HOW DO LOW-INCOME KURDISH MIGRANT WOMEN RECONSTRUCT THEIR LIVES IN AN INNER-CITY NEIGHBORHOOD OF ISTANBUL?: EXPERIENCES OF MIGRATION AND ADAPTATION TO LIFE IN THE CITY

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

The primary goal of this ethnographic study was to understand low-income Kurdish mothers’ experiences with and meaning-making of their lives after forced and/or “voluntary” migration from the southeast region of Turkey to Istanbul. The study situated mothers and families within the multiple contexts they were embedded in, using Bronfenbrenner’s ecological framework. Informed by strengths perspective and structure versus human agency theories, the study focused on women’s coping strategies and agency, while also identifying challenges faced by Kurdish mothers within their immediate and larger contexts. The study also inquired into mothers’ beliefs around child education and child labor as this population has been identified as at-risk for child labor in the literature.

The research took place in Tarlabası, an inner-city neighborhoods that is largely populated by low-income Kurdish migrants in Istanbul, Turkey. Twenty-eight mothers were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. A short demographic survey provided demographic data on participants and their families. In semi-structured in-depth interviews, mothers discussed their migration process and its social, emotional, and financial consequences for themselves and their families. They also talked about strategies they used to navigate through challenges they faced on a daily basis, the impact of gender on their lives, and their attitudes and beliefs about childhood, child labor, and child education. Participant observations focused on the social and physical characteristics of the neighborhood, interactions between mothers and their children, particular strategies mothers used to protect their children in the urban context, and on mothers’ interactions with their neighbors as potential sources of social support. Turkey Census and historical data provided background information and context to the study, whereas newspapers’ helped in understanding the attitude of the public towards Kurdish
Kurdish mothers came to the inner-city neighborhood of Tarlabası through either forced or voluntary migration. Their narratives revealed that regardless of their migration pattern, mothers experienced feelings of loneliness, restricted mobility, and poverty in the city. While they were able to minimize feelings of loneliness and limited mobility in their new environment through creating new social ties, learning their surroundings and the Turkish language, poverty continued to be a struggle for their families despite the various strategies they developed to supplement the family budget. Mothers also struggled with the inner-city characteristics of Tarlabası, especially when it came to raising their children. Mothers’ concerns about their children’s safety due to criminal activities, negative peer influence, and lack of safe places to play for children led them to develop strategies to minimize risks. These included individual and collective monitoring, resource brokering, curfew on hours spent outside, and cautionary warnings to children.

Many mothers with older children reported that their children worked either full-time or during the summer. Mothers played a critical role in making the decision to send their children to work. Families usually chose workplaces owned by other family members, relatives, friends, or people of their hometown to be able to make sure their children were safe while working and to avoid their children’s exploitation. Most of the mothers with younger children also considered sending their children to work as a possibility and poverty was not the only rationale they provided. Limiting their children’s exposure to the dangers of Tarlabası, providing a vocation if their children did not attend high school, teaching about “life” and “responsibility” were among the reasons why they considered sending their children to work. In terms of which child went to work, child age, birth order, and school success/continuation were considered.
Children’s gender was not a major determinant of whether they worked, but it was critical in deciding where children worked.

Gender was a critical and constant variable shaping women’s lives. Many of the mothers were married through arranged marriages, even though there were also a notable number of love marriages in the sample. Most of the mothers cohabitated with their family in-laws to varying extents after marrying their husbands and suffered both emotionally and physically because of this living arrangement. Female members in the family in-law contributed greatly to women’s suffering, underlying the perpetuation of the patriarchal system by women themselves. In their marriage, women usually supported traditional gender roles in the role distribution of wives and husbands, but they expected their husbands to be emotionally more invested in the marriage, reflecting more “modern” perceptions.

The study findings add to the literature on poverty, migration, gender, child labor, and inner-city neighborhood processes by focusing on low-income Kurdish migrant women’s life experiences, an understudied population. The study also revisits the theoretical discussions of ecosystems theory, structure and agency, parental ethnotheories, gender ideologies, and resilience in a different cultural context. The findings have implications for developing culturally relevant policies and programs that recognize and build upon the strengths of low-income Kurdish migrant women and their families.
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PROLOGUE

Three turning points in my life took me down a path that allows me to tell you the life stories of low-income Kurdish migrant mothers today.

*Turning point 1.* In the fall of 2001, when I was a sophomore in college in Istanbul, I decided to register for an applied psychology course that implemented a mentoring project with low-income Kurdish migrant children who were at risk of being sent to work. Over the following three years, I met with the same little girl, Dicle, who was attending elementary school at the time, every week, except during summer breaks. My interactions with her parents and her neighborhood were not as frequent, but were always friendly, except one time. That day, I met Dicle at her school. She and her older sister, who was also in the mentoring project, insisted that we go visit their uncles’ garment production sweatshop close by. Their aunts and uncles worked there together. They welcomed me with great excitement and gave me some clothes as a gift. As her uncles and I were talking around the desk sipping our tea, Dicle placed a drawing she had made at school on the desk. She had drawn a school yard and the Turkish flag for their teacher who had asked them to draw a picture to celebrate the national holiday. When Dicle’s oldest uncle saw the picture, I felt the friendly atmosphere become tense as he told her something in Kurdish. While Dicle removed the picture, he turned to me and said “We don’t like to see the Turkish flag around”. I was speechless trying to find the best words, among the many racing through my mind at that moment, that could ease the tension in the room. I was twenty years old at the time, and had watched and read countless news articles about the Kurdish “problem” in the media, but it was the first time I was experiencing the tension between Kurds and the Turkish government on such a personal level. Everybody was waiting for my reaction. I finally mumbled “everybody has a right to their opinion”. I will never
know how they felt about my answer, but somehow the conversation resumed, although it was not as warm as it was before. While that interaction made me uncomfortable, I stopped thinking about it after a few weeks and never thought of placing it within the larger framework of the Kurdish issue. After all, I wanted to be a psychologist and “help” people and “political” issues were too intricate and not quite my area of interest.

My awakening on the Kurdish issue occurred in 2003 when I traveled to Diyarbakır, the biggest city in the southeast region of Turkey (and also referred as the capital of Kurdistan in some sources) to assist our professor in implementing the mentoring program in Diyarbakır. It was my very first trip to the southeast of Turkey and the first time I got to hear and witness the Kurdish side of the story. There were still military checkpoints as well as a curfew for trips in between the cities in the area. There was also a visible military presence in the city. I felt like I was in a different part of the world. How could we be so isolated from what was happening here? As some level of trust was built between us and the other college students we met there, they shared their side of the story with us. How come we never heard the stories I was told here? It was through this eye-opening experience and the stories I heard in this part of the country that I became more and more interested in the Kurdish issue. However, I had not envisioned that it would one day become part of my research interest.

**Turning point 2.** It was my second year in my PhD studies. I was sitting in my advisor’s office when she asked me what kind of research I wanted to pursue for my dissertation. I told her I had two interests that were completely different from each other. The first one was ‘something related to parents of children with autism’. I told her not only was I interested in the topic but it would be very convenient for me to collect data in the U.S. and not be apart from my boyfriend for an extended amount of time. My advisor said it was important to balance work
and personal life and asked me what my second option was. I said I was a little hesitant about my second option because it would require me to stay in Turkey for an extended amount of time. She said “let’s hear it”. I started to describe the mentoring project I participated in college, my observations of Dicle’s family and neighborhood when I was volunteering for the project, the articles I read on how low-income Kurdish migrant children were at higher risk for child labor because of the low levels of family income. I went on for about fifteen (maybe 20) minutes, during which my advisor listened to me without interruption. As I finished talking and tried to catch my breath, she looked at me smiling and asked “Özge, do you hear yourself when you talk about them? Do you realize how excited you get just talking about it?” That is when I realized it took me twenty minutes to talk about my second option and only two minutes to talk about “something related to parents of children with autism”.

**Turning point 3.** After I had a pep talk (Turning point 2) with my advisor, I spent a semester doing a literature review on child labor and designing a qualitative pilot study to gain insight into the various dynamics that led Kurdish mothers’ experiences and perspectives on child labor and education. As it would be inappropriate to inquire directly into the issue, I organized my questions in a temporal framework starting with parents’ lives before migration followed by their experiences after the migration. I inquired into their beliefs around childhood, child education, and child labor, and concluded with their aspirations for their children and families.

Years had gone by since I had last seen Dicle and her family when I went back to Dicle’s mother to introduce my pilot study in the summer of 2008. Although we had kept some level of contact via phone calls, I had not been back to the neighborhood for five years. Dicle was now an adolescent girl who was working in the textile industry along with her older sister
to support her family financially. I was welcomed in their house with much excitement. Dicle’s mother agreed both to participate in and recruit for my study.

As much as I identified myself as a social worker and a qualitative researcher, I was still somewhat critical of the fact that parents were sending their children to work in order to support their families. However, my interactions with seven mothers who participated in my pilot study juxtaposed real-life experiences and voice against many arguments and the accusative tone underlying many scholarly articles and news in the media. The interviews and conversations I had with them revealed many unspoken stories, sorrows, and hopes. The different life stories mothers kindly shared with me inspired me to explore further issues on women’s journeys to the city and its consequences, cultural values—including gender roles— and its implications on women’s lives, as well as strengths and agency migrant Kurdish women exerted in their lives.

It is with this inspiration that this project has been undertaken.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

*Narin:* *Our [my] lives are like a movie.*

How do low-income Kurdish migrant mothers reconstruct their lives in an urban context after being displaced or migrating from the villages of southeast of Turkey to the metropolitan Istanbul? What are the particular challenges they encounter and coping strategies they use? This dissertation offers glimpses into low-income Kurdish migrant mothers’ lives, with a particular focus on their experiences with internal displacement or “voluntary” migration and adaptation to a new life in an inner-city neighborhood of Istanbul. As an important aspect of life after migration, I also explore Kurdish women’s beliefs and attitudes about child labor and education. Finally, through women’s tales, I seek to understand Kurdish women’s experiences, meaning-making, and perceptions of gender and gender ideologies. In each of these areas of Kurdish women’s lives, I highlight their agency and resilience, rather than merely portraying them as passive and helpless victims of their circumstances.

One of the unique aspects of Kurdish migration is that even though it is an internal migration, it very much carries the characteristics of transnational migration (Grabolle Çeliker, 2013). Grabolle Çeliker argues that while Kurdish migration is a domestic migration, the sending communities are mostly homogeneously Kurdish (hence the everyday language is Kurdish), whereas the receiving communities are ethnically mixed and the spoken language is largely Turkish. Thus, it is not just a change from a rural to an urban lifestyle and a spatial transition, but also a linguistic change for many families. It is for these reasons that Grabolle Çeliker calls Kurdish migration “translocational”.

The women described in this study came to the city for two primary reasons: Armed
conflict and migration for marital union/reunion. The first wave of migration to the particular neighborhood where the study was conducted took place in 1990s. The circumstances of this wave of migration from the hamlets and villages of the less developed southeast region of Turkey were quite different from those of previous waves of migration that were “voluntary” moves from the rural to the urban areas for economic purposes (Kurban, Yükseker, Çelik, Unalan, & Aker 2007; Yükseker, 2006). These migrants, generally accepted to number around one million (Kurban et al., 2007), left their rural homes to move to the peripheries or inner-city neighborhoods of big cities as a result of the armed conflict in the less developed southeastern region and they generally were unable to convert their agricultural assets into money (Adaman & Keyder, 2006). One of the outcomes of this situation was the emergence of socioeconomically and spatially segregated Kurdish communities in Western cities (Saraçoğlu, 2011). Those who settled in cities quickly became marginalized due to ethnic discrimination (Şen, 2005) and a lack of education and skills needed to find jobs in the formal sector (Ayata & Yükseker, 2005).

The more recent waves of migration that followed internal displacement were more “voluntary” in nature and were caused by the rising unemployment in the area as well as devaluation of agricultural activities. Similar to other voluntary migrations (Erman, 1997), Kurdish women either followed their husbands who were already working in the city a few years later or joined them right after marriage. Regardless of their migration patterns, issues of poverty, marginalization, and exclusion continued to be at the center of Kurdish families’ lives.

Marginalization and social exclusion have been even more significant for displaced/migrant Kurdish women due to gender roles that confine them to a domestic sphere, and to their limited literacy skills and fluency in Turkish (Yükseker, 2006). Especially women who
migrated to cities (e.g. west and south regions of Turkey) where Kurdish language is not widespread and literacy skills are indispensable to navigate the everyday life felt further isolated (Çağlayan, Özar, & Tepe Doğan, 2011). Very few studies have focused on Kurdish women who migrated to places outside the predominantly Kurdish areas, and these studies have mainly looked at challenges women encountered in the city, with very little attention given to their resilience and coping strategies (e.g. Çağlayan et al., 2011; Çelik, 2005).

Secondly, child labor has been cited as an important consequence of poverty experienced by displaced and/or migrant Kurdish families (Müderrisoğlu, 2006; Şen, 2005; Yıldız, 2007). The literature suggests that in rural families in Turkey, children start working at an early age to contribute to family farm work (Bakırcı, 2002; Karatay, 2000). Thus, in cases where families migrate to cities and struggle with poverty, parents may find it normal that their children work in various industries to contribute to family income (Bakırcı, 2002; Yılmaz, 2007). However, although the interaction between various factors such as gender, age, parental education level and child labor has been investigated, parental beliefs of Kurdish migrant families around children’s roles in the family, child education, and child work have been understudied.

Thirdly, while there is some literature on migrant women’s gender roles in their new “home” (Erman, 1997; 1998; 2001), little is known about how or to which extent, Kurdish women renegotiate gender roles in their new “home”. The literature identifies Kurdish culture, as well as Turkish culture for that matter, to be primarily a patriarchal one (Çağlayan, 2007; Kaya, 2011; Sunar & Fişek, 2005). There are few studies that suggest that men were not able to find regular jobs in the city (Şen, 2005; Yükseker, 2006). Occasionally married women started working in order to supplement the family income, but that usually was accompanied by
protests from other family members (Şen, 2005; Yükseker, 2006). Gender roles and ideologies are usually discussed in the literature with little credit given to Kurdish women’s passive and/or active resistance. Moreover, there is limited knowledge on Kurdish migrant women’s perceptions of gender roles and ideologies, especially in regard to their children.

I address these gaps in the literature by examining the coping strategies of low-income displaced/migrant Kurdish mothers. More specifically, I explore the following questions: 1. What are the factors that led to women’s migration to the city of Istanbul? 2. What challenges do low-income Kurdish displaced/migrant mothers experience in the urban context? 3. What are the strategies Kurdish women use to deal with challenges of urban life? 4. What are low-income Kurdish mothers’ beliefs about child labor and education and what are the implications of these beliefs for children? 5. How has gender affected Kurdish women’s lives and how are gender roles and ideologies re-negotiated in the urban context?

In the next sections of this chapter, I present the conceptual framework that I use to understand the various aspects of Kurdish migrant women’s lives followed by the organization of the chapters.

**Conceptual Framework**

This study adopts a multidisciplinary theoretical framework by borrowing theories from social work, sociology, and cultural developmental psychology. The theories adopted complement and interact with each other to provide a holistic understanding of everyday struggles and coping strategies of low-income Kurdish migrant women and their families. In the following section, as I discuss each theory individually, I also address how it complements or interacts with other theories used in the study.
**Ecosystems Theory**

The overarching framework for the study is Bronfenbrenner’s ecosystems theory (Howe, 2009). As a distinguishing feature of the social work field, ecosystems theory provides a framework to identify and understand different networks a person is surrounded with and how these networks interact with each other (Mattaini & Meyer, 2002). In other words, ecosystems theory facilitates a person-in-the-environment approach that allows addressing “the psychosocial matrix of which individuals, families, groups, and communities are constituent” (Mattaini & Meyer, 2002, p. 3). This psychosocial matrix called an ecosystem or ecomap (Mattaini & Meyer, 2002) helps circumvent any oversimplification or unidimensionality in analyzing the issue at hand and underlines its complexity.

Conceptually, the study not only acknowledges that internally displaced and migrant women are embedded in and interact with different contexts such as family, neighborhood, and culture, but also explores the meaning these contexts carry for women and their families through women’s perspectives. This study situates women and their experiences in the context of family (both biological and in-law) and explores how various dynamics and processes (e.g. gender roles and expectations, child labor decisions) are experienced in the family. The neighborhood context is given particular attention as it is another close physical and social context Kurdish women spend most of their days. The neighborhood is critical in women’s lives as its characteristics and processes have immediate consequences for the lives of Kurdish women and their families. The study also seeks to understand the interaction among various systems women and their families are embedded in and how these systems affect each other (e.g. impact of culture on parental beliefs about childhood and child education or impact of traditional gender roles on women’s lives). The study uses the historical background to further
contextualize the study.

The ecosystems theory also provides an overarching framework that encompasses the other theories that will be used for this study. For instance the resilience perspective, as discussed next, identifies obstacles and resources/strengths within the participants as well as in the participants’ environment (e.g. family, neighborhood, poverty) (Waller, 2001). Thus, protective factors that enhance individuals’ ability to cope can reside in any component of their ecosystem. Similarly the theory on structure versus agency can be placed in the ecosystems framework to see transactions between structure and agency. In other words, structural forces (e.g. poverty, culture) represent obstacles in the person’s environment affecting, and to an extent limiting, participants while agency represents participants’ interactions with the environment and active efforts to stand against these forces in their environment. Finally, parental ethnotheories is an illustration of how culture, one of the systems participants interact with, affect parents’ beliefs on certain issues and how participants respond to this interaction.

**Strengths-Based Perspective**

The strengths perspective is one of the underlying tenets of social work. In contrast to the medical perspective that focuses on deficits, strengths perspective seeks to identify, build upon, and reinforce the abilities and strengths people have (Zastrow, 2010; Saleebey, 1997). The strengths perspective argues that accentuating problems creates pessimism about people’s capacity to cope with challenging circumstances and environments. Saleebey also states that emphasizing problems portrays individuals as sites of specific problems and deficiencies and strips them off their context which contributes to their struggles but also offers unique opportunities for healing and transformation (Saleebey, 1997).

Resilience, the capacity to overcome adversity, is an important component of the strengths
perspective. Factors grouped under two categories, namely protective factors and risk factors, play a critical role in resilience. Risk factors are influences that may occur at any level of an individual’s or family’s ecosystem that threaten positive adaptational outcomes whereas protective factors are influences that facilitate positive outcomes by acting as buffers between individuals or families and the risk factors they are surrounded with (Waller, 2001). As pointed out by Saleebey (1997), resilience does not seek to disregard adversities and obstacles, in other words risk factors, but emphasizes individuals’ and communities’ capacity for agency and growth in the face of challenges and protective factors that facilitate that process. Strengths perspective believes that every individual, family, or community has assets, resources, wisdom, and knowledge and that these can only be detected by listening and respecting their narratives and experiences (Saleebey, 1997).

Like individuals, families also go through similar processes in the face of challenges or crisis. According to Walsh (2007), migration and relocation are such life experiences that may result in varying levels of trauma and hardship because of losses they entail, as also illustrated by the literature on internal displacement in Turkey (e.g. loss of significant roles and/or relationships, and loss of a way of life and economic livelihood). Family resilience, a concept/theory developed by Walsh (1996), implies that while some families dissolve in the face of crisis or persistent stresses, other families become strengthened and more resourceful. The family resilience approach aims to identify and strengthen key processes and strategies that exist within the families and their environment and that help them stand against challenges they face as a family within the context of their unique challenges, constraints, and resources (Walsh, 1996). Various protective factors or coping strategies for families such as hope, spirituality or religion, flexibility to adapt and reallocate roles, social networks, collaborative problem solving
have been cited (Walsh, 2007). Walsh (1996) argues that how a family responds to a challenging life event and moves forward is critical for both immediate and long-term adaptation for all family members and for the family as a unit.

In contrast to existing studies, this study seeks to identify protective factors and emphasizes strengths and coping strategies while acknowledging struggles participants experience in the face of poverty and migration. Through women’s accounts, this study also seeks to identify coping strategies and strengths families have developed to navigate through, ignore, or reshape the strains their migration to a big city has caused in their lives. Understanding these different aspects is especially important in providing necessary support to not only these families but also other families with similar experiences in order to facilitate their adaptation process.

**Gendered Perspective**

Both migration literature (e.g. Baluja, 2003; Parrado & Flippen, 2005; Perez, 2004) and internal displacement literature (e.g. Benjamin & Fancy, 1998; Gururaja, 2000) suggest that women and men are influenced differently by the move to a new context. The consequences of displacement are gendered in that men and women experience displacement differently because various societal structures (e.g. economy, family, education) are organized according to gender principles (Erdem, Özevin, & Özselçuk, 2003; Gururaja, 2000; Perez, 2004). Gender ideologies are culturally constructed. They are shaped by the religion, environment, and history of a region or group (Baluja, 2003). According to Baluja, that ideology then determines the group’s worldview and interactions between individuals, which evolve into a gender system where women and men are given different roles and responsibilities. These roles in turn create a power structure that dictates what opportunities (e.g. education, participation in the labor market,
access to resources) will be available to men and women. This differential in access to opportunities further perpetuates the power difference between men and women.

When families migrate, gender roles and relations are reconstructed within the family at the place of destination where some elements are discarded, while others are modified or still reinforced (Parrado & Flippen, 2005). This study focuses on gender ideologies and roles and how they are renegotiated to uncover the many ways in which gender affects displaced Kurdish women’s and their families’ lives after migration. Disentangling how Kurdish migrant families reshape or reinforce gender roles in the urban setting enhances our understanding of both the theoretical link between gender and migration and the role of family and gender dynamics in migrant adaptation.

As macro level factors, gender ideologies and roles comprise an important part of Kurdish women’s and their families’ ecosystem in that they determine how Kurdish women have to live their lives. This determination in turn has ramifications for various decisions made within the family. In the analysis of this renegotiation process, I use Kandiyoti’s (1988) concept of patriarchal bargain. Kandiyoti argues that women are not passive victims of the gender ideologies they are embedded in, but instead negotiate patriarchal conditions by either negotiating their specific relationships with men or more generally their position within broader social and cultural structures. Kandiyoti thinks of women’s strategies and coping mechanisms that challenge patriarchal gender system as patriarchal bargains. She asserts that through these bargains that may reflect passive and/or active resistance, women seek to optimize their life circumstances in the face of gender oppression to varying levels of success.

**Structure and Agency**

“Agency" refers to the capacity of individual humans to act independently and to make
their own free choices while “structure” refers to those factors such as social class, religion, gender, race, ethnicity, culture etc. which limit or influence individuals’ daily lives and opportunities (Barnes, 2008; Stones, 2007). Either structure or agency can be dominant and the other element can correspondingly be weak. More recently, it has become popular to suggest a conceptualization of structures and agents as ontologically inseparable because each enters into the other’s constitution (Archer, 2003). As stated by Archer, the causal power of structure is mediated through agency. Social structures possess three characteristics - namely temporal priority, relative autonomy, and causal efficacy - through which they exert influence on agents. Agents – namely members of the society - in turn possess properties such as thinking, deliberating, believing, intending, through which they respond to structural influences. It is as important to know how agents use their own personal powers to act against structural forces as it is to know how structural powers impinge upon agents. Archer claims that agents are capable of foreseeing the risks or benefits of different situations and decide to pursue or abandon them accordingly. Similarly, they can act strategically to try to discover ways around the constraints or to define a second-best outcome given the circumstances.

In parallel with the strengths perspective, this study seeks to understand the relationship between agency and structure within the context of the lives of low-income Kurdish migrant families given the structural forces such as class, gender, culture, and religion. Both components are important in the lives of Kurdish migrant families, especially mothers. The influences of structural forces such as class and gender are undeniable in the everyday life of Kurdish migrant mothers. However, it would be a mistake to see them as passive recipients of these influences. Recognizing the agency (e.g. coping mechanisms, strategies to navigate through poverty) Kurdish migrant mothers and their families exert in their lives is also recognizing the strengths
low-income Kurdish families have. This creates the opportunity to build upon these strengths. Thus, it is critical to understand how much agency low-income Kurdish migrant families, especially women exert against structural forces and what needs to be done to increase its efficacy.

The semi-structured interviews chosen for this study complement this emphasis on human agency. In contrast to demographic studies and survey research which reduce individuals to a cluster of variables such as race, gender, class, or ethnicity, personal narrative methods and analyses offer insights from the narrators’ perspectives (Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008). Narrators position themselves within a particular social, political, and historical context, and their life stories reflect how their experiences shape and are shaped by that context. Thus, narrative methods recognize that individuals are in interaction with their sociocultural worlds – thus with structural factors that affect their life choices and life stories/experiences (Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008). Personal narrative methods and analyses also offer insight to how and to what extent -if any- individuals use agency within that particular context and time.

**Parental Ethnotheories**

Parental ethnotheories are used in analyzing/thinking about mothers’ beliefs around childhood, child education, and child labor. Parents’ understanding about the nature of children, the structure of development, and the meaning of behavior is largely shared by members of a cultural group or subgroup (Gaskins, 1996; Goodnow, 1996; Harkness & Super, 1996). These understandings are developed within a particular cultural place and time and are called “parents’ cultural belief systems” or “parental ethnotheories” based on the idea that cultural understandings that parents hold are organized into larger categories of mutually supportive beliefs (Harkness & Super, 1996). Understanding parental ethnotheories are important because
they relate in systematic ways to parental action such as childrearing practices and thus, influence children’s development.

Cultures are important in providing parents with particular theories not only about how children become functional members of their culture (Gaskins, 1996), but also about what roles they are assigned in the family and how and to what extent they should contribute to family life. Understanding these particular theories provides the basis for understanding parents’ cultural motivations that underlie the specifics of the way parents structure their children’s experiences and thus influence their development (Gaskins, 1996). Without such understanding, parents’ decisions about and actions toward their children are uninterpretable, misinterpreted, or superficial.

Although parental ethnotheories may have some universal dimensions, they are constructed within cultural belief systems and are often implicit (Harkness & Super, 1996). Harkness and Super suggest that when thinking about parental cultural belief systems, culture should not be considered as a third variable but rather serves as the main semiotic tool to organize both the conduct and reasoning of parents. Parents use both individual interpretations of specific situations and previously learned social and cultural directions in formulating their reasoning.

This study aims at exploring what kinds of parental ethnotheories low-income Kurdish mothers hold about child education and child work; what factors contribute to the formulation of these ethnotheories; how they get translated into action; and what factors facilitate or get in the way of this translation. Parental ethnotheories also fit in the ecosystems framework as parental beliefs are affected by other systems (e.g. culture, community) in the person’s environment and affect in turn other systems, mainly children.
All theories fall within the larger framework of ecosystems theory, where all three levels (micro, mezzo, and macro) are in constant interaction. The strengths perspective encompasses all three levels of the ecosystems framework as the study is interested both in mothers’ (micro) and their families’ (mezzo) strengths and resilience. Also although structural factors (macro level) are usually portrayed as restrictive, it is possible that some structural factors such as culture and religion, serve as protective factors for mothers and also their families in certain instances. Strengths perspective and agency also intersect since agency is a strength of both individuals and families. Agency also trespasses both micro and mezzo levels because the study is interested in both individual and family agency.

Gendered perspective is illustrated by including gender under “structure” in the macro level as gender and gender roles are culturally and politically constructed and have ramifications both on mezzo and micro levels. Finally, parental ethnotheories are within individuals (thus in the micro level) but are largely affected by structural forces (macro level), especially culture. They in turn have an impact (as portrayed by the circular arrow) on families, and especially children in the mezzo level.

**Significance of the Study**

Many families who migrated to low-income neighborhoods of Istanbul from the southeast of Turkey continue to live in dire poverty years after migration. Women are still socially excluded and children are at risk of being employed at the expense of their education to support their families financially. Very little research that aims at understanding their process of adaptation and their meaning-making of their experiences has been done with Kurdish low-income migrant women. Existing studies have focused mainly on consequences of displacement and struggles families face, which are very critical but leave out the various resilient strategies
women and their families have developed. This research project approaches the issue from a strengths perspective not to romanticize the situation of migrant women, but to understand which strengths to build upon. By identifying Kurdish women’s agency and resiliency in this context, the study challenges the dominant discourse of women as “passive victims of their circumstances” in the migration and displacement literatures.

This project also builds upon existing literature (e.g. Çağlayan et al., 2011; Çelik, 2005; Doğan & Yılmaz, 2011; Grabolle Çeliker, 2013; Şen, 2005; Yılmaz, 2006; 2008) that mainly focuses on internal displacement, with the exception of Grabolle Çeliker’s study, by addressing various gaps. The Kurdish migration to the cities has continued after the wave of internal displacement in the early and mid-1990s and should be included in the academic discussions to provide a holistic picture of Kurdish life experiences in non-Kurdish cities. The inclusion of both internal displacement and “voluntary” migration in the study helps identify the common struggles Kurdish women experience in the urban context and their resilience regardless of their migration status. Only a few of these studies focus on Kurdish women in particular (Çağlayan et al., 2011; Çelik, 2005; Şen, 2005) but only on internally displaced women, and with limited attention to women’s agency except Çağlayan et al.’s study in Istanbul. Thus, this study expands on this literature by including the impact of “voluntary” migration on Kurdish women and emphasizing Kurdish women’s agency and resilience in the urban context.

The study also explores Kurdish mothers’ beliefs about child education, child labor, and gender. The current literature on child labor identifies poverty as the sole reason for child labor and falls short in exploring other reasons why families may consider child labor as a viable option. In addition, the beliefs of Kurdish families on child labor and the processes they engage in during the decision-making are largely ignored in the literature. Urban child labor in Kurdish
families is also mostly studied within the context of internal displacement, overlooking more recent waves of “voluntary” migration to the city.

Current knowledge on Kurdish women in relation to gender ideologies mostly present Kurdish women as victims and rarely goes beyond common stereotypes such as honor killings and child marriages. The literature thus falls short in recognizing the agency of Kurdish women in relation to gender ideologies. Women’s perceptions on gender roles and how gender ideologies are reconstructed after migration not only affect women’s lives (e.g. disempowerment, social exclusion) but also how children’s trajectories (e.g. education, marriage, work) are shaped. Thus, understanding attitudes and beliefs about both child labor and gender ideologies allows for more culturally-relevant interventions that are grounded in real life experiences.

In short, this study makes various substantive contributions to the literature on Kurdish life experiences as well as the literature on migration/displacement, poverty, inner-city neighborhood, child labor, and gender. The study also has theoretical significance as it adds to discussions of ecosystems framework, structure and agency, family resiliency, and parental ethnotheories in a very different cultural context. These theories are intertwined to provide a more holistic understanding of low-income Kurdish migrant women and their families so that better suited interventions and policies can be implemented.

**Organization of the Book**

This introduction chapter laid out the foundation for this study. In this chapter, I described the conceptual framework used for the study and discussed the significance of this research study. The *Introduction* chapter is followed by Chapter 2, the *Literature Review*. This chapter contextualizes the study by providing a brief overview of social, political, and historical
contexts in which Kurdish population in Turkey is embedded. Chapter 2 also discusses the literature on Kurdish migration (voluntary and forced) and its consequences, including the impact of migration on Kurdish women, child labor, and perception of Kurdish migrants in the west of the country. Chapter 3, the Methods chapter details the research design of the study including data collection and analysis procedures, the trustworthiness of the study, and the field relations as a critical component of ethnographic research.

Chapter 4, Migration Tales: Women’s Migration and Adaptation to Istanbul, explores the different migration pathways that have led to Kurdish women’s arrival to Istanbul and includes more recent waves of migration to the Tarlabası community in Istanbul. It then describes the challenges Kurdish women encountered upon their arrival to Istanbul, highlighting women’s agency and resilience in coping with these challenges. Chapter 5, “The name says it all, it’s Tarlabası”: Life in an Inner-City Neighborhood after Migration, looks more closely at Kurdish women’s everyday lives in Tarlabası, an inner-city neighborhood of Istanbul. In this chapter, the advantages and disadvantages of living in this particular neighborhood are described, with an eye to their effects on women and their children.

Chapter 6, “When it came down to it...”: Working Children in Tarlabası, describes child labor in the community, including the types of jobs and the conditions of work. I discuss who made the decision to send children to work, how the workplace was chosen, women’s concerns about their children’s work and workplace, and what they like about their children’s work and workplace. Chapter 7, Should They Work or Should They Not?: Kurdish Mothers’ Beliefs and Attitudes about Child Labor, then takes a closer look into the arguments women in support of and against child labor advance in support of their attitudes toward child labor. In this chapter, the reasons why children are or are not sent to work and the child characteristics that are taken
into account in the decision to send children to work are explored.

Chapter 8, *Juggling the Traditional and the “Modern”: Gender and Marriage among Kurdish Women in Tarlabası*, explores the impact of gender and gender roles in Kurdish women’s lives. I explore marriage patterns of women in the community and the implications of being a daughter- and sister-in-law for women. I then describe the role division in the marital relationship and women’s perceptions of an “ideal” wife and husband. In my discussion of these issues as they relate to women’s lives, I underline the ways Kurdish women resist or perpetuate the patriarchal gender ideologies prevalent in the community.

Finally, Chapter 9, the *Conclusion* chapter, synthesizes the findings in relation to the conceptual framework proposed in the Introduction chapter and underlines Kurdish women’s agency and resilience in the face of challenges they encounter in different domains of their lives. It discusses the strengths and limitations of the study and lays out the implications for policy and future research.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter lays out the literature relevant to the research questions outlined in the Introduction. The first section provides a brief synopsis on Kurds in Turkey that is indispensable to put this study within its historical, sociopolitical, and cultural contexts. The synopsis is followed by the literature on “voluntary” migration and internal displacement of Kurds. Subsequently, the literature on the consequences of internal displacement for internally displaced Kurds in urban areas, the perception of Kurdish migrants in the west, and migration and Kurdish women are discussed. Finally, the literature on internal displacement and child labor is presented.

Kurds in Turkey

Kurds are a transnational and stateless ethnic group with their own language (Dixon & Ergin, 2010). They live mainly in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, with the largest percentage being in Turkey (Sirkeci, 2000). Kurds are the largest ethnic group in Turkey with a population of about 13.2 million, which is approximately 18 percent of the whole population in Turkey (KONDA, 2011). As of 2003, the majority of Kurds (68%) lived in the less developed east and southeast regions of Turkey and constituted the majority of the population living in the area (Koç, Hancioğlu, & Çavlin, 2008). In 2010, 18 percent of the Kurdish population lived in Istanbul where this study took place.

Ever since the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, Kurdish ethnicity has been treated with caution, if not outright suspicion. The Turkish government started its assimilationist practices shortly after the Republic’s foundation to create an indestructible nation-state with a monolithic Turkish identity (Bird, 2004). Kurds were the most obvious target for this
assimilationist perspective as they are the largest minority group. Most Kurds live primarily in the southeast and east of Turkey (Aker, Çelik, Kurban, Unalan, & Yükseker, 2005). These two regions have experienced continual political, socio-economic, and cultural problems and discrimination (Aker et al., 2005). On March 3rd, 1924, all Kurdish schools, associations, publications, religious organizations, as well as Kurdish language and other cultural symbols were banned (Kurdish people had the right to their language, culture, and organizations under the rule of the Ottoman Empire) (Bird, 2004).

Life for Kurdish people improved slightly in the 1950s. A limited amount of cultural expression was allowed, but political parties representing Kurdish citizens continued to be outlawed, and the Southeast remained mired in poverty. The Turkish government did little to develop the area (Bird, 2004). Kurds struggled with unbalanced and unjust land distribution, tribal structure, stagnant economy, insufficient investment in economy, health care, education, and military presence of the state in the area (Aker et al., 2005), problems that still remain to be resolved. The use of Kurdish language in public was banned constitutionally from 1982 to 1991, and continued to be restricted in practice until very recently (Him & Gündüz Hoşgör, 2011). In 2004, Turkey allowed broadcasting in Kurdish (a half-hour television program in Kurdish) on Turkish Radio and Television (TRT), the national public broadcaster in the country, partly due to European Union pressures (Dixon & Ergin, 2010). In 2009, TRT finally launched a channel broadcasting 24-hour in Kurdish (Grabolle Çeliker, 2013).

Significant differences continue to exist between Kurdish and non-Kurdish citizens of Turkey. In addition to residing mostly in socio-economically more deprived eastern and southeastern regions of Turkey, Kurdish citizens also have lower levels of educational attainment, lower levels of income, and larger households (6.1 people in Kurdish households
versus 4.3 people in Turkish households) compared to the rest of the society (Ağirdir, 2008; Kaya, 2011; Sirkeci, 2000). A recent research conducted by KONDA (2011) with a nationally representative sample from across Turkey revealed that the percentage of illiteracy among Kurds was 17.2 percent compared to 4.1 percent among Turks. Kurdish citizens of Turkey also had lower percentages of high school (18.4%) and college (7.3%) graduation rates compared to the Turkish population in the country (27.3 and 7.3 respectively). Şahin and Gülmez (2000) argue that the long-term state practices of suppressing Kurdish cultural identity, and the martial law imposed upon the region (after the PKK attacks) not only disrupted Kurdish children’s education in the region, but it also causes the Kurds to be suspicious of the Turkish educational system.

Significant differences exist between the Kurdish and the Turkish populations in terms of income. More Kurdish residents reside in socio-economically less developed east and southeast regions of Turkey and live in poorer living conditions (Koç, Hancıoğlu, & Çavlin, 2008; Sirkeci, 2000). The findings from the report by KONDA (2011) underscore the interaction between ethnicity and socioeconomic class. According to the report, 17 percent of the Kurdish population with a monthly household income of 300 Turkish Liras ($166) or less compared to only 4.8 percent of the Turkish population. Thirty-four percent lived with a monthly household income of 301 to 700 Turkish Liras [TL] (167$ to 389$), and 26 percent with a monthly household income of 701 to 1200 TL (390$ to 667$) compared to 28 and 34 percent of the Turkish population respectively. Only about 22 percent of the Kurdish population had a household income higher than 1201 TL as opposed to 33 percent of the Turkish population.
“Voluntary” Rural to Urban Migration of Kurds

The rural migration to urban areas, including seasonal migration, from all regions of Turkey has always been common, gradually accelerating with increasing industrialization and introduction of agricultural machinery (Hemmasi & Prorok, 2002). The urban population increased from 29 percent in 1955 (Erman, 2001) to 70 percent in 2007 (TUIK, 2007). According to Erman (2001), Turkey has been transformed since the 1950s due to the mass migration from the countryside from the less developed eastern Turkey to large and developed cities in the west of the country. Apart from the internal displacement in the 1990s, which will be discussed in the next section, Saraçoğlu (2011) contrasts the Kurdish “voluntary” migration in the 60s and 70s with that since the 1980s. Saraçoğlu argues that the former wave of migration took place in all underdeveloped regions of Turkey as a result of emerging opportunities in the cities as a result of the industrialization. The Kurdish migration after the 1980s on the other hand, was not necessarily motivated by the industrialization of the western cities but rather by plummeting rates of unemployment and worsening standards of living in Eastern Turkey due to neoliberal policies.

Migration has typically taken the form of a chain migration where many families from the same village or region settled in the same neighborhood and have been open to changes that the urban life entails to varying degrees (Erman, 2001). Migrants from rural areas have always been perceived as non-civilized invaders of the urban space, unwilling to adapt to urban life (Grabolle Çeliker, 2013). Yet, Grabolle Çeliker argues, this attitude shifts the attention away from structural inequalities, such as the uneven distribution of national resources and financial investments towards the threat to elitist urban style. In the case of Kurds, the negative connotation attached to their ethnic identity contributes further to their discrimination in the
A Closer Look into Internal Displacement in Turkey

Internal displacement in the context of Turkey is very much embedded in the historical, political, ethnic, and social context of the country and its eastern and southeastern regions that are predominantly populated by people of Kurdish ethnicity (Aker et al., 2005). The armed conflict and the internal displacement have mainly affected the Kurdish population, the largest ethnic group in Turkey with a population of about 11.5 million (about 15% of the whole population in Turkey) (Koç, Hancioğlu, & Çavlin, 2008).

Internal displacement occurred due to an ongoing armed ethnic conflict that started between Kurdish guerillas (PKK) and the Turkish military forces in Southeast Turkey in 1984 as a reaction to assimilationist practices of Turkish government against Kurds that were in place since the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 (Bird, 2004). The villagers in the region were caught in between two forces pressuring them to fight on their side or to cooperate with them (Bird, 2004). As portrayed by Bird, the villagers found themselves in a double-bind. If they refused to cooperate with the PKK, they suffered brutal reprisals (e.g. being beaten, massacred, or kidnapped). But if they cooperated, they suffered equally horrific consequences as Turkish military forces would beat, arrest, or torture those who cooperated.

