war time period whose problems mostly shared by contemporary women workers may help gaining insights in the formulation of alternative ways for the lives of contemporary women workers.



⁴² Birgün, 10 August 2004.

CHAPTER 2

THE IMPACT OF THE WAR: THE REORGANIZATION OF ECONOMY AND LABOR POWER

The aim of this chapter is to explore the impacts of the World War II on the economy and social life of Turkey. Although Turkish Republic did not participate actively into the war, it was exposed to the austere conditions that the war inflicted social lives of the people in diverse countries. The government organized the economy in terms of the tenets of the war economy that required the increasing of production, a strictly planned system of distribution, and the increasing labor power. The first part of this chapter surveys how the war was financed by the mobilization of new sources of economy including taxes, increment in prices, and loans. The second part explores how labor relations were reorganized in the terms of the war economy. The legal organizations of the work practices, the reformulation of the labor power, the increasing recruitment of women into the labor pool, and the gendered aspects of the labor legislations will be delineated in this part. In order to make the contours of the labor relations of the war time balanced, the labor policies and legislations of the 1930s when the labor relations were first organized comprehensively, will be explored.

Financing the War: The Economic Policies of the Government in the Organization of Capital and Labor in World War II

“We take it for granted that modern warfare involves all citizens and mobilizes most of them; that is waged with armaments which require

a diversion of the entire economy to produce them and which are used in unimaginable quantities; that it produces untold destruction and utterly dominates and transforms the life of the countries involved in it. Yet all these phenomena belong to the wars only of the 20th Century.”⁴³

When the World War II broke out hovering on the Turkish political horizon, Turkey was one of the few countries that able to stay out of the conflict, thanks to the state elite's efforts. Although the Turkish state did not participate actively in the war, it felt the devastating effects on the economic and social life. "İnönü left us alone in starvation, but did not let us become orphaned" was a characteristic expression of the period among the people.⁴⁴ Because military expenditures took up the 'lion's share' in national budget throughout the period, the war economy, with its harsh conditions, imposed itself on society. Along with this, 5.9 percent of the total populations of seventeen million were conscripted to the army.⁴⁵ The conscription created a visible void in the prevailing labor pool that acted as a factor leading partly to the decrease of nearly fifty percent in agricultural production. The closing of international trade lines hampered imports to Turkey. Moreover, the state-initiated planning programs and the industrial investments that had begun in the 1930s suddenly stopped due to the war economy. All these caused production to plummet and the state's revenues to be diminished radically.

⁴³ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Exteremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*, London, Abacus, 1995. p.30.

⁴⁴ “İnönü bizi aç bıraktı ama öksüz bırakmadı.”, Interview, Ayşe Zaimoğlu, June 2004. . Some who supported İnönü since favored this expression; it was believed that he prevented Turkey’s participation to the war. Opponents of İnönü, on the other hand, favored the expression that İsmet came, so vanished the hope. “Geldi İsmet, kesildi kısmet.”

⁴⁵ Şeyhmus Güzel, “Capital and Labor during World War II” in *Workers and the Working Class in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic: 1839-1950* ed. by Donald Quataert, Eric Jan Zürcher, London, New York, Tauris Academic Studies in Association with the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, 1995. p.101.

The conditions of the war economy that brought about the increase of expenditures in the state's budget could not be compensated for since the government was also devoid of new resources. One significant shortcoming of the war economy was the sharply increasing inflation. Apart from the public expenditures, decreases in agricultural production and the narrowing of import sector accelerated the increase of inflation. According to the wholesale product price index of the Economy Ministry, prices increased by 500 percent between the 1938 and 1943.⁴⁶ Following this, war years exacerbated the sharpening of class differences: the grinding poverty of lower classes and was contrasted with traders, importers, big landowners and bureaucrats who made great profits as war-time profiteers.

Traders, especially the ones involved in foreign trade took advantage of the war inflation for enormous profits. Since the government did not adapt the foreign currency in terms of inflation and did not control the prices efficiently, importers profitted enormously due to the cheapness of currency relative to the prices in Turkey. Industrial establishments especially the state-initiated ones, were also among those that enjoyed huge profits throughout the war. The big landowners who produced for the market, on the other hand, expanded their profits when the government lifted its control over the prices of agricultural products in 1942.⁴⁷

The middle and lower classes, on the other hand, found themselves in varying degrees of scarcity, poverty and misery in the face of the sharply rising inflation and the black market in this period. Even the wages of the military and civil bureaucrats that constituted the upper scale were hard hit by the inflation. Small state officials, small producers, peasants and workers experienced severe poverty and shouldered

⁴⁶ Yahya Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi İktisat Tarihi, 1923-1950*, İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1994. pp.255-58.

⁴⁷ Yakup Kepenek and Nurhan Yentürk, *Türkiye Ekonomisi*, İstanbul: Remzi Press, 1996, p.45.

the costs of the war period. The most obvious effect of the war on those people was the huge decrease in their wages. Throughout the war, most of the workers did not receive any increases in their wages though the inflation was nearly 500 percent.⁴⁸ Unemployment, poverty, scarcity, and the harsh struggle to merely survive characterized the social life of the lower classes in this period. The workers' constant mentioning of the war as "times of scarcity" but not as war years indicates their conditions and conceptualizations of the war.⁴⁹ Peasants and small producers as well were exposed to exploitive price policies. While the government paid constant prices for agricultural products, all other prices increased parallel to the rate of inflation.⁵⁰ The high rate of inflation, the narrowing of production, the huge decrease in wages that went hand in hand with scarcity of products, poverty and the black market, along with the sharpening of the class differences, compelled the government to take the necessary measures. Generally speaking, these measures did not lead to radical transformations. Since the government proved unable to increase the level of the production or stop inflation, the measures operated only to blunt the partial effects of war on social and economic life.

When the war broke out Refik Saydam was in power in the government which urgently implemented the National Emergency Law, dated on 18 January 1940, to counterweight the backlash of the war and reorganizes the economy in tandem with the basic necessities of war. According to the law, the government was charged with the responsibility and power of reorganizing the economic process in cases of general or partial mobilization, war, and in cases of national emergency

⁴⁸ Ibid, pp.47-49.

⁴⁹ Interview, Ayşe Zaimoğlu, June 2004.

⁵⁰ Çağlar Keyder, *Türkiye 'de Devlet ve Sınıflar*, İstanbul: İletişim Press, 1999, p.129.

where a war was being fought between states of immediate concern to the Turkish Republic.⁵¹ The law provided the government with extraordinary powers to organize the economic life of the country. Along with this, the Martial Law that had been put effect in the big cities restricted the rights of organization and protests, along with restrictions on the press.⁵² In that sense, the Martial Law operated as auspices to monitor the social life in tandem with the National Economy Law. As Taner Timur writes:

In depicting the socio-political aspects of life in Turkey during the war years, emphasis has to be placed upon one law, namely, the National Emergency Law. Even the developments of post-war period bear, directly or indirectly, imprint of the manner in which this law was put into effect.⁵³

The law entailed the government confiscating temporarily factories, mines and private establishments as well as, determining the quantities of production of private industrial establishments and controlling their investment plans. Furthermore, the import and export of the products was put in the total control of the government. The prices of products in the national market were to be ascertained by the government as well. In accordance with these, the government established new organizations. The Trade Office, for example, was to monitor the export, import and internal trade of sustenance and basic consumer goods with the power of determining and controlling their prices. In this way, wheat, cotton, sugar etc were piled by the state underpaying them.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Şeyhmus Güzel, "Capital and Labor during World War II" in *Workers and the Working Class in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic: 1839-1950* edited by Donald Quataert, Eric Jan Zürcher, London, New York, Tauris Academic Studies in Association with the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, 1995. p.106.

⁵² Ibid. p.105.

⁵³ Taner Timur, *Türk Devrimi ve Sonrası: 1919-1946*, Ankara, Doğan Press, p.82.

⁵⁴ Yahya Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi İktisat Tarihi, 1923-1950*, İstanbul : Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1994, p.260.

In relation to these, the government to overcome the scarcity of goods, aimed at substituting the market mechanisms of distribution with a rationing system. The allotments of basic consumer goods such as bread, flour, sugar, coal, and cloth were sold cheaply with ration cards. The Provisioning Office, (İaşe Ofisi) that was established in 1942, worked in connection with local unions, and operated the organization of the process.⁵⁵

On the other hand, the government reorganized work relations to adapt workers and their conditions to the war economy and the premises of the National Emergency Law (*Milli Koruma Kanunu*). First of all, Labor code of 1936 was de facto abolished. The National Emergency Law specified the obligation of all citizens to do paid overtime work in industrial and mining firms. Some of the workers who were included in this law were mandatory workers, whose work was organized as an alternative to military conscription, so they were not free to leave their jobs.⁵⁶ In other sectors, too, workers were obliged to work 3 hours of overtime each day. Furthermore, the prisoners, children and women were put to work both to fill the gap in the labor pool due to the military conscription and to supply enough products for the war economy.⁵⁷ Workers whose rights were curtailed by the Law also had to give up their weekends.

Nevertheless all these measures taken by the government failed to obviate the backlash of the war. The provisioning of the military and of the people who lived especially in cities was hardly conducted. The rationing system in cities led to scenes

⁵⁵ Korkut Boratav, *Türkiye'nin İktisadi Tarih: 1908- 1980*, İstanbul, Gerçek Yayıncılık, 1996, p. 66.

⁵⁶ Erol Çatma, *Asker İşçiler*, İstanbul: Ceylan Yayıncılık, 1998, p.13.

⁵⁷ Şeyhmus Güzel, "Capital and Labor during World War II" in *Workers and the Working Class in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic: 1839-1950* ed. by Donald Quataert, Eric Jan Zürcher, London, New York, Tauris Academic Studies in Association with the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, 1995. p. 130.

of crowds desperately seeking foods in long queues in the streets. The scarcity of foods, which resulted partially from the misconduct of the government, led to the blazing up of black market conditions alongside wartime profiteering. The prevailing black market on the one hand accelerated the grinding poverty of the lower classes and, on the other hand, accelerated the activities of the wartime profiteers. While the traders and big land owners were under suspicion for war time profiteering, bureaucrats of the period also enjoyed high amounts of profits by utilizing the extraordinary power vested in the government via the National Emergency Law.⁵⁸ The outcry against war time profiteering at last was reflected in the Assembly in 1942 by İnönü:

“There is a chaotic atmosphere of trade, and enormously expensive prices with no logical reason... The old land owner who supposes this chaotic time as the great opportunity for profiteering and the trader who could sell even the air we breathe as commodity... They try to destroy the life of a great nation arrogantly... We must not let any of the groups to steal the wealth of our nation in the pretext of the free trade.”⁵⁹

1942 also marked a change in the economic policies of the government. When Şükrü Saracoğlu came to power, the economy was organized in tandem with "liberal" market rules that aimed at stabilizing economy in harmony with market forces. The state's control over agricultural production decreased. The government allowed sustenance goods to be freely traded, and prices to flow in harmony with the market, which, in turn made the prices increased sharply. Moreover, some mechanisms of the distribution of goods such as the Provisioning Office were

⁵⁸ Yahya Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi*, İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2000, p.261.

⁵⁹ “Şuursuz bir ticaret havası, haklı sebepleri çok aşan bir pahalılık belası... Bulanık zamanı bir daha ele geçmez fırsat sayan eski çiftlik ağası, ve elinden gelse teneffüs ettiğimiz havayı ticaret metaarı yapmaya yeltenen gözü doymaz vurguncu tüccar... büyük bir milletin hayatına küstah bir surette kundak koymaya çalışmaktadırlar... Ticaretin ve iktisadi faaliyetin serbestliğini bahane ederek millieti soyamak hakkını hiç kimseye, hiç bir zümreye tanımamalıyız.” Ibid. p.261.

abolished. Nonetheless, this new policy made a boomerang effect on economy by sharply raising the prices and profiteering. Most of the traders applauded the new decisions of the government and declared that it was a revolution.⁶⁰ The Government again was to take extraordinary measures.

So came the infamous “Wealth Tax” (*Varlık Vergisi*) of 1942. Officials explained that it was to counterweight the wartime profiteering. Nevertheless, sixty-five percent of the tax was taken from minority traders, which clarifies its ethnic character. Moreover, ostensibly it served to reconstruct the justice against the public outcry in the face of sharpening class differences. As Ayhan Aktar writes, the tax was especially directed towards those who were known for their luxury consumption.⁶¹ The “Soil Products Office Tax” (*Toprak Mahsülleri Vergisi*), on the other hand, included agricultural producers and their products and this tax exacerbated the conditions of the small producers and peasants.

Throughout the period, the government financed the war economy in the context of the National Emergency Law. The law supplied the government with extraordinary powers to organize and monitor the economy. Military and public expenditures, the provisioning of the cities, the planned provisioning and distribution of goods to overcome the scarcity and poverty of war-time obliged the government to find resources. Taxes played a significant role in the financing of the war economy. In addition, loans were among the policies to create financial resource. Following this, the sources of the Central Bank were used along side foreign debts.⁶² Apart from that, the extraordinary increment laws were, four times in fact accelerated

⁶⁰ Tan Newspaper, 3 August 1942.

⁶¹ Ayhan Aktar, *Varlık Vergisi ve Türkleştirme Politikaları*, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2000, p.76.

⁶² Nevin Coşar, “II. Dünya Savaşı Sonrasında Mali Yaklaşımlar (1945-1950)” *Toplumsal Tarih*, September, 1998, pp. 48-50.

inflation. When, in 1942, the provisioning of the country was at risk in the face of high inflation and scarcity of goods, liberal economic policies were put into effect as a panacea. Notwithstanding this, the new policy accelerated the inflationist process obliging the government to take some precautions finalized with the implementation of extraordinary taxes, namely the Wealth Tax and the Soil Products Tax Law. The revenue of these taxes supplied the government with a significant resource to finance the economy during the austerity of the war economy.⁶³ All the measures, however, had little to obviate the wartime poverty and scarcity. This resulted from the same economic policies in such a way that, the government that had monitored the economic process and handled the total national income let transfer of increasing public revenues not to develop public investments, but to expand commercial private sector. One significant sign of this was the usage of public revenues for capital transfers.⁶⁴ Those individuals who made use of these policies of the period constituted wartime profiteers as the second generation of bourgeoisie after World War I. None of the prerogatives that some traders made use of were on the agenda concerning waged-labor. In the context of the National Emergency Law, workers were exposed to mandatory, over-time work, at extremely low wages, barely with few social rights, struggling for their subsistence in the face of war as the ones who were socially excluded.

Organizing the Labor Power and the Work Experience beyond It: Planned Industrialization to the War Economy

“The monster of 20th Century total war was not born full-sized. Nevertheless, from 1914 on those were unmistakably mass wars.

⁶³ Ibid, p.50.

⁶⁴ Yakup Kepenek and Nurhan Yentürk, *Türkiye Ekonomisi*, İstanbul: Remzi Yayınları, 1996, p. 58.

Even in the First World War, Britain mobilized 12 per cent of its men for the forces, ...We may note in passing that such a level of mobilization, lasting for a matter of years, cannot be maintained except by a modern high productive industrialized economy and- or alternatively- an economy largely in the hands of the non-combatant parts of the population. Traditionally, agrarian economy cannot usually modernized so large in proportion of their labor-force except seasonally at least in the temperate zone, for there are times in the agricultural year when all hands are needed (for instance to get in the harvest). Even in the industrial societies, so great a men power mobilization puts enormous strains on the labor force, which is why modern mass wars both strengthened the powers of organized labor and produced a revolution in the employment of women outside the household- temporarily in World War I and permanently in the World War II.”⁶⁵

As mentioned above, the Turkish Republic was one of the few countries that stayed out of the war. Nevertheless, the social and economic life of the country displayed the austere conditions of a war economy. The provisioning of the people and military was vital for the government, which organized the economy in tenets of the war. Production that required strict monitoring of labor power was reorganized within the context of the National Emergency Law. Before that, work relations had been the issue of the Labor Code of 1936, which was all but put on the shelf through the war years. An inspection of work relations in 1930s gives an insight into labor policies of war years, since the war years were the compact and accelerated version of the 1930s in terms of capital accumulation and labor-power, as Çağlar Keyder argues.⁶⁶

After the Great Depression in 1929, the government directed its economic policies towards what was called “*etatism*” to preclude the side effects of the depression on Turkey. *Etatism* evoked the organization of the economy in terms of

⁶⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*, London, Abacus, 1995, p.30.

⁶⁶ Çağlar Keyder, *Türkiye’de Devlet ve Sınıflar*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1999, p. 132.

capital accumulation by the organic alliance of the state elite and the bourgeoisie. One of the vital mechanisms for capital accumulation was, of course, the strict control over labor-power. Social life, on the other hand, was aimed to be organized within the context of corporatism. The appeal of corporatism, on the other hand, brought a projection of Turkey as a united mass without privileges or classes, instead of a conflicted class structure of a capitalist society. This idea presumed that the conflicts among solidarist groups could be resolved via a neutral state standing above society.⁶⁷ *Etatist* policies, moreover, were justified by the ideology of “national independence”. It was in fact one of the basic economic policies that had been inherited from “Young Turk” period. It postulated that national independence enjoined economic independence, which was possible via the expansion of a “national bourgeoisie”. This, on the basis of industrialization, would bring about capital accumulation.⁶⁸

By the time the Great Depression revealed its effects on the global scale, Turkey as an exporter of agricultural goods and raw materials was badly exposed to the disadvantageous new terms of trade. The panacea for this was formulated in the context of *etatism* that entailed protective and import substitution policies implemented and conducted directly by the state to industrialize quickly.⁶⁹ By 1932, a new decade of statist economic policies came forth and a five-year development plan was embraced. According to the plan, the state would initiate, finance and monitor the industrial establishments and their investments. Moreover, the public

⁶⁷ Feroz Ahmad, “Development of Class Consciousness in Republican Turkey”, in *Workers and the Working Class in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic: 1839-1950* edited by Donald Quataert, Eric Jan Zürcher, London, New York, Tauris Academic Studies in Association with the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, 1995. p.65.

⁶⁸ Yahya Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi*, İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2000, p.255.

⁶⁹ Feroz Ahmad, *ibid*, p.72.

sector would provide low cost raw materials for the development of the private sector, along side creating new realms for investment and sharing the market with the private sector.⁷⁰ The financing of the industrialization process depended upon some basic sources, one of which was the tax on consumer goods. Others were foreign credits and the control of labor power.⁷¹

Textile, mining, paper, chemical industry, cement were the sectors included by the five-year industrialization plan. Following the plan, factories were established throughout the country. The increasing pace of industrialization impelled the government to recruit women, children and peasants into the market to meet the growing need for labor. Peasants had already been driven into the labor market by the time; the price of agricultural goods had fallen down due to the depression. They entered the labor market to supplement their incomes. As Feroz Ahmad writes, the Kayseri Factory that was opened in 1935 employed 4,500 workers during the construction phase. The coalmines in Zonguldak recruited 10,000 peasants, who came from as far away as Erzurum and Gümüşhane. Those workers kept in contact with their villages, to supplement their wages.⁷²

During this decade, the government aimed at organizing work relations via legislative mechanisms. Before that time, there existed no comprehensive law concerning work relations. There were some particular laws such as 1921 “Weekend Law”, 1935 Law for National and General Holidays and 1930 Law for Public Health. Moreover, 1926 Penal Code strictly banned labor organizations and movements. The

⁷⁰ *Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi*, Ankara: Kütür Bakanlığı, İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1996, vol: 2, pp.1767-9.

⁷¹ Yakup Kepenek and Nurhan Yentürk, *Türkiye Ekonomisi*, İstanbul: Remzi Yayınları, 1996, p. 61.

⁷² Feroz, Ahmad, “Development of Class Consciousness in Republican Turkey“, in *Workers and the Working Class in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic: 1839-1950* edited by Donald Quataert, Eric Jan Zürcher, London, New York, Tauris Academic Studies in Association with the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, 1995. p.92.

1938 Law of Associations put forward the illegality of class-based organizations and hindered workers from engaging political activities.

The formulation of a general framework of labor relations was done with the 1936 Labor Code that had aimed at covering various aspects of work relations, so as to include individual contracts, conflicts of work, strikes and lockouts, the regulation of working conditions and the formation of administrative and consulting bodies. Though the Labor Code displayed an authoritative character over the issue of the collective organization of workers, it involved protectionist clauses for individual workers. The first part of the Labor Code delineated the individual work contracts and wages so as to secure workers' rights. The second part of it, organized work hours and ascertained that 48 hours of work was proper for a week together with outlining the conditions of night work and break times. Following these, Part 3 put forward articles concerning the care of workers' health and work security. For this, employers were obliged to take the necessary measures and acquire the equipment to keep the health and security of their workers. Part 6, envisioned the establishment of an office that would monitor the proper operation of the clauses of the Labor Law in work places. The seventh part of the law dealt with the issue of social aid. Work-related accidents and sicknesses, aging, motherhood, and deaths were specified as situations in which the necessary aid would be given to workers by their employers, in tandem with the rules determined by the state. This part also assured that each worker should be included in an insurance system, which the "Workers Insurance Office" (*İşçi Sigorta Ofisi*) would conduct.⁷³ However, the insurance system was not implemented as late as 1946.

⁷³ Republic of Turkey Düstur, 3th Tertip, vol. 17, pp:1146-1203.

In addition to procure social aid in case of pregnancy and motherhood, some articles were specified for the purview of women workers in the Labor Code. One of them addressed birth leave. According to the 25th Article of Part 2, women were provided a three week leave before they gave birth and also three more for the post-birth. During these six weeks, women received half pay. When necessary, for health reasons, this leave could be extended from six weeks to twelve weeks.⁷⁴ Women having a spout had breaks during work-hours that would not lead to a deduction in their wages, according to Article 40. Furthermore, the Code classified the sectors in which women could not be made to work. Article 49 stated that the mining sector, the sewer system, tunnel reconstruction and other such sectors women were banned to work. Article 50 banned women from working at night in industry. However, the same article maintained that if it was necessary for economic reasons, the Economy Ministry could allow women over the age of 16 working at nights and specify their conditions of work.⁷⁵

The articles that addressed the classification of sectors that women could work were inclusive of children; that is to say that the working conditions of women and children were mostly designated under the same heading. This classification of course carried an untold mode of gender division of labor. At first sight, it seemed that it was positive that women were forbidden to work in these sectors, considering their physical capacity. However, the kind of classification based on physical strength had some other implications. The work conditions in the sectors, from which women and children were excluded, were presumed as heavy labor. In the following years of the war, heavy workers were granted some privileges of food in the provisioning system. Since all the work that women and children did automatically

⁷⁴ Republic of Turkey Düstur, 3th Tertip, vol. 17, p.1155.

⁷⁵ Ibid, pp.1163-67.

remained out of this classification of heavy labor, they were not able to take part in some measures promulgated of the heavy laborers. Moreover, the classification of women and children under the same heading reflects the family division of labor, which hierarchically locates woman and children jointly, and ultimately the man as the head of the family.

Apart from the protectionist articles concerning workers, the law bolstered the intense control over the labor power. Labor rights were barely recognized in the sense that the free organization of trade unions was not permitted and instead, a system of workers' delegates and an officially controlled system of arbitration were put into effect. Articles 72, 73, and 75 strictly banned strikes and contained clauses against strikes. Article 73, for example, pointed out that even the action of three workers was considered a strike if that action caused the impediment of the production process partially or totally⁷⁶. Articles 127 and 128 stipulated the conditions of fines and imprisonments via maintaining the right of the employer to abolish the labor contract. In that sense, the Labor Code that aimed at organizing work relations in harmony with capital and labor manifested the government effort to bring labor relations under its control.⁷⁷

One significant problem that pertained to the Labor Code was its scope of work places. In accord with Article 2, the code was inclusive of work places that had at least ten employees. This enumeration was far from capturing the workers of Turkey since the working population was mostly scattered in small workshops. The 1927 industrial census showed that seventy-nine percent of all enterprises employed fewer than four workers and ninety percent of the enterprises employed five workers

⁷⁶ Ibid, pp. 1177-78.

⁷⁷ Ibid, pp.1200-01.

or less. So, the Labor Code did not encompass 98.7 percent of the work places and sixty-seven percent of the workers. Furthermore, a large proportion of these workers consisted of women and children.⁷⁸ In addition, the sectors of agriculture, marine, and navigation along with the domestic workshops were excluded by the code. As Makal argues, textile and carpet weaving employed mostly women and children, who were consequently excluded by the code. Given the conditions, most employers oriented their work towards domestic workshops so as to escape the obligations of the Labor Code.⁷⁹

The state initiated investments established in line with the five-year industrialization plan, and adopted the Labor Code alongside the others. The textile factories that had been established starting from 1935 by Sümerbank throughout the country, in addition to, steel, mining and sugar factories adopted the social policies and more in tandem with tenets of the code. The employees of these workplaces made use of facilities such as relatively high wages, food opportunities for free, residence facilities, health services alongside education and social security facilities. At this point, Makal points out the role of the social policies as a mechanism of social control of the government over the labor power in addition to their advantages for workers. Makal argues that by the time the industrialization process was accelerated by the adoption of a five-year plan, there had appeared labor scarcity that was a result of the agricultural mode of production in Turkey's economy. Though some of the peasants were recruited into the labor market due to the Great Depression, along with women and children, the rate of the industrial work force did not meet the demand of labor force in the industrial establishments. What is more,

⁷⁸ Ahmet Makal , *Türkiye'de Tek Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri: 1920-1945*, Ankara: İmge Yayınları, 1999, p.126.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p.395.

the turnover rates were visibly high, which endangered the stability of the rate of production. Social policies at this level operated as mechanism of recruiting the potential labor power, stabilizing its conduct and increasing its efficiency so as to achieve the envisioned project of industrialization.⁸⁰ The narrow scope of the code affected the minority of the working population, which indicated the low rate diffusion of social policies to the workers' lives.

The scenes of working people's conditions and social lives in the late 1930s manifested the discrepancy between the government's envision of organization of labor in accord with the Labor Code and the industrialization plan and the de facto conditions of the working people. Lütfi Erişci lamented that in spite of the acceleration and expansion of industry, stinging conditions and the lives of workers were not on the social agenda. Indeed, there prevailed a silence in the face of the severe conditions of the workers. He described the work conditions in the leather sector in İstanbul in which seventy-five percent of the leather sector were located. Leather workshops, which were mostly located in Yedikule district, were situated a stone's throw away from the houses. Each street, on which a workshop was located, was dogged with leather garbage, burst sewer system leaked into the streets, the smell of which diffused to the unwaveringly rotten stench that emanated from the work shops. This was a typical workers' neighborhood scene. Concerning the workers' conditions, half of the workers of the leather factories, some 500 persons were single men migrated from Anatolia to work. They dwelled in *medrese* around the workshops, sharing each room at least with three other workers. These ruined, shabby rooms contained only old, thin mattresses to lie on. Further, the rents of the rooms were as high as four and five liras, considering the daily wages of workers,

⁸⁰ Ahmet Makal, "Türkiye'nin Sanayileşme Sürecinde İşgücü Sorunu ve Sosyal Politika", *Toplum ve Bilim*, vol. 92, Spring 2002, pp. 45-50.

which were between fifty to sixty piasters, which had been diminished thirty percent during the 1930s. Erişçi also mentions that there were no doctors or pharmacies in the factories or even in the district.⁸¹

Working class families on the eve of World War II were also under great stress. The city of Istanbul, which was the heart of the economic life, was dominated by the family economy conducted in domestic workshops, namely in houses. Hüseyin Avni denotes the vitality of women's labor in domestic workshops in provisioning the subsistence of lower class families. Recounting the large proportion of women who had been weaving fishing nets and various kinds of textile by the output system, he indicates the low prices that the women earned for this work. For instance, women gained 5 piasters or so for weaning a hat or 15 piasters for a shirt or trousers.⁸² Most of the women worked in the textile, tobacco, leather and sheet making sectors earned the lowest prices in the market. Their labor was appropriated to their sex, imprinting the mark of the gender division of labor in the sense that women worked in the sectors that were presumed to have been the extension of their so-called domestic duties. The kind of work they did required detailed operations, constant and dull repetition and nimble hands that was attributed only to women.⁸³ Apart from that, work hours become undifferentiated with domestic duties by locating women at home. This brings about the blurring of the differences between domestic labor and waged labor that acts as a mechanism for the devaluation of women's labor, since the first one was not valued in terms of the market that also accounts for the low wages of women. Women in such work earned eight to ten liras

⁸¹ Lütfü Erişçi, "İstanbul'da Amele Mahalleleri" *Yeni Adam Dergisi*, 20 May 1937, vol.177, p.17.

