

**The Contemporary Changes in Subcontracting of
Istanbul's Apparel Industry:
An Analysis of Syrian Refugees' Bargaining Power
in Global Capitalism**

by

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The Contemporary Changes in Subcontracting of Istanbul's Apparel Industry: An Analysis of Syrian Refugees' Bargaining Power in Global Capitalism

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Dedicated to my beloved grandmother

ABSTRACT

The Contemporary Changes in Subcontracting of Istanbul's Apparel

Industry: An Analysis of Syrian Refugees' Bargaining Power in Global Capitalism

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The apparel industry, which has been the driving force of the European economy since the Industrial Revolution, and therefore its Istanbul branch, is deeply tied to the chains of global capitalism. The non-skilled positions in the sector are occupied mainly by minority groups, immigrants with or without documentation. After their migration, Syrian refugees have started to occupy a vital position within this system through subcontracting in the workshops. This fact demonstrates a shift in labor dynamics and population in the textile industry of Turkey. This thesis investigates how the shift of demographic changes has occurred and how it is related to globalization, multi-staged production, and subcontracting in particular. The main aim is to understand and evaluate in which conditions these changes took place and how the former and new-coming workers' bargaining power is established through these changes.

ÖZETÇE

İstanbul Tekstil Sektöründe Fason Üretimde Çağdaş Değişimler: Küresel

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Sanayi Devrimi'nden bu yana Avrupa ekonomisinin itici gücü olan tekstil sektörü ve dolayısıyla sektörün İstanbul ayağı küresel kapitalizmin zincirlerine derinden bağlı durumdadır. Sektördeki pozisyonlar yaygın biçimde azınlık grupları, kayıtlı veya kayıt dışı göçmenler tarafından doldurulmaktadır. Suriyeli mülteciler göç sonrası atölyelerde fason üretime katılarak bu sistem içinde hayati bir yer teşkil etmeye başlamışlardır. Bu durum, Türkiye tekstil endüstrisinde işgücü dinamiklerinde ve demografisinde derin bir değişim olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu tez, bu değişimin nasıl meydana geldiğini ve bunun küreselleşme, çok aşamalı ve özellikle fason üretim ile nasıl ilişkili olduğunu araştırmaktadır. Temel amaç, bu değişikliklerin hangi koşullarda gerçekleştiğini ve bu değişikliklerle eski ve yeni gelen işçilerin pazarlık gücünün nasıl kurulduğunu anlamak ve değerlendirmektir.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BSCI	Business Social Compliance Initiative
EU	European Union
ILO	International Labour Organization

Chapter 1:

INTRODUCTION

Today, the garment industry is one of the world's most globalized industries by offering employment opportunities to above 60 million workers globally, most of whom are in low-income exporting countries (World Trade Organization, 2013). Despite technological advancements, the textile industry is still a labor-intensive sector. This sector's operation process is based on a traditional assembly line principle that consists of a large number of workers, each responsible for a defined operation (DAI Europe, 2016). Even a simple piece of clothing sold in any dress shop crosses over dozens of stakeholders and many continents to arrive at the store in the final stage.



In the case of Turkey, textile is the second most significant branch of industry. Turkey is reported to be the third-largest textile supplier of EU countries (Eurostat, 2020) and the sixth-largest supplier in the world (*Trade Map - List of Exporters for the*

¹ *Where do our clothes come from?* (2020). Eurostat. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/edn-20200424-1>

Selected Product (Articles of Apparel and Clothing Accessories), 2020). Turkey has a critical location for the textile industry in connection with its geographic position, being close to Europe, and being able to handle last-minute orders for this reason. Due to the increase in subcontracting agreements and lack of control within this industry, informal working is relatively prevalent. This prevalence is an opportunity for immigrants since they face challenges in finding formal jobs with their current legal status and lack of necessary Turkish language skills. However, these conditions create an unequal power dynamic in the textile work environment with its poor conditions.

The relationship between capitalism and textile is a relatively old and mutualist one. In *Empire of Cotton*, Sven Beckert (2015) centers the emergence of capitalism around cotton and textile production. For the 1800s integrated capitalist economy, the cotton textile was the leading manufactured production in England. The production of cotton textile and its growth became the center of the British economy and contributed to the Industrial Revolution process. Not only in England, but this growth also had a crucial impact on the global economy as well, by means of the cotton textile mills in New England (Beckert, 2015).

At that time, the textile industry also sparked Karl Marx's interest: He discussed the textile and garment industries in *Capital*, Volume I (Marx et al., 1981) by mentioning the intensified exploitation of textile workers due to sewing machines. Furthermore, Annie Phizacklea (1990, as cited in Delice, 2019) argues that immigrant labor was the reason behind the intensification of sweating and subcontracting. After the migration wave of Russian and Polish Jewish refugees to London for five years from 1881, the refugees found themselves working in London's sweatshops as subcontracted because there was no other option due to the language barrier and racism they encountered (Delice, 2019). Phizacklea presents this migration wave and the following

subcontracting system as the reasons behind the intensification of textile production in the factories at the time.

This intertangement of the garment industry and migration waves still endures and, in the case of Turkey, reconstitutes itself through the migration of Syrian refugees to this geography. This research is focused on this relationship and aims to understand Syrian textile workers' effect on the existing labor supply deficit in the sector and how their bargaining power is formed with the ethnographic data obtained from various groups in these dynamics.

There are many statistical research, qualitative studies, and theorization on the subjects of the garment industry and migration as Syrian refugees' intermingling. However, there are not sufficient research that is comprehensive enough to cover various locations where Syrian refugees settle and work. In addition, the existing literature is not detailed enough to discuss numerous aspects of the power dynamics in those fields, including bargaining power of the refugees.

The first main chapter, Chapter 3, discusses the historicity of garment production. I examine the significant place of the garment industry in the history of today's developed countries and how European countries used garment production as a step toward their growth. This production trend has shifted predominantly to underdeveloped and developing countries. Moreover, some of these countries depend on this labor-intensive production to sustain their economies.

Chapter 4 firstly approaches Istanbul's garment industry from a comprehensive point of view including the wages of different positions in different neighborhoods, the workflow in mass production vs. boutique production, employment criteria of workshop and factory owners, client expectations and audit processes, how the employer and employee find each other in the market, formal-informal sector relation in the industry,

and finally how the interviewees foresee the future of the sector. Secondly, I focus on the class relations between employees, employers, firm managers, subcontractor controllers, and brand customers. I also examine the changes in the industry since the early 2000s, including fair trade policies of the brands, and government involvements. One of the main aspects of this change is labor shortage which used to exist in the past, is now even more significant in terms of domestic workers; it is decreasing with Syrians. Lastly, I discuss the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and how it made existing inequalities more visible.

In the last chapter, Chapter 5, I primarily discuss Syrian refugees' place in Istanbul's garment industry and the interrelation between textile and migrant labor locally and globally. The second main subject is how their bargaining power formed regarding ethnicity, their effect on the existing labor shortage, the former experience, language barrier, and attitudes toward them in workplaces and public life.

Throughout these discussions, my theoretical framework is predominantly based on Immanuel Wallerstein's World Systems Theory and Edna Bonacich's understanding of bargaining power. I aim to consider Syrian refugees' positioning in Istanbul's apparel industry within the structure of World Systems while also taking their personal narratives and bargaining power into account. When I discuss their representations and stories, I also benefit from various scholars and thinkers, such as Michel Foucault, Michèle Lamont, Zygmunt Bauman, Giorgio Agamben, and Hannah Arendt.

Methodology

Considering the numerous factors, actors, and institutions ranging from workshops to trade unions and NGOs that have a role in this process, my study benefits predominantly from qualitative research methods. The qualitative analysis is based on

data coming from in-depth interviews with textile workshop workers, owners of those workshops, factory workers, managers, and owners, together with my observations in the field. Observations include the environment of the workshops/factories, their working conditions, and relations.

I also benefitted from statistical data on migration flows, the number of local and foreign workers in the textile industry from the Directorate General for Migration Management, TISK, and also DISK in order to see the resemblances and differences of my findings to the greater framework. The statistical data have some limitations because the immigrants who work as blue-collar workers are mainly in the frame of the informal economy, and this causes a lack of data. As a result of the informal employment issue, it was challenging to attain accurate information via government statistics.

I have divided locations of interest as districts and product-based locations according to the existing population of refugee workers. I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews and asked several constant questions about basic information such as workers' age, gender, ethnicity, spoken languages, where they live, how long they live there, and their salary. The reason behind these questions is that it enables learning basic qualification information about interviewee candidates to use in the analysis of in-depth interviews.

The interviews will be semi-structured rather than structured or unstructured because, as H. Russell Bernard (2006) argues, they are the most appropriate form for situations where the interviewer meets with each participant for only one time. Due to the disciplined and strictly managed environment of textile workshops, the workers have time limitations, and it would be challenging to talk to them more than one time for extended interviews.

Since semi-structured interviewing is based on an interview guide (Bernard, 2006), I prepared a guide that includes my questions for every group of interviewees and topics in order. The interviewees were initially selected and reached through my network, including people who work with textile workshops. The number of interviews was decided in which phase I achieved saturation. During the in-depth interviews with the workers, the questions explored their social and educational background, perceptions of their previous and current occupation, what they think about their employers, working conditions, and their attitudes toward other workers in terms of ethnic solidarity/antagonism. The duration of the interviews and the final number of questions depended on the interviewees' responses.

This research includes 22 interviews, including 5 atelier owners, 2 atelier managers/directors, 7 atelier garment workers, 1 atelier accountant, 1 subcontractor controller, 1 factory owner, 1 company owner, 1 company manager, 2 company employees, and 1 NGO employee. As for total ethnicities, there are 7 Syrian, 14 Turkish, and 1 Kurdish among the interviewees. As for gender information, there are 13 males and 9 females.

Status	Age	Neighborhood	Gender	Ethnicity	Job description
Atelier manager	20	Yenibosna	Male	Turkish	Former atelier worker, current manager
Atelier manager	26	Yenibosna	Female	Turkish	Textile manager
Atelier owner	43	Küçükköy	Male	Kurdish	Middle-scale atelier
Atelier owner	52	Şişli	Male	Turkish	Boutique atelier owner
Atelier owner	27	Yenibosna	Male	Turkish	Atelier/factory owner
Atelier owner	40	Fatih	Female	Syrian	Former worker, atelier owner
Atelier owner	40	Fatih	Female	Turkish	From home-based to business
Atelier worker	42	Fatih	Male	Syrian	Machinist
Atelier worker	33	Zeytinburnu	Male	Syrian	Factory atelier worker, ütücü
Atelier worker	29	Küçükköy	Female	Turkish	Atelier department chief
Atelier worker	30	Yenibosna	Female	Turkish	Former atelier worker, current accountant
Atelier worker	27	Fatih	Female	Syrian	Unexperienced machinist
Atelier worker	28	Yenibosna	Male	Syrian	Machinist
Atelier worker	20	Fatih	Female	Turkish	Ortacı
Company manager	40	Eminönü	Male	Turkish	Textile company manager
Company owner	50	Laleli	Male	Syrian	Export firm owner
Factory owner	51	Zeytinburnu	Male	Turkish	Textile factory owner
Factory white-collar employee	52	Zeytinburnu	Female	Turkish	Vice president of production at garment factory
Factory white-collar employee	42	Gaziosmanpaşa	Male	Turkish	Product manager of garment factory
Atelier accountant	37	Yenibosna	Male	Turkish	Atelier accountant
Subcontractor controller	43	Yenibosna	Male	Turkish	Subcontractor controller from factory
NGO employee	32	Fatih	Female	Syrian	Career planning specialist

Garment workers are from various subbranches as department chefs, experienced and inexperienced machinists, pressers, “ortacı” and collarists. Company employees were the product manager and vice president of production. The NGO employee is a Syrian woman who works at an international refugee association, and she provided me with many networks for interviews and observations. Two of the atelier owners are females, as a rare case, and one of them is a refugee woman who was a former garment worker at the atelier of the other woman.

The neighborhoods are selected according to where the apparel production intensity and the refugees’ population mainly locates in Istanbul which also intersects frequently. Therefore, the research is focused on European side of Istanbul, including both center as the old-town and Şişli and the periphery. The interviews are conducted in Fatih, Şişli, Laleli, Eminönü, Küçükköy, Yenibosna, Bahçelievler, and Zeytinburnu. In some cases, an atelier owner mentioned another workplace that they are connected trade-wise and referred me to them.

As Robert Burgess (1984) claims, interviews are a version of “conversation with a purpose.” As this statement requires, I aimed to conduct fluid, flexible, and interactive interviews. This approach to interviewing stems from different epistemological and theoretical traditions but all of these approaches accept social actors/agents/subjects as data sources and emphasize the significance of conversation and text to understand the social world around us (Mason, 2002). Alessandro Portelli (1991) also argues that one should keep account of the fact that field research is about dialogue in which the researcher talks to people, not studying passive sources. This whole process of talking is fundamentally a learning situation since the narrator has what the researcher lacks: information (Portelli, 1991). In this process, what is critical and essential is being open to perceive and understand more than what we expect. The unexpected tends to be more

fruitful than the repetition of our own conceptualizations (Portelli, 1991). Research does not have a straight and strict object-subject relationship, but beyond that, it is a mutual exchange of ideas and feelings that affect the two sides, not only the ones who are informants for the research.



Chapter 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on the apparel industry is an enormous and multi-layered one. One of the major works on the global side of this issue belongs to Edna Bonacich with her book, *Global Production: The Apparel Industry in the Pacific Rim* (Bonacich et al., 1994). In the chapter called “The Garment Industry in the Restructuring Global Economy”, she analyzes how transnational corporations function by reflecting on the deindustrialization of developed countries. She discusses the concept of “commodity chain” and its power dynamics, export-lead industrialization, the promise of cheap and controllable labor, and immigration from less developed to more developed countries. She argues that the difference in the apparel industry is that it is a combination of the low and high levels of technology.

In addition, her article called “A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The Split Labor Market” (Bonacich, 1972) is a valuable source of ethnic conflicts in the labor market. A split labor market means a market separated into two fragments as primary and secondary markets. The first one includes higher-paid and more stable jobs, while the latter consists mainly of low-paid and unstable job options. According to Bonacich, a split labor market can cause interethnic conflicts: The dominant ethnic group commonly holds jobs in the primary labor market, whereas the minority ethnic group often has jobs in the secondary one. As a result, compared to the dominant group, the minority ethnic group has lower pay and harsher working conditions. This issue heightens rivalry between ethnic groups and may cause prejudice, antagonism, and conflicts.

Regarding the literature on Istanbul’s apparel industry specifically, Nebahat Tokatlı has a crucial contribution. In the article called “The Clothing Industry in Istanbul in the

Era of Globalisation and Fast Fashion” (Tokatli et al., 2011), the authors discuss the global change in the late 1980s, including mid-season purchasing and the shift from ready-to-wear to fast fashion which required more punctuality, “hectic schedules and shorter development cycles.” They analyze how this shift occurred and its subcontracting component to cope with the new demands of fashion and brands.

Subcontracting is one of the strategies used by the clothing industry in Istanbul to stay competitive in the global market and the challenges it faces in the era of fast fashion. Overall, they examine the industry's response to the challenges posed by globalization and the fast fashion industry.

Başak Can also wrote her master’s thesis on “Subjectivities of Women Garment Workers in Gazi Neighborhood” (Can, 2009). In the article, “The gendered workplaces of women garment workers in Istanbul” (Can, 2017), based on the findings from the thesis, she claims that there is a gendered difference between men and women working in garment workshops. The article deals with the experiences of women garment workers in Istanbul where they are exposed to gender discrimination. She discusses the challenges faced by women working in the industry, examples of gender discrimination in the work environment, women's efforts to organize and make their voices heard, and possible countermeasures to these problems. The article emphasizes that women workers often encounter low wages, long working hours, and precarious working conditions in their workplaces and that these conditions are based on gender discrimination. Examples are given of women where they are not treated equally with men in the workplace, they do not benefit enough from promotion opportunities and they are subjected to sexual harassment. She analyzes their work and bodily experiences in the workplace and the discourses around them in this regard. As a result, she

concludes that how being a woman in a garment workshop is inseparable from her reproductive existence and decisions.

The literature also includes various objects of study such as labor market integration of refugees (Pflüger, 2016), labor market discriminations on the grounds of gender and ethnicity (Bassanini & Saint-Martin, 2008), gendered impacts of migration (Toksöz, 2020), and the immigrants' effects on wages (White & Bryson, 2017). They employ different methodologies from quantitative statistical analysis to different ethnographic studies worldwide.

Doreen Pflüger examines the role of ethnophobia in the implementation of the European Social Fund's program. It examines the labor market integration of refugees and asylum seekers within the program of several business and non-governmental organizations in the German state of Hessen, by using a qualitative case study. The research reveals the reality of ethnic hostility and its functioning as a major obstacle to the implementation of the program. Bassanini and Saint-Martin's article "The Price of Prejudice: Labor Market Discrimination on the Grounds of Gender and Ethnicity" reviews various studies done in Europe and the United States, examining how employers practice discrimination based on gender and ethnicity, and the consequences. These studies show that employers are biased towards certain minorities, especially women and certain ethnic groups, and avoid hiring them.

Gülay Toksöz focuses on the problems faced by migrant women workers in Turkey and their relationship with welfare regimes. She studies the difficulties of migrant women's access to the labor market, their working conditions, their access to welfare regimes and the influence of these regimes on the lives of women migrant workers. The article states that the growth of the working class that emerged as a result of the migration of Turkey's farmer population to the cities, and that this class is

fundamentally driven by the participation of women in the workforce. Migrant women often work in low-paid and low-status jobs and have limited access to social security structures. Therefore, the working conditions and well-being of migrant women workers can be much worse than the general social and economic structures of the country.

The arrival of Syrian refugees in different regions of Turkey led to various research analyzing the refugees' effect on social, political, and economic issues. According to Murat Erdoğan's (2015) research on Syrian refugees' social integration, 56,1% of a sample of 1,501 people supported the statement of "Syrians took our jobs" while 30,5% rejected it. The ratio of supporting the statement was higher in the regions of Adana, Gaziantep, Hatay, Mardin, and Şanlıurfa, with 68,9% (Erdoğan & Ünver, 2015). The simplistic economic framework also supports this claim because immigration leads to a rise in both labor supply and demand, but the increase in supply is more than the increase in demand (Kayaoglu, 2020). This means a decrease in the natives' employment ratio and wages in the market.

In the case of Turkey, there are quantitative studies on Syrian refugees' integration into the labor market. (Ceritoglu et al., 2017, Erdoğan & Ünver, 2015). Ceritoglu et al. (2017) investigated the Syrian refugees' effects on the labor market outcomes of natives by using a difference-in-differences strategy. In detail, they examined whether the millions of Syrian refugees who took refuge in Turkey due to the civil war in Syria have increased unemployment by creating a negative impact on Turkish citizens in the labor market. Using data on Syrian refugee flows between 2013 and 2017 in different provinces of Turkey, they explored the effects on domestic labor markets in different provinces. In the study, the relationships between the presence of Syrian refugees and unemployment, wages and labor supply in the domestic labor market are inspected. Their results show that the formal employment and unemployment rates increased while

labor force participation, informal employment, and job-finding rates decreased among natives (Ceritoglu et al., 2017). For native workers, the possibility of working in the informal market dropped by 2.2 percentage points.

However, in the specific situation of Turkey's apparel industry, there are distinctive issues. The recent data indicates that the firms' labor demand in Istanbul's textile and apparel sectors has been suffering from a persistent labor supply shortage (Uysal & Volkan, 2020). This is due to various reasons, including low wages (minimum wage or lower) in the industry and unhealthy and challenging working conditions. Multinational companies demand low costs from contracted firms; hence the firms make agreements with informal ateliers for their orders because they are not able to produce within the terms of multinational companies and still gain profit. The contracted firms get orders from multinational companies and subcontract the ateliers. The ateliers are able to produce with lower costs due to the lack of insurance, health benefits, and lower wages.

In this sense, according to Erdem Yörük (2009), the informality and disciplined structure in the apparel industry result from global capitalist competition. He examines the working disciplines of semi-formal side in Istanbul's apparel sector while focusing on how workers in these semi-formal workshops are encouraged to comply with their employers' the disciplinary rules which are essentially systematically within this side of the industry and how power relations in the workplace are shaped. In his research, Yörük collected data on the workplace disciplines of these establishments, based on the workers' experiences in several semi-formal workshops operating in Istanbul. His research acknowledges that workers in these workshops follow strict disciplinary rules set by their bosses, which in turn increases the productivity of the business.

Yörük concludes that these rules are not particular to the workshops and the owners but they are a part of a whole system that locates in the global frame of apparel production.

The low costs and on-time delivery demanded by multinational companies could not be achieved without the sector's informal side. In order to assure on-time delivery and material quality, the labor in the ateliers is disciplined and regulated. This discipline also provides a protection against the labor circulation resulted from overdue payments, seasonal dismissals, and overtime work (Yörük, 2009).

Since apparel work is a labor-intensive job that could be handled with less intervention from the language barrier and ethnic discrimination, the apparel sector has always represented an entry point for immigrants throughout history. As an example, after the migration wave of Russian and Polish Jewish refugees to London during the five years from 1881, the refugees found themselves working in London's sweatshops as subcontracted because there was no other option due to the language barrier and racism they encountered (Delice, 2019). It is still the case in the 21st century. In the 1990s, when Kurdish people started to migrate from Eastern Anatolia to Istanbul, they got textile jobs in the first place and after years, when they gained experience, many of them started their own textile workshops. In the same manner, mainly Syrian refugees have been employed in textile workshops, by the help of that many of them had textile experiences in Syria.

According to an International Labor Organization study based on 2017 Turkstat data, 31.1% of Syrian refugees work in the apparel industry in Turkey (ILO, 2017). In addition, the large-scale survey research done by DISK (Erol et al., 2017) shows that a considerable part of Syrian refugees working in textile workshops in Turkey come from textile-dominant regions of Syria. Out of 600 Syrian textile workers, 52% of them were working in a textile-related job in Syria (Erol et al., 2017). These facts demonstrate that the demographic structure of the textile industry has always tended to change due to migration movements, and it is the case for Istanbul as well. That is why it is crucial to

evaluate how the power dynamics change within the sector concerning the effects of the newcomers and altering conditions, including the current pandemic that we are experiencing.

In the literature, there are various studies on Syrian refugees and Syrian garment workers in particular. Nevertheless, many of them are economy-focused, numeric, or concentrated on a single location in Istanbul. The most comprehensive questionnaire-based study belongs to Erol et al., 2017 which investigates Syrian refugees' integration process into the apparel sector in Istanbul and their effect through a variety of questions on how they find their jobs, their wages, and work experience. This research demonstrates that 52% of local workers describe themselves as Kurdish (Erol et al., 2017, p. 40). Although it is done with close-ended questions and does not involve extensive interpretations, it is a significant source to achieve relatively recent data on Syrian refugees in Istanbul's apparel sector.

With respect to the Syrian refugees' situation in the Turkish labor market, Mustafa Kahveci (2019), one of the authors of the report above, explores wage discrimination between native and Syrian garment workers in Istanbul's textile industry through the same sample of 600 workers. This is a qualitative study within the realms of the economic discipline. He concludes that among workers who have similar skills and qualifications, Syrian refugees are paid lower wages in comparison with native workers, while women are paid less in reference to men.

In migration studies, Emre Eren Korkmaz (2017) looks at the responses of textile companies to the vulnerable situation of Syrian refugees in global garment supply chains. Korkmaz discusses how Syrian refugee workers are challenging supply chain management in the textile industry in Turkey by arguing that the exploitation of Syrian

refugees in the textile industry has become a systematic problem and is deeply embedded in the industry's supply chain.

Korkmaz argues that Syrian refugees have become a vital labor force in the Turkish apparel industry, especially in fast fashion production, and that these workers face problems such as low wages, long working hours, and poor working conditions. As many of them are employed in informal or unregistered jobs, they become vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. He also analyzes the relations between the informal and formal sectors in Turkey's apparel industry and how such relations have affected the survival strategies of Syrian refugees such as how Syrian refugee workers are challenging supply chain management practices in the industry. Korkmaz states that some workers organized themselves and formed unions to demand better wages and working conditions. Others work with NGOs and advocacy groups to raise awareness of the exploitation of Syrian refugees in the industry.

Similarly, Ayşegül Kayaoğlu (2020) practiced a three-month field study in Küçükköy, Istanbul by conducting interviews with both workers and employers in order to investigate their working conditions and if Syrian refugees affected the employment of local workers. She discusses the employers' preferences in hiring Syrian refugees, the job performance of Syrian refugees and the attitudes of employers towards them. According to the data collected, Syrian refugees did not cause a decrease in the wages of native workers in the majority of the cases, and in some exceptional situations, even affected an increase. Nevertheless, the lower wages paid to Syrians resulted in zero or small increases in the wages of native workers, and led to native workers quitting their jobs, in several cases. Notwithstanding some atelier owners' concerns about hiring Syrians, they seemed to be obliged to employ them due to the shortage of labor supply from the native population in the sector. The entrance of Syrian workers into the

country is rather welcomed by the owners of informal workshops as they have improved the production in those ateliers.