During the height of the conflict between the Turkish military and the PKK militants in the 1990s, more than 900 villages and 2,500 hamlets were evacuated by either the security forces or the PKK in the rural areas of the eastern and south-eastern provinces (Yükseker, 2006). Internal displacement took place in the form of a series of deliberate actions such as depopulation and/or burning down of villages for security reasons or desertion of villages by their inhabitants due to security and financial constraints caused by the armed conflict (Yılmaz,
Yükseker states that official figures citing the State of Emergency Governorship (Olağanüstü Hal Bölge Valiliği), which ruled the region between 1987 and 2002, claim that about 350,000 villagers were evicted from their homes, whereas NGOs and international human rights organizations put the figure of internally-displaced persons (IDPs) as high as 3 million. A recent report estimates the number to be around one million (Kurban et al., 2007).

The majority of people who migrated from their villages as a result of forced migration moved to provincial centers in the region (mostly Diyarbakır and Van), to coastal cities in the south (Mersin, Adana and Antalya) where income earning opportunities as agricultural laborers or tourism workers exist, and to the major metropolitan centers of Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir (Bird, 2004; Yılmaz, 2003; Yükseker, 2006). According to a report prepared by Barut (2002; cited in Kurban et al., 2007) for Göç-Der, an NGO advocating on the problems of IDPs, the level of education of the internally displaced people is very low (61% of women and 28.5% of men are illiterate); more than 90 percent have no social security; and of the people who were employed at the time of the survey, 83 percent worked in temporary jobs or worked intermittently.

While internal displacement shares some characteristics with voluntary economic migration, its causes and consequences are significantly different (Aker et al., 2005).

**Consequences of Internal Displacement for IDPs in Urban Areas**

Internal displacement posed a new set of challenges and concerns for the displaced people as well as the receiving communities and continues to challenge IDPs and their communities significantly even today, more than a decade after their displacement. Internal displacement has created layers of social and economic problems for all its bearers, but
especially those in the urban areas. The metropolitan Diyarbakır, the biggest city in the southeast region, doubled its population as a result of the displacement (Ayata & Yükseker, 2005). Ayata and Yükseker’ study showed that the city’s infrastructure collapsed due to the rapid and large flux of newcomers. Shantytowns with no legal permit or inspection multiplied to meet housing needs, and schools and hospitals fell short in providing services. Similar problems arose in Hakkari, another city in the region, when IDPs moved from hamlets or small villages to larger centers of the city (Aker, 2007). The resources of the municipality fell short in meeting the needs of the newcomers.

The receiving communities, especially in areas outside the east or southeast Turkey have not always been welcoming, which has contributed further to the social exclusion of this population. Social exclusion refers to situations in which some citizens cannot benefit from economic, political, social, and cultural activities or services whereas most citizens can (Yükseker, 2006). Yükseker pointed out that IDPs experienced discrimination in housing, employment, and education because of their Kurdish and rural identities. IDPs also indicated that some homeowners did not want to rent their apartments to Kurdish families, a finding also reported by Çelik (2005). Kurdish families were discriminated against when they looked for employment outside their network of regional affiliations. Finally, some families also reported that teachers treated their children roughly because of their Kurdish identity. More research is needed to understand the extent and nature of discrimination families experience in their new context.

Internally displaced families who migrated to big cities live in dire conditions. Not equipped with the skills and education necessary to find jobs in the urban context and unable to afford decent housing, most internally displaced Kurds who moved to big cities in the west
ended up in shantytowns in the periphery of the city or in low-income inner-city neighborhoods (Ayata & Yükseker, 2005; Yılmaz, 2008). They quickly became the new urban underclass in the urban context (Ayata & Yükseker, 2005). Studies conducted in Istanbul suggest strong links between urban poverty and forced migration. In her study of the neighborhood of Tarlabası, Yılmaz (2006; 2008) states that its mostly Kurdish inhabitants seek to use the centrality of the neighborhood as an asset in their survival strategies. In addition to the low rent level, Tarlabası provides diverse employment opportunities due to its proximity to the Central Business Area and the cultural and entertainment centers of attraction. However, a closer look at the employment structure reveals that having a job does not suffice to prevent social exclusion (Yılmaz, 2004; 2007). The most important aspect regarding the employment structure of Tarlabası is that the access to the formal labor market is extremely limited and only access to precarious, irregular, temporary jobs in the informal sector without social security and with low wages is available (Yılmaz, 2008). Yılmaz indicates that the types of businesses people in the area own tend to cluster around self-owned commercial (groceries, coffee-houses, restaurants, repair-works, etc.) or manufacturing (textile, timber, metal, paper workshops employing mostly fewer than 10 persons) activities. People who do not own their own business work either in the food-drink/entertainment sector (as waiters, day or night guards, dishwashers, cleaners etc.) or in the above-mentioned sectors as an employee.

Another important implication of internal displacement directly related to quality of employment and income is access to health care. As Yılmaz (2006; 2008) points out in her case study of Tarlabası, due to the fact that employment is limited to informal sector and that the access to the formal labor market remains exceptional, the majority of the households are not covered by social insurance. This contributes to a lack of access to proper health care in the case
of simple diseases. However, in case of serious diseases or accidents, the Green Card—a card delivered after a means-test and an indicator of extreme poverty—grants access to free medical care in public health institutions (Yılmaz, 2006; 2008). No data is available on the exact number of Green Card holders in Tarlabası, but, based on her interviews with the officials of the Mutual Aid and Social Solidarity Fund in Beyoğlu District, Yılmaz (2006) suggests that Green Card holders made up a significant part of the neighborhood’s population in that area. Thus, the Green Card is critical for poor households, especially since bad living and working conditions make the inhabitants of Tarlabası more prone to serious illnesses.

Internally displaced people also experience psychological problems because of the pressure they experienced or other negative events they witnessed before the migration, which are aggravated further by the struggles of adaptation to city life after migration (Aker, 2007). However, Aker found that IDPs were reluctant to seek help for their emotional problems both because it would label the person as insane in the community and because of the language barrier. Aker also found that emotional problems were mostly exhibited through somatization and dissociative reactions.

**Perceptions towards Kurds in Host Western Cities**

The relationships between Kurds and Turks have mainly developed in an environment shaped by state bureaucracy before 1980 and the armed conflict after 1980, and resulted in mistrust and prejudice towards each other (Aktan, 2012).

The receiving communities, especially in areas outside the east or southeast of Turkey, have not always been welcoming, which has contributed further to the social exclusion of this population. Social exclusion refers to situations in which some citizens cannot benefit from economic, political, social, and cultural activities or services whereas most citizens can
In Istanbul and elsewhere, Kurdish people in these areas experienced discrimination in housing, employment, and education because of their Kurdish and rural identities (Yükseker, 2006). The discrimination coupled with low levels of income led many Kurdish people who migrated to the west of Turkey to form their own communities in low-income neighborhoods. This social exclusion further limited a potential integration/interaction between Turks and Kurds (Aktan, 2012). Aktan argues that, within a short period of time, the cities in the west became a replicate of the larger country sociologically with Kurdish people living in the inner-city neighborhoods or outskirts and Turkish residents living in relatively better-off parts of the city.

The armed attacks Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) started in the region in 1984 against Turkish government’s assimilationist practices instigated various pejorative stereotypical markers associated with “Kurd”, including ignorance, invasion and separatism (Çağlayan et al., 2011; Saraçoğlu, 2011). Recent research documents the tense relationship between Kurds and Turks, underlying the negative attitudes towards Kurds. According to KONDA’s (2011) recently published report, 58 percent of Turks do not want a daughter-in-law or spouse of Kurdish ethnicity, 53.5 percent do not want a business partner of Kurdish ethnicity, and 47.4 percent of Turks do not want to have Kurdish neighbors. On the other hand, Kurds’ reluctance to establish close ties with Turks is on a much smaller scale. 26.4 percent of Kurds do not want to have a Turkish daughter-in-law or spouse, 24.8 percent do not want to partner with a Turk for business, and 22.1 percent do not want their neighbors to be Turkish.

Yükseker pointed out that IDPs experienced discrimination in housing, employment, and education because of their Kurdish and rural identities. Saraçoğlu (2011) pointed to the negative ethnicization of Kurdish migrants by middle-class residents of Izmir, one of the biggest cities of
Turkey on the Aegean coast. A series of pejorative stereotypes and labels were used by Izmir residents to characterize Kurdish migrants in the urban space. “Ignorant” was the most common word to describe Kurds. This word was used to imply that Kurds were undereducated, which was the reason for their poverty, unemployment, and other social problems. “Ignorant” was also used to allude to Kurds ‘inability’ to comply with the basic rules of ‘good manners’ and etiquette in the city. Kurds were also perceived as “benefit scroungers” who stole electricity and water from the municipality in the slums and didn’t pay taxes to the state because they worked in the informal industry. In other words, Kurds were constructed not as the urban poor suffering from poverty and exclusion, but as people who made their living by unfair benefits. As “disrupters of urban life”, neighborhoods where Kurdish migrants lived were identified as centers of crime and violence. Kurds’ higher birth rates were seen as part of a Kurdification plan of the city, and hence Kurds were perceived as “invaders”. Finally, Saraçoğlu observed that Kurds who were once differentiated from the PKK had become increasingly associated with it and identified as a “separatist”.

Migration and Kurdish Women

The limited literature on migration and Kurdish women mainly focuses on internal displacement. Studies that looked at the impact of internal displacement on women have found social exclusion to be very significant for first-generation Kurdish displaced mothers as they do not have primary school education, are not fully fluent in Turkish, and are not allowed to work outside home (Çağlayan et al., 2011; Çelik, 2005; Şen, 2005). Thus, their contact with the rest of the society in the big city is very limited. In a study conducted in one of the cities in the southeast, internally displaced women reported that they lived a closeted life and saw themselves as “prisoners” (Aker, 2007, p.286). Women also reported that the fact that they were
not fluent in Turkish was preventing them from using public services. Kurdish women’s social exclusion also limits the extent to which their voices and perspectives are heard.

Very few studies have been undertaken in Turkey on the impact of internal displacement specifically on women (e.g. Çağlayan et al., 2011; Çelik, 2005; Şen, 2005) even though the literature suggests that internal displacement can affect women and men differently as they may have gender specific needs and/or develop different reactions as well as ways to cope with displacement (Benjamin & Fancy, 1998; Gururaja, 2000; Erdem, Özevin, & Özselçuk, 2003). For instance, a study conducted in Istanbul by TESEV suggests that internal displacement increased the likelihood of developing psychopathology. However, internally displaced women were more likely to have difficulty in expressing the emotional distress stemming from displacement or events prior to displacement and therefore to somaticize their stress (Aker, 2007).

Male unemployment pushed women to become part of the labor force in some internally displaced families (Yükseker, 2006) although this goes against the traditional gender roles these families are more likely to prescribe to and thus is not very frequent (Yılmaz, 2008). Cultural values around gender are more strictly imposed in Kurdish families, and thus it is not desirable for married women to work outside the house (Akşit, Karancı, & Gündüz Hoşgör, 2001; Ilik & Türkmen, 1994; Yılmaz, 2007). Women are expected to stay home and take care of young children and house chores. The shift in gender roles, the stress of unemployment, and new social and cultural pressures can increase men’s frustration and result in increased incidence of domestic violence (Benjamin & Fancy, 1998; Şen, 2005).

Çelik (2005) examined how forced migration to Istanbul contributed to problems of migrant Kurdish women in their everyday lives both as women and Kurds. Çelik found that the
new environment in Istanbul, which usually was a small and crowded city apartment limited the roles that women used to play back home in their rural environment such as being involved in agriculture, husbandry, and preparing dairy products for household usage and sale. Instead, women became confined to their tiny apartment in the city. Çelik also found that life in the urban context became particularly unbearable for women when they settled in neighborhoods where they had nobody to talk to and their children were labeled or could not find anybody to play with. Çelik claims that women’s attachment to their place of origin and their lifestyle back home makes it particularly hard for women to adapt to the city life. However, the article portrayed mostly problems experienced as families such as poverty, difficulty in registering children to school, housing discrimination etc. and fell short in identifying the strengths and coping strategies of families and women in particular.

One of the most comprehensive studies on internally displaced women was undertaken by Şen (2005) in two neighborhoods of Diyarbakır, the biggest city in the southeast region. Şen interviewed 30 displaced Kurdish women to inquire into the dynamics of displaced households in the new urban context. As most displaced families, women in this study also suffered from significant levels of poverty. Particularly adult women in the study perceived the city as a hostile environment and an “alien” lifestyle and lacked social and kinship networks. The insufficiency of income affected the amount of food available to adult women and oldest daughters in the family as well women’s access to health care. Both younger and older women were subjected to more violence inflicted by male members of the family. Employment of unmarried young women in the family was used by some families as a strategy against poverty. However, adult females –mothers and other elderly female kin living in the household- did not welcome this practice. Not only did they complain that female employment was contrary to
their traditional values and turned young females into a source of conflict in the family because of their increased self-assertiveness but they were also concerned the employment outside the house would jeopardize the “marriageability” of their daughters and hurt the family’s honor because of potential gossip. Adult women reported being disrespected and humiliated by their husbands and parents-in-law but most importantly by their daughters, which they found unbearable. Thus, the employment of younger females in the family threatened the status of both males and older females in the family.

While these findings are important contributions to the field, Şen only introduced two coping strategies families used to cope with challenges they faced, namely female employment and decreased consumption of food by mothers and eldest daughters to make food available to other members of the family. These coping strategies are important, but mainly center around issues families face. It is important to conduct further research to see what other particular challenges women experience as individuals (e.g. being humiliated by members of the family) and what strategies they use to cope with these challenges. It is also important to see if women’s expression of challenges and coping strategies are mainly centered on family, or whether individual needs, challenges, and strengths are also considered and expressed. In other words, further research is needed to show whether women define themselves mainly in relation to their family (e.g. mother, wife, and daughter-in-law) or whether independent identities are also considered by women. Finally, Şen’s research was undertaken with internally displaced Kurds who moved to a city in the southeast region that is predominantly Kurdish. It is possible that IDPs who moved to other provinces or cities where Kurds are a minority, such as Istanbul, may be experiencing additional problems such as discriminatory practices, because of their ethnic identity.
Çağlayan et al. (2011) recently published a comprehensive qualitative study that explored internally displaced Kurdish women’s and their daughters’ experiences in different neighborhoods of Istanbul. Through interviews with 25 women and young girls and focus groups, Çağlayan et al. (2011) documented the internal displacement experiences and early stages of the adaptation processes of Kurdish women and young girls as well as the impact of gender ideologies on their lives in the city. The study also touched upon education for girls in the city; women’s and girls’ work outside the house, discrimination in school and workplace, and feelings about going back to their home villages. Women and girls in the study detailed the trauma associated with witnessing the armed conflict, losing family members and relatives, separating from family and their hometown. Participants also reported the significant levels of poverty they experienced in the city as opposed to their hometown where they had a good financial situation. Çağlayan et al. caution that while participants’ perception of good financial situation may reflect their real socioeconomic status, it is also possible that participants are likely to perceive it as such in comparison to their current status in the city as well as the subsistence agriculture that allowed them to get by. Participants also reported that they did not apply to nor receive any government assistance in the city.

Çağlayan et al.’s (2011) findings replicated Çelik’s (2005) and Şen’s (2005) findings on poverty and on women’s experiences of solitude and limited mobility due to loss of existing social networks of the hometown, as well as lack of fluency in Turkish. Women had to rely on their husbands and children who spoke Turkish. Women gradually became more interactive with the outside world as they learned Turkish and familiarized themselves with their surroundings. They also became more independent in a couple of years after they came to Istanbul in terms of running errands. Going to work, attending college, or participating in the
Kurdish political party activities were ways for participants to get outside the neighborhood. Çağlayan et al. identified the intra-family solidarity and women’s strength to stand up as the mother of the family in order to keep the family together as the main strategies used against the challenges encountered in the city. Women also became responsible of the family budget and the majority of working children gave their income to their mother thinking she would better take care of household needs. The authors highlighted women’s capacity to cope despite their limited Turkish fluency and literacy skills, and lack of familiarity with the city. Çağlayan et al.’s (2011) study definitely filled an important gap in the literature by focusing on internally displaced women’s and girls’ experiences with the displacement, adaptation, life in Istanbul. However, even though the study states that it seeks to identify and emphasize women’s agency, the analysis of women’s agency is limited and at times not supported by the data. Moreover, the fact that the study only focuses on internally displaced women and girls limits the ability to understand the experiences of Kurdish women who arrived to Istanbul for other reasons, yet settled in the same neighborhoods.

**Internal Displacement and Child Labor**

Internal displacement to big cities is directly related to the well-being of migrant children. Official data suggests that urban poverty has been on the rise since the 1990s, which has been tied in the literature to the flow of internal migration around that time (Müderrisoğlu, 2006; Şen, 2005; Yıldız, 2007). Families who came as a result of forced migration lacked resources, education, and skills to find employment in big cities and quickly became the poorest of the urban poor resorting to child labor as a survival strategy for the family (Altuntaş, 2003; 2006; Karatay, 2000; Yükseker, 2006).

One of the reasons child labor is concerning is its impact on children’s education.
Müderrisoğlu (2006) states that many students from poor families are asked to drop out by the time they reach the age of 13 or 14 to join the workforce and miss the last years of primary education to support their families. Other studies conducted in Turkey also show that working children fall short in the education aspect of their lives. In their study with 250 children working on the street, Ilik and Türkmen (1994) found that only 51.2 percent continued school. Despite the fact that elementary school education was mandatory (five years in Turkey), of those who were not attending school 31.4 percent did not finish elementary school and 6.61 percent never attended school. The findings from the study Karatay (2000) conducted after mandatory education had been extended to eight years were not any more promising. Of 905 children working on the street, 29 percent dropped out from school at some point, 17 percent never went to school.

Yılmaz (2006) suggests that the high level of school drop-out for children at the age of compulsory primary education (ages 6-13) is a result of two principal reasons: 1. Many households cannot renounce the income obtained by child labor; and 2. Despite the fact that public primary schools are in principle free, the poorest households cannot afford the registration fees (which, although legally forbidden, are widespread in practice) and school supplies. Although the rate of going to school is significantly higher for children in Tarlabaşı (78%) compared to that of their mothers (14%) and their fathers (66%) when they were at school age, their likelihood of enrolling to high school is very low considering the fact they are seen as resources for additional income to the family (Yılmaz, 2004).

For families from rural areas of Turkey, childhood is not a period that is solely devoted to play and education, and children start working at an early age to contribute to family farm work (Karatay, 2000). Working in the family farm is perceived as a normal part of a child’s
development (Bakırcı, 2002). Thus, when families migrate to cities, parents don’t find it out of the norm to have their children work in various industries to contribute to family income especially given that they struggle to find a job themselves (Bakırcı, 2002; Yılmaz, 2007).

However, although the role that various factors such as gender, age, parental education level play in the occurrence of child labor have been investigated, limited information is available on parental beliefs of internally displaced as well as migrant families around children’s roles in the family, child education, and child work.

The facts that parents themselves are not highly educated (e.g. Akşit et al., 2001; Karatay, 2000; Yılmaz, 2004) and that school attendance of working children does not look encouraging suggest that families may not be valuing education. Especially for girls, traditional and religious values in Turkey result in the expectation that they should be good wives and mothers and thus do not need to be educated (Goncu, Ozer, & Ahioglu, 2009).

Only three studies have reported on parental beliefs around education with this population. In their study in three big cities, Akşit et al. (2001) found that the majority of parents (64% in Diyarbakır and 66% in Istanbul) believed that education would provide their children with the chance to become "decent, educated adults” (p.73). Despite their low levels of education, parents still valued education, believing it would enable their children to find jobs and have an acceptable position in society. Based on the data collected by TESEV through interviews with 50 internally displaced families, Yükseker (2006) also reported that most families valued education and had in fact left some of their children with their relatives back home so that they could finish elementary school. Finally Çağlayan et al. (2011) found that even though families understood the importance of higher education for their children, they were not necessarily promoting it, especially for their daughters. Girls and young women in their study
stated that their families’ main expectation was for them to work.

More research needs to be conducted in not only understanding parental attitudes towards education but also towards childhood and child work as they are critical in decisions around child labor. Understanding how parents approach these issues can facilitate better interventions to prevent child labor and provide more effective support to the families.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the historical and sociopolitical background of Kurds as an ethnic group in Turkey. This overview not only shows how Kurds are uniquely positioned in the sociopolitical and historical fabric of Turkey, but portrays the profound affect that position has had on their lives as well. I also presented the literature relevant to the research questions that the study aims to explore. Finally, while discussing the findings on issues of migration, gender, and child labor, I highlighted gaps in the literature that this study specifically addresses.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

My study aims at understanding how low-income Kurdish migrant women reconstructed their lives in an inner-city neighborhood of Istanbul after they migrated (or were displaced) from more rural southeast regions of Turkey. The study also looked at women’s life experiences before their migration as previous life experiences and attitudes are critical in shaping the person and their experiences in a new context.

My research interest in this population grew out of my voluntary work when I was a college student at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul, Turkey. I volunteered as a mentor for a Big Brothers/Big Sisters project that focused on at-risk children of Kurdish families that were internally displaced or migrated from the southeast of Turkey. The primary concern of the project was to provide emotional and academic support children who were at risk of dropping out of school to work on the street or in the informal sector to support their families financially. Over the course of the four years I spent with a little Kurdish girl, I witnessed the struggles Kurdish families in her community endured in the urban context after their migration.

Initially, the study I envisioned to conduct had a narrower focus, child labor. I wanted to understand the mechanisms (e.g. beliefs, attitudes, poverty) that laid behind families’ decisions to send their children to work. With that purpose in mind, I designed a qualitative pilot research in order to gain insight into the various dynamics that lead parents to make the decision to send their children to work in expense of education. As it would be inappropriate to start directly with questions on child labor, I organized my questions in a temporal framework starting with parents’ lives before migration followed by their experiences after the migration. Then, I inquired into their beliefs around childhood, child education, and child labor, and concluded
with their aspirations for their children and families. I conducted my exploratory pilot study during the summer of 2008 in Istanbul to explore parents’ experiences and perspectives on child labor and to lay the basis for my dissertation. The stories women kindly shared with me during the pilot study shifted the focus of the dissertation research to women’s life experiences before and after migration.

In this chapter, I discuss the various components of the methods I used in my research. I first describe the methodological approach I adopted for my research, followed by the paradigm used in the study. Next, I describe the study setting and my participants including the recruitment process. The data collection and analysis procedures along with the trustworthiness of the study are then explained. The chapter concludes with a detailed discussion of field relations.

**Methodological Approach**

In this study, ethnographic modes of inquiry were used to explore my participants’ experiences and meaning making around migration, poverty, childhood, and gender. Different from “objective” statistical knowledge, qualitative methodologies are particularly useful in understanding the experiences of low-income populations as they move beyond notions of the poor as having only partial, incomplete and idiosyncratic knowledge, if any (Krumer-Nevo, 2005). Krumer-Nevo argues qualitative methodologies privilege the valuable life knowledge of low-income individuals, which can provide a full contextual picture of the actual realities of life in poverty. Also, ethnographic approaches are particularly well suited for the study of both individual and family resilience because narrative methods provide opportunities for identifying protective factors otherwise not readily observable by tapping into people’s subjective experiences and their meaning making of these experiences (Waller, 2001).
Ethnographic methods are oriented to the study of meaning and pay particular attention to the fact that meaning is structured by culture that encapsulates collectively shared and transmitted symbols, understandings, and ways of being (Miller, Hengst, & Wang, 2003). Ethnographic inquiry involves taking up a rigorous research endeavor that is characterized by repeated and varied observations and data collection; detailed recordings of, and reactions to such observations –also known as field notes, and a continuous interpretation and reinterpretation of the data (Miller et al., 2003).

There are four important characteristics of ethnographic methods that were heavily relied upon in this study. The first important characteristic is the sustained and engaged nature of data collection. In ethnographic work, it is essential to familiarize oneself with the participants’ community including “the physical and institutional settings in which they live, the daily routines that they and their companions follow, the beliefs that guide their actions, and the linguistic and other semiotic systems that mediate all of these contexts and activities” (Miller et al., 2003, p.223) in order to penetrate participants’ meaning systems. Through such contact, I hoped to become deeply engaged in the lives, practices, celebrations, and struggles of my participants and thus to be in a unique position to speak on behalf of my participants and identify venues for interventions at multiple levels to support them.

Another important characteristic is the microscopic and holistic nature of data collection and analysis. Focusing on the details of particular participants and practices helped me to capture unanticipated nuances and variations of human interaction and meaning-making (Miller et al., 2003). However, it is not possible to make sense of the patterns and variations without understanding the multiple embedded contexts in which they take place. Thus, it is necessary not only to examine actions and meanings microscopically but also to contextualize them in a
more holistic sense to successfully describe an event as it is understood by its actors. For that matter, this study provides a thick description of historical, political, and physical contexts in which participants formulate their meaning-making.

It is also important to keep in mind that ethnographic inquiry is a dynamic process that necessitates generative and self-corrective methodologies (Miller et al., 2003). One needs to be flexible from the beginning, prepared to revise or discard initial research questions and adjust data collection procedures as they enter the field. My data collection process required my methodologies to be both generative and self-corrective. For instance, I initially targeted internally displaced women with school-aged children. However, once I was in the field, I realized there were other patterns of migration that brought Kurdish women to Tarlabası. While some mothers came directly to Istanbul because of internal displacement, other mothers first moved to other places before coming to Istanbul. Also, some mothers came as a result of indirect consequences of the armed conflict such as unemployment, concerns about safety, or to join their husbands who already were working in Istanbul. Thus, amendments were made to the IRB to include Kurdish mothers with different migration patterns, and interview questions about migration were revised accordingly. Similarly, some mothers who volunteered to participate in the study did not have school-aged children (their children were younger). Therefore, IRB inclusion criteria were revised and mothers with children at all ages were included in the study. The interview protocol with these mothers was also revised and questions about school and teachers were skipped when mothers with younger kids were interviewed. I also added questions to the marriage section of the interview protocol. For instance, I added a question about what was the most difficult to get used to when they married their husband through arranged marriage. I also asked more closely about religious and civil marriage as I realized that
civil marriage was done much later than the religious one and in some cases not done at all.

Finally, ethnographic methods also carry a multicultural perspective even when the focus of the research is not comparison between two different cultures. In trying to understand the local meanings, ethnographers become aware or unconsciously compare their own-deeply taken-for-granted, culturally saturated understandings with those of the participants (Miller et al., 2003). However, it is important not to impose one’s own cultural understandings in interpreting those of the participants—a challenge never fully met but minimized through techniques such as member checking or peer debriefing (please refer to the section on data quality for further detail).

Paradigm

This study uses a constructivist paradigm. In this paradigm, the reality is a multiple set of constructed realities and these constructions are mental, made by humans in their minds (Lincoln & Guba, 2003). According to the constructivist paradigm, people’s understanding of the world is based on what they say and how they talk about the world. The preconceived categories in their minds affect their understanding of the world and these understandings influence their choices—which in turn may modify their world and necessitate revisiting previous understandings (Lincoln & Guba, 2003). It is that subjective knowledge and meaning-making by human agents that this study is interested in. This study does not assume that migration or adaptation processes have a fixed meaning or that they mean the same to all the participants in the study—an assumption that positivist paradigm would make. Instead it seeks to give women their voice to describe their own experiences with migration and adaptation processes. Also, I make the assumption that the environment and circumstances in which my participants and their families operate consist of a variety of other understandings (e.g. how
non-Kurdish people perceive them in the city and the ramifications of these perceptions) and my participants try to make sense of their own world, a world that is constructed both for them and by them. I believe that this has become observable as my participants shared with me different obstacles they are exposed to and how they adjust themselves based on how other people make meaning of them. Finally, in parallel with the constructivist paradigm, the aim of my study is to understand and explore my participants’ experiences and not to change or challenge their perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 2003).

**Study Setting**

The study was conducted in the Tarlabası neighborhood of Istanbul. Situated in the northwestern part of Turkey, Istanbul is the largest metropolitan city of the country, constituting 18 percent of the overall population of Turkey (TUIK, 2011). Renowned as the economic, cultural, and industrial center of the country, Istanbul has received large numbers of rural migrants from all over the country since the 1950s (Ozus, Turk, & Dokmeci, 2011; Sakızhoğlu, 2007). The population that was around one and a half million in 1955 (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, 2008) reached 13,624,240 in 2011 (TUIK, 2011) mainly due to internal migration and higher rates of population growth among the new migrants (Keyder, 2005).

Juxtaposed to one of the main cultural and commercial centers of Istanbul, Tarlabası is one of the neighborhoods that have received a large influx of migrants due to its close proximity to many formal and informal employment opportunities, and its affordable housing (Sakızhoğlu, 2007). Tarlabası is a densely populated neighborhood with a maze of narrow streets and crumbling Ottoman-era houses built on a hill. Most of the houses in the neighborhood date back to 19th and 20th centuries with high historical and architectural value (Ünlü, Alkışer, & Edgü, 2000). Tarlabası became a residential neighborhood in mid-19th
century, mainly for Ottoman Empire’s non-Muslim citizens from middle and working classes, including Greeks, Armenians, and Levantines (Tonbul, 2011; Yılmaz, 2006). After the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the demographic composition of the neighborhood started to change around the Second World War, with a series of events targeting non-Muslims such as the implementation of the Wealth Tax in 1942 (non-Muslim minorities were required to pay very high taxes for their properties), followed by Istanbul Riots in 1955 (also known as Events of September 6-7, and Istanbul Pogrom) attacking mainly the Greek minority in Istanbul, and finally the deportation of people with Greek nationality in 1964 (Tonbul, 2011; Yılmaz, 2006). During the 1950s and 60s, while some non-Muslim residents of Tarlabası sold their properties for very low prices, others simply deserted their houses as they left the neighborhood (Tonbul, 2011; Yılmaz, 2006).

Consequently, the non-Muslim residents of Tarlabası were gradually replaced by rural migrants from Anatolia. During the earlier waves of the rural to urban migration, mainly people from the Black Sea and Marmara regions settled in the neighborhood, followed by migrants from Central and Eastern Anatolia between 1960 and 1980. In the 1980s, a migrant group of primarily Kurdish ethnicity arrived from Southeastern and to some extent Eastern Anatolia (Yılmaz, 2008).

It is during the 1980s, when Beyoğlu lost its lure as a commercial and cultural center for a period of time, that the slumization and marginalization of Tarlabası accelerated (Tonbul, 2011; Yılmaz, 2006). The widening of Tarlabası Avenue separating Tarlabası and Beyoğlu further segregated the neighborhood from the rest of the society. While Beyoğlu was able to recuperate from its fall as one of the most popular cultural, commercial, and entertainment centers of Istanbul due to extensive investments for its revival, Tarlabası quickly became
associated with petty crime, drug dealing, and prostitution (Yılmaz, 2006). This neighborhood has also become a refuge for marginalized populations such as the Romanis (also known as Gypsies), transvestites, and sex workers (Tonbul, 2011). In other words, Tarlabası Avenue became a symbolic urban frontier, more than the physical one, separating the poverty-stricken slum area of Tarlabası on the downhill side from the Beyoğlu area (Yılmaz, 2006).

In the 1990s, another wave of Kurdish migration took place. Different from the Kurdish migration in the 1980s, which was primarily a result of economic conditions, the Kurdish migration in the 1990s was involuntary in nature due to political circumstances in the southeast of Turkey (Sakızlioğlu, 2007; Yılmaz, 2008). Large numbers of low-income Kurdish migrants from southeastern Turkey moved out to escape the grinding poverty and the ethnic armed conflict in southeastern Turkey, where Turkish military forces and Kurdish armed groups have been battling on and off since the 1980s (Tonbul, 2011; Yılmaz, 2008). Of those who came to Istanbul, many chose Tarlabası for its cheap housing (Yılmaz, 2006; 2008). Most recently, migrants from African countries seeking refuge in Turkey have been added to the social fabric of the neighborhood (Sakızlioğlu, 2007; Tonbul, 2011).

As of 2002 (Dinçer & Enlil, 2002), migrants who came to Tarlabası before 1990 constituted approximately 51 percent of the neighborhood residents, whereas migrants who came in the 1990s constituted 27 percent of Tarlabası’s population. While second and/or third-generation migrants were 18 percent of the population, the remaining 4 percent was identified as the “special group” that included foreign migrants, sex workers, and travesties.

Yılmaz (2008) suggests that not only different migrant groups have occupied different socio-economic and spatial positions in the neighborhood, they have also been differentially affected by social exclusion. According to her, migrant groups who migrated to Tarlabası before
1990 have been better off in terms of all aspects of urban life and live in newer buildings in the outer parts of the neighborhood, whereas recent migrants of mainly Kurdish ethnicity live in the most physically and socially degraded zones. Research suggests that many buildings in Tarlabası are in very poor condition and at high risk of collapse, posing serious safety threat to residents in the neighborhood (Sakızhoğlu, 2007). According to Ünlü et al. (2000), 62 percent of the houses are dilapidated and 11 percent totally ruined.

Most of the people living in Istanbul still consider Tarlabası a no-go zone for it is home to many illegal activities (Yılmaz, 2006). Tarlabası was chosen as the research site because it is home to large numbers of Kurdish migrant families from southeastern Turkey and is characterized by substandard housing, poor infrastructure, overcrowding, and low socioeconomic status of its residents.

**Participants**

Twenty-eight mothers participated in the study. Based on the literature on sample size for ethnographic studies (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Morse, 2000), this sample size is sufficient to reach theoretical saturation. All mothers were first-generation migrants of Kurdish origin. This population was targeted for various reasons: 1. Kurds are the main ethnic group affected by internal displacement. Moreover, large numbers of Kurdish people have voluntarily migrated to big cities since 1990s. Both groups of migrants have been experiencing significant levels of poverty in cities, 2. Women play a critical role in determining what is needed for themselves but most importantly their families (Brookings Institution Project on Internal Displacement, 1999), thus Kurdish migrant mothers will be a critical source to understand the needs of this population, 3. Kurdish women’s experiences with migration and living in a big city are largely ignored yet are likely different from those of men, and 4. the literature on child
labor also suggests that most of the children from a Kurdish low-income migrant background end up dropping out of school to help their families financially (e.g. Gorak & Gülçiček, 2000; Yılmaz, 2003). Not only is there very limited knowledge on Kurdish parents' perspectives on child work but also public opinion has operated more on a deficit model and stigmatized low-income Kurdish parents with working children. It is crucial to understand the experiences of Kurdish women and their families in order to most effectively address their needs.

Recruitment

Similar to the pilot study I conducted in 2008, participants were recruited both through purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling was used initially by contacting my key informant from my pilot study, Kader, the mother of the family I worked with for three and a half years during a mentoring project in Turkey and with whom I am still in contact. I visited her upon my arrival to Istanbul and was received with great excitement by her and her family. As we caught up on many aspects of each other’s lives, I told her about my research project. I also told her that I would need her assistance to recruit other mothers for the study. Not only she agreed to participate in the study, she and her husband who was home that day started brainstorming about people they could reach out to in the neighborhood. Those who had participated in the pilot study, including her two sisters-in-law living upstairs, were seen as guaranteed participants for the study.

I did not play any active role in the recruiting of my participants. As envisioned, my participants played a critical role in recruiting more participants. While the majority of my new participants were recruited by Kader, my participants from the pilot study also helped me recruit more mothers by contacting their relatives (sisters and sisters-in-law) in the community. As few of my participants pointed out, their trust in Kader played a key role in their acceptance to
participate in the study. On the other hand, there was a limit to what Kader could do. She later
told me that her reassurance that I was trustworthy worked with people she knew well in the
neighborhood whereas it was less convincing for people she was only distantly acquainted with
(Field notes, August 1\textsuperscript{st} 2011). As a matter of fact, the recruitment was more successful on some
parts of the neighborhood versus others (See Figure 1).

Aslı recruited herself for the study. One day, as I was leaving the neighborhood for a
lunch break, a young girl ran after me and told me her mother wanted to talk to me. Not
knowing what this was about, I followed her to her mother’s house. As I walked in, Aslı greeted
me and started interrogating me about what I was doing and where the interviews would be
used. She sounded very skeptical, which I was taken aback by and found myself in a defensive
mode. Although I reminded myself constantly in my mind that she had all the rights to be
suspicious about a person she met for the first time who was inquiring into people’s lives, I was
also a little bit hurt by the mistrust I sensed for the first time in the field (Field notes, July 5\textsuperscript{th}
2011). Interestingly, she agreed to participate and shared the most intimate and unconventional
details of her life with me.

Another mother, who was on bad terms with my key participant, also approached me to
participate in the study. Although she later changed her mind about participating, she invited me
to her house towards the end of the fieldwork to see whether her sisters who came to visit her
could participate. She also asked whether her mother-in-law who was living with her could
participate. None of them were eligible for the study. Interestingly, she said she could not
participate because her mother-in-law did not want her to. Finally, I had to stop the interview
with one of the participants because it became clear that she only spoke a couple of Turkish
words (even though she initially said she spoke it) as I was doing the demographic survey and there was no one to facilitate translation.

I contacted my participants after they expressed an initial interest in the study to my key informants. I then met with potential participants before the interview and provided them with a consent letter that described the study and invited their participation. As the majority of my participants were not literate, I explained the content of the letter to them verbally. In some cases, a literate member (usually an adolescent child of the mother) of the family also read the letter. My participants were fully informed verbally and in writing about the purpose of the research as well as the topics of study that would be presented for discussion in individual semi-structured interviews. The consent letter emphasized that: 1) Participation was voluntary; 2) The individual might terminate participation at any time by verbally indicating their desire to do so; 3) Responses would be confidential. This meant that no individual's response would be traceable to her in any resulting report or publication; and 4) Participants were assured that in the event of withdrawal, their relationship with any institution(s) they received support from would not be affected. To ensure confidentiality, all participants who agreed to participate were asked what name they would have wanted to be given instead of their real name in order to identify a pseudonym to be used in the study for that particular participant. Those who did not choose a pseudonym were assigned one by me. The names of other family members that were used during interviews were also replaced with pseudonyms. Certain demographic information was either not shared (e.g. gender of children, city/hometown families migrated from) or was modified (e.g. names of cities they lived/worked before coming to Istanbul).

While some mothers signed the consent letter, most mothers felt more comfortable giving their oral consent either because they were concerned about signing an “official”
document or because they did not know how to write. Mothers were given a copy of the consent letter.

Six of my participants (including my key informant Kader) in this study had also participated in my pilot study, and thus I have had an already established relationship with them. They approached the consent letter as a procedure they had to sit through in order to start the interview. The rest of the mothers who met me for the first time had two different reactions to consent letters. For the majority of them, the reassurance from mothers who already did the interview was more critical in their decisions to participate than my reassurance. Especially, those mothers who also participated in my pilot study were “proof” that I was reliable/ there was no harm in participating. However, there were a few mothers who saw the consent letter as a legal document to fall back on if they had unwanted consequences associated with the research. Interestingly, they have become the closest people to me over the course of the study.

All mothers wanted to start the interview right after I went over the consent letter with them. Only one mother requested an extra day after I discussed the consent letter with her to discuss her potential participation with her husband. Although she seemed very excited about the study, my key participant informed me that she told her later that day that she would not participate, mainly because her husband did not want her to participate.

**Renumeration**

Renumeration of the participants was one area that I pondered over. On the one hand, I did not want the renumeration to be coercive. On the other hand, I felt uneasy that I would be taking advantage of my participants as the study did not have any immediate benefit for them. So I wanted the renumeration to at least be of help to the family budget. After careful consideration I decided to offer 25 TL, approximately $15, to my participants at the end of their
interviews. At first, I thought of using an objective measure to determine the actual amount I would offer. For that, I considered using the hourly minimum wage in Turkey. Because these families usually did not have a fixed income and work in seasonal or informal jobs, it was hard to assess how much they could earn typically in the time of the interview if they were working instead. For that matter, I calculated the amount of our renumeration based on the hourly equivalent of the standard minimum wage (roughly $340) determined by the government of Turkey. The hourly amount equaled approximately $1.7 (3 TL). I sensed various problems with that approach. First, I did not believe that this amount adequately honored the participation of the mothers and did not reflect my appreciation for their sharing their experiences with me. Second, since duration of each interview would vary, this would not be the right approach. Finally, I strongly believed that offering that amount would convey the message of "anything goes with poor families", which I strictly refrained from. For that matter, I set the amount of renumeration to $15 (25 TL). I believed that this amount would not be coercive and would honor women’s participation.