⁸² Hüseyin Avni, "Aile geçimi hakkında Tetkikler" *Yeni Adam Dergisi*, 1937, vol.209, pp.4-5.

⁸³ Josephine Donovan, *Feminist Teori*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1996, p.67.

a month, while the men in factories earned twenty-five to thirty liras a month. Two mechanisms operated concerning domestic labor. On the one hand, women's labor was undervalued in the market due to the gender division of labor, and on the other hand, since their domestic labor and its extended practices of work in the market were undervalued, women's labor was ignored in comprehending the subsistence of lower class families at all. As Avni reports, there existed hundreds of families whose subsistence depended on picking up garbage, bones and rags from the coasts of İstanbul, an activity, which was conducted by the women and children of the household.⁸⁴

As has been mentioned, the textile sector recruited the most women workers, most of whom worked in domestic workshops. In addition to the austere conditions of work, the maintenance of their families and their health were badly affected due to the work. Avni describes the work conditions in Denizli domestic textile workshops, which were an important part of Turkey's textile production. Household members, especially women, worked in front of looms endlessly, both day and night, at home. The looms were half buried in the floor. So, too the workers were half buried to their waists into the ground and they conducted their work in that damp space. Since work places were undifferentiated from the living rooms and women had to care for their children, the children stayed next to women in their rooms. While the children were reported to be badly effected in their respiratory systems due to the dust and damp, the workers complained of sight disorders and rheumatism. In spite of the hard and overbearing conditions of work, the totality of the household gained two liras a week due to the domination of textile traders in the market.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Hüseyin Avni, "Aile geçimi hakkında Tetkikler" *Yeni Adam Dergisi*, 1937, vol.209, pp.4-5.

⁸⁵ Hüseyin Avni, "Denizli Tezgahlarındaki Çocuklar" *Yeni Adam Dergisi*, vol.183, 1 July 1937, p.4.

When the industrialization policies were implemented in the early 1930s, the legal formulation of labor relations was outlined by the Labor Code to monitor the labor power in an authoritarian manner. However, the code promulgated the rights of individual workers concerning wages, social security, and work conditions and so on. The execution of the Labor Code failed to diffuse the work relations because of its failure to include all workers. It was especially inclusive of state-initiated factories, largely excluding the working population. The exploitative working conditions and the dire straits of life dominated the working class' lives throughout the period. The exploration of work relations merely in terms of institutional and legislative terms in that sense fails to capture both the labor relations and the experiences of the working class. Especially working women's experiences and the role of their labor in social and economic life was almost hidden since their labor was devalued in the bifurcation of domestic labor and waged labor. Reconstructing the experiences of working people in diverse relations to the government's policies and implementations reveals the diversity of the economic and cultural conditions, power relations-inclusive of gender and ethnicity, modes of contestations and consents through which the modern working class come through in Turkey in the 1930s and 1940s.

By the time the World War II broke out, labor relations were adjusted to the terms of the war economy and working people, whom a proviso was sketchily described above, had to deal with the more rigid and severe conditions of work. Labor relations were organized according to the terms of the National Emergency Law, dated 18 January 1940, which led to de facto annulment of the Labor Code of 1936.

Following the fourth article of the National Emergency Law, a Coordination Committee that consisted of ministers and prime minister were established by the

reason of accommodating the totality of the economic process to the war economy, which was inclusive of military needs, provisioning, production and distribution. The committee implemented various policies in relation to determining the rate of production, the public and private sectors' investment plans, exports, imports, and the organization and work conditions of labor power.⁸⁶

One of the fundamental problems was to increase production so as to compensate for the needs of the war economy. So, the government decided to increase both work hours and the working population. Article 9 of the Emergency Law declared that the government would supply industrial, mining firms, and other work places with the necessary work force and specialists to increase the level of production and make the necessary adaptations in work hours in accordance with the level of production. The government gave itself the authority to compel its citizens to engage in mandatory waged work to execute the production process. By the execution of mandatory waged work and paid overtime work, the public and private sectors, which had been suffering from the high rate of workers turnovers, gained a regular supply of labor, which secured the foreseen rate of production by underpaying the cost of labor.⁸⁷

The Coordination Committee devised mandatory work as an alternative mechanism for the military conscription. Men, who had worked in the mining and industrial sectors previously, were able to defer their military conscription the condition that they began working in the mining and industrial sectors. This policy was at first favored by many people and they participated in the work force. Even some who had not worked in these sectors rushed to the factories to defer their military conscription. Nevertheless, the strict conditions of work in especially mining

⁸⁶ Republic of Turkey Düstur, 3th Tertip, vol.21, p.433.

⁸⁷ Ibid, vol. 21 pp. 433-40.

sector lessened the number of people in this sector. Mandatory workers, on the other hand, were exposed to these conditions since Article 10 banned their leaving the workplace without an acceptable pretext. The fourth and fifth clauses of Article 9 designated the punishments for mandatory workers who left their jobs without an acceptable pretext. According to the article, those workers who left their jobs in such a manner could be compelled to return their work and all the expenditure for the transfer of the workers were paid by the employer of the worker from whose wage these expenditures would be deducted by the time they returned to working.⁸⁸

The oppressive condition of the mandatory work became the subject of the novels of the period. İrfan Yalçın's "The Mouth of the Death" (*Ölümün Ağzı*), which describes the lives of the mandatory workers in the mines as a history of everlasting pain, depicts the long hours in the mines with little food, diseases, deaths, hunger, harassments by the gendarme, the escapes of workers, the poverty of workers' families.⁸⁹ Even the employment and rotation of the workers reflected the oppressive character of the mandatory work. Workers were abducted from their homes without any prior notice. Moreover, these workers were poorly paid, and improperly fed, and made to work nearly sixteen hours in the mines under the violent treatment of the gendarme. Of course, they were exposed to various diseases. For instance, in 1942, 112 workers of total 21,909 were dead and 2272 workers were temporarily unable work because of work related accidents and diseases in only the Zonguldak mines.⁹⁰ These conditions made the mandatory workers escape from the mines. Escape was the usual method for giving up the job. Nonetheless, the

⁸⁸ Ibid. pp. 435-41.

⁸⁹ İrfan Yalçın, *Ölümün Ağzı*, İstanbul, Ze Yayıncılık, 1979.

⁹⁰ Erol Çatma, *Asker İşçiler*, İstanbul: Ceylan Yayıncılık, 1998, p.132.

gendarme constantly tracked and captured them by attacking their villages and harassing their families.⁹¹ In addition to this strict law, the government implemented a law on 11 August 1944 that imposed imprisonment or fines for the offense of leaving work.⁹²

Another method for the regular supply of labor power was putting prisoners to work. Prisoners were in fact the most proper group of people for the demands of the government, since they had no choice of leaving work. In that sense, they were docile, and they accepted underpayment. After the Economy and Justice Ministries outlined the work conditions, more than one-third of 15,000 male and female prisoners began working in factories. Women were mostly employed in the textile sector, while men were in the mines, sewer system and reconstruction industries.⁹³

37th Article of the Law ordered the labor in agricultural production. Following this article, the government had each male citizen who was able to work in agricultural production to work no more than fifteen kilometers away from his residence. Women, on the other hand, could be put to work only within the boundaries of their residence. Furthermore, all farmers who had at least eight-hectare of land were to be forced to grow various crops in their lands.

In addition, the most common method for increasing production was the abolition of weekends and the extension of work hours in most of the sectors. Article 19 gave the authority to the government to extend the works hours at most three hours. For this overtime, workers would be paid twenty-five percent more for each

⁹¹ Ibid. p.140.

⁹² Seyhmus Güzel, "Capital and Labor during World War II" in *Workers and the Working Class in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic: 1839-1950* edited by Donald Quataert, Eric Jan Zürcher, London, New York, Tauris Academic Studies in Association with the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, 1995. p. 134.

⁹³ Tan Newspaper, 16 October 1942.

hour of over time work, which could be conducted at most ninety days within a year. The Law of Overtime Paid Work specified the conditions under which the extension of work hours was not possible. These were night work; work in mines and tunnels, and work that caused health problems. However, Article 9 declared that in the case of a mobilization or preparation for it, work hours could be extended parallel to the workers' capacity to work.⁹⁴ This ambiguous clause, moreover, increased the power of the government over the labor power. After the stipulation of the law, working hours became eleven hours in all enterprises during the totality of the year instead of ninety days of a year. Some of them, like mines even elongated their work hours to more than 11 hours. By the stipulation of these laws, the 50th Article of the Labor Code, which banned the working of women at night, was abolished. Women were also compelled to work eleven hours in the daytime alongside night work. Even circumstances of health or pregnancy were no longer considered excuses.

Women as well as children were highly important elements of the work force compensating the void in the labor pool resulting from the military conscription. As Lütü Erişçi notes:

“The rate of women and children were constantly increasing working in different enterprises. Thousands of prisoners were being rotated to factories. These were paid half less than their counterparts in different sectors.”⁹⁵

Women and children were presumed to be more docile and their labor was cheaper than that of their male counterparts. Especially after the de facto abrogation of the Labor Code, women were exposed to more vulnerable conditions of work under considerably increased rates of exploitation. During the war, the rate of women

⁹⁴ Ibid. Vol. 21-3. pp.433-442.

⁹⁵ “Çalışan kadın ve çocuk sayısı bir artış seyrediyor. Binlerce mahkum fabrikalara çalışmaya gönderiliyor. Mahkumlar, işçilerin yarısı kadar yevmiye alıyorlar.” taken from Erol Çatma, *Asker İşçiler*, İstanbul: Ceylan Yayıncılık, 1998, p.62.

workers increased twelve percent and in big cities where most of the industries were centered, this rate was nearly ninety percent.⁹⁶

New labor legislation of war years outlined the women's work force as a compensatory part of the labor force which would be made use of so as to reach the determined rate of production for financing the war economy and compensate for the void in the labor pool resulted from the military conscription. The sectors in which the women were employed diverged along the lines of gender division of labor. The work conditions of the women, on the other hand, were made harder by imposing them extra work hours. In the face of these conditions women experienced the problem of "double exploitation". In spite of their long hours and heavy conditions of work, they had to manage the childcare and other domestic duties. There existed only one kindergarten in İstanbul, leaving the work of childcare to women. Moreover, considering the scarcity of basic consumer goods, domestic duties required the labor of women. During this period, lower class women devised various mechanisms to deal with poverty, work conditions and domestic duties in the face of changing straits of life including family relations and work life.

Labor relations that was first organized within the context of the Labor Code of 1936 comprehensively, promoted a strict surveillance of the government over the work force. In the following years, when the World War II broke out, the government needed to increase the rate of production so as to finance the necessities of the war economy. Increasing the rate of production meant the increasing the working population with strict monitoring mechanisms of it. The implementation of the National Emergency Law in 1940 supplied the government with extraordinary

⁹⁶ Ahmet Makal, *Türkiye'de Tek Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri: 1920-1945*, Ankara: İmge Yayınları, 1999, p. 309. Celal Dinçer, "Kadın İşçilerimiz, Kreş ve Çocuk Yuvası İhtiyacımız" *Çalışma Dergisi*, vol.8, July 1946, p.28.

powers to reorganize the labor relations, which led to de facto annulment of the Labor Code. In order to extract more surpluses, the government implemented the policies of mandatory work, paid overtime work, and putting prisoners to work. These mechanisms aimed at financing the war economy acted as exploitive mechanisms over the working population.

Analysing the labor legislations through the lens of gender reveals two significant results operated through the work practices of women. First, gender division of labor entailed that women were employed in specific sectors wherein the form of women's labor in domestic realm was extended and appropriated for the work life. More clearly, the works that were purview of women were in fact extended versions of the forms of labor that were accomplished by women in the private realm. Moreover, this division of labor brought about some disadvantages for women. The equalization of women's work with a conception non-heavy labor prevented women's utilizing some social policies implemented through the war years. Second, since women's work conditions was made harder by these legislations and since no policy was implemented so as to help women's reconciling both the working and conducting the houseworks, women were harshly exposed to the so-called double-exploitation.

At this point, it is vital to reconstruct the women's work experience so as to reveal how the war time legislations operated on women's work practices, in what way gender gave way to hierarchical relations of work and how women reacted and appropriated the work practices and norms that were ascribed to them.

CHAPTER 3

WOMEN AS WORKERS

Wars and the Recruitment of Women into the Labor Pool

As Hobsbawm elucidates, on the one hand, mass mobilization and on the other, necessity to expand production to remedy the war's expenses, led to the magnification of labor-power. The non-combatants such as women and children were recruited into work force to increase the rate of production during the war years.⁹⁷ In Turkey, like all other countries, where social and economic life were menaced by the war, similar mechanisms were adopted to deal with the effects of the war on the economy. For instance, in the United States nineteen million women were employed in 1944, an increase of forty-four per cent over the March 1940 level.⁹⁸ One woman who worked throughout World War II in Turkey described women's conditions as follows:

“Before the war broke out, we were living together with my parents, three brothers and one of their wives and child. All three of

⁹⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Exteremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*, London, Abacus, 1995, pp.30.

⁹⁸ Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations and the Status of Women during World War II*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981, p.4.

my brothers were working in either agriculture or factories. By the time war stroke, my brothers were recruited to the military. We did not get any social aid. So we all began working with most of the women who were living in our neighborhood. We went to the nearest factory in our district for work.”⁹⁹

This mechanism for recruiting the non-combatant parts of the population had been resorted to in World War I, too. Since the Ottoman Empire was actively in the war, women’s recruitment into the labor pool was systematically organized. Unions were established to make women participate in the labor force, namely, “The Women Employment Islamic Union” (*Kadınları Çalıştırma Cemiyet-i İslamiyesi*), founded in 1916, “The Muslim Women Employment Union” (*İslam Kadınları Çalıştırma Cemiyeti*), in 1918, and “The First Women Worker Line” (*Kadın Birinci İşçi Taburu*) which was a part of the army, dated 1917.¹⁰⁰ These unions employed women in diverse sectors of the economy or army where labor-power was needed to increase production. The raise in the transfer of women into the labor force took place in the 1930s was like the previous one, during which time, the great depression and following state-initiated process of industrialization were accelerated. In addition, the haunting poverty of the period forced people seeking employment opportunities. When the prices of agricultural goods fell sharply due to the depression, peasants began moving to towns and searching for jobs in factories. People desperately seeking for jobs were a common subject of the newspapers:

“Hundreds of women and children are applying for jobs in a small textile workshop. Since there are many people applying for jobs and only small amount of source, employers pay very cheap wages

⁹⁹ “ Harpten önce annemler, abilerim, yengemler bir de onların çocuklarıyla birlikte oturuyorduk. Abimler ya tarlada ya da fabrikada çalışırdı. Harp olunca hepsi askere alındı. Biz yardım almadık savaşta. Biz yengemle fabrikaya girdik. Mahalledeki diğer kadınlar da geldi fabrikaya. Bizim oraya en yakın fabrikada çalışmaya başaldık işte.” Interview, Ayşe Zaimoğlu, June 2004.

¹⁰⁰ Meral Altındal, “Kadın Birinci İşçi Taburu Tarihiçesi” *Tarih ve Toplum*, vol. 72. 1999. pp.14-15. and Yavuz Selim Karakışla “Harp Mamulleri ve Şehit Kadın ve Çocukları Çalıştırma Cemiyeti” *Toplumsal Tarih* March 2002. p.20.

to workers. Moreover, workers work 11-12 hours a day. They usually have no weekends.”¹⁰¹

Sometimes, the huge crowds of applicants appeared in front of the work places were dispersed by the police. In 1931, it was reported that women who were waiting in front of the American Tobacco Factory for jobs, were scattered via the force by the police.¹⁰² Similar scenes would emerge during the war years, too.

In World War II, one million men, or 5.9 percent of the population, were conscripted to the army. Women and children were vital to fill the gap in the labor pool. 5.9 per cent was of course not so high in comparison to other countries that actively participated in war such as England and the United States. However, Turkey’s mere military expenses for one day were 1.5 million liras, a huge sum for an annual national budget of 487 million.¹⁰³ Moreover, to meet the needs of the military and provision the people, high rates of production were necessary in some basic sectors. Following this, Article 19 of the National Emergency Law specified the conditions of work and overtime paid work for women and children. It was detailed that women and children over twelve could be made to work in day and night shifts, in addition to three hours of overtime paid work. More women needed jobs since their husbands, brothers and fathers had been conscripted and the women had to support the family alone. The census of the Statistics Office of 1945 reported that there was an increase of 12.5 per cent in the rate of worker women and 250 percent of children and

¹⁰¹“Yüzlerce kadın yüzlerce çocuk, hepsi bu küçük atelyelerde işe girmek için bekliyor. İşe alınacakların sayısı çok az. Bu yüzden işyeri sahipleri çok az yevmiye bırakıyorlar. İşçiler on ile oniki saat arası çalışıyorlar. Haftasonları çoklukla tatil yapmıyorlar.”, Yüksel Akkaya, “1929 Bunalımı, İşsizlik ve Bir Kanun” *Toplumsal Tarih*, August 1999, p.49.

¹⁰² Ibid, p.48.

¹⁰³ Tan, 25-27 May 1940.

young workers from 1937 to 1943.¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, Celal Dinçer notes that the number of women workers doubled in big cities, where most of the enterprises were located during the war.¹⁰⁵

Reconstructing the experience of women workers sheds light on both labor history and gender studies in some aspects. First of all, designating the pretext for the recruitment of women, the sectors in which they were employed and the social policies and laws implemented for the purview of women reveal in which contexts the government conceptualized female labor. Furthermore, the examination of women's working conditions reveals how gender practices and conceptions operated in work life. As has been demonstrated, the gender division of labor imposed on women the domestic duties of childcare and housework in a reified manner. Exploring women's working conditions merely in terms of the hours spent in work place overshadows the network of material practices and power relations interwoven within the work life of women. Therefore, it is highly significant to explore women's working in relation to sex, family life and domestic labor to disclose the labor, power, consent and resistance of women workers within the context of World War II in Turkey.¹⁰⁶ In this undertaking, women workers are discussed within three categories that differentiate each experience from the other. These synthetic categories are namely, the public sector, the private sector and day laborers.

¹⁰⁴ Ahmet Makal, *Türkiye'de Tek Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri: 1920-1945*, Ankara: İmge Yayınları, 1999, p. 310.

¹⁰⁵ Celal Dinçer, "Kadın İşçilerimiz, Kreş ve Çocuk Yuvası İhtiyacımız" *Çalışma Dergisi*, vol.8, July 1946, p.28.

¹⁰⁶ Louise Tilly, Joan Scott, *Women, Work, and Family*, New York, Routledge Press, 1989, p.62.

Women as Workers

The aim of this part is ultimately to explicate the women's conditions of work in the context of World War II. Women workers are to be explored under three categories namely, the public sector workers, the private sector workers and day laborers. These synthetic categories of work are designed in relation to the diversity of work conditions, work hours, social policies and security of the work that were promised by these diverse enterprises. That is to say that, in relation to each, women's experience of work diverges. Nevertheless, the linchpin of this study depicts how women's experiences converge when the simultaneity of work and domestic labor is taken into consideration in unfolding the contours of women's workers lives and work conditions. In this perspective, work identities and practices that are inclusive of an exploration of the way identities and practices are shaped by the continual intersections of family and work, public and private spheres. Alongside this, how sexual identity is manipulated and incorporated into the work structure will be defined. The ways and motivations of women's participation of labor-force, their definitions and practices of work, their wages, the social policies they were supplied with, the disciplinary mechanisms shaping their work conditions, the strategies they employed in relation to employers, coping with poverty and duty of domestic tasks how all these practiced in relation to collective gender identities which were produced and reproduced by women's experience of work and home in conjoined manner will be the focus of this part. Over and above, terms and motivations of the public discourse that was constructed issuing from the lower class working women will be designated. The extent of public discourse that explored women workers' lives as a part of social

question to meet the demands of women will be uncovered. The emphasis on the experiences of women which is inspired by Thompson's and gender studies will both help to reconstruct how the working class remade itself via adapting to work conditions of the war years and how gender relations operated in and out of working class.

Working Women in the Public Sector

By the time the government declared that the war badly damaged the economic structure of Turkey and consequently began executing the National Emergency Law, the scarcity of basic consumer goods and inflation had already emerged.¹⁰⁷ Military expenses had the greatest share in the budget.¹⁰⁸ The government's main plan was to increase production alongside increases in taxes and foreign credits. In order to find resources to meet the demands of the war economy, of course, it was necessary to raise the rate of production. Following this, the government implemented laws to encourage production in specific sectors. For instance, it was decided that the Sümerbank textile factories would expand their rate of production¹⁰⁹ as would production in the mining, leather, tobacco, sugar and agricultural sectors.¹¹⁰ Enterprises were supplied with raw materials by the government. Old factories were put back into operation.¹¹¹ Apart from the technical innovations in factories; the increase of production required the recruitment of labor

¹⁰⁷ Tan, 22 February 1940.

¹⁰⁸ Tan, 1 March 1940.

¹⁰⁹ Tan, 23 March 1940.

¹¹⁰ Tan, 22 February 1940

¹¹¹ Tan, 4 February 1941

into the prevailing labor pool with strict work hours: three hours overtime and the abolition of weekends.

The government published declarations on the mobilization of production in the newspapers:

“All producers should maximize their rates of production. All workers on the other hand should maximize their labor to help this process. They should carefully operate their machines. All things should be used in an economical manner so as to increase our national wealth.”¹¹²

Gendered Employment

In this context, women participated in the workforce. They worked mostly in the textile, tobacco, glass, match making, dying, and rope weaving sectors that required “nimble hands” instead of physical strength.¹¹³ Working in the public sector was in some aspects advantageous for women due to the security of work and the partial social policies it supplied workers. However, many women did not have the opportunity to enter these factories. First, the poverty of the period made people rush to the factories, which had relatively limited job opportunities. Moreover, there operated some mechanisms for women in the process of employment. The factories of the public sector demanded some requests in the process of application such as police license, certificate of vaccination, and lastly a virtue report that was demanded only from women and that was issued by *muhtar*. This report was troublesome for many women since, when women were excluded from their district for any reason, such as

¹¹² “Üreticiler üretimlerini maksimum surette yükseltmelidirler. İşçiler ise bu göreve uygun çalışmalıdırlar. İş teçizatlarını bu dikkat dahilinde kullanmalıdırlar. Teçizatların tasarruf dahilinde kullanımı ulusal zenginliğimizin korunması demektir.” Tan, 19 April 1941.

¹¹³ Celal Dinçer, “Kadın İşçilerimiz , Kreş ve Çocuk Yuvası İhtiyacımız” *Çalışma Dergisi*, vol.8, July 1946, p.28.

being single, widowed, having lovers or being prostitute, it became impossible for them to get this license without which getting a job impossible. It was reported in *Tan* newspaper that one of the things that hindered women from finding jobs was the moral report. It was noted that women who were somehow excluded from their districts could not obtain this license, which meant that they were also not to get jobs.¹¹⁴ This mechanism operated on two levels. First, women who were not conceived of as normatively appropriate to the social roles of gender for some reason were excluded by that stigmata and, the social environments in which they took place via invalidation their right to work punished them. One young woman of thirteen years who gave up searching for work the in public sector lamented how degrading it was for a young woman to get that moral report.¹¹⁵

In addition to this, hunting for a job was in itself laborious for all workers of that period. The government's decision to increase production, on the one side, led to the recruitment of people, as it discussed above. In fact, the municipalities were charged with supplying unemployed people with proper jobs alongside the Local Economy Offices and the Municipal Tradesman Unions.¹¹⁶ Following this, as early as March 1940, it was decided that there would be established Employment Bureaus to provide people with work.¹¹⁷ These bureaus, in addition, would function as a control mechanism in such a manner that people who consulted these bureaus would have check ups to see whether they had any diseases that might prevent them working. In this way, it was stated that wet nurses, cleaning women and such who were in direct

¹¹⁴ Tan, 14 September 1943.

¹¹⁵ Tan, 8 June 1942.

¹¹⁶ Tan, 21 March 1940.

¹¹⁷ Tan, 22 March 1940

relation with people while working would undergo health checks.¹¹⁸ If the applicants were homeless, dressed in tatters, and poor, they were furnished with the bathing facilities, food and temporary residence by the bureau.¹¹⁹ However, the facilities and scope of the Employment Office was not enough to meet the needs of the unemployed. In the face of high inflation and poverty people rushed to enterprises. Coercive conditions of work and cheap wages forced already employed people to seeking additional jobs. Hence, there were many people demanding work. High unemployment went hand in hand with the recruitment of labor power under which conditions seeking work became laborious. Orhan Tuna, described conditions of searching for a job as primitive and unregulated.¹²⁰

Most people made use of neighborhood or familial networks find jobs. These networks operated as a part of the solidarity mechanism in the lower class districts. Though it was rare, newspapers also were made use of by the people looking for job. For instance, a fifteen years old girl described her desperate situation in *Tan* newspaper. She had three sisters with no parents or relatives. All of her efforts to find a job had failed. Neither the enterprises nor the Employment Office had supplied her with job. At last, she wrote a letter to the newspaper to find a job.¹²¹ Fatma Özgül, whose husband was recruited into the military made use of the same method of sending a letter. She maintained that since her husband had left; she was barely able to support herself and looking for a job which was very. However, she could not find one. As a last resort she had sent the letter to the newspaper.¹²²

¹¹⁸ *Tan*, 16 February, 1941.

¹¹⁹ *Tan*, 3 June 1943.

¹²⁰ Orhan Tuna, "Küçük Sanayide İş Şartları" *Çalışma Dergisi*, vol.6, 1945, p.32.

¹²¹ *Tan*, 22 October 1941.

¹²² *Tan*, 6 March 1940.

As mentioned above, women worked in some specific sectors, among which textile and tobacco were the most common. In Cibali Tobacco Enterprise, 1,925 of the 2,500 total workers were women. In Bursa Merinos Textile Factory, which employed quarter of the population of the city, the number of women workers was nearly 1,300, or the half of the total number of workers.¹²³ In these sectors, women were employed to meet the changing demands of the wartime production. When the processing time came, for example, for sugar, it was made the work hours increased, the 50th Article of the Labor Code, which had banned women's working at night and extra hours was abolished.¹²⁴ In the textile sector, similar mechanisms were put into effect. In the first part of 1941, the rate of increase in textile production was recorded as following: In Bakırköy, an increase of fifteen percent, in Ereğli ten per cent, in Kayseri eleven, in Nazilli seventeen and in Bünyan an increase of thirty-three percent. Though these rates continued to increase, in the 1943-44 period there occurred a decrease in the effectiveness of production due to the disorganization in the process of production, the scarcity of raw materials and low wages.¹²⁵ Fortunately, women could easily find jobs in those periods of increased production. One women worker said that she found her job in textile sector easily when she had arrived at the factory, though her friends who had applied for jobs later were not hired due to the capacity of the factory.¹²⁶ It can be concluded from this instability in employment and changing rates of production that in the process of employment, workers' circumstances and needs were barely recognized. Instead, the changing demands of production were vital in labor relations.

¹²³ Tan, 19 May 1944.

¹²⁴ Tan, 25 Eylül 1940.

¹²⁵ Tan, 20 April 1943

¹²⁶ Interview, Ayşe Zaimoğlu, June 2004.

Concerning the work hours, women who were in the textile and some other sectors worked eleven hours a day with no weekends. For the extra three hours of overtime work they got an increment of twenty-five percent. Like in all public sector enterprises, their conditions of work were defined in relation to factory's discipline rules, the exploration of which helps to formulate the position of workers vis-à-vis the production relations and practice of hierarchy and power within the factories.