The only comparative study that delves into the details of ethnic differences and power dynamics in Istanbul's apparel sector is Şeyma Yetkin's (2019) thesis on female garment workers in Kanarya where the demographic structure mainly consists of Kurdish families and Syrian Kurdish refugees, after the Syrian migration. She examines the male-dominant environment and dynamics that conclude with the "feminization of garment work" in that neighborhood. She argues that the exploitation of displaced women's labor is not only a result of the Turkish state's exclusionary policies but also a manifestation of the global fast fashion industry's exploitative practices. Nevertheless, it is gender-focused, the interviews are conducted in a single neighborhood, and it does not compare refugees with local Turkish workers.

Neither of these studies and research involves a comparison including different neighborhoods of Istanbul and focuses on the ethnic structure and changing dynamics of subcontracting relations in Istanbul. Consequently, this research stands in a critical position in the literature. It fills the void of comparison by focusing on how the demography of subcontracting labor market changes and also how these changes affect the workers' bargaining power and survival strategies as active agents who are able to modify their lives and conditions by also considering the effects of COVID-19 pandemic. The thesis discusses Syrian refugees' emplacement in Istanbul's Apparel Industry within the context of Wallerstein's World Systems Theory while also considering their experiences and bargaining power in the picture. It examines their stories and the dynamics through various interviews and also analyzes existing discourses and emotions in circulation.

Chapter 3:

**THE APPAREL INDUSTRY'S LOCAL AND GLOBAL
BACKGROUND****3.1 *The Industry's Role in Global Economic History*****3.1.1 *Global Division of Labor***

Understanding and elaborating on global production processes and their historicalities is not possible without the concepts of class and division of labor and therefore, Marxism. Today Marxism includes more than Karl Marx; it includes many elaborations and different forms diverging from Orthodox Marxism to Maoism. These elaborations also include Immanuel Wallerstein's works as the founder of the World-System Theory. The world-system means "a social system, one that has boundaries, structures, member groups, rules of legitimation, and coherence" (Wallerstein, 2011). It consists of conflicting forces that act in relation to each other. Wallerstein's approach has some ground-breaking qualities because it opposed the conventional liberal understanding at that time that believed in the inevitable progress of the past towards greater liberty and enlightenment.

Wallerstein's theory is constructed on the idea that there is a world economy based on a global-scale division of labor. This division of labor consists of three categories of the core, periphery, and semi-periphery countries. In this system, core countries exploit the periphery by means of raw materials and low-cost labor force, and semi-periphery has some characteristics of both core and periphery countries. However, it also has its unique features, such as dealing with nasty work that the core countries are unwilling to do, such as wars.

Various interpretations are possible when evaluating Wallerstein's work in terms of the features of classical social theory. In his article "Hold the Tiller Firm: On Method and the Unit of Analysis," Wallerstein (1994) explains his quest for the true unit of analysis. He says that for at least the last 150 years, modern social science has had explicitly or implicitly a unit of analysis, and this has been the state. It was also related to the assumption that the states had political structure, economy, culture, and these totalities of each state were independent from each other but also followed similar paths in time. However, Wallerstein objects to this understanding and argues that the place where social action occurs is not the state; it is the world systems as historical unities. His argument is that the modern world system is significantly different from the other kinds of world systems, because of the capitalist world economy. Therefore, to understand the modern world and how it operates, one had to see it as a developing historical process of a capitalist world economy (Wallerstein, 1994). Hence, the unit of analysis is not society or state singularly but the whole economic system in the world. He emphasizes the fact that "a world-system is not the system of *the* world, but a system *that is a* world" (Wallerstein, 2004, p. 98) and generally, it is located in separate areas rather than the entire globe.

He defines the system as a "connected whole, with internal rules of operation and some kind of continuity" (Wallerstein, 2004, p. 98). In other respects, Wallerstein still looks at social action, as he also indicates. According to him, there is a division of labor at the global level as including exploitation and these countries are bounded to each other systematically. They are parts of a system altogether and have a form of functioning in this manner.

He addresses the classical question of why West-Western Europe was the first to develop economically and experienced continuous economic growth for the first time

(Janowitz, 1977). He continues with its effects, the emergence of the capitalist world economy, and how it has shaped the world systematically. In a sense, Wallerstein adds another stage to Marx's famous linear line from feudalism to communism: the global phase of capitalism. In place of Marx's classification of capitalists and proletariat, he brings the concept of core and periphery, with the addition of semi-periphery as well.

As Marx's analysis, Wallerstein (2011) also indicates that the driving force of any capitalist system (global or not) is the endless accumulation of capital. He continues with the fact that a serious amount of capitalist accumulation may only be possible with a quasi-monopoly of world-economy-wide production. "The exhaustion of the quasi-monopoly leads to a system-wide stagnation that reduces the interest of capitalists in accumulation through productive enterprises" (Wallerstein, 2011). In this type of functioning, firms tend to shift their industries to places with lower production costs, preferring increased transaction costs which mean more ecological damage over higher wage costs. This causes growing unemployment in the zones of relocated industries, and former trickle-down advantages are generally reversed. Wallerstein argues that the whole course of events is going to result in "the impossibility of running away from growing workers' power; the growing cost of inputs – for instance, ecological exhaustion" (el-Ojeili, 2015). This prospect is parallel to Marx's prospects about the crisis of capitalism.

3.1.2 The Historicality of Apparel Production

At the beginning of Industrial Revolution, the cotton production and its increasing share became indispensable for the British economy. The textile industry, which incorporates the production of clothing and other textile merchandises, was one of the first industries to be mechanized during the Industrial Revolution. New technologies

such as the power loom and spinning wheel were progressed, which prominently increased the efficiency and productivity. This led to the growth of textile mills and factories with mass clothing production, and the rise of a new class of industrial capitalists who owned and operated these factories (Beckert, 2017). The mass production also made cloths more affordable and accessible to a wider range of people than handmade production. Nevertheless, these changes also brought along the exploitation of labor, particularly child labor, and poor working conditions in the factories.

Until the point that the profits were no longer adequate and the creators and owners were asking for more, the industry continued to improve and create its own branches in their home countries. After the major growth carried out by apparel industry, the European countries started to create and promote their brandings. Many of the large European clothing brands that exist today have their origins in the 19th and early 20th centuries, during the period of significant industrialization and economic growth in Europe (Beckert, 2017). During that time, the beforementioned advances in textile technology and the growth of the middle class generated an increased demand for clothing.

This sectoral advancement also meant new opportunities for entrepreneurs to start clothing companies, many of which would eventually become some of the largest and most well-known brands in Europe. Several of these brands, such as H&M, Zara, and Primark, started as small family-owned businesses, but through a combination of innovation, expansion, and acquisition, they grew to become major players in the global apparel industry. Some others such as Benetton and C&A, started as textile companies that expanded into clothing production and retail. The high-end ones, such as Louis Vuitton, Gucci and Prada, started as luxury brands that catered to the upper class, but

through expansion and diversification of their product lines, they also became popular among a broader audience (Donzé et al., 2022).

3.2 *Global Apparel Transformation*

One of the key components of global capitalism is the global supply chain, the system that today's apparel industry is grounded on. In simple terms, it refers to a structure that consists of companies, organizations, and individuals involved in the production, distribution, and sale of goods and services on a global scale (Rossi et al., 2014). This system includes the sourcing of raw materials, the manufacturing of products, the transportation and logistics of getting those products to market, and the retail and distribution channels through which the products are sold to consumers in the last stage. In the context of global capitalism, the global supply chain is driven by the pursuit of profit and economic growth, with companies looking to minimize costs and maximize efficiency to increase their profitability. This pursuit has resulted in the outsourcing of production to countries with lower labor costs and new chains of exploitation of workers globally.

Global supply chains have become more complicated with acceleration through companies and organizations from different countries and regions working together to produce and distribute goods and services. This meant greater efficiency and cost savings for companies, whereas another dimension was increased competition and greater dependence on global trade. As an example, the whole process involving an electronic device like a smartphone might include the designing section in one country, the mining of raw materials in another one, the assembly of components in another country, and the final assembly, quality control, and distribution in yet another country.

The place of these countries in the chain is thoroughly related to Wallerstein's concept of global division of labor. The design part belongs to the core country, whereas the raw material, assembly, and distribution parts are divided between semi-periphery and periphery countries in the World-Systems (Wallerstein, 2004). The core countries specialize in advanced and high value-added goods and services, while the periphery countries' economies are concentrated on raw materials and low value-added goods. Global supply chains tend to be controlled by core countries with the most advanced technology, design, and production process management. The semi-periphery and periphery countries tend to provide cheap labor and resources for the production process.

Briefly, the core regions, such as the United States, Western Europe, and Japan have the most advanced economies and dominate the global political and economic system. They control the most advanced technology, produce the most valuable goods and services, and have the most control over global financial and trade institutions. The semi-periphery countries, such as Brazil, Mexico, and South Africa, have less developed economies than the core countries but more advanced than the periphery countries. They often depend on the core countries for trade and investment, and may have some control over their own economic and political systems. The periphery countries, such as most of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, have relatively the least developed economies and are the most dependent on the core and semi-periphery. They often produce raw materials and agricultural goods to export to the core and semi-periphery, and they have minimum control over their own economic and political systems.

Within many sectors as fragments of the global economy, the apparel industry is integrated into the global supply chain also through a complex network of suppliers,

manufacturers, distributors, and retailers. Even a simple piece of clothing sold in any dress shop crosses over dozens of stakeholders and many continents to arrive at the store in the final stage. For example, Inditex, one of the world's largest fashion retailers, has 1,790 direct suppliers and 8,155 factories worldwide in 2021 (*Collaborating so Our Suppliers Grow*, n.d.). This vast production chain spreads over Spain, Portugal, Morocco, Turkey, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Cambodia, China, Brazil, and Argentina.

This new production model started in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as European apparel manufacturers began outsourcing production to low-wage countries in Asia and Latin America in order to reduce costs and increase profits (Sluiter, 2009). This was driven by especially the growing competition from Asian apparel manufacturers. Therefore, during the 1980s and 1990s, many European apparel manufacturers moved their production facilities to low-wage countries, primarily in Asia, and established global supply chains to produce clothing (Sluiter, 2009). This allowed them to take advantage of the lower labor costs and other benefits of producing goods in these countries, such as access to raw materials and favorable trade agreements.

In the late 1980s and 90s, the fast fashion industry emerged in Europe, and the trend of outsourcing production to low-wage countries accelerated (Tokatli et al., 2011). It was as a response to the growing demand for inexpensive, trendy clothing. The growing global population, increased disposable income, the rise of e-commerce, and the influence of social media on fashion trends, all have been effective in its emergence. This transformation also reflects the changing consumer attitudes towards clothing. Compared to the past, people have started to buy more clothes than ever but kept them for shorter periods of time due to seasonal trends and creations. Hence, the fast fashion business model is characterized by a rapid turnover of styles and collections, with new

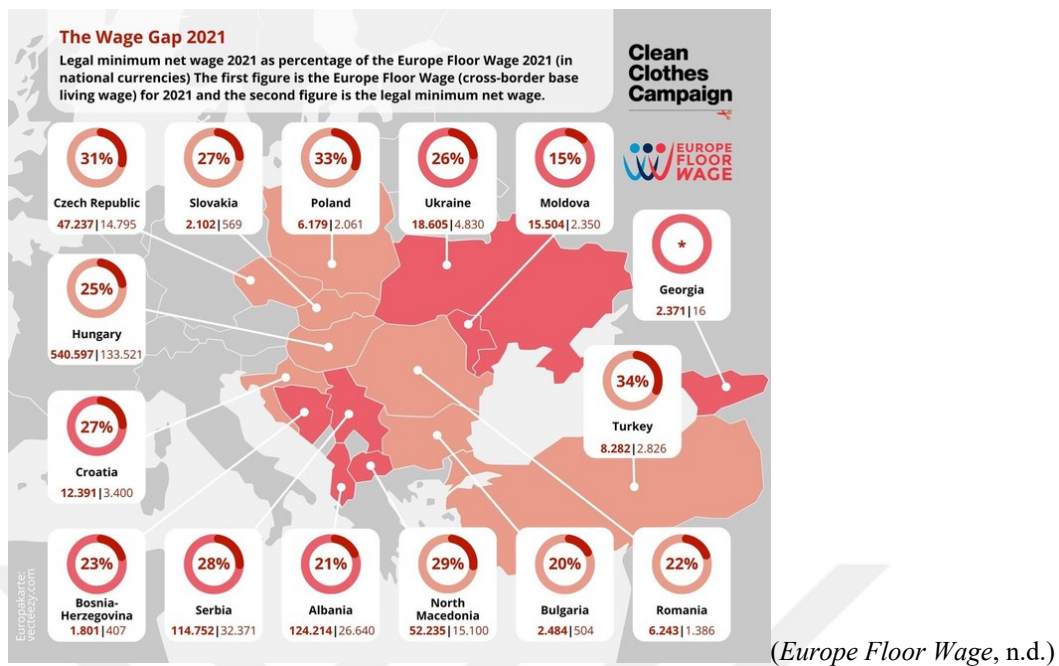
items being designed, produced, and shipped to stores in a matter of weeks (Tokatli et al., 2011). This contrasts with the traditional fashion industry, where collections are typically released twice a year and have a longer shelf life.

Fast fashion retailers use a variety of strategies to keep costs low and speed up the production process. Certain examples might be using low-quality fabrics and materials, copying designs from high-end fashion brands, and introducing them into the market by undercutting (Tokatli et al., 2011). Other ones are keeping inventory levels low and frequently restocking to respond quickly to changing trends and consumer demands. Last but not least, their most crucial move is subcontracting production to low-wage countries, where labor costs are much lower than in developed countries, by benefiting from inexpensive expenses. Thus, fast fashion companies such as Zara, H&M, and Primark rapidly increased their production in low-cost countries, such as Bangladesh, Vietnam, and China, in order to keep costs low and speed up their production process.

Many of these countries' economies are based on these labor-intensive productions; this fact is seen as an opportunity in the eyes of governments. Therefore, in many countries with developing economies, governments deliberately suppress the minimum wage line under living wage in order to keep competing in the global market. Whereas minimum wage is a measure that governments define, living wage is evaluated in accordance with daily needs, market prices, and inflation. It means a minimum-level income that is necessary to meet a family's basic and vital needs and put aside for enjoyable expenses and savings (Musiolek & Ljarja, 2020).



Although earning a living wage is classified as a human right by UN and European institutions, according to the Europe Floor Wage Report in 2020, “minimum wages are, on average, equivalent to two-thirds of the EU’s poverty line” (Musiolek & Ljarja, 2020). In addition, according to the data of Industry Wage Gap Metric which is established by Wage Indicator Foundation and The Industry We Want, “in major garment producing countries, this gap is 45 percent” (Adegeest, 2022). Even though the brands do not directly pay garment workers overseas, they subcontract and pay employers of the ateliers and factories. The fact that the brands offer undercutting prices to the manufacturers creates unfair wages and poor working environments.



Raw materials, such as cotton or synthetic fibers, are sourced from suppliers in the periphery countries and then transported to manufacturers which generally located in semi-periphery and periphery countries. Subsequently, they are turned into finished garments there as the last stage of production. These garments are then distributed to retailers, where they are sold to consumers both online and in stores. As a result of the global aspect of the industry, all steps of production, distribution, and sale take place in different countries with different labor and environmental regulations. The locations where the raw materials are sourced from, the finished products are manufactured and the stores are placed, might even be on separate continents.

3.2.1 Turkey's Apparel Transformation

In accordance, the global changes in apparel production are also observable in the history of Turkey's apparel industry. As mentioned in the introduction chapter, Turkey has a significant role in the world's garment production and consequently, the fast fashion industry. There are various reasons behind this critical positioning.

Geographical location is the first one to notice. Turkey is strategically located between Europe and Asia and the country's proximity to major markets in Europe, Middle East and North Africa, and Central Asia provides fast fashion companies with easy access to these markets. Turkey also has a large and skilled workforce that is relatively cheaper compared to European countries, which makes it an attractive destination for fast fashion manufacturers. In addition, it has a well-developed textile and apparel infrastructure, including a large number of textile mills, spinning mills, and garment factories. Finally, the country has a rich source of raw materials like cotton, grown in numerous regions of the country. Due to all of these factors, Turkey has become a major supplier of fast fashion garments to many European and American brands (*World Trade Report 2018*, n.d.). It is also one of the leading suppliers of fast fashion to countries in the Middle East and Central Asia, as the interviews support.

However, this was not always the case. Before the 1980s, the apparel industry in Turkey was relatively small and domestically oriented. The industry primarily focused on producing traditional garments for the domestic market. It was characterized by small-scale, family-run businesses and a lack of investment in modern technology and equipment. The sector was also facing challenges such as high tariffs and quotas on textile and apparel imports, which protected the domestic market but also restricted the industry's growth.

In the early 1980s, the Turkish government began implementing economic and trade liberalization policies by aiming to open the doors of the economy to foreign trade and investment (Sluiter, 2009). These policies included the removal of tariffs and quotas on textile and apparel imports, and the introduction of incentives to attract foreign investment. These new implementations also coincide with the fast fashion trend in the industry.

As a result of these alterations, the apparel industry in Turkey started to grow rapidly. It was not possible to meet this ever-increasing global demand by continuing to produce in the old style. There was a need for a more rapid and flexible production process. This is the point that subcontracting in the industry became a part of this system (Tokatli et al., 2011). The intermediary firms started to take orders from the global brands and subcontract small to large-scale ateliers in order to meet the deadlines in time.

Herewith, the industry also began to focus on producing lower-end garments such as basic t-shirts, underwear, and socks, and afterwards started exporting these products to Europe and the United States. The industry also began to attract foreign investment, mainly from European and American apparel companies, and they introduced new technology, management, and production methods to the sector (Sluiter, 2009). It continued to grow in the following years, and Turkey became an essential player in the global textile and apparel industry. It started to diversify its products and produce higher-end garments, such as jeans and sportswear as well, and started to target more demanding and upper markets (Sluiter, 2009).

The continuity of this globally structured system is highly dependent on the relationship between the informal and formal sides of the sector in Turkey. The formal agents as intermediary firms and big-scale workshops are not able to carry on the business without the interlocation of informal workshops due to the global brand's beyond-reach expectations, such as the highest quality with lowest prices and pressing deadlines.

The state placement in this relationship is also exceedingly critical. Along with the global customers' expectations, the responsibilities coming with formality also constitute a significant burden on the businesses, such as high taxes, insurance

expenses, and bills. For example, the employers in informal ateliers do not cover meals, but many registered ones do. The informal places also have more working hours and make the employees work half day on Saturdays. The managers and owners complained that many workshops do not care about quality; they only care about quantity. The informal ones do not pay taxes or sometimes even bills; therefore, they have no expenses like formal workshops.

The firm managers and workshop owners claimed that the state sets conditions as a minimum 80% of insurance rate among employees in a business. A workshop owner stated that their insurance rate is over 80%, and businesses like theirs have more expenses accordingly. They have to pay 50.000 TL insurance monthly for 80 people in 2021. A firm director said that:

“The informal ones keep all their gain. Because of that, in the local market, the customers say that our prices are too high, there are other places do the same job for 12 TL or even sometimes 8,5 TL. But it costs me 22 TL here at the moment. This price also includes the depreciation value and my profit... How do they make that without all of these? They have to cut down from somewhere. I am sure that his profit would double ours.” (Director of External Production, male, Turkish)²

The informal workshops are able to make more profit than the formal ones. They underprice the market and stand in others' way. A director mentions that some customers justify their underpriced requests by exemplifying informal workshops. When a formal workshop asked for a regular price of 25 TL per piece in 2021, the customers

² Çalıştığı sadece kendisine kalıyor. Bu sefer iç piyasada firmalar bu fiyat fazla, 12 liraya gömlek diken var diyor. 8,5 liraya bile diken var. Ama benim burada şu anki maliyeti 22 lira. Bunun amortisör bedeli var, benim kâr yapmam lazım... Nasıl yapıyorlar? Kaçak, bir yerden çalmak lazım yoksa yapamazsın. Onun kâr marjı bizimkinden fazladır.

insisted on 12-13 TL and when the owner refused, they went to other workplaces with cheapened prices.

These kinds of ateliers might not manage to export in many cases. Nevertheless, even if a workplace manufactures a product and does not receive any bills, it is able to acquire its bill from another place and sell it. In this way, selling the products to the global market is not possible, but it is possible to sell them domestically. Since presenting the bill in the local market is not necessary. For instance, an Arabic bagman (“poşetçi”) comes and purchases 100-200 pieces of clothing, then sells them in his boutique by piece. These practices are called shuttle trade in general. According to the interviewees, this is quite common in Laleli and Merter. Hence, they avoid taxes in their countries by buying like tourists rather than businesspeople.

Furthermore, while the government encourages producing locally and exporting those garment products, it also started implementing anti-dumping taxes in the early 2000s to control and limit global subcontracting in many sectors, including the apparel industry. In this way, it is aimed to encourage domestic production and less travel for afterproducts. This implementation has altered the dynamics of Turkey's apparel production drastically, as the workshop owners mentioned during my interviews.

“In the past, LC Waikiki was subcontracting in Cambodia. Then Turkey started to implement anti-dumping duties of 40% to imported products. In overseas, they could hire low-cost workers but LC Waikiki began to produce domestically after this new tax. This tax is still implemented on fabrics. For instance, when you import fabrics from China, the state asks you to pay the KDV for imports to the tax office. It takes almost a year to get that money back as an export tax refund after presenting the customs declaration to them to evaluate. The textile-oriented countries keep the taxes high, so

that the domestic production of fabrics would still continue.” (Workshop owner, male, Kurdish)³

Anti-dumping taxes are imposed on imported goods sold at a price that is considered to be lower than their “fair” market value. Initially, these taxes are intended to protect domestic industries from foreign companies that are “dumping” their goods into the domestic market at below-market prices to gain an unfair advantage over domestic producers. However, in the clothing sector, anti-dumping taxes are sometimes imposed on imported clothing, particularly from countries with low labor costs and weak labor laws, such as East Asian countries. The goal of these taxes is to level the playing field for domestic clothing manufacturers, who may struggle to compete with the low prices of imported clothing. The above quotation is on this intention of the government.

³ “LC Waikiki önceden Kamboçya’da diktiriyordu, sonra Türkiye %40 vergi uyguladı ithal ürünlere. Damp vergisi. LC Waikiki de içeride diktirmeye başladı çünkü dışarıda ucuz işçiye yaptırıyor ama vergi verdiği için Türkiye’ye döndü.

Kumaşta hâlâ var, mesela sen Çin’den kumaş getirdiğinde diyor ki kumaşı ihraç edeceksin, edeceğine dair KDV’yi teminat olarak vergi dairesine öde. Gümrük beyanlarını verdikten sonra o beyanları araştırıp 7-8 ayı, bir seneyi buluyor paranın geri gelmesi. İçeride kumaş üretimleri durmasın diye. Tekstil üretimi olan ülkeler vergileri yüksek tutar.”

Chapter 4:

THE APPAREL SECTOR IN ISTANBUL

4.1 *Broad Framework*

As a broad framework, I aim to present an in-depth picture of Istanbul's apparel industry. This chapter starts with the wages for various positions in various neighborhoods in order to understand the labor market and the differences between positions and districts. The workflow differences between mass-production and boutique production are also crucial in terms of perceiving two distinct branches in the industry. Subsequently, I turn into employment criteria of workshop and factory owners, their clients' expectations, how the clients' audit processes work, and how the employer and employee find each other in the market. There are some patterns and recurrences in these subjects, such as the concept of probation period which exists in almost all ateliers without any legal liability or BSCI (Business Social Compliance Initiative) standards for social compliance that client brands expect from the producers. The chapter concludes by discussing how formal-informal sides of the industry are interrelated to each other and presenting the interviewees' foresight on the future of the industry.

4.1.1 *Wages for Different Positions on European Side*

In Istanbul's apparel industry, the wages are dependent on the position and the worker's experience in that position. If the worker is unskilled with no former experience, the highest salary they could get is minimum wage. It is the case if the workshop works in entirely legal conditions. Even if the workshop is formal and has all the permits, there is the possibility of giving the minimum wage via banking and taking

it back in person. On the dates between March-June 2021, when the interviews were done, the minimum wage was 2.825 TL, and USD to TL was, on average, 7.30-8,60⁴.

The exact opposite situation might happen for experienced workers who appear to be given minimum wage formally but take the rest of it as cash-in-hand-payment in order to pay lower insurance for the worker (by making the wage look lower than it is). I have witnessed the second situation in many places, including workshops and even factories that were working with multinational companies.