As I went to the field, I decided to ask my key participant whether there were any chain grocery stores that people in the neighborhood shopped from. My thinking was that I could offer my participants a gift card instead of actual money. She said that they shopped from various places, including open markets. Hence, I thought it would be more practical and useful for the women to have the cash.

As most interviews took place in multiple sessions, I gave women a certain amount at the end of each session, which at the end summed up to 25 TL. Participants who could not complete the interview received the partial reimbursement of 15 TL. Getting women to accept the renumeration for their participation proved to be a challenge. Many women refused to take
the envelope I offered them and insisted that they participated to help me out. I told them that I knew they participated to help me, that I greatly appreciated that, but that this was simply to thank them for their contributions to my study. In a lot of cases, I had to beg them to accept the envelope.

Participants’ Characteristics

All but one participant, Narin, self-identified as Kurdish. Narin said she was Arab. She was included in the study because she had been married to a Kurdish man for about 10 years, had lived with his side of the family since she got married, and had learned to speak Kurdish. She talked about difficulties of being a stranger (not Kurdish and not a relative of the family) in the family during her interview, and provided a different perspective. The participants came from eight different cities in the East and Southeast of Turkey, though seventeen of them were from the same city in the Southeast. These cities included Adana (her family is originally from Batman), Ağrı, Batman, Mardin, Siirt, Şırnak, Urfa (also known as Şanlıurfa), and Van.

Age and education. Mothers ranged in age between 22 and 46 (mean=33.5), which facilitated the inclusion of varying levels of life and motherhood experiences. Only one mother was an elementary school graduate and three mothers had some level of elementary schooling (one was a third grade dropout, and two were second grade dropouts). The rest of the mothers (83% of the participants) never went to school, except for two mothers who attended first grade for a couple of months (see Table 1 for all demographic information).

Husbands’ educational levels were higher compared to women. Seven of the husbands never attended elementary school (25% of the husbands), two of which attended first grade for only a couple of months. Two husbands finished middle school and one finished high school. Eighteen husbands graduated from elementary school. The discrepancy of educational level
between Kurdish men and women in the sample is clear.

The proportion of Kurdish women with no education was even higher than Sirkeci’s statistics (2000). Sirkeci reported that from West to East, the proportion of Kurds with no-education is 28 and 40 percent respectively for males, and 48 and 66 percent for females. The proportion of those with secondary and higher education is 10 percent in the West and 6 percent in the East among Kurdish males. The corresponding uneven distribution for females ranges from 3 percent in the West to 1.6 percent in the East as opposed to 20 percent in the West and 6.6 percent in the East for female population in Turkey as a whole.

**Household size.** The median number of children mothers had at the time of the study was three and a half. Two mothers had only one child and one mother had nine children. Most families lived in nuclear households even though they lived with extended kin (mostly with the parents of the husband) at earlier stages of their marriages. There were only two households that lived with extended kin. Gülistan lived with her husband and six children. Her daughter-in-law, her oldest son’s wife, also lived in the same house with them. The other household with extended kin was also the largest household (12 people) in the sample, where two of my participants who were sisters-in-law lived in the same household with their husbands, children, and two single brothers of their husbands. At the time of data collection, their youngest sister-in-law was also staying with them to work in textile industry so that she could send the money to their mother who still lived in the village. She went back to the village towards the end of the summer (Eight months later when I went back to the field, I found the two sisters-in-law living in separate houses on the same street. Moreover, the two single brothers-in-law and the youngest sister-in-law had moved out with their mother who migrated from her village to live in a house that was a couple of blocks away after I left the field at the end of the summer).
The second largest household in the sample was a nuclear family with 11 people. The smallest household was composed of my participant, Aslı, who lived with her six year-old daughter. Although not in the same house, some nuclear households lived in the same building with their extended kin. The most recent study on the demographic characteristics of Kurds in the context of Turkey suggested that Kurdish families lived in relatively large households (Ağırdrır, 2008). Ağırdrır reported that the mean number of people in Kurdish households was 6.1 whereas that number is 4.3 in Turkish households. Thirty two percent of the Kurdish households were composed of six to eight people and 21 percent had more than 9 people in their household.

**Employment.** Because culturally women are not allowed to work outside home after they are married (e.g. Şen, 2005; Yılmaz 2004), only three mothers were working at the time of the study. Aslı worked as a part-time cleaning lady because she was a single mother. Zarife also worked as a cleaning lady because her husband was in prison. She said her husband was sending her to work before he got in prison because he needed the money for gambling but he did not want anybody to know. Finally, Gamze also worked as a cleaning lady despite her husband’s initial disapproval. Interestingly, the demographic survey revealed 23 of the 28 women worked before they got married (five women have never worked) and only 4 of them worked some after they got married. They mostly worked as seasonal agricultural workers (17 women), some (six women) worked in textile industry in the city before they got married.

As supported by the literature (e.g. Yılmaz, 2006), husbands in the study had low-skill and/or seasonal jobs. They worked in the informal sector (mainly textile sweatshops, some in restaurants, some as cab drivers) with no social security or health insurance. The main downside of textile industry is that it significantly slows down in the summer, causing many sweatshops
to close during that time and leaving husbands unemployed. Given the heavy reliance on informal industry in the community, families experienced significant levels of poverty. The lowest income reported in the study was 300 TL (about $170) monthly for a family of nine. The highest income reported was 3000 TL (about $1700) for a family of eight. The poverty level for a family of 4 reported in September 2011 was 2,900 TL (TÜRK-İŞ, 2011). Ağirdır (2008) also reported that 52 percent of the Kurdish population earned below 700 TL monthly, suggesting significant levels of poverty for this population.

**Data Collection**

Four different methods were used to collect data:

**Demographic Survey**

Before starting the semi-structured interview, participants were administered a short questionnaire to obtain information on important demographic characteristics such as age, ethnicity, income, education level, and current employment of different members of the family (Please see Appendix A for the demographic survey). This questionnaire provided an opportunity to move more smoothly into the interview process. For instance, the information on whether children in the family worked or did not work helped frame the questions about child labor in the interview accordingly. Also, the demographic survey sometimes revealed unexpected patterns that were then further explored in the interview. For instance, the discrepancy between the length of time spent in Istanbul and the length of time in the neighborhood made me include questions about other neighborhoods my participants lived in as I started the interview.

**In-Depth Interviews**

The data were collected primarily through in-depth interviews conducted in Turkish.
Participants were interviewed by the researcher using pre-established semi-structured interview protocols. The interview questions were revised after the pilot study. New questions were added and existing questions were reworded and/or expanded on. The interview protocol was given to two Turkish native speakers after the questions were translated into Turkish to make sure that they sound natural and conversational, and were revised accordingly. As expected, new stories and questions of interest that I had not considered emerged during my interviews with the mothers. These emerging questions and stories were carefully considered and added to the interview protocol (e.g. religious marriages, relationships with mothers-in-law, hardships of arranged marriage).

The length of each face-to-face interview session varied, ranging from approximately 1 ½ to 10 hours. Given the length of the interviews and my efforts to respect the daily obligations of the mothers, such as cooking, feeding children as well as fatigue, I had multiple sessions to finish the interviews. Visiting mothers on multiple occasions also enabled me to deepen my relationship with the mothers.

All interviews took place in participants’ own houses, except one mother who came to my key participant’s house for the interview because she found it inconvenient to have guests in her house. All interviews were accompanied by tea and snack breaks, and in some cases by lunch meals and dinners. At the end of the interviews, some of my participants or their kids gave me small gifts including drawings, a nazar boncuğu¹, a scarf, and a necklace.

As with my pilot study, I did not introduce any expectations about the format of the interview in this study. I let it up to my participants to decide whom they wanted to have with them during the interview. However, based on my pilot study experience, I assumed that my

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¹ Nazar boncuğu (evil eye talisman) comes in various sizes and is believed to protect someone or something from nazar (evil eye). It is very popular in Turkey. You can use this link to see how an evil eye talisman looks like http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Blue_eyes.JPG
key informant or the mother who referred that particular participant would be present during the interview (during my pilot study, my key informant was present during the whole interviewing process either because the interview took place in her own house or because she took me to participants’ houses). I also expected participants’ adolescent daughters to join us during the interview. Interestingly, I had fewer interviews where we were constantly accompanied by daughters or other adult(s), though children almost always gave up playing with their friends on the street and followed me inside when it was their mothers’ turn to be interviewed.

Kader took me to the house of all the participants she referred me to, but she only stayed during the introductions. At times, during her presence she reassured participants that I was trustworthy, but she always excused herself right before we started the demographic survey saying she had things to attend to at home. I was curious about this drastic change in her behavior. She later told me that she very much wanted to stay with me during the interviews but wanted to give women their privacy because I was asking more personal questions this time, which she did not feel comfortable when her sisters-in-law were in the room with her during her interview. So she thought other women should have their own space during the interviews (Field notes, June 20th 2011).

All interviews were audiotaped. The interview primarily aimed at exploring women’s perception of their families’ and their own adaptation to their lives after migration. More specifically, the interview inquired into: 1. Their lives before migration; 2. Their migration story; 3. Their lives in their “new home”; 4. Gender roles and their implications for women; 5. Parental beliefs about childhood, education, and child labor; and 6. Aspirations for the future (Please see Appendix B for a full list of the interview questions and Appendix C for a distribution of interview questions by guiding questions of the study). In addition to the themes
covered in the interview protocol, each interview individually had a dominating theme, such as difficult relationships with mother-in-laws, loss of young family members, husband’s unemployment, boyfriends they were not able to end up together with. Some of these themes were common across participants whereas others were more unique to individual circumstances.

Semi-structured interviews are used for this study because personal narrative methods and analyses offer insights from the narrators’ perspectives and introduce marginalized voices that often provide counternarratives to dominant discourses (Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008) and helps us learn about how they subjectively experience the migration process (Brettell, 2003). These narrators see themselves as persons in context, and their stories reflect life experiences situated within a particular social, political, and historical context (Abu-Lughod, 1993). Thus, while looking at individuals as unique and whole, these methods also recognize that individuals are connected to social and cultural worlds –thus to structural factors, and to relationships that affect their life choices and life stories/experiences (Abu-Lughod, 1993; Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008). Personal narrative methods and analyses are also an effective way for demonstrating how individual agency is operative in a particular context and time (Brettell, 2003; Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008).

The stories women told represent Kurdish women’s voices in the Kurdish community in Tarlabasi. However, I have not excluded stories that women told about men and issues that concerned men and women equally because family is a major part of women’s lives. Women spoke often of their husbands, brothers, fathers, and were interested in all matters that concerned those to whom they were close (Abu-Lughod, 1993).

**Participant Observation**

Participant observations took place in participants’ homes as they permitted and/or on the
doorsteps outside their houses to observe the life on the street (many mothers spend some of their time during the day sitting on the doorsteps to watch their children and socialize with their neighbors). When it is undertaken over an extended period of time, participant observation is an effective tool to obtain information not only on observable details but also on more hidden details (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). As pointed out by Emerson and his colleagues, participant observation also allows the ethnographer to see from the inside how and under which conditions people lead their lives including opportunities, constraints, and pressures; what daily activities they carry and how they carry them; and what they find meaningful. Participant observation is not enough by itself to understand the meaning of different practices in a given community but it does cue to significant, frequent but peculiar activities/practices that warrant closer attention and examination (Basso, 1996). For this study, participant observation mainly focused on daily routines and lives of the participants as well as those of the family with an eye to constraints, pressures, and agency; interactions between women and other family members—especially children; protective strategies mothers use while children play outside on the street; and interactions between women and neighbors.

In addition to time spent on interviews in the field, I joined women in daily conversations they had sitting on the sidewalks of their street. While sometimes they included me in their conversations, other times they spoke in Kurdish among themselves. Some of these conversations were translated in Turkish with or without my request, but there were also times when the whole conversation was in Kurdish, and I did not understand a word of it. I also joined women in activities such as cooking, child care, and shopping.

Extensive field notes were taken at the end of each day usually when I was back from the field and sometimes on my way back home. On some days, when it was not possible to
write down detailed field notes as I got home, I wrote brief reminders on significant aspects of that day that I wrote in the next 24 to 48 hours. Field notes contained: 1. Physical descriptions of the site; 2. Women’s daily activities; 3. Relevant aspects of informal conversations with participants and other community members (e.g. neighbors, kids, husbands) that were not audiotaped; 4. The atmosphere in which the interview took place; 5. My personal feelings and reactions to incidents taking place in the field; and 6. Hunches, questions, and ideas that arose during data collection.

Participant observations provided further evidence to some of the points mothers made in their interviews. One of the common themes in the interviews was the support the neighbors provided to each other. I observed multiple instances where women came together to provide emotional or practical support to each other. For instance, carpet washing on the street was an activity everybody joined in in different ways ranging from giving suggestions to physically helping (Field notes, June 13th 2011). During the course of the study, Gurbet’s adolescent nephew who still lived in her hometown accidentally shot his friend and killed him. This devastated Gurbet because it meant vengeance. On the day she got the news, the neighbors came to visit in her house and console her (Field notes, July 13th 2011).

Additional Data Sources

In addition to participant observation and interviews, Turkey Census and historical data were used to provide background information and context to the study. News and opinion articles published in newspapers were also collected during the study to be used to update the state of the armed conflict between Turkish military forces and Kurdish armed groups and its possible ramifications as well as to portray society’s attitude towards the armed conflict and the Kurdish population in general. I collected news and opinion articles from an online version of
Hürriyet, a major newspaper, and Radikal, a more left-wing newspaper in Turkey on a regular basis. I also included online comments of readers to various news and opinion articles, which provided a snapshot of the attitude towards the armed conflict and Kurds in general.

As I approached the end of my fieldwork, I told my key informant Kader that I had a surprise for her. As she excitedly watched my hand go in my bag, she had a big smile on her face and I could tell how nervous she was. As I pulled out a certificate of appreciation (see Appendix D) signed by Dr. Teresa Ostler, I told her that this was a small thank you from me and my teacher for her tremendous help to make this study happen. The certificate was in English so that she knew it came from both me and my advisor. I told her that it was in English but that it thanked her for all the big help she offered. I knew she would be happy about the certificate, but I did not expect what she said next. As her eyes glowed with pride, she showed it to her daughter who was home from work for lunch and said “You know, I might not have attended elementary school, but see I have a teşekkür belgesi² from a university, and a university in the United States!” To see that pride in her eyes was one of the most priceless moments of my fieldwork. As she kept giggling, her daughter grabbed it and rushed out of the living room shouting “I’m gonna show this to my aunts and make them all jealous!” As she came back with the certificate, Kader wanted to hang it on the wall and exhibit it for a week. We then hung the certificate of appreciation on a nail in the wall. She showed it to everyone who stopped by her house that day.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze results from demographic surveys. The demographic survey data were mainly used to describe the basic characteristics (e.g., mean age,

² The exact translation for it is “certificate of appreciation”. However, we also call “teşekkür belgesi” a certificate given to successful students with a GPA above a certain threshold at the end of each semester. An equivalent in the United States would be graduating with honors, except in this case it is for every semester.
mean number of children, mean number of years since migration) of the sample in a study. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. The data analysis was conducted using the Turkish (original) version of the data collected in order to prevent misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the meanings.

Using analytic induction techniques (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), interview transcripts and field notes were read multiple times for initial coding that focused on the meanings women attached to their own and their families’ experiences with migration and life in a big city. Common themes and concepts were identified through repeated readings of the transcripts, participant observation notes, and field notes. During these readings, I highlighted critical themes/concepts, using an emergent coding scheme (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) and selected quotes that reflected the themes and concepts. Several themes were generated based on interview questions, while other themes emerged from observations and other stories/experiences mothers shared during the interview. Key passages or notes from field and participant observation notes that illustrated or supported the concepts, themes, and arguments that were made based on women’s narratives were included.

In-vivo codes, actual words or expressions of participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), were used as codes when appropriate. Broader themes were then be broken down into smaller, more specific units until no further subcategory is necessary. For instance, the general theme of “Mothers’ beliefs and attitudes about child labor” was initially identified. This theme was then grouped under “Mothers who support child labor” and “Mothers who oppose it”. For “Mothers who support child labor” group, data was then coded under the category of “rationale behind mothers’ positive attitudes”. This category was broken down to two subcategories of “financial reasons” and “alternative explanations of child labor”. The latter subcategory included “child
labor as a protection against inner-city dangers”, “child labor as a learning experience”, and “child labor as facilitator to appreciate school”. Within “Mothers against child labor” group, data was coded under the category of “rationale behind mothers’ negative attitudes” – with subcategories of “interference with school work”, and “parents’ responsibility to take care of children”. As the analysis progressed, codes and themes were revisited and redefined until the definitions made sense to all cases. Negative cases were used to expand and revise initial interpretations of codes and themes. This process allowed me to obtain deeper understandings of the meanings of participants’ experiences and beliefs.

The secondary analysis described similarities and differences across participants’ experiences. Consequently, rather than presenting women’s and their families’ stories as case studies, (e.g. Brown Rosier, 2000), the data was organized around prominent themes and issues bringing relevant data from all participants to illustrate and develop these themes (e.g. Perez, 2004; Rubin, 1994).

Data displays were used to display demographic characteristics of all mothers and their families participating in the study using data from the demographic survey. Data displays were also used to identify patterns for challenges and coping strategies across different mothers and families. Diagrams were used to explore and describe different relationships among various findings (e.g. relationship between parental beliefs on education/child labor and their actions, and different factors that come into play in the translation of beliefs into actions).

Translation of Narratives

During the writing stage of each chapter, I first included the Turkish version of the quotes. Once multiple sections of a given chapter – in some cases after I finished the whole chapter- were finalized, I translated the quotes in English. During the translation, I chose not to
translate expressions/concepts that are unique to Turkish language/culture and do not have an equivalent in English (e.g. börekçi, simit). Instead, I provided an explanation of what they meant at the end of the quote. Women’s language was also rich in little affections, especially when they addressed me (e.g. Özge kızım –my daughter Özge; Özgeciğim –similar to “my dear Özge” in English or ‘Özgecita’ in Spanish). I kept and translated these expressions to convey the tone of the conversation. Finally, religious references saturated women’s language (Abu-Lughod, 1993). Most women used standard religious phrases at appropriate moments during their interviews. Women swore by God (Vallahî3) almost unthinkingly to strengthen the effect of their stories (Abu-Lughod, 1993) or used “God willing!” (İnşallah) when they wanted to emphasize their wish for a certain thing to happen. As these religious phrases have become part of everyday use of Turkish across gender and class, I left them in place in their original form.

**Trustworthiness of the Study**

Four strategies were used to ensure credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the findings and interpretations: Prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, and thick description. Prolonged engagement, which is the idea of investing “sufficient” time in the field to learn the culture of the population, test for misinformation introduced by distortions of the researcher or the respondents, and build trust (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), is likely to increase the chance to obtain genuine and correct information from the participants. Sustained engagement with the community members is also crucial as it may open the door to observe unforeseen situations, topics, or practices that are worth studying within the community (Basso, 1996). I spent three full months in the field. I believe this engaged and sustained relationship helped me establish trust with my participants and understand their meaning-making processes and actions better.

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3 Vallahî means “I swear to God”, but in everyday Turkish, it also means “really/ seriously”.
I also triangulated my methods of data collection to ensure the credibility of my findings and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I used in-depth interviews, demographic survey, participant observations, historical data, and newspaper articles. Not only did these different sources of data help me further contextualize the study, they also informed each other about the credibility and consistency of my findings and interpretations.

I used a version of peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) throughout the research process to test and defend emergent hypotheses, see if they seemed reasonable and plausible to a disinterested debriefer, and facilitate exploration of aspects of the data that might otherwise remain implicit to me. After initial reading, I wrote detailed summaries of seven randomly selected interviews with headings consisted of general themes, in English to provide ground for the discussion of codes and themes I identified with my advisor. Although an independent coder would strengthen the trustworthiness of data analysis, the chances of finding a person fluent in Turkish and with necessary qualifications are rather slim. This is discussed as a potential limitation of the study in the dissertation.

Finally, I used member checking as I collected my data in the field to further strengthen the credibility of my findings, as qualitative studies involve interpretation and interpretation is open to be influenced by the researcher’s personal biases and motivations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I asked my participants to clarify certain points they made during the interview, summarized or rephrased what they had told me to make sure I understood their points or arguments correctly. Taking these measures was particularly critical in this study to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations as Turkish was not the native language of my participants and their level of fluency and comfort with the Turkish language varied.

Özge: When you compare your life here to your life in the village, how were your days in the village?
**Gülistan:** It’s better here. There is no money [employment] in the village. There were only eggs in the village back then. Now there’s everything there.

**Özge:** You mean life is harder in the village?

**Gülistan:** Yes, it was very hard back then.

**Özge:** There were no jobs, no money?

**Gülistan:** Yes, not much money there, not easy to make ends meet.

**Özge:** Is that why life here is better?

**Gülistan:** Yes, it’s better. The kids are working here and we spend it.

**Sevda:** Vallahi, they work. The kids work but I won’t send my daughter to work. Boys can work but not my daughter....Girls shouldn’t work but go to school. If she becomes something [has a profession], she can work in an office. I don’t want her to work in textile (**Özge:** What about boys?) Same with boys.

**Özge:** So until what age you won’t send your kids to work? You won’t send them under any circumstance?

**Sevda:** No, I won’t send them. I am adamant about this, I won’t send them [to work] ever.

During the interviews, I also told some of the participants the conclusions I came to on various topics based on what I gathered from other participants’ interviews, and I asked them whether these were accurate conclusions, or needed correction or elaboration.

**Özge:** So what types of jobs do you think women could work at? Because correct me if I’m wrong but I got the impression that men don’t quite wanna let their wives work outside the house (**Kader:** Right), is that so?

**Kader:** Yes.

**Özge:** You said you would send both your daughter and son to work if you didn’t have a good financial situation.

**Narin:** Yes, if I don’t have a good financial situation, I will send both of them.

**Özge:** Hmm, you also said even if you didn’t have the means, you would send both of them [the children] to school as long as they wanted to [go].

**Narin:** Yes I will even if I don’t have the means. (**Özge:** But if they don’t want to go to school, then you will send them to work?) Yes.

Another criterion I considered to establish the trustworthiness of the study was transferability, which is the assessment of whether the findings or interpretations from this study can hold in some other context or at some other time in the same context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thick description is an important component that is necessary to enable someone interested in making a comparison with or transfer to another context to make that judgment.
Most efforts to define thick description have concluded that it was a recording and reporting of circumstances, meanings, intentions, and of context that characterize the particular instance, situation, or phenomenon studied (Schwandt, 2007). The challenge with thick description is that there is no consensus on how the “proper” thick description is established (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 2007). I provided a detailed description on different aspects of my participants’ lives such as the living circumstances of my participants, their personal characteristics, the neighborhood they live in, their daily activities and interactions with neighbors and children. I also provided a detailed historical background of the Kurdish “issue” and circumstances that have led to internal displacement to further contextualize the study.

Field Relations

Personal narratives emerge from the interactions of both the narrator and the researcher (Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008). Van Maanen (1988) argues that there are limits to what a fieldworker can and cannot learn in a given setting depending on her personal characteristics and working habits. Who the researcher is and what she represents for the people she studies with also affect who she can build rapport with and what people choose to share with her (Van Maanen, 1988). Hence, it is critical to understand the researcher’s position because it affects where the researcher looks, what she asks, and thus what she finds (Brown Rosier, 2000).

My Association with Kader and Her Family

As I mentioned in the recruitment section, I gained access to my research site through Kader and she played a key role in recruiting other participants to the study. While other participants also helped me with recruiting, I was primarily associated with Kader and her family in the field. I mainly “camped” in her house during the time I was in the field. I left my belongings in her house as I ran from one interview to another. We drank tea, chopped
vegetables, and chatted in her living room in between interviews. Even though I eventually became close with other women in the neighborhood and enjoyed many conversations and meals in their homes, Kader’s home was my surrogate house in the neighborhood. The fact that she and her husband called me their “adopted” daughter, even though Kader was only six years older than me, made me always welcome in their house. Kader’s husband jokingly told me that my husband needed to come ask for my hand from them since I was their daughter. My husband and I honored this request by him paying a short visit to them in one of the many afternoons I spent with Kader’s family. Since Kader’s daughters knew my husband from the days when I was mentoring Dicle, Kader’s younger daughter, they were particularly excited about his visit and celebrated it with a cake Dicle made for my husband. My husband also met Gurbet and Narin at the end of that visit. A couple of days later, Nurbanu told me that she saw my husband. When I asked her what she thought about him, she said he was on the heavier side. She then asked me if he loved me. As I told her that was what he told me, she burst into laughter.

My affiliation with Kader affected my access to other women in the neighborhood, mostly in a positive way as Kader was a well-liked and very social person. Her neighbors called her the “Muhtar”[^1] of the neighborhood due to the fact that she knew many people in the community. Her reassurance to women about my trustworthiness made it easier to establish relationships with other women. Many women told me that they liked me and would like me to visit them any time after they got to know me, but they also told me that they would not initially have agreed to talk to me if it was not for Kader. As a matter of fact, one day as I was sitting in Gurbet and Narin’s apartment chatting and sipping tea, Gurbet, who was standing by the window, called me to show two women who were passing by. She said that they also were

[^1]: Muhtar refers to the head of a village or mahalle (neighborhood) in many Arab countries as well as in Turkey and Cyprus.
doing a project, but that no one was talking to them because they didn’t know them. As stated earlier, Kader recognized the limits of her social network when she said that her word did not matter much for women she did not know very well. Her endorsement for my trustworthiness and the fact that she also participated in the study did not matter for women she was only acquainted with. This also was the proof of the critical role she played in making this study possible. When her networks were exhausted, other women kindly tapped into their social networks to recruit more women for the study. Participants and other people I got to know in the field were always friendly, saying they got used to me, and missed seeing me around on the days I was not there. They frequently checked on where I was with my recruitment and interviews, and were concerned that I was not able to have a proper summer vacation.

As I did in my pilot study, I presented myself as a student in a university in the United States, trying to get this research project completed to be able to graduate and start working as a teacher in a university. I had to simplify my position as such because doctoral studies are not something people are very familiar with in Turkey. Most of my participants were more than enthusiastic to help me with the project so that I could get a good grade.

I also prioritized my relationships with my participants over my research. The fact that I could not offer any immediate benefit to my participants or could not help change the dire consequences many women were in, I tried to make myself “useful” in other ways. I postponed interviews when another participant needed me. I tried to assist them in writing application letters for financial aid for their children. I went with them to Rotary Youth Center when they asked me to accompany them to talk to the director of the center or to the community center to follow up on a government aid application. I stopped interviews and rescheduled when my participants had other things to attend to or had unexpected visitors. When some interviews
went on for multiple days, some mothers, Şükriye being one of them, said it was because I was too nice and accommodating, and should be harsher with the women to get the interviews done (Field notes, August 6\textsuperscript{th} 2011).

I see the privilege of the researcher to withhold information as one of the most important components of the power hierarchy between the researcher and the “researched”, especially when the researcher’s expectation from her participants is to talk about diverse aspects of their lives as comprehensively as possible. So, I chose to be transparent about the details of my life I was asked about by my participants, including religiosity, family members, and marriage/having children.

**Insider and Outsider Dynamics**

Similar to what Perez’s (2004) position in her ethnographic study of Puerto Rican life in Chicago and San Sebastian Puerto Rico, while I was an insider in some aspects, I was also an outsider to the population I worked with. While I know the culture and traditions of my country and my religion, I am not familiar with the unique aspects of the Kurdish culture. References to my “insider” status were made during my conversations with the women. They assumed that I knew some of the things about aspects of their lives because of some shared characteristics of our identities. For instance, they assumed that I knew about the criminal activities in Tarlabası (e.g. “You know how it is in Tarlabası). Similarly, due to some shared cultural practices, they knew that I understood what they were talking about or what it meant when they mentioned they had to show their bed sheet following the first night of their marriage as a proof of their virginity. They also gave me some insider status for having spent time with them in the neighborhood. They would say things like “As you know, we spend a lot of time with the other women on the street” or “You know I had an operation and I can’t stand up much”. However, I
still was an outsider to many other aspects of their lives. Next, I discuss in detail the dynamics created by three of my identities: Gender, ethnicity, and religion.

**Gender.** Being a woman talking to women clearly was an advantage. Some of the information women shared with me (e.g. birth control, first night of marriage) would probably be inaccessible to a male researcher. Many women assumed that I was not married – even though I wore my wedding band, and were usually surprised when I told them I was. Some did not think that I looked 30 years old, most likely deceived by the fact that I was still a student. It was also hard for them to think I was married because I did not have children. As marriage entailed having children shortly after for most of them, the conversation soon switched to why I chose not to have children and when I was planning to have them, while reassuring me that it was better to have children sooner than later. Questions also included where we met, how long we had been married, and where we lived. Though issues around class had usually not been brought up, some women were surprised that my husband and I did not own our house in the United States, but rented instead. As for most women owning a house was an indication of wealth (they would say in conversation that so and so was rich and that they owned a house), their being surprised by us renting our place points to their assumption that I was “wealthy”.

Husbands I met in person during my field work were also friendly. Especially Kader’s and Nurbanu’s husbands were always ready to talk about random as well as more serious issues with me. Gülcan’s husband always greeted me with a smile when he saw me on the street or in his house. Yasemin’s husband was home every time I went to her house for an interview and was friendly. During one of these visits, he suggested that I interviewed men instead of women because women stayed home all day and their lives were always the same whereas men, he thought, had plenty to talk about, hinting to his gender biases (Field notes, July 22nd 2011).
When I told him that each woman’s life also sounded different to me, he said that men’s lives were more diversified and different. He did not agree with my perception that men would not be interested or willing to talk to me, and said he knew plenty of men who would like to talk.

**Ethnicity.** Because of the ongoing tension between PKK and Turkish government, I expected that my being Turkish might raise some concerns for my participants. Even though I don’t align myself with the politics of the Turkish government on this issue, it would be only natural if they assumed I was on the side of the Turkish government. The study also took place during a tumultuous time of national elections, and the political atmosphere was mostly tense, with many protests taking place. My experience with the mothers from my pilot study was that conversations never became politicized, potentially because of me being Turkish, but also because I was hesitant to ask them directly about issues that may result in politicized conversations. They also had reservations about sharing some of the incidents they witnessed or experienced back in their hometown that occurred because of the armed conflict. However, they shared with me the minute details of what happened after they checked in with my key informant and were made sure that I was trustworthy. The conversations between the mothers and my key informant were in Kurdish. I was able to guess the content based on their hesitance, nonverbal gestures during their conversations among each other, and the kind of information they shared afterwards. A Kurdish student at the university I met after I came back from the field was actually surprised to hear that the mothers talked about these experiences with me. He even asked me what it was that I was doing to get that information from them.

My experience this time was not any different, even though I directly asked them about the armed conflict. It was impossible not to talk about the “Kurdish issue” in informal conversations because the reports on elections (including the arrest of a congressman just
ellected from the Kurdish party) and the increasing tension between PKK and Turkish military were on the TV and newspapers every day. Similar to my pilot study, every little detail about the various acts of violence their relatives, neighbors, and they experienced was shared with me. At times, I mentioned my Circassian ethnicity to create a common ground to discuss ethnicity, minority, or language. I also used my ethnic background to disassociate myself from the anti-Kurdish and nationalist discourses in Turkey. The fact that I defined myself as Circassian rather than Turkish facilitated this process at times. Moreover, mentioning my ethnicity usually helped me show that I had some idea about having a native language different than Turkish in Turkey, and also hear their thoughts about other ethnic groups’ rights in Turkey. In addition to my conversations with my participants during interviews and informal conversations, I also talked in numerous occasions with Kader’s husband on these issues (e.g. elections, protests, arrests, and attacks). As they usually watched the news on the Kurdish channel broadcasting from Germany, he had access to the other side of the story that probably was not always objective, but neither was the media in Turkey. I felt at times that both women and Kader’s husband also saw this as an opportunity to make their cause heard, defend, and educate me on it, which I greatly appreciated because I wanted to hear their side of the story and the perspective of “everyday” people rather than the politicians.

There was only one instance when I felt uncomfortable with not being Kurdish because I was not sure whether the comment was coming from a friendly or not so friendly place, and that was when Zeynep’s husband who saw me sitting with other women one day said “You’re here again” (Field notes, August 18th 2011). I was not sure whether my presence made him uncomfortable or he just wanted to initiate a conversation. When I said yes, he said that I took

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5 Also known as Adyghe or Cherkess, Circassians are a North Caucasian ethnic group who were displaced in the course of the Russian conquest of the Caucasus in the 19th century, especially after the Russian–Circassian War of 1862.
over the women completely. As I told him I would be there until the women kicked me out, he
vaguely smiled and disappeared in the building. I never asked Zeynep about what her husband
thought about her doing the interview or me being there, but I would not be surprised if a
constant “Turkish” presence in his neighborhood made him uncomfortable as he had a rocky
past with Turkish authorities.

Sometimes dialogues contained comparisons of “Kurds versus Turks”, especially when
they expressed their expectations from Turkey as Kurds, but mostly when they compared
everyday lives, such as gender roles, marital relationships, and childbearing. In these dialogues,
Turkish women were mostly portrayed as more “westernized” (e.g. divorce, having fewer kids,
working, marrying late), reminding comparisons Bedouin women made between Egyptian
women and themselves, where they portrayed Egyptian women as “westernized” and sometimes

Clearly, the fact that I did not speak Kurdish was a limitation to my interactions with my
participants and to the study. Older women were less likely to be fluent in Turkish, so my
interactions with them remained limited. My interactions with women also were limited at
times, especially when they had guests or when we were all sitting on the street together. I did
not mind sitting there with them not understanding it, and at times they translated what they
talked about so that I could join the fun (I believe that my not being able to speak Kurdish gave
them room to have private conversations in my presence). The little Kurdish I could learn while
I was there was nowhere near in engaging in a conversation, even though they appreciated the
effort and were very nice about not embarrassing me. It was not towards the middle of my time
there that one of them told me I was saying “Good night” instead of “Good evening” to them in
Kurdish every day as I left, but up until that point, everybody replied “Good night” to me.
The fact that I did not speak Kurdish also had implications for study participation. Both Serap and Züleyha’s neighbor said their mothers would have so much to tell me if they spoke Turkish. Initially, I was open to the idea to do the interview with a translator. When Lale, who spoke some Turkish but was not very fluent, said she wanted to participate, I agreed thinking that we could have someone to facilitate the conversation. However, Lale was less fluent than I initially assumed, and it became a challenge to make sure that it was her own words and not the translator’s (one of the neighbors) when she answered my questions. For that matter, I decided not to include women who were not fluent in Turkish, especially given the length of the interview. Needless to say, women would be more at ease expressing their feelings, emotions, and thoughts if we could do the interviews in Kurdish. I believe that the stories would be even richer and more nuanced if they could express themselves in their own language.

Religion. My religious identity makes me both an insider and an outsider. I grew in a Muslim family and have relatives and acquaintances who are more orthodox or conservative Muslims. In that sense, I am in a better position to understand the practices, delicacies, and meanings of religious rituals. Yet, I am not a practicing Muslim (e.g. wearing a headscarf, praying five times a day, fasting etc.) and religion is a very important aspect of Kurds’ lives. In that sense I am an outsider.

I knew I would be in a conservative community where women wore clothes that covered their arms to their wrists and skirts that covered their legs down to their ankles. Women also covered their hair. I chose to respect their clothing practices by wearing loose pants that covered my legs down to my ankles. I was careful to wear t-shirts or shirts that concealed any kind of cleavage even though they were mostly short-sleeved. On the one day I wore long sleeves because all women and young girls in the neighborhood always wore long sleeves, Kader’s
daughter asked me why I wore long sleeves on such a hot day. One of my favorite exchanges happened when I interviewed Özlem. As we were talking about how she learned about religious practices, she talked about a religion teacher in the Mosque who emphasized the importance of covering your hair when you went outside. As she was telling me how much she agreed with it, she realized that she might have offended me because I chose not to cover my hair.

Subsequently, she said:

*Don’t misunderstand, that’s what our teacher used to say. Of course, you can’t know a person’s inside. You may not cover your hair but may still be a very good person inside. Some people cover their hair, but do other bad things. That’s why whether a person covers her hair or not is not important. It’s one person’s inside that’s important.*

When asked questions about my religious practices, I answered honestly. The fact that part of the study took place during Ramadan made women wonder about whether I was fasting. Even though I never ate or drank when I had their company, I told them that I did not fast. I had varying reactions to my answer. Some did not say anything and offered me something to eat or drink. Others asked me whether my parents were fasting in a possible attempt to establish some common ground around our shared identity of Muslim. Nurbanu’s husband and Aslı (on multiple occasions) mentioned that it would be good if I fasted. When Aslı found that I did not fast on the day of the Night of Power[^6], she said that I should have at least fasted that day (Field notes, August 26th 2011). When I jokingly said that she would maybe consider taking me with her to Heaven, she laughed and made a pact with me that whoever went to Heaven would take the other with her. Narin mentioned once that I could eat or drink while they were in the room even though they were fasting, because the fact that I didn’t fast was my sin (Field notes, August 2nd 2011). When she found out that my parents were not fasting either because of their

[^6]: Night of Power (Kadir gecesi): The 27th of Ramadan when the Koran was revealed. It is considered a Holy Day in Islam.
illnesses, she thought I should be fasting for them (Field notes, August 22\textsuperscript{nd} 2011). Gurbet stated that they did not offer me anything to drink or eat because the Imam said it was inappropriate, while fasting, to offer food to others (Field notes, August 13\textsuperscript{th} 2011). None of these dialogues changed the quality of my relationships with them or our daily interactions, at least on the surface.

It is also important to note that while most of the women were pious, the fact they organized their daily schedule around the prayer times or read the Qur’an did not preclude them from cursing at their children when they were angry, gossiping about neighbors, or laughing at and making “sexually explicit” jokes (e.g. Kader making a joke that Gurbet was having an affair with the electrician or that she was eyeing handsome men).

Another significant interaction about my religious “choices” took place when the religion of my husband was revealed. One day, I was late to the neighborhood looking for a black dress to wear for the funeral my husband’s grandmother who had just passed away. When I told Kader about it, she asked me why I needed a black dress in particular. I said it was their customs. The next day she had a black shirt ready for me. It was her daughter’s shirt. She said she went through her daughters’ clothes to find something black for me to wear to the funeral (Field notes, August 22\textsuperscript{nd} 2011). Later that day, as we were talking about my parents’ fasting, Kader asked me my husband’s religion, to which I responded honestly. After talking in Kurdish between themselves, Kader asked me if they could ask me a question. When I said “of course”, they asked me why I married a non-Muslim man. Narin was particularly adamant that I committed a sin by marrying a non-Muslim man. While I did not mind having a conversation about my personal life, Narin’s judgmental tone and insistence on the fact that I should not have married a non-Muslim made me uncomfortable at the time. However, we shortly moved on to
talk about other things, joking how Narin made me use the thicker leaves of the cabbage for the dolma\textsuperscript{7} so that she could blame me if they did not turn good. Narin continued the joke saying that it was our luck that both she and I ended with “thick”, similar to how our husbands were also on the “chubbier” side. In addition to the very important place religion has in their lives, I believe part of this emphasis on my religious practices was the fact that religion was an identity that they wanted to see as a common/shared identity that unified us.

Religion became an identity that differentiated us more so than I anticipated, especially when I found out that we belonged to different schools/sects of Sunni Islam\textsuperscript{8} (which mainly stemmed from my assumption that we would be from the same school of Islam before going to the field. As a matter of fact, it never occurred to me that it could be otherwise). While my family and people around me belonged to and practiced Islam according to the Hanafi school, most of the women in Tarlabası were from the Shafi’i\textsuperscript{9} school. My observation in Turkey has been that conservative Muslims are usually reluctant to touch someone from the opposite sex (e.g. handshaking) under any circumstances, unless they are very close relatives or young children. So when I first saw Kader’s husband, I let him take the lead on whether he would shake my hand or not. However, this shortly became very confusing because there were days when he shook my hand and days when he did not. Moreover, he also tried not to touch my hand on some days, when he asked me to pass the salt or the cushion to put behind his back. I also realized that their daily prayers lasted shorter than my grandparents’ prayers. Soon enough, Kader explained that they were from a different school of Sunni Islam. Among other nuances in

\textsuperscript{7} Any of a family of stuffed vegetable dishes.
\textsuperscript{8} Sunni Islam is one of the two main branches of orthodox Islam (the other being the Shiah), consisting of those who acknowledge the authority of the Sunna. Sunnis accept the first four caliphs as rightful successors of Muhammad.
\textsuperscript{9} Among the four established Sunni schools of legal thought in Islam, the Hanafi school is the oldest. It has a reputation for putting greater emphasis on the role of reason and being more liberal than the other three schools. The Hanafi school also has the most followers among the four major Sunni schools. Shafi’i Islam It is followed by approximately 15% of Muslims world-wide. Most Kurds in Iraq follow the Shafii school of Sunni Islam. The Shafi’i school is considered the easiest school in terms of social and personal rules.
the practice of Islam, Kader explained that in Shafi‘i school, one would not touch a person from the opposite sex (including his wife or her husband) that he/she could theoretically marry after he/she did the ablutions. Doing so required doing the ablutions again. I then realized that this was used as a code word that indicated whether we could shake hands or not. There were other husbands whom I met that I knew I should not be shaking hands with at that specific instance because they said they “did their ablutions”.