Discipline in the Workplace

In order to display discipline practices, it is instructive to examine the handbook that was given to each worker when she or he began working in Sümerbank, which was one of the biggest public enterprises of the period. In addition to this how these discipline norms were put into effect and in which ways women workers adapted and reacted the discipline rules helps to reconstruct the experience of women workers in the work place.

The handbook consisted of the identity card of the worker and the discipline rules to be obeyed in work life. The discipline rules addressed the issues of the organization of work conditions and work hours, the principles of contract between workers and employees, hierarchy within the workplace and the circumstances under which workers were punished. The first item of the discipline rules declares that work starts at determined hours at which time workers should start their shifts. Each time a worker is late or does not show his/her identity card entering the factory he/she will be fined. This fine varied from three hours of daily wage or the entire daily wage. The 17th clause organizes the work hours. According to it, all workers should be working during the day. Hanging around, talking to each other, leaving the work station. The

workers who do not obey these rules will be fined. The continuous presence of workers in workdays is underscored in the discipline rules. If any worker does not come to work three days in a month or repeats not coming two days following weekends without any excuse, she/he will be fired according to Article 14.

Apart from that, workers are responsible to clean and take care of their work machines whenever it is necessary, declares 19th clause. In the factory, all workers should put their tools in their places and they should not leave any place untidy. When they do not keep this instruction, they will be fined again. Smoking in the factory, on the other hand, is a pretext for firing workers, according to 16th article. During entrance and exit from the factory, workers should not argue with each other or swear at each other. Instead, they should enter and leave in silence. Any behavior that is not in conformity with this instruction will be fined. To be clean and tidy moreover are among the duties of workers. They should bathe often and keep their hands and feet clean. If they have only shabby clothes, they should buy new ones from the factory.

The relations of workers with the foreman and the relations among workers are also organized in conformity with the principle of conserving the hierarchy of the factory. According to article 3, obeying the foreman is vital in an organized work life. In the case of disrespect toward any of the chiefs, workers will be fined the amount of three days wages, according to article 18. If any of the workers are exposed to harassments of chiefs she/he should consult another chief to solve the problem. Concerning the relations among workers, it is declared that any of the occurring conflicts will be solved by consulting the chiefs. Insulting treatment, lying and stealing another's property are forbidden. If one of these is seen among the workers the perpetrators will be fired in conformity with Article 21. Leaving the factory or the abolition of the labor contract is defined in the context of the Labor Code. However, if

the worker leaves or the employee abolishes the contract, he/she will pay six daily wages for compensation, says article 13.¹²⁷

Outlining the discipline rules in the public enterprises allows for the location of the workers and labor relations vis-à-vis the practices and conceptions of the government in the wartime economy. There exists a huge literature revolving around discipline as a form of modern network of power inspired by M. Foucault's study of power. The insights articulated by his studies on discipline unfold the interwoven relationships among labor-power, production relations and practices of work. According to Foucault, discipline is a form of power sui-generis of modernity:

“Discipline may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its existence, comprising a whole set of instrument, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a “physics” or an “anatomy” of power, a technology. And it may be taken over either by “specialized” institutions (the penitentiaries or “houses of correction” of the nineteenth century) or by institutions that use it as an essential instrument for a particular end (schools, hospitals)... or finally by the state apparatuses whose major, if not exclusive, function is to assure that discipline reigns over society as a whole.”¹²⁸

Foucault conceives schools, prisons, hospitals and factories as the articulation and execution of the modern form of power over the totality of societal relations. Discipline as a form of power reining all of society, not only monitoring the entire population, but aims at increasing its capacity for efficient production:

“In order to extract from bodies the maximum time and force, the use of those overall methods known as time-tables, collective training exercises total and detailed surveillance. Furthermore, the disciplines must increase the effect of utility proper to the multiplicities, so that each is made more useful than the simple sum of its elements: it is in order to increase the utilizable effects of the multiple that the discipline define tactics of distribution, reciprocal

¹²⁷ Bakırköy Sümerbank Textile Factory; Workers' Identity Files.

¹²⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, London, Penguin Groups Press, 1997, pp. 215-6.

adjustment of bodies, gestures and rhythms, differentiation of capacities, reciprocal coordination of in relation to capacities and tasks.”¹²⁹

Concerning factory discipline and its various practices, the discipline practices and rules operate with the aim of maximizing the rate of production via organizing, as well as hierarchically locating, furnishing and monitoring the tasks and hours of working beside the workers. In this way, the maximum efficiency of production is extracted from the working population via either neutralizing or fostering the diversities among them, which accomplishes the operation of the discipline practices that ultimately serve the accumulation of capital:

“Accumulation of men and accumulation of capital cannot be separated; it wouldn't 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. At a less general level, the technological mutations of the apparatus of production, the division of labor and the elaboration of the disciplinary techniques sustained an ensemble of very close relations.”¹³⁰

Sümerbank's discipline norms listed in the given handbooks affirm swarming relationship between maximizing the production and disciplining the labor-power. The organization of work-hours, work conditions, work practices and workers' proper behaviors during work-hours were designed in tandem with the aim of maximizing the efficient process of production and bringing into being a type of docile worker who efficiently worked. Discipline punishments and fines ensure that any impediment in the production process or organization of work-hours and conditions were to be fined by the employers. For instance, Mualla Palabıyık was fined 200 piasters that cost more than sum of three of her daily wages because she did not come to work one

¹²⁹ Ibid., p.220.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p.222.

day.¹³¹ Bedriye Gür was fined 200 piasters since she had weaved deficiently.¹³² Gülsüm Yavaşoğlu, who left her job for one hour during work time was fined 100 piasters.¹³³ Ayşe said about the discipline punishments and fines:

The eye of foreman was constantly on us during the day. One day, there slipped a small part of my machine. He immediately took and sent me to the paying office and I was fined 100 piasters. It was a high price for us. Gardeners of the period were paid less than that money for one day. I remember cursing the foreman that day because of the fine.¹³⁴

Wages Appropriated to the Sexes

Throughout the war, another significant issue for all workers was the rate of their wages in the face of encompassing poverty and high rates of inflation. Concerning wages, women were always underpaid in comparison to their male counterparts. For instance, in the Tekel Tobacco factory of Üsküdar wherein most of the workers were women, the wages varied in relation to sex. While women earned five to twenty piasters for an hour, men earned sixteen to thirty piasters for the same hour.¹³⁵ In the Bakırköy Sümerbank textile factory also, women earned twelve to fifteen piasters for an hour, while men were earning twenty-five to thirty.¹³⁶ There also existed different mechanisms in the determination of wages. They varied from

¹³¹ Bakırköy Sümerbank Textile Factory: Mualla Palabıyık, Identity File.

¹³² Bakırköy Sümerbank Textile Factory: Bedriye Gür, Identity File.

¹³³ Bakırköy Sümerbank Textile Factory: Gülsüm Yavaşoğlu, Identity File.

¹³⁴ “Ustanın gözü hep bizdeydi tabii. Bir gün çalışırken iken bobini düşürdüm yere usta hemen ceza yazdı. Düşürdüm diye bobini demiri kırmışım. Mehmet ustaya da kızdım o zaman. 100 kuruş ceza. Hemen beni götürdü parayı ödemeye vezneye. O paraya bütün gün koca bahçede çalışırdı. Az para değildi yani...” Interview, Ayşe Zaimoğlu, June 2004.

¹³⁵ Tan, 1 July 1941.

¹³⁶ Bakırköy Sümerbank Textile Factory: Workers' Identity Files

department to department or in relation to whether workers conducted their work depended on the output system or hour system. However, the discrepancy among male wages and female wages was always the same, in favor of male workers. As well as the wages, the work hierarchies run on behalf of men workers in the sense that men had the chance for upward mobility, such as being chief while women had only the chance to change their departments in the factory.

Workers in the public sector had received increments in their wages twice during the war. For instance, the women workers of Sümerbank textile factory of Bakırköy had three piasters an hour raise that made their wage fifteen piasters for an hour. In 1944, there came a three piasters increment, making their wage eighteen piasters for an hour. One women worker in the public sector could earn thirty to forty liras net, which was highly insufficient in the face of the accelerated inflation. Even in early 1930s before the wartime inflation, the İstanbul Commerce and Industry Office had declared that a family consisting of five persons living less above the subsistence level required 120 liras for a livelihood a month.¹³⁷

As mentioned before the inspection of women's work conditions and wages hint on both the work practices and the conservation and reproduction of the given practical and normative patterns of gender division of labor intermingled with the experience of work. This gender division entails the division of sexes along the lines of allegedly public and private spheres. While the deeds and identity of men are defined in conjunction with the public sphere, which is the realm of economy, work and politics; women's acts and identity, on the other hand, are enclosed in the private sphere as the realm of the domestic tasks. Parallel to this, not only did women's domestic labor become invisible, but also women's labor in the market was devalued

¹³⁷ Hüseyin Avni, "Aile geçimi hakkında Tetkikler" *Yeni Adam Dergisi*, 1937, vol.209, pp.4-5.

since men were conceived as the sole responsible for the wage earning while women were supposed to work only supplementary to the family budget.¹³⁸ However, as the war conditions clearly show, many women supported their family members' livelihood.

Gendering the Rationing System

Low wages were devastating for all workers and the lower class vis-à-vis the increasing cost of living. The government took some measures to obviate the impact of the war economy. It aimed to increase the rate of production, alongside preventing the inflation. As İnönü declared in one of his speeches two main mechanisms had been devised to meet the expenses of the military and to compensate for the scarcity of goods that had resulted from the closing of the international trade lines: Increase in production and the rational organization of the distribution of goods.¹³⁹ Following the National Emergency Law, the government had the authority to determine and monitor the prices of products, especially of basic sustenance goods.¹⁴⁰ Following this, the Price Monitoring Committee was established to be in charge of determining the maximum prices of basic consumer goods to be sold in the market. However, traders pulled their goods out of the market and sold them doubling their prices. This policy, in fact, led to the emergence of a rapidly expanding black market and rocketing inflation.¹⁴¹ Most consumer goods became scarce in the market. In the face of public outcries about the scarcity of goods and high inflation, the government devised a

¹³⁸ Josephine Donovan, *Feminist Teori*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1996, p.113.

¹³⁹ Tan, 21 November 1941.

¹⁴⁰ Tan, 21 November 1940.

¹⁴¹ Tan, 21 October 1941.

rationing system for the provision of basic goods in especially the big cities.¹⁴² The rationing system operated by the distribution of ration cards to family members on a monthly basis. Each member could go and buy the determined bread allotment from the bakers by presenting a piece of the card.¹⁴³ In addition, bakers were supplied with flour in specific amounts by the government. The rationing system was put into effect on 14 January 1941 and functioned until the end of war.¹⁴⁴

The rationing program involved a system of classification of people and their proportion of allotments. According to this classification, workers were divided into two sections, namely heavy laborers, which included porters, waiters, workers in the mining and construction sectors, carpenters, motormen, ticket controllers, blacksmiths, bakers and such whose work required physical strength and needed high amounts of calories. The other part contained all other workers. Ensuing this division, the allotments of heavy laborers consisted of 750 grams of bread while the other part received 350 grams like all other citizens.¹⁴⁵

It can be easily inferred from this classification that operated in the rationing system, all sectors of heavy work were in fact, exclusively male labor employing sectors. The sectors, in which women were mostly employed, like textiles and tobacco, were not considered heavy working conditions. Even Şüküfe Nihal, who was one of the prominent feminists of the early Republican period, described the conditions of women tobacco workers in Üsküdar as easy and untiring.¹⁴⁶ However, there arose protests against this classification system voiced from the tobacco

¹⁴² Tan, 14 November 1941.

¹⁴³ Tan, 21 December 1941.

¹⁴⁴ Tan, 14 January 1941.

¹⁴⁵ Tan, 3-15 January 1941.

¹⁴⁶ Tan, 1 July 1941.

workers, most of whom were women. A letter published in *Tan* reflected their objection:

“We as tobacco workers earn the least money among all workers. It is not possible for us and our families even to subsist on these wages. Our basic and mere nourishment is bread. How can it be possible for tobacco workers who work in the smell of nicotine the whole day, to get enough amount of food?”¹⁴⁷

Subsequent to this letter, the press began to show interest to the conditions of tobacco workers. It was declared that all tobacco workers could not be classified under non-heavy laborers since some divisions of tobacco work required heavy work. After a while, the government expanded the heavy laborer classification so as to include some tobacco workers, although only a small number of them were women.¹⁴⁸ Similar to wages, women were thus exposed to excluding practices in the rationing system. The classification of heavy laborer bears the conception of female labor as supplementary and therefore devalued them as deserving less than male labor.

Gender hierarchies that are deeply rooted in the gender division of labor that ascribes certain tasks to sexes succeedingly, impose on women the conduction of the domestic tasks in the private realm and while pre-ordaining men working in the market and earning wages. The implications of the gender division of labor were experienced by women participated to labor force via their insignificant wages and exclusion from specific social policies which were the reflections of the devaluation of the women’s labor in the market resulted from the gender division of labor.

¹⁴⁷ “Biz işçiler arasında en az gündelik alan kimseleriz. Elimize geçen parayla bir aileyi geçindirmek mümkün değil. Bizim biricik gıdamız ekmektir. Bütün gün nikotin kokuları içinde çalışan tütün işçileri yarım ekmekle gıdasını alabilir mi?” *Tan*, 17 January 1942.

¹⁴⁸ Interview, Mediha Özçelik, July 2004.

Workers' Insurance as a Mechanism to Control the Risk

In following days of the war years, the government's design of the rationing system to organize the distribution of goods expanded with the declaration of economic mobilization throughout the country on 3 February 1942.¹⁴⁹ The measures were in tandem with the National Emergency Law; intervention in prices, confiscation of some enterprises, the determination of the rate of production and their prices in specific sectors. The rationing system was expanded so as to include basic sustenance and consumer goods such as sugar, tea, coffee, flour, cloth, oil, and cheese.¹⁵⁰ For the organization of the rationing system and distribution of goods the Provisioning Office was established.¹⁵¹ In addition, the government via, the standardized and low-cost production of some basic consumer goods, aimed at supplying people with low-cost goods that were to be sold in National Goods Bazaar with ration cards.¹⁵² Nevertheless, all these measures did not hamper the high inflation or scarcity of goods. In 1942 inflation in sustenance goods prices 100 percent.¹⁵³ News was constantly mourned on the high rates of inflation, the poverty, low wages and skyrocketing prices that were depicted as the enemy inside.¹⁵⁴

The Şükrü Saracoğlu government, which came to power in the mid-1942, implemented more "liberal" policies in the price determination and distribution to

¹⁴⁹ Tan, 3 February 1942

¹⁵⁰ Tan, 31 March 1942.

¹⁵¹ Tan, 25 March 1942.

¹⁵² Tan, 21 February 1942.

¹⁵³ Tan, 13 April 1942.

¹⁵⁴ Tan, 8-9-14 April 1942.

overcome the inflation and black market.¹⁵⁵ It let the prices of sustenance goods freely flow in market terms and abolished the Price Monitoring Committee as well as the confiscating mechanism.¹⁵⁶ These policies exacerbated the prevailing poverty. Within a few weeks, prices exploded in the black market.¹⁵⁷ The government had to implement extraordinary taxes such as the Wealth Tax of 1942 to counterweigh wartime profiteering as well as returning to the price controls and rationing system. It was noted in early 1943 that half of the population had serious problems in making a livelihood.¹⁵⁸ According to cost of living index of 1943, the cost of monthly subsistence for a family had showed an increase of 400 percent relative to 1939, while the cost of sustenance goods increased 500 percent.¹⁵⁹

The government introduced some measures to protect the lower class socially and economically. As early as 1940, the government declared that it would implement an insurance system concerning workers.¹⁶⁰ This insurance can be envisioned as a mechanism to lower the risk that could come from the working classes, who had been working under increasingly exploitive conditions due to the National Emergency Law.¹⁶¹ This insurance, which would cover the work-related incidents, work resulted

¹⁵⁵ Tan, 25 July 1942.

¹⁵⁶ Tan, 25 July 1942.

¹⁵⁷ Tan, 12 August 1942.

¹⁵⁸ Tan, 4 March 1943.

¹⁵⁹ Tan, 26 November 1943.

¹⁶⁰ Tan, 21 June 1940.

¹⁶¹ The idea of controlling risk derives from the literature of governmentality that expounds the issues of government of human conduct in all contexts, by various authorities and agencies, invoking particular forms of truth, and using definite, resources, means and techniques. The monitoring of the risk in this context relates to the idea that in modern societies the social production of wealth is systematically accompanied by the social production of risks. So, the problems and conflicts relating to distribution in a society of scarcity overlap with the problems and conflicts that arise from the production, definition, and distribution of techno-scientifically produced risk. The role of insurance, especially social insurance is to conduct a social compact against industrially produced hazards and

diseases and maternity would include all workers in the enterprises included by the Labor Code.¹⁶² Concerning maternity, it was planned that during pregnancy, a women worker would have check-ups and leaves throughout which she would receive full wages. In the case of the death of a male worker, his wife and children would receive a stipend. In case of the death of a woman worker, the allotment would be given her children. Beyond that, the insurance plan outlined a system of retirement for workers.¹⁶³ İnönü proclaimed in 1941:

“Till now, we have been trying to organize workers’ lives in the context of law and health. In addition to this, our government has worked on an insurance system that will protect workers in cases of work related accidents, diseases and motherhood. This project, which has been delivered to the National Assembly, will be executed as soon as possible.”¹⁶⁴

However, this insurance system was not put into effect during the war. It reemerged on the government’s agenda in 1943, when the public outcries rose in the face of high prices, and the black market, the scarcity of goods and the harsh conditions of subsistence.¹⁶⁵ It can be concluded that the government put the system on its agenda so as to counterweigh the backlash that could come from the working class, whose working conditions deteriorated throughout the war.

damages. Which lie at the core of consensus of the welfare state. For this, see. Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, London: Sage Publications, 1999.

¹⁶² Tan, 21 June 1940.

¹⁶³ Tan, 12 January 1941.

¹⁶⁴ “Bugüne kadar hukuki münasebetler ve sıhhi kalıplar cephesinden tanzime çalışılan işçi hayatının iş kazaları, mesleki hastalıklar ve analık hallerine karşı maddi cepheden de teminat altına alınmasını sağlayacak işçi sigortalarına ait kanun projesi meclise arz edilmiş bulunmaktadır.” Tan, 2 November 1941.

¹⁶⁵ Tan, 25 August 1943.

Social Policies

The social policies implemented during the war years cover the facilities of settlement, provision, health, and child care. A survey of these facilities sheds light on the work relations and practices in many respects. First of all, the social policies mostly addressed the public enterprises' workers that indicate the partial character of the policies implemented. In addition, social context and the scope of the social policies reveal the motivation of the government in implementing them. Furthermore, how the social policies operated on the work and social lives of the workers, and in which ways the practices of the social policies yield in gender hierarchies expounds the significant contours of the experience of working class, especially of women workers. What is more, describing the diverse experience of women workers in relation to the mechanisms of coping with the work and domestic tasks both in the presence and absence of the social policies unfolds the significant bulk of the social lives of women workers, the exploration of which is mostly impossible within the perspective of modernizationist labor history, since it conceives the emerging and the development of the working class in tandem with the production relations, merely implementation of social policies, legal social rights of workers and following practices of workers in relation to the previous ones. However, the historicist perspective that Thompson's studies put forward emphasises the experience of workers not only in relation to the aspects mentioned above but also to the totality of culture, and the traditional norms and practices of living via which it becomes possible to reconstruct the totality and peculiarity of the working classes. Moreover, gender studies that stress both the different needs and demands of women and men workers and the simultaneity of the work and domestic task in shaping the work lives of

women help to reconstruct the efforts and mechanisms accomplished by women via appropriating or contesting the prevailing networks of solidarity, cultural and traditional patterns of living in coping with the simultaneity of work and domestic tasks.

One important motivation for the government to implement social policies was the increasing rates of the turnover rates. Social policies operated as a mechanism for preventing the workers' quitting their jobs of which conditions were highly exploitive. The governments position vis-à-vis the turnover rates clarifies this point.

As stated previously, the government's main mechanism to cope with the severity of the war economy was to increase the rate of production, the methods of which were mandatory work, paid over-time work, labor recruitment, extension of work hours and expansion of enterprises. However, in 1943, it was noted that while the efficiency of work in the enterprises had become eighty percent by the implementation of the National Emergency Law, it had decreased by forty percent in 1943.¹⁶⁶ One reason for the enterprises working less efficiently was the high turnover rates. During 1944, in Sümerbank, which was one of the biggest enterprises of the period, 23,578 workers of a total of 25,194 workers left their jobs, which amounted to a 93,58 percent turnover rate.¹⁶⁷ In the Sümerbank textile factory of Kayseri the worker staff was replaced seven times during the war. In the sugar factories, the turnover rate was 300 percent.¹⁶⁸

A few interpretations have been put forward to account for these high turnover rates. The entrepreneurs of the period stated that no worker wanted to tie

¹⁶⁶ Tan, 20 April 1943.

¹⁶⁷ Ahmet Makal, "Türkiye'nin sanayileşme sürecinde işgücü sorunu, sosyal politika ve İktisadi Devlet Teşekkülleri: 1930'lu ve 1940'lı yıllar", *Toplum ve Bilim*, vol.92, Spring 2002, p.41.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.45.

himself/herself to any of the enterprises since there were many opportunities for finding jobs either full-time or part-time. Workers aimed at earning more money via constantly changing their jobs.¹⁶⁹ Another explanation connected turnover rates with the underdevelopment of industrial working class during the period. According to Makal, high turnover rates signify the underdevelopment of the industrial working class, resulting from the agricultural structure of Turkey. The hegemonic land structure through which the agricultural production flourished was small-scale land ownership. This structure hindered the dispossession of the peasants, which forced them to work in factories as workers, as in the historical phenomenon of the emerging of working class in modern Europe. Moreover, he stresses the mentality of the peasantry as a factor in explaining this “underdevelopment”.

Following this mentality, the peasants chose to stay on their lands as the owner of lands, even when they could earn more money by working in factories. Moreover, peasants conceived their status as landowner as higher than being a mere worker. Therefore, Makal concludes that the workers of the wartime period could not be considered to have been industrial workers due to their experience of work, education and social behavior patterns.¹⁷⁰

Makal’s explanation is problematic in some aspects. First of all, he interprets the whole process of industrialization and the emergence of working class in the context of modernization theory, which construes the emergence of specific historical phenomenon as emanated from a specific location and time through which similar phenomena succeed the initial in the same manner. The view enjoins the idea that there exists a center to historical phenomenon that is unique and original through

¹⁶⁹ Tan, 7 September 1943.

¹⁷⁰ Ahmet Makal, *ibid.*, pp.39-41.

which other phenomena imitate the original one as an exemplar. Following that, modernization theory presumes a linear progress and normative prescriptions on diverse historical practices in the explanation of different events.¹⁷¹

This normative perspective, leads Makal to impose a reified pattern of norms and practices on workers' identity and to locate a hierarchial strata between different kinds of workers. However, each historical group and phenomenon dialectically emerges in relation to social, economic and cultural context of its milieu rather than following a normative pattern.

Concerning the turnover rates and peasant-worker identity, there exists an alternative way of interpretation that transcends the negative aspects of the modernization theory. This alternative explanation partly enjoins Thompson's perspective which emphasizes the experience of the working people which is an amalgam of production relations specific to the region in question, cultural patterns of living, and traditions in explaining the historical context through which working classes come and make themselves.

As has been stated, the workers who received insignificant wages throughout the war years in the face of the inflation of nearly 500 percent were faced with serious difficulties for even to subsist. The usual way for them, it was noted, was to find jobs with higher wages or to work in more than one place.¹⁷² So they could easily leave their positions wherein the wage was in fact low.

Another way was to keep their contact with their lands since they were able to produce some amounts of vegetable or wheat so as to support themselves under the

¹⁷¹ Arif Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism*. Colorado: Westview Press, 1997. pp. 120-30.

¹⁷² Tan, 20 September 1943.

severe conditions of poverty.¹⁷³ The reason for the turnover rates was neither the normatively imposed underdevelopment of working class nor the reified mentality of the peasantry. The reason was rather the regional socio-economic conditions that created specific practices and needs for which people devised specific survival mechanisms, which also mark the specificity of the working class in Turkey.

High turnover rates forced the government to take some measures, one of which was to increase the wages of workers.¹⁷⁴ Throughout the war, the wages of public sector workers were increased twice. However, the increments were considerably low in comparison to inflation of 500 percent.

Another measure was the recruitment of women into works that were formerly conceived as the sectors wherein the men's heavy labor was required. One striking example of this was the recruitment of women for the İstanbul Trolley Company (*İstanbul Tramvay ve Trolleybüs Şirketi*). The turnover rates were considerably high in the trolley company, so it was decided that women could be accepted as drivers and ticket controllers in the company. After that, eleven women, one of whom was driver and the others were ticket-controllers started to work in the company. However, eight ticket-controllers left the work soon after they began.¹⁷⁵

The press often published the workers procurement announcements of the trolley company. In 1941, it was stated that the Trolley Company had begun to provide all of its 1400 workers with bread and lunch.¹⁷⁶ However, the Trolley Company still suffered from labor scarcity. Trolley workers did heavy work; they had to work nearly twelve hours, ticket-controllers had to stand up and control the crowd

¹⁷³ Sümerbank Bakırköy Textile Factory; Workers Identity Files.

¹⁷⁴ Tan, 20 September 1943.

¹⁷⁵ Tan, 24 September 1941.

¹⁷⁶ Tan, 16 November 1941.

in the trolley, people usually argued and insulted them. It was stated that, even the trolley company supplied its workers with bread, lunch, a bonus, as well as providing its workers with two dresses and two coats and providing wages of five liras for workers' families, the company still could not hire enough workers because of the exhausting conditions of work.¹⁷⁷ These social policies failed to help the company, so that it decided to hire women workers again soon after the implementation of social aid.¹⁷⁸

In sanitation work similar mechanisms operated. This sector also suffered from labor scarcity. The Municipality Cleaning Office (*Belediye Temizlik Bürosu*) pronounced that street cleaning, which had been conceived as degrading, would be turned into a legitimate job which women also would be accepted as workers.¹⁷⁹ The chronic labor shortage in this sector was to be compensated for with the recruitment of women.¹⁸⁰

The practices of employment in these sectors make plain how the female labor power was treated in the labor market. When there emerged a gap in the labor pool due the labor scarcity, women were integrated to the labor pool to the sectors that were formerly known as male works. This indicates how the division of labor among sexes was socially constructed serving the reproduction and conservation of the gender hierarchies. The discursive division of heavy work and non-heavy work that bears the mark of gender division of labor was made de-facto invalid when the determined rate of production required an extra work force. Notwithstanding this, the

¹⁷⁷ Tan, 23 February 1943.

¹⁷⁸ Tan, 23 October, 1943.

¹⁷⁹ Tan, 26 February 1941.

¹⁸⁰ Tan, 23 June 1942.

public discourse of recruitment of women as supplementary labor force was persistent.

The practices mentioned above reveal a significant aspect of the social policies and aid implemented during the war. As Makal elucidated the social policies of the 1930s and World War II implemented by the government can largely be understood as a mechanism to overcome the problems that the government confronted with in the recruitment and organization of the labor force.¹⁸¹ The main policies of the war economy, increasing the rate of production and the efficient work were bound to fail in the face of the high turnover rates and following the decrease of forty percent in efficient production of the enterprises. Raises in wages and the implementation of social policies while supporting the workers with extra livelihood beside, operated as a mechanism to recruit people to the public sector enterprises. The Ereğli Coal Mines' evaluation indicates this point:

“In this enterprise, the issue of employees is worth mentioning in some aspects. First, finding permanent workers and second caring for the workers were important. According to economic tenets, a worker's efficiency increases to the degree that he is properly fed, attentively cared, and comfortably settled.”¹⁸²

By the 1930s the government began executing various social policies for workers of the public sector including housing, supplying food and clothes, day nursery and sanitary facilities. Housing was a problem for most workers since most had to rent instead of owning a house. Moreover, workers who had migrated from rural Anatolia had an overwhelming difficulty in finding housing due to the dwelling

¹⁸¹ “ Ereğli Kömür İşletmesinde eleman ve işçi meselesi bir kaç bakımından mütalaa edilmeye sezarır. Birincisi daimi işçi bulma meselesi, ikincisi işçinin bakımı davasıdır. İktisadi kaidelere göre işçi ne kadar iyi bakılırsa yatacağı, giyeceği ve yiyeceği ne kadar ihtimam görürse verimi o derece artar.” Ahmet Makal, *ibid.*, p.35.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 46.

scarcity in the cities.¹⁸³ Moreover, worker housing was mostly decrepit, old buildings. In addition, the big public enterprises that were constructed far from city centers required housing.