At a workshop in Küçükköy, mechanics received between 3000-4000 TL monthly, while the managers received between 4500-7000 TL monthly. However, their wages were recorded as minimum wage officially. The unskilled workers received minimum wage. In that area in Küçükköy, there were many workshops, producing shirt and denim spesifically, side by side and many of them have job adverts that look for almost every position (makineci, kolimacı, cep takan, boscu, çiftiğneci, ilik ve düğmecı, regolacı, yakacı, katçı, temizlemeci, ortacı, kaleti kontrolcü, kolcu, düzcü, overlokçu, ponterezci, kemerci, ütücü) and even for unqualified positions (“vasıfsız eleman”). They were marketing themselves with “insurance + transportation + generous salary”⁵ and not working on Saturdays.



⁴ US dollar to Turkish Lira Spot Exchange rates for 2021. Exchange Rates. (n.d.). Retrieved June 22, 2022, from <https://www.exchangerates.org.uk/USD-TRY-spot-exchange-rates-history-2021.html>

⁵ SGK + yol/servis + dolgun maaş

In Fatih, Syrian machinists received 750-1200 TL weekly. Nevertheless, it was not a regular salary. They were called to work by the owner when there was an order requiring more labor at the workshop. Master (usta) machinists' wages are 1000-1200 TL. "Ortacı" (the worker who carries the pieces between the machinists and places the finished products in their places) received 500-600 TL weekly. At a small workshop that belonged to a Syrian woman in Fatih, there were two machinists, including herself. The not experienced machinist received minimum wage, whereas her "ortacı" received 1500 TL-2000 monthly.

At a small-scale workshop that had started as a home workshop in Fatih again, at first, the "ortacı" received 200-300 TL less than minimum wage, but if she was really experienced, she might receive even higher than minimum wage. A machinist received around 3500 because she was experienced and talented, but non-experienced machinists received minimum wage. Before 8-10 years, at the beginning of Syrian migration to Turkey, while the minimum wage was 630-770 between 2011 and 2013, the employer gave the minimum wage (around 700) in her home workshop (together with annual leave of 10 days). However, other workshops in the Fatih region paid 200-300 TL, and their owners accused her of putting prices up and making up "unnecessary" side benefits like annual leave.

In Bahçelievler, at a large workshop, the wages depended on seniority and the amount of output the worker produced. For example, in 2021, their raise was 500 TL, but the employer increased a worker's wage to 800 TL because his number of outputs was high (around 1000-1200 outputs daily), although he started last year. The starting wage was minimum wage. At other workshops in the area, the salaries were higher if they were paid weekly rather than monthly because, in that case, the workers might not be called to work when there was no order.

In Esenyurt, the wages were lower than in Fatih, and for master machinists, it was around 800 TL weekly. Nevertheless, in Eyüpsultan, the wages were dependent primarily on seniority rather than their specialties at a factory, whereas in Çağlayan, for experienced machinists, it is in the range of 1300-1400 TL weekly. In Bayrampaşa, at a factory that took orders from multinational companies as an intermediary firm, the machinists received 3500-4000 TL monthly. However, their wages are dependent on how much they produce. The manager threatens the workers by not paying them full wages or paying on time. Managers also decide who gets how much raise by looking at the number of produced items. This situation creates an oppressive environment with continuous control from above. Pressers' (ütücü) wage was the minimum as starting salary at the factory, but it was also dependent on experience, i.e., how much they produced daily, although it was not a significant difference. A senior presser who had 20 years of experience in the position got 500-1000 TL above the minimum wage.

The wages are paid in these ranges in mass production lines; however, the issue is entirely dissimilar in the old textile center in Istanbul. The boutiques in Osmanbey and Laleli areas produce their own products sold in both home and foreign markets. Besides, they do not outsource to any other workshop. Since they prioritize mostly quality, their workers are highly skilled and qualified in comparison to mass production. This also means that paying minimum wage is not even a part of the discussion.

Furthermore, job switches happen less frequently than in mass production areas. Some workers even tend to work until their retirement at the same place. The average working time for boutiques could be up to 5-10 years which is a considerably long time in the sector. Definitely, it had not always been this way, but since they get into the market, they employed various people, experienced countless leaves and layoffs, and in the end, they continued with the ones remained who were also skilled.

In boutique production, certain modelers and stylists are paid more than experienced machinists. Some cutters (makastar) are also on a salary that is approximately equal to a skilled machinist. Their wages are dependent on qualification more than seniority. The more talented ones receive the highest wage. A high-skilled machinist received 1500-2000 TL weekly. For modelers, it is 6000-7000 TL weekly. For stylists, 2000 TL weekly. Cutters ask for 6-7 or 8 thousand TL monthly. The previous year, in 2020, the wages were half or %60 of these numbers. It have changed immensely because of various factors, including the pandemic, inflation, and currency depreciation, along with the textile sector's labor supply deficit.

4.1.2 Discipline and Workflow

The dissimilarities are prominent between the wages in the periphery and more core regions since those regions are the old centers of the apparel industry in Istanbul: “*Our employees are qualified people whom can produce a design pattern from scratch when given the order.*” (Company owner of a boutique in Osmanbey, male, Turkish)⁶

The workers in the boutique production in Osmanbey are capable of making a model from scratch because it has different requirements than the factory production system. It is the birth place of textiles in Istanbul; therefore, the production is more suitable to the customs at the beginning of the sector. Factory production means a higher volume of products and a more detailed division of labor which causes workers who could not make one product all by themselves. For example, during the production of a shirt at the factory, a worker specialized in collar could not sew every inch of it, despite having a lot of experience.

⁶ “İşi verdiğin zaman sıfırdan sana model olarak ortaya koyabilen insanlardır bizim çalışanlarımız.”

In general, factory production comes with a seasonal collection plan which aims to reach a broader customer mass with lower market prices, whereas boutique production is hand-crafted in small numbers and addresses a small number of clients, including small retail brands or shops. These factors make them higher priced in relation to mass production in a clothing line. The shops in the Osmanbey neighborhood are in a boutique style which addresses a more elite customer group; therefore, they are able to ask for more money for higher quality and pay higher wages to their workers.

4.1.3 Employment Criteria and Probation Period

The workshop owners' main criteria for employment are residing in the vicinity of the atelier, previous work experience, and references from their current workers, managers or other atelier owners whom they trust.

Almost all ateliers (both small and larger-scale) mentioned a probation period which they observe the new worker's manners, work quality, speed, skills, adaptation to the work environment, relations with the coworkers, being responsible or not and even hygiene. The owners claimed that the probation process allowed employers to be more careful and conscientious when selecting candidates. In this process, employers could get an idea about the candidates' work discipline, abilities and adaptation to the business. At the same time, candidates can better understand the workings of the business and the employer's expectations and it is possible for both employers and candidates to better understand their roles and expectations within the business. However, it also means that candidates work for a period of two weeks with no guarantee of employment which causes to remain in a precarious situation and be economically strained.

“Being a family” (with workers) or “having a family bond” (with clients) is highly praised among employers. They also attach importance to whether the potential workers’ have a family or not. Especially for Syrian workers, some employers stated they would not hire a single man since they more tend to “cause problems”, being a threat for female workers and they are not responsible. The fact that the person to be employed has a family causes employers to perceive them as a reliable employee. Family ties can be used as a criterion for employers to measure employee loyalty and reliability, and can also affect an employee's commitment to work. For example, employees with families may not be able to leave their job easily because they have to bring bread to their home and the family members depend on t.

*“(…) Because they are young and aimless... **If someone has a family, they aren’t harmless to anyone. A person who doesn’t belong to a family, alone, he would have no shame, no manners, he would jeopardize others.** The first arrivers were mostly single, they were staying in rooms [in shared flats with other refugees] and workplaces. They were behaving odd. But these two [the workers in his atelier] are married and their families are here, in Istanbul. **If you live as a family in a certain neighborhood, then you comply with the rules and the rights of people living there.** They became a part of this place, adjusted. The ones who came alone, without a family are different. Because most of them are the ones trying to escape from being a soldier for the war, the ones who prefer living as a runner.”* (Workshop owner, male, Kurdish)⁷

Another example of being a family with workers from a boutique atelier in Osmanbey: “We still hear them [his previous workers] saying that it was a totally

⁷ “(…) Çünkü genç başı boş... Bakın bir insanın ailesi varsa o insanın kimseye zararı olmaz. Eğer ki bir insan aile değilse, tek başınaysa o insanda ne utanma kalır ne düşünce olur, o insan zarar verir. O ilk gelenlerin çoğu bekardı, bekar odalarında dükkanlarda kalıyorlardı. Onlar biraz farklı davranırlardı. Ama bunların [atölyede çalışan Suriyeliler] ikisi evli, aileleri burada. Artık sen bir semtte aile olmuşsan o semtin kurallarına oradaki insanların haklarına riayet edersin. Onlar artık burayı benimsediler, adapte oldular. Aileyle birlikte gelmeyenler farklıdır. Çünkü onların çoğu da askerlik yapmamak için kaçıp gelenler, gizli yaşamak isteyenler.”

different workplace for us, we had many experiences with various ateliers but this one was different, we felt like a family there.” (Workshop owner, 52, male, Turkish)⁸

He was very proud of the fact they have been working with the same core team of workers for many years since it is an exceptional case for the apparel industry in Istanbul which is famous for frequent job switches and difficulty of finding qualified workers. This kind of pride is also related to the status of the business owner because working with the same team for years and being referred as a family create a good reputation for them. The employer differentiates himself from other employers in terms of being a better boss and, therefore, a better person.

Furthermore, hygiene is an essential issue related to having close relationships and adapting to the atmosphere. The atelier owners mentioned “being a family” and especially paid attention the sense of cleaning. One of these ateliers was transformed from a home-based atelier, and the employer brought her child to her office as well. She said:

*“Don’t get me wrong but I was paying a lot of attention to their cleanness. I was checking their restroom habits since we are sensitive about hygiene. Besides, it was quite important if they fitted in the other employees. As long as they fitted in, it was not a problem if they can’t handle the job because we teach them in a couple of months as a training period anyway. However, if they failed to adapt and had troubles with other employees, we usually parted ways between 7 to 10 days. **The most crucial parts were hygiene and adaptation.**” (Atelier owner, female, Turkish)⁹*

⁸ “Hâlâ duyarız orası bir başkaydı denildiğini [eski çalışanlar tarafından], biz o kadar yerde çalıştık ama orası farklıydı, aile gibiydik denildiğini.”

⁹ “Yanlış anlamazsanız, geldikleri zamanki temizliklerine çok dikkat ediyordum. Tuvalet alışkanlıklarını kontrol ediyordum, biraz temizlik hassasiyeti var bizde. Bir de buradakilerle uyum sağlayıp sağlamadığı çok önemliydi. Uyum sağladığında işi iyi yapmasa bile zaten burada 2-3 ay işi öğretme sürecimiz olduğu için sıkıntı olmuyordu, öğretiyorduk ona. Ama adapte olamadıysa, diğer

Businesses establish a control mechanism over individuals' bodies and shows that these mechanisms direct the behavior of employees by determining the norms and rules within the business. This effect is achieved by controlling, regulating, and normalizing the body. According to Michel Foucault (1995), the body is the most important target of modern discipline and control mechanisms. The importance that employers attach to the hygiene of employees might also be seen a part of these control mechanisms. The reason that employers use hygiene of employees as recruitment criteria is to strengthen discipline and control mechanisms within the enterprise and increase the efficiency of the enterprise. Firstly, it is thought that hygienic employees will prevent the spread of possible diseases in the work environment; a clean environment will protect the reputation of the business, and the rate of absenteeism will be reduced by keeping the employees healthy.

In addition, modern disciplinary mechanisms enable individuals to internalize social norms through their control over their bodies (Foucault, 1995). Employees are forced to adopt these norms and rules, as the importance that employers attach to employee hygiene is determined by social norms and legal regulations. In this way, a certain hygiene standard is formed within the enterprise and employees begin to act in accordance with this standard.

When it comes to the criteria of residency, it is seen that the workers' residency and the location of the workplace are generally vicinal. Although some of the ateliers offer transportation services, all of them prefer employing people from the nearby neighborhoods, and generally, the workers also apply to closer places. That is why, the ethnic distribution in the workplace commonly represents its neighborhood's

çalışanlarla çekişiyorsa uyum sağlamıyorsa 1 hafta 10 günün sonunda olmaz diyorduk. En önemli noktalar temizlik ve uyumdu."

demography. For example, an atelier owner in Küçükköy mentioned that they prefer workers residing in the vicinity of the atelier because these difficulties with transportation reflected in their performance. Additionally, they might leave the job in a short span of time because of the fatigue caused by long hours on the road. In a big city like Istanbul, transportation problems are quite common and traffic is very congested, especially during rush hour.

“We try to hire the ones living nearby and close as possible. We don’t prefer hiring people living away. Because on our shuttle route, there are only Sultangazi and this one [Küçükköy]. We have preference over the ones on our route or nearby. For them, not to have trouble with transportation to work, and not to reflect those troubles to us.”

(Workshop owner, male, Kurdish)¹⁰

Besides, despite the fact that providing transportation is not an employer’s obligation according to law, providing transportation services or subsidized transportation are also a condition of BSCI¹¹, an initiative of the Foreign Trade Association, which aims to improve working conditions in global supply chains. Nevertheless, the employees and directors also complain about the brands’ hypocritical attitude toward their BSCI standards. The brands that are their customers demand transportation and meal from the firms whereas they do not expect the same from factories in Vietnam, for instance. Moreover, in relation to the emphasis on continuity of employment, the employers are

¹⁰ “Mümkün olduğu kadar çevremizde, yakın olan insanlar, uzak yerden gelen insanları biz tercih etmiyoruz. Çünkü servis güzergahımızda sadece iki semt var, Sultangazi ve bu semt. Tercihimiz bu güzergahta veya işyerine yakın oturanlardan yana oluyor. İş geliş gidişlerde sıkıntı yaşamamışlar, o sıkıntı bize de yansımış diye.”

¹¹ amfori. (2018). *amfori BSCI System Manual*.
<https://www.amfori.org/sites/default/files/amfori-system-manual-2018.pdf>

extremely critical about the worker's job-changing habits and suffer from the lack of qualified and permanent labor force.

*“Some people in the textile industry, can be very **ungrateful**. Here we raise the staff from zero by ourselves. We raise a **true machinist**, put up with their rawness, their mistakes like defective products, the huge problems they cause. We teach them, we create a **machinist individual** out of them. After all these efforts, they leave us for another atelier's needs or a higher salary. Continuity of the employee is very important to us. Because we have a schedule to keep up like I said before.”* (Workshop owner, male, Turkish)¹²

Changing jobs according to one's needs, such as better conditions, fewer work hours, more side benefits or simply higher wage could be considered a rational decision. However, this upper hand of workers is perceived and entitled as greed and disloyalty by the employers. In the manner that they interpret selectivity toward jobs as laziness, nitpicking, and desire to cut corners; they also address this issue with emotion-driven and mainly judgmental. On the contrary, when they mention their concerns about wages, side benefits, or working hours, they maintain a contrasting attitude. They mention economic explanations, implications towards state policies, and multinational companies' problematic expectations. Regarding the worker's decisions, the discourse is on emotions and character traits rather than rationality or structural realities.

In addition, the concept of “transforming some incapable, inexperienced workers into a “*machinist person*” is deeply crucial, meaningful and connected to Michel Foucault's

¹² “Tekstil sektöründe bazı insanlar çok **nankör** olabiliyor, biz burada kendi emeğimizle eleman yetiştiriyoruz, **gerçekten bir makineci** yetiştiriyoruz, acemiliğine katlanıyoruz, yamuk yapıyor, bozuk yapıyor, büyük sıkıntılar çıkarıyor öğretiyoruz; onu **makineci bir birey** haline getiriyoruz, daha sonra farklı bir yerin farklı bir ücret önermesi veya ihtiyaç duyması yüzünden bizi bırakıp gidiyor. Süreklilik bizim için çok önemli. Çünkü biz dediğim gibi programa dayalı çalışıyoruz.”

concept of biopower which means regulation and control of human lives and their bodies (Foucault, 1978). The docility of the individual makes these formalizations possible. From the beginning, generally as a probation period, the workers are exposed to surveillance on their hand washing habits, clothing, communication with other workers (particularly how male workers communicate with female workers), and their adaptation skills.

“We usually ask about their family, details about their family. Once we hire them, we consider their working style, hygiene, and the care for the job. We don’t agree on full terms while hiring anyway. We let them work for a couple of weeks first. During this trial period, we also ask for their opinion, whether they want to work with us permanently. If we see any kind of incompatibility or lack of satisfaction, we immediately tell them ‘brother, you are not suitable for the job’.

No matter how hard they work, my priority is the tranquility and cleanliness of the employees here. Because both men and women work at our atelier. For an employee to have a fight or have an unpleasant situation with a man or do wrong to a lady... We don’t even let males and females sit together at the cafeteria, yet they are married. On the outside, everybody lives their own life but in here we don’t permit such things.”

(Workshop owner, male, Kurdish)¹³

Here the atelier owner makes a distinction between outside (outside of workplace) and inside (in the workplace). The outside is defined as a separate entity where the

¹³ *“Ailesini sorarız, aile yapısını sorarım. İçeri aldığımızda da çalışması, temizliği, işine verdiği özveri... Onları göz önünde bulundururuz. Zaten işe alırken hiçbir zaman net anlaşılmayız, bir iki hafta çalışır önce. O deneme süresinde onun da görüşlerini sorarız, bizle çalışmak isteyip istemeyeceğini. Eğer çalışmasında bir sıkıntı görmüşsek, bir memnuniyetsizlik hissetmişsek hemen diyoruz zaten kardeşim sen bize olmazsın.*

“Ne kadar iş yaparsa yapsın burada çalışan insanların huzuru, hijyeni çok önemli benim için. Çünkü bizim işyerinde bayan da çalışıyor erkek de çalışıyor. Bir erkekle kavga etmesi ya da kötü bir durum yaşaması, bir bayana yanlış bir harekette bulunması... Halen mesela mutfakta eş de olsa bayan erkek ayrı oturur, karışık oturulmasına izin vermeyiz. Böyle bir duruma biz işyerinde izin vermiyoruz. Dışarıda herkes hayatını yaşar ama içeride öyle bir şeye mahal vermemek için...”

workers are free to experience their own lifestyles, habits, and values. However, the inside is controlled by the owner and the workers have to accommodate themselves according to his rules and the general functioning there, and also accept his values.

Therefore, the surveillance and control in the workplace are not only related to quality of work or the quantity of produced goods but also interconnected with the workers' bodies and behaviors which move those bodies in a certain way. These behaviors are a wide subject including many subtopics, such as hygiene, manners, communication between coworkers, their families (if they have one or not), and especially language.

One of the atelier owners gave the example of a fight caused by a lingual misunderstanding. A Syrian worker used an Arabic word which had a profane meaning in Turkish but not in Arabic because some of the Arabic words experienced a semantic restriction (restriction of their meaning) while transferring into Turkish -like "ceza" in Arabic means "response", whereas in Turkish it means "punishment"-. When the Turkish worker heard the word said against himself, he was offended and there was a fight until the owner interfered and the misunderstanding was resolved. Therefore, the atelier owners and directors frequently mentioned the language barrier, not being able to understand deeply and the problems caused by this barrier.

4.1.4 Client Expectations

Almost every employer and manager emphasized the importance of meeting the deadlines and on-time delivery. Following this emphasis, quality and reasonable pricing are other key criteria. The importance of the quality and its standards depend on if the market is domestic or foreign and in which country it occurs. For most of the retailer brands, the quality heavily matters, whereas for wholesalers, the cheaper is the better.

For instance, an atelier owner who exports to Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and African countries said that in the past, quality had a superior place; however, nowadays the clients prioritize the price. She complained that when she would like to produce in superior condition with newer designs, the prices increased accordingly and the clients preferred cheaper products in average quality, rather than pricier products with higher quality.

“On-time delivery”, “good quality”, and “affordable prices” are the key factors for every business. When it comes to multinational company customers, there are additional measures such as social compliance and technical compliance. Social compliance is evaluated according to BSCI which is the abbreviation of Business Social Compliance Initiative. It is “an initiative of the Foreign Trade Association (FTA)” that brings together more than “1,500 retailers, importers, brands and national associations” in order to build more socially compliant global supply chains (Boeva, 2022). BSCI standards include several subtopics on forced labor/debt bondages, payment structure, factory policies and environment, health, and safety measures. When the companies audit a workplace according to these standards, they evaluate if:

“

- Employment is freely chosen
- Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining is respected
- Working conditions are safe and hygienic
- Child labor shall not be used
- Living wages are paid
- Working hours are not excessive
- No discrimination is practiced
- Regular employment is provided

- No harsh or inhuman treatment is allowed” (*Ethical Trade Initiative (ETI) Audit - Standards & Code*, n.d.)

When it comes to technical compliance, it includes maintenance of the machinery, electrical safety, quality performance such as fabric test reports and quality control system in general. The criteria are concerning factory warehouse, trims, fabrics, cutting, sampling and pre-production, sewing, finishing, and final quality audit (Shaikat & Washim, 2018).

4.1.5 Finding Workers and Jobs

For employers seeking workers, the main way is finding someone they can trust through references of their acquaintances such as other atelier owners and their workers. If there is no one to be recommended, another common way is hanging job adverts outside of ateliers or on the windows of their shops where they sell the end products. Factories sometimes get workers via The Institution of Providing Jobs and Employees (İŞKUR) similarly to one of my interviewees who worked in an intermediary firm as ironer. Although using the Internet in this case is considerably common in many sectors, the employers in apparel industry do not post their demand on the Internet in general.

On the other side, the workers looking for jobs also use references of their acquaintances such as a friend or relative working in the industry but they also visit the workshops and ask if there is any need in the neighborhoods where the garment sector is concentrated such as Zeytinburnu, Fatih, Küçükköy, Yenibosna etc.

For migrant workers, it is very common to get a job through their social network. If a relative of theirs started work in the apparel sector, they generally prefer to follow the same path and get the job through their reference. They can be employed comparatively easier in this way. This situation has also resemblances to Kurdish population who

experienced displacement and migrated to Istanbul from Eastern Anatolia. In order to hold on to life despite the exceedingly adverse circumstances of the city's economic and geographic peripheries, they were also primarily dependent on kinship and community networks. (Yörük, 2009).

4.1.6 Informal-Formal Sector Relationship

The informal structures and formal side in the industry are highly interbedded. Primarily, there is a difficulty of meeting sudden increase in the workload with current number of employees at that moment, especially during peak seasons. That is why daily labor might earn much more. A qualified worker could earn more by working in an atelier in the case of urgent need of skilled labor until the peak season passes and then go to another workshop. They can have an indispensable position in this way, a highly needed person/worker. In addition, some workers might prefer working informally to not lose unemployment pay with having insurance. Other workers might choose working without insurance, in order to receive a higher salary (including the amount of insurance payment).

There are other factors related to running a business in a severely competitive market, such as the need of lowering the cost to a minimum in metropolitan cities where all types of expenses are higher than in the cities of Anatolia. Besides, the employers might hire refugees or illegal immigrants to lower their costs of insurance and obligation of minimum wage. In that case, informality rises from the necessity of hiding those workers from the state and sometimes the clients of that workshop, because of the lack of work permits or visa.

4.1.7 Foreseeing the Future of Sector

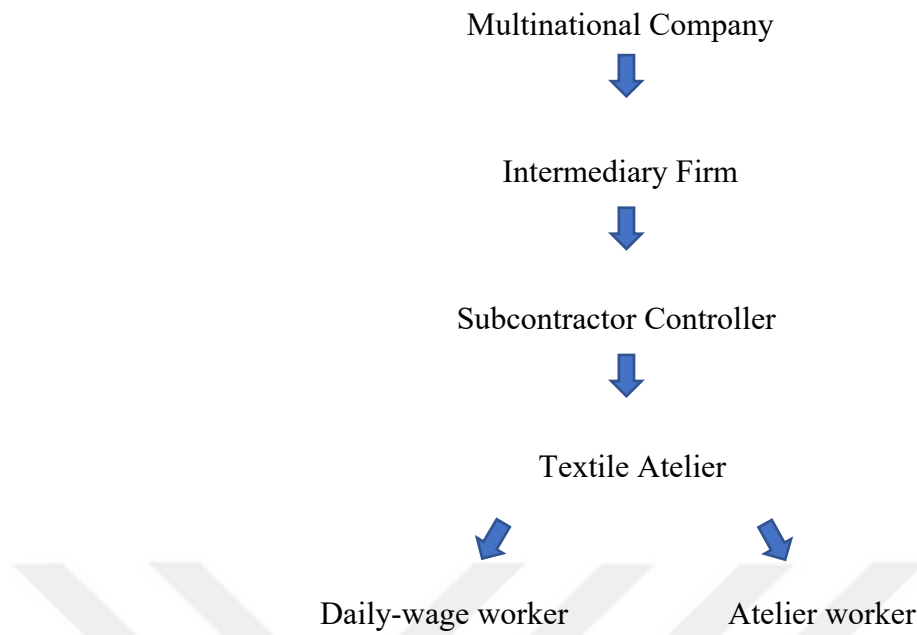
During the interviews, it is asked every worker, manager, and employer how they see the future of the industry. The common ground of their answers involves that due to the globally rising labor costs, there is and there will be a demand shift to the countries that have cheaper expenses. Locally, the sector fragmentizes by dispersing into small production areas in Anatolia because of the increasing costs in metropolitan cities, such as Istanbul.