“My emotions ran high at times”: Reactions and Feelings Evoked in my Fieldwork

The fieldwork was intense and at times emotionally trying. Given the characteristics of the population I wanted to study with my pilot study, I expected to hear some powerful stories, especially around armed conflict. Recently, more has been written about experiences of armed conflict in the region, and I had read many of them before starting my fieldwork. I strongly believed that my social work training had prepared me to be there for my participants when those stories would be told. Yet, the vivid descriptions of armed conflict women provided me with were beyond my imagination. As I heard their stories, I felt inundated with feelings of shock, anger, and frustration. As women’s eyes teared up telling me their stories, I did my best to be there for them and listen, but I could not help my eyes tearing up at times. There was one instance where we had to take a break from the interview because it became so emotional.

While I was expecting the difficult-to-hear stories of armed conflict, women’s stories about their families-in-law caught me off guard. As I heard what their in-laws did to women, I felt I was listening to a real-life version of the Cinderella tale (except the happy ending). Not only did I think that their treatment was inhuman, I was frustrated by the fact that female members of the in-law family took an active role in instigating much of the emotional and physical abuse. My mind was blown away that women who most likely had experienced the
pain of this mistreatment themselves when they were young, could do the same to their
daughters- or sisters-in-law. I was disappointed to see that the patriarchal system had been so
internalized by women. Having said that, I could also see the ways my participants had been
perpetuating the patriarchal gender system. For instance, I struggled with the fact that they did
not challenge the belief that married women should not work. While I would have nothing but
respect if a woman chose not to work, it was harder for me to grasp the idea that children could
work instead of married women.

My role was not to challenge women’s belief system, but there were times when it was
hard not to do so, especially when the discussion was about girls and education. Although very
few in numbers, some women thought that girls did not have to continue their education beyond
middle school. One of the women thought that her daughter should not go to high school
because she could find a boyfriend there. She had never attended school herself and met her
husband at the textile workshop she used to work at. Interestingly, her husband and her own
mother strongly opposed her view that girls should not go to school. Another woman also
thought that her daughter did not need to go to high school because she would be a housewife
anyway. In both instances, I resorted to humor (which was widely practiced in the community)
to gently challenge these views.

Two instances were particularly challenging for me as they happened to two participants
I deeply cared about. The first one was when I found out that one of my participants was beaten
by her husband the night before. The minute she told me about it, I felt like it happened to me.
Sadness, anger, and disappointment rushed through me all at once. I knew her husband well and
I could not believe that he would do that to his wife. I found myself in a dilemma. I knew I was
in no position to tell her to pack and leave him. Yet, that was exactly what I wanted to tell her.
As I regrouped my thoughts, I canceled my interview for the day. I sat by her, held her hand, and let her cry as I could not help my own tears. We then talked about how she felt and what she thought about what had happened so many times in her marriage.

A similar instance took place with another participant whose husband was in prison at that time. Her narratives of domestic violence her husband inflicted upon her were beyond my imagination. She had recently started thinking about going to a women’s shelter with her kids. When I asked her whether it would not be easier to do so while her husband was in prison, she said “If I do it now, people will think I ran away with another man. I can’t live with that stain to my honor. I will wait for him to beat me again so that I can escape.” I was shocked and saddened by her answer. I could see where she was coming from. Yet being protective of her honor at the expense of risking her life was beyond my comprehension as it had never been part of my reality.

There were times when my participants and I cried together over some of their life experiences or things that happened to them while I was there. However, there were also many laughters and jokes. At no point, I felt unsafe while I was there even on the day when the police raided the streets of Tarlabası to catch the protesters who participated in a protest walk and fled to Tarlabası when the police came. My participants, especially my key participant Kader, always made me feel home and safe.
Figures and Tables

*Figure 1.* Where did women live in the neighborhood?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age</th>
<th># of kids</th>
<th>Women’s education</th>
<th>Women’s current employment</th>
<th>Husband's education</th>
<th>Husband's current employment</th>
<th>House owner or renting</th>
<th>Relationship among participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kader</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>dropped out of 1st grade</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>elementary school graduate</td>
<td>textile</td>
<td>rent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurbet</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>attended night school for a year</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>elementary school graduate</td>
<td>unemployed</td>
<td>rent</td>
<td>Relatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narin</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>elementary school graduate</td>
<td>has a cell phone shop (rent)</td>
<td>rent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatma</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>finished elementary school</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>middle school graduate</td>
<td>works in a restaurant</td>
<td>rent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lale</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>elementary school graduate</td>
<td>whatever job he finds</td>
<td>rent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Şükriye</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>dropped out of 2nd grade</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>elementary school graduate</td>
<td>textile</td>
<td>rent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elif</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>elementary school graduate</td>
<td>works in a restaurant</td>
<td>rent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seda</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>elementary school graduate</td>
<td>has a small restaurant (rent)</td>
<td>rent</td>
<td>Relatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yasemin</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>elementary school graduate</td>
<td>textile</td>
<td>rent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dilan</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>dropped out of 3rd grade</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>elementary school graduate</td>
<td>textile</td>
<td>rent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serap</td>
<td>27 but 33 on ID</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>dropped out of 1st grade</td>
<td>textile</td>
<td>own</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table 1 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Current Job</th>
<th>Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nurbanu</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>dropped out of 3rd grade</td>
<td>cab driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Özlem</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>dropped out of 2nd grade</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>elementary school graduate</td>
<td>textile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sevda</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>sells fruits/veggies on a pushcart</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gülistan</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>elementary school graduate</td>
<td>has a coffeehouse (rent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashı</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>cleaning lady</td>
<td>no husband</td>
<td>no husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zarife</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>cleaning lady</td>
<td>elementary school graduate</td>
<td>cab driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esra</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>did not finish elementary school</td>
<td>textile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gülcan</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>unemployed for the last 3 years (before he was selling stuff on a pushcart)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebru</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>textile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Industry/Status</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nermin</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>Porter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beritan</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>Textile rent (they also own a house) G&quot;ulcan’s husband’s relative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeynep</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>elementary school graduate</td>
<td>Textile has a corner store (rent)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakine</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>a couple of months</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>High school graduate works in a restaurant rent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamze</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Cleaning lady</td>
<td>Textile rent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayşegül</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>At least elementary school graduate works in a bakery rent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Züleyha</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>elementary school graduate</td>
<td>Textile own</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faraşin</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>elementary school graduate</td>
<td>Electrician (walks around with a pushcart) rent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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CHAPTER 4

MIGRATION TALES: WOMEN’S MIGRATION AND ADAPTATION TO ISTANBUL

*Dilan*: ....I was staying in the village with my grandma, and I saw many village guards- people in the village next to us had agreed to become village guards. They came and raided our village. I still remember it, it’s still stuck in my mind how they kicked us out from our homes, how they burnt down our homes, and how they did those things. We left there crying, I’ll never forget it. They burned down my grandma’s village, they threw out all their belongings. Everybody was on the road. I still remember it. I’ll never forget it. They [the soldiers] said “Go away”. They kicked us out. I’ll never forget that day.

*Kader*: Like me, I remember the exact same thing.

*Dilan*: I swear to God I still remember it. Now, I really don’t give a damn about that village and whatever happens to it....Our villages were so nice. We’d go there and play. My grandma’s house was a three-story house. They had the cattle in the basement and they lived on the upper two stories. The village guards burned it down. We were kids back then, we were kids. I was about my son’s age....

*Özge*: So they didn’t give you any explanation?

*Dilan*: No, they burned down everyone’s village back then, right? (Asks Kader)

*Kader*: Yes, that’s how they did it (Dilan: [They burned] everyone’s [village]).

They’d raid the village all at once and regardless of whether a person was in a house or not, they’d burn it down. Especially the young man [in the village], they [the village guards] would step on them.

*Dilan*: Yeah, when there were young men in the village, they beat them down.

*Kader*: And what a horrible beating! (Dilan: Thank God we didn’t have any young men). Those things are still stuck in our minds.

*Dilan*: We wouldn’t have come here if they didn’t burn our villages down. Why would we wanna come here? I swear to God, if you went to our village, you’d never wanna come back.

The conversation between Dilan, Kader and me is a vivid description of one of the reasons why Kurdish families migrated to Istanbul. The armed conflict in the area and the circumstances resulting from it (e.g. increased threat to safety, increased unemployment) played a critical role in the migration of many Kurdish families that lived in the southeast of Turkey. Other families migrated so that wives could join their husbands who had been already working in the city.

Many Kurdish migrant families who moved to big cities in the west region of Turkey,
including Istanbul, were confined to shantytowns in the periphery of cities or to inner neighborhoods due to their limited skills and education necessary to find jobs in the urban context and hence inability to afford decent housing (Ayata & Yükseker, 2005; Yılmaz, 2007; 2008). Ethnic discriminatory practices in the housing and job markets perpetuated their residence in low-income neighborhoods (Şen, 2005). Hence, Kurdish families quickly became marginalized as the new underclass in the city (Ayata & Yükseker, 2005). Kurdish families who live in the Tarlabaşı neighborhood were no exception.

Women’s experiences with migration appear to be different than men’s (Benjamin & Fancy, 1998; Gururaja, 2000; Erdem et al., 2003; Erman, 1998a). Compared to Kurdish men, Kurdish women experience greater marginalization and social exclusion in the city due to limited literacy skills and fluency in Turkish in addition to traditional gender roles (Aker, 2007; Çağlayan et al., 2011; Yükseker, 2006). In a report published in 2001 by Göç-Der (2001) with a large sample of migrant Kurdish people, 58 percent of women spoke only Kurdish and 35 percent of women spoke both Kurdish and Turkish (in contrast to 18% and 74% of men respectively). Thus, a difficult transition process awaits Kurdish women when they migrate to the city. This does not mean that men’s adaptation to the city is necessarily easier than women’s, but rather that there are potential qualitative differences in how men and women adapt to life in the city after migration.

Yet, studies that uniquely focus on Kurdish women’s experiences of migration and its aftermath are rather limited, and mostly focus on internal displacement (Çağlayan et al., 2011; Çelik, 2005; Şen, 2005), leaving out more diverse and recent waves of migration. Exploring the various pathways that have led Kurdish women to come to Istanbul has multiple functions. First of all, it helps to understand how “it all began” or in other words to contextualize women’s
arrival to the city. Secondly and more importantly, looking more closely into women’s narratives on migration allows us to detect the similarities and differences in the lived experiences of migration and adaptation to urban life.

Therefore, this chapter is devoted to the migration tales of women in Tarlabası, and focuses on the migration process that led women to come to Istanbul and their adaptation to the city life. More specifically, I explore women’s reasons for migration to Istanbul in the first section of this chapter. The second section of the chapter looks at the struggles women have experienced since they came to Istanbul while highlighting the strategies women developed to actively cope with the various challenges they faced.

**Reasons for Migration to Istanbul**

Women in the study came to Istanbul from different cities in the east and southeast regions of Turkey (see Figure 2 for cities women migrated from). The number of years participants had been in Istanbul varied greatly. Some came to Istanbul well over 15 years ago whereas others arrived more recently. Some of the women were still little girls when they moved to Istanbul with their parents. Other women arrived to the city after they had their own little girls and boys. The mean number of years women spent in Istanbul was 14 years. Not all women came directly to Tarlabası to settle, and others moved out of the neighborhood, only to come back later. Hence the mean number of years spent in the neighborhood was lower than the number of years in Istanbul (11 years). Kader, Nermin, Zeynep, Ebru, and Şükriye were among the most “seasoned” residents of Tarlabası. Two major reasons for migration were identified by Kurdish women, namely marital union/reunion and armed conflict, and are discussed next (see Table 2 for a detailed overview of participants’ migration patterns).
“My husband was working in Istanbul, so I joined him”: Marital Union/Reunion

More than half (19) of the women came to Istanbul through marriage. Women such as Fatma, Lale, Nurbanu, Aslı, Esra, Gamze, and Züleyha either came right after their wedding ceremony in their hometown or came to Istanbul to have their wedding ceremony. Fatma’s family was originally from Batman, a city in the southeast of Turkey, but the family migrated to Adana before any of their children were born (her parents returned to their hometown in Batman after her father retired from work). Thus, Fatma was living with her parents in Adana when her husband’s mother came to her family to ask for her hand. After the wedding in Adana, she and her husband first stayed with her mother-in-law in her house in Adana for a month and then moved to Istanbul to live with her mother-in-law, this time in her house in Istanbul.

**Fatma:** We [I] got married and came. We considered going back to Batman [hometown] many times, but it wasn’t meant to be. My husband works here. I don’t have many relatives from my side of the family here. There are few distant relatives, but they live in other parts of the city and don’t come here much.

Aslı came to Istanbul for the first time when she was 15, after she married her much older husband that her father gave her away to. Six months later, when she could not take it anymore, she returned to her hometown only to find her father trying to marry her to someone else. So she escaped after being tortured by her father and has been living in Istanbul since she was 16 years old. Lale was in love with the man she married and followed him to Istanbul after staying with him for a month in their hometown. They settled in Tarlabası, where her husband lived while he worked in the city. Her husband’s brother and other relatives also lived in the neighborhood.

Zarife came to Istanbul not because of her marriage, but because of her divorce. Zarife left her village to go live with her husband and his family in a city in the west of the country.
When her husband decided to divorce her, her brothers who still lived in her hometown contacted her to let her know that she should either kill herself or that they did not want her back in the village because she dishonored the family with her divorce. She was on her way to the village, as she had nowhere else to go, when her brother who lived in Istanbul with his wife and children came to take her to stay with them.

**Zarife**: After my divorce, they [my in-laws] were gonna take me back to my hometown. My brothers said “Zarife better kill herself at the doorstep of her husband’s house. We don’t want her back here”. And I said “Either here or there, where should I kill myself?” My in-laws say they don’t want me. My brothers say they don’t want me. Finally, my brother in Istanbul had pity on me and accepted me. He brought me [to Istanbul] to stay with him.

Özlem first moved to Karaman (a central Anatolian city) with her parents from a small village in Mardin when she was young. Her father was a seasonal worker in Karaman and the family could only see him when he came home for a couple of months. Her parents finally decided that the family should be together and moved to Karaman. She also mentioned that many villages, including their own, were evacuated by the soldiers four to five years after they came to Karaman. Özlem’s move to Istanbul took place years later when she married her husband who was already living in Istanbul.

**Özlem**: When I was her age (showing her 4 year-old daughter), we were in the village. And my dad left for work in Karaman, and then came back and then left again. He didn’t stay [in the village]. That’s why my dad said “Come here [to Karaman]. I come to the village in the winter and we spend it all and I leave again. We can’t save any money and we also miss each other”. So we had to go there [to Karaman].

**Özge**: Uh huh. So when you guys married, your husband had already been living in Istanbul, right? (Özlem: hmm hmm) So you knew you were gonna come to Istanbul.

**Özlem**: Yes, he had come from Istanbul [when he saw me in Karaman]. I wasn’t excited at all [about coming to Istanbul] because I didn’t wanna be away from my family... Some people get excited about coming to Istanbul after marriage. I wasn’t at all, I wished we’d stay in Karaman.
Sevda, Beritan, and Gamze joined their husbands years after they were married. After the wedding, they stayed behind with their parents-in-law. Their husbands who worked in Istanbul returned to the village occasionally to visit them.

**Sevda:** I was living with my mother- and father-in-law [in my husband’s village]. I had brothers-in-law that I was taking care of there. I stayed there for five years. My life in that village...the first year I didn’t have a kid. After a year, I had my oldest daughter. My husband came to Istanbul to work and I stayed behind with my in-laws. He [my husband] worked in Istanbul and we wouldn’t even talk on the phone for six or seven months. I was in a difficult situation, I was staying with my in-laws...I had my two kids and was expecting the third. And he said “You’re there, I’m here, it can’t go like this anymore”. I said “the kids need diapers, they need formula. I need to take care of them. I can’t always take care of my father-in-law” I always took care of them. So I finally came to Istanbul.

Beritan lived with her parents-in-law for two years before she moved to Istanbul to be with her husband. Her account on the unemployment in the area and the fact that many young men fled the area draw attention to the structural inequalities and the “non-violent” impact of the armed conflict on young men in the region.

**Beritan:** [After the wedding], I went to their house. I stayed [with them] for about two years. My husband was here [in Istanbul]. I stayed with them [in-laws] for two years or two-and-a-half years. I don’t know, I can’t remember exactly. But he came back and stayed in the village one month every year. I stayed there for about two years and he only came back two or three times. He stayed here [in Istanbul]. He’d come back [to the village], stay for a month or twenty days, and return back here....There was no work there. What would he do if he returned to the village? He worked here. Plus even those who didn’t have a job here escaped from there. Even those who had a job back there, those who had fields and all fled to Istanbul. Moreover, the young men didn’t stay there [in the village]. You wouldn’t find one young man, they all fled. So we had to come here.

After staying with her in-laws for seven years while her husband worked in Istanbul, Gamze and her husband decided that it was time for Gamze and their children to move to Istanbul. In addition to limited job opportunities in their hometown as a motivation to move, they also thought that Istanbul would offer better opportunities for their children as children
would not be obliged to work in the fields and miss school. Hence Gamze moved to the city with her children and reunited with her husband.

Gamze: My husband would work for a while in Istanbul and stay in the village for a bit. He was [working] in Istanbul when he was single too....He was working in textiles like now. We moved to Istanbul] because of the financial situation. There was no job back there. We said “Let’s go to Istanbul. We’ll be more comfortable and the kids can go to school. They can continue school [there]”. In the village, it wasn’t like here....Here I live in one room but my children go to school properly, all three of them. I work but they [my kids] don’t need to work. If we stayed back there, they’d go to school for a month, then they’d have to work. We can’t send them to school properly there. Even if they go, it’s not very effective. They can start school a month after the school year starts [because of agricultural work]. If you start school a month after your friends, how can you catch up? You fall behind.

Nurbanu married her husband in their hometown. After staying there for a while, her husband decided to come find work in Istanbul. One month after he came to Tarlabası where he had other family members, Nurbanu joined him.

Nurbanu: My husband came here to work, and I followed him [after] we got married in the village. There were jobs in the village. But he [my husband] didn’t like village [agricultural] work. He said it was too hard and didn’t do it. He wanted to come to Istanbul, that’s why we came. His sister was [already] here. He had relatives here. He came near them. He came a month before I did. He worked for a month, and brought me in.

Züleyha also joined her husband who was already working in the city after their marriage.

Züleyha: My husband was here [in Istanbul]. He came when he was young. He didn’t have a mother. He didn’t have a father. He then came to the village to ask for my hand....I wanted to come to Istanbul. I wondered how Istanbul was like.

In both Nurbanu’s and Züleyha’s cases, their hometowns were evacuated after they married and came to the city. Nurbanu’s husband and her son, who was young at the time, were in their hometown for a funeral when the evacuation occurred and witnessed it firsthand.

Nurbanu: The armed conflict had not started back then [when I got married]. But [then] everybody started talking about the conflict, how they escaped, how they [the village guards or the soldiers] burned the houses. We weren’t there
[anymore] at that time. I was here. My eldest son was in the village [with his father] at that time. He told me that his grandparents were moving out. He didn’t understand. He said “They are crying and moving out at the same time”. My mom, my dad, my older sister, my uncle, all my relatives were there [at that time]. [After the evacuation], some went to Izmir, some came to Istanbul, some to Adana. Everybody went somewhere.

Züleyha’s hometown was evacuated after she came to Istanbul, but she saw other villages being evacuated when she was still in her hometown. Many of her family members went to other cities in the west while others went abroad to escape while others.

Züleyha: I got married and came here. They evacuated the village after that. Before my marriage, they evacuated many villages around us. The whole East region became empty. When I went back home after my marriage, a lot of people had moved to larger towns and lived there. Nobody lives there [now]. But they go there during the day to work on their fields and go back to the town in the evening.

Even those who came for marriage were directly or indirectly affected by the armed conflict and internal displacement in their lives. Faraşin, who had moved from her hometown in Mardin to Izmir (Turkey’s third biggest city) with her family when she was younger, came to Istanbul directly after she married her husband who was already in Istanbul. She started living with her husband, and her husband’s parents and siblings in an apartment in Tarlabası. Her move with her family to Izmir, on the other hand, was precipitated by other families in their hometown being forced to move. Faraşin stated that as their hometown gradually lost its population, they decided to move to Izmir where her uncle lived with his family.

Kader’s husband was working in Kırklareli (a city in the northwest of Turkey) and her brothers-in-law in Istanbul while she stayed with her parents-in-law in their hometown. When the brothers-in-law decided that they needed a woman in the house to take care of household chores, they decided to call Kader to ask her to come to Istanbul to look after them. Kader’s husband would also move from Kırklareli to Istanbul and the family would stay together. When
I started to ask whether their move had anything to do with the armed conflict, she interrupted and said that the reason for unemployment in the area was the armed conflict. She also acknowledged that fear that something would happen to them also drove them to move to the city.

**Kader:** My brothers-in-law were here. I was in the village with my mother-in-law. My brothers-in-law were single at the time. They called me and said “Come stay with us because we’re single and when we come home from work we’re tired but we have to cook and do laundry.” They asked me to come and I said okay. I came here. My husband was working in Kırklareli at the time, he came here too.... There isn’t any job in the village. Yes, there is some seasonal agricultural work. But even to do that agricultural work, we were coming to this part of the country. Life back there was difficult, we had to migrate here. If there were jobs there, we would not have come here....I wanted to come here because I wanted to get out of the village. My husband was here and I was there. Plus I was pregnant. I thought we’d at least be together.

**Özge:** So about the armed conflict there (Kader interrupts)

**Kader:** Yes it had to do with that too. For instance, you couldn’t go to the city at the time. There was always either an explosion or they killed someone on the road. There was always something, so we fled here out of fear. It was mostly out of fear that we came here. Sometimes my mother-in-law said she wanted to send her youngest children to Istanbul as well so that nothing happened to them.

**Özge:** So that’s why there was unemployment?

**Kader:** Yes, that’s exactly why there were not any jobs.

**Gurbet:** They were burning down the villages. There were lots of killings.

Narin had her wedding ceremony in Istanbul, after which she started living with her husband, his single brothers, her sister-in-law Gurbet and her family in the same house. She has been living in that house since then. Prior to her move to Istanbul which was due to her marriage, she and her family had to leave their hometown and settle in a larger town nearby as a result of the forced migration. Narin believed the military asked them to leave in an attempt to protect them from the village guards (that were armed by the State to work against PKK) who were also mostly of Kurdish ethnicity. Narin stated that her hometown was still deserted.

**Narin:** The village guards and the terrorists fought next to our village. Two village guards and a terrorist died. Then, the village guards blamed us. They said
“Why did this happen in your village? You knew about it [the terrorists’ presence]. And we didn’t know anything. We really didn’t know. We didn’t see them [the terrorists]. They never came near us. They said we were Arabs. They didn’t come near Arabs that much. We didn’t cause any trouble for them, and they didn’t cause any for us. So we told the village guards many times that we didn’t know. They kept saying it was our fault. They came to our village so many times to scare us. Maybe they were gonna kill us. There was a commander -our soldiers there still like us very much. The soldiers there came to my uncle one day and told him “Leave the village. We keep guard of you here every day, but what if we have to be somewhere else one day, and they [the village guards] come and do something to you….So leave.” So we left....

Gurbet came to Istanbul to be “a bride to her husband” who was working in Istanbul. Her husband and his family visited her family in her hometown to ask for her hand. Gurbet then came to Istanbul to have her wedding ceremony and live with her husband and his single brothers. While she did not migrate to Istanbul due to internal displacement, Gurbet described in detail their daily exposure to the armed conflict in her hometown. She also talked about the “indirect” effect of the armed conflict on her husband’s migration to Istanbul when explaining why she came to the city.

**Gurbet:** I came here as a bride [after marriage]. And my husband came before me when he was single. Kader’s husband was working in Kırklareli, and the other brothers, including my husband, were working here, I mean in this neighborhood....When they grew up, there was a lot of battle there....So their mother told them[her sons] “Take your siblings and go away! We’ll stay behind”. So they came. There was no woman here to take care of them, no sister or a sister-in-law. Finally, Kader came to take care of them....And when I came here, she moved out.

Beritan also came to the city as a result of her marriage. However, she and her family were affected by the armed conflict when she was younger. Beritan lost her uncle and brother to the armed conflict, when the soldiers mistook her brother for a PKK fighter on his visit to his uncle in another village. She vividly described their experiences with the armed conflict, which resulted in their moving out from their hometown to a larger village closeby.
**Beritan:** ...We came because of the armed conflict. We used to sleep on the roof in the summer. We were still young, and we used to curl up on the bed when we heard the gun fire. They [soldiers and PKK] were firing at each other. The following morning, the soldiers would raid the village and nobody could get out of their house. There was a lot of oppression. They’d search the houses and turn everything upside down.... So it became gradually worse and people started moving out one by one. We moved out by ourselves gradually because there was a raid every day. They’d say to us “The guerillas come and you give them bread”...I mean, that was right, the guerillas were coming to the village sometimes and we were scared of them too. For instance, we were little and my parents were scared of them too, so they had to give them bread. My mom was alone at home - my dad wasn’t home for about five years. He was working outside the country. He’d come and stay for a little bit and go back- So my mom was alone and she was scared. She’d say “What can I do? They come again and again. I’m scared”. So we had to give them [the guerillas] food. Then the soldiers would come and say “You gave them food. Why did you give them food?” They’d both beat us....The soldiers’ [beating] was worse, but if we didn’t give the guerillas food, they might have done something to us too....There were ten households in the village, and they all left. Slowly the village was deserted. After my maternal uncles left, my paternal uncles left too. We were the last ones to stay because my dad wasn’t home. There were only one or two households left. My paternal grandma left first, and then asked us to join her. So everybody left out of fear. Because we couldn’t take it anymore.

Elif also decided to join her husband who had gone to work in Istanbul. Five months after her husband started working, he came back to the village to visit Elif and his kids. That is when Elif told him that she wanted to move to Istanbul as well. For her, the reason for migration was a combination of poverty, armed conflict, and her husband being away. They chose to come to Tarlabası because they had relatives living in the neighborhood.

**Elif:** There was armed conflict everywhere in Mardin....For instance, when I was in labor for my second son, an explosion happened in the village. Everybody ran away and I stayed behind by myself.....All my contractions went away out of fear. There was armed conflict everywhere in Mardin, in all the villages....There was unemployment in the village, there was poverty. There was an armed conflict all the time. So we fled and came here. My sister-in-law was here. So we came after her. We didn’t know anywhere else, so we came here....We didn’t know anywhere else. We heard about Tarlabası, that there were Kurds here. So we came here, we didn’t know anywhere else in Istanbul....We had relatives here, so we came here.
Nermin’s arrival to Istanbul was related to marriage in a different way. She did not come to Istanbul to join a husband, but to run away from a potential husband her father wanted her to marry as his second wife (see Chapter 8). Her single brother who was in Istanbul at that time came to pick her up and took her to Istanbul to live with him. While her move to Istanbul was due to an escape from a potential marriage, her arrival with her family from her hometown to Adana, a nearby city where her uncle lived, was due to internal displacement.

_Nermin:_ We lived in the village. I don’t know they made us migrate and they tore down the village. The soldiers asked us to get out. So we did. My dad said let’s go to Adana. We stayed in Adana for ten years. My uncle was there. We stayed with him for two months. Then we rented our own apartment. We rented for five years. We worked hard and bought ourselves a house....The State gave us arms [to become village guards] but we refused. Then they kicked us out. We couldn’t save anything. They burned down everything. My uncle gave us some stuff. We couldn’t save anything.

“I’ll never forget that fear”: Armed Conflict

Other women came to Istanbul with their family of origin when they were children or at a later time with their husbands (and children) either because they fled their hometown due to increasing concerns for safety due to the armed conflict or because they were forced by the military to leave.

Gülcan was living in the village in Mardin with her children while her husband was working in different parts of the country. Six months before Gülcan came, her husband started working in Istanbul. Gülcan’s mother also had already moved to Istanbul to live with her other daughter and insisted that Gülcan come to Istanbul as well. However, the major force behind Gülcan’s decision to move was the fear of living with the incessant armed conflict.

_Gülcan_:....They [the soldiers] did a search. There was nothing in our house. There was nothing in the village. Then there was this old man married to this young woman. And the soldier asked her “Why did you marry this old man? You should marry someone like me”. They did extreme things like that. They didn’t do
anything to the woman, but they beat the old man up. They turned the village upside down. We had a lot of hardship in the village, and we came here. I was very scared there Özge.... They always came and searched the homes, turning them upside down.... The kids were afraid too. The commandants, some were good and some were bad. The kids were scared.

Şükriye came to Istanbul with her family when she was nine years old. While her village was not evacuated, they lived under constant fear and witnessed death on a daily basis.

Şükriye: Before coming to Istanbul, our life was very hard. We were in the Village, we lived under constant fear. There was oppression because we were Kurds. We were scared. That’s why we fled and came here, out of fear.... The soldiers and the terrorists were firing at each other, which scared us. We couldn’t go to bed out of fear of gunfire. We were always on pins and needles.... It [gunfires] happened every night. In the morning – the mosque was right across our house- they’d bring the corpses to the mosque. We were depressed of seeing all those funerals.... We were in constant fear. Life there [in the village] was very hard.

When her father came to Istanbul to buy a new truck, his relatives, who had already moved to Istanbul because they feared the PKK recruitment, convinced him to bring his family to Istanbul as well. Hence, Şükriye’s father who came to buy a truck bought instead an apartment in Tarlabası, and the whole family joined him a month later.

Serap also came at a young age with her parents because of the armed conflict. She vividly described many difficulties that the soldiers created in their lives.

Serap: Those village guards, when they raided our village, it scared me a lot. They were causing a lot of distress for people. They were beating people and all. That is why we came here. If they didn’t do those things, we wouldn’t have come here. The soldiers were beating people. They stopped my parents so many times on the road. They wouldn’t let through people who were on their way to the market to sell their crops. They’d throw people’s crops on the floor. That’s why we came here. They’d force people to become village guards or leave the village. They burned down the houses, and after that we came to the city. All the pictures my parents had on the wall burned to ashes. Everything in the house was burned to ashes. They didn’t let us take our belongings, they burned them all....

After their village was burned down, Serap and her family first stayed in a larger town nearby
for a couple of months. They then decided to move to Istanbul. Her brother who at the time worked in Karaman went to Istanbul and rented an apartment first. The rest of the family followed him.

**Serap:** Then we first went to Buzkaya\(^{10}\) and after one or two months we came to Istanbul. I had two brothers, and they both worked outside the village. And we, the girls, stayed with my mom behind in the village. And it was hard not to have any man in the house.... So my brother who worked in Karaman went to Istanbul and rented an apartment. He called us, and I came, and then my mother came. After we came here, we worked and pulled ourselves together [financially].

Gülistan, Zeynep, and Ebru also migrated to Istanbul because of the armed conflict. In Gülistan’s husband’s hometown where she lived with her children and her parents-in-law (her husband worked in other cities), those who agreed to become village guards, and thus side with the State against PKK, were allowed to stay. Those who refused were asked to leave their homes. Hence, Gülistan moved to another town with her children and in-laws. About a year after that, they moved to Istanbul because of the unemployment in the area.

**Gülistan:** Nobody stayed in our village. Vallahi they all left the village. Some went to Karaman, some to Manisa, some to Izmir. Some became village guards. There was no one left in the village. There was another village nearby ours. I stayed there for a year, and then I came here. There was no work in the village. The kids went hungry. The fathers all came here [for work]. They were all here.

Zeynep’s husband was personally affected by the armed conflict. Zeynep discussed in detail some of the violence that was imposed on the villagers by the village guards.

**Zeynep:** There was armed conflict. The village guards would come and gather everybody in the schoolyard of the village. Then they’d search the houses. They wouldn’t leave anything undamaged. They’d tear everything down, break everything. They’d throw fuel on our winter stock and burn it. They’d burn the houses. There was also this one incident one time where they killed four people right in front of my eyes. I was very scared at that time.....The soldiers and the village guards were cursing at us. It was really bad. Every day, they’d raid the village. We would wake up in the morning and the soldiers were there....I condemned that village. My husband tells me to go visit the village and get some

\(^{10}\) A larger town in the area
Ebru came to Istanbul with her parents because they could not bear the armed conflict anymore. Ebru’s father was already in the city working. The intensity of the armed conflict combined with the unemployment in the area pushed many families out, including Ebru’s family.

_Ebru_: We were still kids when life in our village turned upside down. The armed conflict broke out there. The terrorists killed so many people from the village. And once that happened, our villagers didn’t stay there longer. We didn’t get in trouble or anything but my dad was already working in Istanbul. And there wasn’t much work to do there….Yes, they killed a couple of people in our village….They killed each other. So many people were killed so we all migrated here and there. We left our village. It’s been 20 years since we came here.

“_When I first came to Istanbul…_”: Challenges and Coping Strategies

Low-income Kurdish women talked about various struggles associated with their migration to the biggest metropolitan of Turkey. This section describes these struggles and enumerates the strategies women developed to deal with the barriers they faced in the city (See Figure 3).

Feelings of Loneliness

Many women expressed feelings of loneliness associated with moving away from their parents, relatives, and friends. Being detached from their existing social and kinship networks also cut the immediate emotional and practical support that their support system provided.

_Gamze_: Being away from one’s home. I had never been away from my mom. Both my husband’s family and mine stayed back. I couldn’t get used to here. It was very difficult the first few years, very difficult. Plus, we didn’t know anybody here so we stayed home all the time, and we were getting bored. It was very hard back then.

_Dilan_: I swear to God, I cried for a month. I told my husband “Why are you not sending me back to be with my parents?” I was very bored here, but I’m not
anymore. Now I have friends and acquaintances. I didn’t know anybody back then.

Fatma: If I could, I wouldn’t be here. I’d be in my village with my own relatives. I’d stay in the vicinity of my village. But I guess it’s our fate to be here, our source of income is here. I’d be happier there [in my village]. Here, one can’t help but feel alone. Sometimes I call my family and my sisters are at my mom’s, my nephews are there. Even my kids ask me why we aren’t there. I’d love to be there and visit them when I wanted. Now, we are so far away. I can’t go visit them when I want. I can only go once a year or once every two years and stay for a month. That’s why I feel a bit lonely here. It’s better if one doesn’t move away for marriage.

Even though women, especially those who came through marriages, had their husband’s relatives in the city, they still felt alone. When Narin married her husband and came to live in her husband’s household in Istanbul, including Gurbet and her family, she suffered from being away from her own family. The fact that she was of Arabic origin and not fluent in Kurdish at the time she joined the family also contributed to her isolation.

Narin: I feel lonely here. I didn’t know anyone here when I came. Plus everybody in the family is each other’s relative. I am not. For instance, Kader and Gurbet are cousins. Gurbet is married to her uncle’s son and Kader is married to her aunt’s son….I am the only non-family. I am also from a different village….Plus I couldn’t express myself to them. Sometimes I would stay in my room, and they’d be upset with me. They’d stay “Why don’t you come out?” And I’d say “I am bored”. I mean, I didn’t know how to speak with them because I didn’t know much Kurdish at the time. I knew very very little Kurdish. I learned to speak Kurdish here. I understood what they were saying, but I couldn’t reply back.

Narin usually found consolation in her sister-in-law Kader’s company. When she had a problem, Kader was there for her to help her out. On the other hand, Narin’s husband was not very supportive in easing her feelings of loneliness. When she asked him to take her out, he was reluctant.

Narin: Sometimes I’d ask my husband to take me out because I was bored, but he wouldn’t come because he had work. Plus neither Gurbet’s nor Kader’s husband were taking their wives out. So we wouldn’t go out either.
Beritan also complained about the fact that her husband and her in-laws were not emotionally supportive and did not help to ease her feelings of loneliness. Especially because she was not fluent in Turkish, she could not socialize with the neighbors in the first neighborhood (that was predominantly Turkish) she lived in when she came to Istanbul.

Beritan: I didn’t speak Turkish at the time. I wasn’t getting along with my in-laws at home and I couldn’t speak to people outside home because I didn’t know Turkish….I think if I had people I knew, some acquaintances, or if my in-laws were nicer to me [it would have been easier to adjust]. Not all in-laws are like that. There are in-laws who like their daughters-in-law, who take them to places, treat them nicely. I didn’t see any of that. I’m saying if my husband or my in-laws were more helpful, it wouldn’t be that hard to get used to [living in the city].

Nurbanu recounted how happy she was to see a man who came to visit from her village. Even though she had her husband’s relatives in the same apartment building, she missed her home and seeing a man from her hometown made her feel better. Gradually, as more and more Kurdish people settled in the neighborhood, Nurbanu started feeling like she was in her hometown and did not miss it as much.

Nurbanu: I didn’t know anyone. I missed my mom and dad…. A man from our village came [to the neighborhood]. And I screamed his name (everybody laughs) and ran to see him. I was so longing to see my relatives….Then so many Kurds came and I had many relatives in the city. After our village was evacuated, everybody came here. Now, I’m like in my village. I don’t even think about going back there.

Özlem also came to Istanbul through her marriage and lived for a year in another neighborhood with her parents-in-law. Even though she lived with her in-laws and her husband took her out on the weekends, she still felt having a close relative in Istanbul would have made a big difference.

Özlem: If my mother or my sister was here, she’d help me out. I’d tell myself “If my sister was here, I could go to her and ask her about where to go, where to find things. I could ask her to go to the farmers’ market together or go shopping together”. Many people here have their sisters here or friends, and when they go
somewhere they go together. So sometimes I say “If I had a sister or an aunt here, I could also go to places with her.”

In addition to the lack of emotional support, Kader pointed to how having older relatives, either from her side or her husband’s, would have helped her deal with the hardships of taking care of a household of eleven at the age of 18 when she arrived.

**Kader**: Everything was so hard for me because I was only 18 years old. Neither my mom nor my mother-in-law was with me. I was all alone. I didn’t have any relatives here either. I felt lonely in all possible ways. I’d say “I wish I had my mom or my older sister here, or someone older than me, she could support me.” I was by myself, 11 people were staying with me. I didn’t know how to cook, how to do the dishes. So I had problems with all that.

For other women, having relatives (hers or her husband’s) or children helped them not to feel the loneliness they might otherwise have felt in the city.

**Sevda**: Nope, I didn’t feel that [lonely]. I was with my sisters-in-law.

**Elif**: No it wasn’t hard for me because my sister-in-law was here. My siblings were here. Everybody who was on this street was from our village. So I didn’t have any problems. My sister-in-law helped me out. She found an apartment for us. We’d go and eat and shower at her place once a week. I never had any hardship here.

**Zeynep**: No, I had my kids so I didn’t feel alone at all. If I were by myself, I would. But I had my kids so I was busy with them and the days went by. So I didn’t feel alone.

Despite the fact that she had her children and her very close relatives (her mother, her father, and her siblings) in the same neighborhood, Gülcan, on the other hand, still was bored because she did not know her neighbors. Her lack of fluency in Turkish also contributed to her isolation since there were not many Kurds in the neighborhood at the time. She thought that her feelings of loneliness took a toll on her health.

**Gülcan**: My dad was here, my mom was here. My sister was here.... I had many neighbors back in the village but here I didn’t know anyone. I was bored. I came here and my body like stopped. I didn’t know the neighbors here. How was I gonna live here!? What was I gonna do here!? I got depressed....My husband
goes to work, I tell him not to go. He says “What am I gonna do? Sit at home?” I tell him “Don’t go, I get bored.” He says “Why do you get bored?” I started having health issues my daughter Özge. I felt like I was gonna explode. I didn’t know anyone. I didn’t know how to speak [Turkish] with people. People were talking to me and I didn’t understand what they were saying. Maybe they were cursing at me, I didn’t understand.

Women found it unbearable when they first settled in neighborhoods where they had nobody to speak Kurdish with. Especially those who came in the neighborhood when the Kurdish community had not been formed yet expressed the sense of solitude resulting from not being able to speak to anyone except the family members they came with, as women were not fluent in Turkish.