In order to meet these needs the government supplied the workers with housing facilities along with apartments and residences for the staff. By 1945, forty-four percent of Sümerbank Gemlik silk factory workers, thirty-five percent of Konya Ereğli Textile and Kayseri Textile workers, sixteen of Nazilli Textile workers and forty per cent of Hereke weavers were furnished with housing facilities.

However, this seemingly high rate was not wide-spread. For instance, it was reported that they, Beykoz Leather Factory workers, were ailing due to the housing problems alongside the dilapidation of the existing residence facilities.¹⁸⁴ The housing did not encompass all sectors or enterprises. For instance, Sümerbank's Bakırköy, Bursa, Bünyan, Deftardar, and Isparta factories were completely lacking housing facilities. A woman worker at the Sümerbank Bakırköy Textile Factory of the period mentioned the importance of the residence and the difficulties in finding a place to live:

“In that period, albeit the rent cost not extremely high, workers were not able to find homes for rent easily since money was extremely scarce. But what was very important was finding houses close to workplaces. This was very important, especially for women since we both worked night and day shifts under which conditions we felt insecure on the way home. Fortunately, our house was close to Sümerbank so that we found jobs. Even our houses were relatively close to Sümerbank. We women would gather while going to work and coming home.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Tan, 29 January 1944

¹⁸⁴ Ahmet Makal, *Türkiye 'de Tek Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri: 1920-1945*, Ankara: İmge Yayınları, 1999. p.151.

¹⁸⁵ “O zamanlarda, evler çok pahalı değildi. Ama para yoktu ki kiraya. Herkes fabrikalara yakın oturmak istiyordu. Önemliydi yakın oturmak. Yoksa gidiş geliş çok zor oluyordu. Hele de kadınlar için. Gece vardiyasına gidip gelmek korkutuyordu yollarda. Neyse ki bizim ev yakındı fabrikaya.

Apart from that, residence facilities were distributed in a discriminatory manner among workers and officers. As is delineated in an article on Sümerbank residences, there were 6,200 people of 29,000 total staff who utilized the residence facilities. Among the apartments, though there were 314 building for officers, there were only eighty-seven for married workers and thirty-four for single workers. Those 25,000 workers had housing out of a total 29,000, proves the discrimination practiced on behalf of the officers.¹⁸⁶

In addition to housing, nourishment played a significant role among the social policies organized for the workers of the public sector. By 1941, all Sümerbank workers whose wages were below 160 piasters were supplied with lunch every work day.¹⁸⁷ Following this, similar practices expanded including other sectors of work. For instance, the Merinos Textile Factory of Sümerbank was giving its workers lunch by 1941.¹⁸⁸ As recounted above, trolley workers were furnished with lunch so as to recruit and keep them work. Apart from that, some of the public enterprises helped with lunch by undercharging. In the Tobacco Enterprise of Üsküdar, workers paid 7.5 piasters for meat and 5 piasters for vegetables and rice.¹⁸⁹ However, it is hard to say that the meals were satisfying or nutritious. As Ayşe recounted:

“While working, we were served lunch everyday. However, I cannot say that, meals were satisfying. They usually made potato. If you were lucky, you might have a little piece of onion in it. Though

Yakın ama yine de gidip gelirken kadınlarla toplaşıp yola çıkardık.” Interview, Ayşe Zaimoğlu, June 2004.

¹⁸⁶ Tan, 28 June 1944.

¹⁸⁷ Ahmet Makal, “Türkiye’nin sanayileşme sürecinde işgücü sorunu, sosyal politika ve İktisadi Devlet Teşekkülleri: 1930’lu ve 1940’lı yıllar”, *Toplum ve Bilim*, vol.92, Spring 2002, p.53.

¹⁸⁸ Tan, 6 October 1941.

¹⁸⁹ Tan, 1 July 1941.

rare, they sometimes cooked beans. At night shifts, they only served soup.”¹⁹⁰

Another service provided by the public enterprises involved health. During the war, most of the workers and lower classes were exposed to malaria and typhus epidemics in addition to lice. Medical treatment of these diseases and similar ones were given to workers via the health offices of the public enterprises. The health condition of workers was vital for ability to work efficiently. For which reason, health services were organized expansively.

For a general overview on health, by 1947 the number of health staff at Sümerbank was 188, forty-nine of which doctors, ten dentists, nine pharmacy, twenty-eight nurses, thirty-four nurse’s aides, seven laboratory assistant and forty-four in other departments.¹⁹¹ In the tobacco factory of Üsküdar, where 1,000 women worked, there were four doctors.¹⁹² In the late years of the war, it was declared a Workers’ Hospital would be established even though this never materialized.¹⁹³

Work-related accidents were treated in health offices of the factories. Some common work-related accidents of women dominated sectors such as tobacco and textile were injuries to the hands or skin and catching of their hair into the machines. Cemile Gül, worked in the Sümerbank Textile Factory of Bakırköy, was treated in the health office for the injury to her left hand.¹⁹⁴ Another worker, Nazife Devam, received eight days of leave when she slipped over her machine and her face was

¹⁹⁰ “Fabrikanın yemekhanesi vardı. Yiyiyorduk orada düzenli. Ama yemekler çok iyi değildi. Yemeklerimiz iki üç patates. İçinde ya iki soğan görürsün ya görmezsin .Çorba yapıyorlardı. fasulye yaparlardı bazen. Gececi oldun mu çorba veriyorlardı. Ağır yemekler vermiyorlardı.” Interview, Ayşe Zaimoğlu, June 2004.

¹⁹¹ Ahmet Makal, *ibid*, p.54.

¹⁹² Tan, 1 July 1941.

¹⁹³ Tan, 7 August 1944.

¹⁹⁴ Sümerbank Bakırköy Textile Factory; Cemile Gül, Identity File.

injured.¹⁹⁵ Meliha was one of those who injured a hand. Apart from these, migraines were common among the recorded doctor reports, which might have resulted from the noises of machines.¹⁹⁶

Concerning women workers, not their own health but that of family members, especially their children's health influenced women's work and the economy. Vesile Çakıt, who worked at the Sümerbank of Bakırköy, was a widow with two children. In a petition that she wrote to the directory she explained that,

“My daughter is hopelessly sick and she needs to be cared for. There is no one but me who can look after her. Therefore I request a leave of one month”¹⁹⁷

Within the same year, she took another leave of one month.

Family members' sicknesses were a burden for women in two respects. First, medical services were only for workers not for their relatives, so workers had to pay for their family members' treatments. In addition, child-care was the duty of women as mothers, and the accomplishment of this task required some compromises. For instance, they sometimes had to leave their jobs temporarily during which time they did not receive their wages. Concerning the low wages of women, it was very hard for a woman like Vesile to support herself and her family.

Some women workers devised mechanisms of support in cases of illnesses in their families by making use of their own facilities. A women worker at Sümerbank Bakırköy, Gülsüm, requested a temporary leave of a month long from the directory,

¹⁹⁵ Sümerbank Bakırköy Textile Factory; Nazife Devam, Identity File.

¹⁹⁶ Sümerbank Bakırköy Textile Factory; Workers' Identity Files

¹⁹⁷ “Kızım ümitsiz halde hasta. Ona bakacak benim haricimde kimse yok. 1 ay izin istiyorum.” Sümerbank Bakırköy Textile Factory; Vesile Çakıt, Identity File, 1943.

since her child was sick. In order for her to pay for the price of the medical treatment, she had to return to her hometown and sell her lands.¹⁹⁸

Women sometimes even had to quit their jobs. Şükriye Demirci, who was a worker at Sümerbank Bakırköy, stated that she had to quit the job and she had to look after because her mother, who was in her hometown and sick.¹⁹⁹

One important implication of these experiences of women reveals how their work lives are interwoven with their domestic responsibilities and familial relations. Under every circumstances, women had to fulfill their domestic tasks; child caring in this context. Since the prevailing policies strictly divided work and family, women's domestic responsibilities were accepted as arbitrary leaves for which no aid or wage was provided. Child care was introduced after the war. Before then, women had to devise tactics to deal with it through relative or neighborhood networks of aid, and extra-support from agriculture to cope.

Another facility developed for helping women was the establishment of day nurseries. Day nurseries were the least developed among all other facilities. Labor history also did not even give account of it. In the Labor Periodical of 1946 (*Çalışma Dergisi*), it was declared that one vital problem of women workers was the absence of day care facilities-the ideal was stated as twenty-three for İstanbul- that would care for children while women were at work. It was maintained that some women were not able to work though they needed to, since they had no place to leave their children.²⁰⁰ By 1941, there was reported only one day nursery established by İstanbul Municipality.

¹⁹⁸ Sümerbank Bakırköy Textile Factory; Gülsüm Yavaşoğlu, Identity File.

¹⁹⁹ Sümerbank Bakırköy Textile Factory; Şükriye Demirci, Identity File

²⁰⁰ Celal Dinçer, "Kadın İşçilerimiz , Kreş ve Çocuk Yuvası İhtiyacımız" *Çalışma Dergisi*, vol.8, July 1946, p.30.

Considering that women were only permitted six weeks of maternity-leave, the role of day-nurseries in maintaining the health of babies is clear. It was reported that in Şişli Children Hospital, a baby whose mother had to give up breast feeding due to the end of maternity-leave so it could be properly fed.²⁰¹ The government's mechanism for day care was to reconstruct the old *medrese* as day nurseries.²⁰² Likewise, the big public enterprises contained a few day-nurseries. Sümerbank established five of them.²⁰³ Moreover, the Children's Protection Society established though few- day nurseries. However, their capacities were limited. For example, in the Beyazıt day nursery of the Children's Protection Society looked after only thirty children.²⁰⁴

By the mid 1940s, public outcries rose against the shortage of day care facilities. In early 1944, it was maintained that, both mothers and fathers working necessitated the increase of the number of child-care institutions, which would make it easier for women to work.²⁰⁵ A tobacco worker, Remzi Özçelik, complained about the lack of day care in a letter published in *Tan*:

“We as workers are able to buy only breads with our daily wages. In order to have a meal, we send our wives to the tobacco enterprises to work. Because of this, our children are pitifully worn-out. They wander in the streets, under the bridges or in the fields dressing in tatters, disheveled looking and also hungry. To whom people call tramps are in fact our children. Tobacco workers are bringing up vagabonds for the society. What our children need are day nurseries that feeding and looking after them.”²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ *Tan*, 1 June 1941.

²⁰² *Tan*, 23 August 1942.

²⁰³ Ahmet Makal, *Ibid*, p.63.

²⁰⁴ *Tan*, 18 August 1941.

²⁰⁵ *Tan*, 23 February 1944.

²⁰⁶ “Gündeliklerimizle ancak ekmeğe alabiliyoruz. Haftada bir iki zeytinyağlı yemek için, karılarımız tütün depolarında çalışıyor. Bu yüzden çocuklarımız sefil oluyor. Toz, toprak içinde aç, susuz dolanıyorlar. Köprü altlarında, yangın yerlerindeki çocuklar- serseriler bizim çocuklarımız. Kırk bin

Nurseries for homeless children were opened by the Children Protection Society in Kırklareli and Erzurum.²⁰⁷ After that, the Tophane Kılıçalı *Medresesi* was reconstructed as a day care center.²⁰⁸ However, these barely met the demands of the workers.

Lack of enough child-care facilities led women to devise different mechanisms of child-care, via making use of neighborhood and familial network relations. Some women workers had come from rural Anatolia to İstanbul to work left their children with their relatives living in their hometown.²⁰⁹ If women workers were living with their relatives, the relatives were in charge of taking care of the children while the women were at work. However, there were many working mother who had no familial networks, or were widow, living with only their children. In this case, the old women of neighborhood looked after the women's children at a small fee. As Ayşe maintained:

“When we were at work, my mother was caring for the children alongside doing domestic tasks. On the other hand, many women did not have of this chance. Many women began working after their husbands were recruited to army. They had to do so. Otherwise how were they able to support themselves and their children? On the other hand, their children could not stay alone. In this case, the old women of our district began looking after their children. Working women paid small fees to these old women who cared for their children.”²¹⁰

tütün amelesi size serseri yetiştiriyor. Çocuklarımıza göz kulak olacak onların karnını doyuracak kreşelr lazım”Tan, June 1945.

²⁰⁷ Tan, 8 May 1944.

²⁰⁸ Tan, 10 June 1944.

²⁰⁹ Sümerbank Bakırköy Textile Factory; Resmiye Şen, Sahure Ölmez, Identity Files.

²¹⁰ “ Biz çalışırken, anam işleri yapıyor, torunlara bakıyordu. Bizim orda herkes fabrikalara girdi. Herkesin kocaları gitti. Herkes işe başladı o yüzden. Gelin kaynana kaldı. Kim kime bakıcak. Çocuklu kadınlar vardı. Onlar mahalledeki yaşlı teyzelere rica ederlerdi. Çok cüzi bir paraya çocuklarını teyzelere baktırılardı. Kadınlardan yalnız başına kalanlar oldu.” Interview, Ayşe Zaimoğlu, June 2004.

The exploration of the child care facilities unfolds two significant aspects of gender operations in work relations. First, the underdevelopment of child care facilities indicates the ignorance of the government and enterprises concerning the needs of women workers. Second, it reveals that how the family ties and domestic duties could dominate the work life of women in such a way that women sometimes had to give up working to accomplish these tasks.

Social Aid

Throughout the war years, social aid policies were implemented to alleviate the severe conditions of the lower class' lives. The initial social aid program addressed the family members of men who had been conscripted into the military.²¹¹ The municipalities were in charge of the aid for these lower class families.²¹² Following this, the Aid Bureau was established to which families would be eligible for aid.²¹³ The maximum amount of pecuniary aid was determined as twenty-five liras and those who were ascertained as able to support themselves would not receive the aid.²¹⁴ This aid could not be said to have alleviated the masses' life conditions since its scope was very limited. Most of the families that had members working were not qualified to receive this aid. Ayşe, complaint that:

“After my three brothers were recruited to the army, we did not get any aid. We stayed with my mother and father who were very old to work alongside with my brother's wife and her children. Only two

²¹¹ Tan, 12 July 1940.

²¹² Tan, 19 August 1940.

²¹³ Tan, 22 October 1940.

²¹⁴ Tan, 10 October 1940

of us were working that made our lives unbearably poor. However, no aid was for us.”²¹⁵

Another aid program addressing the lower classes was aimed at fixed and lower income people. Saracoğlu delimited the focus of the aid as following:

“Persistent conditions of war and ensuing inflation lead people to have troubles in supporting themselves. The revenues of tradesmen and workers had been adapted to the conditions of the war economy. The overwhelming cost of the living was, on the other hand, on officers whose wages was lower and fixed. However, the limits of our national budget prevent us from increasing their wages. We will help them with aids. For the beginning, we supply the head of these families with shoes and the clothes.”²¹⁶

Following this, lower and fixed income public officers, except for workers, were helped with cloth, sugar, flour, bread, coal with low prices or for free.²¹⁷ After that, it was ascertained that public officers would get pecuniary aid not below fifteen liras.²¹⁸ Alongside this pecuniary aid they were supplied with basic consumer goods. Nonetheless the aid program again excluded the workers.²¹⁹ Concerning only workers, it was decided that they would be supplied with underwear by subsidizing.²²⁰ A year later, Sümerbank furnished clothes for its workers.²²¹

An overview of the aid program reveals discriminatory organization on behalf of public officials. Though labor power was vital for the government they were made

²¹⁵ “ Abilerim askere gidince yardım falan almadık. Ne yardımı. Kim kime bakacak. Biz, annem babam yengem bir de torunlarla kaldık. Sadece yengemle ben çalışıyorduk. Kendimize çok zor bakıyorduk, ama yardım vermedi kimse bize.” Interview, Ayşe Zaimoğlu, June 2004.

²¹⁶ “Savaş ve hayat pahalılığı karşısında, amele ve esnaf yevmiyelerini ve işlerini yeni şartlara daha evvelden intibak ettirmişlerdir. Bu hayat pahalılığının bütün ağırlığını bilhassa muayyen miktardan daha az maaaş ya da ücret alan memurlar çekmektedir. Şu an için zam yapmak mümkün değildir. Başak çözümler araştırılacaktır. Şimdilik bu aile reislerine, birer çift ayakkabı, bu aile reilerine ve aşlerine elbiselik kumaş veriecektir” Tan, 6 August 1942.

²¹⁷ Tan, 22 October 1942, 12 November 1942, and 17 November 1942.

²¹⁸ Tan 17 June 1944.

²¹⁹ Tan, 19 June 1944.

²²⁰ Tan 26 February 1944.

²²¹ Sümerbank Bakırköy Textile Factory; Workers' Identity Files.

invisible in the aid programs. This situation was best reflected in the reduction of some workers' wages. Fatma from İzmir, who had been working at the Bakırköy Sümerbank underlined her strange position in the petition she wrote to the directory:

“On 25 July 1942, my family and I came from İzmir for work via the factories officer who hired us. All other workers who came here with us after a while gave up working. Only we continued working. While we were coming from our hometown, the factory supplied us with 10 liras of bonus and 14 liras of money for our transportation. For 14 months, 3-5 liras of our wages were cut, which makes clear that other workers' debts are being cut from our wages. I came here not to pay for others' debts but to work. I can only pay for my own debt. Will the reward of our hard work be paying someone else's debts? If you do not solve my problem, I will consult a higher office.”²²²

Apart from that, workers who could barely supported themselves made use of their rural ties. Most workers supported themselves with food from their lands in their hometown. Most of the petitions of workers were related to their going to home to pick up crops.²²³ This practice of workers underlines the fact that workers' rural ties should be evaluated in the context of not the underdevelopment of the working class, but the mechanisms of the working class in adapting to the wartime poverty and scarcity.

During the period, workers voiced their demands for social aid but these were rarely recognized. Resmiye Şen stated her position and requested aid in her petition:

“I have been working for seventeen months during which period I have been a good worker. I have six children; one of whom sixteen years old studying at the Village Institute, the others are,

²²² “25. 7. 1942 tarihinde fabrikanın tayin ettiği memur tarafından, çalışmak üzere ailecek buraya geldik. Bizimle beraber gelen bütün işçileri yavaş yavaş kaçırdılar. Yalnız biz kaldık. İzmir'den gelirken fabrika bize on lira avans ile ondört lira yol parası Verdi. 14 aydan beri maaşımızdan her ay üç beş lira kesilmekte. Herhalde bu işçilerin parası bize ödetilmekte. Ben buraya başkalarının borçlarını ödemeye gelmedim. Ancak kendi borcumu tanırım. Biz burada sebat ettik çalıştık diye, mükafat olarak mı başkasının parasını ödülüyoruz? Eğer sorunumuz çözülmezse daha yüksek makama başvuracağımı bildiririm.” Sümerbank Bakırköy Textile Factory; Fatma Gökür, Identity File. 17 September 1943.

²²³ Sümerbank Bakırköy Textile Factory; Sahure Ölmez, Gülsüm Yavaşoğlu, Nazife Devam, Identity Files.

succeeding, thirteen, nine, seven, five, and 3 years old. With my wage, I can barely nourish them with only bread. Since they are improperly fed day they are losing weight day by day. I request one of the followings: A raise in my wage, scholarships for my children's' education or an exemption from taxes.”²²⁴

A similar demand was embodied in Şerife's petition:

“My husband has a sight related disease. Since he is not able to see he cannot work. I am responsible for supporting my husband and two children. We have not given any aid. I request to get an aid to support my family.”²²⁵

The poverty of the World War II years with no social aid left the lower classes in overwhelmingly desperate situations. Workers, even though they worked overtime, could barely support themselves. For women workers, the degree of poverty varied with their marital status and whether they had children. These factors acted on women's entering in the work force alongside, wartime scarcity, work conditions, supporting themselves and mechanisms they devised for survival. In general, workers'being excluded from social aid and low wages led them to devise mechanisms of survival that stresses the role of familial, neighborhood and rural networks of support.

²²⁴ “ On yedi aydır dokumada çalışıyorum. Şu ana kadar hiç bir vukuatım olamamıştır. Köy enstitüsünde okuyan onaltı yaşında bir oğlum ve sırayla onüç, dokuz, yedi ve beş yaşlarında altı çocuğum var. Bu ücretle ancak ekmeğin temin ediyorum. Çocuklarım cahil ve gıdasız kalıp gün be gün zayıflıyorlar. Bu durumda ya ücretimin yükseltilmesini ya çocuklarımın okutulmasını ya da vergilerden muaf tutulmayı istiyorum. “ Sümerbank Bakırköy Textile Factory, Resmiye Şen; Identity File. 28 March 1944.

²²⁵ “ Kocam göz hastası ve göremediği için çalışmıyor. Dokuz ve üç yaşındaki iki çocuğa ve kocama ben bakıyorum. Alakadarlardan yardım istiyorum.” Sümerbank Bakırköy Textile Factory: Şerife Haral, Identity File. 1944.

Prisoner Worker Women in World War II

Forcing the prisoners to work as a mechanism for supplying enough labor power to increase production had been put into effect long before the war. It had been implemented in World War I, too.²²⁶ Moreover, putting prisoners to work like mandatory working provided the docile labor-power so badly needed in the face of high turnover rates. In 1940, the Justice Ministry was in charge of ascertaining and putting prisoners to work in public enterprises. The first group of prisoner-workers was 150 women whose imprisonment was longer than two years and whose health status was deemed for work. They were sent to the various enterprises of Sümerbank Textile Factory and they were paid 2/3 amounts of their non-prisoner counterparts.²²⁷

Later, it was declared that the result of putting prisoners to work was a highly efficient mechanism in production so it would be extended so as to include other sectors of work, such as construction and agriculture. Prisoners in İstanbul, İmralı, Ankara, Isparta and Karabük were also put to work.²²⁸ In Early 1941, 600 more prisoners were put to work.²²⁹ In order to recruit prisoners it was decided that one day of working would compensate for two days of punishment.²³⁰ The mechanism expanded by also including the juvenile correction houses.²³¹ The number of working

²²⁶ Erol Çatma, *Asker İşçiler*, İstanbul: Ceylan Press, 1998, p.46.

²²⁷ Tan, 24 August 1940.

²²⁸ Tan, 19 December 1940.

²²⁹ Tan, 21 March 1941.

²³⁰ Tan, 31 January 1941.

²³¹ Tan, 2 June 1941.

prisoner women at the Kayseri Sümerbank for instance, doubled within a few months. It was recorded that prisoner women were paid sixty piasters daily.²³²

In 1942, Justice Ministry decided that instead of transferring prisoners to factories, it would establish prison-factories. In such prisons, all prisoners were considered as workers during work hours. This facility was put into effect in Nazilli, working in the textile sector, and included 350 women.²³³ In one year, the number of worker-prisoners increased sharply. 5,000 prisoner-workers were recorded, which constituted nearly 1/3 of the 16,130 total numbers of prisoners. It was recorded that worker-prisoners were supplied with meals three times a day, and provided underwear and clothes alongside shoes.²³⁴

The ministries' decision to put prisoners to work was reflected in public discussions too. Worker-prisoner women's individual histories and work conditions came forward via the press' interest in them. A scan of news on prisoner-workers reveals the context in which prisoners' working was conceived and justified via government and public discourse. *Akşam* newspaper published a series of articles titled "Among Prisoner Women" that described prisoner-worker women's work and prison conditions beside women's individual stories. The main theme articulated in delineating the lives of these women was a kind of emancipation theme that working brought about. These women, who were excluded from the totality of social life in prisons, were assumed to have been corrected via working. It was affirmed that they were in an advantageous position relative to their prisoner counterparts in three main aspects: First, they were being reformed by working which furnished them with job

²³² Tan, 16 July 1941, 9 October 1941.

²³³ Tan, 16 July 1942.

²³⁴ Tan, 28 June 1943.

skills and money. Second, their souls were being cleaned of crime via the pleasure of working. Last, they were being reintegrated into social life by the crafts they learned. For these reasons the mechanism of putting prisoners to work was applauded in the public discourse. Moreover, it was noted that most of the prisoner workers lives' had improved; their eyes sparkled, faces smiled, the pain and sorrow of their crimes had been removed.²³⁵

As explained, the government, throughout the war, developed different mechanisms for increasing the rate of production required by the war economy. The recruitment of labor power was vital in this process. However, the prevailing labor scarcity, which deepened with the high turnover rates, impeded the efficiency of production. Putting prisoners to work was one way to increase production in the sense of supplying a labor pool of docile workers who had not chance to leave the work throughout their punishment. The public discourse on prisoner-workers, on the other hand, portrayed the issue in relation to the emancipation of prisoners theme, which overshadowed the efficient production base of the mechanism. Therefore, the public discourse, instead of conceiving prisoner-workers as a marginal part of the working class, delineated them as emancipated prisoners blurring the burden of working, and the exploitative conditions of the work on prisoners.

Working Women in the Private Sector

Most of the private enterprises of the period were small-scale, employing less than ten persons that made them exempt from the Labor Code and its obligations. But it is difficult to reach accurate data about workers in the private sector. However,

²³⁵ Akşam, 1 October 1944, 4 October 1944.

workers' personal stories and memoirs enable us to reconstruct their work experiences.

Big public enterprises that had expanded through the 1930s via the industrialization program hindered the development of especially small-scale private enterprises. Notwithstanding the disadvantages of the process on small scale enterprises, the World War II years witnessed a transformation on behalf of the development of small scale enterprises. The void in the market, resulting from the scarcity of basic goods, created a realm for the operations of small-scale enterprises. Moreover, the closing of international trade lines enabled local enterprises to get expanded in the market.²³⁶ What is more, the government implemented a policy to protect small-scale enterprises and support their investments.²³⁷ Following this, these enterprises supplied employment opportunities.

Women, as in the public sector were recruited mostly into tobacco and textile concerns, which were normatively considered to be female work. According to an Economy Ministry census, there were 143,706 looms in small-scale textile work. 45,716 of these looms were working for the market while the remaining was for family needs. The workers of this sector consisted of women and children who produced seventy-five to eighty million meters of cloth a year, which was three times more than the total production of Kayseri Combinations.²³⁸

²³⁶ Tan, 4 February 1941.

²³⁷ Tan, 1 March 1942.

²³⁸ Tan, 24 February 1942.

Intermittent Work

The main characteristic of small-scale enterprises, especially of tobacco, was the unstable periods of the work. That is to say that, the period of harvest in summer was the high point for tobacco sector's recruitment of workers, while in winters the same sector barely continued operating. When the tobacco work finished, the workers were let go until the next season of work. Therefore, the intermittent work conditions were the most troubling aspect of the private sector that the workers experienced. Following this, workers had two chances: They either searched for miscellaneous job opportunities seasonally or devised different mechanisms of survival in the face of haunting poverty of the war.

During the harvest times, people could find jobs easily. As Zehra Kosova writes, the head of the workers of the enterprises even stopped people in the streets to recruit them.²³⁹ Nonetheless, when the market conditions grew stagnant, people were barely able to find jobs. The scarcity of work opportunities interwoven with the poverty led people rush to factories. For example, in a tobacco enterprise in Galata, which advertised that new workers were needed, a huge crowd of men and women gathered to apply jobs. The prevailing throng, it was reported was dispensed by the intervention of policemen.²⁴⁰ The sporadic employment of tobacco workers were portrayed as them working in summer and then, getting into debt to the tradesmen in winter since they were not able to find jobs in that time.²⁴¹

²³⁹ Zehra Kosova, *Ben İşçiyim*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1996, p.72.