There are also several risks due to the pandemic, economic crisis, and inadequate measures on the part of the government policies. They mention the disproportionate growth in production capacity with no economic future driven by seasonal needs. One example of that is the shift of the machinery park to mask production due to the effect of the pandemic. The employers and managers complain about lack of sectoral planning and subsidies to encourage proportional growth of capacity. They also struggle with increased maturities in payments despite the fact that industry expenses such as wages, insurance payments, rents, bills, taxes are upfront.

4.2 Class-related Positionings

4.2.1 Diversified Employer-Employee Relationships

Within the frame of subcontracting, the class positionings are diversified and complicated in comparison to the dynamics in a single factory. Firstly, there are multinational companies which give orders to intermediary firms. The intermediary firms contract with subcontractor controllers who find the best deal among textile ateliers. The textile ateliers hire both monthly-paid and daily-paid workers.



Besides the table above, there is a hierarchy including atelier manager and department chiefs who are also responsible for the process; however, that system resembles a conventional factory hierarchy. In addition, the daily-wage workers, who are not working on monthly salaries but daily wages and generally hired for peak season, when necessary, have their own team that consists of less demanded workers. Therefore, the daily-wage workers are also employers in a sense; they have their team of workers who are temporarily hired as well.

In the traditional sense, the definition of Marxist class is composed of two parties: One bourgeois who has the ownership of the means of production, whereas the other party, proletariat, has to sell their labor to survive. As capitalism evolves, the class relations have become increasingly complicated and layered. Furthermore, as Erik Olin Wright (1976) argues, classes are more than plain abstract concepts; they are embedded in real social dynamics with real world effects. For this exact reason, the fundamental classifications of bourgeoisie and proletariat are not sufficient to evaluate the existing class relations in global capitalism. Wright verbalizes this situation as the “dissolution

of pure ownership of means of production” (Gerry & Birkbeck, 1983) and it means that there are some jobs including some qualities of both bourgeoisie and proletariat, such as the job of subcontractor controller in the system.

Gerry and Birkbeck (1983) also argues that “petit bourgeois” has control over the production process, while it does not own the means of production directly. He also defines another class called “new petit bourgeois” which includes the managers, chiefs, and other white-collar workers (Gerry & Birkbeck, 1983).

As a transitional concept, the term petite bourgeoisie is used as an intermediate class and it means a conjugation of the two main classes as bourgeoisie and proletariat. Small-scale merchants and artisans belong to this category. In the past, before the excessive effect of neoliberalism on Turkey’s various industries and ready-made clothing sector, the production was based on “petty production” as a small type of production without wage workers and, if necessary, with family labor. Boutique ateliers and tailors belonged to this group. With the rise of the ready-made garment industry and then fast fashion, this group has changed into a more “disguised” class position. In more clearer terms, Chris Gerry and Birkbeck (1983) dismantles the concept of “petty producers” into three sections as “direct wage laborers”, “disguised wage laborers”, and “the truly self-employed” (p. 152) in their book chapter, *The Petty Commodity Producer in Third World Cities*.

Within the textile production system, the first and main class relation is between the multinational companies and intermediary firms which consists of receiving orders from the company, together with the design and fabric details. The conditions are determined by the company (although there is a room for negotiation) and they might even apply sanctions in case of delays in due date. Since they have the superiority due to the existing competition in the both local and global market, they can demand confidently

without becoming concerned about losing their deal. These facts create an appropriate situation for exploitation of intermediary firms.

The firms take their payments after they ship the products and the customers receive the delivery and inspect. In some cases, even after the company sold the products. All of these conditions make the firms more vulnerable to problems which might be expected and normal in the process of production and shipment. They are obliged to make the most profitable deals for the basic materials including fabric, button, zipper etc. They also have to keep up their work within very strict deadlines in order to stay competitive.

The firm owners and managers also complain about the excessively late payments of their customers, multinational companies. During the lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the retail stores were closed and the companies did not accept the deliveries by claiming they could not put them in the store at that moment. This rejection caused many products with a value of millions of euros to stay in storage.

According to the some workshop owners and firm directors, the multinational brands exploit the businesses they work with, by making use of the laws in that country. The countries that experience economical drawbacks are also the ones with laws prone to abuse. In their case, the brands are able to maintain their business relations and profit with relative ease, whereas in the countries with more structured law systems their exploitation are more subtle and supported with existing legislations.

The second place of the class relations is the ateliers. Atelier owners are not direct wage workers as the conceptualization in *The Petite Bourgeoisie* (Gerry & Birkbeck, 1983) because they get payments according to their shipments, unlike a monthly wage. They also have a complicated position with the firm owners, subcontractor controllers, and their own workers. Although they are employers of the workers, they are also exploited by the firms, controllers and indirectly by the multinational companies. They

are offered with minimum prices, particularly because of the pressure of the multinational brands on intermediary firms.

In this framework, the workshop owners could not be classified as capitalists within a classical understanding of class positioning. Contrarily they occupy a contradictory class location in the system. They are fundamentally a contradictory class since they suffer from the subjective experiences of exploitation within their relations to the apparel brands and companies (Yörük, 2006), whereas they hold power against their employees and also exercise it by transferring the oppression from the brands to them. They own means of production and also have control over the production process; however, it works in a limited regard because the operation is essentially supervised and coordinated by subcontractor controllers, and indirectly the firms which the controllers work with.

The chain of hierarchy also brings along the chain of domination over the weaker members. It applies in the same structure for everyone from the CEO of the company to the department chief of any small atelier. Since the actual control over the process belongs to the firms through their subcontractor controllers, atelier owners do not have total authority on the production process they manage.

The weakest part of the chain is the atelier workers which also have subsections as atelier manager, and department chief who are generally master machinists themselves. They suffer the biggest consequences of the time pressure, high quality expectations, and payment problems that the atelier owners experience with the firms (and the firms experience with multinational brands beforehand). Controlling the production process particularly involves controlling the time. The workers have to work in the fastest way and still keep the quality as possible as they can. This also means more strict starting times, shorter breaks, pressure from the department chiefs and managers, and doing

overtime (especially during peak seasons). The workers are expected to reach a minimum daily output and this is tracked monthly to evaluate their efficiency. These numbers determine their importance in the eyes of the atelier owner and therefore their future in that atelier. Department chiefs aim to increase output numbers and have a trouble-free working environment.

Daily wage worker is another ambiguous term as a class positioning. They do not work for one factory or workshop, contrarily they are hired during peak seasons or when there are more orders than the existing labor force is adequate to complete. Daily workers are usually highly talented machinists and prefer working in this way since it is more profitable than earning a monthly stable income. Their position is ambiguous as they generally have a team of their own which they bring along to the workshops. They both hire and are hired at the same time.

4.2.2 *Employer Discourses*

Being picky at job selection (“İş beğenmemezlik”)

Many employers, managers and department chiefs had an attitude that depicts unemployment as a result of certain mistakes or personal choices. According to them, there are many people finishing university nowadays (because of parent pressure, newly opening universities, and low university entrance threshold), but this does not make them necessarily qualified. People do not accept this fact and still look for more prestigious jobs as a beginner. Even if they could not find a desk job, they chose to work as a security guard or be a sales assistant to work at a workshop since they consider these jobs “easier” and “cleaner”.

The employers do not acknowledge the fact that the minimum wage is not worth the downsides of the sector for those people. They frequently blame the current course of

events in terms of education, new businesses, and taxes and make connections with a decline in moral values, and rising expectations of workers. They approach the problem from a particular standpoint solely and depict a complex social issue as either a personal choice or a moral problem.

*“As long as people are honest and do their job decently, they wouldn’t be unemployed. However, people don’t prefer working. There are plenty of university graduates who are too picky. If a person needs a job, they can’t be selective. I believe all unemployed people are **useless**, they are the ones who don’t desire working. If you are **useful** to the business, they won’t be tightfisted with money and give it away easily. Still, people want to gain money without any great effort, there is no such a thing!”*
(Workshop owner, 43, male, Kurdish)¹⁴

The employers claim that people are too picky in terms of job seeking and they do not make use of the opportunities they come across properly.

“It is not possible for one to find a proper job while sitting at the tea house and grumbling about there is no job to get.” [towards Turkish people] (Workshop worker at his brother’s workshop, 42, male, Turkmenian Syrian)¹⁵

“The ateliers are in need of labor force, then why are not these people working, why there is this unemployment? People are too picky. ‘I don’t do this, I don’t do that, and the result is this high rate of unemployment.’” (Factory employee, 42, male, Turkish)¹⁶

¹⁴ “İnsanlar dürüst olursa, yaptıkları işi düzgün yaparlarsa işsiz kalmazlar. **İş beğenmemezlik var.** Nice üniversite mezunu var iş beğenmiyor. Bir insanın işe ihtiyacı varsa iş ayrımı yapmaz. İşsizlerin hepsi bence **boş insan**, iş yapmak istemeyen insan.. Sen eğer işletmeye **faydalı** olursan o iş yeri için beşin hesabını yapmaz. Ama insanlar ben rahat olayım çok para kazanayım diyor, öyle bir dünya yok.”

¹⁵ “Çay ocağında oturup iş yok, iş yok demekle olmuyor.”

¹⁶ “Atölyelerin işçi sıkıntısı var, e o zaman bu millet niye çalışmıyor, bu işsizlik niye var? İş çok seçiliyor. Ben onu yapmam, bunu yapmam, sonra işsizlik seviyesi had safada.”

“I think when people want to work, they can find a job in a breeze. The problem in our dear country is that we are too picky when it comes to working. But one should start from somewhere without caring the wage or the position so that you can continue in your career. If I had been picky about the job back then, I probably wouldn’t be where I am now.” (Accountant - former workshop worker, 30, female, Turkish)¹⁷

The same arguments are generally suggested by a number of employees who are not currently textile workers. They argue that people should compromise their expectations in the beginning, in order to achieve better conditions in the future. A Turkish department chief also claimed the same argument. She mentioned that job seekers should shoulder some responsibility, otherwise they can’t make any progress. According to her, without a compromise on the part of the employee, nothing can be expected from the employer.

Trust

According to many employers, trust is a central concept in understanding of the trade. It is a crucial criterion for selecting whom to work with. They also care about their status and reliability in their clients’ eyes. They make an effort to be consistent with their promises and deadlines (termin) particularly. Many of them pride themselves on working with the same clients for years and having a trusting relationship with them. Workshops and firms predominantly find clients through references and they say that the clients trust their quality. Various workshop owners stated that they would not work with a firm unless they trust them. Trust is the priority and it would not matter how much they pay.

¹⁷ “Zaten çalışmak istediklerinde bence rahatlıkla iş bulabilirler. Bizim Türkiyemizin şöyle bir problemi var, çok iş seçiyoruz açıkçası. Oysa azına çoğuna, düşüğüne ya da yükseğıne bakmaksızın bir yerlerden başlamak gerekiyor ki devamını getirebilesiniz. Ben de zamanda iş seçmiş olsaydım, belki de bu yerlerde olmayabilirdim. Seçmediğim için bugün buradayım.”

“One of the most crucial things for me is ‘don’t make promises even if you die, keep your promise even if you die’.” [an aphorism attributed to Hacı Bektaş Veli]
(Workshop owner, 43, male, Kurdish)¹⁸

The importance of trust demonstrates us that for them, business is not only related to a form of having rational decisions and making profit but it is embedded in social relations and forms of status. Being a good businessperson is highly related to being a good person in the eyes of society. They care for other people’s judgments about them as well as their economic interests.

Family

Despite all the conflicts of interest between the workers and the employers, the employers have a discourse about being a family in the atelier. They put great emphasis on social and affectional bonding and portrait themselves as a father/mother figure for their employees in terms of providing meals, knowing their families and daily troubles, keeping a safe working environment (especially for women). They would like to express their embracement with words of care and empathy.

“I have been in their [Syrian brothers working at the atelier] home twice. I was invited by their father as a guest and had some tea with them. (...) I don’t hire Syrian workers anymore. I had these two but they are like a family to us now.” (Workshop owner, male, Kurdish)¹⁹

“All of the employees become your family, so you feel troubled when they have a problem. Since we employ mostly foreigners, their taste differs from Turkish cuisine and

¹⁸ “Benim için en önemli şeylerden biri ‘öl, söz verme; öl, sözünden dönme’.”

¹⁹ “Ben bu iki [Suriyeli] kardeşin evlerine de gittim iki defa, babaları davet etmişti beni, misafir oldum, çaylarını içtim. (...) Ben de öyle artık Suriyeli almıyorum, bu çocuklar var ama onlar zaten bizim ailemizden gibi oldular artık.”

they can't eat every meal. When they can't eat, it bothers you and makes you concerned because they are hungry.” (Workshop owner, 40, female, Turkish)²⁰

In this sense, it is possible to say that the class relations that are related to economic interests are intermingled with emotions and personal bonds. This fact also favors the discourses of loyalty and ungratefulness, which the employers mention on every occasion while discussing their relationships with the employees. They see themselves entitled to gratitude and stability in the workforce since they are “generous” and paternal employers.

Some workshop owners also attributed a great significance to belonging a family in personal life. They argued the fact that they were married and had a family was an indicator of virtuousness and being a part of society. They give huge importance if the person has a family during their employment process, especially when it comes to hiring Syrian refugees.

“If someone has a family, they are harmless to anyone. A person who doesn't belong to a family, alone, he would have no shame, no manners, he would jeopardize others.” (Workshop owner, 43, male, Kurdish)²¹

This emphasis on family illustrates again that having business relations cannot be separated from social codes and values. Employers look for workers with “good morals” which means morals and behaviors similar to the employers themselves. They would like to work with people more like themselves and living similar lifestyles. Having a “proper” family is an excellent example of that, according to them. A person with a family is more embedded in neighborhood dynamics, having more life

²⁰ “Çalışanların hepsi senin bir ailen oluyor, hepsinin derdi senin derdin oluyor. Genelde yabancı çalıştırdığımız için, Türk de vardı iki üç tane ama çoğu yabancıydı, onların yemek zevkleri uyumuyor, her yemeği yiyemiyorlar, yemeyince sıkıntı oluyor aç kalıyorlar diye düşünüyorsun (...)”

²¹ “Bir insanın ailesi varsa o insanın kimseye zararı olmaz. Eğer ki bir insan aile değilse, tek başınaysa o insanda ne utanma kalır ne düşünce olur, o insan zarar verir.”

responsibilities. They also depend on their job to support their families, which means less bargaining power against employers.

Discipline

Another critical concept for employers is discipline, regarding the working environment or workers' attitude. The common view among themselves is that during the time of "apprenticeship", the workers were a lot more disciplined than today. Some of the employers mentioned that although they had a rough life, this new generation is different; their circle of friends and "called social life spoil" most of them. The kids facing the hardships of life are more disciplined. *"I always side with discipline; too much freedom and too much comfort drive people to laziness."* (Workshop owner, 43, male, Kurdish)²²

Certain employers bragged the fact of experiencing a rough training period during their apprenticeship and when they started to their own businesses, they did the same to their own apprentices. This indicates a cycle of verbal and physical violence through generations.

"At that time, we used to train our staff from scratch. We were getting angry, yelling from time to time but also were having cheerful conversations and there were no offense or anything like that. Because people had goals like working and not being in need of anyone. Nowadays, they work to pass the day and don't think beyond the daily expenses." (Workshop owner, 43, male, Kurdish)²³

²² "Ben her zaman bundan yanayım, çok aşırı özgürlük çok aşırı rahatlık insanları tembelliğe sürükler."

²³ "Biz de o zaman çalıştığımız elemanları sıfırdan yetiştiriyorduk. Kızıyorduk, bağırıyorduk, yeri gelir şen şakrak muhabbet ediyorduk, ne alınma ne şey vardı çünkü insanların bir ihtiyacı vardı ve insanların kendilerine dair bir idealleri vardı, ben çalışayım kimseye muhtaç olmayayım diye. Şimdi çalışan insanlar gününbirlik bakıyor, cebinde o günlük ihtiyaç kadar parası varsa gerisini düşünmüyor."

One of the main differences stated between Turkish and Syrian workers is also about their work discipline.

“Many Syrians know the drill but there are a lot of differences in quality, comparing how it works in Syria. When they work, they don’t watch out any defects or flawed threads because they aren’t accustomed to doing that. But when you correct one of ours, at the worst, they understand after a couple of times and do it right.

“(…) and if someone gets used to do something in a certain way during years, you can’t fix that either. That’s why Turks are more efficient. There is a difference between their work discipline [between Syrians and local workers].” (Workshop manager, 21, male, Turkish)²⁴

The employers and chiefs expect that the work flows without any interruption until its deadline and they argue that this is possible with the true work discipline. The interruption might include several things, from an extended break to an unplanned off day, sometimes due to illness or funerals.

The concept of discipline contains various sub meanings. It implies work order, rhythm, speed, and being only focused on their jobs during work time. All of these stem from the “just-in-time labor process” that is one of the requirements of fast fashion logic (Yörük, 2009). In the 1980s, the clothing retailers began to generate more seasons to their former two-season agenda, such as Inditex brands, H&M, Gap, and M&S (Tokatli et al., 2011). This crucial change led the industry to demand far more punctuality, and therefore assembly lines with larger machines which required more investment. It was a

²⁴ “Suriyelilerin birçoğu bu işi biliyor ama oradaki işle bizdeki iş çok farklı. Kalite anlamında. İş yaptığı zaman, basket yaptığı zaman, iplik çıkmış bir şey olmuş onlar ona dikkat etmiyor. O şekilde alışmadığı için. Ama **bizim Türk insanına** söylediğin zaman bir söylersin iki söylersin üçüncüde onu anlıyor, düzgün bir şekilde yapıyor.”

“(…) ve yıllardan beri adamın eli o şekilde alışınca onu düzeltemezsin de. O yüzden Türk daha verimli. **İş disiplini arasında farklar var.**”

new market that paired high fashion and low cost by creating a throwaway fashion (fast fashion) (Tokatli et al., 2011).

4.3 *The Alterations in the Sector since the early 2000s*

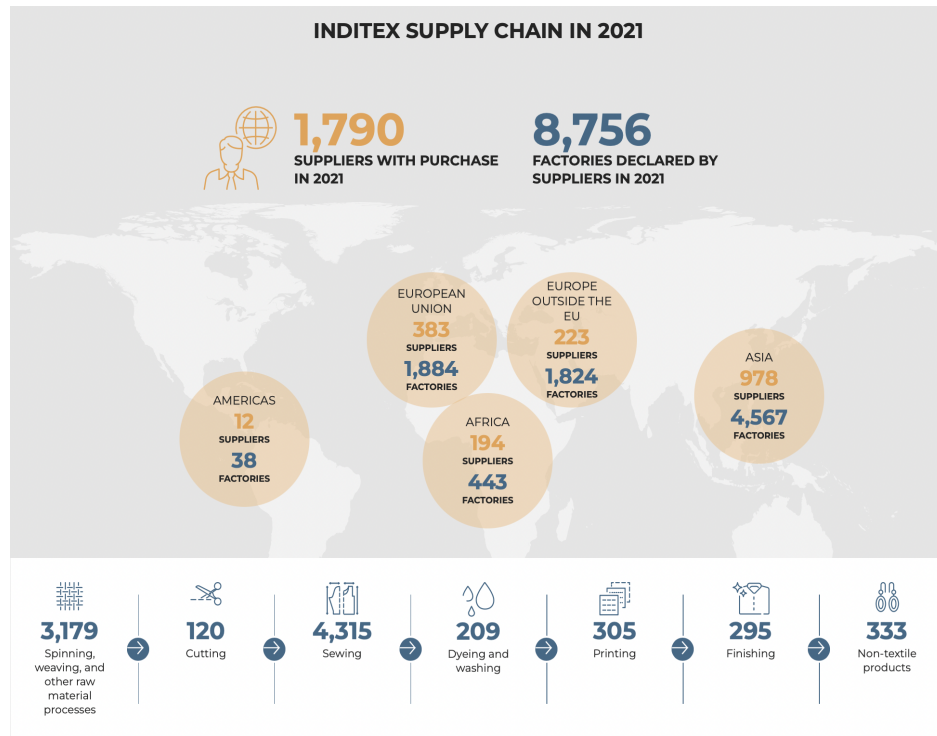
4.3.1 *Fair Trade Policies*

There is an increasing sensitivity, consciousness, and concern on the fairness in the globalized commodity chains in the world. In the case of the apparel industry, fast fashion is the most disconcerting segment of the sector because of the countless issues discussed in Chapter III.

Awareness on how and in which conditions the garment products manufactured is increasing among the customers. This rising awareness contradicts with the profitable business model of fast fashion and even its existence. Since within the current conditions, they are able to produce and sell so many items, even with huge discounts during the sales season. The only way that they keep the prices this low and still continue to make a high profit is cutting down on the quality of fabrics or exploiting the workers even more. They do not prefer rising the prices since it would be a change for their entire business model that is based on producing cheaper seasonal alternatives to high-end designer brands. However, due to the importance of brand image and public relations between the brands and the (potential) customers, the brands place importance on how they can create a “labor-friendly” (Yörük, 2009) and fair trade image.

There are various examples of many fast fashion brand attempts on this issue. For example, H&M publishes their supplier list which includes the manufacturing, processing, and fabric factories they subcontract on their website (*H&M: Number of Suppliers and Factories 2022 by Country*, n.d.). There are 1,519 factories from Africa,

Asia, Europe, and North Africa, whereas most of them are located in China, Turkey, and India (“Supply Chain,” n.d.). Inditex also presents a graph of their factories worldwide from Americas to Asia (*Collaborating so Our Suppliers Grow*, n.d.):



Fair jobs in our production supply chain



The clothing and textiles supply chain is complex, with many shared suppliers. Our own tier 1 and 2 production supply chain contributes to the employment of around one and a half million people in 24 countries.

It's our responsibility to respect and work to advance the human rights of the people working for our suppliers and ensure they know their rights. We collaborate to improve industrywide working conditions, particularly with respect to wages and worker representation. We take a risk-based approach, prioritising locations where we identify potential issues.

We focus on:

- Health, safety & wellbeing.** Everyone has the right to a safe workplace, and health and safety is an important topic in our supplier assessments. We are a signatory to the new *International Accord for Health and Safety in the Textile and Garment Industry*.
- Social dialogue.** We support the right to freedom of association and believe that strong industrial relations contribute to resilient, stable supply chains and decent work. We work with suppliers to increase democratically elected worker representation and to empower workers to know their rights.



Issues brought to National Monitoring Committees in 2021 or carried over from 2020³

	UNRESOLVED FROM 2020	RAISED IN 2021	RESOLVED IN 2021	UNRESOLVED INTO 2022
Compensation & benefits, and severance payment	1	25	20	6
Discrimination & harassment	1	9	7	3
Freedom of association & collective bargaining agreements	2	6	4	4
Working hours	0	0	0	0
Forced labour and modern slavery	0	1	1	0
Social security	0	1	1	0
Total	4	42	33	13

³ This year, we have included the categories of forced labour and modern slavery and social security. These were not reported against last year, since there were no cases raised in either of these categories in 2020.

²⁵ Supply chain. (n.d.). *H&M Group*. Retrieved November 11, 2022, from <https://hmgroupp.com/sustainability/leading-the-change/transparency/supply-chain/>

However, on the background of the photos with smiling faces behind sewing machines, dynamic graphs, and reports/disclosures with hundreds of pages; there is the reality of disguise, distortion, and misdescription. One of the concepts that defines this situation is “greenwashing” (Barnes, 2022). It is a tool of the brands that are neither ecological, sustainable nor ethical, and is used to make consumers believe that they are. Their aim is finding or creating loopholes for the criteria on sustainability and fair trade, by remaining within the realm of legislation. This is the part that greenwashing starts to take place. Deceiving the customers by making them think and trust that the products are sustainable/within the conditions of fair trade, whereas they are, in reality, not.

There are also examples of greenwashing within the fast fashion industry. A relatively recent news from November 2022 reveals a lawsuit that “H&M facing over ‘misleading’ marketing of ‘conscious’ collection” (TFL, 2022). The plaintiffs claim that H&M advertises and places the products which are not originally from sustainable materials on the market by presenting them as “Conscious Choice”. They are also accused of deceiving the public by using green-colored labels, the statements on so-called sustainability on the web page, advertising focused on famous models in green sceneries where plants and grass are around (TFL, 2022). It signifies nature and a collection which is in harmony with the environment.