**Şükriye**: We didn’t know anyone. Nobody was sitting outside like that [back then]. Everybody was Turkish. It was hard for us. Now, everybody is an acquaintance of ours.

Ebru also mentioned that Kurds were very scarce when she first came to the neighborhood with her parents. She then elaborated on how Kurds gradually filled the blocks of Tarlabası neighborhood as a result of the armed conflict and unemployment.

**Ebru**: When we first came, there were no Kurds here. You could barely find two or three Kurdish households around here. Then people came because of unemployment. Kurdish families gradually filled this neighborhood up so that their children could work here when they grew up. They came here to make money. Others came because their villages were burned down. Ours wasn’t burned down, but other villages in the area were. So a lot of people fled their villages or were forced to leave. They settled in this area as well.

All women greatly appreciated being surrounded by their own people, including people from their hometown, whom they defined as kin even though they were not blood relatives. Those who came in more recent years were lucky to have an established Kurdish community.

**Lale**: We like each other, we hang out and chat together. Our neighbors are all our acquaintances. So I don’t feel like a stranger.
Elif: When I came to this neighborhood, they were all my relatives. It was exactly like in our village. No difference at all. Kader and all, we are all relatives.

Women gradually recreated their hometown in the city, recreating the social, cultural, and linguistic environment to a certain degree as a result of the increasing Kurdish population in the neighborhood of Tarlabası. Even corner and grocery stores were gradually owned by Kurds (Field notes, June 25th 2011), making it easier for women who were not fluent in Turkish. Women played an active role in establishing and nurturing their relationships with the neighbors. Though contentious at times, most women praised their relationships with their neighbors, emphasizing their critical role as a support mechanism. Even though women were more cautious about sharing their problems with their neighbors, practical and emotional support to some degree was common among the neighbors. Women helped each other with cooking, cleaning, and child care (Field notes, June 13th and 29th 2011), as also illustrated by Dilan.

Dilan: Our neighbors here are very good. We help each other with washing the carpets for instance, for painting our houses. Let’s say I have to clean my windows today, if I tell my neighbors, they’ll come and help me. Our neighbors are very good. We get along well. That’s why I don’t wanna go anywhere far from them.

Women paid each other visits when there was illness, death, or birth in one’s family (Field notes, July 13th 2011). Some even thought that neighbors were “beyond brothers and sisters” to them.

Serap: We help each other out. If something [bad] happens to them, we go help them. If something happens to us, they come help us....We go to the open market together, to shopping together. We always go with our neighbors.

Kader: If somebody is sick, everybody comes and takes her to the hospital. If you don’t have food for dinner, my neighbors will bring me something. I mean, we’re that close. We share everything with each other. We share our food, we go to the farmers’ market together, we go out together, we sit outside together.
Ethnic identity became a source of safety, solidarity, and support for the women. Fatma, who came to Tarlabası about six or seven years ago, contrasted her experience in a predominantly Turkish neighborhood where she lived when she first came to Istanbul, with her experience in Tarlabası.

*Fatma:* It’s really nice, we’re all Kurdish here... I’m happy that we’re all Kurdish here, we’re close to each other. If one of us goes to the hospital or somewhere else, the others keep an eye on her kids.... But in the other neighborhood [where I lived], it was all Turkish. Everybody stayed in their home and didn’t go outside. Nobody asked the other how she was doing. They would stay away from each other’s business. They wouldn’t do a thing even if somebody killed someone.

Gamze, Dilan, and Gülistan raised similar points:

*Gamze:* What I like is that we’re all Kurdish. We speak the same language. We’re understanding towards each other. But if they were Turkish here, it wouldn’t be the same. It wouldn’t be like having Kurds here. If they were Turkish, you’d go to them like a guest. But the Kurds are really close to each other.

*Gülistan:* No, [I’m not concerned about my safety], because all our neighbors here are Kurdish. We only have three or four Turkish neighbors, the rest is Kurdish. There are people from Mardin, Van, Siirt, Batman. There are people from my village as well. We all sit outside, chat, and drink tea.

*Dilan:* No, I’m not scared; I’m not scared at all [in this neighborhood] because they’re all people I know. Sometimes my husband came home late; I was home alone until 12 am or 1 am. In the summer everybody is sitting outside anyway. In the winter, when he came late, I swear to God I wasn’t afraid. My neighbor upstairs, she is an acquaintance. So is my neighbor downstairs. I know everybody here. That’s why I am not scared. If I were in another neighborhood, maybe I’d be scared.

Even women who were not particularly close with their neighbors expressed that they felt safer and more comfortable being in a Kurdish community that spoke the “same language” both literally and figuratively.

*Yasemin:* I don’t know a lot of people, only this one girl. I go to her house or we sit outside, we go to the open market together... The other neighbors, I see them outside, but they’re not like that girl. What I like about here is that everybody is
Kurdish. Sometimes I go and sit outside, and everybody is Kurdish. I don’t know, Kurds you can ask them for help….Of course, there’re good people among Turks as well, but Kurds speak the same language. We understand each other; we can tell our problem when something happens.

**Women’s Limited Mobility in the City**

Many women reported that their mobility was restricted, especially during the first few years, because they did not know the city and their neighborhood. Women were further intimidated by scary stories they heard about what might happen in the city. Thus they relied on relatives to help them out until they got used to navigating their way.

*Kader:* When I came here, I was a total stranger. I didn’t know anyone. I didn’t know how to get around. I didn’t know how to go to the farmers’ market. I didn’t know anywhere. I couldn’t even get out of the house, I was scared. And everybody scared me even more saying “This is Istanbul, this or that can happen to you”. So my brothers-in-law used to come with me when I went somewhere because they had been here for a while [and knew the city]. They were coming to the farmers’ market with me or anywhere else I went to. They helped me until I got used to [getting around]. But now I go anywhere in Istanbul (we laugh).

*Serap:* Because people were saying things like the thieves were cutting people’s ears and wrists, we couldn’t go anywhere by ourselves. Either my older brother or my uncle was with us. We used to work together back then so they were with us….When we first came, our uncle came with us everywhere we went because we didn’t know the city. Everything was unfamiliar….All the streets looked alike to me. We slowly got used to it. Within four to five months, I came to know my surroundings.

*Ayşegül:* When I first came to Istanbul, I was very scared because people were saying things like “They kidnap girls, or make them do bad things”. So I was very scared when I was out on the street.

The fact that women did not speak Turkish made it harder for them to navigate city life. The simplest tasks such as going to grocery shopping were hindered as they could not express themselves.

*Beritan:* If I spoke Turkish, I wouldn’t have a problem at all. I would get used to [living here] right away. I couldn’t buy anything; I couldn’t go anywhere because I didn’t know what to say. Even if I was hungry, I didn’t go to the corner store
because I didn’t know how to ask for things in Turkish.

*Nurbanu:* I didn’t speak Turkish. When I went to the corner store, I’d leave my money on the counter, and take back whatever change he gave me back. There was no one [to help me]. My husband went to work in the morning. And here weren’t any kids around like there’s now [so that I could ask them to go to the store for me]

*Züleyha:* My uncle’s wife sent to the corner store to get some fruit juice. I didn’t know how to say “give me some fruit juice” [in Turkish]. I practiced saying “fruit juice” [in Turkish] until I got to the store and then told him. Then the man gave me the fruit juice.

Narin tried to avoid going both the Kurdish and Turkish speaking corner stores in the neighborhood, because she did not speak Turkish nor Kurdish when she came to the city.

*Narin:* I didn’t wanna go to the stores owned by Turks because I didn’t understand Turkish. And when I went to the stores owned by Kurds, I didn’t understand much either. I had a hard time, I had a very hard time. I didn’t speak much Turkish and I didn’t speak much Kurdish either. So I couldn’t go out by myself. I had a hard time until I learned speaking both languages.

Hence, women relied on their husband, sisters and brothers-in-law or neighbors who spoke Turkish when they went to the open market or grocery stores until they learned some basic Turkish.

*Nermin:* When I went to the corner store, I’d either point at things [I wanted] or my neighbor would come with me. Then I learned Turkish bit by bit....When I went to the corner store, I swear to God, when I went to buy let’s say bread, I couldn’t tell them what I wanted and they’d laugh. They’d ask “What did you come to buy?” and I’d say “Vallahi I don’t know”. When I said ‘Nan’

Some husbands were very helpful and took their wives around to show them the city.

*Dilan:* My husband came with me [to wherever I needed to go]. He took me out and showed me where everything was and how to do things. I slowly learned. My husband knew the surroundings here because he came when he was little.....So he helped me. He’d say “Here is Taksim”. He’d take me around on the weekends and teach me the surroundings.

11 Bread in Kurdish
Zeynep: When I first came, we went everywhere together. He came with me the first two weeks. Then I did it myself. He went to work, and I took care of the kids and went to the market.

Women gradually became more interactive with the outside world as they learned Turkish in the city and familiarized themselves with their surroundings. They also became more independent in a couple of years after they came to Istanbul in terms of running errands.

Elif: Now, I feel freer. I go to grocery stores, I go to shopping. I know a little more. I [can] go to the hospital.
Züleyha: Now I can go anywhere I want [because] I learned to speak Turkish

Gülistan: I never went anywhere alone at first. I went with my husband. But now I know. I can go anywhere I want by myself.

Besides problems with fluency in Turkish, women’s illiteracy, though not critical in a rural environment, became a significant barrier in the city as it limited their simplest daily activities including shopping or taking a bus. They could not read the price tags or recognize the value of money bills when they went shopping. They could not read the signs on the buses when they wanted to go somewhere, or got lost on their way back home because they could not read the street signs.

Kader: It’s important to be literate. When I wanna go to Fatih, if I can’t read the signs on the buses, how am I gonna take the bus? If I go somewhere, they tell me to take the bus number such and such, but I can’t read. Literacy is important. We search for a place for hours until we realize it’s right in front of us. For instance, somebody tells us to go to this place that says such and such on its door, but we’re like blind because we’re illiterate. We’re like blind. Literacy is very important but we didn’t know it back then [when we were kids].

Gurbet: When we go somewhere, we’re not at ease because we can’t read.

Narin: I was illiterate. The streets had signs with their names on them. But because I was illiterate, I’d pass by my street [on my way back home from somewhere]. If I knew how to read, I could read the street signs and find my own street. But, [instead] I’d go pass by and get lost on my way back from somewhere.

12 A neighborhood in Istanbul
Hence they needed other people’s help.

**Sevda:** I couldn’t read the price tags. I’d always ask my husband to accompany me when I needed to go somewhere. Because I was illiterate, I couldn’t go anywhere.

**Elif:** It’s hard because we can’t read. Now, I know the prices a bit when I go to the grocery store or the farmers’ market. I recognize the price tags. I know 1 TL, 2 TL, or 5 TL for instance. When I first came, I didn’t know anything...I used to take a neighbor or someone with me. I never went alone.

Hospitals were especially challenging for them because they needed to read the signs on the doors to know where to go. So they relied on other people to accompany them. In some cases, they were the ones to accompany their neighbors.

**Züleyha:** I didn’t know how to go to the hospital. My husband or by brother-in-law always came with me, and sometimes an aunt who came to Istanbul before me. Now, I know when I go to the hospital, but I still can’t read the signs on the different rooms in the hospital because I’m not literate.

**Narin:** The other day, our neighbor’s son fell down. I went to the hospital with her. They gave me a piece of paper with information on where to go next. I told them “I can’t read. Just give me the directions and I’ll go”. We walked around for two hours in the hospital with my neighbor’s son in my arms. My neighbor’s was crying. Her son’s leg was all splintered.

In addition to learning to speak Turkish, some women attended literacy classes in the city or taught themselves reading and writing. These efforts helped them feel more confident in navigating the life in the city. Beritan was adamant about teaching herself to speak Turkish and to write.

**Beritan:** I didn’t know anything. I didn’t know Turkish and I didn’t know how to read and write. That bothered me very much, so much that I’d cry because of it. I’d sit and cry and say “Why don’t I know how to read? I will absolutely learn how to read”...I really liked reading very much. I’d try to read anything and everything I saw, the signs on the buses for instance. I’d try to read them and couldn’t. Then I’d be very upset and start crying for not being able to read and not having gone to school. So one day, I bought myself a pencil and a notebook. I went to my husband, because he finished elementary school, to ask him to teach me syllables. First he said “How am I gonna teach you?” but then he wrote down
some letters and asked me to fill the page with those letters. That went on for a
couple of months….I also asked other people, like my aunt or my uncle’s
daughter. So I learned all the letters. Then I asked my husband “what now?” He
asked me to write words, like Istanbul, Mardin, Ankara etc....

In addition to her husband’s help, Beritan also learned some Turkish as well as the
numbers when her daughter started school. Because she did not speak Turkish when she started
school, her daughter had a hard time understanding the teacher and would ask Beritan for her
help when she came home. As Beritan knocked on her neighbors’ door and asked their help to
understand her daughter’s homework, she also was able to improve her Turkish and basic math
skills.

At the minimum women taught themselves the basics such as recognizing the numbers
and basic math skills so that they could shop or get on a bus.

**Narin:** Thank God I know now. I go to the grocery stores, and I know all the
prices. I recognize the money bills. I can take care of my own business now. I
recognize the numbers.

**Elif:** When I had to go visit my aunt, I had a hard time because I didn’t know
which bus to take. Now it’s gotten better....For instance, when I needed to go
somewhere and didn’t know which bus to take, I’d ask people whether that bus
was going to Okmeydani\(^\text{13}\) and some people would turn away. And I was offended
by it. But now, I know.

**Poverty**

Characterized by substandard housing, poor infrastructure, and overcrowding, Tarlabasi
was home to Kurdish migrant families because of its cheap housing and proximity to the
informal job market where most of the husbands were employed (mainly jobs in the textile
industry and restaurants). Women who came to the city through marriage mainly moved to this
neighborhood because their husbands were already working in the area. Despite families’ hope
to strengthen their financial situation and buy a house so that they would not have to pay a rent,

\(^{13}\) A neighborhood in Istanbul
most families barely made it to the end of month. Only seven families owned the house/apartment they lived in, even though the neighborhood provided one of the most affordable housing markets. As family members mainly held jobs in the informal job market, poverty was a significant issue for the families. As already reported in the methods section, household income that women reported were well below the official poverty level for a family of four (2900 TL; TÜRK-İŞ, 2011). Considering that husbands were off work during certain times (summer for those in textile) and children worked on and off to contribute to the family income, the amount of income women provided were only estimates and should be treated with caution. Even though there may be some over or underestimation with the household income, the average income for a family of four in the community was approximately 750 TL.

Many women identified poverty as one of the challenges they experienced when they came to the city.

**Gülistan:** Nobody else but my husband was working at the time. The kids were all young. I [we] paid rent and utilities. Only one person was working. It was hard.

**Elif:** We suffered a lot from poverty [in the village]. After we came here, we suffered too. We lived in a house where there were rats. It was really bad. The house was damp and I got lung disease. We’ve been doing slightly better these last five years. Before that we suffered a lot [financially].

**Şükriye:** When we first came here, there was no work. We suffered a lot. This house wasn’t like this. It was all wooden. We’d have to take a shower in the basement. It was hard.

Poverty or “the struggle to make a living” was a continuing issue for many women and their families.

**Sevda:** The worst thing is not to be able to make ends meet, it’s poverty. If we had money, we’d make ends meet and buy everything our children wanted to make them happy. That [poverty] is the worst. We want things for ourselves too like anybody else, but we can’t afford them.
Faraşın: When the rent is due, I start worrying whether we’ll be able to pay it. Same with the water and electricity. For instance, he [my husband] has been home since this morning, no calls at all. Some days he gets a call, some days nobody calls at all. Thinking about whether he’d make any money or not that day is very stressful. When you have to think about that all the time, you’re overwhelmed.

Seda: When you have money, people are around you. If you don’t have money, nobody knocks on your door. So my husband has to work because nobody would help us out with six people to feed. It [living on little money] is hard. Everything in life is harder [when you don’t have money]. Right now, we live in this old apartment. It’s old but we manage. The rent is okay. In two months, they are gonna evacuate us. God forbid! We can’t afford paying 500 or 600 TL for rent. We’d have even harder time [if we had to pay a higher rent].

Beritan and Gamze talked about their concerns of how their limited income could interfere with their children’s education.

Beritan: I worry about making ends meet. If I don’t send my kids to high school, we can make ends meet, but I do want to send them to high school. I am not sure whether we can afford it. Only one of us [my husband] works and not regularly because business [textile industry] slows down at times, then picks up. And he can’t do any other work because he never worked in any other type of job. That concerns me a bit. I wanna send them to high school because they are both good students.

Gamze: The kids have always a lot of expenses. They’ll go to college in two years. That concerns us. This one [kid] is starting high school this year, the other one is starting middle school, that one is starting first grade. We don’t know how we’re gonna be able to afford all this. We don’t own a house, we’re on rent. So it’s very hard. If we owned a house, I’d give the money [we now spend on rent] to my kids and send them all to school. But now, both sending them to school and being on rent challenge us.

Although families experienced significant levels of poverty in the city, twenty-five of the married women did not work outside the house even though the majority worked when they were single mainly in textile industry or as seasonal workers in agriculture. As a result of married women not working -or not being allowed to work outside the house (see Chapter 8), older children, including girls, were mobilized into the workforce (see Chapter 6). While
women did not work outside the house, they actively sought other ways to alleviate the poverty their households suffered from. Women took an active role in identifying and applying to various government agencies providing financial assistance to low-income families. When the word spread in the neighborhood about an agency that provided financial or in-kind support, they put the paperwork together and went with their neighbors or sisters-in-law to agencies in different parts of the city.

**Narin:** We had a green card\textsuperscript{14} before. I also applied to other government assistance programs. But then my green card was terminated. I always went to apply to government agencies with Kader. She knew them better.

**Gamze:** We sometimes get assistance from the Youth Center [my children attend]. I go talk to them. For instance, this year my daughter will start going to the dershane\textsuperscript{15}, so I went and talked to them. I told them it’d be good if my daughter attended the dershane. The other day, the director asked to talk to my daughter. He told her that they’d take care of expenses related to the dershane. They help out with things like that.

**Elif:** I only got some [assistance] this month. It’s called school salary\textsuperscript{16}. They gave me 110 [Turkish Liras]....You go to the birth registration office\textsuperscript{17}. You make copies of your documents and then go to the bank. I only got the money this year. I had never had any other assistance since I came to Istanbul.

Unfortunately, not all attempts resulted in securing financial assistance.

**Yasemin:** There’s a place called something like Kadin Koordinasyon Merkezi\textsuperscript{18} All my sisters went there to get financial assistance. I went there too and applied but I haven’t heard anything since then. It would been great if I received assistance once every two or three months. I went to the community center too.

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\textsuperscript{14} Green card was given by the State to low-income people to cover their health expenses. This government assistance was terminated by the government in 2012.

\textsuperscript{15} Dershane is a private educational institution that specifically prepares students for the university entrance exam. In Turkey students are accepted into universities based on their scores in a multiple-choice test that is administered across the country simultaneously. Many students in Turkey attend the dershane to prepare for the exam. It is comparable to SAT courses offered in the United States.

\textsuperscript{16} Known as “Child salary/money” in public, the Conditional Cash Transfer (Sartli Nakit Transferi) program is provided by the Directorate General of Social Welfare to low-income families and gives them financial support for their children’s educational expenses contingent upon their children’s enrollment and continuing attendance to school.

\textsuperscript{17} Office of Civil Registration and Nationality

\textsuperscript{18} Founded by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, Kadin Koordinasyon Merkezi (Center for Women’s Coordination) aims to address women’s problems and needs as well to empower women’s position in the society.
Fatma: I heard about these government assistance programs after I came to this neighborhood. I went to this community center and applied, but haven’t heard anything yet. I didn’t go again. One time the neighbors went. They told the neighbors they would come [for screening]. It’s been a while but they haven’t come yet. Many people got food assistance and all. But they didn’t come to me.

Esra: I don’t get any assistance. I applied but I didn’t get any. A woman came to our home for assessment from the community center. I didn’t have these couches at that time, only two old carpets. But she said “You’re rich. You have everything”.

Women followed up with the agencies by showing up in person or by making phone calls when they did not hear from them. Kader asked me to accompany her to a community center in the neighborhood to inquire into when they would be visiting her for an assessment. It had been a while since she had applied, and she wanted to make sure that she was still on their list (Field notes, June 22nd 2011). Elif also called the agency on a daily basis to make sure that she received the check.

Elif: My neighbor and I went to the community center and applied [for financial aid], but we haven’t heard back yet. There’s also one further away that gives checks. They came the other day, asked questions, and took notes. I called them the other day, they said my application was accepted. But the check hasn’t arrived yet. I call them everyday and ask.

Even though women mostly depicted a positive picture of their neighbors and the relationships among neighbors, some women suspected or witnessed that the neighbors sometimes undermined a financial assistance that a family could receive.

Serap: When I applied [to the municipality] to get some coal for the winter, I got it for two years. The third year, she (pointing to the building across hers) went and said, remember that woman I told you about, she told the man [who came from the municipality for needs assessment] that we didn’t need any and made him turn around and leave….My husband was gonna have an operation around that time. So I took my husband’s medical reports and went to the municipality.. I told them “My husband hasn’t been working for five months. Why didn’t you give me the aid?” And they said that they received complaints. I told them “Why do you care about the complaints? She gets the coal every year and then sells it for money. But we’re gonna use it because we need it. She uses natural gas for
heating, but we need the coal.” But they didn’t give it to me despite the medical reports…. We found out that she placed the complaint.

**Dilan:** I’d support my neighbors and tell them [the personnel of the government agencies] “She is my neighbor. I know that she recently came here and needs assistance” if they asked me. If I lie and tell them she doesn’t need assistance, they won’t give her any. There are people who do that.

**Zarife:** If you go and ask people whether they help each other, they’ll say “Yes, we help each other. We like each other”. How do they like each other? In the winter, they [personnel from the municipality] came to distribute coal for the stoves. They asked around about some people’s financial situation and whether they were already getting coal [from somewhere else]. I saw people, before the woman who was to receive assistance arrived, say that she had this and that, and that she had money in the bank. And after the woman arrived, they totally switched and started saying that she was having financial hardship, that she needed help, and that she needed the coal etc. I was astonished. I couldn’t believe my ears.

Women also took an active stance in managing the household budget. They carefully adjusted their expenses when there was a little money for the month regardless of whether they kept the money or only got weekly allowances from their husband. They cut back on any extra expense. Narin described an elaborate strategy to cut on the expense of bread. In a co-residing household with two families and single brothers-in-law, bread consumption cost was something the household could save on. Thus Narin went to places that sold bread more cheaply. Sometimes, she had to go to different stores when one ran out of it.

**Narin:** I used to go all the way to Haci Ahmet Square for bread, for Halk Ekmek. Here [in the neighborhood] bread was 50 Turkish cents. Now we can get three loaves of bread for 1 TL here, so I don’t need to go [to Haci Ahmet Square] anymore. Before one loaf of bread was 50 Turkish cents. So after we got the dinner table ready, I was running to Haci Ahmet Square [to get cheaper bread] and I was pregnant with my daughter at the time. Sometimes, when I couldn’t find it there, I’d go to this other Square. Sometimes I needed to go to Taksim to get it [Halk Ekmek]. This went on for five or six years.

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19 The municipality established stores where bread is sold for cheaper. They are called “Halk Ekmek” (Public Bread).
20 All the different squares she mentions are at least 10-15 minute walking distance, and they are in opposite directions.
When cutting on extra expenses was not sufficient, women also bought fewer amounts of food. Kader drew attention to the irregularity of their income due to textile industry and talked about some of the adjustments she needed to make.

**Kader:** When I go to the farmers’ market, instead of buying tomatoes that cost 2 TL, I buy tomatoes that cost 1 TL. Still, we can’t manage. Because they’re without work so often. If they worked regularly with only one month vacation, it’d be better. But they’re without work for four to five months at times. That’s why we have so much [financial] hardship.

Şükriye and Gurbet were also among women who regulated their budget depending on the amount of weekly income. They reduced their family’s consumption of meat or made use of what they had available at home when their budget was tight.

**Şükriye:** Sometimes I get by with 100 TL in a week, sometimes I spend 150 TL, and sometimes I spend 50 TL. For instance, if I buy everything this week, I don’t buy that much the following week. Or if I buy meat this week, we don’t eat it the following week. That’s how we manage. Or I cook with whatever I have at home.

**Gurbet:** Of course we need to cut on certain things. Sometimes our neighbors buy five kilograms of tomatoes. When we have money, we buy five kilograms too, when we don’t [have money] we buy two kilograms or one kilogram [of tomatoes]. Sometimes if we don’t have money, we don’t buy any. They [our neighbors] ask us why we’re not buying, we tell them we already have [tomatoes] at home and we don’t need any. We don’t complain about our income. We thank God for what we have.... Sometimes, when we don’t have money we cook pasta. If we have money, we cook meat. Sometimes, my brother-in-law brings in money on the weekend and tells us to cook meat, so we do.

I also saw a few women who chopped wood and stored it in their basement. When I asked them what they were doing, they said they were storing the wood to burn in the stove during the winter (Field notes, July 27th 2011). Dilan’s account during her interview further clarified this activity. Women either sent their children to go or went themselves to the carpenters in the neighborhood to take any surplus or remains of wood that the carpenter got rid of. This helped families save on their heating budget, especially since prices for wood and coal...
skyrocketed in the winter.

**Dilan**: I sent my kids to the carpenter today and told them to fill the sack [with wood remains]. I’m ashamed to go and do it myself. So my nephew and my son went and filled the sacks and I went to pick the sacks up. My husband never told me to do that. Other people’s husbands aren’t like that. They bring in the firewood and they chop it. They get ready for the winter. My husband isn’t like that at all. I go get the wood from the carpenter, and he says “Why do you trouble yourself with that? I’ll go buy it in the winter”. Where is he gonna buy it? Firewood gets so expensive in the winter. It’s a pity [to spend so much money on it]. He doesn’t think about that at all. He says “I’ll go buy it”.

Women’s continuing ties to their relatives in their home village also helped them support their food budget. Both their and their husband’s relatives in the village sent women’s families fruits, vegetables, and homemade cheese.

**Beritan**: My mom sent me a LOT (with emphasis) of things. That’s how I held on. If she hadn’t, I wouldn’t be able to hold on. They helped a lot, not only me but my sisters too, but mostly me….Whatever I needed at home, my mom sent it to me, tea, chickpeas, lentils, all of them.

**Kader**: Remember when I told you my husband was unemployed for six months and so were the kids? During that time, my older sister sent me stuff like wheat, beans. They sent me stuff like that. They knew we were having a financial hardship, that’s why she was sending those things….Sometimes they sent us naan bread they baked in the village.

In return, women sent their relatives clothes, including t-shirts and dresses, when they could afford them.

**Lale**: [In return] I send them clothes, like t-shirts, dresses, and sweaters.

**Beritan**: I send clothes for my sisters and my younger brother. And I send stuff like shoes for my mother.

**Zeynep**: [I send them] sometimes shoes, sometimes pieces of fabric. We send them fabric and they sew it. Elder women there do not wear skirts like we do here. [They wear dresses].

This exchange in-kind was done when relatives came to visit them in the city or when they went back to visit their relatives. There were also times when these goods were sent with
acquaintances or simply given to the bus company to be picked up at the terminal by women and vice versa.

**Elif:** People come and go to Mardin, there are buses too. Yes, sometimes they [people from the village] come to visit their children. For instance, my sister-in-law’s daughters are here. My dad comes to visit my brother.

**Özlem:** I take stuff with me when I go visit them or sometimes if an acquaintance goes to Karaman, I send stuff [to my family] with them. I buy little things for my brother’s children. I don’t send any food. I send them clothes or things to wear.

**Zeynep:** When my son went to visit [the village], they [my relatives in the village] sent things to me with him. Sometimes they give it to the bus, and we pick it up from the bus terminal.

**Discussion**

Women’s accounts showed that there was no unanimous reason for or pattern of migration for women who lived in Tarlabası. While some women directly migrated to Istanbul from their hometown, others took a more indirect route making stops in other villages or cities before coming to Istanbul. Women’s reasons for migration also varied. However, other than Seda and Yasemin who came to Istanbul to stay with their siblings after their biological mother died and their father married another woman who was mistreating them, women usually came to Istanbul for two main reasons: Armed conflict and marriage. Those who came to the city due to armed conflict either fled the area due to safety concerns or because they were forced out of their hometown by the State. Women’s narratives vividly depicted the constant fear they lived with in their hometown as a result of the armed conflict. Their homes were burnt to ashes, their relatives or neighbors were taken away or beaten, and in some cases killed. Among them, not all went directly to Istanbul. Hence, while their migration out of their hometown was due to internal displacement, their migration to Istanbul was not necessarily related to it. Other women came with their families due to increased rates of unemployment and heightened threat to safety
as a result of the armed conflict in the region. Finally, there were also women who came to the city to join their husbands who were already established in Istanbul few years after they married them or directly after marriage. In some cases, this move was also precipitated by concerns for safety in their hometown due to the armed conflict in the region. Regardless of their migration patterns, most women’s lives were deeply touched by the armed conflict in the area. Even in cases where their family members were not directly harmed by the conflict, they or their relatives witnessed many acts of violence that occurred in their village.

Çağlayan et al. (2011) argued that internal displacement led to the separation of Kurdish families where some family members, especially children were left behind. Women’s accounts in Tarlabası suggested that families who came to the city as a result of the forced migration were likely to do so as a whole family. To the contrary, women who migrated “voluntarily” were separated from their husbands for varying periods of time before coming to the city. In that sense, women’s migration to the city helped families reunite. Contrary to Çağlayan et al.’s (2011) participants who reported a better financial situation back in the village, many women in this study pointed to limited financial opportunities in the village. Some women also talked about their brothers and fathers working outside the village as there was no job in their village. The absence of fathers, brothers, and husbands in the village points to a deeper structural issue of poverty that is caused by the unemployment that results from the combination of armed conflict, underinvestment, and devaluation of agricultural activities with increased industrialization and modernization.

The organic growth of the Kurdish population in Tarlabası community mirrors other rural to urban chain migration patterns where people from the same village or ethnic group cluster in the same or adjacent neighborhoods (Erder, 1999; Hemmasi & Prorok, 2002; Keyder,
Women’s accounts point to the fact that Kurds were scarce in Tarlabası when the neighborhood received its first wave of migration. Other Kurdish families also came to this neighborhood as the armed conflict in the area continued because as nicely put by Elif “We heard about Tarlabası, that there were Kurds here. So we came here.” This existing social capital triggered a chain migration. Many families moved to Tarlabası because of their existing ties in the community (e.g. relatives or people from their village) or because their husbands already lived in the area to be close to their work. Many women appreciated being surrounded by their “own people” and expressed a sense of safety and solidarity that resulted from it.

One of the unique aspects of Kurdish migration, regardless of whether it is “voluntary” or forced, is its similarity to transnational migration. Grabolle Çeliker (2013) draws attention to the fact that, even though it is domestic, Kurdish migration has characteristics of transnational migration processes because of the crossing of the border from an ethnically homogenous geography to an ethnically mixed one and the continuing connections between “here” (the city) and “there” (hometown). Grabolle Çeliker argues that even though a physical border between “here” and “there” is denied by the official discourse of a homogenous Turkey, it symbolically exists and is reinforced by both Kurdish and Turkish nationalist discourses. The shift in the linguistic environment in the “host” culture from Kurdish to Turkish is the most visible sign of this symbolic border. While Kurdish is the main language spoken among people, especially in the villages of the southeast Turkey where Kurdish population predominantly lives, once Kurds migrate to the west of Turkey, including Istanbul, the primary language is Turkish. Hence, Grabolle Çeliker identifies the Kurdish migration as “translocational”.

Kurdish women’s accounts on the critical role Turkish fluency—or lack thereof—played into their challenges, more specifically feelings of loneliness and limited mobility in the city.
illustrate the importance of the shift in linguistic environment for women. This specific characteristic of the Kurdish internal migration as well as the tension between Kurdish and Turkish populations differentiate Kurdish migration from the rural to urban migration of other groups in Turkey and contribute to the conceptualization of the Kurdish migration as “translocational”.

The narratives of Kurdish women in Tarlabası showed that, irrespective of their reasons for migrating to Istanbul, Kurdish women experienced similar challenges in the city and literacy skills and language played a critical role, especially in their social exclusion. Paralleling other findings in the literature (e.g. Çağlayan et al., 2011; Çelik, 2005) on Kurdish migration to non-Kurdish speaking cities, Kurdish migrant women’s limited literacy skills and fluency in Turkish initially restricted their interactions with the community outside their own. As also supported by Çelik’s (2005) and Şen’s (2005) findings, women felt socially isolated in the city, especially when they first arrived both because they were separated from their parents, relatives, and friends and because they did not speak Turkish. Those women who came to Tarlabası in 1990s also struggled within the confines of the neighborhood as there were only few Kurdish families at that time.

Women’s lack of fluency in Turkish, when coupled with their illiteracy, also affected their mobility in the city. Daily tasks such as getting on a bus or going to the farmers’ market were initially challenging for women, not only because they hadn’t familiarized with their surroundings yet, but also because they could not navigate the city without language and literacy skills. Yet, women actively worked on both these skills, and most women learned enough not to rely on others with these daily activities, as also documented by Çağlayan et al.’s study (2011). More complicated tasks, such as going to the hospital, continued to be challenging
for women and resorted to the company of their relatives or neighbors who were literate and more fluent in Turkish. It is important to underline the fact that this study included only women who were fluent in Turkish enough to participate. There were many other women in the community, especially older women, who understood Turkish to varying degrees but did not speak it.

Poverty was another problem experienced in the city was poverty. As also reported in other studies of Kurdish migration (Çağlayan et al., 2011; Çelik, 2005; Şen, 2005), Kurdish women and their families experienced significant levels of poverty in the city mainly because their husbands’ access to the formal labor market was extremely limited. Only access to precarious, irregular, temporary jobs in the informal sector (mainly workers in garment sweatshops and waiters in restaurants), without social security and with low wages was available to men (Yılmaz, 2008). The irregular and temporary nature of men’s jobs made it difficult for families to break the cycle of poverty. While Çağlayan et al. (2011) argued that internally displaced families suffered from poverty in the city because they lost the financial assets they had in the city, the findings from this study shows that those who came to the city via “voluntary” migration also struggle with poverty.

Although families experienced significant levels of poverty in Tarlabası, married women were not allowed to work outside the house, even though the majority worked before they got married. While most women did not work in the city after marriage, they proactively sought other ways to support the family budget. Not only did Kurdish women identify the various government agencies that provided cash and in-kind assistance, but they were also the ones to apply to and follow up with the agencies to secure some extra support for their family budget. They also developed strategies in order to match their budget with household expenditures, such
as cutting on food expenses and stocking surplus of firewood in advance for the winter in order to minimize heating costs.

In addition to coping strategies that relied on human capital (e.g. budgeting, learning Turkish and reading, and applying to social welfare programs) to deal with the problems they encountered in the city, Kurdish women also used strategies that tapped on their social capital. Social capital is defined as resources (including norms, trust, networks) that are acquired through relationships and facilitate cooperation and coordination for mutual benefit (Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 1993). According to some researchers, social capital has two dimensions, namely social support and social leverage (Briggs, 1998; Dominguez & Watkins, 2003). While social support (emotional support and practical help such as accompanying someone to somewhere) helps people deal with the demands and stresses of everyday obstacles, social leverage refers to access to opportunities through established social networks (Briggs, 1998; Dominguez & Watkins, 2003). By establishing and nurturing their social networks with their neighbors and relatives, Kurdish women benefited both from social support and social leverage. While they were able to lessen their feelings of loneliness and increase their mobility in the city through their neighbors that kept them company, they also had access to information about various government assistance opportunities. However, women’s social capital was not always beneficial. Women reported instances where neighbors undermined people’s access to assistance by withholding information or misinforming the authorities on families’ financial situation. This attitude may be due to the scarcity of resources and an abundance of families in need for financial assistance in the community.

Another social capital strategy Kurdish women used was their continuing ties to their hometown. Similar to other migrant women in Turkey (Erman, 2001), women retained their
relations to the village. Contrary to the common practice of migrant families sending money or other goods to their relatives in their hometown (e.g. Cohen, 2011; Koc & Onan, 2004), Kurdish women received food and other goods from their family members who stayed behind. An example of “reverse” remittances, this in-kind support from their kin made it easier for Kurdish families in the city to get by and even to survive at times. Similar to Puerto Rican immigrant women in Perez’s (2004) study in Chicago, while Kurdish women’s connection to their hometown was an important way of dealing with problems of poverty, women also used local resources to help themselves and their families survive.

In summary, Kurdish women followed different pathways to come to Istanbul. While they escaped the various hardships of their lives in their hometown, they faced new challenges when they arrived in the city. Although women came to Istanbul for a variety of reasons, they nonetheless experienced similar problems in the city. At the personal level, women struggled with feelings of loneliness and limited mobility in the city. At the family level, poverty had been a continuous struggle even though they thought the city would alleviate their financial problems. However, Kurdish women’s migration tales showed that even though migration to the city, forced or voluntary, has entailed various challenges for them, Kurdish women proactively used their human and social capital skills to deal with these obstacles, and confirmed that they were not victims of the circumstances that surrounded them. Thus, women were active agents who fought for their individual well-being as well as the well-being of their families.
### Figures and Tables

**Table 2. Participants’ migration patterns**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years in Istanbul</th>
<th>Years in Tarlabası</th>
<th>Marital Union/Reunion</th>
<th>Armed Conflict</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Further Details on the Individual Migration Pattern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kader</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>She came to take care of husband and his brothers in Istanbul and also to escape the armed conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurbet</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>First moved to a nearby village because her village was evacuated due to armed conflict. Then she moved to Istanbul for marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narin</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Her village was not evacuated but they moved out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatma</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>She came to join her husband who had come to work in Istanbul and escape the armed conflict</td>
</tr>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Elif</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>She came to join her husband who had come to work in Istanbul and escape the armed conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dilan</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serap</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurbanu</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>total 13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>First moved to Karaman (another city) for father's job. Then she moved to Istanbul for marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Özlem</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sevda</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>She joined her husband who worked in the city after staying with in-laws in the village first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gülistan</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Her village was evacuated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ash</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esra</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zarife</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>She joined her husband who had come to work in Istanbul and also to escape the armed conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gülcan</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 (cont.)

| Name  | Age | Year | | | | | Description |
|-------|-----|------|------| | | | | |
| Seda  | 15  | 8    | X    | | | | She lost her mother and came to live with her siblings in Istanbul to avoid her mother-in-law |
| Yasemin | 8.5 | 6    | X    | | | | She lost her mother and came to live with her siblings in Istanbul to avoid her mother-in-law |
| Nermin | 18.5 | 18.5 | X    | | | | First moved to another city due to armed conflict (her village was evacuated). Then she came to Istanbul to live with her brother when her dad wanted give her away as a second wife |
| Beritan | 16  | 7    | X    | | | | First moved to a nearby village due to armed conflict. Then she came to Istanbul to join her husband who worked in the city after staying with in-laws in the village first |
| Zeynep | 20  | 20   | X    | | | | Her village was not evacuated but they moved out |
| Sakine | 12  | About 3 years | X | | | | She joined her husband who worked in the city after staying with in-laws in the village first |
| Gamze | 11  | 11   | X    | | | | Unemployment in the village precipitated by the armed conflict |
| Ayşegül | 16.5 | 2    | X    | | | | Shortly after she married and came to Istanbul, her hometown was evacuated |
| Züleyha | 18  | 18   | X    | | | | First she moved to another city in the west with her parents due to armed conflict. She then came to Istanbul for marriage |
| Faraşin | 6   | 6    | X    | | | | Her village was evacuated |
| Ebru  | 20  | 20   | X    | | | | |
Figure 2. Map of Turkey indicating cities where participants originally migrated from

- Indicates the cities where participants came from
- Indicates Istanbul
**Figure 3. Struggles and coping strategies of Kurdish women after migration to Istanbul**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Struggles</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of loneliness</td>
<td>Recreating rural life in the city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building relationships with neighbors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s limited mobility in the city</td>
<td>Reliance on family members and neighbors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning Turkish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acquiring basic reading and math skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Familiarizing oneself with the city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>Seeking financial assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adjusting/managing household budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In-kind support from family in hometown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 5

“THE NAME SAYS IT ALL, IT’S TARLABAŞI”: LIFE IN AN INNER-CITY NEIGHBORHOOD

Fatma: There are better neighborhoods in Istanbul but when one can’t afford it [there’s nothing one can do]. The rents are much higher in better neighborhoods, thus our kids have to grow up here....It reassures me that we’re all from the same village on this block. When I say reassurance, I mean, I don’t know, it’s like we all know each other well. We keep an eye on each other’s kids for instance. If we go to another neighborhood, it may not be like this. We also do everything outside. For instance, when we wash our carpets, we do it on the street. So we’re together all the time. Because we do everything out on the street, we’ve become like a family. If you noticed, we’re all [sitting] outside (we laugh).