²⁴⁰ Tan, 26 March 1940.

²⁴¹ Zehra Kosova, *ibid.*, p.49.

In finding a job, familial or neighbourhood networks played a significant role. The children of tobacco workers and their other relatives found jobs in the same sector. The same process was true in other sectors, too. Most women entered enterprises where their fathers, sisters or brothers already worked. Kosova described her entrance to work as following:

“I had decided to work since our income barely supported us. My mother told my request to my father. After the dinner, he asked me whether I wanted to work or not. After I told him that I wanted to, he took me to his workplace and introduced me to the head chief. In this way, I started working.”²⁴²

Familial relations played an important role in succeeding generations continue in the same jobs:

“I was living in Kasımpaşa, where most of the inhabitants were workers too. Mothers, fathers and all their children continued working in the tobacco sector passed down from earlier generations. They did not know any other work to do.”²⁴³

Neighborhood networks that furnished the inhabitants with informal and informational networks helped workers to learn about prevailing work opportunities and provided workers of same neighborhood to know each other. This social network in turn, helped worker’s acceptance to work. One striking example of this practice was the licenses that were informally distributed by the foreman in the workplaces to the persons with whom they were acquainted with:

“Tobacco enterprises informally sent to the workers whom they had known before licenses. In those years, foremen distributed those licenses to the workers with whom he were already acquainted. By the time, the work would start; those workers who had obtained those licenses applied and were accepted to the job with the licenses in their hands. There was no foreman with whom I was

²⁴² “Çalışmaya karar verdim. Çok zordu geçim çünkü. Annem babama çalışmak istediğimi söylemiş. Akşam yemeğinden sonra babam: Zehra çalışacak mısın diye sordu. Ben evet dedikten sonra ertesi gün beni atölyeye götürdü ve usta başıyla tanıştırdı. Böylece iş hayatına girmiş oldum.” Ibid., p. 25.

²⁴³ “Kasımpaşa’da yaşıyoruz. Burada herkes işçi. Analar, babalar ve çocuklar atadan kalma tütün işiyle uğraşıyorlar. Burada kimse tütünden başka bir iş tanımıyor.” Ibid., p.36.

familiar. Fortunately, my brother found a license for me so that I was accepted for the job.”²⁴⁴

Nonetheless, not all of the works were considered proper for women, even textile work, which was the conventional work area of women. Zekiye from Gaziantep was not able to work in the textile sector due to the loom owners and laws. Zekiye, who had eight children and a husband whose wage, was eighteen liras a month had to work to support her family. She bought four looms by selling the furniture of their house. To buy yarn she got in contact with mediators who sold yarn twenty-five liras instead of the 680 piasters fixed price. Then she directly applied to bank to buy the yarn. When she approached the Trade Office for help she was rejected on the grounds that it was forbidden for a woman to be a master weaver.²⁴⁵

Beside this, women’s marital status influenced their gaining acceptance on these enterprises. Kosova noted that one day, while she was looking for a job with her girlfriends. They heard that that a sock-weaving enterprise was looking for women workers they decided to apply. When they approached to the director he asked them whether they were married or not. All of the women declared that they were single, but they were badly in need of the work since they had to support their families. However, they were told the enterprise was no longer hiring.²⁴⁶ Concerning marital status, it operated in a manner similar to the “morally clean report” that was a prerequisite for women to enter work in the public sector. In this sense, the familial and neighborhood networks had a bifurcated effect on workers.

²⁴⁴ “Açılacak olan tütün mağazalarından işçilere gizli gizli markalar gönderiliyor. O yıllarda tütün mağazalarında işe almak için ustabaşılar önceden tanıdıkları işçilere marka gönderirlerdi. İşin başlayacağı gün işçiler o markayla müracaat ederlerdi. Beni tanıyan yok ki marka göndersin. Ağabeyim bana da bir marka bulmuş. Böylece ben de işe başladım.” Ibid., p.64.

²⁴⁵ Tan, 10 September 1941.

²⁴⁶ Zehra Kosova, ibid., p.75.

On the one hand, having those ties made it easier for people to find jobs, which also had become a mark of guarantee for the employers concerning the qualifications of the workers, on the other hand, lacking these ties, including marital ties, became the pretext for employees to exclude people from work wherein the gender and ethnic diversities were normatively appropriated in a discriminatory manner.

Wages

As mentioned above, the most important characteristic of work in the private sector was its sporadic nature. However, this did not hinder people from working in those sectors since the wages, and opportunity for changing jobs, attracted people. One women tobacco worker of the period, Mediha Özçelik, recounted that the people of the period including her, chose to work in the private sector:

“Some of my friends and I worked in the private sector. Its wages satisfied us more than the wages of the public sector. Yes, there existed disadvantages of the private sector concerning the social policies; however I chose not to work there, since I could change my job whenever there was a job with a better wage or I could work at two jobs whenever it was possible. Yes it was exhausting to work two jobs, but what else could we do? Everyone was experiencing the same poverty.”²⁴⁷

Concerning wages, however, it was reported that workers' wages in the private sector did not rise. In 1942, though state personnel and the public sector workers received raises in their wages, the private sector workers did not.²⁴⁸ The news

²⁴⁷ “Bazı arkadaşlarla birlikte biz özelde çalıştık. Niye dersin yevmiyeler devletten daha iyiydi de ondan. E tabii bizim sektörde sosyal güvence çok yoktu. Ama ben yine de özelde çalışmayı tercih ettim. Çünkü daha iyi yevmiyeli bir iş bulunca hemen oraya geçebiliyordum. Ya da iki işte birden çalışıyordum. Eh tabii zor oluyordu iki işte çalışmak. Ama ne yapacaksın. Herkes açlık tan kırılıyordu.” Interview, Mediha Özçelik, July 2004.

²⁴⁸ Tan, 19 January 1942.

complained that though the public sector workers had receive a twenty-five percent rise, the wages in the private sector was remained as same the rate of 1939, from which time to 1942 the prices had risen 400 percent.²⁴⁹ Since the government did not oblige the private sector enterprises to increase wages, it was noted that workers who earned 100-150 piasters a day struggled to support themselves. These workers were eating only bread and their capacity for work diminished day by day.²⁵⁰ The private sector enterprises, on the other hand, were reported to have been doubled their profits. Though some of the enterprises announced that they would implement social aid instead of raising their wages, the aid was never materialized.²⁵¹ Nevertheless, the following years, which witnessed the high turnover rates, forced private enterprises to increase the wages of their workers.²⁵²

Lack of Social Policies

As discussed in the previous part, the public sector workers made use of, though in a limited way, social policies such as housing, health services, nourishment, and day-nurseries. In the private sector enterprises such policies can barely be said to exist, since most of the enterprises were exempt from the obligations of the Labor Code. Nonetheless, two significant factors sometimes forced employers to implement the basic kinds of policies of health, security and nourishment. Initially, employers had to take into consideration the efficiency of workers for the maximization of production, so they sometimes provided workers with security of work, health leaves

²⁴⁹ Tan, 24 March 1942.

²⁵⁰ Tan, 27 April 1942.

²⁵¹ Tan, 21 June 1942.

²⁵² Tan, 20 September, 1943

and nourishment facilities. Moreover, workers, via executing the mechanism of workers representation, bargained on the conditions of work with the employers.

Kosova describes their bargaining in Felemenk Tobacco Enterprise:

“We had barely social rights there. However, there was a kind of solidarity among the workers. Worker representatives bargained with employees on raises in wages, delivery of meals in work hour and work leaves. After our contestation, employers accepted and implemented most of our demands.”²⁵³

However, workers complained of the worsening conditions of work and breaks. Husca, a tobacco enterprise located in Beşiktaş, exemplified the work conditions in most of the private sectors. The daily wages varied between forty and sixty piasters and 500-600 people worked in the same room. The workers had their lunches in the same room.²⁵⁴ Sometimes, old houses were transformed into workplaces wherein the workers mostly worked sitting on the ground.²⁵⁵ Apart from that, not all the enterprises supplied their workers with the basic facilities. Mediha Özçelik recounted how every morning while they were on the road work, they bought their half loaves of bread distributed by ration-cards and ate them, apart from which they were not able to have any meal during the work day, because of having no money.²⁵⁶ The poverty of workers even troubled them when they were going to work. Mediha Özçelik again described their way to get to work:

“We applied all the jobs that we were able to find. Our workplaces were far away from our homes. We had walk hours to reach the

²⁵³ “Burda sosyal haklar çok azdı, ücretler düşüktü. Yalnız her şeye rağmen işçiler arasında bir birlik vardı. İşçi mümessilerimizin yaptıkları müzakereler sonucu ücretlerin artışı, işyerinde yemek verilmesi ve izin hakkının tam olarak sağlanması gibi isteklerimizin büyük bir bölümü kabul edildi.” Zehra Kosova, *ibid.*, p.116.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.71.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.32.

²⁵⁶ “Nerde işi bulursak ona başvururduk. İşyerleri evimizden çok uzak olurdu. Saatlerce yürürdük işe. Sabah beşte kalkar, tek yemeğimiz ekmeğimizi alır yiye yiye işe giderdik. İşe varınca yorgun olurduk.” Interview, Mediha Özçelik, July 2004.

work. We used to get up near 5 o'clock in the morning. We used to eat our only bread on the way. By the time we got to work we were tired."²⁵⁷

Similar complaints concerning work routes took place in the press too. Neriman who had been living in the Yedikule district commented on the exhausting circumstances with which the women workers had to deal while on the way to work. She maintained that since there was no trolley serving their district, women had serious difficulties getting to their workplaces.²⁵⁸ Night shifts were also dangerous and insecure for women while they were on the road. A court reported one that Rukiye, who had been working in a textile enterprise, while was going to work for night shift, was sexually harassed by two men who tried to kidnap her. When she cried, the inhabitants of her neighborhood rescued her.²⁵⁹

Sanitary facilities were also non-existent in the private sector. Diseases and work related accidents were a constant danger. First of all, the workplaces were unclean. Moreover, since most enterprises were free from the obligations of the Labor Code Workers, work conditions did not protect against work-related accidents. Many women workers injured themselves using their machines. They got either part of their bodies or hair caught in the machines.²⁶⁰ Some accidents were fatal. For instance, two washerwomen were reported to have died in an explosion of the washing machines at one enterprise.²⁶¹

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Tan, 8 March 1944.

²⁵⁹ Tan, 16 March 1944.

²⁶⁰ Tan, 27 April 1941, 12 February 1942.

²⁶¹ Tan, 3 August 1940.

Intermingling of the Work and Domestic Tasks

In cases of diseases or work-related accidents to which nearly all workers were exposed, workers stayed out of their workplaces without receiving their wages and the cost of their treatment were also met by them. Family members' diseases were, on the other hand, of course taken care of the women during which time they also had to leave the work. It became especially overwhelming for single women to take care of their families. Kosova's experiences exemplify the conditions that women had to deal with in the case of family member illnesses. When the war broke out her daughter and mother fell ill at the same time. She spent most of her money for their treatment. However, when her mother's health grew worse, she was not able to continue her work, and she needed someone to look after her daughter. A woman from her neighborhood came everyday to look after the daughter, but within a week or so, her child died. However, she had to continue work and look after her mother. She spent four liras of her total weekly wage of six liras for the treatment of her mother and she spent the remaining amount for their subsistence. Three months later, her mother died too. She was so miserably poor that she sold her golden watch that had been given to her a present at the birth of her daughter in order to bury her mother.²⁶² After a while, she gave birth to another baby but her husband was in the army and she had to find work. Via her neighbors' help she found a job in a tobacco enterprise of which the daily wage was seventy piasters. Nonetheless, her wage was too low to nourish her child. The improperly fed baby got easily sick. The doctor prescribed an injection for the baby, the cost of was eight liras. Although, she and her neighbors tried to collect

²⁶² Zehra Kosova, *Ibid.*, pp.116-118.

money, they failed to find it. Therefore, she sold her bed and one suit of her father-in-law to get the money.²⁶³

The intermittent work conditions embittered the lives of workers more when the season for work finished. Kosova described the lives of tobacco workers:

“When the tobacco season finished, workers started doing various jobs. Some became porters some shoe-cleaners and some got into debts. Tobacco workers were miserably poor and wretched. They used to go to villages working to survive in winters, in summers though, they worked in rooms where they worked, ate and sleep. Most of the time, a few families used to live together in a home.”²⁶⁴

Mediha Özçelik affirmed that they went to nearby villages to work with her husband in winters, during which time they lived and slept in a small room with three other families.²⁶⁵ Notwithstanding the difficult conditions of working in agricultural lands in winter, the workers had to go there. Moreover, those who found jobs in these areas were conceived to be lucky. Winter time, meant grinding poverty besides having to leave one’s homeland. Kosova maintained that most workers picked up all their families, sheets, dishes and saucepans and traveled to Mudanya by ferry and then each family directed themselves to the villages wherein they would work. The conditions of work and living were another difficulty for them. Three or four families lived and work together under the strict control of the local landowners who paid workers insignificant amounts.²⁶⁶

Workers also sought for various jobs when their work-period had finished.

Lives of the private sector workers can be illustrated as transient periods of work and

²⁶³ Ibid., pp.120-1.

²⁶⁴ “Tütün işi bitti, işçileri kimisi ayakkabı boyacılığı, kimisi Sirkeci’ye gidip hamallık yapıyor, kimisi bakkalardan borç bulup yiyor. Tütün işçilerinin durumu çok sefildi. Kışın boğaz tokluğuna çoluk çocuk köyler tütün işine giderlerdi, yazın ise tütünlerin içinde bir odada hem çalışır, hem yerler, hem de yatarlardı. Çoğu zaman birkaç aile birlikte yaşardı.” *ibid.*, p.60.

²⁶⁵ Interview, Mediha Özçelik, July 2004.

²⁶⁶ Zehra Kosova, *Ben İşçiyim*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1996, p. 71.

then succeeding desperate times spent to looking for other work, during which time finding other mechanisms to survive, day laboring and sometimes finding work again in the summer. Women in these periods supported themselves and their families by day labor as peddlers, charwomen or cleaning women. On occasion when no such work was available they either bartered or sold household goods functioned to save themselves. During the war years, it was common for women of the same district to go to near villages together to barter their household goods or clothes for sustenance goods such flour, wheat, rice, *tarhana* and bulgur.²⁶⁷ In addition, women collectively again, went to nearby lands to collect the redundant wheat or grass to prepare their meals.²⁶⁸ Ayşe portrayed these women as follows:

“Fields around the railway in our neighborhood were full of women collecting the grass in these fields. I wish these fields could speak and tell all the poverty lived by us in those times. Women used to collect these grasses after which they boiled them and prepare the dinner. That was the results of poverty and scarcity of the war years.”²⁶⁹

The exploitive work conditions interwoven with the poverty, scarcity and destitution of everyday life wrapping the lower classes’ social life had a distinctive aspect specific to women. Women, as they always have been, come under discussion as mothers, wives, as commodities in the market and also as sexual objects. Under different conjectural power networks such as in the market, in politics, family, and education, one of the identities above, inclusive of its normative and practical implications, became more obvious via which process the prevailing gender practices, norms and division of labor have been reproduced. This kind of reification-abstraction

²⁶⁷ Ibid., pp.123.

²⁶⁸ Tan, 2 July 1943.

²⁶⁹ “Bizim oradaki tren yolunun orası. İşte oranın dili olsa da söylese size. Kadınlar oradan otlar hindba falan toplar, yemek yaparlardı. Sağdan soldan ot toplanıp yenirdi. Çorbasını yapıyorsun, yemeğini yapıyorsun. Kıtık zamanı öyle oldu işte.” Interview, Ayşe Zaimoğlu, June 2004.

that operates on the labor, identity, norms and bodies of women overshadows the corresponding gender inequalities.

Sexual Harassment

One of the leading forms wherein the gender inequality is embodied is in sexual harassment which the control and disposal of women over their bodies, sexualities and identities is subversively transposed. Sexual harassment as an exclusionary and subversive mechanism acts conclusively in the social and personal lives of women. Therefore, it is a multilayered form of exercise of power over women. Just as women are fragmented as the flesh as a result of sexual harassment, their identity dramatically diverges on corresponding lines. A mother can be turned into a victim, or a women worker is turned into a woman who has a doubtful morality. This subversive permeability not only operates on women's bodies and identity but also on the totality of their social lives that are exteriorized by women's transposition towards the margins of social life.

Such a determining occasion that women experienced, the way they handled it, how it was conceived in the public discourse, and how dramatic an effect it had on women's social and work life, and ultimately how women reconciled their sexuality with work in the face of the prevailing gender inequalities in World War II years would be delineated in the context mentioned above. It should be noted that, locating the issue of sexual harassment in the private sector part does not mean that this issue was more prevalent in there. Rather, notwithstanding the others, it was the one reflected in the press. It can be seen in the unfolding of the position of the public discourse, government, and labor relations vis-à-vis the issue of sexual harassment.

The case came under discussion with *Tan* publishing an article. It was reported that employer had sexually harassed a girl named Vedia employed in a workshop consisting of five to ten workers. Her employer propelled Vedia into prostitution. Though she was suffering from poverty she had to leave the job. She had been unable to bring a suit against her employer. The case had revealed itself in the press via Vedia's writing a letter about it to Sabiha Sertel.²⁷⁰ In the following days, the case took off swaying the press with the participation of diverse actors such as lawyers, writers declaring their opinions, the local governor, the Work Office and the policemen involved in the issue which also influenced the public discussion of the issue.²⁷¹ The economy inspectors decided to conduct an inquiry into the factory by asking the other workers to shed light on the case. İstanbul governor Lütü Kırdar declared that the case was a social problem with which the local economy directory had been dealing. It was also stated that the issue relates not only with proper clauses of the Labor Code but judiciary. Within one week or so, the case finalized with Vedia declaring that her employer had not sexually harassed her. According to the account that she had given to inspectors, she said that she had never been badly treated by anyone in the workshop. She left the job by her free will since she was going to get married. She maintained that, because she was embarrassed, she said she would go to Ankara instead of saying that she would get married.²⁷² *Tan* published another account informally declared in *Tan's* office by the lawyer of the enterprise in question. This lawyer was asserted to have come the day after the news about the sexual harassment was released. The officers of the newspaper were surprised since they had not

²⁷⁰ *Tan*, 23 March 1940.

²⁷¹ *Tan*, 24 March 1940.

²⁷² *Tan*, 28 March 1942.

revealed the name of the girl who had been harassed. The lawyer stated that he had received an anonymous letter. He accounted for the issue by saying that the man she had been referring to was not the employer but the foreman, and that; he had been informed that she had left the factory since she would be getting married.²⁷³

These conflicting accounts shed light on how the discourse on sexual harassment evolved and finalized in the legal and social context. The significant issue is not to demonstrate that this woman was sexually harassed- though it seemed in this case it was probable- but to analyze how the discourse on sexual harassment was constructed, evolved, and finalized through which the women's lives were significantly reshaped. Analyzing these processes reveals the mechanisms of articulation, reproduction and contestation of gender inequalities. First of all, the case of sexual harassment was the subject of an inspection in which the policemen and Labor Office became involved. Even in the first place, it was constructed as a semi-detective and semi-judiciary issue. Following that, it was also a case for the Labor Code. Therefore, it could be said that sexual harassment was defined in the context of crime. However, there arises a big problem, at this point, concerning the definition of sexual harassment as a crime since it has never been not concretely but merely defined with its implications in laws it could be a subject of punishment. There are various types of sexual harassment and only a few of them can be appropriated gives measures of crime. The Labor Code and the other related laws formulates it in terms of a damage to one's self-esteem and pride, which are highly obscure normative terms and hard to prove. What the Labor Code did not allow for in such a condition was free the worker to leave the job without paying for damages. Such an obscure occasion and insignificant obligation concerning the sexual harassment hint on its social

²⁷³ Tan, 28 March 1940.

construction, implying the reproduction of gender inequalities. Just as forms of crimes elaborate the map of the embodiment of forms of power that conserve the totality of social order, the obscurity of sexual harassment as a form of crime serves its reproduction it via annihilating its practical base in social life. As a result, the only way for women in such an occasion is to furnish themselves with the social mechanisms of protection, such as obtaining social acceptance by being virtuous mothers and wives.

To learn about women's own conceptions of their sexuality, identity and work life and how they were able to reconcile these during the war years it is instructive to probe the letters of working women published in *Tan* newspaper. When, Sabiha Sertel published these letters, she stated that she had received numerous letters from lower class women who were socially vulnerable and had experienced different kinds of sexual harassment in work places.²⁷⁴ Most of the women lamented that they were mostly treated as sexual objects, which exacerbated their working conditions.²⁷⁵ Another woman maintained that women were forced to stress their sexuality to continue working otherwise they were not able to even get the job. And in the workplace this treatment was worsen since their employers wanted to flirt with them. She declared that most of their women kept silent about such degrading treatment since they badly needed to work.²⁷⁶ There, of course, were more damaging experiences of women. A poor woman who had to look after her aged mother began working. She had an illicit love affair with her employer, and she became pregnant. She was not able to have an abortion since she had a heart-related disease. After she

²⁷⁴ *Tan*, 25 March 1940.

²⁷⁵ *Tan*, 27 March 1940.

²⁷⁶ *Tan*, 28 March 1940.

gave birth to her baby she abandoned her in fallow field, wherein the baby died. She was arrested and imprisoned. Her employer confirmed her account.²⁷⁷ She was called the murderer mother in the newspapers.

Generally speaking, women's control and disposal of their bodies and sexuality was the subject of manipulation. They had almost no mechanisms of contestation to deal with this kind of manipulation that resulted from the exclusionary gender practices and norms, social control mechanisms and basic economic necessities along which they either had to consent or withdraw from the given circumstances.

In conclusion, women working either in the public or the private sectors experienced similar mechanisms of discrimination resulted from the manipulation of sexual difference and its incorporation into the structure of work. Even the hiring of women was based on the elimination of women who were supposed to be sexually impure from the labor market. Though the public sector furnished its workers some social policies and aids, these were both very limited in their extents and failed to meet the demands and needs of women workers resulted from the simultaneity of work and domestic duties. Thus, women utilized diverse methods varying from making use of neighborhood networks to gaining an extra support via their rural ties.

Day Laborer Women

Day labor promised very bare opportunities for gaining a livelihood to the lower classes. By definition it offered no stability concerning work place, hours and works

²⁷⁷ Tan, 29 March 1940.

itself. Nevertheless, there were similarities among private, public sectors and day labor in relation to the incorporation and manipulation of sexual difference in the work practices.

Day laboring was a common form of earning money among the lower classes. Unemployed people, lower class housewives, children and the aged strived to support themselves in this manner. Day laboring involved arbitrarily found work of which the duration was no longer than one day and could be sought again after that day, requiring manual labor, and was conducted either in streets or in houses for indeterminate work hours and insecure work conditions.

The pay for day labor was highly insignificant in the sense that it only helped saving the day, with the opportunities of work left unknown for succeeding days. When the intermittent periods of work in private sector are taken into consideration, many people supported themselves with such works. Kosova describes how on the days when she was unemployed and did not have any money, she went to the boat station and carried people's baggage. In this way, she was able to earn the money for the dinner.²⁷⁸ This striking example reveals the nature of day labor, its highly transient and insecure aspects in addition to the market value that it supplied for only sustenance.

Porters hanging around the local bazaars or in streets in the early morning waited and sought opportunities. They sometimes were not able to find any work, but only wandered around. Adnan Binyazar, whose mother due to her poverty sent him and his brother from Diyarbakir to İstanbul to be with their father, began working as a porter with his brother. After a while, their father abandoned them because he was unable to support them. So they were homeless. He depicted those days as following:

“My brother and I were sleeping in the streets or in old, ruined buildings. We barely found anything to eat and we constantly

²⁷⁸ Zehra Kosova, *Ben İşçiyim*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1996, p. 42.

wandered around in such hunger that when we went to the bazaar we could barely stand up because of exhaustion and hunger. Sometimes, old women pitied us and had us carry their baggage. However, we were so weak that we were trembling while carrying the baggage.”²⁷⁹

Sometimes, it was possible to find jobs for more than a few days. Mediha Özcelik told how she found work ironing that took nearly a week. She ironed nearly 1000 dresses a day in a filthy dark room without eating anything.²⁸⁰

For some part of the lower class, day labor was a temporary period that was resorted to as a last when they were unemployed and needed extra income. On the other side, day labor for especially the marginal part of the lower class was a permanent form of gaining their livelihood. Women mostly worked as peddlers, charwomen, and washerwomen did tasks such as ironing, knitting, and washing which were extended forms of domestic labor. It was reported by İstanbul Municipality in 1941 that there existed 2,500 people in Istanbul who worked as servants and day-nurses. A Workers Bureau would be established so as to provide them with working licenses.²⁸¹ However, the efforts of the municipality did not yield favorable result. Apart from that, the estimated number failed to include even a small number of day laborers since day laboring combined both informal and transitory forms of work.

These aspects left day laborers in vulnerable positions vis-à-vis their employers and work conditions. In the news of the era, it was common to come across the work-related accidents of cleaning ladies. A woman named Meri, who was a cleaning lady,

²⁷⁹ “ Kardeşimle birlikte ya sokaklarda ya da hanlarda kalıyorduk. Zar zor yiyecek bir şeyler bulabiliyorduk. O kadar aç oluyorduk ki hamallık etmek için pazara gittiğimizde ayakta zar zor durabiliyorduk. Bazen yaşlı kadınlar bize acır, eşyalarını taşıttırırlandı. Ama biz öyle bitkin, öyle takatten düşmüş olurduk ki, eşyaları taşıırken güçsüzlükten titrer, düşecek gibi olurduk.” Adnan Binyazar, *Masalını Yitiren Dev*, İstanbul: Can Yayınları, 1996, p.52

²⁸⁰ Interview, Mediha Özcelik, July 2004.

²⁸¹ Tan, 16 February 1940.

was reported to have died while she was cleaning the windows of a house.²⁸² Another cleaning woman named Menekse, whose body seriously burned while cleaning had been only fifteen years old.²⁸³

Many poor women worked in such conditions without any kind of work security. It was not rare to come across description of the dramatic events to which these women were exposed. For instance, Mukaddes, who was a thirteen years old, was a cleaning lady who spent three days a week cleaning and conducting the housework in Halise's house. One day when she did not come home from the work, her sister went to pick her up from Halise's house. Unfortunately, she found that her sister was about to die. Mukadess was in an unconscious state, her body badly wounded and seriously burnt. She learnt that when Mukaddes had been cleaning the house, she had broken one of the windows after which Halise the owner of the house, had beat and thrown her into the fire. Within a few days, Mukaddes died.²⁸⁴

The poor living in the slums of the big cities were mostly involved in day labor since gaining a livelihood was becoming harder and harder in the face of the grinding poverty of the war years. Nearly all of the members of a family had to work to support themselves. An aged woman who lived in a slum with her family described how all of the members of their family supported themselves by day labor:

“My daughter, my son-in-law, my grandchild and I are living together. My daughter knits and earns fifty piaster a day. My son-in-law shines shoes. I do not know how much he earns for a day. He can only support himself. He leaves early in the morning and comes at night to sleep. My grandchild sells newspaper in the streets and he is paid fifteen to twenty piaster a day.”²⁸⁵

²⁸² Tan, 15 November 1940.

²⁸³ Tan, 4 January 1941.

²⁸⁴ Tan, 29 June 1943.

²⁸⁵ “ Bir kızım ,bir damadım bir de torunum var. Kızım dikiş dikiyor günde elli kuruş kazanıyor. Damadım kundura boyacılığı yapıyor. Ne kadar kazanıyor bilmem. Ancak kendi karnını doyuruyor.