²⁶ TFL. (2022, November 11). H&M Facing New Lawsuit Over Marketing of “Conscious” Collection. *The Fashion Law*. <https://www.thefashionlaw.com/hm-facing-new-lawsuit-over-misleading-marketing-of-conscious-collection/>

Their web page declares “every piece in the collection is made from a sustainably-sourced material, such as 100% organic cotton, Tencel or recycled polyester”²⁷. Even in this one sentence, there are some problematic aspects. It says “sustainably-sourced” but its meaning is not explained there. Does it mean sustainably grown, sustainably picked or transferred? Also, does it mean that a piece of clothing has a full material of 100% organic cotton? In other words, every clothing is exclusively made of “organic” materials. Or does it mean that if there is a share of cotton in a clothing, that cotton is 100% organic? The answer is in their store web page which says that for Conscious Collection “at least 50% of each piece is made from more sustainable materials, like organic cotton or recycled polyester.” This also means that its other percent is from unsustainable materials like any other garment they might be selling and it is far less than 100% which they would like it to be understood (Leconte, 2021).

In addition to these plays on words, the Conscious Collection has a small portion in H&M’s total production with other collections that have nothing to do with ethical production or sustainability. What about other garments that have a huge share of H&M’s production? How are their materials sourced? In which conditions do the workers who produced them work? In general, the usage of “sustainable”, “pure”, “eco-friendly”, “green”, “conscious” are problematic because they do not have any legal definition to be checked or accredited (Leconte, 2021). They have vague meanings that can be led to any direction with ease. Besides, the fast fashion model is already conflicting with the efforts towards sustainability and ecology. Even a process of producing a single t-shirt involves countless toxic chemicals mixing in the water,

²⁷ *H&M’S CONSCIOUS COLLECTION LAUNCHES WORLDWIDE WITH A SUSTAINABLE FASHION FUTURE IN MIND*. (n.d.). Retrieved November 12, 2022, from <https://about.hm.com/news/general-news-2019/h-m-s-conscious-collection-launches-worldwide-with-a-sustainable.html>

whereas fast fashion means producing whole new clothing lines every season. Thus, the labels of sustainability and being ecological are paradoxical with the concept of fast fashion.

Since the concept of fair trade and the movements/policies regarding them are relatively new and the awareness on this topic has been rising throughout some time, its effect on subcontracting is also on progress. According to the interviewees, in the late 90s and early 2000s of the apparel industry in Istanbul, the inspections on the workshops were more flexible and bribery to pass them without any elaboration were more common in the sector. In that way, it was possible that the workshops with illegitimate conditions stayed within the circle of global trade.

Nevertheless, the recent developments changed these backdoor agreements between intermediary firms, inspectors, and workshops. The firms with global relations can no longer work with informal workshops easily and have to follow strict EU standards. Although there are still workshops with disputable working environments in global supply chains of the industry, they are obligated to continue more subtly and go by the book with caution. For example, they have to restrict transportation service routes, choose cheaper brands for cleaning supplies, use more than one accounting book, one for official examination and one for themselves. The workshops with such informal conditions that cannot even disguise are exiled to the margins of the industry and are able to work only in the domestic market. This situation makes the workers in these informal places more vulnerable to exploitation since there is no superior authority to control and inspect them.

The intermediary firms and workshops criticize the brands' approach by claiming that they are not consistent with their expectations:

*“For instance, the customer requests BSCP²⁸ or other stuff but the X brand works with India or African countries for production... When it comes to us, **they rip us to shreds** about everything from the worker’s salaries to their meals, even water, but how can they do the same interrogation in India or Africa? In Turkey, we pay minimum wage but there, the workers might only receive one-third of minimum wage.*

But that’s not fair! Like, a workshop I work with has excellent quality and produces perfectly but for a silly reason coming from my customer, I can’t give them the job. But why doesn’t this customer look for that silly reason when it comes to African and European countries?

*They accept the terms of African, East Asian countries but not of Turkey’s. **They exploit those countries in broad daylight, whereas they exploit us through official papers.***” (Director of External Production of a Textile Factory, male, Turkish)²⁹

According to the above quotation from an interview with the director of external production, the exploitation of companies exists in every country where they make subcontracting agreements. The interviewees believe this problem is related to governmental policies. Every country has a certain law frame and the brands base their standards on that. They determine the criteria according to the law in the country they subcontract.

²⁸ amfori. (2018). *amfori BSCI System Manual*. <https://www.amfori.org/sites/default/files/amfori-system-manual-2018.pdf>

²⁹ “Mesela benden müşteri BSCI istiyor, başka şeyler istiyor ama X marka gidip o ürünü Hindistan’da yaptırıyor, Hindistan’da veya Afrika ülkelerinde... Bize geliyor elemanın **aldığı maaştan içtiği suya kadar hesap soruyor** ama orada kime neyin hesabını soruyor? Biz burada kendi asgari ücretimizi veriyoruz ama oradaki çalışanlar asgari ücretin belki 3’te 1’ini alıyor.

Burada adaletsizlik var. Mesela benim çalıştığım atölyenin kalitesi on numara, dört dörtlük iş yapıyor ama bilmem neyi yok diye müşteriden dolayı ben oraya iş veremiyorum. Aynı müşteri neden Avrupa’da bunu yapmıyor, neden Afrika ülkesinde yapmıyor?

Afrika’nın Uzak Doğu ülkelerinin şartlarını kabul ediyorlar ama Türkiye’ninkini kabul etmiyorlar. **Onları alenen sömürüyor, bizi resmi evrak üzerinden sömürüyorlar.**”

For countries with less structured law systems, it could be more obvious and direct, whereas in countries like Turkey, the exploitation is discreet and based on legislations and regulations. For example, the brands encourage workers to join labor union, despite knowing the meaning of unionization which is higher costs for the producers. They are aware of the fact that the higher costs do not correspond to their bidding prices.

However, the consequences of this do not matter to them since if that business goes to bankruptcy, another one is going to take its place. It is also known that there are many manufacturers, which take orders from fast fashion brands locally or globally, either go bankruptcy or they change their names every 3 to 5 years in order to renew their tax and insurance payments or they get through the audits “in their own ways”.

4.3.2 Changes in Payment Process

The timing of the brands’ payments is the bottleneck in the industry for intermediary firms and ateliers. In the beginning of 2000s, the payments used to be made in half shares, before the production process and after shipment arrived. However, since the apparel industry's golden age has passed and the local and global competition has become increasingly higher, the brands have significantly more bargaining power to make decisions about how the payment is made on their behalf. Especially with China’s rise in the global market, brands are able to threaten the firms by changing their suppliers and having cheaper alternatives in East and Southeast Asia available.

These changes have resulted in new patterns of payment in orders. Now there is no pre-payment and the final payment might be even delayed after having the shipment and placing the products in the stores. In general, the payments come from behind, which means that in order to continue to stay in business, make a profit, and have suitable investments; there should not be idle time or any large-scale delay. Otherwise, the

intermediary firm starts to get into difficulties in terms of paying credit debts, paying their employees' salaries, and making payments to their subcontractors at the same time. On the other hand, the workshops suffer from these delays even to a greater extent because they have less financial capital to balance their budgets than the firms. This issue underlies bankruptcies and economic recessions of numerous workshops and firms. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the problems have become more severe and evident through the delayed payments and months without orders because of lockdowns. During my interviews, the summer of 2021, even only in the Fatih region, 60 workshops were closed because of the pandemic and economic recession.

4.3.3 Labor Shortage

The labor shortage is the number one problem of the apparel industry, and it is the main complaint topic by various industry actors such as workshop owners, managers, firm owners and employees, and subcontractor controllers. In terms of provinces, according to IPA 2018 data, "Istanbul has the highest number of vacancies, accounting for 31.1 percent of the total vacancies in the private sector in Turkey. Of the vacancies in Istanbul, 95.5 percent are labeled as 'hard to fill' by the firms posting them. Almost half of these positions are in the manufacturing sector (42.1%), and almost one-third of them are classified under 'plant, machine operator and assemblers' (27.6%)" (Uysal & Volkan, 2020). Regarding more recent data, IPA 2020 demonstrates that the highest number of vacancies belongs to the manufacturing sector, with 32.9% in Turkey. It was %18.7 in 2018 and 24.7% in 2019 (*İşgücü Piyasası Araştırma Raporu*, 2020).

Manufacturing consists of textile and apparel, along with food, beverage, tobacco, petroleum and coal productions, plastics and rubber products, electrical equipment, electronic products, and various others. Within low-supply occupations, machinist

(stitching) has 10.1%, whereas garment workers have 5.5% and machinist (weaving) has 2.3%. Among these occupations, the main reasons for vacancies are “no sufficient application”, and “not having a sufficient level of occupational skill” (*İşgücü Piyasası Araştırma Raporu*, 2020).

According to the data retrieved from my interviews, the literature, and statistical data, there are various reasons for this shortage. The main concern is the absence of a sufficient number of skilled workers in the industry. In the past, apparel work used to be maintained through apprenticeship. Many of the workshop owners began as unqualified workers, were promoted gradually and then started their own businesses with some capital and debt. That is why they are highly critical of the implementation of 4+4+4, which made four years of high school compulsory starting from 2012. As a result of this new system, the apprenticeship has become unsustainable. Before the legislation, the business owners used to accuse the obligation of middle school within the same context (Yörük, 2006).

Since there is no way of training a worker from scratch at an early age, they are not able to fill their vacancies with skilled workers. Although there are technical high schools and internships in the industry, business owners, managers, and department chiefs do not find them adequate at almost any rate. They argue that the real-life experience within the system is substantially more distinctive and challenging.

As Didem Danış (2016) suggests and many of my interviewees mentioned, with the rise of the service sector, the apparel industry lost its appeal as providing easy entry-level jobs. Due to the spread of shopping malls with countless job opportunities, private security, call centers, and wardership after the 2000s, potential workers prefer the service sector over ateliers and factories. With the emergence of new alternatives, people no longer favor working in a confined area with the same repetitive job among

the same people. Based on the lost appeal of the industry, being an atelier or factory worker has become a low-status job. Therefore, people choose more pleasant environments or desk jobs with no necessary skills, such as being a sales assistant, private security, call center agent, cashier, etc. They prefer spacious or outdoor workplaces with a flow of new people.

Apparently, another reason behind these decisions is that the average salary is the minimum wage for a newcomer in the apparel industry unless they are not an experienced machinist. Besides, since the service sector generally means corporateness, insurance, side benefits, and on-time payment are guaranteed, whereas in the case of ateliers, they might be questionable or delayed. People think that the jobs at shopping malls or at corporations also come with more side benefits such as holidays, no overtime work, or the assurance that their overtime will be paid.

Although the employers and managers acknowledged these issues and changes, they also mentioned a moral degeneration with rising consumption culture (media including TV series based on luxurious lifestyles and the effect of social media in the last years), credit debt system, and declining value of producing and manufacturing in the eyes of people. They argued the existence of a cultural change in people's expectations about occupation and its status and desire to make money in a quick way. Therefore, people do not want to work at a workshop or factory in the long term; hence they do not make an effort to learn the tricks of the trade or to master it.

“The structure of Turkish society has also deteriorated due to TV series and so on. Back then there were poor but happy people on TV. But all we watch now is people getting out of the pit³⁰ and getting rich with short cuts, having luxury cars, villas... So,

³⁰ The Pit (Çukur) is actually a Turkish TV series based on people living in a disadvantaged neighborhood and becoming entangled in illegal affairs in order to get rich.

current youth's satisfaction level and expectation is highly different now. Working in the manufacturing sector is not a goal like it was before, like back then working in manufacturing, being a worker/factory laborer was a well-accepted occupation. Right now, everyone doing this job are looking for a way to win through another job and get rich one day.” (Vice president of production at a garment factory, female, Turkish)³¹

“Back in time people had their own ideals, like ‘I should work to not be in need of anyone.’ Now working people look at it just for the day, if they have enough money in their pocket for that daily need, they don't think about the rest. As their expenses increase, their income falls short. Nobody has savings anymore; everyone owes money to banks.” (Workshop owner, male, Kurdish)³²

Regarding the fact that people find the wages unsatisfactory for working in the atelier environment, intensity of work and long shifts; employers and managers have a different standpoint to these problems. They claim that the essential problems behind the poor conditions are tax policies of the state, meaning high taxes, and global and local competition that leads to decreasingly low piece rates are. Several workshop owners and managers mention the competition raised by China. It leads to less bargaining power for Turkey in the global market; because of the existing side benefits and rights of workers, Turkey is not able to have the cheapest rates.

³¹ “Türk toplum yapısı dizilerden vesairelerden dolayı da çok bozuldu. Eski dizileri izlediğimizde işte fakir ama mutlu insanlar. Şu anda kısa yoldan zengin olan, çukurdan çıkıp da zengin olan, bir anda villalarda lüks arabalara binen insanlar olduğu için gençlerin şu andaki tatmin düzeyleri, beklentileri çok farklı. Üretim sektöründe çalışmak eskisi gibi bir hedef değil ya da üretimde çalışmak eskiden işçi olmak, fabrika işçisi olmak tanınan, kabul gören bir meslekti. Şu anda bunu yapan herkes günün birinde kapağı başka bir yere atıp zengin olma derdindeler.”

³² “Eskiden insanların kendilerine dair bir idealleri vardı, ben çalışayım kimseye muhtaç olmayayım. Şimdi çalışan insanlar günübirlik bakıyor, cebinde o günlük ihtiyaç kadar parası varsa gerisini düşünmüyor. Harcamalar artıkça gelir yetmez oluyor. İnsanlarda birikim kalmamış, herkes bankalara borçlanmış.”

“Supposedly, it costs me to manufacture a t-shirt for 5 TL but in China, they can fabricate it for 3 TL because the salaries are low, there is no insurance etc. If I wouldn't have paid for their meal, not offered them insurance, I could even have produced it for 2,5 TL!” (Accountant in an atelier, male, Turkish)³³

The workshop owners and firm managers mention that in some instances, the business has to lower the costs, if it would like to float because there are certain liabilities the state indicates. There are various financial liabilities such as astronomical rentages, insurance payments, stoppage taxes, utility bills... These expenses lead them to trouble financially. To overcome this, some firms can cut down on food, cleaning supplies by purchasing the cheapest, even if they cannot evade tax.

Turkey is struggling to survive in this area by trying to compete with countries having low-cost labor forces, such as China, India, and Thailand. Although it has the advantage of quality against East Asian countries because they mass produce in large quantities and disregard the quality. Quality comes with a price but companies prefer to not settle for that.

“The firms agree with you as a supplier, torment you, that's the reality.” (Director of External Production, male, Turkish)³⁴

4.3.4 Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many novelties appeared due to changes all over the world in many areas of life. The main change in manufacturing production was that the sales dropped due to decreasing demand of the people who could not go out to shop

³³ “Mesela üstündeki tişörtü ben 5 liraya dikiyorum diyelim ama Çin’de 3 liraya dikiyor çünkü ücret düşük, sigorta yok vs. Ben de yemek ödemesem, sigorta yapmasam onu 2,5 liraya bile dikerim.”

³⁴ “Senin tedarikçisi olacağın firmalar bu konuda seni gebertiyor, işin gerçeği o.”

or use the goods they purchased. This decrease was negatively correlated with the increase in the sales of food, home-wear, and mask. Some factories and ateliers switched off producing clothing items and proceeded to manufacture face masks in general.

The drop in demand also decreased the employment rate since many ateliers and factories either went into bankruptcy or closed up during lockdowns. The aftermath of these situations is a waiting period for the uncertainty in the market to dissolve.

Alongside this economic crisis, the raw material input prices increased due to the inflation in the economy and decrease in all kinds of production.

The ateliers started to have problems with their delivery dates in meeting deadlines because of the inadequate number of employees due to the downsizing or sick leaves resulting from the pandemic. In addition, another problem with deadlines was about their customers. Numerous brands that gave the orders did not pick up their shipments since they could not sell them in the stores because of the lockdowns. This resulted in a high number of unwithdrawn clothes and hundreds of parcels waiting in the storehouses of the factories. Since the shipments were not withdrawn, the payments were also on hold. This waiting period caused numerous bankruptcies or economic crises the factories and ateliers experienced.

“For example, right now, there are some stocks that were supposed to be delivered in 3 months ago but delayed 6 months. We already purchased their fabrics, paid for their labor cost and they are ready to transport waiting in the warehouse. However, the customer says that it is not needed at the moment because the stores are closed, so they can’t sell it. We have 122.982 pieces of product ready at the warehouse which means, equalizing one product as 15 Euros, approximately 1 million 844 thousand 730 Euro worth stock is buried downstairs waiting. This is the situation even in a company that

has financial problems like ours...” (The vice president of production at a garment factory, female, Turkish)³⁵

Due to the environment of obscurity, including the apparel businesses and the market, the employers could not get new orders, the brands could not plan their following line, and all of these resulted in waves of economic regression. This situation amplified all of the negative effects of pandemic since people were not able to progress in their businesses.

The workplaces had to keep up their work accompanied with the fear of disease. They had new expense items such as masks, hand sanitizers, gloves, new ventilation methods and detailed sterilizations from privately held companies:

*“In every two months we hire people for sterilization operation and each week we antisepticise the workshop. We are frightened by this disease but also trying to move on. Because if we quit just because of our fears, we would not be able to earn a living. **We have to stand still to provide for people around us.**”* (Manager of the atelier, male, Turkish)³⁶

Some workshop managers mentioned that they had to shut down for months during the lockdowns and were trying to hold on without compromising neither from their ethics nor their production quality. One of their main concerns was that not being able to predict the future, even a month while living through that crisis. As long as this

³⁵ “Şu anda pandemiden dolayı mesela normalde eylül ekimde alacakları malları şubata falan attıkları var. Biz onların kumaşını almış oluyoruz, işçiliklerini ödemiş oluyoruz, depoda üretilmiş olarak hazır duruyor ama müşteri diyor ki “bana şu anda lazım değil, benim mağazalarım kapalı, ben bu malları satamayacağım” diyor, bizim depomuzda duruyor. Şu anda hazır olan mal sayımız, mesela şöyle söyleyeyim, 122 bin 982 adet demek, bir 15 Euro’dan çarpacak olursam ortalama, şu anda 1 milyon 844 bin 730 euroluk mal aşağıda yatıyor, bizim gibi finansal sıkıntısı olan bir şirkette bile...”

³⁶ “İki ayda bir ilaçlatıyoruz burayı. Her hafta dezenfekte ediyoruz. Korkuyoruz hastalıktan ama bir şekilde ilerlemeye çalışıyoruz. Çünkü hastalıktan korktuğumuz için işi bıraksak kendimizi geçindiremeyiz. **İlk önce bizim ayakta olmamız lazım ki yanımızdakilere bakalım.**”

environment of obscurity continued, the possibility of losing their trained employees to another place or to other sectors would be increasing.

Many branches in the industry weakened during the first two years of the pandemic. The capital share in many types of clothing such as overwear, jeans, formal dressing shrunk because people stayed at home in the pandemic. Due to lack of events, the production of suits, jackets, shirts fall behind. It was the same worldwide, nobody could export. Many brands complained about the fact that there was nobody on the streets to sell the products. Despite these negativities, there were also certain manufacturers profited from this era. Since people turned to home-wear such as sweatpants, pyjamas, leggings which are seen relatively easy to manufacture, those areas in garment industry were able to pass this crisis with ease.

Chapter 5:

SYRIAN REFUGEES IN ISTANBUL'S APPAREL INDUSTRY AND THEIR BARGAINING POWER

5.1 *Syrian Refugees in Istanbul and Their Employment in the Industry*

5.1.1 *Statistical Background*

When we look at the data of İŞKUR, as of 2020, the sector with the highest employment deficit in terms of workplaces with a shortage of workers is the manufacturing sector with the rate of 19.6% (*İşgücü Piyasası Araştırma Raporu*, 2020). However, the difference between the sectors is not extremely big. For example, the gap in the manufacturing sector is followed by the deficit in information technologies with 16.2% (Table 15). Nonetheless, the difference grows significantly in the same period in terms of worker deficit. For instance, while the number of job vacancies (workers) in the manufacturing sector is 55,540, this number is 2,371 in the IT sector (Table 16). Since manufacturing is a labor-intensive sector, the employment need is higher, therefore the employment deficit is more intense. As an example, when the workplaces with more than 20 workers are listed, 8 of the top 10 occupations are related to the textile-apparel sector (Table 32).

In the dataset of the same period, it is seen that the level of education is not very determinant during the search for workers in the manufacturing sector (Table 30). Among the companies stated that they did not seek an education, those looking for garment workers lead the way (Table 30). This is followed by those looking for sewing machine operator (dikişçi makineci) and packaging worker, respectively.

When the sectors that are most difficult to supply are listed according to the size of the workplaces, the manufacturing sector comes first with 48,609 people. The number of

vacancies in businesses dealing with wholesale and retail trade ranks second with 14,391 people. When the occupations that are most difficult to supply are listed according to their workplace sizes, 5 of the top 10 occupations are related to the textile-apparel sector.

Professions and the vacancy rate are respectively: Machinist (sewing) 4.2%, garment 3.2%, production manufacturing worker 2.8%, flat sewing mechanic 2.5%, waiter 1.5%, housekeeper 1.7%, plastic injection production staff 1.5%, gas metal (mig-mag) welder 1.3%, weaving machine operator 1.3%, sewing machine (fabric) operator 1.0% (Table 36).

In terms of workplaces employing more than 20 workers, when the occupations that are expected to be vacant monthly in the near future are listed, it is predicted that the occupations related to textile-apparel are ranked in the top 10 (Table 42).

Considering the distribution of Syrians by sectors as of 2017, it is determined that employment in the ready-made clothing industry is 31.1%, in trade and accommodation 17.7%, in other manufacturing sectors 17.1%, in construction 13.2%, in other labor activities 13.1% and in agriculture 7.8% (ILO, 2017). When the sectoral distribution of Syrians in terms of the number of workers is evaluated as of 2017, it is observed that 392,350 of the total 813,781 workers, i.e. 48%, are working in manufacturing (Table 2). Considering informality in the sector involving Syrians in a vast scale, it is seen that 34.7% of total employment in Turkey is unregistered as of 2017 (ILO, 2017).

In conclusion, although there is a lack of labor supply in sectors in Turkey, most of the Syrians work in manufacturing and textiles, in other words, in factories and workshops in general. These findings also approve the fact that although there are other sectoral vacancies and labor supply deficits, apparel sector has a specific place and the existence of Syrian refugees fulfill the deficit in the sector to a great extent as it is discussed in the following subchapters. This reality is also in conceit with the concept of immigrant labor in apparel

industry, which has happened in Turkey in the past and has existed in other countries throughout history.

5.1.2 Interrelation Between Apparel Industry and Migrant Labor Locally and Globally

When we align the expectations of the employers who own mid and small-scaled ateliers and factories in the industry, it is seen that they prioritize the quality and on-time delivery of products. Their first concern is to manufacture more quality for less costs, in order to make profit just like any other firm in any sector. To gain higher revenue, they have to exist in the market and to keep existing in the market, they have to stick to the deadlines and agreements on the orders.

On a ground that the quality competes with its costs, we can predict that the quality standards might not be steady. Especially for the domestic market, lower grade and relatively cheaper goods also have buyers. However, for greater brands, both local and global, the situation is peculiar. The quality and on-time delivery have more importance against the price for them since they are able to sell their commodities in the retail market for a better price. Besides, higher payments bring more expectations and intervention along. Interventions include audits from the brands or their intermediaries, suitability to lists of standards, and penance in terms of delays or above the margin of error than agreed on. Despite the fact that firm and atelier owners despise these interventions from their customers, they still excused them for the sake of their trade.

If we consider two concepts that the employer does not like but are among the customer expectations, the concepts of social compliance and technical

compliance are prominent. These two terms aim to improve the physical conditions in production and workers' rights. They are among the demands put forward as a condition, especially by customers with international brands.

Increasingly detailed expectations, such as adequacy of ambient lighting, appropriate heating, noise level in the environment, seating arrangement, number of employees in the unit area, fire escape doors and routes, hygiene conditions of cafeterias and restrooms, adequacy of width, quality of food as content, protein calorie levels, quality of transportation vehicles, transportation of personnel in safe and comfortable environments, are included in the concept of physical adequacy of the workplace.

Issues related to employee rights such as, not hiring child workers, protection of young workers and pregnant women with positive discrimination, minimum wage level, payment scheme, who can work overtime, duration of overtime hours on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis, fair payments of these earnings to the worker, psychological comfort of the environment, signs of mobbing are discussed in detail. This review is called a social compliance audit.

In particular, these expectations of brand customers are inspected and certified by accredited independent organizations before ordering. Sometimes the brand customers set up their own control unit and performs this inspection themselves. The found non-conformities may lead to the loss of the order, and the loss of the customer if repeated. For this reason, even the manufacturers have themselves inspected and certified by independent organizations in order not to lose customers.

There are two types of employees in the apparel firms, white-collar and blue-collar. Blue-collar are those who work at the workshop side. White-collar

employees, on the other hand, constitute the order and marketing pillar. Above all, there is a management team. In such large companies, there are almost as many white-collar workers working in the marketing and ordering areas as the blue-collar workers working in the workshop. Large orders are received, and all production stages are carefully followed, from the order stage to the delivery of the product. Each stage has a unit, unit team or teams. On this side of the business, all attention is focused on ultimate customer satisfaction.