Özge: Do you feel attached to this neighborhood?

Fatma: I’m used to it. I’d miss it here if I went somewhere else. I’ve been here for years.

Özge: What would you miss the most?

Fatma: My neighbors. I’d miss them the most.

A neighborhood is one of the immediate contexts families are embedded in. The neighborhood characteristics and social processes have been documented to impact various aspects of the lives of its residents, both adult and child alike (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Aber, 1997; Sampson, 2003; Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002). Inner-city neighborhoods have been found to be particularly challenging for their residents due to risk factors such as high levels of poverty, lack of resources, and criminal activities (Anderson, 1990; Brown Rosier, 2000; Jarrett, 1999; Jarrett & Jefferson, 2004; Jones, 2007; McIntyre, 2000; Wolfer, 2000). Yet, families, especially women, actively develop strategies to cope with the limitations that are imposed upon them by their neighborhood environment (Jarrett, 1999; Jarrett & Jefferson, 2003; 2004; Wolfer, 2000).

Tarlabaşı is uniquely different compared to many other low-income neighborhoods Kurdish migrant families reside in because of the inner-city characteristics it manifests, especially in terms of criminal activities and various marginalized groups residing in the
neighborhood. Various studies that document the physical conditions, demographic composition, criminal activities, and poverty in Tarlabası (e.g. Dincer & Enlil, 2002; Yılmaz, 2003; 2007; 2008), but little is known about how Kurdish women and their families in Tarlabası experience and make meaning of their inner-city neighborhood in their everyday lives, and the strategies they have developed to cope with the risk factors that exist in the community.

In this chapter, I explore through women’s eyes the experience of living in an inner-city neighborhood for Kurdish women and their children. I first describe a typical summer day in the Tarlabası neighborhood. I then discuss the criminal activities in the neighborhood and the dynamics between the residents and the criminals. In the third section, I focus on raising children in Tarlabası, including the challenges of an inner-city neighborhood and the strategies women have developed to minimize these obstacles. The final section explores women’s thoughts and feelings about the pros and cons of moving out of Tarlabası.

**A Typical Summer Day in Tarlabası**

The summers are steamy in Istanbul. Yet, as soon as you make a turn from the main avenue to the main street of Tarlabası, you are cooled down by a breeze, the same breeze you get in Kader’s house as soon as you open the window of her tiny living room, which we came to call the “natural air conditioner”. There is no doubt that you enter a different –and a very lively world - as you walk down the hill deep into the depths of the neighborhood, which has a smell of its own that welcomes you, a heavy smell of stuffed mussels mixed with dampness and at times sewage. Even women complain about the smell of dampness in their homes. There is always laundry hanging on clotheslines strung to the window of the building across the street.

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21 Stuffed mussels: Mussels are stuffed with a special type of cooked rice and usually sold on trays as street food. It is prepared by Kurdish women in the neighborhood to be sold by family members. In some cases, Kurdish women prepare them for other sellers who then buy them from the women.
The language you now hear most on the street is Kurdish.

The streets look alike, with a combination of very old and newer buildings, some run-down and some deserted with graffiti on the walls. The number of deserted buildings will be increasing over the summer as more buildings, especially those closer to the main avenue, will be evacuated and sold for the big gentrification project planned in the neighborhood. The main street is full of a variety of small shops, on both sides of the street, that supply the everyday needs of the community, including a barbershop, second-hand furniture shops, multiple corner stores of various sizes, a coffeehouse for men, an aygaz22 franchise, and another franchise that sells clean water in barrels since tap water in Istanbul is not potable. Garment workshops are dispersed across the neighborhood, yet they are hard to notice as they usually do not have a sign on their door. There are also local bus companies, some now closed down but with the sign still up on the store, usually carrying the name of the city they travel to in the name of the company. Just by looking at the names of these bus companies, it is possible to get a sense of where the inhabitants of Tarlabaşı are from.

However, one should not simplify the demographic composition of the neighborhood. In addition to Kurds, there are also transgender people usually working as sex workers. In their interviews, women have reported seeing transvestites for the first time in their lives in Tarlabaşı and think transvestites should not be living among them. Romanis, also known as gypsies, are a big part of the makeup of Tarlabaşı. Finally, I also come across African immigrants, a rather recent immigration wave to Turkey (see Brewer & Yükseler, 2006; De Clerk, 2013; Suter, 2012). As a matter of fact, there was an African family who lived on one of the blocks I spent the most time. They had two young children, but none of the other children played with them.

22 A brand of propane tank that people in Turkey use for gas stoves.
Everybody in the neighborhood called them the “Hellos”, potentially because this was the only word both sides understood or because they associated “Hello” with foreigners. Only one of the women could communicate with the African family to some extent because she spoke Arabic. They moved out shortly after I started my fieldwork as they could not afford the rent, as reported by women on the block.

While the main street of the neighborhood is always busy with traffic, the side streets are calmer, but not necessarily quieter. Except for the main street, he most visible characters of the neighborhood during the day are women and children. Men are at work during the day. Even when they don’t work, they stay home watching TV or spend their time in the coffee house with friends. Only Nurbanu’s husband hangs out a bit outside and chats with women when he comes back home from work. Children and women, on the other hand, spend most of their time outside especially now that it is summer and the schools are closed for summer break. Children are shouting, running, and playing on the streets not paying much attention to the cars until they honk. Most of the women sit on their doorsteps or the sidewalk alone or in groups chatting, yelling at their children, or just looking around. Sometimes they also chop or peel vegetables while conversing with their neighbors, or sip their tea and eat their sunflower seeds as they talk. These conversations are at times interrupted by street vendors, pedestrian or in trucks, who sell everything one can think of, ranging from fruits and vegetables to clothing and plastic kitchen utensils. Based on the two nights I spent in the neighborhood and also what women told me in their interviews, I infer that the gathering of women outside resumes after dinner and continues until past midnight. During that time, children continue to play outside and young girls and boys also socialize after work. Interestingly, as women sit on their own doorstep or the sidewalk in front of their house, they tend to socialize only with women on their own block and seldom go
talk to women on other blocks during the day. Thus, inter-block socialization is rather rare, unless somebody needs to be visited for a special occasion.

Moreover, some blocks are comprised of Kurdish families who all came from the same village or adjacent villages. Other blocks have households from different cities, mainly from the Southeast of Turkey. There are also blocks where there is a mixture of Romani and Kurdish families. Thus, each block has its own dynamics.

There are different traces of rural life in the neighborhood. For instance, when the building next door collapsed, Gülcan’s husband decided to turn it into a garden to grow tomatoes, peppers, and grapes among other things. The whole block is proud of that garden, even though one of the women complained that Gülcan and her husband did not give any of the produce to them. The garden is guarded by wooden fences and a lock. The fences are decorated with plastic flowers and multiple “nazar boncuğu”s to protect it from “nazar”. One of the main summer activities for women is to wash/clean their carpets and take out the wool from their pillows, comforters, and floor beds to wash and/or air them. As they do not have enough room in their house to do any of it, women do all this washing and cleaning on the street. Hence, it is not surprising to run into carpets and wool laid on the street or over fences. Women who do not have balconies to hang their carpets and wool to dry used their neighbors’ balconies (Houses with a balcony are rather rare in the neighborhood).

**Crime in Tarlabası: Past and Present**

One of the main concerns for women was the crime that has been taking place in Tarlabası. Women vividly described the various criminal activities they witnessed in their community, ranging from drug dealing to purse-snatchings. As these criminals lived in the neighborhood, women also witnessed the violence that was committed by them throughout the
day and night.

**Narin:** There was always a fight that broke out [among the drug dealers] and we’d run home. It’s not like that anymore, it’s calmed down now. But before, it was a horrible neighborhood. They used to sell heroin, they sold drugs. They’d fight and the police would come. It wasn’t nice at all here.

**Şükriye:** In the past, when they used to deal drugs, there were people who lost themselves. There were always fights at night. Normally we’d not sleep much. Those who came to buy drugs would start a fight, or someone would be in withdrawal and come. He’d not have any money so they’d not give him any drugs.

**Elif:** There are drug dealers. When it’s night time, nobody can walk on these streets because of drug dealers. They also snatch purses here. One’s scared.

Dilan talked about her personal experience with thieves in the neighborhood. She described how thieves entered their house and stole the cell phone and money of her brother and brother-in-law who used to stay with them at the time when they lived on another block.

**Dilan:** One morning I woke up and our door was open. They [the thieves] didn’t come to our bedroom Thank God, I had two gold bracelets [in the room] back then. My husband and I also had our cell phones in our bedroom. My brother and brother-in-law were sleeping in the living room. So I woke up, the door was open. They [the thieves] had emptied their [my brother’s and brother-in-law’s] wallets and stole their cell phones.

Dilan contrasted the environment of Tarlabası to the safety of her hometown.

**Dilan:** There is a lot of robbery here. For instance, you can’t leave your door unlocked/open. When you go somewhere or stay over somewhere, you worry all the time about whether something happened [to your house]. You’re scared. It’s not like that in the village. We go up to the roof to sleep at night time in fresh air. Here even when we die from the heat, we’re afraid to open the windows [because of the thieves]. The other day, they robbed a neighbor’s house and stole her cell phone. Not that we have anything [to steal] but still.

Özlem saw “those kinds of things” for the first time in her life when she moved to Tarlabası and did not quite understand what it was until her neighbors explained it to her.

**Özlem:** When we first came to this neighborhood, we lived in this basement [pointing outside the window] right there. They used to deal drugs there right next to us. I of course didn’t know what it was. Then I learned from the neighbors what they were doing. I had never seen it before so I didn’t understand. We’re old
enough but we had never seen things like that before.

Ayşegül also reported a recent incident in the neighborhood where thieves entered the house of single young male workers and stole their money.

**Ayşegül:** I’m telling you, last Sunday, they [the burglars] broke into these single men’s house and stole 4000 Turkish Liras and their credit cards. The robbers withdrew 8000 Turkish Liras from the credit cards after they found the password saved in one of the men’s cell phones. Usually the robberies occur in the morning. That’s the reason why I don’t wanna stay in this neighborhood.

Families in the neighborhood did not dare to challenge the drug dealers because they were scared of them. Gurbet and Dilan described instances where their husbands stood up against the drug dealers but were almost attacked by them. When Gurbet’s husband found out that the drug dealers put a package of drugs in his son’s pocket and told him they would pay him if he kept it until the police left, he went to talk to them. Yet, the conversation did not go very well.

**Gurbet:** My husband went to their boss and told him “Why are you putting your drugs in our kids’ pockets?” God forbid, he [my son] was still young, what if he had eaten that pill? He’d have died. And the boss was angry with my husband. He told him “We can even deal with the State. Who are you to threaten us?!” If my husband had replied back to him, they could have beaten each other up. Those men are bastards/bums. They are psychopaths, they can do anything. They break a glass bottle on the all and scare you off with that [broken bottle] then saying they’ll throw on your face or eyes. We’ve seen it all on this street.

**Dilan:** I swear to God one time they [the thieves] fought here and they almost killed a man. My husband called the police and said “We can’t take it anymore! What is this!?” The police came and told the thieves that a neighbor reported on them. And they swore all kinds of curses.

Şükriye thought that since the drug dealers had been stabbing people and not getting arrested, there was no point reporting on them and that the drug dealers could actually hurt them as well if reported on.

**Şükriye:** They stab people under our nose, kill them and run away. Nothing happens, no one catches them. So if we report on them, we can go down the drain.
On the other hand, other women said the drug dealers and the thieves usually did not do any direct harm to them, especially because they did not interfere with their business and refrained from interacting with them.

Gamze: No they don’t harm us, we haven’t seen any harm. We didn’t bother each other. They never did anything to our children Vallahi. Whatever they do, they do it to themselves and that doesn’t concern us....If you don’t ask for it, nobody will do anything to you. If I go sit with them and talk to them, they may do something to me. But I don’t go talk to them and don’t interfere with their stuff. I don’t go near where they hang out.

Yasemin: It [their presence] makes me uncomfortable but I don’t think they’ll do something to me because we always see them when we go outside. And people say that they [thieves and drug dealers] don’t hurt people in their own neighborhood. So that’s why I’m not afraid.

Züleyha: There’re drug and dope sellers. There’re thinner addicts, there is all kinds of things. But they don’t do anything to us. I don’t know [why], maybe they protect us. We haven’t even seen a burglar break in our house.

Faraşin stated that the gangs had never bothered her family on the block she had lived for four years before moving to her current home. Yet she was still scared that she and her kids could be hurt by a stray bullet during the shootings on the street.

Faraşin: Nobody came to my door or bothered me, but I was still scared. I’d say “If I take my kids outside in the evening, will a stray bullet hit my kids when the [criminals] shoot at each other?” I was scared of that. Not that they would aim at you, but sometimes when they fought they ran around with guns. And if they fired, who knows who it’d hit. But they never bothered me in my own house.

She contrasted that experience to her experience on where her current home was located. She thought this block was now quieter with no armed men. She and her children could spend their day on the street without having to worry about shootings.

Faraşin: ....But here [this block] is not like that. I haven’t seen anybody fighting or running after each other. We can sit outside day and night. I can take my kids out.

On the other hand, Ebru, who just moved to the same block where Faraşin lived,
mentioned that her son’s bicycle had been stolen just a couple of days ago from the building. She suspected that the Romanis who lived on that block stole the bicycle. She said that on the block where she moved from, she could leave her door open and nothing would happen.

_Ebru_: There is a Romani living downstairs. So many people come and go to his house. My son’s bike was stolen last week, that’s why I am a little edgy here. But I lived on my former block for 9-10 years and the building door downstairs was always open and nobody stole anything from there. But here, we don’t know the people who go to his [Romani’s] house, they may steal our stuff.

Beritan was also one of the women who did not think the gangs were harmful to them. Even though Beritan was concerned that the gangs set a bad example for children in the neighborhood (as discussed in the next section), she also mentioned that the thieves did not harm them but quite to the contrary protected them by not letting strangers and other gangs pass by their block.

_Beritan_: Vallahi, to be honest I didn’t have any harm coming from them [the band of thieves]. We lived among them for five years....They don’t harm the place where they live. They indeed protect it. If another thief comes from some other place, they don’t let him in. You could easily tell who was part of the gang in our old block. I think there are some around here too, but I don’t know them. But there [in my old block] we knew them all....When a stranger passed by our block after midnight, they’d stop him and ask where he came from and where he was going because maybe he was a burglar and was gonna break in someone’s house. They protected our block like that.

For Zarife, it was a relief to know that the gang of thieves protected their block. She knew them by name and occasionally hid their guns for them in her place, as I once witnessed when I went to visit her and her little kids (Field notes, July 22nd 2011). Especially during times when her husband was in prison and she stayed home alone with her kids, their protection made her feel safer. She seemed to have developed a symbiotic relationship where she hid their guns for them and they protected her when men behaved inappropriately towards her. She confirmed that it was not just her that they protected but the whole block.
**Zarife:** Men [the thieves] here don’t let other thieves from around come to our block. They prevent bad things from happening [here]. I’m staying at home by myself and I’m not scared. If they weren’t here, I’d be scared. [Now] I don’t worry about who’s gonna knock on my door. If somebody dares doing something [to me], I go tell them and they take care of it.... And it’s not just me [they keep an eye on]. Go ask anybody on this block [they’ll say the same]. It’s thanks to them we are at ease here. [Otherwise] this is Tarlabası; ten burglars can break into the same house in one night.

She also provided insight to the mechanisms with which gangs established their territory in the neighborhood.

**Zarife:** Yes, there is a gang here, right by where my sister-in-law lives, and there’s another one over there. The two gangs don’t intrude in each other’s business. If a thief from somewhere else comes here, they don’t let him in. The other day, another gang came and burned this gang’s motorcycle. Then, they started shooting at each other. It went on all day long.

Similarly, Seda who lived on the same block as Zarife, personally experienced the benefit of the presence of gang of robbers. When there was a big fire in her building, one of the thieves helped save her three children, which she greatly appreciated. She added that the thieves also kept an eye on her block and did not do any harm to people living there.

**Seda:** People say they’re thieves but they don’t harm us. For instance, they don’t curse at us, they don’t steal our stuff. If anything happens, they protect our block. They don’t hurt people on our own block. Like I told you, one of them [the thieves] saved my three kids from the fire. I barely got out myself. My husband was still in the house. He [the thief] saved my three kids from the fire. One doesn’t save his child or his sibling from fire like that, right? But he [the thief] did [save my kids] even though we didn’t know him.

Women suspected that the police partnered with or was bribed by the criminals since the criminals could continue their activities despite police surveillance. Some women also witnessed the verbal and monetary exchange that occurred between the police and the drug dealers that supported their suspicions of bribery.

**Dilan:** Police officers were friends with the gangs. When they ran out of money, they’d come here and get their allowances [from the gangs].
**Gülistan**: Mostly, they’d [gangs] be reported to the police and then they’d put some money on the police officers’ pockets and the police would set them free.

**Gülistan’s daughter-in-law**: They [police officers] were taking bribes from them. We haven’t personally reported them, but some people do. Nothing comes out of it. So why would we? People report them and the police lets them go. It’s better not to get involved.

**Beritan**: …We always saw it happen on our former block. The [police] cars would stop in front of our house. Then the police officers and the drug dealers would make a deal. Sometimes the drug dealers would hand them the dope or vice versa. Sometimes they exchanged money. Sometimes when the police officers did want to take them in, the drug dealers bribed them. They’d kiss each other and the police would leave. There are some [drug dealers] right there too. My husband says, he wakes up early some mornings, he says he sees the police and the drug dealers come together early in the morning up there (points towards up the hill). I don’t know how they [the police] area gonna eliminate them [drug dealers] from here.

However, women noted some relief from drug dealers in the last few years, at least on some blocks.

**Kader**: For the last two years, either the police officers or the chief of police changed, because they do a lot of raids. If two or three young men come together here, the police car shows up right away as if there’s a camera on every corner. They either placed some cameras here or somebody calls them, but they come right away. People say the police placed cameras on certain corners where they know the drug dealers hang out.

**Narin**: This block wasn’t good at all. It’s been better since last year. It’s not like before.

Şükriye, Sevda, and Aslı were sure that at soon as the drug dealers got out of the prison, things would go back to how they were.

**Şükriye**: They [drug dealers] are gone, they’re in prison. Insallah they won’t get out. If they come back, it [things] will happen again.

**Sevda**: Now, they’re all in prison. Next year when they get out, it’ll be business as usual.

**Aslı**: They’re in prison now, that’s why. Once they get out [it’ll be business as usual].

Yet, Kader, Özlem, and Gülistan stated that the thieves and drug dealing still continued
on some blocks in the neighborhood.

**Kader**: For the last two years, the police cleaned it up a bit, but there’re still drug dealers on some corners....Not as many as there used to, but there still are.

**Özlem**: There aren’t many [drug dealers] now. The police don’t allow it, but there still are few. They try to do it under the table.

**Gülistan**: There still are [drug dealers]. There’re a lot of them on that street there. They all sit and deal there. Then they fire their guns at night....There’re thieves on that corner. Vallahi we can’t go to sleep at night, they shoot all night long, they kill people.

It was indeed easy to spot where the gangs were located as many young male adolescents loudly hung out on some corners and fancy cars stopped by where they were (Field notes, August 4\(^{th}\) 2011). Towards the end of the summer, I started spotting the same black jeep regularly on the corner of the block where Kader and many other participants lived. Nobody in the neighborhood could afford a fancy car like that unless they were not involved in some type of criminal activity. When I asked the women, they said the drug dealers were back (Field notes, August 5\(^{th}\) and 6\(^{th}\) 2011). The following summer when I went back to visit my participants, I witnessed a transaction between a man in a car and one of drug dealers (Field notes, July [exact date unknown] 2012).

"**It’s hard to raise kids in this neighborhood**: Challenges and Strategies

Women thought that Tarlabası was not the ideal environment to raise children. They identified many challenges related to child-rearing in the neighborhood. Yet, they also developed strategies to minimize the negative impact of these obstacles on their children (See Figure 4).

**Challenges**

Women had many concerns about the neighborhood, including negative peer influence, lack of parks, but most importantly the existence of criminal activities.
Criminal activities. The criminal activities that took place in plain daylight in front of their children were the major concern for mothers in Tarlabası. Women were concerned that the drug dealers set a bad example for their children and that their children learned the names of all types of drugs at an age they should not.

Şükriye: They [kids] learn all kinds of bad things here. There’s nothing but bad things here in Tarlabası. They [drug dealers] were giving the drugs [to people] bluntly. We were seeing it, and so were the kids. Now if you ask little kids, they know it all, even the names [for different drugs]

Dilan: I don’t know, our kids can see and want to do the same. There are thieves here. They sell drugs, pills, or heroin. Won’t the kids see it? Won’t they watch? That’s what we’re concerned about...

Esra: This is no place for people. There’re drugs, there’re drug dealers. There’s everything….This is no place to live. We’re scared that [our kids] will hang out with them or smoke pot.

Zarife talked about how attractive it was for children to see “easy money-making”.

When Zarife realized that her four-year-old son was being approached by the thieves and she found out that he stole potato chips from the corner store, she punished him and did not let him go outside.

Zarife: Kids are outside all day long. They see how easily they [the drug dealers and thieves] make money and they [kids] quickly take them as examples. Sometimes I let my two kids go downstairs to the street and I kept an eye on them by looking out the window. I saw the thieves talking to my kids. One time one of them told me “Your son is gonna be my friend. I’ll teach him all the tricks”. Since then, I don’t let him go to play on the street. This one [pointing to her son], they took him to the corner store twice. He started stealing packages of potato chips from the corner store. He was hiding them under his shirt….I spanked him on his butt. He’d rather be spanked than getting used to stealing things.

Beritan had a similar account. When Beritan and her family lived on a different block in the neighborhood, they had daily encounters with the thieves and drug dealers who always hung out in front of their building. Beritan talked about the thieves and drug dealers’ strategies to lure children. They attracted young children by giving away money to them, and created for children
a certain dependence or addiction to being around them. Beritan stated that some children gradually joined the gang.

**Beritan:** We lived on the fourth floor. They owned the store on the ground floor. We couldn’t sleep all night long because of their noises. They’d hide things in the building, I saw them. All the kids of the block were nearby them. They [kids] were all very young, two or three years old. And the thieves would give them money, would treat them nicely.....For instance, my husband passed by them [gangs] many times and they told him “We give money to your kids. They never take it”. They told me too and I said “Thank you, please don’t [give money], they may get used to it and ask money from other people too”....I mean it wasn’t good. Why were they treating the kids so nicely? I don’t know, that probably was their way of attracting the kids. There were many kids who became friends with them.

While Beritan did not experience any harm from the gangs during the time she lived with them on the same block for five years, she underscored that children were inspired to become like gang members due to the fancy cars they drove.

**Beritan:** They didn’t hurt us but they were being bad examples for the kids. For instance the kids saw those fancy cars and they drive fast too. So kids my son’s age or younger were saying “We wish we had cars like that. When I grow up, I’ll do the same [job]”. I saw it [them saying that], I heard it....They envied it.

Gülcan also talked about how the drug dealers and thieves lured children, especially boys, by giving them money.

**Gülcan:** They’ll give kids 1 or 2 Turkish liras, then they’ll get them used to smoke cigarettes and pot. And poof you lose your kid. That’s why I’m scared. They won’t do anything to the girls, but I’m scared for my boys.

Nurbanu had convinced her husband to move out of the neighborhood because she was concerned about the impact of the criminal environment on her children. After living in a different and safer neighborhood for few years, Nurbanu’s husband, a taxi driver, complained about not being able to find as many customers as he used when they lived in Tarlabası. Hence, they moved back as a family. Nurbanu was now worried for her sons.

**Nurbanu:** I came [back] here. My sons are now older. They go out and I’m scared because there are thieves here. I tell my husband to move out of this
neighborhood but he doesn’t want to leave. I can go anywhere but Tarlabası. I can move to the mountain, can go to the other23 side. I can go anywhere he wants but he doesn’t wanna move out. He says he can find work here [as a taxi driver]. He says no one gives him a job in other places and that he works here. Vallahi, the kids go out and there’s drug dealers and thieves. I’m very concerned for the kids.

Influenced by the news they watched on the television, mothers were also concerned that their children could be kidnapped, raped, and/or killed.

**Kader:** Because we always see it on television that they rape 10 year-old kids, or kidnap them and kill them, that’s why we are scared.

**Aslı:** Now you see –though this may happen in villages and towns too, that a girl went out to get holiday candies24 from her neighbors and she was killed. That’s why I don’t want to let her go out….Let’s say, God forbid, the kids are playing downstairs. If somebody comes [to kidnap her] and gags her, we won’t hear a thing.

Zarife let her children go downstairs to the street by themselves once, and that was the last time she did so as she saw them from her window running in all different directions. From then on, she did not let them go unless she was also with them, except few times when I went to interview her.

**Zarife:** The other day I let my kids out by themselves. I saw that one was running in one direction and the other in another direction when they were playing. So I don’t let them go by themselves. Now, I go downstairs [to the street] with them once a week. We stay outside for two hours maximum and then I take them back home.

Fatma was also worried about potential kidnapping of her children because she watched the news on television of a little girl that was lost. While Fatma trusted that nothing would happen to her children on their block because it was a dead-end street and strangers did not pass by very often, she did not want her children to wander to other streets.

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23 Istanbul is located on two continents, Europe and Asia, and is separated by the Bosphorus. Tarlabası is located on the European side. Nurbanu refers to the Asian side of the city when she says “the other side”.

24 For both the Eid and the Ramadan Holidays, we have the tradition, especially in villages or small cities, of little children knocking on neighbors’ doors to wish happy holidays. In exchange, the neighbors give children candies, chocolates, or small amounts of money.
**Fatma:** This is Istanbul. We see things on the news. For instance, children go to collecting candies during the Holidays or go to the corner store and never came back. Those child abductions make us [scared]....Our street doesn’t have any strangers going through. What I’m trying to say is there’re a lot of strangers passing by [during the day] that street over there. But our street isn’t like that. Because it’s a dead-end street, only those who live here come here. That’s why we say [our block] is safe....If my kids go to that street (pointing to the other side), an ill-intentioned person can take my kids away.

**Negative peer influence.** Many women did not want their children to play with other kids outside. Most children played with children on their own block. These were children of neighbors whom women socialized with all day long. Yet, they still were concerned that children were a bad influence on each other. Women thought that children copied each other’s bad behavior, including cursing.

**Yasemin:** When the child goes out to play, he learns all kinds of bad things. He learns all the curse words and then they [kids] say them to each other.

**Aslı:** Kids know all kinds of swearwords. How will my child grow up hearing all that? A sixth grader says all kinds of dirty words, so do the mothers [in the neighborhood].

**Şükriye:** She [my daughter] learned to say “whore” in a week. They [kids] learn bad things here. She used to call everybody “abla” and “abi”²⁵, now she calls them by name. She only calls women “aunt”. I’ve heard her so many times say “whore”. If she says that know, she’ll get used to so many other things.

Narin speculated about how it would be easier to raise children in the village. She believed that her children would only play with the children of their relatives, and hence less likely to learn bad behavior.

**Narin:** I don’t want my kids to have friends here at all. If we were in the village, nothing could have happened, because there is no [bad] place to go. They’d play with their cousins and come back home. But it’s not like that here.

Şükriye contrasted children’s daily activities in Tarlabası with the neighborhood she

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²⁵ Abla means older sister and is used to refer to girls or women older than oneself. Similarly, abi (ağabey) means older brother and is used for the same purpose.
used to live in before moving here. Giving the example of her sisters-in-law’s children, she stated that children in the other neighborhood spent their time mostly inside and with educational activities.

Şükriye: If you go to other neighborhoods, you won’t see anyone sitting on their doorsteps all day long. We never sat outside [in my old neighborhood]. We only got out to the parks or someplace else. If you saw my sister-in-law’s kids, you’d be surprised. They sit at home and watch cartoons, or do puzzles. They haven’t started first grade yet, but they know everything.

Esra and Narin contrasted their own experiences as a child with those of children today. They thought that today’s kids were not outside to play but to fight and learn other bad behaviors.

Esra: We played too when we were young. But the kids today, they don’t know how to play. They only learn mischief and swearwords. They don’t know how to play. We used to jump ropes or play with our dolls outside. But these [kids] aren’t like that. They go out to learn swearwords like whore, or to learn malice. They go out to the street to fight.

Narin: We used to play all day long and come home and go to bed. The kids now fight each other or hit the other. We spent our time playing. We’d either play house or jump rope or play marbles. We played marbles with the boys. There was no problem. Now my daughter chases Gurbet’s daughter. She chases Kader’s daughter. There’re maybe fifty kids on this block. How are they gonna all play together [peacefully]?

Another problem with having so many children playing outside was that they often fought with each other, which at times got physical.

Sevda: On this block, we can’t leave our kids outside for five minutes. They were playing a soccer game. One of the kids hit my kid on the ear, he cried for two hours. You try to tell them, they don’t listen. Aunt Gurbet has a son, you tell him [to play nicely], and he doesn’t listen. The kids on this block are misbehaving.

Esra: When the kids go out, they fight. Either my kids will beat someone else’s kids or vice versa. Then I’ll yell and she [the other kids’ mother] will yell, and there’ll be an argument.
**Faraşin:** The kids fight. No matter how good the kids are, at the end of the day they’re kids. If one [kid] takes a toy away from the other’s hand, he’ll cry and they’ll fight.

These fights usually ended up with mothers’ interfering and protecting their children, which also raised the tension between the adults, especially the mothers. Sometimes, women reconciled quickly, but there were also cases where women never spoke to each other again.

**Fatma:** Sometimes there are arguments because of the kids. Kids fight and then the adults interfere [and argue], but we still like each other. The kids play and then five minutes later they argue and fight.

**Zarife:** Adults here only fight because of kids. They fight and two hours later they sit together. Then fifteen minutes later, one’s child hits the other neighbor’s child, and then they fight again. Two hours later you see the two women sitting next to each other, chatting and laughing. It’s usually like this on our block.

**Serap:** She [that neighbor] has a daughter, she only has one daughter. I touched her daughter one time and hell broke loose. If my child hits her child, she raises hell about it. If her daughter hits mine, she doesn’t say anything. So we [me and the other neighbors] decided to break off our relation with her. We haven’t spoken since then. We argued with her a couple of times.

Some women also complained that children always asked them for money to go to the corner store to buy potato chips or ice cream when they saw their peers eating snacks from the corner store, which created an endless cycle of junk food eating in the neighborhood. This led to endless arguments between the children who insisted on for money and mothers who did not want to give them any. In addition to the cost of giving money to children multiple times a day, mothers were unhappy that their children ate unhealthy food. Usually, it was always children who won at the end (Field notes, June 15th and July 29th 2011).

**Narin:** They [the kids] always call us and ask for money to buy this or that. It wasn’t like that back in our time. Our moms would go to the corner store and buy us something and give it to us. Now, the kids want money. They’ve become obsessed with money. There is a corner store on every corner here….If one of the kids buys something, then my kid comes to me and starts crying “Why aren’t you buying me one?” Then, we’re obliged to buy. Sometimes I don’t have money [to
buy him what he wants], and then I beat him. I say “Why are you asking money from me? I just gave you some”.

Şükriye: I don’t want her [my daughter] to buy ice cream and stuff. But since we came here, she’s been buying it. Sometimes she throws a tantrum, but I still don’t give her money. Then her dad gets upset with me. He tells me to give her money every time she asks for it, even if it’s a small amount. But I don’t [give her money] because she goes and buy a popsicle. It doesn’t have any vitamins or nutritional value.

As there were always children playing on the street, it was hard for mothers to keep their children inside even though they were not very keen on letting them play outside. Dilan tried to keep her children busy at home by giving them their toys or turning on the cartoon channel on the television. However, as her children heard other children playing outside, it became challenging to keep them in, especially in the summer.

Dilan: They’re kids, of course they want [to go out]. They beg me to go out to play. And I don’t wanna break their heart. I don’t want it [them to play outside] either. They get all dirty [when playing outside], they learn swearwords, and they see bad examples [people]. It’s better if they stay home but my son always wants to go out….They sometimes play at home. I give them their toys and they watch cartoons. I try not to let them out. During winter time, they don’t go out at all. But when it’s summer and they hear other kids playing, they wanna go out. I give them toys to play and sunflower seeds to eat so that they don’t go out but still they hear other kids’ voices [on the street] and they wanna go out.

Serap had similar complaints. She did not want to let her children play outside either, but as their friends were outside, her children insisted on joining them.

Serap: My kids are always outside. If we lived somewhere else, I wouldn’t let them out. Because all their friends are outside all the time [here], they say they wanna go out too. Then, if I get angry with them, I don’t know. Sometimes, I beat them [because they want to go out to play] then I regret it right away. If we lived somewhere else, I wouldn’t let them out because they get all dirty. I don’t know, [playing on] the street isn’t good. It’s better if they don’t get used to it.

Aslı also stated that it was hard to keep her daughter inside when other children were playing even though, as she mentioned earlier, she was reluctant to send her to play on the street because she was afraid that someone might kidnap her.
**Aslı:** I don’t want her to go outside but because all the kids play outside on our block and she sees them, I end up letting her out to play. Otherwise, it’s not a good thing for kids to play on the street in the city, especially in these times.

Gurbet’s children refused to do their homework when they came from school, because they wanted to go out to play with other children as soon as they came home.

**Gurbet:** It’s hard to raise kids [in this neighborhood], very hard, because they come from school and don’t do their homework [when] they see that the street is full of kids. I tell them “Do your homework, eat your lunch, watch your television, then go out to play for an hour” [but they don’t listen].

**Lack of parks and playgrounds.** Another complaint women had about raising children in Tarlabası was the lack of parks in or close to the neighborhood. None of the buildings had a back or front yard where children could play in. As there were no places for children to play, they played on the street.

**Narin:** I wish there were playgrounds for kids to go and play. There’s nothing here, ABSOLUTELY (emphasizes) nothing. If we don’t take our kids to far away parks, there is nothing in our neighborhood. I wish there was some place nearby for our kids to play.

**Gamze:** There’s nothing easy about raising kids here. There is no playground, no yards, nothing. It’s not good for kids [to play on the street], not good at all but they have to because they get bored [sitting home]. There is no place to go, no parks nearby. If we had a house with a yard or some yard, he could go play soccer for an hour. There is none of that, so they can’t sit home forever, they go play on the street.

**Nermin:** Vallahi, it’s very hard. There’s no balcony nor yard. The street here is very narrow. If there was a balcony or a yard, kids could play there. That’s what we want, but..

Nurbanu’s children were now all grown up. So the noise younger children made when playing outside all day long bothered her. However, she also understood the need for children to play on the street as they did not have parks where they could go in the neighborhood.

**Nurbanu:** The kids [playing on the street] bother us a lot, but there isn’t anything to do. There are no parks or playgrounds, so they are bound to go to the street to play. The kids are right too, they’re right. What else can they do? They do want a
playground, but there’s nothing here. So the kids are forced to go to the street to play.

Gurbet complained that there were no parks nearby and that taking children to the parks took away from time she needed to spend on household chores, which she thought would upset her husband and brothers-in-law she lived with.

**Gurbet:** The nice parks and playgrounds are far away. When we go to the parks, we can’t do our chores at home; we don’t have time to cook. Then, my husband is upset that dinner is not ready on time, so does my brother-in-law.

An important consequence of not having parks in the neighborhood was that the streets became the playground for children. This increased their risk of being hit by a car, which concerned mothers.

**Seda:** I do want them to stay home but they wanna go out. This is a busy street, cars pass by, which worries us. We call them [our kids] from the window and tell them to come home but they don’t listen. They get bored at home, you know. If I had a balcony or a yard, I’d let them play there [but we don’t], so they’re bound to play on the street.

**Nermin:** Vallahi, I don’t feel comfortable, not comfortable at all. My son is outside right now, I don’t feel at ease at all. God forbid, if a car hits him.... A car hit Sevda’s son the other day. God helps us Vallahi, we can’t do anything [to make things better for our kids].

**Gamze:** Cars pass by where kids play. There is no room for children to play. Let’s say you keep kids at home, you can only do so for an hour or two. Then they get bored, so you’re bound to let them go out to the street. What else can you do? This [neighborhood] is no place for kids.

Züleyha who lived in another neighborhood before she came back to Tarlabası contrasted the two neighborhoods. She wanted to move back to her former neighborhood where her children could play more easily.

**Züleyha:** The streets are very narrow and there’re cars passing by, the kids can’t play.... If there were no cars, it would’ve been better.... It’s better there [in my old neighborhood]. Even now, I wanna move back there. It was better for kids to play. This street [here] made it so hard for them when they were little. Cars almost hit
them. I always took my kids to my former neighborhood to play, the streets there were wider.

Those women who lived on dead-end streets were happy that their children were not exposed to the risk of being hit by a car. These dead-end streets provided safe havens for children to play.

**Fatma:** This block is like a yard because there’re no cars or strangers passing by. So, they go out to play.

**Elif:** For instance, no cars pass by our street. That’s good.

**Serap:** What I like about [this block]? Because no cars go through, kids can play comfortably. It’s a nice block. On the other block, there were too many cars coming and going, kids couldn’t play. This block doesn’t have traffic, it’s nice.

Even then, there was always the risk that children could run to busier streets while playing, as it happened few times during my stay in the neighborhood (Field notes, July 7th and July 29th 2011).

Not all mothers were worried about their kids playing outside, as long as their children played on their block. While they trusted that nothing would happen to her children as long as they stayed on their block, Fatma and Elif did not want them to go play on other blocks.

**Fatma:** Because this block is a dead-end street, there’re not too many cars, but if my kids go to that street or to that block (pointing different directions respectively), I’ll be angry with them. I have to see them when I look out the window. I don’t let them go anywhere else. They can go up and down on our street, but not to other streets. They know I’ll be angry with them if they do. They aren’t allowed to go far. If they wanna go to the corner store, they should go to this one, not to the one there….They can only play on this street.

**Elif:** If they don’t go outside, they get bored. So it’s better if they play outside. I don’t think anything [bad] will happen if they’re with their friends. If they play with good people, not bad people….it doesn’t worry me. They stay on this block. There’re no cars nor strangers [here]….For instance, I tell my son not to go to any other street [to play]. I’d be scared if he went to another street.

Lale thought that she did not have to worry about her kids because her neighbors kept an
eye on them.

*Lale*: I don’t worry about them because my neighbors keep an eye on them.

**Strategies**

Despite various challenges that existed in the neighborhood, Kurdish mothers developed various strategies to keep their children safe and out from trouble. These strategies included cautionary warnings to children to stay away from trouble, individual monitoring, collective monitoring, curfew on hours spent playing outside, and resource brokering strategies in the community.

**Cautionary warnings to children.** Women gave instructions to children before sending them out to play. Kader was worried about her children playing with the children of drug dealers who lived around the corner, as she suspected these children also used drugs. She cautioned both her daughters and sons not to play with them. When they did not listen to her, she kept them home.

*Kader*: Like I said before, there are bad families like next to where we live. Their kids are using heroin and they don’t go to school. And we live very close to them. I always tell my daughter and sons not to go near them. When they do, I make them go home. It’s hard.

Like Kader, Zeynep and Gamze constantly told them not to interact with any of the thieves or drug dealers. Zeynep’s children were all older than 17 years now, so she spoke about the times when they were young. Gamze, whose children’s age varied from seven to 16, made a deal with them before letting them go out to play.

*Zeynep*: I always told my kids not to hang out with them [drug dealers and thieves], not to approach them, not to sit with them. I always told them those things. Both their father and I have been constantly telling them these since they were three years old, not to hang out with the wrong crowd, not to approach bad people, and always to be friends with good people....When one is young, it’s easy to turn you into a killer or a thief. That’s how life was here. It really was like that.
Gamze: If we see that you’re not a good person, I don’t come near you, I don’t sit with you. I don’t let my kids come near you or speak to you. We make a deal at home [beforehand]. I tell my son “This person is no good. Don’t go near him nor speak to him. Don’t be friends with him. Stay away from him”. [I talk to them] like that. (Özge: And do they listen to you?) Yes, they do.

Züleyha, Seda, and Nermin were among mothers who told their children not to take any money from the drug dealers, thieves, or strangers, and not to go with them if they told them to do so.

Züleyha: I always tell them [my kids] “Don’t take anything from them [drug dealers and thieves]. If they give you money, don’t take it”. We always tell them these.