Şükufe Nihal describes a typical way of life in the slums. The poorest of the poor lived mostly in old *medreses*, consisting of small rented rooms. She came across a woman named Ayşe who had been living with her six children paying six liras for rent. Their room, of which the window was broken, had solely a broken, wooden bedstead with a thin mattress on it. Ayşe whose husband had died four years ago, had supported them by washing the laundry of her neighbors living in that *medrese*. Her children desperately sought numerous jobs wandering in the streets. For the last fifteen days, she had been lying ill and the family barely could feed itself²⁸⁶

This portrait of the poor was far from exaggerated; it was typical pattern of their living. As Sabiha Sertel reported, there existed 50,000 people in İstanbul alone who were miserably poor.²⁸⁷ Single women who had to support their children and other family members comprised the lowest strata of the marginal poor. A woman whose husband had died had to look after and support her aged mother and three children, the oldest of which was nine years old. She rented out one the rooms of her house and began knitting to earn money. However, she could barely gain a livelihood. Therefore, she had to sell her household goods in the local bazaars periodically.²⁸⁸

Though the government implemented a social aid program to alleviate the problems of fixed and lower income people, it helped only a very insignificant part of the poor population.²⁸⁹ Most of the poor, moreover, were excluded from the social aid program on the pretext that they were able to work. This exacerbated especially the lives

Akşam da sandığı omuzuna vurup evine yatmaya geliyor. Torunum gazete satıyor. O da günde on-onbeş kuruş kazanıyor.” Tan, 7 June 1943.

²⁸⁶ Tan, 12 July 1941.

²⁸⁷ Tan, 12 July 1942.

²⁸⁸ Tan, 2 July 1942.

²⁸⁹ Tan, 4 March 1943.

of women who were living alone and were responsible for looking after and supporting their children, mothers, sisters and brothers alone. Sevim Özyeğen, whose husband had been recruited to military, did not receive the stipend that was given to the family members of conscripted men since her wedding had been performed by an imam. In order to support herself and her baby, she had begun knitting the legs of stockings and received 0.5 piaster each. Since she was nursing her baby she was able knit at most fifteen stockings a day. However, she was not able to meet her quota everyday. Apart from that, she was not given any tasks in some days. Süreyya Güler, who was seventeen years old, was a washerwoman who had an elderly mother with five little sisters. Since she was able to work, she was excluded from the food ration card system. However, after a while, she was exposed to pneumonia, which prevented her from working, after which she was not supported with any kind of aid. Likewise, a mother and daughter who were supporting themselves by washing the laundry in Laleli district were excluded from the aid because they were marked as having the capacity to work.²⁹⁰

Day laboring, was a common form of gaining a livelihood, was the purview of the lower classes that were unable to work and were excluded from the minority of poor people supplied with social aid. In this way, they daily earned insignificant amounts of money to obtain their sustenance. However, the transitory and insecure aspects of day laboring left them in vulnerable positions vis-à-vis their employers and work conditions.

²⁹⁰ Tan, 10 December 1942

Lower Class Working Women and the Social Question

Through the war years, the number of working women significantly raised. Women had to work mostly overtime and also accomplish their domestic tasks. Nonetheless, the two tasks of work and domestic labor were overwhelmingly hard for women workers overcoming both of them simultaneously. Moreover, social policies that addressed the women workers barely existed and failed to alleviate the hard conditions of women's lives. Therefore, women mostly made use of both familial and neighborhood ties to conduct their domestic duties.

The aim of this part is to portray the public discourse of the war years on women workers. How women as a part of work force were conceived by the government, which was reflected on its policies, various enterprises, and feminists, to which degree this discourse met women's needs and demands and, via which historical changes this discourse was reoriented, will be discussed in this part.

Women first of all, were conceived as the mothers of the nation. This notion was in fact one of the keystones of the Kemalist regime that was inherited from the early Republican years. The discourse of the mothers of the nation could be rendered intelligible as effectively bolstering and monitoring of the reproductive capacities of women via articulating the notion as a part of the social policies.²⁹¹ From the early years of the war, the issue of increasing the population was formulated within the context of increasing the efficiently laboring parts of the population.²⁹² Suphi Nuri İleri, for

²⁹¹ Ayşe Durakbaşı, *Halide Edib : Türk Modernleşmesi ve Feminizm*, İstanbul : İletişim Yayınları, 2000. p.56, see also, Nilüfer Göle, *Modern Mahrem : medeniyet ve örtünme / Nilüfer Göle*, İstanbul : Metis yayınları, 1998., *75 Yılda Kadınlar ve Erkekler*, edited by. Ayşe Berktaş Hacımiraçoğlu, İstanbul : Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1998.

²⁹² Tan, 16 December 1940.

instance, by pointing out the low rates of production and efficiency, stressed the raising of population via the procreation of women:

“We have to improve our rate of production. The solution of this problem lies in women’s reproductive capacities. Women should give more and more births in following years. The procreation of Turkish women is the subject of both the economy and social policies. Women should be furnished with social aid for each child they have had since children are also of nation and the state.”²⁹³

In tandem with this idea, lower class women who had more than six children were awarded with a medal.²⁹⁴ However, this policy was far from supplying women with any mechanisms of social security and there soon raised objections against it. A woman who wrote in *Tan* stated that:

“I have six children. In our family, only my husband works as an officer. Therefore, we have serious difficulties supporting ourselves. Though my husband has been serving our state for twenty years none of my children has been able to get any kind of scholarship to continue their education. The medals that have been given to women like me cannot meet our children’s needs.”²⁹⁵

A Similar critique of the award system was reflected in the press. It was stated that rewarding was an unrealistic solution for increasing the production. What was really required was the implementation of social policies addressing the alleviation of the severe life conditions of women in brining up their children, such as child aid or day nurseries.²⁹⁶

²⁹³ “ Üretimimizi artırmamız lazımdır. Bu yüzden, kadınların her yıl daha fazla doğurmalarını ve bu çocukları yetiştirebilmelerini sağlamalıyız. Tür kadının doğurma işi hem para hem kanun işidir. Doğan her çocuk için kadınlara nakdi yardım yapılmalıdır. Çünkü çocuk devlet ve milletin evladıdır.” *Tan*, 12 November 1943.

²⁹⁴ *Tan*, 23 March 1940.

²⁹⁵ “ Altı çocuğum var. Bizde bir tek kocam çalışır ve çok zor sağlıyoruz geçimimizi. Kocam yirmi senelik memur olduğu halde, çocukları bile okutmadı devlet. Çocuklarımla rızkınlı sağlamadıkça madalya hiç bir şeyi çözmez.” *Tan*, 2 April 1940.

²⁹⁶ *Tan*, 23 March 1940.

Another policy that aimed at increasing the population was the Singles Tax (Bekarlık Vergisi) that was put forward in the early years of the war.²⁹⁷ The tax that was suggested by Süleyman Sırrı, decreed that all male citizens that had fulfilled their military service and all female citizens over seventeen would be obliged to pay the tax, which would last as long as they continued earning and it would come to end when these citizen were 45 years old. Peasants, mothers and widows would be exempted from the tax. Noting three of its aspects shows the aim of the tax: First, it forced citizens to get involved in family life since family life would bring about the procreation of women. Second, domestic family life with its obligations for both men and women, would impose normative patterns of living including the division of labor, through which the efficiency of labor power would be easy to bolster and monitor. Last, the tax would be utilized as a resource by the government to alleviate of the war economy.

However, the tax was criticized in many aspects. The monitoring of efficient capacities of the population was claimed to be accomplished merely by social policies, but not with the tax. Sabiha Sertel underscored the need for sanitary facilities, day nurseries and employment opportunities for monitoring the efficient capacities of the population.²⁹⁸ Şükufe Nihal, on the other hand, pointed out the discriminatory aspects of the tax, which would exacerbate the social conditions of especially single women who had lower incomes.²⁹⁹ In the following years, the Singles Tax was reappeared on the political agenda.³⁰⁰ However, the public pressure for the abolition of the tax on the basis

²⁹⁷ Tan, 7 April 1940.

²⁹⁸ Tan, 14 April 1940.

²⁹⁹ Tan, 7 July 1941.

³⁰⁰ Tan, 16 January 1944.

that most singles were in fact young poor workers who were unable to pay the tax hampered the government's effort to implement it.³⁰¹

As mentioned in the previous parts, one of the social policies that addressed women workers was the motherhood insurance, which supplied women with paid maternity leave and child aid. However, during the war years, the motherhood insurance was not implemented. The increasing number of women workers and laborers also surfaced women workers' problems resulted from the tension of the simultaneity of the work life and domestic life. Most women workers suffered from the lack of childcare facilities and having to pertain of domestic duties. The wartime policies failed to meet their demands.

Moreover, the government's restriction on class-based political organizations hindered working people from formulating their demands. There was no network that would embody lower class working women's demands on the public discourse. A striking example is of Şükufe Nihal, who was one of the prominent feminists of the early Republican period. She makes clear her perspective on women workers while she was depicting the conditions of women tobacco workers in Cibali. She included the information about the work conditions, wages, health, and provisioning facilities of the enterprise. She criticizes the unequal discrepancy between men's and women's wages and she requests that at least the women who are the sole bread winners of their families should be considered while ascertaining the wages in relation to sexes. Following that, she hints on the work life of women in the enterprise. She delineates women as earning their money, supporting their family and children which is the highest good for women:

“The factory unfolds a sublime scene: the pride of working women. Those women have the greatest virtue by working, supporting their families and children and, these are the women who do not surrender to anyone, who suffer from poverty but

³⁰¹ Tan, 19 January 1944.

stand alone with full perseverance. All of them are so pure and glad that their faces are full of the pride of satisfaction of working and earning their own money.”³⁰²

Nihal’s account of women workers bare the mark of Enlightenment liberal feminist discourse, sprung from the premise that women and men were equal. What renders lower status to women in social life was the women’s entrapment into the private sphere which hindered women from equal development with their male counterparts in the public sphere. When women were given an equal chance with men in the areas of education, work and politics, they would accomplish the same task in the public sphere. Therefore, the most significant aspect of women’s liberation was their participation in the public sphere via various activities.³⁰³ Nihal, following the basic premises of Enlightenment Liberal Feminist discourse gives a standing ovation to women’s working which implied women’s independence by their efforts to earn their money by themselves participating to the public sphere. Nonetheless, the enchantment of Şükufe Nihal with women’s working overshadowed comprehension of women workers’ position in class lines vis-à-vis the exploitative conditions of work and the needs of women workers in work life. Nihal only applauded women’s participation in the work force, which became the mark of their independence in work life, while she failed to comprehend and formulate the practices and problems, to which women workers were exposed resulting both from their class position and conflict of domestic duties and work life.³⁰⁴

As has been clarified, the needs and demands of lower class working women were not reflected in social policy programs and public discourse; rather, social policies

³⁰² “ Fabrikadaki ulvi manzara: Çalışan, çocuğunu, yuvasını besleyen kadın. Byun eğmeyen, zebil olmayan kadın. Dert, yokluk, çeken fakat sabretmesini bilen kadın. Hepsi o kadar temiz, o kadar sakın, memnun yüzlü ki. Çalışmanın, kendi kendinin sahibi olmanın guruyla okadar dolu ki.” Tan, 1 July 1941.

³⁰³ Josephine Donovan, *Feminist Teori*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1996, pp. 47-50.

³⁰⁴ See also. Elizabeth . Huthison, *Labors Appropriate to Their Sex: Gender, Labor and Politics in Urban Chile 1900-1930*, Durhan NC: Duke University Press, 2001. p.162.

addressed women to the degree that the government's policies, which were directed at the increasing the rate of production, imposed some obligations and measures on them. The basic demand of women workers, the provision of day nurseries, surfaced on the political agenda only in the post-war years. The Labor Ministry, which was established the year after the war finished, was in charge with the organization of labor relations via appropriating the wartime changes and developing welfare state policies.

In order to follow the reconstruction of the public discourse on women workers, "*Labor Periodical*" (*Çalışma Dergisi*) published by the Labor Ministry is invigorating. One of the basic changes in the conceptualization of women workers was to affirm the needs of women workers resulting from the conflicts of conducting the domestic duties and work life together. Women were defined as workers in the public sphere and as wives and mothers in the private sphere. It was maintained that though the foremost role and duty of women is motherhood and the other duties it bring about, it had to be accepted as a fact that women were present in social life as workers. Nermin Abadan depicted women's lives as following:

"Today, many married women are living in two separate worlds. Women of our times, while on the one hand, conducting housework such as childcare, shopping, preparing meals and knitting, on the other hand partaking economic life entangled with scheduled times and various obligations of work."³⁰⁵

What was at stake was the reconciliation of the conflicting duties of the public and private spheres on women via furnishing them social policies of motherhood insurance and childcare. Women workers were conceived anymore as "worker mothers":

"One of the duties of Labor Ministry is to satisfy the needs of its workers. Work related accidents, work related diseases, and

³⁰⁵ "Bugün birçok evli kadın iki ayrı alemde yaşamaktadır. Bugünkü kadının hayatında bir yandan çocuk bakmak, alışveriş etmek, yemek pişirmek, söküklere dikmek gibi evişlerle dolu bir alem, diğer yandan değişmez ve ölçülü zamana bağlı ödev, mecburiyet ve mükellefiyetler taşıyan bir ekonomik çalışma alemi vardır." Nermin Abadan, "Çalışan Kadın ve Evlilik", *Çalışma Dergisi*, Vol. 15, 1946, p.16.

motherhood insurance is the ways in which the Ministry satisfies the needs of its workers. To help the procreation of women workers, monitoring their health, looking after their children with birth centers and day nurseries will secure the women workers socially. In this way, women will be able to concentrate their working.”³⁰⁶

The procurement of women workers with social policies was again articulated on the lines of efficient production and the increasing the population. It was asserted that social policies addressing the purview of women workers would foster women’s efficient working and their procreation in the sense that:

“Women should be supplied with the facility of childcare otherwise we are to be confronted with the following two consequences: Either the rate of procreation of women workers continues to decrease or efficient working decreases alongside the growth of poverty... The first occasion results from women’s aversion from procreation since they lack childcare facilities; the second, on the other hand, results from women worker’s giving up their work so as to bring up their children.”³⁰⁷

In sum, the war years witnessed an increasing number of women workers alongside surfacing the problems of women workers in coping with the work life. One significant problem of the women resulted from the impossibility of reconciliation of the work and domestic duties. Wartime policies were, however failed to meet the demands of reconciliation of women workers. In the post-war years, on the other hand, the newly established Labor Ministry warranted the duties of women both in the public and private spheres following the gender division of labor and began implementing social policies

³⁰⁶ “Çalışma Bakanı’nın da söylediği gibi çalışanları mutlu ve emin kılmak Bakanlığın görevlerinden biridir. İş kazaları, meslek hastalıkları, ana sigortaları kanunu, bu nasılın ilk cevabıdır. İşçi kadınların doğumuna yardım etmek, sağlığını gözetmek, yavrusunu korumak için doğumevleri, kreşler açmak, işçi kadını gözünü arkada bırakmayacaktır. İşine dört elle sarılan kadın, kafasını işine rahatça verebilecektir.” Muazzez Aruoba, “İşçi Ana” *Çalışma Dergisi*, vol. 3, 1945, p.65.

³⁰⁷ “Kadın işçilerimizin çocuk bakımı meselesi çözülmelidir. Aksi halde şu iki sonuçtan biriyle karşılaşmak mukadderdir: Kadın işçilerimizin doğurma nispeti düşmekte devam edip gider, çalışma randımanımız düşmekle beraber bir kısım yurttaşımızın da geçim zorlukları artar... Birinci hale sebep, çocuğuna baktıracak kimsesi olmayan kadın işçilerin doğurmaktan kaçınmaları; ikinciye sebep ise çocuğuna bakacak kimsesi bulunmayan fakat çocuk sahibi olmak mutluluğundan da kendini mahrum etmek istemiyenlerin işlerini bırakmak zorunda kalışlarıdır.” Celal Dinçer “Kadın İşçilerimiz, Kreş ve Çocuk Yuvası İhtiyacımız”, *Çalışma Dergisi*, vol.7 1945, p.28.

for women workers, which aimed at reconciling the duties of women in the pretext of efficiency of labor power and monitoring of women's reproductive capacities.



CHAPTER 4

SOCIAL LIFE, LABOR AND POLITICS OF LOWER CLASS WORKING WOMEN

For lower classes, the war was a “time of scarcity”. Zehra Kosova voiced typical portrayal of social life in cities:

“In the war years, the life was harsher than ever in Istanbul... There were blackouts. The ones who had money left Istanbul for Anatolia to escape from the dangerous occasions. The streets were full of hungry people. The typical scene of Istanbul streets was of poor people who were shuffling through the garbage, praying for a slice of bread in front of the restaurants, AWOL soldiers and etc. That is to say, all kinds of poverty and wretchedness were the view of İstanbul streets.”³⁰⁸

This chapter examines various aspects of the social lives of the lower class; the exclusionary practices they experienced and the survival strategies they devised to overcome the poverty of the period. While delineating these strategies, the practices of social reproduction, the role of which has been underrepresented in most of labor history studies so far since it has been devalued in market terms, inclusive of the forms of domestic labor that was conducted by women will be unfolded so as to manifest the significance of social reproduction in dealing with the poverty and scarcity of the period.

³⁰⁸ “Savaş yıllarında İstanbul’da hayat çok zordu. Karartma vardı. Parası olanlar tehlikelerden uzaklaşmak için İstanbul’dan Anadolu’ya kaçıyorlardı, sokaklar aç insanlarla doluydu. Çöp kutularını karıştıranlar, lokanta önlerinde bir dilim ekmek dilenenler, asker kaçakları, akla gelen her türlü yoksulluk ve sefalet İstanbul sokaklarının doğal mazarası olmuştu.” Zehra Kosova, *Ben İşçiyim*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1996, p.118

The feminist usage of social reproduction refers to the activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, responsibilities and relationships that directly involved in the maintenance of life on a daily basis. The notion is comprised of the activities of making food, housing, care, and socialization of children and social organization of sexuality. Social reproduction is thus conceptualized as inclusive of various kind of mental, manual and emotional work so as to provide the socially and historically defined as care necessary to maintain existing life and to reproduce the next generation. The employment of the concept in such a manner that is to say that conceiving it as work allows the argument that unpaid domestic labor converts wages into a means of subsistence.

This perspective challenges modernization theory, which alleges the separation of work and home in relation to the development of the public and private spheres distinctively as an essential and universal marker of modernization and the blooming of it in its fullest sense. The political fabric of the private sphere, that is to say, the importance and implications of practices that have been identified with household “work” such as cooking, child care, sewing, and washing when analyzed in relation to the feminist usage of social reproduction, it conceives domestic labor as waged labor which is converted into a means of subsistence for the reproduction of social life. Moreover, familial and neighborhood networks as a form of solidarity in favor of these survival strategies are delineated. Last but not the least, politic activism as a form of historically alternative life projection for women will be one of the focal points of this part.

Exclusion of the Poor

Urban Spaces and the Poor Housing

As David Harvey argues, spatial organizations can only be rendered intelligible by the comprehension of them in the context of societal relationships, which come through appropriating class, gender and ethnicity.³⁰⁹ He maintains, following Henri Lefebvre, that social power operating in and on the everyday lives of people is intertwined with the social power that reshapes the spatial organizations. Social empowerment of some spatial forms while excluding some others in social life is a form of exertion of social power.³¹⁰ Following that, outlining the housing of the poor reveals the contours of social power map in the social location of the lower classes.

As mentioned above, the government furnished public sector workers with social facilities, one of which was housing. However, the scope of this facility failed to encompass most of the workers. What is more, the discriminatory character of the distribution of housing on behalf of the state officials was widespread. Most workers in the public sector, workers in the private sector and the rest of the lower class had no access to these facilities. In addition, the cities of the period were unable to offer enough housing for the lower classes. The scarcity of houses was a significant part of the existing scarcity.

³⁰⁹ David Harvey, *Postmodernliğin Durumu: Kültürel Değişimin Kökleri*, İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 1997, p.251.

³¹⁰ *Ibid*, pp.255-57.

The press constantly criticized the scarcity of housing and the high rents. It was asserted that the scarcity of housing put the burden on the lower classes and people who migrated to the cities to work.³¹¹

The single men workers mostly dwelled in rented rooms, which unkempt and wretched.³¹² The more fortunate working class families lived in working class neighborhoods, which were mostly located in the districts of Cibali, Fener, Balat, Yedikule, Bakırköy, Ortaköy, Tophane, Galata, Beykoz and Üsküdar.³¹³ The most significant characteristics of these districts were the serious infrastructure inadequacies, lack of municipal services such as sanitary and the gathering of garbage, and dirt and wretchedness. The people of these districts suffered from all too frequent interruptions in water and electricity.³¹⁴ A woman named Neriman, who lived in Yedikule district, described the material inadequacies of the district that surrounded her life in a letter to

Tan:

“Yedikule is the most neglected and dismissed part of İstanbul. In our district where many factories were located around, there is not even a trolley. Women therefore have great difficulty in getting to their work. Garbage men have not come for months. People in this district pinch their noses due to the nasty smell. The streets are like a sea of mud. If someone searches for dirt and mud, our district is the best place for them”³¹⁵

In addition to workers' districts, where marginal parts of lower classes lived; day laborers and unemployed people found shelter in old and ruined buildings such as old

³¹¹ Tan, 29 December 1942, 29 January 1944.

³¹² Tan, 26 March 1940.

³¹³ Celal Dinçer “Kadın İşçilerimiz, Kreş ve Çocuk Yuvası İhtiyacımız”, *Çalışma Dergisi*, vol.7 1945, p.29.

³¹⁴ Tan, 5 December 1942, 29 June 1944.

³¹⁵ Yedikule şehrin en bakımsız en öksüz semtidir. Bugün tamamen fabrikalar mahallesi haline gelmiş olan bu semtte bir tane bile tramvay bulunmaz. Kadınlar ise gitmekte çok zorluk çekerler. Çöpçü aylarca uğramaz. Bu semtte halk pis kokudan genzini tıklar. Caddeler çamur deryası halindedir. Toz ve çamur için örnek sokak aranacaksa Yedikule'nin her tarafı buna musaitir. Tan, 8 March 1944.

medrese. These buildings, located in the furthest parts of the workers' districts consisted of several small rooms, which lacked more amenities than the workers' districts did. Those were the locations which most of the fatalities were recorded in winters since these people heated the rooms with open charcoal braziers.³¹⁶ Most of these rooms contained were at most a thin mattress, a few kitchen tools, sometimes braziers, and sometimes nothing for warmth, and wooden bedsteads.³¹⁷ Suad Derviş, in a series of articles titled "Where the People of İstanbul Live" in *Cumhuriyet* described these rooms:

"I do not know the age of this building "Taşhan". Probably, it is very old. It reminds me the monasteries of the old times with its wide stoned hall, dome, ceiling and stone stairs. When you enter through the door, you first of all feel uncomfortable due to the damp and airlessness. There live 150 people in this building, which has had thirty-five rooms. The building, rather than being a house, seems to be a prison or monastery. In this place, where there are three hours of electricity, people live without sunshine, air in scarce."³¹⁸

The rooms of these *medrese* displayed the dramatic poverty of the poor. Derviş witnessed the living conditions of the people living at the *Uncuzade medrese*:

"I enter a room of this building. It is so dim here. I think there is no window in this room. A mess of benches and coffins stacked on each other rise like a mountain of horror in the middle of the room. There lives a family with children in this room where the benches and coffins rise to the ceiling of the room."³¹⁹

³¹⁶ Tan, 12 January 1942.

³¹⁷ Tan, 12 July 1941.

³¹⁸ Taşhan kaç senelik bir bina bilmiyorum. Herhalde çok eski olacak. Geniş taş koridoru, kubbesi, tavanları, taşmerdivenleri ile bana zamanımızı değil, eski devirlerdeki manastırları hatırlatıyor. Kapıdan girince evvela havasızlık ve rutubet insanı rahatsız ediyor... 35 odası olan bu handa 150 kişi yaşıyor. Bir meskenden çok, daha fazla, bir hapishaneyi, çilehaneyi, bir manastırı hatırlatan bu yerde bu insanlar güneşsiz havasız ve yoksul yaşamaktadırlar. Günde sadece üç saat elektrik var bu handa. Cumhuriyet, 29 March 1935.

³¹⁹ "Bu handaki bir odaya giriyorum. Burası çok loş bir yer. Galiba hiç penceresi yok... Üstüste atılmış birbirine dayanmış teneşir ve tabuttan bir yığın karşımda bir dehşet dağı gibi yükseliyor. Geniş toprak odanın tavanına kadar yükselen bu teneşir ve tabutların içinde çocuklarıyla birlikte bir aile yaşıyor." Cumhuriyet, 3 June 1935.

The people who rented these small rooms either lived alone, with their children or as conjunct families, which were usually comprised three generations together. The inhabitants of these rooms mostly gained their livelihoods by various forms of day labor and each member of the family worked.³²⁰ In *Taşhan*, five to ten people lived in the same room, paying rent of five liras a month. The men worked as porters, peddlers and day laborers. The women earned money sewing and washing the laundries. In *Taşhan*, the families usually had seven or eight children, all of which had to work. However, in some of the families there sometimes only one or two people were able to work. For instance, a family living in *Taşhan* consisted of nine people. Since the parents were sick, they were unable to work the two daughters working in a factory supported the family.³²¹

The government's role concerning the urban spaces and the poor's housing is helpful in figuring out the government's political stance vis-à-vis the social conditions of the lower classes. Just as the lower classes were enclosed in specific districts of the cities, which lacked most of the infrastructure facilities, their socio-economical conditions typified by the extreme poverty, were also left intact.

Especially during the war years, the city of Istanbul manifested the social distance between the growing wealth of a few and the grinding poverty of the many in increasingly dramatic terms. Notwithstanding the poor's housing, the government's urban renewal projects initiated a picture of Istanbul wherein the urban slums constituted eyesores while the social utopia of the glamorous life-style of upper classes was embodied in the state funded public parks, pleasure grounds, boulevards, and stadiums. As reported, the government outlined a grand plan for the reconstruction of urban

³²⁰ Tan, 7 June 1943.

³²¹ Cumhuriyet, 29 May 1935.

İstanbul. The plan had foresaw the construction of trade centers, public parks, boulevards and a grand stadium in which the 1953 Olympiads would be realized.³²² Following that, it can be easily concluded that the government's perspective on the organization of the urban spaces reveals the market-oriented stance of the government that excluded the lower classes socially, embodied in the spatial location of the lower classes.

Diseases and Epidemics: Health as a Form of the Exclusion of the Lower Classes

Throughout the war years, the miserable conditions of living, poverty and scarcity rendered the lower classes vulnerable to diseases in the form of epidemics. Typhus, malaria, tuberculosis and lice instantly spread throughout the lower classes, alarming the government so that it moved to take some precautions against the diseases. However, the precautions taken by the government were far from conclusive. Rather, those precautions fostered the exclusion of the lower classes from the public arena. An account of this issue reveals the contours of the exclusion of the lower classes from public life.

A report that the number of people carrying lice was getting higher prompted local health offices to take measures in order to prevent the spread of lice in the early 1940. The measures brought the lower class districts under the strict surveillance of the forces of the government. The municipalities charged their forces with controlling the lower class dwellings; the rooms of single men and working class neighborhoods were to be inspected to ascertain and clean the lousy people.³²³ The cleaning control teams of the municipalities had the authority to send lice-ridden and dirty people to the public

³²² Tan, 19 June 1943, 28 April 1944.

³²³ Tan, 19 February 1940.

baths. Moreover, new public baths were opened in lower class districts of Galata, Kasımpaşa and Balat to expand the surveillance of the municipalities. In these public baths, it was declared that the poor would be able to clean themselves for free.³²⁴

Alongside the louse, typhus as an epidemic disease spread among the lower classes alongside malaria. Then the government announced that “the battle of clearance” had taken start.³²⁵ Cleaning teams were gathered to identify and separate the people who had been infected by disease. Lousy people were sent to the public baths and their cloths were boiled.³²⁶

After a little while, the precautions took the form of isolating and separating the lower classes from the public sphere. The cleaning teams were given the authority to monitor public spaces such as hotels, *medrese*, coffee houses, public transportation vehicles, and the rooms of the single men and whenever the team encountered any suspicious person they had the right to separate him/her from the others alongside isolating the lower class districts wherein the epidemic spreaded.³²⁷

Nevertheless, the epidemic diseases continued spreading among the lower classes. Within two months there were reported a 420 people who had been inflicted by the epidemic.³²⁸ Following that, a more strict surveillance mechanism was put into effect following the declaration of the local health assembly. In tandem with the declaration, the trade of second-hand clothes was banned, third class movie halls were closed

³²⁴ Tan, 26 March 1940, 23 April 1940, and 26 April 1940.