However, production costs increase accordingly with all physical and social compliance demands in the production environment and related improvements, and the employment of high-paid white-collar workers who concern with these areas. The company, which does not experience any customer shortage due to the strong relations created by the white-collar teams, is stuck between profit expectation and customer satisfaction. Moreover, customers are plentiful but the firm's capacity is limited. At this stage, a new situation emerges. To a certain extent, subcontracting to large and small workshops are formed, which is fed by the aforementioned situation.

In these workshops, only the boss and accountant are on the white-collar side of production. All of the remaining personnel are blue-collar workers directly involved in production. Their number is not to be underestimated and these workshops make up the main employment with a rate of 78% in textile (Erol et al., 2017, p. 17). Compared to companies with overseas connections, the capacity of this type of workshops is relatively smaller. Their customers are mostly not the company that markets the product; they are apparel firms that have good domestic and international connections, can receive orders over capacity. This type of production is called subcontracted production.

It can be easily predicted that the physical and psychological quality will decrease in this new production environment, which is far from the expectations of physical and social competence and control that increases the costs. On the other hand, China as a cheap production power, regularly increases its share in the global market every year. These companies, which have indirect relations with this shrinking market and have to share the total profit with the company that placed the order, operate with a very limited profit margin. The decrease in earnings also reduces the share to be paid to the worker. Here, on this ground where the standards have fallen in many aspects, the refugees who do not have a work permit turn into an opportunity for the employer.

The refugees desperately need work to meet their basic and vital needs. In particular, house rent is a new item of expense for the people of pre-war Syria, a semi-socialist country, that they are not familiar with. With the arrival of the refugees, the rental house market has risen, as the supply of houses has been stable, and life has become a bit more difficult for everyone. Even for a local with an average income, the house rent is equal to half of the income, especially in big cities, but with the arrival of refugees, this balance has disturbed further. For this reason, all members of the refugee families who live side by side with local people and try to live a normal life are ready to contribute to the family income.

Syrian refugees are already accustomed to garment production in some degree. It is a familiar area especially for women. The routine of the work in garment production, the relatively simple and harmless nature of the machines used facilitate and accelerate the adaptation process. Moreover, getting a family member into a familiar job in a foreign land where there is a language barrier is like a simplified invitation for others. Therefore, this situation increases the

supply in the labor market and decreases prices. Refugees, who have to work because of the costs of living in the big city, especially the rental expenses, find a place in the labor market as a cheap labor force.

In a similar way to Kurdish immigrants who settled in Istanbul in 2000s and started to work in manufacturing (Yetkin, 2019), both of these communities have constituted a new labor force for apparel industry. Yörük (2006) also mentioned that Kurds formed a significant portion of Istanbul's informal work force, due to the fact that the majority of migrants in the 1990s were internally displaced Kurds. As Kurdish workers got accustomed to the sector, gained experience, and then started their own workshops in the field, Syrian refugees also followed the same path. In the course of time, Syrian refugees created new networks, gained social and financial capital and some of them became employers and even established new employment opportunities for other refugees.

5.1.3 Syrian Workers' Former Experiences in Sector

When evaluated with the data obtained from the interviews, it is observed that the Syrian refugees worked similar jobs in their own countries before the migration, and the majority of them had textile experience. It is also among the data obtained from Syrian refugees that there were many large and small textile workshops in Syria before the civil war. According to the statistics of 2011, Syria consumes 2/3 of its 320 thousand tons of annual cotton production in its own country, while it exports 1/3 especially to European countries (Kaddar, 2018).

While some of the Syrians working in the apparel industry after taking refuge in Turkey have experience as a textile workshop employee, some of them have textile experience as direct employers. Local employers also confirm that Syrians

are especially experienced in evening dresses and suits. It is also within the data obtained from the refugees that Syrian women traditionally understand the needlework and use sewing machines to meet the needs of the household. For this reason, the number of Syrians who set up their own businesses after experiencing the environment in Turkey for a while is considerable.

It is seen that most of the Syrians who migrated from rural areas, based on agricultural production, have not had a job experience in Syria similar to their job in Turkey. However, they have to earn their living by learning manufacturing and workmanship in order to meet their needs in this new country. According to local employers, it takes up to 6 months for them to learn the job.

The language barrier poses a serious problem for the refugees in every aspect of life. This problem comes their way in state affairs, healthcare field and employment market. However, their serious needs are the most important dynamics in overcoming this obstacle. The refugees, who employ workers by establishing their own workshops, turn into a great opportunity for the Syrian workers in this situation. Refugee workers prefer a refugee employer because they can communicate easily, do not feel vulnerable, and can trust to get their wages on time and fully.

5.1.4 Government's Neglection on Informality

It is not possible to discuss informal employment solely from worker's perspective since it cannot occur without other actors. In addition to that, if this employment takes place in the surveillance area of an authority like the government, it is also required to talk about a situation of overlooking or ignoring.

The Advantages of Informality from Workers' Side

Most of the employees who prefer to work unregistered are refugees without work permits. Rather than not working at all, they compulsorily prefer to work unregistered to meet the growing needs in the big city. As for those who prefer informal employment even though they have the opportunity to work formally (which are generally domestic workers), most of them act with the fear of losing their social income such as unemployment benefits. Some of them are highly skilled workers.

According to some employers, these workers are in the position of “wildcard workers” (joker eleman) who could work successfully in any environment they enter and in many positions. By acting this way, they prefer going unregistered as they get more revenue by jumping from one firm in need to another. On the other hand, it is observed that homemakers and young people preparing for university are concentrated in the daily work, which is expressed as daily wage laborer. These are the people who do not want to work regularly, but aim to have an income as much as they need.

The Advantages of Informality from Employers' Side

Fundamentally, unregistered worker means a worker who does not have insurance expenses, cannot receive compensation in case of cancelation of employment or having a work accident, and can be dismissed without a hassle if desired. All of these states serious advantages for the employer. On the other hand, if the employer him/herself is unregistered, there is no other choice.

Moreover, employers apply to such workers when they get an order beyond their workshop's capacity and their own employees are unable to meet the needs.

This situation is especially concentrated in the workshops that make contract manufacturing. Decreased profit margins push them to produce as cheaply as possible, since these workshops are not also the main order takers but are secondary production environments, as subcontractors. For the employers who see themselves in this situation, unregistered production is inevitable because it makes the cost cheaper; that is a must to exist in the market.

The Advantages of Informality for The Government

It can be said that national and local administrators at different levels have a habit of ignoring anomalies. This has been implicit, if not overt, in many countries and it is perceived as for the interest of the country (*A Guide for Policymakers and Practitioners*, 2021). Considering the increasing numbers of refugees in Turkey, it might be aimed to split the burden to society and thus to alleviate the burden on the state. Or, it might have been desired to lay a groundwork for the formation of workforce in sectors with a shortage of workers, such as the apparel industry.

Syrian refugees' positioning in the industry locally and worldwide can be also understood with Agamben's (1998) concept of "bare life". It implies a life deprived of the basic rights and values, a life without any protective means. The subject of such a life is interrelated to the figure of Homo Sacer whom the people have judged on account of a crime in Ancient Rome. He cannot be sacrificed; however, he can be killed with impunity (Agamben, 1998). Homo Sacer is both inside and outside of the juridical system. It is internal into the juridical system because the order has to take decisions on him. On the other hand, simultaneously, it is external since the political system withdrew from him and he remains without rights and basic protection provided by law. This situation is valid for the status of

refugee as well. Without a citizenship, they are not able to obtain the standardized national protection of any state. The abstract idea of human rights, which should be applicable regardless of having any citizenship or not, is not in force universally, although in theory it is. This lacunae in the practice of law facilitate the making of Syrian refugees into a cheap labor force, as Marx's expression of "disposable reserve army of labor" (Marx et al., 1981).

Considering all these normalizations, Syrian refugees are embedded into the informal side of the apparel sector. When it comes to the government's role in this picture, given the discussions of informal work in the domestic market, the overlooking of administrative authorities is considered to be almost obvious. According to domestic producers, informal work is taking place on a comfortable and calm ground as if it were official. Yet, there is a serious expense in registered businesses due to expenses such as taxes, insurance, and safety measures. Unregistered work is exempt from all these expenses. This situation has turned into an unbeatable advantage in favor of informality.

Although almost all of the domestic producers in the sector complain about the informality and exploitation, they continue their existence by taking advantage of the cheap labor force created by the presence of immigrants. This situation, which everyone in the environment benefits from with complaints, is also the basic dynamic of the process.

5.1.5 Conclusion

Briefly, as a result of the over-capacity purchases of intermediary firms working for multinational brands, cheap production workshops with contract manufacturing have emerged. Thus, the need for cheap labor force has arisen and

subcontracting as the employment of that force has become a common business model. While the international companies spread the claim that production is made under ethical working conditions to their customers, they also put pressure for cheaper production. Hence, informal employment in subcontracting has increased and it has become legitimate for the manufacturer not legally but discreetly. Therefore, the main cause of unethical working conditions has been the brands that sell internationally, claiming to reach everyone and make everyone happy.

In addition, subcontracted ateliers make investments to increase their capacity by relying on orders from large companies. They also aim to reduce their expense items in order to meet the debts and make their payments, thus minimizing workers payments. In that case, the risk of informality turns into a preference. Subcontractor workshops choose to grow in order to stay in the system, also pave the way for the companies, to put more pressure on them. It is one of the topics discussed among the workshop owners that some of the contract workshops went bankrupt due to these policies of big international brands. The survivors, on the other hand, could not find a way out other than to resort to cheap labor and turned to unregistered refugee and immigrant labor, which is the cheapest of the cheapest. According to statistics based on the survey conducted in February 2021, 9 out of 10 refugee workers work unregistered (Akyıldız et al., 2021, p. 21).

This situation has not occurred only in Turkey and not only in the apparel sector. Seasonal labor in African countries is met by workers who have migrated from neighboring countries seasonally; poor countries such as Bangladesh become centers of contract manufacturing (*A Guide for Policymakers and Practitioners*, 2021). Therefore, almost everywhere in the world, the most fertile source of

productive labor has been immigrants and poor nations who are acquiescent to earn less. These people on the ground increase the profitability of the most widespread and strongest brands, have formed the final ring of exploitation chain.

The competitive attitude of international companies includes several elements, such as the desire to be accessible to everyone, to sell to all segments, to earn more, the goal of always growing, the determination to offer quality at a cheaper price. Their attitude has allowed the formation of a deep exploitation system and has justified this system by transforming cheap production into a policy devoid of any ethical concern (Özkasap, 2019).

Correspondingly, the ethical conditions of competitive capitalism need to be questioned in this context. According to the interviewees, the extreme pressure on the field should be reduced through national and international social policies. In order to protect and support the communities who are prone to exploitation, a basis should be created for them to contribute to producing under more ethical conditions. Incentives for brands that have taken the market should be reduced, training qualified personnel should be prioritized. Bureaucratic obstacles against registered work should be reduced, business lines in which production decreases should be supported, raw material production should be localized in order to reduce imports and make it cheaper as an input. International relations should be improved on a country basis, thus production should not flee away from centers and dispersed in small settlements. Last but not least, informality should be brought under control through inspections/audits.

While all this is being done, in order not to decrease employment and production, the sectors experiencing exploitation and informality the most, should be protected with positive discrimination such as reducing the tax burden, cheap

energy supply, and cheapening of finance, according to several managers and employers in the apparel industry.

5.2 *Syrian Refugees' Bargaining Power*

5.2.1 *Ethnicity and Bargaining Power*

The most important factor in the formation of bargaining power is the inverse relationship between supply and demand. As supply increases, demand decreases proportionally. Whereas supply decreases, demand per unit supply will increase. Therefore, as the supply of what is offered to the market increases, it becomes cheaper, and as it decreases, it becomes more valuable. When this inverse proportion is adapted to the labor-intensive sectors in terms of the number of jobs and workers in the market, as the vacant jobs increase, the value of job becomes cheaper compared to the labor and the labor becomes more expensive. Conversely, as the number of vacant jobs decreases, labor demand for a unit of job increases, so jobs gain value relative to labor and labor becomes cheaper. Therefore, the workers start to compete for vacant jobs.

The common view of employers who mentioned the year of 2011, when Syrian refugees started to migrate massively to Turkey, is that there was a serious shortage of labor in the apparel sector in that time. With the arrival of Syrian refugees, labor influx to the apparel related-job market has increased, and therefore, labor in the sector has become relatively cheap. While this situation reduced the bargaining power of the domestic worker, throughout the time, it has also offered bargaining power to the refugee who had no such power in the beginning.

According to the relationship between supply and demand discussed beforehand, anything that increases demand will also increase the value of what is demanded. If the worker is skilled, they are more valuable because they are much more preferred in the

market. Qualification of the workforce will then contribute to bargaining power. In time, the inexperience of Syrian refugees in the early stages of migration has decreased and barriers such as language inadequacy have largely disappeared. They have become more skilled in their jobs day by day. The fact that their wages have met with the local's amount day after day, also supports this situation. At the beginning of the migration, refugees were paid less than domestic workers in accordance with Edna Bonacich's (1972) theory of split labor market which means separated positionings of higher paid and lower paid jobs in the industry in correlation with ethnicity. However, this wage difference between two groups became negligible as time progressed. During the interviews, with domestic employers and workers, they mention this fact as refugees, who were initially unqualified, learned the job and started to "get a slice of the pie" as time passed.

The workers' persistence in the job and the stableness in working life contributes to their bargaining power. The most important thing that distinguishes Syrian refugees from other immigrants is that they did not mean to settle and work in Turkey in the first place. Their most important motivation was surviving in a foreign country. Individuals who see their own existence in danger have a lower tendency to leave the branches they cling to. This situation has provided Syrian employees sectoral stability in their work life. Their stability made them preferable to other immigrants and locals, and contributed to their bargaining power in the sector. In the interviews, it is observed that the local employers are more satisfied with the Syrian workers than the other immigrant workers.

Another factor that creates bargaining power is the sectoral density of the Syrian labor force. In other words, the relationships between the refugee workers and the intensity of these connections allow solidarity. In this way, a unity of power is formed

among the refugees. They can come together through vicinity, kinship, compatriotism, and unionization. The size of the mass of workers is also important in this context. As of today, more than half of the workers in the apparel sector in several regions are refugees (Erol et al., 2017, p. 16). Correspondingly, it is seen that more than half of the total refugee population in working life is involved in textiles (Oğuz et al., 2020, p. 74). There are also several examples of strikes of Syrian and Turkish workers, involving unionization in Gaziantep, İzmir, and Adana (Akdeniz, 2022; Baylav, 2023).

Another factor worth mentioning is that Syrians also have distinct ethnic backgrounds, such as Turkmenian, Kurdish, and Arabic. Although the research sample does not have the variety to discuss this fact in detail, Turkmen Syrians have an evident upper hand in terms of being familiar with the Turkish language, as the interviewees mentioned. Kurdish Syrians had another advantage in Istanbul's regions where the Kurdish population mostly settled since they knew the language and they might have network more easily. This fact can be observed in Yetkin's (2019) work while she examines the Kurdish Syrian population in Kanarya.

5.2.2 Syrian Refugees Meeting Labor Supply Deficit

First of all, it is critical to take a look at the process of labor shortage formation in a sector and the factors affecting this process. Labor shortage is an economics term and it expresses that the labor force directed to the sector where the deficit is experienced is not enough for the sectoral needs. In this case, there are two points to address. Firstly and obviously, a labor shortage cannot occur without the formation of the sector or without the continuity in the sector. If the sector goes into regression while it is in the process of formation or continuation, a labor shortage does not occur, on the contrary, the unemployed people, who lose their jobs due to the businesses that are closed

because of the sectoral recession, create a surplus of labor. Secondly, a labor shortage cannot occur without the loss of labor or growth in the sector. If the sector grows, its need for labor increases, so there is a labor shortage. Or, if the labor force shifts to other sectors and working areas while the dynamism in the sector continues, a labor shortage will occur again.

In this context, when we consider the development process of the apparel industry in Turkey, it is possible to say that textile production has an important place in the Republic of Turkey since its establishment. According to the Halil İnalçık's (2008) studies, as early as the 1930s, the products of yarn and fabric factories based on cotton production in Çukurova and cotton raw material exports had a share of 23% in all exports. By the 1950s, 32 thousand people were working in the sector and there were 441 large enterprises (İnalçık, 2008). In 1960, the number of employments in the sector exceeded 70 thousand and in the 1980s, 29% of those working in the manufacturing industry in Turkey worked in the textile industry (İnalçık, 2008). At the end of the 1990s, the ratio of those working in textiles reached 45% within the manufacturing sectors (İnalçık, 2008).

Therefore, years before the subject of the discussion, the apparel industry completed its formation process in Turkey and developed enough to occupy a place in the market. If we consider the aftermath of the 2000s through the table prepared by Seval Uyanık and Dilan Canan Çelikel in their article titled *Türk Tekstil Endüstrisi Genel Durumu* (General Situation of the Turkish Textile Industry), it is possible to summarize the situation after the 2000s as follows (Uyanık & Çelikel, 2019):

Yıllara Göre Tekstil İhracatı (milyar dolar) [2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10]

Yıl	Türkiye Tekstil İhracatı	Türkiye Toplam İhracatı	İhracat Payı/Türkiye (%)	Dünya Tekstil İhracatı	İhracat Payı/Dünya (%)
2005	7	73,5	9,6	215,4	3,2
2006	7,6	85,5	8,9	230	3,3
2007	9,01	107,3	8,4	249,6	3,6
2008	9,6	132,0	7,3	259,6	3,7
2009	7,6	102,1	7,4	219,2	3,5
2010	8,8	113,9	7,7	260,3	3,4
2011	10,6	134,9	7,9	302,9	3,5
2012	10,9	152,5	7,2	292,6	3,7
2013	12,0	151,8	7,9	315,8	3,8
2014	12,5	157,6	7,9	323,4	3,9
2015	11,0	143,8	7,6	290,5	3,8
2016	10,9	142,5	7,6	284,0	3,8
2017	10,1	157,0	6,4	246,0	4,1

The ratio of textile exports to Turkey's overall exports decreased between 2005 and 2017, because while Turkey's textile exports increased 1.5 times in those years, Turkey's total exports increased more than twice in the same period. Besides, in the same interval, the ratio of Turkey's textile exports to world textile exports has not decreased, but has increased relatively over the past years. Although there was a decline in exports in the sector between 2008 and 2010, it preserved its rank in world exports. From the year the Syrian refugees arrived until 2017, when the research was conducted, Turkey's share in world textile exports has increased (Uyanık & Çelikel, 2019). Subsequently, even the fact that the dynamism in the sector continues, the sector is growing. Despite that, Turkey's total exports increased more than textile exports. Therefore, other sectors grew more than textiles in the said period. As the job supply increases in other growing sectors, labor is valued and wages increase accordingly. Increasing salaries accelerate the flow of labor to the relevant areas. Therefore, the apparel sector has been losing workforce in the mentioned period.

Labor shortage is inevitable in a dynamic and growing sector that has completed its formation process. Moreover, other exporting sectors are growing faster. This situation

made the labor shortage in the textile sector more evident between 2005 and 2011. Statistical information corresponds to the issues which employers address during the interviews. There was a serious labor shortage in the sector when the Syrian refugees arrived. Furthermore, textile work is a labor-intensive production environment that does not require many skills, it is safe and quickly facilitated by routine actions. The gap in the sector has turned into a great opportunity for Syrian refugees in this foreign and new country they came. Syrian refugees have filled this gap at a high rate. This fact strengthens their bargaining power against employers in the market since the workshops and factories in a great need of both unqualified and qualified workers, especially skilled machinists.

According to the empirical results from Serttaş and Uluöz's (2021) research, it is seen that there is a significant and negative relationship between the number of vacant jobs in Turkey and the number of Syrian refugees in the long run. This negative relationship shows that the influx of Syrian refugees has had an impact on reducing the number of job supply in Turkey. According to the results, it can be said that the Syrian refugee workforce and the local Turkish workforce act as complementary forces (Serttaş & Uluöz, 2021).

5.2.3 *Effects of Former Experience*

For the refugees who managed to survive by escaping from danger, the primary problem in the new environment is to meet their vital needs. For the refugees held in the refugee camps, it is met at a minimum level. However, the situation is more complicated for the refugees who entered the living spaces in the new country they take refuge in and intermingle with the local people. In this context, it is crucial to consider

which opportunities refugees have when dealing with this new and challenging situation.

In a number of the interviews with local employers, it was stated that the refugees were inadequate in doing business, they did not get much work done, and they had to settle for low wages for this reason. However, in a survey of Syrians who migrated to Turkey, the rate of those who stated that they had a job before the migration was found to be over 90%. Besides, 43% of them had 10 years or more work experience (Akyıldız et al., 2021). More than half of the refugees who had a business life back at Syria, became unemployed after migrating to Turkey. The ratio of the ones that had a craft at their country is higher than the rest. Among these, the rate of those who have textile-related occupations such as tailoring, sewing machine use, and textile product manufacturing is around 30% among all craftsmen (Akyıldız et al., 2021). As these former apparel-related experiences have created an upper position for refugees in the bargaining process against employers, in the course of time, they gained further skills and capabilities in their fields which reinforced their positions higher.

In addition, vocational courses that refugees attended after migration have played a major role in their adaptation to working life. Approximately 30% of the refugees who attended these courses focused on clothing, textiles and service sector. It is believed that 58.8% of Syrians who attended at least one vocational training course can practice the profession they learned (Akyıldız et al., 2021).

Furthermore, as of 2020, 403 thousand of 1 million registered employees working in textiles in Turkey are women (Kıvanç, 2020). However, when an evaluation is made for the entire manufacturing sector in the same period, it is seen that the number of female employees is at the level of 25% (*Tekstil Sektörü Cinsiyet Eşitliğinde En Demokratik Sektör*, 2020). Therefore, it can be said that the textile industry in Turkey is a relatively

women-intensive employment environment with a rate as high as 40% compared to other sectors (*Tekstil Sektörü Cinsiyet Eşitliğinde En Demokratik Sektör*, 2020).

The business life of refugee women is also noteworthy. The ratio of working refugee women who have a profession while in their own country is around 13.3% (Akyıldız et al., 2021). Another study conducted in the same period reveals an interesting situation. In a study conducted in regions where immigrants live intensely, it was stated that the rate of refugee women working in the textile industry in Turkey is higher than the rate of local women working in the same industry (Erol et al., 2017). In a study conducted with women living inside and outside the camps, the average job searching rate of Syrian women was found to be around 70% (*Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Kadınlar*, 2014). While women's participation in business life is extremely low in Syria, which has economically been a male-dominant country, the background of this transformed situation is the financial difficulties and insufficient income of one breadwinner.

However, it is seen that the arduous situation that the refugees are in has led women to business life, by revealing their potential, especially in the apparel sector. When considered the low number of working women back in Syria and rising number of women attending business life after migration, it can be said that many Syrian women is pleased with this fact, instead of disturbed. For women who had access to pre-migration education and joined the workforce, migration from Syria to Turkey is an experience that brings new challenges and causes loss of social status. For women who cannot benefit from pre-migration education and employment opportunities, these novel conditions are experienced as a process of participation in education and employment, access to public space and new opportunities such as the reduction of family pressure (Doğangün & Keysan, 2021).

5.2.4 *Challenges within the Sector*

In the interviews with Syrian refugees in Turkey, the main three answers to the questions about the difficulties encountered after migration are regarding low wages, language problems and unregistered working. These problems are followed by working in heavy jobs, social exclusion, not working in jobs suitable for their skills, and not having knowledge of legislation. Exposure to maltreating takes place after these. When the expressions in the first three articles that Syrian refugees complain about are evaluated in detail, it is seen that the complaints of low wages and insecure work come from the same origin. Because the definition of low wage, in countries like Turkey with a minimum wage limit, not always but often means a wage level below the minimum wage, which also means working without security and side benefits. This even the case with the fact that minimum wage is not in accordance with living wage in Turkey, like many other developing countries embedded in global division of labor.

For instance, an immigrant woman, who owned a small textile workshop at the time of the interview, stated that her husband received nearly half the wages of Turkish employees, which is below the minimum wage. A wage below the minimum wage also means an unregistered working environment, another statistical evaluation showed that 9 out of 10 refugees work informally. (Akyıldız et al., 2021). In the formal workforce, a qualified job with expectation is a saturated wage. On the contrary, for the migrant workforce, the priority is to meet the vital needs; their legal rights such as being able to work registered has turned into an expectation or even hope.

"All I want is to get the document [work permit] and start a job in a company. It is important for us that the wage is continuous rather than its amount. I dream of finding a job like this. Because if I don't work even one day as a Syrian, I can neither eat nor pay my rent." (Construction painter and gypsum plaster applicator) (Akyıldız et al., 2021)

The second biggest challenge expressed in interviews with refugees is the language barrier. They state that their education has become meaningless due to not knowing the official language. They cannot find a job at administrative levels even though they have proper experience, and they do not even hope to find a job in such a status. Contrarily, it is underlined in the interviews that the language barrier becomes unremarkable in the case of manual work. This is identified as the reason for the concentration of the refugee workforce in apparel, as a labor-intensive sector. In other words, it is seen that people, who encounter language barriers, move away from finding a job suitable for their qualifications and tend to more repetitive and less skilled jobs that are more physical and labor intensive. As can be seen in the interviews and studies in the literature, the number of Syrian refugees who complain about not being able to find a job according to their education, abilities, skills, or experience exists actually at a considerable level. These people, who have to work in low-skilled or unqualified jobs compared to their qualifications, take their place in the labor market as a cheap labor source.