Seda: I tell her 24-hour “Don’t take money from anyone. If a stranger calls you, don’t go. They may do something to you”.

Nermin: I tell him “don’t take anything to eat from anyone. There’s all kinds of evil here.” And my son says “No, I don’t eat anything anybody gives me”.

Beritan’s children already refused to take the money the thieves gave out to children on their block. Beritan reinforced that behavior by praising them for doing so.

Beritan: My kids didn’t take anything from them ever. They would come and tell me “Mom, we didn’t [take any money from them]”. And I’d say “Good for you. Never take anything from them. Politely thank them and say you don’t want any money”.

Narin, Fatma, and Serap were among mothers who told their children not to get in fight with other children in the neighborhood. Narin took her children away to the parks when there was a fight on their block. Fatma told her oldest daughter to keep an eye on her younger siblings and Serap told her children to call her if a fight broke among children.

Narin: [I always say] “Daughter, don’t fight. Son, don’t fight with him, don’t beat him. Stay by me.” When there’s a fight, I take my kids to the playground so that they don’t fight with other kids.

Fatma: I don’t want my kids to get into fights. I always tell my daughter before she goes out to play “Don’t interfere with anyone’s business. Keep an eye on your siblings”.
Serap: I tell my kids “Don’t go near bad people. If a fight breaks among kids or if anything happens, let me know.”

Individual monitoring. Another strategy women widely used was to always keep an eye on their children. This individual monitoring mainly took the form of sitting outside with their children and checking on them from the window periodically.

Sevda: When my kid plays outside, I’m at the window all the time. Either I sit outside with them or I watch them from the window so that they don’t go near them [thieves and drug dealers] or wander off.

Esra: This is no place to reside. This is no place to live. One gets scared that they [our kids] would go there [where the drug dealers are] and smoke pot. We’re scared. That’s why we constantly keep an eye on them so that they don’t go there….My husband tells me “What else do you have to do all day? You have to run after them all day long.” When they go out, I do my chores for five minutes, and I come downstairs right away after that.

Narín: I sit outside a lot, I sit with them outside. I sometimes sit [outside] for an hour or two. Sometimes, I even sit outside by them for three hours, a little on this side of the street, a little on the other side. If I’m home, I watch them from the window one thousand times to see where they are and what they do.

Seda also kept an eye on her children by sitting outside or checking on them from her window. Now that her oldest daughter was old enough, she thought, she helped her mother keeping her siblings safe as well.

Seda: Vallahi I look out the window a hundred times, I call their names. I check on them to see whether anything happened or whether they went somewhere else. Sometimes, when I’m done doing my chores, I go sit outside to keep an eye on my kids. When they were little, I never let them outside without me sitting there [with them] or watching them constantly. Now my oldest daughter is a little older, she keeps an eye on her siblings.

Nurbanu’s son who was in the room with us during the interview stated that if his mother had not kept a close eye on them, he and his brothers could have joined the thieves.

Nurbanu’s son: There are all kinds of thieves here. People envy them, [especially] the little ones. My mom watched us very closely, otherwise my older brothers would have become thieves too. She watched us very closely. She used to search us when we came home to make sure we didn’t smoke.
Gülcan also did not let her son play with a robber. She and her husband told the thief to leave their child alone.

**Gülcan**: You know this avenue there? We lived there for six months. My son was still young back then. The thief asked my son why he didn’t play soccer with him. My son said he didn’t want to. I told him [the thief] “What do you want from my son?” He said “I want him to play soccer with me”. I told him “My son would never play soccer with you”. My husband was there too. He told him “What do you want from my son? He doesn’t wanna play ball with you. Do you want him to become a thief like you?”

Şükriye contrasted her close supervision with some of the other women on her block. In addition to checking on her regularly by being outside or looking out from her window, she also called her home every two hours to give her healthy food to eat.

**Şükriye**: Here, when they let their kids outside, they don’t really keep an eye on them. For instance, Lale gives breakfast to her sons and lets them out. Then she doesn’t think about them until dinner”. I call my daughter every two hours; I give her her meal, her yogurt, her fruits. Women here ask me why I do all that….I always run after her. If I am doing dishes, I go out three times to see where she is.

Mothers also checked on their children from the window during interviews. Dilan said she did not see her son since that morning so she opened the window and asked her neighbors during the day (Field notes, June 24th 2011). Şükriye also checked on her child during the interview to make sure she was safe. While she panicked at first when she could not see her, the neighbors told her Semra, her daughter, was at Kader’s house.

**Şükriye**: Let me look out the window to see where my daughter is. I haven’t seen her around for hours. Semraa (calls her daughter)! Where is Semra (she asks a neighbor)?

**The neighbor outside**: I don’t know.

**Şükriye**: Is Semra with you (she asks another neighbor)? Okay, okay.

**Özge**: Where was she?

**Şükriye**: At Kader’s house.

According to Özlem whose children were four and two years old at the time, a woman should always stay with her children or “keep an ear” outside until her children are old enough
to listen to her. Until then, one should closely supervise them.

Özlem: For instance, if your kid is [playing] outside, you’re bound to keep an ear outside or you’ll sit outside with them. When they get older, you can keep them inside or they’ll listen to you. But because they’re too little to listen to you now, you have to run after them. That’s what we do, that’s what we’re trying to do.

Aslı also checked on her daughter from the window. Unlike other mothers, she did not sit outside because of the tension between her and the other neighbors on her block. Hence, she called her daughter’s name from the window. When her daughter responded, she went back inside to continue her household chores.

Aslı: I look out the window all the time. I call her, and when she answers, I go back to doing my chores. After a little while, I call her name again. I look out to see if she’s there. For instance, I looked out yesterday and she wasn’t there. I called her name, no answer. I was very scared. It turns out they went to that street behind us. I yelled at her not to go to that street ever again.

Curfew on play time outside. Some mothers who did not want their children to spend the whole day outside had some restrictions on how long their children could play outside.

Şükriye whose daughter was around four years old had a rather strict schedule.

Şükriye: For instance, in the morning when I do the house chores, I put my daughter on the window [behind the bars] and give her something to eat. Then around 2, I put her to bed so that she rests for a couple of hours. That’s how I do it. [I don’t want her outside] from morning till night (chuckles). It’s enough if she plays for a couple of hours.

Zarife let her children play for two hours outside, and under her supervision (though she sent them out few times by themselves during our interview sessions).

Zarife: I go downstairs myself and I take my kids with me. We stay outside maximum two hours, then we come back home.

Yasemin did not want her son to be outside because she did not want him exposed to drug dealing, stabbing, and cursing that occurred in that part of the neighborhood. Hence, her five year-old son went outside to play only once every two or three days, and only with his
mom. Yasemin thought he was indeed not very interested in playing outside.

**Yasemin:** He goes outside with me once every two or three afternoons. I take him outside in the afternoon a little bit and he plays. Sometimes we go visit my brother. I take my son there. He doesn’t go outside by himself. He doesn’t want to anyway.

Kader also had a curfew, though less strict, for her children that let them play during daytime

**Kader:** For instance, I don’t want them to play outside late at night because we’re in Istanbul, anything can happen. Otherwise, they can play with their friends, with their neighbors during day time. I don’t say anything to that.

Gamze criticized women who let their children be outside all day. She thought that children in other neighborhoods did not stay on the street all day long. She did not let her children be outside from 4 pm, at which time she went to her part-time job as a cleaning lady. She thought that letting children be outside all day and night not only was bad for children themselves but also bothered other residents on the block.

**Gamze:** When evening comes, there is not a single child outside in other neighborhoods, but here children are outside till dawn. I don’t understand how their parents let them [stay] outside. I don’t let my kids go out after 4 pm. When I go to work, I take them inside and they don’t go out until I come back.

[Otherwise] I worry about what happens when I’m at work. The kids [in the neighborhood] are in the middle of it when there is a shooting or a fight between two people. Nobody takes their kids inside. They [kids] are outside all day long. They bother people. When it’s evening time, they should eat dinner, stay home, and watch television. I wake up for the Sahur26 and the streets are still full of kids.

Zeynep stated that she never let her children outside all day when they were little. Even on days she had to be in her husband’s corner store, she took them with her when she went back home during the day.

**Zeynep:** When my kids were this young, we opened our corner store. They were always with me in the corner store. They were always with me. When I went upstairs [to home], they came with me. I never left them on the street. I’d take them home and put them to bed. They’d eat first and then go to bed or I’d wash

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26 Sahur refers to the meal eaten at dawn before starting the fasting for the day during the Ramadan. The meal is eaten before the sun rises.
their heads and they’d go to bed. When I went outside, I’d take them with me and that was it. I never let them [play] on the street otherwise.

Faraşin took her two children to play under her supervision on the street for an hour or two in the afternoon when her baby was asleep at home.

**Faraşin:** For instance, in the afternoon, when my baby goes to sleep, I take them out for an hour or two and watch them. Then, I bring them back home.

Having said that, there were also mothers who did not curfew their children’s outdoor play hours. Serap and Züleyha for instance, let her children play outside all day. Children only came home for their needs such as using the bathroom or eating.

**Serap:** They [my kids] are outside from morning to evening. Believe me they reluctantly come back home. Sometimes I yell and yell, and they don’t come home. They say “Please mom, let us play a bit more”. And time goes by like that and the evening comes. I force them to come back home. Especially this one (pointing to her daughter in the room), she never comes home [from playing outside]. My kids love playing outside. If I let them, they’ll stay outside all night long. What can I do? I allow them to play outside and they do. They play and then come home.

**Züleyha:** It’s fine [for the kids to play outside]. It’s easier for them to play outside, they get bored at home. Even I get bored here. I never impose any specific time [to come back home] on them. They come home to eat or to use the restroom and then go back to the street. But I tell them not to go far away.

**Collective supervision.** One of the biggest strategies that facilitated the safety of children in the neighborhood was the collective supervision among neighbors. Most mothers relied on this strategy to ensure their children’s safety. Neighbors watched each other’s children when they played outside or when women had to go somewhere and needed to leave their children behind.

**Elif:** All the neighbors keep an eye on kids, so do I. For instance, when I go to the hospital or somewhere else, all my neighbors keep an eye on my kids. They tell my kids not to go anywhere or come stay with them. So, it’s good.
Serap: If I have something to do, I can leave my kids with my neighbor and I don’t have to worry about them. Our neighbors are really good. If they go somewhere, we keep an eye on their kids. So we trust each other.

Dilan: We let our kids to play on the street but we know everybody [here], they won’t do anything [bad] to my kids. If I’m not there [on the street], my neighbors keep an eye on my kids. They know my kids. If any stranger holds my kid’s hand, they won’t let him. We’re all relatives here. When I say relative, I mean we’re all from the same village.

Knowing that she could ask her neighbors about her daughters’ whereabouts provided some relief to Özlem. She thought that other neighborhoods might not have that kind of mechanism.

Özlem: For instance, when my kids go out to play, even though my neighbors aren’t that close to me, they’re acquaintances, I can go and ask them where my kids are. Because I know them, it’s a little easier. If I were in another neighborhood, maybe it wouldn’t be like that.

Şükriye stated that she had never taken her baby son with her when she needed to run an errand since he was born. She fed him and left him to her neighbors’ care until she came back. Being able to rely on her neighbors was the biggest reason why she wanted to move back to Tarlabası where she grew up when they moved out from her brothers’ in-law’s house in another neighborhood.

Şükriye: Because my neighbors I know them all from our village, if I go somewhere I don’t take my son with me. I haven’t ever taken my son with me so far when I went somewhere. I feed him and give him to my neighbors. That’s why I wanted to move back to this block. I can go anywhere I want and leave my kids with my neighbors. On this block, we all help each other and are there for each other. This block is very good in that sense.

Fatma greatly appreciated that her neighbors picked her daughter up from school when they saw her. After she had a baby, Fatma could not go take her daughter at the end of the school day and her daughter had to come home by herself. It was a great relief for Fatma to know that her neighbors would accompany her home when they could. Sometimes she asked
them to pick her daughter up. Other times, her neighbors did so by themselves.

**Fatma:** I watched out from the window and saw that sometimes my daughter couldn’t carry her backpack. Sometimes, when the neighbors saw her at school, they’d bring her home with them....Sometimes I told them to pick her up and sometimes they did so by themselves. All my neighbors here knew that I couldn’t go to school to pick up my daughter so they brought her back when they saw her at the end of the school day.

Zarife thought on the one hand that everybody knew each other’s children on her block and would not let any stranger take away any child. On the other hand, she believed her neighbors were not particularly helpful when it came to keep an eye on each other’s child. She stated that if a child fell down, all they would do is to bend over the child to see what happened.

**Zarife:** You may be scared to do so [let your child play] in other places, but here all the kids know each other. Last month, there was this boy who was lost and came to our block. We all knew he wasn’t from around here so we took him to the mosque and they made an announcement from the mosque for the boy. So if somebody tries to take away a kid from this block, neither I nor anybody else will let him....The neighbors don’t help me out here so I don’t know whether they help each other. When I see a kid on the street and if his mother isn’t around, I take care of him. I ask him where his mother is....People here they may be helping each other [with the kids] but I haven’t seen it [happening]. If anything happens to a kid, all they do is run to see what happened. They never run to help a kid, instead they sit and talk about what happened to him.

Interestingly, one day when I came to the neighborhood, Zarife’s children were playing on the street and she was at work. It had been over an hour that the children were outside when I got there. She had many relatives on that block, none of which had taken them to their home to take care of them. Yet, people seemed worried about the children while criticizing her loudly for leaving them unsupervised. At the end, it was one of the neighbors who called her on her cell phone at work to let her know about the situation after he got her cell phone number from me. It turned out later that she had left her children at home (as none of her relatives agreed for child care while she was at work, and she had to work because her husband was in prison), and children locked themselves out when they decided to go downstairs to play on the street (Field
notes, July 23rd 2011). Even though her neighbors probably did not attend to her children at a level she expected or she would have if she found her neighbors’ children wandering on the street, there was still some type of protection on her neighbors’ part to reach to her that might not exist in other neighborhoods.

Seda, who lived on the same block as Zarife, left her children at home one day because she had to go to the hospital to take care of her husband. When a storm broke out in her absence, Seda’s children got scared of the thunder. It was one of her neighbors who went to her apartment and took care of her children. She thought she would not have this type of care from a neighbor anywhere else.

Seda: I’d go to the hospital because my husband needed some blood transition and I’d leave my kids at home. One day [when I was at the hospital], it rained very badly and my kids screamed because [they were scared] of the lightning and thunders. One of my neighbors came and took them to her home. They wouldn’t do that anywhere else.

Depending on the makeup of the specific block, sometimes help from neighbors was limited. For instance, Aslı did not talk to any of her neighbors on her block. Hence, she took the sole responsibility of keeping an eye on her child. On Esra’s block there were many single men and only very few families, one of them being her husband’s relatives. Moreover, Esra’s children did not like going to the houses of non-relative people.

Esra: Our neighbors are good. Those who live above us are my husband’s relatives. Those others have been here for eight years now. When they go somewhere, they leave their children with me. My kids don’t go to anybody’s house. Either they come with me or they stay home by themselves. Sometimes, when I go to my sister-in-law, my kids go upstairs and stay there because they’re relatives. But they don’t go to anybody else’s [house]. They don’t go to strangers’ houses. There’s a single man living in this building, they can’t go there [anyway]. There’re also two old people who live here, they don’t go there either.

Resource brokering: Use of community/youth centers in Tarlabası and playgrounds in other neighborhoods. There was one community center and one youth center
in the vicinity of the neighborhood. The state-run youth center was about 20- to 25-minute walking distance from the neighborhood and accepted children from nine or ten years old to up to eighteen. This youth center, through which I initially got to know Kader’s daughter Dicle as her “Big Sister” used to be much closer to Tarlabası. As many children (the enrollment age was much lower at that time) had been already attending the center for quite some time, most continued their attendance when the center moved to a much bigger and nicer building but further away from the Tarlabası community. The youth center offered various activities for children, ranging from extracurricular activities (e.g. art classes) to after-school programs. Children who attended the program also received a small amount of monthly salary to encourage continued attendance. The center also provided uniforms and school supplies, as well as financial aid for institutions that prepare senior high school students for university entrance exams. Children were taken to field trips as well, especially during the summer when the school was off. The youth center provided multiple benefits for children and their families. The financial support the center provided alleviated at least some of the struggles families experienced around supporting their children’s education. Children also received academic support through after-school lessons offered at the Center. All of Kader’s, Gurbet’s, and Gamze’s children, except Kader’s and Gamze’s youngest children (because they were not old enough yet), were attending or had attended the center. While Kader talked about the educational benefits of the center, Gurbet and Gamze illustrated the financial support provided by the center for children’s education.

**Kader:** They’re more comfortable at the center. They like it there. If they have homework to do, they do that. It really helps, because when they come from school, they don’t do their homework. They either watch TV or play outside. But when they go to the center, their teachers help them study.
**Gurbet:** They have been going to the center for six years. They give them 25 [Turkish Liras] every month. They also pay for their school expenses, like the uniform and the backpack. They give us gift cards and we spend them for kids’ school expenses.

**Gamze:** Sometimes we receive help from the youth center. I told them this year that my daughter would take the university entrance exam and would be good if she could attend the dershane\textsuperscript{27}. The other day, the director of the center talked to my daughter and said they would enroll her in a dershane.

Tarlabaşı Community Center, a more recent institution, served children from various age groups, including kindergarten age. The center also provided classes for women (e.g. reading classes). There were fewer children in Tarlabasi who attended the center, potentially because it was a newer institution or because it could not outreach to parts of the neighborhood where I conducted the study. Narin’s and Dilan’s accounts also suggest that people may be reluctant to send their children because the classes were only once a week and that it did not meet the expectations of the families in terms of academic support. However, for those who did send their children to Tarlabasi Community Center, the expected benefits were primarily academic support.

**Narin:** I heard the community center from other kids. Then I thought it would be beneficial for my kids. So I took my daughter there once a week for a year. Then when she started elementary school, she was all fine. She was used to sitting in a classroom and being away from me. But it’s only one day a week, I wish it were more often. They help kids with school work and they play games with them, but they don’t give any money like the youth center does.

**Dilan:** I told my husband about the community center, and he said my son could go. Sometimes my son didn’t wanna go. He’d say “I won’t go. They don’t give us anything to do. He only went when he had too much schoolwork to do. He’d tell me “Mom, they don’t have reading time and this and that”. So he only went sometimes.

\textsuperscript{27} Dershane is a private educational institution that specifically prepares students for the university entrance exam. In Turkey students are accepted into universities based on their scores in a multiple-choice test that is administered across the country simultaneously. Many students in Turkey attend the dershane to prepare for the exam. It is comparable to SAT courses offered in the United States.
Mothers did not make a direct link between their children’s attendance to these institutions and keeping them away from the troubles of the neighborhood. The main reason children were sent to the centers were educational. Yet, the time children spent in these centers reduced the time they spent on the street being exposed to the risks mothers identified. Moreover, children who attended the centers were also able to interact with more positive role-models. Thus, these centers should also be considered as a way to deal with the risks in the neighborhood.

There were also mothers who used parks and playgrounds in nearby neighborhoods given the lack of proper places for their children to play in their own community. Faraşin and Narin took their children to the parks in other neighborhoods.

**Faraşin**: When I get a chance, if the weather is nice, I take them to the playground in the summer. Instead of having them play on the street, I take them to the swings in the playground to make them happy.

**Narin**: Sometimes when I bring my daughter back home from school, I take her and my son to the playground for a half an hour. Some days though, not always. When I don’t have work to do at home, I take them out [to the playground].

When her children were younger, Zeynep used to work on some days at her husband’s corner store that was right on their block at that time. Yet, on days she did not, she took her children to the park so that they could get some fresh air and play on the grass.

**Zeynep**: Sometimes I sat outside with them all day long. If not, I took them to the playground so that they could get some fresh air. There’s just dust on these streets. When I took them to the playground, there was greenery there, so it was better. I always took them to the playground.

“I’d move out if I could, but…”: Thoughts about Leaving Tarlabası

Women initially came to Tarlabası because they already had relatives or acquaintances living there or because their husbands worked in/around Tarlabası. Since the housing, both for renting and buying, is one of the most affordable in the city, many families are stuck in the
neighborhood unless they can support to move to a better-off neighborhood. Most of the families continued to rent, with only seven families owning their apartment.

_Asli:_ I’m forced to live here [in this neighborhood]. What I mean by forced is that I stay here because the rent is cheap. Otherwise I wouldn’t live here.

_Yasemin:_ There are thieves here. They fight all the time, they stab each other. This neighborhood isn’t good. We’ve thought about moving out so many times but our financial situation doesn’t allow us. So we’re forced to stay here.

_Narin:_ Wherever we go in Istanbul, it’ll be the same because we’re poor. [Hence] we can’t go to better-off neighborhoods. If we move out from here, we can only go a couple of blocks up or down. It’s all the same around here. If we had money and could afford going somewhere else and buying a nice house, but I don’t have money. Where am I gonna find [that kind of] money? (laughs sarcastically). That’s why we stay here.

While the houses were affordable, women were not happy with the quality of the housing. The complaints included rats, the smell in the apartment, small square footage, and rundown or non-existent kitchens.

_Özlem:_ This house [I’m living right now] is better than the other one [I used to live in]. The other one had only one room and it was dark. When it’s a basement unit, it’s dark. Plus, it had that smell [of humidity], this one doesn’t. I used to clean the house all the time, still it didn’t look clean at all. It smelled so bad. When I told the landlord about the smell, he said “You guys don’t appreciate the houses anymore”.

_Esra:_ I don’t know. Everything is still hard for me. If we lived in another neighborhood, if I had a big house, it would be better. When you clean the house here, it doesn’t look clean. I don’t even have a proper kitchen. I don’t have a decent anything.

_Zarife:_ For instance, I’d die for a kitchen with a countertop. I’ve never been in a kitchen like that. I’ve never done the dishes in a sink on a countertop.

_Gurbet:_ For instance, our ceiling in the kitchen is leaking. In the winter, we have water dropping from the ceiling. Nobody is fixing it, neither the landlord nor the men in our house.

Fatma and Sevda moved out of their homes because of rats.
Fatma: The rats were kicking the windows. We couldn’t sleep out of fear. We could only stay there for about twenty days. It was like living in the same room with the rats.

Sevda: There were big rats in the house. We stayed there for two or three months. Then we came here.

Elif complained about the rats as well as the humidity which made her sick in her previous home.

Elif: We used to live in this house where there were rats and all kinds of things. It was bad... It was very humid and it made me sick. I became sick on my lungs. It was very bad. We’ve only been doing a bit better for the last five years. Before that, we had a lot of hardship.

The majority of the homes I visited during my fieldwork were too small for the size of the household that lived in it. In most cases, part of the family slept in the living room while few other members slept in the only other room the house had.

Seda: This old apartment, I keep cleaning it but it doesn’t look clean. It’s run down and filthy. It’s only one room. We sleep here, sit here, and eat here.

Narin: Look at Aunt Kader. You see her apartment. [She has] so many kids in that apartment. Sometimes her oldest son comes here and sleeps in our apartment. If they have a guest, some of the kids sleep here. If she had the [financial] means, would she stay in that apartment?

Gülcan and Gamze complained that the fact that her children had to share the room for all daily activities also interfered with children’s school work.

Gülcan: I wish I had an extra room so that my kids could sleep in separate rooms. Right now we only have two rooms my daughter Özge. For instance, my kids eat their meals in this room; they study in this room; and they sleep in this room. How can they be successful students like that?

Gamze: The television and everything is in this room. Eating meals, sleeping, sitting, having guests, all is in this room. (Özge: Do you think they’re affected by that?) Of course, while they study here, the television is on. As much as I tell them to concentrate on school work, they do look at the television as well.

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28 In this case “aunt” is used to refer to the wife of the brother of one’s husband. Usually, aunt in that context is used for women older than the person who uses the word.

29 When she says two rooms, it also includes the living room.
Given all these problems with the housing and the criminal activities in the neighborhood, women wished they could move to a safer neighborhood where they could have bigger and better homes.

-Sevda. Vallahi, my house is small. If I find a bigger house, of course I’ll move. First I don’t wanna raise my children here and second my house is too small.

-Faraşın: I would wanna go to a better place on a quiet and clean street. But right now, I have to stay here. I have to....If we get some more money, if we have a better financial situation, I’ll rent a place in a better neighborhood and live there. But right now, I have to stay here.

-Gurbet: I do say that [moving to another neighborhood] too. Thank God, we’re not complaining about our situation but still, it would have been better if we moved to a nicer house, to a nicer neighborhood.

Women’s dream neighborhood included a nice house, parks, and streets free of trash and criminals.

-Seda: I dream of a clean house. This wood [in this apartment] are killing me. When I wake in the morning, I want to clean the tiles, the bathroom, the kitchen. I wanna have cabinets in my kitchen....I want the neighborhood to be quiet and clean.... I want both the neighborhood and the neighbors to be good.

-Sevda: I want in my dream neighborhood to have a nice playground for my kids to play. I want it to be a clean neighborhood. I want the people to be good and the neighborhood to be clean. I don’t want people to throw their trash out of the window. I wash my doorsteps here every day, both in the morning and evening. I want my neighbors to be like that too.

-Ayşeğül: [In other neighborhoods] people keep it clean. They treat each other nicely. Nobody leaves their trash on your doorsteps. It’s not like that here. [Here] people sweep their own doorsteps and put all the filth on yours.

-Faraşın: A nice neighborhood? There would be no theft, no psychopaths (we laugh) because let’s say I’m living here and there’re single men or drug addicts or thieves here. I can’t go out and sit on the street. I can’t let my kids go outside.

Even though they considered moving, women had an emotional attachment to Tarlabası because they had been living in the neighborhood for so long.
Züleyha: Yes, I do feel attached [to this neighborhood]. When I go to some other place, I feel like a stranger. When I come back here, I feel much better. Other neighborhoods are nicer, but we have relatives here….And when we see them, it makes us feel better.

Yasemin: [If I moved somewhere else] I’d be sad because I’m used to living here. I worry about how I’d get used to living somewhere else and getting to know people there. I’d miss this neighborhood [if I moved out].

Sevda: I don’t know. I feel like my everything is in this neighborhood. I’m used to this neighborhood. I’ve been living on this block for ten years. When I go somewhere else, I get upset that I can’t sit outside at my doorsteps. It’s nice here. On the one hand I wanna move because my apartment is very small. I have many kids and we don’t have enough space. On the other hand, I don’t wanna leave the neighborhood.

Aslı: I lived here during my whole adolescence. I grew up here. Think about it, 30 years! When I came here I was 14 or 15 years old. It’s a long time. I’ve had both good and bad days here. When I go to another neighborhood, I feel empty inside. I feel like I’m on another planet. [I miss] nothing really here. But when I come back, I feel full. I’m like a balloon. When I come back here, the balloon swells up. When I go somewhere else, the balloon blows up and it’s all empty.

When asked about whether they would miss anything about Tarlabası, the majority of the women stated that they would miss their neighbors the most.

Elif: I like this neighborhood very much. Aside from all this filth [bad people], I like this block. I like my neighbors. I feel like I’m in my village.

Nermin: What I miss are the people here. I miss my neighbors. Vallahi, they’re better than my mom and dad. Whenever I have a problem, I go to them. We get along no matter what.

Gurbet: Of course, I’d be upset about [leaving] my neighbors. I wouldn’t be upset about leaving the neighborhood at all.

Özlem’s husband liked the other neighborhood where they used to live before moving to Tarlabası because he thought it was cleaner and safer. However, Özlem, while acknowledging the down side of living in Tarlabası still liked it better than her old neighborhood because she could socialize with her neighbors here even though she was not particularly close to them.
Özlem: [My husband] says Yenibosna neighborhood is nicer and cleaner. He used to live there so he knows. He likes it there because he used to live there but I don’t like it. I like it better here because I could never go out in Yenibosna. Here, I get out during day time and talk to women here. I didn’t speak to anyone there.

For most women, neighbors provided the emotional and practical support that they greatly appreciated, as also discussed in the previous chapter.

Nurbanu: I like my neighbors. If I get sick, my neighbors come and visit me. That’s why I like them. We’re like family. In other neighborhoods, no one will notice if you die. Here when I don’t get up in the morning, everybody asks “Where is Nurbanu? Why isn’t she around?” I like that.

Sevda: Valla hery evening we sit outside and chat with our neighbors. They bring out tea and sunflower seeds. So we sit and talk about stuff. That comforts me. Everybody helps each other. For instance last week, this neighbor of us, I don’t even know her, took all her rugs out to wash but she couldn’t. So I washed all her rugs and hung them on my balcony. Then I gave them back to her. That’s what a neighbor does, help each other out.

In some cases, neighbors’ assistance was life-changing and saved women from difficult situations. For instance, when Fatma’s husband was unemployed for an extended period of time right after their first child’s birth, it was her neighbor who lived downstairs that helped him secure a job.

Fatma: When my daughter was born, my husband lost his job. The textile industry stopped at that time and he couldn’t find work until when my daughter started crawling. We couldn’t pay the rent for months. We didn’t know what to do. We thought about going back to the village. Then one day, when I was talking about it with my neighbor downstairs, she said “All my brothers work in a restaurant. Would your husband work in a restaurant?” I told her “He’s never done it before. He’s always worked in textile. But can you still ask your brothers? My husband says he’ll do any type of work.” And she did. God bless them [her brothers], they came and called my husband. He’s been working there ever since.

Yet, when it came to their family life, there was a limit to what was shared with the neighbors. Women chose not to talk about their personal problems with the neighbors because they did not want any gossip or “backstabbing”.

Özge: So you don’t tell anyone anything here?
Zeynep: No. I told you but I can’t tell anyone else. What good will come from me telling them? So it’s better that I don’t tell them. It’s better because if I tell one [of the neighbors], she’ll tell other people. But if I don’t tell anyone, no one will know.

Dilan: I have neighbors but you can’t trust everyone you know. If you argue about something, then they’ll hold it [what you confide in them] against you. So I can’t trust them. So I don’t tell them anything.

Beritan: Sometimes, I talk to them about things that aren’t too personal but I don’t say things like “My husband is no good. He does this or that.” Those things, I can’t tell them. What can they do if I tell them? Nothing. They’ll either laugh behind my back or make a mockery out of me saying “Her husband doesn’t stay home. He does this or that”. That’s why I don’t tell them those kinds of things.

Some were lucky to have one or two women they trusted enough to confide in.

Kader: We do talk to them but don’t fully disclose our problems. There are certain things one doesn’t tell everyone. There’re certain neighbors [I talk to]. There is difference between neighbors. I have one neighbor who is like my abla. Not that she’s older than me but she’s like an abla to me. I tell her my everything.

Şükriye: When I have a problem or when something bothers me, I don’t keep it bottled inside me. I talk to a neighbor and get it out. Not everyone [though]. I talk to one or two people.

While the social relations with neighbors were portrayed mostly as positively, not everybody was keen on their neighbor relationships. Beritan contrasted her neighbors in Tarlabaşı to those she had in her former neighborhood and complained that her neighbors in Tarlabaşı were jealous and not very amiable. She thought she would not miss her neighbors if she moved out of this neighborhood.

Beritan: I don’t know. I don’t feel like I have neighbors here. Us Kurds, Kurds are a little, I mean sometimes Kurds don’t like each other or they envy each other. There’s jealousy among them. But when I was in Haskapi, there were Turks and Kurds. There were people from Diyarbakır, Malatya, Tunceli, Batman, and Mardin. I liked them all. When I bought something they’d all be very happy for me. Because my financial situation wasn’t good, they’d say “We wish you could buy yourself a carpet”. Or they’d be very happy for me when I bought something. Here though, I feel like the neighbors don’t want me [to get anything], not just me but anybody. They always want things for themselves (she laughs). I won’t miss
the neighbors. The neighbors here aren’t very friendly or sincere. You can’t trust anyone to talk about your problems. Absolutely not.

Ayşegül had been living on her block for about two years but in contrast to her former block where the neighbors got along well, her neighbors here were like “enemies” to each other.

**Ayşegül:** I wanna get rid [of this block] as soon as possible because when I used to live on the other block, I didn’t have any problems or arguments. But on this block, I did. It’s like they’re each other’s enemy [here]. I don’t like that. They gossip, they argue with each other all the time. They can start a fight out of nothing.

Aslı also complained that women in Tarlabası always gossiped or talked behind other people’s backs. Unlike other women, Aslı did not sit outside to socialize with her neighbors. As a matter of fact, she did not talk to most women on her block.

**Aslı:** Here, when three or four women sit together, you can be sure that they talk evil. Look, if you pass by here and you’re not covered properly, they’ll call you “whore” right away. How do they know that? But when their own daughters are dressed exactly the same way [you are], they don’t see that. When it’s anybody else, they see it right away. Nobody sees her own flaw. You know, people don’t see their own hunchback. They don’t turn around and say “I have a hunchback”. But they point out others’. It’s like that here... I don’t even go outside. There’s no neighborliness here. I don’t know, maybe my thoughts seem wrong to them. Their thoughts seem wrong to me.

Thus, even though Kurdish women’s thoughts about the housing and their feelings of “being stuck” in Tarlabası were unanimous, their feelings and experiences with their neighbors were more varied. While women mostly appreciated their relationships with their neighbors, some women preferred to stay away from or be distanced to them.

**Discussion**

This chapter explored Kurdish women’s lives in Tarlabası. Tarlabası bore similar characteristics to inner-city neighborhoods described in the literature (Anderson, 1990; Jarrett,

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30 She means when one’s hair, arms, and legs are not covered (potentially also when someone wears pants because women usually wear long skirts).
31 She makes reference to the saying in Turkish “A camel doesn’t see its own hump”, which corresponds to “People who live in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones” in English.
1999; Jarrett & Jefferson, 2003; Jarrett, Jefferson, & Kelly, 2010), including poverty, deserted and run-down buildings, graffiti, limited resources, and criminal activities. The neighborhood, home to various marginalized and low-income groups, was characterized by a mixture of old and newer buildings, some of which was deserted and decorated with graffiti. The neighborhood was always alive and crowded with Kurdish women and their children, especially during day time, despite the criminal activities that women vividly depicted in their community. Women’s accounts presented two sides of the same coin when it came to criminal activities. On the one hand, women and their families were scared of and concerned about the crime and the violence associated with it that happened “next door”. On the other hand, some argued that the people engaged in these criminal activities did not directly hurt the residents who lived on their block. Quite to the contrary, they provided protection of the block against rival gangs that could potentially harm families living on that particular block.

However, “regular” residents of the neighborhood were passive in taking action against the crime in their community. Some may argue that this is due to a combination of non-existent social ties and a detachment or lack of engagement in one’s community in the community, which then results in a lack of collective efficacy against crime. Yet, similar to Jarrett and Jefferson’s (2004) findings in an inner-city neighborhood of Chicago, Kurdish women’s accounts suggested this passivity resulted not from a lack of social ties with neighbors but rather from the combination of hopelessness and helplessness that was perpetuated by the police passivity (and even collaboration with the criminals) and fear of retaliation by the gangs. Kurdish women detailed the positive tone of the police encounters with drug dealers and other criminals. Few women also talked about how their husbands were scared off by gang members when they were confronted or reported on to the police. These factors combined by the fact that
gangs on various blocks did not directly harm the residents prevented Kurdish women and their families from confronting criminals in their community. Hence, similar to African American women’s strategies to deal with violence in their inner-city community (e.g. Jarrett & Jefferson, 2003; 2004; Wolfer, 2000) Kurdish women adopted a more passive strategy of identifying dangerous people and corners, avoiding or staying away from where gangs hung out, and not “mixing into their business”. Women also reported that there was less criminal activity in the neighborhood because many were now in prison as a result of more effective police intervention. They assumed that police maybe started working more effectively due to a change in personnel, but they were certain that their block would go back to how it was as soon as the gang members were released.

As also documented in the literature in inner-city neighborhoods in the United States (Anderson, 1990; Jarrett, 1999; Jarrett & Jefferson, 2004; Jarrett, Sensoy Bahar, & Taylor, 2011; Jones, 2007), Kurdish women were concerned for their children’s safety in the midst of various criminal activities and were particularly anxious that their children were exposed to “bad examples” at such a young age. Even women who thought drug dealers and thieves were not directly harmful to them and their families acknowledged that children not only learned the names of the drugs at such a young age but could be easily tempted by the fancy cars they saw the criminals driving and the money they gave away to children on their block. It is highly likely that women were right in their concern and that the drug dealers’ and thieves’ strategies to hand out money to children in the community was a strategy to recruit new members, and possibly to get the residents on their side. Considering the low socioeconomic status of the residents in Tarlabası, criminals might have thought that with this added benefit, families would be more likely to turn a blind eye to their illegal activities.
In addition to the impact of criminal activities on their children, Kurdish women were also concerned about their children being snatched from the street as they watched many news on the television that reported kidnapping, raping, and killing of children. The fact that children did not have proper space to play in the neighborhood also concerned Kurdish mothers. As many other inner-city neighborhoods (Estabrooks et al., 2003; Jarrett, Sensoy Bahar, & Taylor, 2011; Powell, Slater, & Chaloupka, 2004), backyards, parks, and playgrounds were non-existent in Tarlabası and even the closest ones were at a long enough distance according to the mothers. Also, most houses did not have a balcony where children could get some fresh air and play. The lack of proper spaces for children to play outside pushed them to play on the street instead, which increased their risk of being hit by cars. Speeding cars and traffic as threat to inner-city children’s safety have been reported in other studies as well (e.g. Jarrett, Sensoy Bahar, Williams, & McPherson, in press). The existence of dead-end streets in the neighborhood, although few in number, provided a safe space for children on the block. Even then, there was the risk that children could run to busier streets while playing. Finally, women were also concerned about the large numbers of children playing outside all day long. Not only did this made it harder for mothers who preferred having their children stay inside to keep them at home, Kurdish women also complained that children learned bad behaviors (e.g. cursing) from each other and always fought over the slightest disagreement. Children’s fights also raised the tension among adults and in rare instances led to irreparable damage to neighbor relations.

As playing on the street was inevitable for children given the neighborhood’s lack of resources, women were more proactive in protecting their children from criminal activities in the neighborhood and other obstacles Tarlabası posed against childrearing. Similar to other strategies used by African American mothers living in inner-city neighborhoods (Jarrett, 1999;
Jarrett & Jefferson, 2003; 2004), Kurdish women used cautionary warnings to their children before they left the house or when they were on the street, and also monitored and limited the time their children spent outside. They constantly told their children to stay away from “bad people”, strangers, and fights among their peers. While some mothers implemented strict hours as a curfew time, other mothers’ curfew time started at a much later time or did not exist at all.

As also identified in qualitative studies in predominantly African American inner-city neighborhoods of Chicago (Jarrett, 1999; Jarrett & Jefferson, 2003; 2004; Jarrett, Sensoy Bahar, & Taylor, 2011), Kurdish mothers also mastered individual monitoring. Sitting on the doorsteps or sidewalks during the day served the double purpose of socializing with neighbors and keeping an eye on their children. When mothers had other chores to attend to at home, they checked on their children multiple times from the window or by stepping outside momentarily to make sure they were safe.

Another important and widely used strategy by the mothers was collective monitoring, in other words reliance on their neighbors to keep an eye on their children. Though neighbors were limited in their collective efficacy against criminal activities, their collective efficacy when it came to child care and supervision of their fellow neighbors’ children was remarkable. As also documented in other inner-city African American communities (e.g. Jarrett, Jefferson, & Kelly, 2010; Jarrett, Sensoy Bahar, & Taylor, 2011), collective monitoring is an effective way to ensure children’s safety when the caregivers cannot be available to monitor their children. Though in African American communities, extended kin is more frequently used for child supervision (Jarrett, Jefferson, & Kelly, 2010), Kurdish women in Tarlabası mainly trusted their neighbors, also called as “fictive kin” or “like family” by many women. The collective monitoring was reciprocal and ranged from picking up a neighbor’s child from school to
watching neighbors’ children when the neighbor is busy at home or gone to run some errands. Mothers knew all the children who lived on their block and some of those who lived on adjacent blocks.

These coping strategies are not unique to low-income Kurdish mothers. Parents from any socioeconomic status or ethnic group use these strategies to varying degrees to ensure their children’s safety. However, the context in which these coping strategies are used is radically different (Jarrett & Jefferson, 2003). While resource-rich and safer communities have other institutional, economic, and social means to supplement their parenting strategies, low-income parents in inner-city neighborhoods have to rely heavily on these strategies in order to make sure their children are safe and do not go down the wrong path (Jarrett & Jefferson, 2003; Jarrett, Sensoy Bahar, & Taylor, 2011). It is also important to note that compared to better-off neighborhoods in urban areas where children do not spend as much time playing on the street and neighbors randomly spend time together, reliance on collective monitoring in Tarlabāşı is extensive and plays a critical role. Sampson, Morenoff, and Earls (1999) argued that social capital, in this case neighbor relations, did not always translate into collective efficacy. They suggested that while social capital referred to the resource potential of one’s existing personal and organizational networks, collective efficacy was the activation of these resources for a specific goal, in this case protection of children. Kurdish mothers in Tarlabāşı exemplified a successful conversion of their social capital (close ties with their neighbors) into collective efficacy in order to ensure their children’s safety.