³²⁵ Tan, 26 May 1943.

³²⁶ Tan, 27-28-29 May 1943.

³²⁷ Tan, 30 May 1943, 1 June 1943.

³²⁸ Tan, 3 June 1943.

alongside with unclean coffeehouses and people were forbidden to sleep in train, boat stations, and coffee houses.³²⁹

The government's measures to prevent the spread of the epidemic diseases became a hot topic in public discussion, too. The public discourse on amending the health conditions was constructed along the lines in harmony with the perspective of the government. That is to say, the prevention of the spreading of epidemic diseases was comprehended in terms of the separation and exclusion of the "dirty and disease inflicted" people from the public sphere. There operated two mechanisms in this discourse: First, filthiness, dirtiness and diseases that were the aspects of the lower classes that were in fact resulted from their miserably poor social conditions, were reified and manipulated as a mechanism of exclusion of lower classes from the public spheres.

At this point, the class based separation of the lower classes were subversed in terms of health conditions and acted in favor of monitoring and excluding of lower classes from public life. Second, the totality of the lower class whether or not suffering from the diseases was brought under strict surveillance of government in the pretext of epidemic diseases. The social and economic conditions of lower classes from which the diseases emerged were left intact by this reification.

The amendment of social conditions of lower classes was never on the agenda, though it was the common characteristic of lower class neighborhoods that they were devoid of infrastructure facilities of water pipes and electricity the lack of which which made the diseases spread easily. In many times, it was reported that in the lower class districts the water pipes were mixed with the sewage system.³³⁰ The terms of public

³²⁹ Tan, 8 June 1943.

³³⁰ Tan, 2 June 1942.

discourse based on the exclusion of them from the public sphere, on the other hand, can be exemplified as following:

“We should clean those dirty people. For example, in Tahtakale, dirty people gather around in the pretext of shopping though in fact they cause the spread of the disease. In the battle against typhus, the important thing is to prevent their gathering of these people in public places such as bazaars. Moreover those people should be collected and sent to the public baths.”³³¹

What is more, lower class people were comprehended as a threat for the existing social and labor relations:

“Everyday in our city there are reported approximately fifteen typhus cases. The prevailing measures are not enough to prevent the typhus epidemic. In Haydarpaşa Trade Station, there wander hundreds of bums and unclean people in an arbitrary manner and these people threaten the health of working people there. People who work there should be made clean and bums should not be permitted to enter the station.”³³²

The discourse on the health that developed alongside the exclusion of lower classes went hand in hand with “criminalization of the diseased inflicted people”. Following that, the police forces got involved in the issue. The police were mobilized to trace and capture the lousy and disease infected persons and sent them to public baths. It was reported that the police forces captured 1000 lousy people in one week.³³³ Subsequent to this, people who were suspicious of carrying any virus, lice and disease were brought under strict surveillance via curtailing their basic rights to work and settle freely. It was announced that lousy people would not be accepted to stay in any of the

³³¹“Bu kirli insanları temizlemeliyiz. Tahtakale’de pazarda alışveriş etme bahanesiyle toplanıp sirayet tehlikesini artırmaktadır bu insanlar. Tifuse karşı mücadelede, çarşı, pazarlarda ve bu gibi umumi yerlerde bu gibi toplulukları önlemeli. Kirlileri yakalayıp temizlemeliyiz.” Tan, 13 June 1943.

³³² “Şehirde hergün vasati onbeş tifus vakası kaydediliyor. Salgından kurtulmak için tedbirler yetersiz. Haydarpaşa’daki Eşya-i Ticaret İstasyonu’nda yüzlerce serseri, kirli ve pis adam lüzumsuz yere dolaşmakta, burada iş güç dolayisi ile bulunanların sıhhatini tehdit etmektedir. Buralarda çalışanlar temizlenmeli, işi olmayanlarsa istasyona sokulmamalıdır.” Tan, 6 June 1943.

³³³ Tan, 13 June 1943.

hotels and they were not permitted to work. Work places were charged with monitoring their worker's health and firing the diseased workers.³³⁴ Moreover, diseased and lousy people whose hometown was not İstanbul would be forced to return back their hometowns.³³⁵

Furthermore, the government's disposal and monitoring of the health conditions of the lower classes was also transformed into the surveillance of the labor power of lower classes. The marginal part of the lower classes who were assumed to be potential disease carriers was utilized by the government so as to obviate the prevailing labor scarcity of the war years. The agriculture Ministry was charged with gathering lousy and diseased people and sending them to rural lands for agricultural works.³³⁶ The press galvanized the public opinion for the implementation of this policy as following:

“In this way, dirty, unemployed people and bums will not be able to convey their diseases to other people in our city. This will be advantageous in two aspects: The health problems of our city will come to an end and the bums will be reintegrated to society as efficient citizens.”³³⁷

Nonetheless, after a while, the practices of the health measures revealed the discriminatory and exclusionary aspects of the measures exerted on lower classes. Sabiha Sertel asserted that the typhus epidemic, rather than being a problem of health, was a social problem which could be resolved through the amendment of the miserable social conditions of the lower classes.³³⁸ In addition, the press indicated the totalization of lower classes under the head of potential disease conveyers and followed that it was

³³⁴ Tan, 19 June 1943.

³³⁵ Tan, 13 June 1943.

³³⁶ Tan, 3 June 1943.

³³⁷ “Bu surette, şehrimizdeki işsiz ve serseri insanlar hastalıklarını diğerlerine sirayet ettiremeyeceklerdir. Bu hususta iki faydayı belirtmek gerekir: şehrimizdeki salgın hastalıklar sona erecek ve bu insanlar çalışma suretile milletimize faydalı olacaklardır.” Tan, 3 June 1943.

³³⁸ Tan, 28 June 1943.

injust of the municipality forces to capture the people as potential disease conveyors just because they were workers.³³⁹

Unfortunately, the government's sole effort to improve the poor social conditions in that instance was the decision that the lower classes were to receive with low cost soap.³⁴⁰ Notwithstanding this, the cost of cleaning was highly expensive for lower class people who were struggling hard merely to subsist. A woman who had been living in a room of a *medrese* described their conditions:

“For only the bread we pay thirty-five piaster in a day and our rent is four liras of a month. In our circumstances washing our laundry is a dream. The smallest pack of soap is 25 piaster. If we are able to have bath once in two months long, we think how lucky we are.”³⁴¹”

Another woman living in a room in Gedikpasa district made similar comments:

“I can support my children by cleaning people's houses. I earn 10 liras in a month. Will I buy coal or will I buy soap with this money? I wash the laundry with cold water, pouring ashes in it. Since we do not eat hot and oily meals we do not have dishes to wash. We have our baths once a month with water without the soap.”³⁴²

In the following years, malaria and tuberculosis spread in epidemic form among the lower classes. In these cases, public opinion underscored the socio-economic roots of the diseases leaving aside the exclusionary discourse of during previous practices of health measures. When an increase of 100 percent in tuberculosis was reported, various doctors and “The Struggle against the Tuberculosis Society” (*Tüberkülozla Mücadele*

³³⁹ Tan, 18 June 1943.

³⁴⁰ Tan, 19 June 1943.

³⁴¹ “Her gün 35 kuruş ekmeğimiz tutuyor. Ayda 4 lira da oda kirası. Çamaşır yıkamak kim, biz kim. Parmak kadar sabunun fiyatı 25 kuruş. İki ayda bir yıkanırsak ne mutlu bize.” Tan, 7 June 1943.

³⁴² “Çocuklarımın rızkını ayda 10 liraya hizmetçilik ederek kazanıyorum. Bu parayla sabun mu alacağım, odun mu alacağım? Camaşırlarımızı küllü ve soğuk su ile yıkıyoruz. Sıcak ve yağlı yemek yemediğimizden bulaşık da pek olmuyor. Kendimizi ise ayda bir defa soğuk su ile sabunsuz yıkıyoruz.” Tan, 7 June 1943.

Cemiyeti) underlined that the solution for the diseases lay in obviating the poverty and amending the social conditions of lower class people.³⁴³

However, the poverty encompassing the lives of the lower classes continued to be reflected by the government. Consequently, lower class people not only suffered from the diseases themselves, but also their social implications of which were experienced in the forms of exclusion from work and social life. In Edirnekapı district, women who had dwelled in the rooms of a *medrese* complained that since they were miserably poor they were not able to look after their children and protect their health. Following that, their children contracted tuberculosis. In order to care them, the mothers left their jobs but then since they had left their jobs they were unable to pay for their children's treatment.³⁴⁴ A former tobacco worker delineated how he had been fired when he got tuberculosis, because of which he had lost forty kilos and had access to supply him a medical treatment since he did not have a job.³⁴⁵ At last, tobacco workers wrote a letter to the National Assembly for a real solution in order to protect their health:

“In our day, tuberculosis is one of the disasters and its solution is decreasing the price of our living. When we get tuberculosis, we are medically treated in hospitals well. However, after leaving hospital, we again get tuberculosis since we do not have money to be properly fed. And if we request a medical treatment while we are working, we are fired. So we cannot demand it in our workplaces.”³⁴⁶

Through the war years, the poverty and scarcity left the lower classes in vulnerable circumstances vis-à-vis the conditions threatening their health.

³⁴³ Tan, 25 June 1944, 18 July 1945.

³⁴⁴ Tan, 11 August 1943.

³⁴⁵ Tan , 6 August 1945.

³⁴⁶ “Günümüzün afeti veremdir. Veremi çözmek için hayatı ucuzlatın. Hastanede iyi bakarlar ama çıkınca yine verem oluruz Çünkü para yok ve beslenme de yok. İşçiyken tedavi olmak istersek atılırız o yüzden tedavi istediğimizi de söyleyemeyiz.” Tan, 1 October 1945.

Notwithstanding the socio-economic conditions of the poor from which the diseases spreaded, the government took precautions to obviate the diseases that that brought lower classes living under strict surveillance and which fostered their separation and exclusion from public spaces.

Social Life of the Lower Class: Subsistence and Survival

Under the grinding poverty and scarcity, the lower classes experienced social exclusion that penetrated the totality of their lives in the pretext of epidemic diseases and settlements. The social lives of the lower classes can be portrayed as a battle for survival merely to subsist at the lowest level. As previously stated, bread was almost the sole food for most part of the lower class. It was allotted to the people with ration cards in determined portions to hinder wide-scale famine. The issue of bread, which was both vital for the nourishment of the lower class, was also a subject of politics, around which the government, producers and traders contested. The bread, of which scarcity has also a symbolic value, expressing the barometer of the poverty, implies the struggle of the lower class for survival. Ayşe portrayed the relation between the degree of their poverty and the bread they had:

“We got the bread with our ration cards. It was as small as my hand. This same bread was for breakfasts, lunch and dinner. We had to stretch it out since we could not find anything else. All was surrounding scarcity and again scarcity.”³⁴⁷

Therefore, the delineation of the bread issue reveals both the degree of poverty that the lower classes experienced and the survival mechanisms that the lower classes devised in order to survive.

³⁴⁷ “Ekmek karne ileydi. Ekmeği alıyorsun, şu kadarlık birşey işte. Aynı ekmeği sabah da akşam da öğlen de yiyiyorsun. Hiçbirşey bulamıyorsun çünkü. Sadece kıtlık, kıtlık...” Interview, Ayşe, June 2004.

The scarcity of bread was revealed through the successive closing of the bakeries and the lacking ingredients of the prevailing bread. It became clear after a while that some enterprises had the bakeries close by paying money to increase their rate of surplus.³⁴⁸ Following that, the scarcity of the bread expanded in city centers.³⁴⁹ When the war economy loomed larger on the political horizon, the government implemented economic measures to organize the distribution of the basic consumer goods. Initially, the government declared total control over the prices of sustenance goods for which The Price Monitoring Committee (*Fiyat Murakabe Komisyonu*) was established.³⁵⁰ However, these measures, far from hindering the scarcity of goods, fostered the explosion of the black market since tradesmen hid their goods and sold them in the black market, doubling the prices. Therefore, the government's measures for preventing the scarcity in fact led to the deepening of the scarcity itself.³⁵¹ İnönü stated in one of his speeches that one of the most important issues was the government's provision policy that would regulate the just distribution of basic goods in society.³⁵²

Following that, bread was sold with ration cards.³⁵³ However, as has been mentioned, the unequally ascertained portions of the bread allotment between the alleged heavy workers and the rest of the people gave way to heated discussions in public.³⁵⁴ In the following period, the portions of the bread allotted were subjected to constant change.

³⁴⁸ Tan, 24 May 1940, 26-27 May 1940.

³⁴⁹ Tan, 11 June 1940.

³⁵⁰ Tan, 21 December 1940.

³⁵¹ Tan, 18 October 1941.

³⁵² Tan 2 December 1941.

³⁵³ Tan, 14 January 1942.

³⁵⁴ Tan, 15 January 1942.

First of all, the bread allotment was decreased to twenty percent for a person.³⁵⁵ After a while, the portion of bread increased. However, it was decided that the bread allotment would one day be total while it would be half on the succeeding day.³⁵⁶ In the last months of 1942, the bread allotment was again reorganized. The portions of bread allotment were separated into three parts each to be given to adults, children and heavy workers.³⁵⁷ Furthermore, the government furnished some of the state personnel, as village teachers, railway officers, health officers, and Ereğli Coal Mining officers with low-cost bread.³⁵⁸ Against the raising public outcries concerning the exclusion of the lower classes from the low-cost bread supply, the government declared that the cheap bread supply would be expanded so as to include fixed and lower income people.³⁵⁹

After a year or so, the division between cheap bread and the normal-priced bread was nullified and an increase of 150 grams in the portion of the bread allotment for each person was introduced.³⁶⁰

The fluctuations in both portions and prices of the bread allotments resulted from the contest and bargaining over the rate of wheat production and ascertainment of the minimum price of the wheat between the agricultural producers and the government. Moreover, the activities of the traders in the black market fostered these fluctuations. When the war broke out, the rate of wheat production like that of all other goods decreased. There also emerged problems in the transportation of the goods to the cities. The existing scarcity then went hand in hand with the black market. The distribution of

³⁵⁵ Tan, 28 February 1942.

³⁵⁶ Tan, 6-7 May 1942.

³⁵⁷ Tan, 16 October 1942.

³⁵⁸ Tan, 16-17 October 1942.

³⁵⁹ Tan, 25 October 1942.

³⁶⁰ Tan, 3 August 1942 and 16 August 1942.

bread with ration-cards was a solution for the prevailing scarcity. However, the strict monitoring of the prices of bread and other consumer goods did not work well. This led to the government's implementation of more liberal policies in relation to price monitoring and production rates. The aim of these policies was to make consumer goods plentiful in the market through letting the prices move freely.³⁶¹ However, the prevailing black market prevented the government's obtaining plentiful amounts of wheat since the producers chose to sell their products in the black market at double prices.³⁶² Therefore, though there were enough amounts of products, people suffered from the scarcity of bread and other basic consumer goods.³⁶³

Furthermore, the price and portion of the bread allotment troubled the people as did the deficient ingredients of the bread provided, which threatened both the health and nourishment of especially the lower class, whose basic sustenance good was the bread. In especially the lower class districts like Kasımpaşa and Balat, people complained that either it was impossible to find bread or the available bread was so malformed it was inedible. Many cases were recorded of in of breads containing mud, soil or pieces of crops.³⁶⁴ The issue again was related to the surplus contest between traders and the government. First of all, the amount of the flour that the government supplied the traders and bakers with was very limited, and the wheat rate was fifteen percent. On the other hand, traders stockpiled most of the flour so as to sell it in the black market.

The impact of this contest, however, put burden on the shoulders of the lower classes that suffered from the scarcity of bread. They either endured the scarcity by consuming the available bread or they baked their own bread. The women of the lower

³⁶¹ Tan, 22 October 1942.

³⁶² Tan, 21 August 1942.

³⁶³ Tan, 20 August 1943.

³⁶⁴ Tan, 3 July 1943, 13 July 1943 and 3 August 1943.

classes undertook this task.³⁶⁵ Ayşe described her mother's labor for their supply of bread:

“The bread was with ration-cards. But we sometimes could not find it. Also the amount of bread was not enough for nourishment. So we had to bake our own bread. Since we were working, my mother prepared all the things for us. With all the women of our district, my mother used to get up early in the morning to get flour. They walked from Osmaniye district to far Avcılar district since the flour was sold cheaply there. But what I called flour was not made of wheat, but of barley. Mom, after getting it, sifted it many times before baking it for us.”³⁶⁶

The issue of the scarcity of bread in the war years sheds light on the degree of poverty that the lower class experienced since they sometimes went without their most basic sustenance goods. Moreover, the government's weak, unstable and hesitant policies, which failed to supply enough amount of bread marked the government's neglect of social and economic life of the lower classes. Therefore, the lower class people sometimes had to make even their bread themselves, a task with the women were charged again.

Social Aid

One of the government's efforts was furnishing some parts of lower classes with social aid to alleviate the severe poverty they experienced. The first part of the aid addressed the men whom were conscripted to the military on the pretext of the threatening war conditions. Their families who were unable to support themselves were

³⁶⁵ Tan, 6 July 1943.

³⁶⁶ “Ekmek vesikaylaydı. Ama bulamıyorduk ki çoğu zaman. Zaten çok az ekmek veriyorlardı. Biz de kendi ekmeğimizi yapıyorduk. Anacığım, biz çalışırken bu işleri yapıyordu. Mahallenin kadınlarıyla erkenden kalkıp taa Avcılar'a un almaya gidiyordu. Ucuz un almaya. Un da arpa unu bu arada. Anam alıyordu unu, kaç defa elekten geçiriyor, sonar da bize ekmek yapıyordu.” Interview, Ayşe, June 2004.

given aid by the government.³⁶⁷ The municipalities, which were charged with identifying the families, which would be procured, took into consideration the degree of poverty of the family members and their abilities to work.³⁶⁸ The highest amount given was twenty-five liras, five liras of which was for the rent.³⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the scope of the aid failed to capture the poor families, one of whose member ha been recruited to the army. Since the terms of aid such as the degree of poverty and the capacity to work were highly obscure to ascertain, the poor families, one of which member was working or asserted to have the capacity to work even though he/she was unemployed, was denied of the aid.

The second part of the aid was addressed to fixed and lower income people who face serious problems of supporting themselves under the austere conditions of war and the following increase in the cost of living. The Prime Minister Şükrü Saracoğlu outlined the objectives and scope of the aid as follows:

“The war and the increasing cost living have caused serious troubles for people who are having trouble of getting by. The wages of workers and tradesmen have been adjusted in terms of war economy before. People who are with fixed and lower income, on the other hand, in fact bear the burden of the increasing cost of living. Nevertheless, under these conditions, it is impossible to make an increase in their wages. So, we would find different solutions. For the time being, the head of these families will be furnished with a pair of shoes and their wives with cloth to make clothes.”³⁷⁰

³⁶⁷ Tan, 12 July 1940.

³⁶⁸ Tan, 16 October 1940.

³⁶⁹ Tan, 10 October 1940.

³⁷⁰ “Savaş ve hayat pahalılığı halkımızı geçim zorluğuna itmiştir. Amele ve esnaf yevmiyeleri ve işleri yeni şartlara daha evvel intibak ettirmişlerdir. Bu hayat pahalılığının bütün ağırlığını bilhassa muayyen miktardan az maaş ya da ücret alan memurlar çekmektedir. Zam yapmamız ise mümkün değildir. Başka çözümler bulunacaktır. Şimdilik, bu aile reislerine birer çift ayakkabı, eşlerine ise elbiselik kumaş verilecektir.” Tan, 6 August 1942.

1,600,000 people with fixed and lower income that were identified as deserving aid.³⁷¹ Since they suffered mostly because of the scarcity and the skyrocketing prices of basic consumer goods, they were supplied with basic consumer goods: such as oil, sugar, bread, and clothes by subsidizing.³⁷² As Şükrü Saracoğlu declared, the totality of the workers were excluded from the aid on the pretext of their wages had been adjusted to war conditions before. However, as was discussed in the previous chapter, not all workers had received increments in their wages. What is more, the twenty-five percent raise in the workers' wages was highly insignificant relative to the 500 percent raise in the prices of basic consumer goods. Workers constantly complained of the increasing cost of living and requested social aid. Şerife, for instance, an employee of Sümerbank Bakırköy Factory requested social aid since she had to support her three children and blind husband alone.³⁷³ Resmiye, moreover, who was working in the same place, asked for any kind of social help to support her six children.³⁷⁴ In the face of these demands, the government refused to develop a social aid program on the pretext of the expensive cost of the aid.³⁷⁵ The workers of the public sectors were supplied with insignificant social aids: such as cloth and shoes as late as 1945.³⁷⁶

In addition to existing aids, municipalities and philanthropic institutions furnished the poor with various facilities of support. For instance, Red Crescent (*Kızılay*) supplied the poor with meals at soup kitchens.³⁷⁷ Retired people, widows and orphans

³⁷¹ Tan, 12 November 1942.

³⁷² Tan, 17 October 1942, 15 November 1942.

³⁷³ Bakırköy Sümerbank Textile Factory, Şerife Gülmez; Identity File.

³⁷⁴ Bakırköy Sümerbank Textile Factory, Resmiye Şen; Identity File.

³⁷⁵ Tan, 14 November 1942.

³⁷⁶ Tan, 26 February 1944.

³⁷⁷ Tan, 2 December 1942.

received wages from the state alongside people who were unable to work.³⁷⁸ It was reported in 1943 that 17,800 women and 380,500 men were socially and economically supported via the state budget.

Nevertheless, the totality of the aid was subjected to harsh criticism in two aspects. The discriminative practices in the operation of implementing the aid were the one part of the debate.

The exclusion of workers from the aid, the obscurity of the terms of aid and the favoring of the state personnel in the implementation of the aid were often reflected in the press. Second, the limited scope of the aid, which failed to alleviate the poor social conditions the lower classes, was criticized. 17, 800 women and 380,000 men were reported to have received social aid from the state budget. Despite the 8,236,000 unemployed people who constituted half of the population who were devoid of facilities of social aid, a limited number of fixed and lower income people were furnished with social aid that marked the focal point of the criticisms voiced by the press.³⁷⁹

Gaining Subsistence: Survival Strategies

Under prevailing conditions of poverty, the lower classes resorted to diverse mechanisms to gain their livelihoods. The most common way of earning money was, of course, working. The number of working people in a family increased to include children and women. Ayşe described the women of her district as follows:

“When the war broke out, the men of our district were recruited to the army. The remaining members of families began working. The brides, mother-in laws left alone with the children, searched for jobs. In our family, my sister- in-law and I started working at

³⁷⁸ Tan, 31 January 1943.

³⁷⁹ Tan, 1 March 1943, 4 March 1943.

Sümerbank. In that time, there were many working women. What could they do otherwise? There was no other way of living apart from working.”³⁸⁰

Most of the times, not only women but also other members of the family began working. Lower class people who lived in the rented rooms of *medrese* for instance, survived by working of each member of their families who was able to work. An elderly women living in one of these rooms in the Beyazıt district said that her daughter, her son-in-law and grandchild were living together. While she herself washed people’s laundry, her daughter knitted, her son-in-law shined shoes and her grandson sold newspapers in the streets. In this way, they supported themselves.³⁸¹ A woman, on the other hand, living with her three children in Gedikpaşa district, earned their livelihood by her working as a servant, with the support of her children selling newspapers in the streets. A women living in Laleli district with her daughter worked as washerwomen with her daughter.³⁸²

This kind of work, which included each family member, was very common among lower class people during these years and before.³⁸³ What these circumstances of working indicated, apart from the severe conditions of living, is the destabilization of the normative gender division of labor in the sense of the diminishing of the role of men in the family as the head of family. Among the lower classes, it is not possible to argue that men were the sole bread winners, which constituted the basic aspect of the nuclear family. Rather, most of the family members contributed to the livelihood of the family.

³⁸⁰ “Savaş olunca herkesin kocaları askere gitti. Herkes işe girdi o yüzden. Çocuklarla kaldı, gelinler kaynanalar. Hepsi ise başladı. Biz de yengemle Sümerbank’ta çalıştık. O zaman çok kadın çalışan vardı. Çalışmasınlar da ne yapsınlar? Başka yolu yoktu ki yaşamamın.” Interview, Ayşe Zaimoğlu, June 2004.

³⁸¹ Tan, 7 June 1942.

³⁸² Tan, 7 December 1942.

³⁸³ Cumhuriyet, 28 May 1935.

A woman who lived in Beyazıt noted that she did not even know that how much her son-in-law earned since he only worked and came home only to sleep.³⁸⁴

Notwithstanding the hard work of these people, it was barely possible for them to earn above the subsistence level. Most of them suffered from the inability to meet their basic demands of housing, cleaning, and health. Therefore, in addition to work, people utilized diverse mechanisms to alleviate the living conditions. These mechanisms operated in various layers of social life such as obtaining sustenance goods cheaply, childcare, domestic duties and work life. The most significant aspects of these mechanisms to be displayed and explored are the labor efforts and mutual aid of women in the context of social reproduction in achieving these tasks, which played a significant role in the subsistence of the lower class.

An increasing number of working women and other family members made the issue of the housework. Most of the women had to do housework by themselves after eleven hours of working, or they made use of familial ties to accomplish the domestic tasks with which they were charged. Ayşe Zaimoğlu fussing over the impossibility of reconciling the housework and exhausting conditions of work appreciated her mother's doing the housework:

“My sister-in-law and I were working during the war years. My mother though she was old did all of the housework. We were not able to help her since we were working eleven hours a day. When we returned home we had time only to eat something after which we fell asleep. My mother took care of the grandchildren and accomplished the domestic tasks daily.”³⁸⁵

³⁸⁴ Tan, 7 June 1942.

³⁸⁵ “Biz yengemle savaş zamanı çalışıyorduk. Yaşlıydı annem ama bütün ev işini o yapıyordu. Biz hiç birşey yapamıyorduk. Nasıl yapacağız ki, 11 saat çalışıyorduk. Eve dönünce ancak yemek yemeye vaktimiz oluyordu. Annem hem torunlara baktı hem de işleri yaptı o dönemde.” Interview, Ayşe Zaimoğlu, June 2004.

Zehra Kosova and Mediha Özcelik, remarking on the same point stated that their mothers took on the domestic tasks including childcare, which made it possible for them to work regularly.³⁸⁶ Accomplishing the domestic tasks was highly significant in the sense that sometimes women were not able to work -though they were in such poverty- since they had to accomplish their domestic duties. A poor young woman explained her inability to work as follows:

“My mother-in-law, my husband, my child and I are living together. My husband is blind. He is making baskets at home. I have a child and I have to look after him. So I am not able to work.”³⁸⁷

What is more, in those years, housework required much more effort because of the increasing cost of living forced people to meet their basic demands through the careful and creative use of the available resources. Ayşe strikingly described the scarcity of basic consumer goods and how her mother brilliantly seized them to meet the basic needs of their family:

“You know, all goods were sold with the ration cards. You had to wait for hours in those terribly long queues to buy something. Since we were working, my mom waited in these queues for shopping. But most of the things were not available, there was a huge scarcity. We were barely able to prepare soups, for instance. You put oil, water and a small amount of flour or something in it and you cook it. From month to month, mom bought small amounts of tea with ration cards and she used it sparingly during that time. We used to find and buy cheese once in a blue moon. Coffee, for instance, was absent. Mom used to buy rye or chickpeas to make coffee. After her grinding them up many times, she made coffee with them: rye coffee and chickpea coffee.”³⁸⁸

³⁸⁶ Zehra Kosova, *Ben İşçiyim*, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 1996, p. 116, Interview, Mediha Özcelik, June 2004.