*"For example, a Syrian cannot find a job as a manager very easily, nor can he be an accountant because he does not know the language. Maybe he has enough education, but without language, he will not be able to communicate, he will not be able to understand what he reads. That's why they work in textiles. How can I say, **when you work with your body, you can understand what you are told** and you can do what you*

understand, I think that's the reason." (Accountant – former textile worker, female, Turkish)³⁷

A large-scale study mentions that the language barrier is featured in order to create an exploitable workforce within the socio-economic and capitalist context. Nimer and Rottmann's (2020) research indicates that this situation shows language as an obstacle and commodifies it in this way. According to their findings, the language knowledge is not enough on its own without necessary cultural and financial capital. Hence, this marginalized new workforce is drawn to a ground where they have to do the heavy and unpleasant jobs that the locals do not want to do (Nimer & Rottmann, 2020). Another relevant book chapter points out that within the global capitalist relations, the existence of refugee labor force has been used to meet the consumer demand that capitalism created in the first place. This is the rationale behind the regular importation of migrant labor. The state powers take part in the condonation of their irregular entry into the country in order to make use of their labor (Delice, 2019).

By definition, it is not possible to have legal employee rights in informal employment. Workers who work under these conditions often do not receive even their progress payment completely. If they reported the injustice done to them by applying to the legal authorities, they would also report themselves for working without legal permission. Therefore, a worker in this situation cannot take legal action. It has been stated that some refugee workers never get their accumulated rights, and the payment is postponed until they lose hope of getting it. Even in this case, employers reserve the

³⁷ "Bir Suriyeli mesela müdür statüsünde çok kolay bir iş bulamaz, muhasebeci de olmaz dil bilmediği için. Eğitim açısından bakılsa yeterli eğitimi var belki ama dili yok, iletişim kuramayacak, okuduğunu anlayamayacak. O yüzden tekstilde çalışıyorlar. Nasıl diyeyim, **bedeninizle çalıştığınız zaman size anlatılanları anlayabilirsiniz** ve anladığınızı yapabilirsiniz, o yüzden bence tekstil"

right to fire the precarious worker without compensation, deprived of all rights, to use it when necessary. They will not hesitate to use this right when appropriate, for which they will not pay any price.

*“When I was working at the tire factory, there were 40 Syrians, the thing the boss feared most was a fight. Because he can't control it. He says if there is a problem, fire this man immediately. There was a fight once, a friend got punched in the face. At that time, there were 5 Uzbek employees. The boss sent all the Uzbeks directly. **When there is no insurance, the boss can send you at any time, very comfortably.**”* (Textile worker, male, Syrian)³⁸

Another issue that refugees complain about is that they feel excluded or are directly exposed to such negative treatment. The environments where social exclusion is experienced or felt can be evaluated in two categories as business and social life. The interviews show that the motivations behind exclusion actions in these two areas are different, and that the perception of exclusion stems from different concerns. As an example, the discourses circulating in the business environment advocate that domestic workers' wage has decreased regarding arrival of refugee workers:

“I realize that, for example, poor Turks hate Syrians very much. Because let's say he gets 2 thousand 3 thousand, he says, "If it weren't for you, I would get 5 thousand now and also the rents went up when you came. If it weren't for you, I would have rented this house for this much". On the other hand, the bosses, and the rich love the Syrians

³⁸ “Lastik fabrikasında çalışırken 40 tane Suriyeli vardı, patronun en çok korktuğu şey kavga çıkmasıydı. Çünkü kontrol altına alamıyor. Bir sorun olursa hemen bu adamı işten çıkarın diyor. Bir defasında bir kavga oldu, bir arkadaş yüzüne yumruk almış. O zamanlar da 5 tane Özbek çalışan vardı. Patron direkt bütün Özbekleri göndermiş. **Sigorta olmadığı zaman patron her an seni gönderebilir, çok rahat bir şekilde.**”

because they can work without insurance, because they are willing to do anything.”

(Textile worker, male, Syrian)³⁹

The hostility towards Syrians is based on some discourses, such as “they are stealing our jobs”⁴⁰ that according to Erdoğan and Ünver’s (2015) research supported by locals with % 56,1 in 2015. As Bonacich (1972) claims, Syrian refugees compulsorily accepted to be a part of and the secondary labor market which includes lower wages, less benefits, and worse working conditions. The refugees, on the other hand, are uncomfortable to feel all these negative sentiments when they do not have the luxury of leaving. Nevertheless, it also has been observed that as the education level of the refugees increases, this social discomfort decreases and the feeling of being excluded is relatively eliminated (Akyıldız et al., 2021).

Legislation is a problem in itself for refugees. For work and residence permit, in which neighborhood of the city they can settle, in which school they can enroll their child, if it is possible to get economic assistance, how to get clothing, food and fuel support, how to get insurance... To learn all these, they need both language support and guidance. They are already in a situation where not knowing the language makes them restricted. The fact that they have to know the laws, regulations and rules of the country turns into an intimidating wall for the refugees at the beginning.

Nonetheless, throughout the years they spent in Turkey, Syrian refugees got accustomed to the cultural and sectoral codes (codes of conduct). They learned know-hows in the sector and daily life, their legal rights, and Turkish language. In the

³⁹ “Bir de şunu fark ediyorum, mesela fakir olan Türkler Suriyelilerden çok nefret ediyorlar çünkü diyelim 2 bin 3 bin alıyor “siz olmasaydınız şimdi 5 bin alacaktım, siz geldiğiniz zaman kiralar yükseldi, siz olmasaydınız bu evi şu kadara tutacaktım” falan. Diğer taraftan patronlar, zenginler Suriyelileri seviyorlar çünkü sigortasız çalıştırabiliyorlar, çünkü **her şeye razı**. Zenginler bizi kullanmaya çalışıyorlar, fakirler bizden rahatsız oluyorlar.”

⁴⁰ “İşlerimizi çalışıyorlar”

interviews, they mentioned the occupational and language courses they attended, their evolving social relationships, having citizenship, starting their own business, or buying a house... These changes have affected their positioning and bargaining power drastically and created a new emplacement for them.

5.2.5 *The Place of Insurance in Refugees' Lives*

As seen in the International Labor Organization (ILO) report on Vietnam's social security reform, the administrative committee made the following definition of social security: *"Social security includes ensuring minimum income, social insurance approach, self-assurance through capacity building in terms of population, helping people in particular distress, government subsidy, insurance system, voluntary contributions of institutions and individuals."* (ILO Policy Brief, 2014)

The definitions related to social security are based on international conventions originating from the ILO. The concept of social insurance is a sub-title of that definition. Nonetheless, the definition in question contains citizens of almost all nation-states or workers who are not citizens but have work permits; the rest cannot find a place in these definitions. As Hannah Arendt states, there is now a novel concept of the "right to have rights" (Arendt, 1973), which belongs to only citizens of the state providing this right. In order to be recognized as a human who inherently has rights in the realm of international law, one should be recognized as a citizen of a particular state. Therefore, belonging to a nation-state has transformed into an equal status of being human.

The ILO, on the other hand, gives an international status to the concept of social security in its latest articles and makes definitions that include the reality of migration. Thus, the latest definitions emphasize that social security is a universal need and say

that social security is a human right that responds to the need for universal protection against certain risks to life and social needs (Alpar, 2000) and continues: Effective social security systems guarantee income security and protection of health, thereby contributing to the prevention and reduction of poverty and inequality and the promotion of social inclusion and human dignity (Alpar, 2000). It adds to these explanations the unconditional right of access to health services at every stage of life and in its changing conditions (Alpar, 2000). In addition to all these comprehensive definitions, it imposes an obligation on the countries that signed the convention to recognize these rights for the other member states' citizens who are in their own country (*118 No'lu Muamele Eşitliği (Sosyal Güvenlik) Sözleşmesi*, 2015).

The priority issue for the refugee who has experienced war is the concern of complete survival with other family members. However, in most families, this worry has been deepened, and one or more of their family members have been lost due to war or migration. In the interviews, it is seen that for people in this situation, being able to feed the rest somehow and keep them alive has become a primary priority. The chaotic terror of war is such an overwhelming reality that everything else has been reduced to minor details. All the details have become trivial for the refugee except those that support clinging to life.

“Because the Syrians work in very difficult conditions... For example, they would come and say to the boss that they can work for free, just give them food and a bed.”
(Textile worker, male, Syrian)⁴¹

Insurance, on the other hand, is only a detail for many refugees, and it is underlined that such details are not so important in almost all the interviews with refugees

⁴¹ “Suriyeliler çok zor şartlarda çalıştığı için... Mesela gelip patrona biz ücretsiz çalışırız sadece yemek ve yatak verin yeter yani diyorlardı”

regarding this term. Interviews, which is not surprising from the perspective of the refugee, show that most of the refugee workers work informally and prefer to remain unregistered. Despite the fact that insurance is a detail for the refugee, it is worth to question if undeclared work is a veiled coercion or is it really a voluntary choice.

Refugees by their Status and Undeclared Work

It is possible to analyze this situation in three groups: Those who are citizens of the Republic of Turkey and take part in business life, those who are not citizens but have a work permit, those who are neither citizens nor do they have a work permit. In the declaration of the Department of Population and Citizenship Affairs dated December 2, 2022, it was announced that 221 thousand 671 Syrian refugees were granted Turkish citizenship; Among them, there are 163 thousand 44 people aged 18 and over, whose birthplace is Syria, registered in the population register (Tekeş, 2022). The number of Syrians granted work permits is around 96 thousand (*Yabancıların Çalışma İzinleri*, 2021). The total number of Syrians in Turkey is announced as approximately 3 million 6 hundred thousand people on the official website of the Directorate of Migration Management (*Geçici Korumamız Altındaki Suriyeliler*, 2020).

The ratio of Syrian refugees who are Turkish citizens to those who are not is below 10% (*Geçici Korumamız Altındaki Suriyeliler*, 2020). The number of refugees with a work permit is around 5% (*Yabancıların Çalışma İzinleri*, 2021). Over 3 million refugees, the majority of whom are Syrians, do not have a work permit, at least two out of three of them are of working age and they are scattered among the local population, not in the shelters. The rates of benefiting from social assistance are not even as much as those staying in the camps (Erol et al., 2017). However, these people need to make a living and therefore to work, and they have no choice but to work informally.

In interviews with refugee workers, it is seen that only those who are Turkish citizens want to work in insured jobs. Because it is possible for these people to benefit from their investments in the future. On the contrary, it has been observed that even the employers would like apply for work permit, many Syrians prefer to work unregistered; because employers deduct the insurance expenses from the worker's salary. In this case, the refugee, who desperately needs income and is unlikely to benefit from insured retirement, prefers to work without insurance even if he has a work permit.

Refugees in terms of their Hometown in Syria

Refugees' familiarity with state affairs also depends on the characteristics of the regions they came from. Among the groups from various regions of Syria, refugees from big cities are more familiar with business life and the state. They know the punitive aspect of the state and are familiar with its possible outcomes. For those coming from the countryside, the idea of state has been constructed dissimilarly. For them, state is correlated with the intelligence and security organization of the Syrian State, Al-Mukhabarat. Its sudden and unjustified detentions are a frightening phenomenon that evokes suspicious disappearances in custody. They prefer not to encounter the state power as much as possible.

Nevertheless, both parties met the concept of insurance as a part of social state in Turkey. According to the statement of one of the refugees interviewed, they did not have any experience of working with insurance in Syria. Public hospitals are almost free for the entire public. Pensions are not available for workers in private sector, tradesmen, and agricultural workers. Only state employees have insurance and retirement in the familiar sense.

"I don't know exactly the insurance here because we didn't have insurance in Syria. There were only those who worked in the state, they could retire. There were public hospitals for free, they would take a small fee, just like here." (Textile worker, male, Syrian)⁴²

Consequently, the security system that refugees have while in Syria is voluntary and has a traditional structure such as the help of acquaintances, friends, relatives, and tribe protection. This situation covers all business people and workers. Conversely, in their new environment in Turkey, social benefits have partially replaced the previous way of cooperation. As another aspect, temporary protection status offered by the Turkish state has created an environment similar to the one in Syria with partially cost-free health support. Beyond these, insurance, as a relatively new concept for them, is an opportunity that 90% refugees do not want, even if they know its benefits, since it reduces their income.

"Insurance is important but after insurance deducted, then the salary drops (lowers) a lot. We get 2 thousand liras. If a thousand liras is given to insurance, then we will only receive a thousand. How is it possible to survive with this amount? That's why Syrians don't want to have insurance. Because they get the insurance from the salary they pay." (Workshop owner - former textile worker, female, Syrian)⁴³

It is in a preferable position for a group that makes up less than 10% of the refugees, that is, for the lucky few who can obtain citizenship of the Republic of Turkey, even if it reduces their salaries, as it provides a future investment opportunity. Statistical studies

⁴² "Ben buranın sigortasını tam olarak bilmiyorum çünkü bizim Suriye'de sigorta yoktu. Sadece devlette çalışanlar vardı onlar emekli olabilirdi. Devlet hastaneleri vardı ücretsiz, az bir şey alırlardı, aynı burası gibi."

⁴³ "Sigorta önemli aslında ama sigorta olunca, o zaman maaş çok düşüyor. 2 bin lira alıyoruz bin lirası sigortaya verilirse o zaman bin lira alacağız bununla da nasıl geçinilir. O yüzden Suriyeliler sigorta yaptırmak istemiyorlar. Çünkü sigortayı ödedikleri maaştan alıyorlar."

focusing on refugee workers' positions in working life support this assessment. 9 out of 10 refugees work informally (Akyıldız et al., 2021).

At the intermediary firms which are inspected regularly by multinational brands themselves or their contractor audit corporations, each and every one of the workers are insured. This insurance policy and special attention to their working environments and comfort is a entirely novel situation for them. One of the workers from such a firms' factory says that:

*"We work insured; company representatives come and ask how it is, how is the situation, is there any problem or not. **This is the first time we are being treated like this, no one has ever treated us like this before. Very good conditions.**"* (Textile worker, male, Syrian)⁴⁴

There also several specific cases that the insurance becomes highly useful, such as pregnancy, birth, and intensive care:

"I also have a friend who does ironing packs. His wife gave birth and she had a lot of difficulties; he said that he saw the importance of insurance at that time. For example, he was covid and he had to be in intensive care for a while. Since he was insured, they were able to do it easily, at a discount, so it was very beneficial. They always say what does insurance do, so much money goes to insurance. In such cases, it is useful, though." (Textile worker, male, Syrian)

*"Ütü paket yapan bir arkadaşım da var. Onun eşi doğum yaptı, çok zorluk çekti, o dönemde **sigortanın önemini gördüğünü söyledi.** Mesela covid oldu, yoğun bakımda kaldı bir süre. Sigortalı çalıştığı için kolay bir şekilde, indirimli şekilde hallededebildiler, o yüzden çok faydası oldu. Hep sigorta ne işe yarıyor diyorlar o kadar para sigortaya gidiyor. Böyle durumlarda faydası görülmüyor ama."*

⁴⁴ "Sigortalı şekilde çalışıyoruz, firma temsilcileri gelip soruyorlar nasıl olduğunu, durum nasıl iyi mi sıkıntı var mı yok mu. **Biz ilk defa böyle bir muamele görüyoruz, daha önce kimse bize böyle davranmamıştı.** Çok iyi şartlar yani."

5.2.6 *Public Attitudes Towards Refugees*

Social equality as a term is among the concepts whose content has been developed through academic and policy-related studies. It is possible to summarize the definitions agreed in those studies under three sub-headings categorically: Equality of power, equality of status, equality of distribution. The concept of power refers to the resources owned, the concept of status refers to the approval of social position, and the concept of distribution refers to the redistribution of resources collected by the state in favor of the weak with positive discrimination. If it were to be evaluated with these three sub-headings, the situation of refugees in society they entered could be stated as problematic. Especially at the beginning of the migration, it can be seen in the majority of the interviews that it is far from all kinds of social equality.

Weakness in terms of power, otherness in terms of status and deprivation in terms of distribution

As a result of the standpoint of social state, the idea of social equality is expected to bind all citizens and guests under temporary protection of the country. Although this is accurate on paper, it cannot be fully met in social life outside the boundaries of formality. The reason behind that is the differences, such as socio-economic status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and age, are used as a basis of discrimination and damage the principle of equality. Especially from refugees' point of view, their economic and social gains are undermined and the concept of freewill is shattered in almost every way. Therefore, the boundaries between the other segments of society and refugees become more evident. In a situation where the distinction has become so visible, it is no longer possible to talk about equality in any case.

When inequality becomes a social fact of life, whichever segment of society is stronger, the other one becomes insignificant and the dominant class takes the main position. Norms, which are the invisible rules of social life, are determined by the ruling class as Marx suggested (Marx & Engels, 1932). Therefore, the relationship between the rule maker and the one who must abide by the rules is the continuation of the master-slave relationship. This positioning has been transformed in accordance with its time and location. While this is an economic analysis, almost every aspect of social life can be seen through the lenses of the one with power; the other is marginalized and excluded by a label of being weak. Although which actions and obstacles contribute to the formation of this exclusion is not entirely determined in principle, it can be said that all kinds of discrimination in favor of the powerful contributes marginalizing.

For example, in the interviews, it is seen that one of the issues hurt the refugees most is that they are accused of running from the war. In fact, as they stated, they did not escape from a war, they avoided a civil war in which aimless bombs were dropping on defenseless people. It was not clear who killed whom; it was a war pitting brother against brother. There is no enemy in such a civil war, according to them, there is no line of defense. They are people who were killed because they did not want to take up arms and join the army. In other words, there are civilians killed because they do not want to be among those who point guns at their own people. Abandoning such a tragedy would can be evaluated as avoiding persecution, not war.

The statements of immigrants, which can be summarized as “choosing to suffer rather than make others suffer”, explain their situation in terms of leaving the war zone in Syria. Whilst local people accuse refugees of running away, this accusation forms the basis of a discriminatory discourse. The motive behind expressing an obvious situation that will hurt the other person, even if it is real, is perceived as hatred by the refugee.

The humiliation directed from the local to the refugee results in marginalizing and the marginalizing results in de-identification.

According to Zygmunt Bauman, these people, whom Marx discusses as outsiders of the economic cycle, are wasted people in the eyes of society; “impossible to accommodate within a social framework resonant with the capitalist economy” (Bauman, 2004). “They are the source of the problem more than a solution” (AbdulMegied, 2022).

“I don't want to be offensive but when I say I prefer Turkish... Because as I said there are reasons, you can explain your problem better, you can get better efficiency, you know the culture... Culture is especially important, for example, if you throw one bad fig in a sack, it will spoil forty figs in it, for example. You don't know what you will encounter, but you know the Turk.” (Director of External Production, male, Turkish)⁴⁵

As seen in the statement above, expressions that evoke marginalizing are indirect in business life; because harsh rhetoric can lead to the loss of a cost-effective refugee workforce. However, marginalization in daily life becomes direct since there is no fear to lose something. In this area, marginalization is direct and hurtful, such as disidentification by generalizing, not establishing relationships, or treating with suspicion as if they are potential criminals.

“I live in Avcılar. They do not like Arabs, Syrians, and foreigners in Avcılar. So they're not very friendly. Once I went into a shop, I had an Egyptian friend with me. He's a little dark. There was a man in the shop, he said "be careful, they can steal something and go", meaning they have the potential to commit a theft. We didn't do

⁴⁵ “İlk tercihim her türlü Türk olur. Ama şimdi bunu yadırgamak olarak söylemiyorum... Sebepleri dediğim gibi, derdini daha iyi anlatabilirsin, verimi daha iyi alabilirsin, kültürünü biliyorsun... Özellikle kültür çok önemli, mesela bir tane bozuk inciri bir çuvala atarsınız içindeki kırk tane inciri bozar misal yani. Bilmiyorsunuz neyle karşılaşacağınızı ama Türk'ü biliyorsunuz.”

anything, we went in, bought something, paid. At that time, I wasn't sure because I didn't understand the language very well, then when we went out, I talked to my friend about what he said, then I understood. I was very disturbed." (Textile worker, male, Syrian)⁴⁶

This paradox that people who define themselves as moral, prudent, benevolent, altruistic, and really show these traits most of the time fall into, is also worth examining. In the book of *The Dignity of Working Men*, Michèle Lamont (2000) points out that morality, which is a social notion including many factors, is detached from this context, and turned into an ethnic belonging. The people believe in this discourse so much that they can pass from morality to ethnic identity without any problems. Contrarily, while producing discourses that support racism, they may feel themselves to be moral, virtuous, and good inherently. Within such a deviant perception, the elements that are later added to the existence of virtuous local people, such as immigrants, are defined as "courtesy lacking parasites" (Lamont, 2000, p. 211)

While the local workers express their discomfort by giving reasons, the interviews with the refugee workers reveal data ranging from business life to social life. According to these data, a part of the society, especially the elderly, did not like the arrival of refugees for no reason:

"I was on the tram once, there were a lot of Arabs around, almost everyone speaks Arabic. An old man got on, "It's always Arab! It's always Arab shouting." Then he got off. I laughed a lot, old people do things like that very often.

⁴⁶ "Ben Avcılar'da oturuyorum. Avcılar'da pek Araplardan Suriyelilerden yabancılardan hoşlanmıyorlar. Pek samimi olmuyorlar yani. Bir kere bir dükkana girdim, yanımda Mısırlı bir arkadaşım vardı. Biraz esmer o. Dükkanda bir adam vardı, "dikkat et bunlar bir şey çalıp gidebiliyorlar" dedi. Hırsızlar anlamında. Bir şey yapmamıştık, girdik bir şeyler aldık ödedik gittik yani. O zaman dili çok iyi anlamadığım için emin olamadım, sonra çıktığımızda arkadaşım ile konuştuk şöyle mi dedi böyle mi dedi diye, o zaman anladım. Çok rahatsız oldum."

One day, I was in Avcılar walking. An old woman shouted to an Iraqi woman “pu!” I know, old people can react like that.” (Textile worker, male, Syrian)⁴⁷

In addition, a refugee describes the marginalization in formal and informal relations as follows:

“Syrians consider that if they work alongside with Syrians, at least their money would be safe, wouldn't be stolen. I also would prefer working with Syrians because we were both wretched, so I could get what I deserved with my work. Way back then, there was a man that I got orders from. I went to him to receive my 10 thousand TL but I could only get 4 thousand of it hardly. It took too long, 2 years. He was paying me weekly for the number of orders. Then, the orders went down. When he was supposed to pay me 5 thousand TL, instead he paid 2 thousand TL and the rest of the money was withheld. His debt slowly piled up. When I went to him to receive it, he claimed that he went bankrupted and he said ‘do whatever you want, you can report me, I can even show you the way to police station.’ He still had his workshop and everything but that's what he said. What could I possibly do to him? I left it to Allah.”

“[In reply to “could police do something?”] What can they do? No contract, no evidence... How can the police act if he claims he doesn't know who I am? Back then, I haven't had my citizenship yet, so it was more difficult... We were afraid of going to the police station. We have witnessed many times that no matter what they blame it on

⁴⁷ “Bir defasında tramvaydaydım, etrafta bir sürü Arap vardı, Arapça konuşuyor neredeyse herkes. Yaşlı bir adam bindi, “Hep Arap ya! Hep Arap bağırıp çağırıyor” Sonra da indi. Ben çok güldüm, yaşlılar böyle şeyler yapıyor çok sık.

Bir gün Avcılar'da yürüyorum. Iraklı bir kadına yaşlı bir teyze “pu!” yaptı. Ben biliyorum yaşlılar tepki veriyor böyle.”