³⁸⁷“Kocam, kaynanam ve çocuğumla birlikte yaşıyorum. Kocam kör. Evde el yordamı ile sepet örüyor. Çocuğum var ve ona bakmak zorundayım. Bu yüzden çalışmıyorum.” Tan, 19 November 1943.

³⁸⁸“Biliyorsun işte, herşey karne ileydi. Bir şey almak için upuzun kuyruklarda saatlerce beklemen gerekirdi. Biz çalıştığımızdan, annem girerdi kuyruklara. Birşey de bulamazdık, kıtlık var ya. Bir çorba yapardık, o da yapabilirsek artık. Suyu koyarsın, yağı koyarsın, içine de bi avuç un gibi birşey. Aydan aya çay alırdı annem. Bütün ay bir paket çayı elinin ucuyla koyarak idare ederdik. Peynir falan binde bir o da karneyle aydan aya. Kahve falan hele hiç yok. Çavdar ya da nohut alırdı annem. Onları öğütüp öğütüp

Obtaining the basic consumer goods cheaply was vital in obtaining the sustenance goods. The government, in addition to the rationing system, established cheap domestic goods bazaars (*yerli mallar pazari*) for lower income people to buy basic consumer goods at subsidized prices. In these bazaars, people bought basic goods such as wheat, cloth, and shoes with their ration cards. For instance, each person could buy five meters of cotton cloth with the ration cards in these bazaars.³⁸⁹

Nevertheless, for women, who were charged with shopping, it was an overwhelming process to buy goods in the disorganized and arbitrary sales. The press constantly reflected the arbitrary operations in these bazaars. *Tan* depicted a day in one of this bazaar under the heading of 'Is the Domestic Goods Bazaar Mocking the People?

"We are wandering through the Domestic Products Bazaar of Beyoğlu. In front of each stand, there is a huge crowd of women; young, old, poor or rich. Each one runs from one stand to another with the identity cards in her hand. All their efforts are to tell the sellers what they want to buy. Sellers on the other hand, are ignoring the demands of the crowd. They only say: Wait, when it is your turn you will get what you want. However, whose turn is it, can not be determined. There are many women who have been waiting for hours in the crowd, who even cannot tell what they want. When these women ask something, the sellers say insulting things to them. I saw many women who were not able to buy anything."³⁹⁰

The same kind of disorganized and arbitrary operations took place in food distributions via ration cards. It was reported that in some districts like Laleli, Balat and Kasımpaşa

kahve gibi içerlerdi. Çavdar kahvesi, nohut kahvesi, ne yapacaksın ki başka." Interview, Ayşe Zaimoğlu, June 2004.

³⁸⁹ *Tan*, 3 December 1942.

³⁹⁰ "Beyoğlu Yerli Mallar Pazarındayız. Her tezgahın önünde genç, ihtiyar, zengin, fakir çeşit çeşit kadın dolu. Hepsi nüfus kağıtlarıyla bir tezgahtan diğerine koşuyor. Dert anlatmak için çırpınıp duruyorlar. Tezgahtarlar bu kalabalığa oldukça lakayıtlar. Bekleyiniz sıranız gelince alırsınız, diyorlar. Fakat sıra kimin belli değil. Saatlerce bekleyip de ne istediğini söylemeye fırsat bulamayan pekçok kadın var. Bu kadınlar tezgahtarlara bir şey sormaya kalktıklarında hemen haşlanıyorlar. Pazardan eli boş dönen pek çok kadına rastlamak mümkün.", *Tan*, 15 March 1942.

most of the people were not able to buy their basic needs due to the massive crowds.³⁹¹

In the face of the 450-500 percent increase in the prices of basic consumer goods, it was vital to obtain the goods cheaply and for which women laboriously effort.³⁹² Among lower class women, it was highly common to gather some wheat or similar things from which they were able to prepare meals from the near lands or surplus products from the factories. For instance, it was reported that many women gathered corn pulp that were left in front of a sugar factory in Vaniköy district and they used it to make their bread.³⁹³ Furthermore, the women of various lower class districts went to nearby agricultural lands to pick seeds and surplus products which were left by the producers to feed the animals, and they cooked these surplus products and ate them.³⁹⁴ Ayşe told about a similar tactic that the women of her district devised. They used to gather the seeds and grass from the lands around the train station of the district and fed their families by cooking these seeds.³⁹⁵

Another way of gaining extra support for livelihood was the utilization of the bartering system. In the years of World War II, a significant increase in trade that took place in second-hand goods bazaars was reported.³⁹⁶ According to *Tan*, after the war displayed its effects on the social and economic life of the country, the second-hand bazaars were exposed to a rush of people. Most of the lower class women living in the cities rushed in these bazaars to gain extra support for their livelihood. They went there

³⁹¹ *Tan*, 27 May 1942.

³⁹² *Tan*, 5 May 1943

³⁹³ *Tan*, 30 June 1942.

³⁹⁴ *Tan*, 19 June 1942.

³⁹⁵ Interview, Ayşe Zaimoğlu, June 2004.

³⁹⁶ *Tan*, 2 July 1942.

to sell their household goods such as mattress, couches, and dishes.³⁹⁷ Zehra Kosova, when she needed extra money for the medical treatment of her daughter, sold some of her household goods.³⁹⁸ In addition, women bartered them for basic consumer goods for. The women of Kosova's district, for example, used to go the near villages to gain the basic sustenance goods which they were not able to find in İstanbul:

“We went to Aksakal village with other women with our bags containing household goods. We used to give a cup and dish to villagers, for which they gave us two kilos of beans or chickpeas. Likewise, when we gave a pair of socks knitted in İstanbul, we were able to gain various sustenance goods such as flour, tarhana, bulgur and lentils. These were the goods that we could not find and buy in İstanbul at that time.”³⁹⁹

According to the census of the Trade Office in 1943, the cost of living for a family consisting of four people was around 150 liras, the earning of which was barely possible for a lower class family. A lower income woman, named Ayşe, affirmed the diverse strategies to support herself and her family in the face of overwhelming burden of the cost of living:

“In these days, it is not possible to gain a livelihood by merely working. In order support yourself you should either get married with a man who has a decent income or you should make your wife work, you should find some loans around or sell some of household goods or get involve in bartering.”⁴⁰⁰

In addition to all these, the utilization of ties within the rural lands, if there were any, supplied lower class people with extra support. These people either sold some parts of

³⁹⁷ Tan, 2 July 1942.

³⁹⁸ Zehra Kosova, *Ben İşçiyim*, İstanbul, İletişim Press, 1996, p.121.

³⁹⁹ “Kadınlarla birlikte Aksakal köyüne gittik. Yanımızda eşyalarımız... Köylülere bir çay bardağı ile tabağını veriyor, yerine iki kilo fasulye ya da nohut alıyorduk, bunun gibi örülmüş ya da İstanbul'da satılan bir çorabın karşılığında çeşitli gıda maddelerini, un, tarhana, bulgur, mercimek gibi... Bunlar tabii ki İstanbul'da pek alamadığımız gıda maddeleriydi.” *ibid.* p.123.

⁴⁰⁰ “Bugünlerde geçimini çalışarak sağlamak oldukça zor. Geçinmek için; ya geliri olan biriyle evleneceksin, ya eşini çalıştıracaksın, ya sağa sola borç yapacak, ya evdeki eşyaları azar azar satacaksın ya da değiş tokuş yapacaksın.” Tan, 7 November 1943.

their lands or gathered some crops for sustenance by keeping in contact with their hometowns. This mechanism was made operative for many reasons among the lower classes. For instance, Resmiye, working in the Bakırköy Sümerbank Textile Factory, requested temporary leave for the following reason:

“I have been working here for two years. I have been a good worker since then. I will go to my hometown to gather some crops for winter. I request a leave of twenty days.”⁴⁰¹

Nazife Kozan, who worked in the same place, made a similar demand:

“Since I have neither my mother nor my father, I will go to my hometown to store some crops as provision. Thus, I request a leave of fifteen days.”⁴⁰²

Gülsüm Yavaşoğlu, working in Sümerbank, on the other hand, needed a leave for the following reason:

“I have to go to my hometown. My daughter is seriously sick and in order to pay for her treatment I will sell our land. So I request a one month leave to go to my hometown.”⁴⁰³

The diverse methods devised by the lower class women sometimes took the form of mutual aid, which served the abatement of the burden of the severe work conditions and domestic tasks. One significant issue for women was securing childcare while they were at work. Women who lived with their parents left the children with their parents while they were at work. Women who had no parental help left their children with the elderly women of their district for day care. Ayşe explained the childcare in their strict as following:

⁴⁰¹ “ 2 senelik işçiyim. Hiç bir vukuatım yoktur. Memlekete gidip kışlık zaire toplayacağım. 20 gün izin istiyorum.” Sümerbank Bakırköy Textile Factory, Resmiye Şen; Identity File, 26 September 1944.

⁴⁰²“Babam, annem olmadığından, köyde birkaç parça ekili mahsulü erzak yapıp geleceğim. Bundan sebep 15 gün izin istiyorum.” Sümerbank Bakırköy Textile Factory, Nazife Kozan, Identity File, 1945.

⁴⁰³ “Memleketime gitmem gerekli. Oraya gidip hasta olan çocuğuma baktırabilmek için tarlalarımı satacağım. Bir ay izin istiyorum.” Sümerbank Bakırköy Textile Factory, Nazife Kozan; Identity File, 20 September 1944.

“As I have said, the women of Osmaniye district began working after the war broke out. Women like us left the children with their grandmothers for keeping. However, there were so many women living alone with their children. Thus, they asked the elderly women of our district to watch their children. And these elderly women looked after the children at insignificant costs while their mothers were at work.”⁴⁰⁴

Sometimes women who had been living alone began sharing the same house in order to share expenses. Zehra Kosova, after her husband was conscripted the army, began living with one of her friends, Rasime, whose husband was also conscripted. Though they shared all the expenses of the house they were scarcely able to support themselves:

“We began living with Rasime. I was giving the money to her and, she was doing the housework. When the work started in the enterprises, I began working there. Nevertheless, we were in dire straits. We could not eat meat. We used buy mumbar with which we used to blend corn flour and oil and prepare the food called "kaçamak". There was no heating in our room. We used to burn wood in a washbowl made of zinc to get warm, to get light and to cook our meals.”⁴⁰⁵

Concerning the work life, lower class people always made use of neighborhood ties so as to gain information about any opportunities.⁴⁰⁶ One significant problem of work life for women was the night shifts, which were specific to the war years. It was not safe for women to go to work alone. Thus, they mostly gathered together to go work. Ayşe depicted the feeling of insecurity and how they went to work in those years:

⁴⁰⁴ “Söyledim ya, bizim mahallenin kadınları savaşla birlikte çalışmaya başladılar. Bizim gibi kadınlar annelerine baktırdılar çocuklarını. Ama yalnız kalan bir sürü kadın da vardı. Onlar da mahalledeki yaşlı teyzelere rica ederlerdi, çok cüzi miktarlara baktırırlardı çocuklarını.” Interview, Ayşe, June 2004.

⁴⁰⁵ “Rasime’yle yaşamaya başladık. Ben aldığım parayı Rasime’ye veriyordum, evi o idare ediyordu. Ben mağazalarda iş açılınca çalışıyordum. Ama durumumuz yine de içler acısıydı. Et yiyemiyor, mumbar alıyor, bunu yağ ve mısır unuyla karıştırarak kaçamak diye adlandırılan bir yemek yapıyorduk. Odamızda doğru dürüst bir ısınma düzenimiz yoktu, bir çinko leğenin içinde tahta yakarak ısınıyor, yanarken ışığından yararlanıyor, üzerine bir sacayağı koyup, yemeğimizi pişiriyorduk.” Zehra Kosova, *Ben İşçiyim*, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 1996, p.124.

⁴⁰⁶ Interview, Mediha Özçelik, July 2004.

“When we worked at night shifts, all of us gathered together to go to work. Sometimes, the old men of our district, such as my father, guided us with a stick in his hand. Otherwise, we all gathered and went together. In those times, all the lands around here were empty. There were no buildings on the way to work. Furthermore, due to the war, everywhere was dark, there existed no lightening and planes constantly flew over us. It was really hard to go to work at night. I mean scary... When we were on the road we did not even talk to each other.”⁴⁰⁷

Women as Political Activists

Through the war years, lower class people struggled. The contours of their social lives were shaped by their efforts for survival. Nevertheless, it is possible to capture some fragments of experience evolving into an alternative life projection in these years. Zehra Kosova’s experience of political activism reveals a historically evolved alternative life project via which a woman made herself by involving in socialist politics.

In the mid the 1930s, Turkish Communist Party (*Türkiye Komünist Partisi*), which had been organizing illegally due to the political repression of the government, was organized significantly among the tobacco workers. Zehra Kosova, who was also a tobacco worker, met with socialist ideas through her worker friends. Then she became a member of the TCP in 1933. After a year, she was charged with going to Soviet Russia in order to get a socialist education. Some of her friends and she lived there for three years. During these years, they were educated in a school which operated as an organ of the central committee. The members of the school were gathered together from diverse

⁴⁰⁷ “Gece çalışırken, kadınlarla toplaşıp giderdik işe. Bazen babam ya da mahallenin yaşlı erkekleri başımızda olurdu. Ellerinde sopalarla. Öbür zamanlar hep toplaşıp giderdik. O zamanlar buraları bomboştur. Bina falan yoktu hiç. Çok zor olurdu. Her yer karanlık, lamba falan yok, karartma yar ya. Bir de tepemizde uçaklar uçardı. Yolda hiç konuşmazdık. Korkardık yani...” Interview, Ayşe Zaimoğlu, June 2004.

nationalities whose were representative members of the communist parties in their countries. Kosova portrayed their lives and education as following:

“The school wherein we were educated was a really big building. It is hard to describe it...But it was the first time that I had seen such a building with its classes, library, residents, garden and gymnasium. Since I was single, I stayed in a room suited for the unmarrieds. Every day we got up at seven o'clock, after which we had exercises under the supervision of our sports teacher. For getting exercises it was required to a have check-up. After our exercises, we had a shower and then breakfast. The classes started at nine o'clock. After three hours of class, we had a one hour long break, during which we had our lunch. In the afternoon, we followed the classes again. Among our classes, history, economy, revolutions, basic principles of socialism, the history of the party, Turkish and mathematics were the most significant ones...All our expenses, including our meals, clothes and residence were paid by the Party.”⁴⁰⁸

During her stay in Moscow, Kosova married İskender Kemal Peres, who was also a member of The Turkish Communist Party and she gave birth to her first daughter. After three years of education, she returned to Turkey. However, she had to leave her daughter in Moscow since she had made an illegal trip that was insecure. Moreover, she was never able to see her daughter again:

“I left my daughter with her godmother. The party would bring up my child. They said to me that in the future either they would send my child to Turkey or I would come there. However, neither I went there nor I was able to see her again. I left her crying. But this break up was necessary. There was nothing else to do.”⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁸ “Ders gördüğümüz okul çok büyüktü. Tarif etmem biraz zor ama ayrı ayrı sınıfları, kütüphanesi, yatakhaneleri, bahçesi, spor salonu ile böyle büyük bir tesisi ilk defa görüyordum. Ben bekar olduğum için tek kişilik bir odada kalıyordum. Her gün saat yedide kalkılır, önce bir salonda jimnastik hocasının nezaretinde idman yapılırdı. İdmana başlamak için doktor kontrolünden geçmek şarttı. Ardından duşumuzu alır ve kahvaltıya otururduk. Saat dokuzda başlayan derse onikide yemek paydosu verilirdi. Öğleden sonra derslere devam ederdik. Gördüğümüz dersler arasında tarih, iktisat, inkılaplar tarihi, sosyalizmin temel kuralları, parti tarihi, türkce, matematik önemli bir yer tutuyordu...Yemek,elbise, çamasır vb. herşey ücretsizdi. Harcamalarımız parti tarafından karşılanıyordu.” Zehra Kosova, *Ben İşçiyim*, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 1996, p.102.

⁴⁰⁹ “Çocuğumu süt annesine verdim. Parti yetiştirecekti çocuuumu. Bana ‘hiç merak etme çocuğun çok iyi bakılacaktır, ilerde ya sen gelir, ya da kızını sana göndeririz’ dediler. Ama ne ben gittim, ne de kızımı tekrar görebildim. Kızımdan ağlayarak ayrıldım. Ama bu ayrılık zorunluymdu, yapacak hiçbirsey yoktu.” Zehra Kosova, *ibid.*, p.109.

After she returned to Turkey, she began working as a tobacco worker as well as working in the Turkish Communist Party. During the war years, she dealt with the poverty partly by the solidarity networks among the party members, such as sharing houses and other expenditures. Soon after the war finished and the ban on the class-based organizations was lifted by the government, she became a member of the Turkish Socialist Workers and Peasants Party (*Türkiye Sosyalist Emekçi ve Köylü Partisi*) established by Dr. Şefik Hüsnü in 1946.⁴¹⁰ In the famous Arrest of the 1947 most of the legal socialist activists of Turkey were arrested by the government, she was apprehended by the police forces. In following days and years, she was arrested, tortured and put into prison. Throughout her life, she lived her by working and being involved in socialist politics.

Kosova's life delineates a women tobacco worker's life which was radically transformed when she became involved in the socialist politics of the period. She always experienced the exploitation of the severe conditions of work alongside the poverty, like her worker counterparts. However, she ripened politically as well as intellectually through her experiences in socialist politics. Furthermore, she experienced a kind of collective form of living with her party colleagues that constituted a radical shift from the nuclear family life. These experiences distanced her from the conventional forms and roles of gender appropriations that issued in the totality of social life.

During the war years, urban Turkey manifested the increasing social distance between the growing wealth of a few and the deepening poverty of the people. One striking form of the social distance revealed itself in the lower classes' housing within the urban spaces. The people were enclosed at best in workers' neighborhoods which lacked most infrastructure and municipal facilities. The more marginal parts of the lower

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., p.129.

classes, on the other hand, lived in rented rooms, where five to eight people lived, in old and ruined buildings. The uncompromising social conditions as well as the poverty that the lower classes endured exposed them to illness and diseases, such as malaria, typhus and tuberculosis. The precautions that the government carried out evolved in such a way that they operated as a mechanism excluding the totality of the poor as potential disease conveyors from the public life including work. In the face of the crushing poverty, scarcity and exclusionary social practices, the lower classes devised mechanisms of gaining livelihood in which forms of social reproduction inclusive of domestic labor forms conducted by women took a significant part. The domestic labor forms achieved by women, operated so as to make other women's working possible mitigated the existing poverty and scarcity via supplying basic consumer goods cheaply and thriftily. Moreover, women in order to meet their basic needs helped each other in ways that sometimes took the form of solidarity among women. Apart from all that, the experience of lower class women involved in socialist politics reveals an alternative historical life trajectory unfolding a collective form of living and solidarity for women that dissociated them from the conventional forms of family-based social life.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Ahmet Makal argues that the working class of modern Turkey historically evolved out of the industrial developments and the following institutionalization of work relations in the 1930s and 1940s.⁴¹¹ The state-initiated industrial development program of the 1930s denoted the establishment of the private and public industrial enterprises, the recruitment of peasants, women and children for the newly emerged labor market as well as the legal organization of the work relations by the Labor Code of 1936.

The 1940s which marked the looming of the World War II on Turkey's social and political horizon, reiterated the work relations for different motivations. The 5.9 percent of the male population were conscripted into the army in the face of the prevailing threat of the war. This rate betokened a 5.9 percent of void in the labor market. In addition to this, the closing of the international trade lines forced the government to increase the rate of production, in response to which the government implemented policies so as to increase the rate of production. Confiscating the enterprises' rate of production, increasing the rate of labor-power and strict surveillance over labor power were measures for seizing the country's economy for the demands of the war. One significant outcome of these changes resulted in a twelve percent increase

⁴¹¹ Ahmet Makal, *Türkiye'de Tek Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri: 1920-1945*, İstanbul, İmge Yayınları, 1999, p.102.

in the rate of working women; a rate reached a high point of ninety percent in the big cities.

This study, in its broadest sense, explored the social conditions of lower class working women living in urban Turkey during the World War II. The theoretical background of this study ensued on the basis of the criticism of modernizationist theory voiced by both Marxist labor history and gender studies. E. P. Thompson, who was a member of the British Marxist historians, challenged modernizationist assumptions in working class historiography that had sought the emergence and ripening of the working class as a direct result of the development of relations and means of production. He emphasized instead the historical aspects of the class formation which are ultimately embodied in human relationship as well as experiences. In relation to this, class can be uncovered via the search for human beings' class experiences which are largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born- or enter involuntary. Class consciousness is on the other hand, the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value systems, ideas and institutional forms.

Focusing of the social and work life experiences of the working class during the war years revealed that the lower classes developed specific mechanisms to cope with both the over-exploitative conditions of work by leaving or changing the work, and grinding poverty encompassing the social life, such as obtaining sustenance goods through the appropriation of rural ties.

Modernizationist history writing accounts for these two phenomena as normatively appointing them resulting from the underdevelopment of the industrial working class in Turkey presuming a linear and historically homogenous development for the prevailing class relations while those phenomena concerning work relations and

social life are in fact sui-generis of the working class intermeshed with their experiences of the war years resulted from the socio-economic conjuncture of the period.

Concerning lower class women workers' social and work life, inclusive of their activities both in public sphere and private sphere, gendered norms and practices operated decisively in their handling of the totality of their lives. The lens of gender shows how sexual identity yields in diverse practices, norms and behaviors that has addressed and appropriated by men and women in social relations. By studying the operations of gender, it was demonstrated that men and women experience, use and conceive of family, religion, work, public and private spheres differently. The factory, for example, imposed distinctive burdens and offered divergent opportunities for men and women. By incorporating power relations within the concept of gender, the term denotes relationships of power that resulted from sexual difference in the production and reproduction of social life both materially and symbolically and gender becomes the lens through which the analysis of social institutions, cultural practices, and politics is realized. Furthermore the practices and discourses of social life are shown to be historically and socially constructed.

What is more is that all institutions, cultural practices and identities are shown to be shaped by the contests among living men and women as all of them being the actors of history. Following that, how women workers were recruited into the work force in World War II years becomes clear. First of all, women were located in the sectors, such as textiles, tobacco, and cleaning, which required "nimble hands" and which were in fact the extension of forms of domestic labor conducted by women in private sphere. These kinds of work implied the transposition of the devalued labor of the women in private sphere to the labor of women in the public sphere, on the pretext of women's labor did not require physical strength. This normative definition was reflected in women's low

wages and low bread allotments, which were critical for sustenance in the years of the war. Moreover, the chastity of women as an appropriate social norm for female identity acted as conclusive mechanism for the employment of women. Female identity, defined on the basis of the activities of women in relation to domestic labor and devoted wife norm was sexually articulated and incorporated into the structure of work and into the strategies of employers serving the devaluation of women labor in the market, which was reflected in the low wages and lack of social policies designed for workers in the war years.

In conjunction with these, the reconstructing of women's experience of the work required a critique of the idea of "separate spheres" which defines each sex in different social spheres, public and private. The notion of men's and women's separate spheres of paid work and domesticity led to the definition and exploration of women's experiences confined to the private realm and men's experiences in the public realm that imposed on each sex some assumed behaviors, values and activities. Reconstructing women's work experiences not only displays the activities of women in the public sphere, but more significantly stresses the interdependency of the two spheres in shaping women's lives. Exploring women's working conditions merely in terms of hours spent in the work place overshadows the network of material practices and power relations interwoven within the working lives of women. Therefore, it is highly significant to explore women's working in relation to sex, family life and domestic labor to disclose the labor, power, consent and resistance of women workers.

The women workers of the war years, working either in the public or private sectors, underwent the challenge of reconciling the domestic tasks and work together. Since there barely existed facilities that mitigated women's domestic tasks even some lower class women were not able to work. Most of the women took part in familial and

neighborhood networks for the conduct of domestic tasks such as childcare and preparing food that made possible and eased the conditions of their working. In this perspective, work identities were inclusive of an exploration of the way identities were shaped by the continual intersections of family and work, and public and private spheres. Moreover, the camaraderie of the work place and solidarity of sharing the experiences of pregnancy, birth or illness were an important part of women's work experience. Women workers devised similar mechanisms to cope with these experiences, such as gaining an extra supply of food through utilizing their rural ties, neighbors' looking after their children and so forth. What's more, the solidarity among women workers led them to find job opportunities for each other and secure themselves against the risky conditions of work, such as gathering women workers to go to work at night.

In the face of skyrocketing prices and the explosion of the black market in the years of the war, lower class people were exposed to grinding poverty which encompassed the social lives as well as the over-exploitative conditions of work such cheap wages and overtime work. In the following years of the war, the efficiency capacity of production of the enterprises was decreased twenty to forty percent and workers' turnover rates were high. Thus, the government furnished workers in the public sector with social policies and aid to alleviate their social conditions. It supplied public sector workers with housing, food, health and day-care alongside helping fixed and lower income people. However, these policies were implemented in a discriminatory manner on behalf of the state personnel. What is more, the government barely implemented policies addressing the purview of women workers, their demands, and needs.

In fact, female labor was highly significant for the conservation and reproduction of the social order and increasing the rate of production. The significant role of women

unfolded via the public discourse on lower class women workers. First of all, women as mothers were the crucial for increasing the population which was important especially in the war years. Procreation was fostered by awarding women medals for having six children. Moreover, women as housewives were the sole actors who were to conduct housework economically and support other family members in the face of times of scarcity. The efficiency of women's domestic labor and women's efficient labor in the market both required both considering the increased rate of women workers in the war years. Nevertheless, there barely existed social policies addressing the demands and needs of women workers. Women had a total six weeks of pregnancy leave according to the Labor Code of 1936. Apart from that, women had no other facilities helping them with the childcare, illnesses and other domestic duties. Even the public cries for the expansion of the day-care were left unanswered till the end of the war.

This kind of treatment towards women workers left them alone in handling both work conditions and domestic tasks. Thus, women utilized diverse forms of social reproduction to cope with the simultaneity of work conditions and domestic tasks. The delineation of forms of social reproduction reveals how women conducted both work and domestic tasks, how they developed a kind of network of mutual aid resulting from social reproduction and how significant women's labor issuing from social reproduction to deal with the poverty of the war years and support family members in their survival.

The feminist usage of social reproduction, as was mentioned previously, refers to the activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, responsibilities and relationships that are directly involved in the maintenance of life on a daily basis. The notion is comprised of the activities of providing food, shelter, and the care and socialization of children and the social organization of sexuality. Social reproduction is thus conceptualized as inclusive of various kind of mental, manual and emotional work so as

to provide the socially and historically defined as care necessary to maintain the existing life and to reproduce the next generation. The employment of the concept in such a manner that is to say that conceiving it as a work allows to the argument that unpaid domestic labor converts wages into means of subsistence.

This perspective challenges the “modernization theory” that alleges the separation of work and home in relation to the development of the public and private sphere distinctively as an essential and universal marker of modernization and its growth in its fullest sense. The political fabric of the private sphere, that is to say, the importance and implications of practices that have been identified with household “work” such as cooking, child care, sewing, and washing, when analyzed in relation to the feminist usage of social reproduction, which conceives domestic labor as waged labor which is converted into means of subsistence for reproduction of social life. Lower class women’s way of dealing with social reproduction, which varied looking after each others’ children, finding ways to shop cheaply, making tea from chickpeas to producing their own bread and sewing their own cloths, reveals the zealous efforts and labor of women in overcoming the poverty of the period from the perspective of the feminist usage of social reproduction. In this way, women’s domestic labor which is devalued in market terms is shown to be vital for lower class people’s struggle for survival in war years.

Lower class people endlessly strived to survive in the face of grinding poverty. The contours of their social lives grew out of their efforts for survival. Nevertheless, it is possible to capture some fragments of experience evolving into an alternative life projection in these years. Zehra Kosova’s experience of political activism reveals a historically evolved alternative life project through which a woman made herself by

becoming involved into socialist politics, which promised a life seizing favors as well as costs which was shaped at the intersection of poverty, work and politics.



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