Syrians. They hit even before questioning if the guy is Arabian. The situation clears after the beating, unfortunately this happens.” (Textile worker, 42, Syrian, male)⁴⁸

Democracy Aspect of Public Life

Most of the refugees stated that they experienced the democratic life in Turkey. Only one party participated in the elections in Syria, and the people could not do anything but vote for that party, willingly or unwillingly. The democratic experience they have enjoyed first time in Turkey is an exciting and promising opportunity, especially for those who can obtain Turkish citizenship. They think that what a blessing this right of choice or rejection is, cannot be comprehended by the native citizens. On the other hand, although democracy is a new experience and an exciting opportunity, it has been a bitter experience for some of the refugees. Even some of them has Turkish citizenship and they are able to engage in public sphere, many of the refugees expressed that they feel inferiority in comparison to the local people in public arena. They see themselves as secondary citizens and cannot state their political opinions or involve to public discussions:

"Why did you come? Will your war never end? Turkey is tired of Syrians. Slowly this conversation continues, they start talking about politics, I get angry but I hold back;

⁴⁸ “Suriyeliler şunu düşünüyorlar: Suriyelilerle çalışayım en azından benim paramı çalamaz, alamaz. Mesela ben dışarda çalışırken Suriyelilerin yanında çalışmayı tercih ediyordum çünkü ben de garibim oda garip; hakkımı illaki alabilirim. Zamanında ben bir adamdan 10 bin lira alacağımı almak için yanına gittim zorla 4 binini alabildim, 6 bini kaldı. Çok sürdü iki sene sürdü. Mesela haftada 1000 tane iş dikiyordum veriyordu. Her haftayı veriyordu ne dikiyorsam. En son işler azaldı. Mesela alacağım var diyelim 5 bin lira; o 2 bin lira veriyordu. Diğer kısmı içerde kalıyordu. Yavaş yavaş böyle birikti. 10 bin lira diye hatırlıyorum çok oldu ama en az 6 binim onda kaldı yani. Adamın yanına gittim, ‘İflas ettim ne yapacaksan git yap, Polislin yolunu bilmiyorsan ben göstereyim sana’ dedi. Adamın atölyesi, her şeyi var ama iflas ettim dedi, vermedi. Ben ne yapabilirim ki ona, Allaha havale ettim gitti.”

[Polis bir şey yapabilir miydi, sorusuna cevaben] “Ne yapacak ki polis? Şahit yok, elimde kanıt yok. Adam dese ki ben bunu tanımıyorum nereden bilecek polis. O zaman vatandaşlık da almamıştım zordu biraz. Biz çekiniyorduk karakola gitmekten. Bakıyorsun bazen ne olursa olsun Suriyelinin üzerine atıyorlar suç, gözümüzle görüyoruz. Arap olduğu zaman direk vuruyorlar. Ne oldu ne olmadı dinlemeden bilmeden Arap varsa bir olayın içinde direk ona vuruyorlar. Dayak yedikten sonra belli oluyor iyi mi kötü mü ama o dayağı mutlaka bir yiyor. Bu oluyor maalesef.”

*why am I holding myself because I am **secondary**. If I were a real Turk, I could defend politicians, but I cannot. Because I am not a real Turk, even if I have a blue identity, even if it has been twenty or even a hundred years, I am not Turkish, I cannot defend it. They say that they took the Syrians and brought them here, our bread is not enough for us anyway... They are telling those to the ones who brought us, not to us. They are not doing anything directly to us. I want to defend them, but I can't. If I speak, something terrible will happen, something will happen... I cannot live a democracy life.” (NGO worker, female, Syrian)⁴⁹*

Despite the more intense negativities at the beginning of the migration, the frames around inequality become unclear over time, and the two groups have approached each other. Some of the refugees are also aware that the situation is getting more favorable day by day:

*“It is not the same as before, because the Syrians understand the laws, recognize the customs and traditions, and act according to the environment. Our Turkish **brothers** also recognized us. So, there was a rapprochement. It's not like the first years, no one understood anyone, but now there is no such thing.” (Company Owner, male, Syrian)⁵⁰*

⁴⁹ “Neden geldiniz? Savaşımız bitmeyecek mi? Türkiye bıktı Suriyelilerden. Yavaş yavaş bu konuşma devam ediyor, politika konuşmaya başlıyorlar, ben sinirleniyorum ama kendimi tutuyorum; kendimi niye tutuyorum; –bu nokta benim için çok önemli– çünkü ben **ikinci derecedeyim**. Öyle değil de gerçek bir **Türk olsam** politikacıları savunabilirim, ama savunamıyorum, anlatabiliyor muyum? Çünkü ben gerçek Türk değilim, her ne kadar mavi kimliğim de olsa, aradan yirmi sene, hatta yüz sene de geçse, ben Türk değilim, savunamıyorum. Mesela onlar söylüyorlar: Suriyelileri aldılar buraya getirdiler, bizim zaten ekmeğiniz bize yetmiyor... Bize değil bizi getirenlere söylüyorlar. Bize (doğrudan) bir şey yapmıyorlar, siyasetçilere söylüyorlar. Ben onları savunmak istiyorum ama savunamıyorum. Konuşursam çok kötü bir şey olacak, olay olacak... Demokrasi hayatı yaşayamıyorum.”

⁵⁰ “Şu an zaten eskisi gibi değil, çünkü Suriyeli olanlar kanunları anlıyor, adetleri gelenekleri fark ediyor, ortama göre hareket ediyor. Türk **kardeşlerimiz** de bizi tanıdı. Yani bir yaklaşma oldu. İlk seneler gibi değil hiç kimse kimseyi anlamıyordu ama şu an öyle bir şey kalmadı.”

5.2.7 Conclusion

Refugee employment in the industry

The competitive attitude of the brands that hold the world market in textiles has suppressed the prices by breaking down all the production steps. Under this pressure, production was subcontracted and moved away from the brands' headquarters with necessary control mechanisms. Informal employment has increased in apparel production workshops that are far from inspection. Thus, this sector, where the need for cheap workers is extremely high, has been the gateway to working life for the majority of immigrants who cannot find formal employment opportunities.

Among the reasons why the apparel sector acts as a gateway for refugees to enter the business life, the greater labor shortage in the apparel sector compared to other sectors played a significant role. In addition, the fact that refugees have more textile experience compared to other sectors also has a significant importance in the concentration of the migrant workforce in this area. In addition, refugee women are familiar with the act of sewing and the use of sewing machines. Sewing craft, which can reach up to dress making, is a traditional part of the daily life of Syrian refugee women. This situation has been the reason why refugee women, most of whom stepped into business life in their lives in Turkey, started to work in the apparel sector for the first time in their lives.

Informality

If the reasons for the intensive unregistered work in the sector are evaluated in terms of employees, employers, and management in three aspects; informality is preferable for employees, because the workforce that wants to work in this sector is predominantly immigrant and a significant number of immigrants do not have a work permit. It is preferable for employers since their profit margins in the sector are extremely low due

to cheap production pressures. Government, on the other hand, turns a blind eye to informality, because the labor force to work in cheap jobs is formed in this manner and it has paved the way for production.

Bargaining power of the refugee workforce

The main factor that creates the bargaining power of migrant workers is price cuts by creating competition in the supply of workers. Cheaper labor force is preferred by employers. Factors such as their professional experience, language learning, stability in their working life, meeting the existing labor deficit also contributed to this bargaining power. Besides, some refugees employ Syrian people by establishing their own workshops. This situation allows refugees to take a share of the total revenue by directly participating in production.

Sectoral challenges for refugees

Anything that weakens the refugee's work life and reduces his bargaining power is perceived by him as a difficulty. These difficulties are mainly related to the status of the refugee in the country of residence. Immigrants face serious difficulties in terms of technical obstacles such as the lack of a work permit, the bureaucracy experienced while trying to obtain this permit, the language barrier experienced both while working and seeking bureaucratic solutions, and the reservations experienced while trying to regain their rights that were taken from them. In addition, accusations of reducing the share of local workers reinforce the difficulties experienced.

Insurance's role in refugee's lives

For the refugee, whose primary concern is to survive and protect their loved ones, technical issues such as insurance remain in detail. In addition, the concept of insurance, which has no place in their lives in Syria, is new for the refugees. Except for health-

related necessities, insurance concerns the future, not the present. Therefore, insurance is not of vital importance for the refugee, whose primary issue is today. Moreover, the employer deducts the monthly insurance expenses from the employee's salary. The decreased salary harms refugee worker's present subsistence.

Public attitudes towards refugees

Among the negative experiences of refugees in social life, there are more potential acts of accusation and discourses of marginalization. Discourses on ethnic difference and being accused of fleeing the war are among the negative experiences faced by refugees. Contrary to this situation, refugees with positive experience were also interviewed. They also met people who helped them, offered jobs, shared their meals and opportunities. The interviewees mentioned that over time, the negativities have been decreasing and they could make the transition to a more livable life in Turkey.

General Summary

There are causes of the exploitation of labor in labor-intensive sectors. It is possible to gather these reasons under two headings as those that directly affect the exploitation of labor and those that indirectly affect it. For example, unemployment, which means a surplus of labor in the sector, directly affects the cheapening of labor. Increasing competition in labor supply is the main reason for this situation. Conversely, an increase in the job supply is naturally expected to increase the value of labor. Contract manufacturing as subcontracting in garment industry is a job supply and needs labor; therefore, it is expected to support the valuation of labor. However, subcontracting paves the way for the exploitation of labor in many ways and indirectly causes labor to become cheaper. Unsurprisingly, as long as this is the case, the problem cannot be

solved by increasing the sectoral job supply; the characteristics of this job supply must also change.

The situation of the immigrant workforce in terms of essential needs such as shelter and food are urgent. Not knowing the language has made most of the refugees unskilled labor force. On the other hand, refugees have more textile experience compared to other business lines. The sewing-related practices of women create a fertile ground for the apparel industry. The fact that apparel is an easy-to-use production with simple machines has led to the concentration of the refugee workforce, which has become unqualified due to their obstacles and has become cheaper due to their urgent needs.

Welfare measures in social states have raised the standards of the workforce, and it has become difficult to create sufficient workforce for cheap, heavy, or technically dirty jobs. Regular and irregular migrants offer serious opportunities to the receiving countries to find solutions to this problem. Correlatively, at the end of the 20th century, there was the same problem behind the labor importation of some of the European welfare states from other countries where unemployment was widespread.

The standpoint of the person who puts their products on sale to profit is not the same as the person who puts forth their labor and even own existence to keep themselves or their loved ones alive. The business person's need is finding customer firstly, whereas the latter needs support, and when they cannot find that support, they put themselves on the table in return for a price that will only meet their vital needs.

Especially during their first years in the market, refugees have had a vulnerable position in the market due to their urgent needs. This destitution strengthens employers' hand and established refugees as a cheap labor force. Although the refugees had occupational abilities such as education, seniority, and craftsmanship, in the existing system, there are many obstacles to make use of them in the labor market. This is a fact

that strengthens the employers' hand in the apparel industry. This situation constitutes a ground that reduces the refugee to an even more exploitable and vulnerable subject. The apparel industry and subcontracting model in Turkey have had a dynamic structure for decades, and the labor shortage in the industry has been growing, especially when refugees enter the country. Consequently, this new group of people trying to exist in the midst of all kinds of poverty, tried to hold on to life by accepting a salary slightly above zero. That is a wage less than the official minimum wage that has become almost standard in subcontracting except for experienced machinists.

Although the language problem is often seen as an obstacle both by the refugee and by the local employers, this situation has not hindered the entry of the refugee into business life. Most likely, it has weakened the refugee's hand and intensified the labor exploitation by making the employer's hand a little stronger. In these living conditions, the issues concerning the future of refugees, such as insurance and working with insurance, have lost their meaning in the refugee's world before they have been met. Thinking about the future is perceived as an extra issue for these people, who are trying to save the day they live on a ground where the concern for survival becomes so evident and vital needs come to the fore.

In social life, ethnicity and language differences were seen by many locals as the reason for marginalization. Although it does not reach the level of violence in general, excluding police violence and some fights in the workplace, hate speech makes the refugee devastated and excluded in society. Despite all these negativities, the working time has reduced the size of the problems, reduced their severity, and made the distinction between the native and the refugee blurred to some degree.

5.3 Chapter Conclusion

When we look at both mid 2000s and 2011, which is the year of entry of refugees to Turkey, the apparel industry in Turkey is in an increasing labor shortage. This fact is also reached from the interviews in the field and recognized in the existing literature. The minimum wage application in the textile sector in Turkey has been a routine practice. On a ground where almost all workers, except master machinists and other experienced machinists, earn minimum wage, the loss of workers towards better-earning areas is inevitable. As a result, the large workforce in the apparel industry is regularly shifting towards more less labor-intensive and the higher-yielding areas. For instance, waitering is usually an area of interest because there is the possibility of extra earnings, like tips. In addition, new business areas with better gainings and social status have become a trend, similar to the security sector. In the same period, the construction industry in Turkey was developing rapidly, a large workforce was needed in this area, and the wages were much better than textiles (Gültekin-Karakaş et al., 2021). In the textile sector, which lost its workforce for all these reasons, salaries began to increase, and some workshops had difficulty even finding unskilled workers to be trained.

On the other hand, textile has been a common entry point to the labor market for immigrants, universally and throughout history. In Arab societies such as Syria and Egypt, there is a sewing machine in almost every home (Kupferschmidt, 2004). Since they have had contact with needle and thread since childhood, they are habitually handy. It is traditional for women to be able to tailor to meet the household's daily needs and to be familiar with needlecraft. Besides, the training process in the textile sector is shorter and less detailed compared to the heavy

industry, with safe and simple machines. The work is routine and does not require constant communication once learned. As a result, the language barrier is at a lower level compared to other sectors. To give an example, being a waitress or clerk requires severe language and communication skills. There are other challenges than language skills, such as when it comes to the construction industry is almost completely closed to women. Or it is not possible for refugees in a foreign country to be a security guard while being concerned about their own safety, apart from various other factors.

However, there is already a labor shortage in the apparel sector. The employers in the industry, who had been accustomed to paying the minimum wage for many years, have been seriously disturbed by the increased salaries as they mentioned in the interviews. This being the case, refugees came across a sector with whom almost half of their population has already been familiar in Syria. They were in desperate need of income in terms of meeting their vital needs, so ready to cut prices.

Syrian refugees are not entirely stranger to this industry. Although pre-war Syria was not a leading country in the sector, it was a country that could export textiles. As of 2011, it exported one-third of its cotton production, which reached three hundred and twenty million tons per year, primarily to European countries (Kaddar, 2018). Consequently, we can easily say that a serious labor force worked in the textile sector in pre-war Syria. With the data obtained from the interviews, we see a substantial number of large and small textile workshops of various sizes in Syria. In fact, some of the refugee's transition from workmanship to employership has taken place on the basis of their experiences in this area.

In addition, as stated in the previous article, almost half of the individuals forming the society have sewing experience at the level of tailoring. This experience gives the individual in the adaptation process a communication opportunity that overcomes the language barrier and shows itself as bargaining power in the market. This is a significant opportunity for individuals in urgent need in a foreign country. Moreover, once a family member enters a business line, it is easier for others to enter that business. Therefore, it is frequently observed that family members and their relatives are concentrated in the same sector.

Consequently, it can be easily argued that Syrian refugee's situation has changed in many ways since their first years in Turkey and in Istanbul. When they first started to work, their wages were far below than the local workers and they came across many forms of unequal behavior and abuses. Nowadays, their bargaining power is quite higher due to various factors, such as learning the Turkish language, gaining more occupational experience, accumulating more social and financial capital and finally, having an upper-hand because of the existing labor deficit and the shortage of skilled workers.

Chapter 6:

CONCLUSIONS

The motivation behind this research and analysis is to shed a small light to the ordinary people, ordinary stories of the “small” people within the layers of global and broadscale structures. Without the existence of women in the beginning of textile industry, or Russian and Polish Jewish refugees in London in 1880s, this branch of production, that has a crucial role in global capitalism now, could not exist. As it is the same for the essentiality of refugees and immigrants for today’s Turkish apparel industry.

The historicity between apparel industry and global capitalism stems from Industrial Revolution and has strong relations with migration. Historically, the industry has been closely tied to the growth of capitalist economies, with the rise of textile manufacturing in Europe during the Industrial Revolution playing a key role in the development of industrial capitalism. Its relationship with migration is also multifaced since the apparel industry has been a significant driver of migration, as workers move to areas where the industry is located in search of employment. Besides, for immigrants, the sector has always been an access point to the labor market in their new country. The globalization of capitalism has created another dimension and this time the production side of the industry migrated to where labor was cheaper. This has led to an opportunity of employment for refugees and immigrants in these countries.

The industry is known to employ marginalized groups such as women, people of color and immigrants, who are disproportionately represented in low-skilled, low-wage jobs in the apparel industry. These workers often face discrimination and limited job opportunities in their countries of origin or the new one. Thus, apparel industry appears as a way to improve their living conditions and those of their families. In addition, the

relationship between the apparel industry and migration is shaped by the policies and regulations put in place by governments. Labor laws, trade agreements, and immigration policies can all have an impact on the conditions under which apparel workers are employed, and the ability of workers to migrate in search of employment in the apparel industry.

This relation is still valid in the many regions of the world including Syrian textile workers' situation in Turkey. They are a part of a huge system as a part of global division of labor. At the same time, they have their own agencies, support and defense strategies, and bargaining power in this system, even they are embedded in the dynamics of the order. My aim is attempting to comprehend some parts of this multi-layered whole not only with the historical facts and contributions of existing sociological literature on apparel industry and migration but also with their representations and stories.

Turkey's apparel industry has been experiencing a serious labor supply deficit for 5-10 years. Although in the past it was a popular area of employment, apparel industry has fallen into disfavor because of various reasons such as government policies which discard apparel industry, globally changing mode of businesses and emerging of new and more comfortable employment areas with minimum wage (such as wardership, widespread of shopping malls with many stores in them, obligation of private security services for building complexes and companies). Being a textile worker has started to be perceived as a low-level occupation along with each of these transformations. Except for experienced machinists, the wages are at the minimum wage level and people prefer other unqualified jobs.

The 4+4+4 education system resulted in a drop in apparel sector's employment rates in Turkey. Previously, secondary school obligation also caused the same; now the age

limit is further advanced, master-apprentice relationship is not possible. Therefore, there is a shortage of qualified personnel from below since there are no apprentices from bottom-up; the higher and skilled positions left empty. According to the firm and workshop owners and managers, vocational schools do not provide adequate education in this area either. Besides, the fashion always changes with new models coming out and accordingly, more knowledgeable staff who can do better quality work are needed. Still, some of the skilled workers prefer to work informally because it is more profitable and this fact limits the recruitment scale of workshops that do not want to employ informal workers.

Subsequently, employers who suffer from labor deficit, have started to hire refugees and immigrants. This ongoing gap has started to be filled by refugees and immigrants from predominantly Syria, also including other countries, such as Turkic Republics and Afghanistan. Although there are other sectors with labor supply deficits such as the service sector or construction, Syrian refugees take mostly place in apparel sector in consequence of various factors, such as the familiarity of apparel industry to Syrians and the language barrier problem in other sectors. Since most of the refugees lack work permits, their existence in the sector is highly related to informal side of the coin. The sector has started to host many unregistered workers in ateliers because many of these people lacked necessary documents to work with permit. They constituted a low-cost alternative labor force since they were not documented. The low-cost aspect is exceedingly essential in the industry principally because of the quite low bidding prices that the brands offered.

There is a mutual relationship between formal and informal sides of the industry. Since there is a difficulty of meeting the sudden increase in the workload with current number of employees at that moment, especially during seasonal increases, intermediary

firms and formal workshop need subcontracting or hiring informal workers. Therefore, many exporter companies take orders that overburden their production capacity and, therefore, have to subcontract. Due to the above-mentioned reason, daily laborers earn much more and some experienced machinists prefer working in this way on purpose, although they could be employed in any workplace in the industry due to their high experience and skills.

The necessity of hiring experienced and qualified workers is also seen as a major expense by the employers. Since they avoid lowering profit no matter what the conditions are, this also establishes a substantial reason behind informality. In order to survive with brutal price competition in local and global scale, they adopt strategies of lowering the cost to minimum, such as accounting and tax frauds, fulfilling the requirement of insurance in only 80%, hiring daily-wage laborers and immigrants without work permits to avoid paying insurance and side benefits. The last method also brings along the necessity of hiding it from the state and their clients since most of the brands would not subcontract to a workshop with those conditions. A weight of responsibilities comes with hiring a worker formally as well. In a case of conflict or occupational accident, there might be a lawsuit or exemplary damages. However, for an informal worker, there is no worry for the employer and there is no mental load of it.

The issue of informality also resulted in a social compliance problem. Multinational companies and the Turkish government do not allow to hire workers without work permit. That is why businesses which employ illegal workers cannot be audited by the multinational companies to take orders from them. They are either eliminated or they attempt to pass inspections by hiding the undocumented workers in the ateliers and factories. Since the refugees and immigrants came to Turkey by escaping wars or poverty, they are in need to work to survive. Many of them are seen as low-cost labor

force in the eyes of business owners. By the time they came, there was no sufficient local labor force in the sector, therefore the ateliers demanding preferably low-priced workers, have found a new supply source.

Nevertheless, since the unemployment ratio is quite high in Turkey, it is not applicable for the government to give work permit to all of the refugees and immigrants. It would be a problematic move politically and that is why taking a work permit is in the responsibility of the employer and there are some bureaucratic obstacles. However, the government is also aware that these people have to work in order to survive and without employment, many problems would emerge including high crime rates. Therefore, the government's strategy is turning a blind eye to the issue. There are subsequently high number of undocumented foreign women working in various areas such as child care, elderly care, disabled care, cleaning, cooking and many of them work as live-in. In addition, ateliers hire undocumented workers. The government is aware of these situations but by being silent and not taking necessary precautions entirely. This is its way of saying "continue without getting caught".

All this local process is also embedded in a global and overscale system. Throughout history, the countries with lower economic power have been a source of cheap labor in favor of the countries with more power. War economies also contribute this circle of migration and exploitation. As major agents in global capitalism, the big garment companies make use of this cheap labor force.

Contrarily, the fast fashion brands make advertisement with the concepts of "fair trade", "fair labor", and "ecological sustainability" in order to build a respectable brand recognition and being in harmony with latest movements and customer sentiment. They also announce that their production is made by solely audited producers. These are especially the big and affordable brands, such as H&M, C&A, Inditex Group (Zara,

Massimo Dutti, Bershka etc.), Primark, COS... However, while they are making these advertisements and aiming to have decent and profitable public relations through them, the inspection and auditing part is subcontracted with private firms and they force the producers to work below cost pricing. Therefore, for the producers, it is not achievable to work within the legal conditions and by fulfilling all the conditions of the brands and make enough profit to invest and resume to produce in this way.

The brands are well aware of the fact that their conditions and price expectations are neither reasonable nor sustainable. It means that they advertise their “fair labor” standards and procedures whereas they do not give value for its cost. For example, they give countenance to workers to join labor union, although they are knowledgeable what unionization means; higher costs for the producers. Those higher costs do not correspond to their bidding prices and the brands are aware of this fact. Nevertheless, they also know that if that business goes to bankruptcy, another one is going to take its place, therefore it does not matter to the brand. It is also a fact, many producers working with fast fashion brands either go bankruptcy or they change their names in a couple of years in order to not paying taxes and insurances or they pass the inspections “in their own ways”.

In this way, global capitalism still works as necessary for its progression and is able to create a misperception of innocence and goodwill regarding fair trade in fashion. An owner of an intermediary firm claims that unregistered workers are employed in the production of many of those famous brands. Some of the subcontracted workshops could not pass any inspection under fair conditions. Nonetheless, nobody discloses these because in that case not only the employee but the workshop, the intermediary firm and the brand would be ruined.

Everyone turns a blind eye since everyone has a benefit from it. Migrant workers work cheaper than Turkish workers and without insurance because they have no other choice. Workshops employ these workers and pass the inspections by sweeping under the rock because there are not enough local workers and they will not be able to receive orders if they work with only local or registered immigrant workers. The government is ignoring this since if it did not, it would be politically problematical and the economy would suffer severely as well.

Notwithstanding all these exploitative circumstances, the refugees manage to make ground in the sector and the country. In comparison with their first years of migration, their bargaining power has strengthened considerably in the apparel sector. They have improved their language skills in professional and daily life, gained experience in the industry and also made use of the existing labor supply deficit which stems from the declining status of apparel work among locals. In addition, with their acquired experiences, network, and financial capital throughout the years, several Syrian workers could start their own business as workshop owners, similarly to Kurdish workers' accomplishments in the past.

The interrelation between textile and migrant labor continues to conserve its local and global dimensions. Throughout history, textile has always been a gate for immigrants into the labor market. It is the same for London in the 1880s, for Istanbul in the 2000s with Kurdish workers, and since 2011, Syrian refugees' employment in the apparel sector. The stories and conceptual connections help us to see multiple structural forces in Syrian textile workers' daily and occupational lives. They become embedded into Istanbul's apparel industry which is interconnecting to the global supply chains and world economy. However, they also have an increasing bargaining power in the system since they have more experience, social capital, and higher language skills.

Conclusively, the COVID-19 pandemic and the depreciation in the Turkish Lira made the existing problems and inequalities more visible. The conditions in the industry are severe to compete within the global dynamics. Almost every business complains about delaying payments and low-price expectations of the client brands, high expenses and taxes, insufficient government incentives, and the economic crisis. Many of these complaints of the workshop/factory owners and the workers are almost identical to the statements from the 2000s (Yörük, 2006). They said and still say that “No smart person continues in the apparel industry.” It seems possible that in the future, the medium-scale apparel business may be in the tendency to move to Eastern regions of Turkey where there are government incentives and lower expenses. In the meantime, the small-scale workshops are in danger of bankruptcy as many of them have already experienced that during the pandemic lockdowns and economic crisis. Nevertheless, the global production chain in the apparel industry continues to survive and reshape in these changing conditions by finding itself new cheap labor forces all around the world.

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