Sampson et al. (1999) also proposed three components necessary for neighborhood-level organization for childrearing. These components included intergenerational closure defined as whether parents know the children of their friends, or in this case neighbors; reciprocated
exchange, which refers to exchange of information and interaction among families; and finally informal social control and mutual support for children (also known collective efficacy), which refers to the idea that neighborhood residents’ can and will intervene to protect children in the community, when necessary. Though Sampson et al. used specific questionnaires to measure each of these constructs, the findings suggest that Tarlabası community would show a good neighborhood-level social organization -had they been given these measures, though some blocks were more successful at this than others.

Mothers also used resource brokering strategies in their community, similar to African American mothers of inner-city communities in the United States (e.g. Jarrett, 1997; Jarrett, Sensoy Bahar, & Taylor, 2011). The two institutional resources identified and used in the neighborhood were mainly seen as a source of academic support for children by the mothers. The Child and Youth Center was older and much widely used by the children in the community. Mothers wanted their children to attend this Center because it provided academic support and financial assistance for school needs. The fact that the center offered field trips, had positive role-models, and reduced the amount of time children would otherwise spend on the street were not mentioned by the mothers. Yet, these were side benefits that contributed to the healthy development of children. The downside of this Center was its limited age range for children it served, which left no choice for many children younger than nine years old to continue to play on the street. The Tarlabası Community Center was more recently established and used to a much smaller extent by the children of the Kurdish women who participated in the study. Yet, the existence of such a center is promising as a protective factor for positive development of children in the neighborhood if it succeeds to reach a larger audience with time.

While Kurdish women in Tarlabası had various complaints about the neighborhood
including the criminal activities, limited resources for children, and the poor quality of housing, most women praised their relationships with their neighbors, except few personal grudges, and pointed out that what they would miss the most about Tarlabası if they could afford to move out was their neighbors. In contrast to the distrust and estrangement that typically characterize resident relations in inner-city neighborhoods (Jarrett, Jefferson, & Kelly, 2010), neighbors of Tarlabası provided both emotional and instrumental support for each other. The neighbor relations were further reinforced by a common ethnic identity, shared hometown, and distant or close kinship. However, it is also important to note that not all women depicted a rosy picture of neighbor relations and criticized the neighbors for talking behind others, engaging in arguments, and being envious/jealous of other neighbors. All the women in the study also pointed to the limits of what was shared with neighbors, despite these close ties. Women were careful not to disclose any personal matters in order to avoid gossip. They chose to confide in their relatives, or only in few selected neighbors.

Overall, this chapter supports the argument that although inner-city neighborhoods are stigmatized as dangerous places, most of the residents are not involved in violent activities and yet suffer the consequences of violence and criminal activities in their communities (Jarrett & Jefferson, 2004). Kurdish women who participated in the study showed that many families lived a family-oriented lifestyle, contrasting the street-oriented lifestyle that also existed in Tarlabası (Jarrett & Jefferson, 2004). Kurdish women, as primary caregivers and day-time inhabitants of Tarlabası have developed strategies to cope with limitations of an inner-city neighborhood and ensure their children’s safety. Finally, the findings also suggest that women in Tarlabası achieved a sense of psychological community, emotional attachment, and social order in the midst of chaos and social disorder. They played an active role in establishing and maintaining
social ties with their neighbors, and hence creating a community that made it more bearable for them and their families to live in Tarlabası.
**Figure 4. Challenges and strategies for childrearing in Tarlabası**

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<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
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<td>Criminal activities</td>
<td><strong>Cautionary warnings</strong> (Narratives used to</td>
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<td>heighten children’s awareness of the dangers of</td>
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<td>the neighborhood and its dangers)</td>
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<td>Negative peer influence</td>
<td><strong>Individual monitoring</strong> (Maternal supervision</td>
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<td>to protect their children from the dangers of</td>
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<td>the inner-city life)</td>
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<td>Lack of parks and playgrounds</td>
<td><strong>Curfew on play times</strong> (Restrictions on hours</td>
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<td>children can spend playing on the street)</td>
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<td><strong>Collective monitoring</strong> (Reliance on trusted</td>
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<td>and reliable nonfamily adults, in this case</td>
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<td>neighbors, to supervise children’s outdoor</td>
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<td>play activities or trips to school in order to</td>
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<td>keep them safe)</td>
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<td><strong>Resource brokering</strong> (Locating and involving</td>
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<td>children in institutions that promote positive</td>
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CHAPTER 6

“WHEN IT CAME DOWN TO IT…”: WORKING CHILDREN IN TARLABAŞI

Kader’s oldest daughter Sevim’s workplace was a two-minute walk from her house. It was a specialized textile sweatshop that only did detail work, like button and tag sewing, and buttonhole cutting. The sweatshop was on the ground floor of a residential building. There was no sign marking the sweatshop outside, so no one knew it was there, unless they looked inside. Approximately 160 square feet large, the sweatshop was a single room filled with seven sewing machines. Spools of different colored threads lined the wall. It was hot in the room and loud when the machines were working. When I entered the shop, it was difficult to hear anything. Music from a radio was drowned out by the whirring of the sewing machines.

Sevim was working with another girl about her age, the sister of Sevim’s boss. I had seen her at Kader’s house before during the lunch hour. The girls took turns cutting buttonholes and sewing buttons on to pants. Sevim said she would have offered me water, but the water barrel was empty. I said I would buy water. As I stepped outside, people looked at me with curious eyes. When I came back, the boss’s sister was gone, and there was an adolescent boy, age 17 or 18, standing at the door smoking. I asked Sevim who he was. She said he took the clothes back to the atelier once they were ready. As I sat next to her sipping my ice tea to cool off, the boss’s sister came in with a fan she said she took from the basement of the sweatshop where, according to Sevim, there were even more sewing machines. They placed the fan in front of me and turned it on.

I sat with the girls for about an hour, watching Sevim closely as she quickly cut buttonholes and sewed buttons on pants. When I asked her how she knew where to sew each button, she said it was easy and showed me how to do it. Smiling, she added that I could
come help them once I learned how to sew. In addition to their own work, the shop also accepted “walk-in” work. A man stopped by with some pieces of garment and asked what it would cost to put in buttonholes. As Sevim cut buttonholes in his garment pieces, he paid 4 Turkish Liras (about 2.25$) to the boss’s sister. Sevim said her boss taught them how to calculate the prices for people who requested services when he was not there. The boss, a man in his late 20s early 30s, stopped by once during the time I was there. As I got ready to leave, he came back and sat behind his desk after briefly chatting with the girls in a friendly manner (June 10, 2011).

Child labor is defined as ‘work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development’ (ILO, n. d., para. 3). The last official statistics on child labor in Turkey were published in 2006. At that time, 22 percent of Turkey’s population (approximately 16 million) consisted of children between the ages six and 17. Six percent of these children engaged in some form of economic activity (Turkish Statistical Institute [TUIK], 2007).

Although the legal adult age in Turkey is 18, the Labor Law only forbids employing children under age 15 years (Bakırç, 2002; Bureau of International Affairs, 2004). However, it allows children between the ages of 13 to 14 to be employed in light work if it will not adversely affect their health, school education or vocational training (Bakırç, 2002). Moreover, this law also enables governors in provinces that depend on agriculture to determine the minimum age for work in agricultural sector (Bureau of International Affairs, 2004). Serious discrepancies still exist in legislations regarding child labor and the implementation of existing legislations continues to be problematic (Bureau of International Affairs, 2004).

Considering that a person is defined as a minor until age 18 in Turkey and that official statistics on child labor include children who are 17 years of age, I include any child who is
employed before age 18 in my discussion of child labor in this chapter. While the inclusion of this age group conflicts with the minimum employment age specified by labor laws in Turkey, I argue that leaving this age group out of the definition of child labor leads to significant negligence of the working conditions they endure, and, hence, to an incomplete picture of child labor in Turkey.

In this chapter, I describe child labor in the community including the types of jobs, age they started working, and the working hours. I discuss who in the family made the decision to send children to work followed by the process through which a workplace for children was chosen. Finally, I describe what mothers are concerned and what they like about their children’s work and workplace.

**Working Children in the Community**

My sample included twelve mothers with working children. Some of these children were working part-time (in the summer or after school) and others were working full-time (see Table 3). All children started work before the age of eighteen. There were eight mothers who had children younger than seven years old (a total of 38 children out of the total number of 105 children in the sample) and hence, there were no working children in those households. In eight other households with no working children, the oldest child was younger than 15. In other words, 38 of the children were somewhere between 1st and 8th grade. It is very likely that if I had more mothers with an older age group of children, higher rates of child labor could have been observed.

The textile industry was important in the Tarlabası neighborhood. It was the main source of income for many families in the community. Garment sweatshops were dispersed in-between houses all across the neighborhood. It was hard to recognize them as shops, however, as there
were no signs outside. Many fathers, and even some mothers (prior to marrying), worked in textile sweatshops in the neighborhood. Children were no exception. Kader’s two daughters started working full-time in the textile industry after they graduated from middle school.

Gülcan’s three children (one son and two daughters) also worked in the textile industry. Gülcan’s eldest son started working in textiles when he was nine years old, right after the family came to Istanbul. Now age 24, he was still working full-time in the industry. One of Gülcan’s younger daughters (age 14) was also working in the textile industry. These children had been working for the last two years and a year respectively. One of Gülcan’s other daughters also worked when they first came to Istanbul. Seven or eight years old at that time, she worked on the street for about two to three years selling water and selpak (Kleenex).

Gülistan had a similar story. Her third eldest son (18 years old) and her oldest daughter (15 years old) were working in textile sweatshops. Her son started work at age 14 after he finished middle school, and her daughter started a year ago when she dropped out of 7th grade. Gülistan’s oldest son (23 years old) also worked in the textile industry for some years after he dropped out of 10th grade. He then started working as a waiter in a restaurant. Like Gülcan’s family, Gülistan’s three eldest sons also worked on the street (the youngest was five and the oldest about nine years old) for about six to seven years while they also attended school.

On the other hand, Nurbanu’s sons never became involved in the textile industry. Nurbanu’s eldest son started working after-school and during weekends in a mechanics shop when he was 10 years old. After working for five years in the mechanics shop, he did not want to attend high school. When he turned 18, he obtained his driver’s license and became a taxi driver. His younger brother also dropped out of 9th grade. He worked in a kuruyemişçi32 for

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32 A store where dried fruit and nuts are sold or a person who sells them
three years. At the time of this study, he was unemployed by choice.

Some mothers had children who worked full-time and some who worked only part-time. For instance, Elif had two sons who were working at the time of the study. Her eldest son started working after school during the academic year and full-time during the summer when he was about 12 years old. Now age 19 and getting ready for high senior year at high school, he had been working in the same börekçi since he was 12. His younger brother (17 years old) started working in another börekçi owned by the same owner six months ago, after he dropped out of 9th grade.

Zeynep had a son working full-time on and off in the textile industry since the age of 16. Ebru’s daughter (14 years old), oldest of her siblings, started working full-time in the textile industry right after she graduated from 8th grade. Ebru’s oldest son (13 years old), though not working that summer, had been working each summer since he was in 5th grade.

Finally, there was a group of mothers whose children worked only in the summer. These children worked only in the summer because their parents did not want work to interfere with school.

**Beritan:** That’s when I don’t want them to work. I tell myself if they work, they’ll neglect school. So if at all possible, I don’t want them to work [during the school year].

**Gurbet:** We’ll send them to work these three months. Then God willing, once school starts we won’t send them to work because if their grades aren’t good, [it is not good].

Summer jobs were more varied. Beritan’s daughter (16 years old) was working as a salesperson in a store and her son (14 years old) with a shoemaker. Both of them found their jobs themselves. Gurbet’s oldest son (13 years old) was working in the textile sweatshop owned

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33 Börekçi is a store that sells variety of flaky pastry/phyillo dough filled with thin layers of a food, usually cheese or cooked ground beef
by a man from their hometown. Her second eldest (12 years old) son also worked for some time in the summer, in a corner store right around the block in the neighborhood. Nermin’s 13 year-old son sold water on the street twice a week during the summer. Among the working children in this study, he was the only one who currently worked on the street. Gamze’s daughter (16 years old) had been working in a pharmacy for the last two years. And finally, Züleyha’s oldest child, a 16 year-old son, worked as a salesperson in a clothing store.

Gurbet’s son worked in the summer because Gurbet did not want him to go to internet cafes. Gurbet realized that her son who was attending the Child and Youth Center either went to internet cafes on his way back home or skipped going to the Center altogether. As a result, they decided to send him to work in the summer to prevent him from going to internet cafes.

**Gurbet:** Before we were sending him to the youth center. They were going [there], but on their way back, they weren’t coming straight home. He [my son] was going to these internet cafes. He was going to those internet cafes with his friends. Wherever you look, there are internet cafes on their way to the youth center. That’s why he didn’t succeed in school, he was wandering around with his friends and not doing his homework. One day, the youth center told us my son wasn’t attending classes at the center. We told them we were sending him to the center. His dad told my son “since you are deceiving us and not going to the center, you’ll go to work”.

Regardless of whether children worked full-time or only in the summer, the work hours were long. Children working full-time worked about 11 to 12 hours a day, including Saturdays. Most importantly, they did not have any social security benefits. For those who worked in the textile industry, the hours were sometimes even longer depending on the amount of work to get done.

**Zeynep:** My son, he works long hours. He leaves at 8:30 am and comes back at 9 pm, sometimes at 10 pm. Sometimes, there is urgent work to get done, they say.

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34 A state-run center that offered both academic support and other extracurricular activities for at-risk children from low-income neighborhoods, especially for children working on the street.
“get these done right away and send them back”. When that happens, they stay late. 10 pm, 11 pm, or 9 pm, you never know when they’ll be done.

Kader: They leave at 9 am. Dicle leaves at 8:30, she comes back at 8:30 pm, and sometimes at 9 or 10 pm. Sevim too, she leaves at 9 am, and comes back around 9:30 to 10 pm.

Elif’s sons also worked long hours in the börekçi. While Elif’s older son only worked four hours after school during the academic year, he had, from the start, been working 12 hours a day in the summer. His younger brother who also worked in a börekçi had the night shift from midnight to 10 am. Children working in the summer also worked long hours regardless of where they worked. Beritan’s two children, Gamze’s daughter and Züleyha’s son worked in the summer as salespersons in various stores, including clothing stores and a pharmacy.

Beritan: My daughter leaves at 10 am and comes back around 10 pm. My son leaves around 10 am and comes back around 8 to 9:30 pm.

Gamze: She works from 8 am in the morning to 7:30 pm.

Züleyha: [My son] goes to work at 9 am and comes back at 8 pm. But now he comes around 7 pm because of Ramadan.

When Nurbanu’s son started working in a mechanics shop at age 10, he also had considerably long work hours for a child of his age. Though Nurbanu did not mention summer work hours, she stated that, for five years, he went to school in the morning and then worked in the afternoon. Considering students switch between morning and afternoon shifts in elementary school, and that in middle school children have longer school days, her account about her son working from 12 pm to 7 pm may not be completely accurate. Yet, it still underscores the long work hours children may have already at a young age.

For children who were used to working on the street, the hours were more diverse. Gülcan’s daughter, who was seven or eight years old when she started selling water/selpak on the street, worked about five to six hours a day. Considering her young age at the time and lack
of adult supervision on the street, five hours is a long work day exposing her to many dangers. However, Gülcan also mentioned that there were days when her daughter only stayed at work for an hour.

_Gülcan: She used to leave at noon and come back around 5 to 6 pm. Sometimes she only stayed for an hour and came back saying she couldn’t sell any selpak. And I used to say okay. Or sometimes she sold everything out very fast and came back early._

Gülistan’s account about the days her children used to work on the street was similar. Children came back from school around noon and went to sell water or selpak until 5 pm. During the summer, they had longer work days from 10 am to 5 pm.

_Gülistan: They used to leave for school in the morning at 8 am, and then come back from school around noon and go to work on the street. They used to come back around 5pm. [In the summer] they were leaving at 10 am and coming back around 4 to 5 pm._

Contrary to Gülistan’s and Gülcan’s children, Nermin’s son who was currently working on the street had a more flexible schedule. Not only did he only work in the summer, he only worked two to three days during the week.

_Nermin: He works in the summer until school year starts. He works two or three days a week, like he goes two days and stays home two days....For instance, he didn’t go yesterday and he won’t go tomorrow either._

When mothers whose children worked for financial reasons were asked whether they tried anything else before they resorted to sending their children to work, they said they had no other choice. Even though almost all of them worked when they were single, they stated that it was not an option for them to work now, and, hence, their children had to. The fact that mothers had young children to take care of prevented them from working outside the family.

_Gülcan: No I didn’t work [when we first moved here]. My kids were still young back then._
Züleyha: I have a young one [child]. [Plus, it’s not good] if there is no food on the table or the stove is not running when they come home from school. My husband says he’ll work at night, but that we shouldn’t work. I don’t want to disobey him.

Beritan: Hmm, no. When these [my kids] were young, I couldn’t do anything anyway.

While having young children to take care of plays a role in mothers’ staying home, traditional gender roles that prevail in the community also prevented them from working outside the house even if they did not have young children (see Chapter 8).

Beritan argued that her husband complained and protested even when she used to do some beading work on garments at home. She said if her husband saved money back then, they would not have to worry about whether they would be able to support higher education (high school and beyond) for their children and would not have to consider sending them to work instead.

Beritan: ...[My husband] kept the money. And when I asked him for money, he said he didn’t have any. On the weekends, when he got his salary, I was telling him we needed this and that, like water and all, and he’d say he didn’t have money that week. The following weekend when I asked him, he’d say they didn’t get their salary. Every week he’d say “we’ll get our money next week” or “they gave us very little this week”. I don’t know what he did with the money. One day, I told him “I guess one day you’re gonna come home with a big sack/bag of money because you never bring the money home” (we laugh). So, he was spending the money. He didn’t think back then [of saving]. If he had thought about it and if I were working like you said, maybe today our kids wouldn’t have to work.

Who Decided to Send Children to Work?

Mothers were asked about how decisions were made to send children to work and whose idea it was to do this. Contrary to what one might assume, mothers were usually the ones who suggested that their children start working either full-time or in the summer.

Gamze: I told her. I said “work and see what working and making money are like”. And she said okay.
Kader: Umm, they finished middle school and I said it was time for them to work... They wanted things and we couldn’t buy them. So I thought sending them to work was the best solution. ...I told them to work.

Beritan: As a matter of fact, I told them, before school year ended, to find a job for themselves and work. [I said] You see, we don’t have enough money, so get used to working, learn how to work....It was me who always told them to work....

Elif: I made the decision. I had a fight with him and told him he’d either go to school or go to work. He said he’d work. If you’re not going to school, go to work, right? Otherwise, he’ll sit around at home all day. So I decided to send him to work.

When asked what their husbands thought about children going to work, mothers’ answers suggested that men took a more passive stance on the issue. Even though husbands were asked for their opinion or approval, mothers initiated the decision-process.

Elif: My husband didn’t say anything. He closed the door and left when my son and I started fighting. I told my son he’d either go to school or go to work. We were yelling at each other like that, and my husband left. He didn’t interfere.

Beritan: I was telling them, yes, their dad didn’t say anything. As a matter of fact, maybe he would have told them to work too, but he didn’t know. They both found a job.

Gülcen: I told my husband too, because she is a girl [I asked him] whether [it would be okay] for her to go [sell selpak]. He said she could go if she wanted to.

Only in one case (Zeynep’s) was the husband the one who approached his sons with the idea to work. But, in this case, he only did so when his sons were already age 16 or 17 and not interested in going to school. Even then, he let them choose what type of work they wanted to do and where they wanted to work.

Zeynep: It was his father who told him [to work] but he was right. He [my husband] told him “Since you dropped out of school, you should get yourself a vocation, do whatever you want, do whatever your friends do. Go work somewhere you can get insurance”. My son said no, he said he’d work at that sweatshop, his dad said “okay”.

Zeynep mentioned the social pressure created by neighbors and her husband’s friends
about their sons still not working “properly” at age 17. While neighbors gossiped that it was probably because they had a lot of money, her husband faced his friends’ questions about why his sons were not working.

**Zeynep:** People gossip, they say we have money and all. If we had money, why would we get credit from the bank? I mean, my kids don’t work, they don’t like to work. My husband’s friends come to him and ask him why his sons aren’t working even though they’re all big men now.

Zeynep defended their attitude about not pressuring their children to work at a younger age by contrasting it to one of her older neighbors. She claimed that when her neighbor’s son did not work for a week, he was kicked out by his parents. She and her husband, on the other hand, chose not to send their children to work on the street like some people in the neighborhood did. While she thought her sons would have been hard working now if they had started working at a younger age, she still thought they had made the right decision by not sending their sons to work. She justified this by noting that many children who worked on the street ended up getting involved in illegal activities.

While Gülcan and Beritan asked their children to work, they did not insist when some did not want to or could not find a job. After being encouraged by a neighbor whose children were also selling selpak on the street, Gülcan asked her two daughters to try it. While her younger daughter did, her older daughter did not want to continue after having tried it once. Gülcan did not ask her to go again.

**Gülcan:** I asked my younger daughter, I told her about our financial situation and told her to go sell selpaks. She said it’s okay mom, I’ll go. And she got used to it. I told her that if she didn’t like it, she could stop going. She said she was going with friends so she kept going. My older daughter went for a couple of days, and stopped. She said she didn’t wanna go. And we didn’t push her to go.

Similarly, Beritan told her three eldest children (two girls and one boy) to find a summer job. While the son and older daughter found a job and started working, her younger daughter
did not locate a job, even though she looked for one. While Beritan and her husband tried to
find a job for her, they did not push her to keep looking for one.

Kader’s eldest daughter, Sevim, was not that lucky. Even though she wanted to continue
on to high school after finishing 8th grade, she did not have a choice because she was the oldest
of her siblings and the first one to become “eligible” to work. Her younger sister, on the other
hand, was not that interested in school. So when her parents asked her to work, she readily
accepted.

**Kader:** *We asked the kids because Dicle said she didn’t want to go to high school.
She didn’t want to (chuckles), but Sevim wanted to stay in school.*

In some cases, children themselves wanted to find work. Beritan’s eldest daughter stated
that she wanted to work in the summer. Gurbet’s second oldest son also wanted to work. He
asked his father to find a job for him for the summer.

**Gurbet:** *Now, my son still asks his dad whether he found a job for him. He says he
wants to work. And I tell my husband that my son wants to work.*

Elif’s eldest son was the one who approached his parents with the idea of working when
he was 12 years old, because he thought his parents needed the money.

**Elif:** *My eldest son says “Mom, I’m gonna work”. He says “I don’t want us to
have any debts. I saw that we struggled a lot and had debts. My uncle is rich and
he never comes to our house”. So, he said himself he wanted to work.*

Nurbanu’s eldest son also requested to work in a mechanic shop when he was 10 years
old. He worked and attended school simultaneously for five years until he graduated from 8th
grade. As he did not want to continue with school, his parents did not object to him working.
Nurbanu added that he would not work if he did not want to even though they had asked him to
work. Contrasting it to old times, Nurbanu said parents did not have much of a say with today’s
youth.
Nurbanu: He wanted to work, and we said “okay”. If he [a child] doesn’t want to, no one can oblige him (silence). It’s not like in the past. In the past, he was scared to say no to his parents, but now it’s not like that. You say something, and he responds back.

Some mothers asked their children whether they would be willing to work. However, it is not clear whether children accepted work because they wanted to or because they could not say no to their parents.

Gülcen: We asked him [my son] and he said he wanted to work. All those kids [at the workplace] were kids his age, they knew each other.

Gülistan: The kids want to go too, they go to work. I mean, they don’t turn us down, they go readily.

Gürbet: His dad always told them [him and his brother] not to stay out after 8 pm, and they always came home at 10 pm or 9 pm. So one day his dad told them “this is it. I keep telling you not to be late, but you’re always late. If that’s the case, you’ll go to work”. And my son didn’t say anything, he says his dad wants the best for him.

How Were Workplaces Chosen?

Either parents or children decided where children ultimately worked. For children working in the textile industry, their workplace was chosen by their parents. The owner of the place was usually a relative, a friend, or someone from the same hometown or an adjacent hamlet (village). While mothers played a more active role than fathers in the decision to send children to work, once the decision was made, fathers and other relatives used their connections to find an appropriate and reliable workplace for the children. Thus, social networks played a critical role in finding jobs for children.

Kader: There was a textile sweatshop here right down the street, we knew the others. So I said “Vallahi, I’m gonna send Sevim to work, I’m not gonna send her to school anymore.” I have a cousin and she said “wait, I know the owner of that sweatshop. I’ll take Sevim there, and if he agrees [she can start there]”. So she asked him and he agreed. Sevim started working there. Dicle also works with people we know. Dicle’s boss’s village and ours are close, and for instance her
dad [my husband] and her boss always spend time together at the kahve\textsuperscript{35}, so they know each other very well.

Gamze: For instance I wanted to send my daughter to work in the textile industry, but her dad didn’t let me. He didn’t want her to work there at all. He said he’d starve but not send his daughter to work there. So, my sister-in-law said we could ask the pharmacist if she could work there. It was a good place, plus she knew the pharmacist. The pharmacy and my sister-in-law’s apartment are in the same building.

Gülcan: So my son was 10 when he came here. We had a relative who had a textile sweatshop. He said to me “Gülcan, you’re in a difficult financial situation”. He said it himself “you’re in a difficult financial situation, let your son come work with us”.

Gülcan’s son had worked in many other textile sweatshops since then, some owned by relatives and some by strangers. Nurbanu’s son was currently working as a taxi driver. Nurbanu explained that her son worked as a taxi driver because it was his father’s profession and that her other son would also become a taxi driver. She thought that sons followed their father’s footsteps when it came to a profession: “If his father was a doctor, he would become a doctor. As it is, his father is a taxi driver, so he became a taxi driver too”.

Sometimes, neighbors introduced children to their workplaces. Neighbors were critical in finding jobs in the textile industry and also for work on the street. While one of Zeynep’s sons found his most recent job through his father’s friends, he was first introduced to the textile industry by the brother of one of her next-door neighbors.

Zeynep: Like I said, our neighbor’s brother took him there [to where he worked]. And he slowly learned the job. He quit his last job. But his father’s friends usually let him know. For instance, there is this underwear store. The man there says he needs someone to work for him, and my son goes. So the man is from our village, and he has an underwear store. So, it’s his father’s friends he hears from, not young kids.

Gülistan decided to send her children to work on the street when she first came to

\textsuperscript{35} Coffeehouse where males gather to drink tea and socialize
Istanbul because she saw her relatives and neighbors do the same with their children. Similarly, Gülcan was encouraged by her neighbor to send her daughters to work on the street.

Gülcan: *How did we decide?... We were new here. There was a woman on that street whose kids were working on the street. She said ‘‘My kids are working on the street. Why don’t you try it [sending your children to work on the street]? You aren’t doing well financially, let your daughter sell selpak.*

The fact that children worked somewhere owned by relatives or acquaintances was also a strategy that ensured children’s safety. As illustrated by Kader, mothers could rely on acquaintances to keep their children safe or could call them when they worried about their children.

Kader: *Because we know everybody here, I mean they’re in good hands. If they went somewhere else [to work], who would we ask about her situation, like what time she came [to work] and what time she left. At least, we know the people at their workplaces, I know her hours, and I know her workplace. I go ask them if she is late. If she worked somewhere else, I wouldn’t be able to ask them. We have their bosses’ phone numbers. They call us. My husband calls them and asks about our daughters. We know whether they’re still at work or have left.*

Similarly, Gurbet talked about the importance of having their children work in a place they knew and trusted. Gurbet’s husband specifically told people at that workplace to keep an eye on his son and call him if his son did not show up at work. Gurbet was confident that they would call her husband if anything happened with her son because they were relatives.

Gurbet: *It is an acquaintance of ours, we trust him, we trust his workplace... His father [my husband] knew the boss, whose son he was, where he was from. My son works there because my husband trusts the owner. For instance, his dad [my husband] told them not to let my son go somewhere else, and to give him a call if my son is late to work, to keep an eye on my son. If my son doesn’t show up to work, they’re gonna call his dad and let him know whether he came or not. If they don’t keep an eye on my son, his dad [my husband] will be upset with them. He’ll say ‘‘I brought you my son, you’re my relatives, I trusted you with my son’’*.

In other cases, children found their own workplace. Gurbet’s second son found his own job at the corner store right across the street.
**Gurbet:** He worked briefly at the corner store right there, without telling us. He was working there and bringing the money back home.

Gurbet’s son also collected plastic bottles and scrap metal at times, and sold them to dealers who, in turn, sold them to recycling companies. One of Zeynep’s sons and her daughter, Beritan’s two working children, and Elif’s oldest son also found their own workplaces through job ads on store windows or their friends. Through his boss, Elif’s son found a job a couple of years later for his younger brother when he dropped out of school.

**Elif:** He saw a job posting at that börekçi I think. Then he went to talk to the owner, and the owner asked him whether he was sure he wanted to work because he was too young. My son said he would and started working. Since then, he is working there. His boss doesn’t let him go, he trusts him. My son’s boss told him “[I am sure] everybody in your family is like you, they can come work for me.” So, my son took his younger brother there. And the boss said “as long as he is like you, he can work for me”.

When Züleyha and her husband wanted their son to work in a barber shop in the summer, Züleyha’s son mentioned a job posting he saw on the window of the clothing store where he now worked. He then asked his father to accompany him to the store or help convince the store owner to hire him.

**Züleyha:** He [my son] said he saw a job posting for an apprentice and that he wanted to work. He told his dad to come with him to the store to talk to the store owner. They spoke [with the owner] and I think it turned out they knew each other. So he has been working there in the summer for the last two years.

**Kurdish Mothers’ Concerns about Children’s Work and Workplaces**

Even though mothers promoted sending their children to work, it was not without concern. The main concerns revolved around two main areas: safety during commute and physical demands of work.

**Safety During the Commute and at Workplace**

One of the major concerns Kurdish mothers expressed in relation to their children’s
work was their safety on their way to and back from work. Kader was especially concerned about her younger daughter’s safety during her way back from work when it was dark. She was concerned because it was a girl walking alone in the dark, even though she mentioned she would be equally concerned if it were a boy.

*Kader:* Dicle now works further away in Guzelyurt\(^36\). One gets concerned with her coming back home by herself at 9 or 10 pm because she is a girl by herself [out there] though it’s the same thing with a boy because they’re only 14-15 years old. One is scared [for them]. I’m scared [that something will happen].

While Kader was really worried about her daughter’s safety, she could not provide any protection for her. Her husband would also be working at the time, and she could not go pick her up because she had other kids she could not leave alone at home.

Gurbet was not only concerned about her eldest son’s safety on his way to work. She was also concerned about her son stopping by internet cafes during lunch breaks, even though the main reason she sent her son to work was for him not to go to internet cafes. His aunt kept an eye on him and reported on his activities to Gurbet.

*Gurbet:* I wish he worked right here and not far away. One is not safe on the way to work and back. Vallahi, I’m scared. One morning I’ll follow him to work. Yesterday his aunt said he was stopping by the internet café before he came back home from work. So I said, I’ll follow him to work one morning and see whether he’s going to work or hang out with other kids and go to internet [cafes].

While Elif felt pretty confident that her younger son who worked the night shift was safe at his workplace, she was also concerned about her son’s safety on his way to work.

*Elif:* I’m a little concerned about that [when he is on his way to work and back]. For instance, when there is a fight, like yesterday\(^37\), one gets concerned a bit. I mean, I know his workplace is good and safe, and good people come there. If it wasn’t a good place, I would be scared. But I know his boss is a good person, so

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\(^36\) Guzelyurt is used as a pseudonym that is used for an adjacent neighborhood.

\(^37\) She is referring to the protests on the street by Kurds the day before against the revoking of the congressmanship of an elected Kurdish politician because he was in prison for political reasons.
I’m not scared about that. I’m a little scared about his commute, but may God protect him.

Mothers also wanted to make sure that their children were safe at their workplace. Checking on their children at their workplace was a common strategy mothers used to make sure their children were safe where they worked, sometimes a few days or weeks after their children had started working. Kader was concerned about her eldest daughter’s safety even though she was working in the textile sweatshop right around the corner. She was concerned that her daughter would stay alone in the sweatshop, especially since she did not know who stopped by the sweatshop. So she regularly checked on her daughter when she was out to run errands.

Kader: It’s the same for Sevim. Her workplace is close but still [I worry about] whether she is alone at the sweatshop, whether something may happen to her since all kinds of people stop by the sweatshop all day long. They bring garments from so many different sweatshops for buttonholes and all. We don’t know whether those people are good or bad.

While almost all mothers checked on their children regardless of whether they were working with acquaintances or relatives, this strategy was probably more critical for children who found their own jobs. In either case, the fact that most workplaces (textile sweatshops, börekçi, clothing and cell phone stores) were either in or very close to the neighborhood made it easier for mothers to visit their children’s workplace personally or ask other members of the family to do it.

Elif: I went and checked out [his workplace], it’s very close to our house. A couple of days after [he started working], I went there with a friend and checked the place out. I didn’t talk to the boss but he looked like a good man.

Zeynep: I went multiple times and saw it [the previous sweatshop], but I haven’t seen this one because it is not close. But the other ones were close so I went to those. There was one right at the basement of this building (pointing to a building from the window), he worked there for 4 months and I always went there and helped them. They were our neighbors. There was another one, he had someone
he knew there too. I went to that one too, took there things like water. I was checking on them and coming back.

The fact that Gurbet’s younger son worked in one of the corner stores in the neighborhood made it easier for her to check on her son during the day and keep him under control, especially because she was worried about them going to internet cafes.

Gurbet: …The corner store was very close to us, and we knew he was there, so we were at ease. I was sending my youngest son to the corner store to check up on his brother….He was there late the other night. So I told his dad to go get him. The corner store is a safe place, it’s close to us. We knew he didn’t go to other places.

Beritan first had her children, her husband, and her nephews stop by her daughter’s workplace to make sure she was okay. After the first couple of weeks, Beritan went herself to check her daughter’s workplace which was on one of the most commercial avenues of Istanbul, only at 10 minute walking distance. Before Ramadan started, she had her other children and sometimes her husband met her daughter after work to be sure she was safe as she returned home at around 10 pm in the evening.

Beritan: Umm she comes back alone. At first we were going to pick her up. Her dad went a couple of times, but she didn’t want her dad to come. Sometimes my other kids were going to get her [at the end of the work day], but we haven’t been going since the Ramadan started. She has been coming home by herself for the last three days. Before Ramadan, every day someone was going to get her, either my other daughter with her girlfriend or my son. But she doesn’t want people to come get her every day. She says she gets out not so late and the streets are still full of people at that time of the day. She especially doesn’t want her dad to come.

Interestingly, when I asked Beritan the location of her son’s workplace, she hesitated. She did not know exactly the location because she had never gone to his workplace, so she had to ask her daughter who was in the room with us during the interview. I began to think she might be less worried about her son because he was a “boy”, but she said that she had asked her husband to visit their son’s workplace and meet with his boss to make sure the work place was safe.
**Beritan:** I didn’t go but I told his dad to go check out my son’s workplace. He went and met the boss, and he said they were good people. He also sometimes went to check on my son.

As a matter of fact, Beritan’s son was approached by an unknown man at the coffeehouse next to Beritan’s son’s workplace a couple of times. The man told him to come earlier to work so that they could have breakfast together, but not to tell anyone about it. He also told him that they could go to the movies together on the weekend, again without telling anyone. When her son came and told Beritan, she was really worried. Not only did she tell her son to stay away from the man, her husband went to work with her son a couple of times to check on the man. However, no one saw the man ever again.

Needless to say, working on the street makes children more susceptible to danger. The fact that children can’t have adult supervision and may meet all types of people as they walk up and down the street all day exposes them to many dangers (e.g. physical or sexual abuse, kidnapping, car accidents). At the time of the study, only one mother had a child who was selling water on the street. I was unable to ask her any questions about this because we could not finish the interview. However, Gülistan and Gülcan who had sent their children to work on the street in the past talked about their concerns. In addition to strangers on the street, police also regularly took children working on the street to the police station as street work is illegal for children. Both mothers had experience with the police taking their children to the police station.

**Gülistan:** Yes, I’m [was] scared. I’m [was] scared but their dad went and checked on them a little. They had friends they went together with. I’m [was] scared that the police will catch them. But my husband goes [went] and checks [checked] on them, takes [took] more bottles of water to them in the evening.
Gülcan: Of course one is scared, my daughter Özge. For instance, she was going to Taksim, and I was worried that somebody would kidnap her. So I was always telling her not to go with anyone. I was always telling her that. One time, the police caught them. Vallahi I was scared. We went [to pick her up], the police said don’t send them [to work on the street], and we didn’t. She had already been going to school anyway.

Gülcan and Gülistan also talked about a common strategy to keep their children safe. They always sent their children to work with a group of neighbors’ or relatives’ children. While this did not completely eliminate the danger, they saw it as a strategy that reduced the risk of anything bad happening.

Gülcan: Yeah, she [my daughter] was going with the neighbor’s daughter. I was telling her to be careful. She wasn’t going too far away anyway (Gülcan’s daughter: We were with my aunt’s sons [when we were selling water]).

Gülistan: They had friends they were going together with to Taksim [to sell selpak].

In addition, Gülistan’s husband went to pick them up in the evening to bring them home for dinner, possibly because they stayed so late.

Physical Demands of Work

Mothers were also worried about the physical demands of work on their children. Kader, Gülcan, Beritan, and Zeynep were concerned that their children were too tired because of work. All these mothers’ children except Beritan’s son were working in the textile industry.

Kader: She gets very tired. She always says when she comes back that she gets very tired, that she can’t make it back home for lunch. She says it takes 20 minutes to come home and 20 minutes to go back, and lunch break is only an hour, I can’t sit down and eat lunch peacefully [at home].

Beritan: Umm, I’m not happy. I mean I tell myself they work and get real tired at this young age... but then I say "What can I do? We have to [send them to work]". When my son first started working, every day I was like “oh, he is so tired” and I was telling him to go get a bath.... In the morning, when I went to wake him up,

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38 Taksim is one of the most popular commercial centers of Istanbul, close to Tarlabası neighborhood. Many children sell water or selpak on the streets of Taksim.
he’d say “mom, my whole body aches, I’m tired, I’m so tired”. And I was like “oh, he’s so exhausted”. So I wasn’t very at peace with him working.

**Zeynep:** I don’t like it, they make them work to death. They don’t care about people. The boss says one more piece [of garment] and one more piece to get done, and they’re up on their feet all day long [to get the job done].

Even though Gülistan did not directly allude to fatigue, she complained about the overtime that was required by the textile sweatshops.

**Gülistan:** [I want them] not to be late at the night and to come home....Sometimes, they work overtime, that’s why [they come late].

Some mothers warned their children against the risks at the workplace. Even though Gurbet said she was not worried about anything bad happening to her eldest son when he was at work, when her son burnt his finger on the smoothing iron at work, Gurbet told him to stay away from the “dangerous” equipment at work, including the iron and scissors.

**Gurbet:** I don’t worry about him [at the workplace] as long as he doesn’t go astray....That day he came back from work and his finger was all red. I asked him why, and he said it was the steam iron [at work]. I told him “don’t get anywhere near the iron. You’re still young, you can burn yourself. Also stay away from scissors, and be careful with needles and machines”.

When Beritan’s son complained that his boss was asking him to carry heavy boxes, Beritan told her son to let his boss know about it.

**Beritan:** My son said his boss was sending him to all these places, and I said that was okay. He said “but he is giving me these heavy boxes and asks me to deliver them”. He is a shoemaker, I don’t know what heavy boxes he has, but I told my son to tell his boss if the boxes were too heavy for him to carry and that he couldn’t carry them all together.

**Kurdish Mothers’ Likes about Their Children’s Work and Workplaces**

Mothers whose children were working discussed what they liked both about the fact that their children worked and about the specific workplaces where they worked.
Mothers’ Likes about Children’s Working

Mothers were happy that their children were working, mainly because of their financial contributions but also because of the various learning and growth opportunities they believed working provided for their children. Children’s monetary contributions not only alleviated the financial struggles families experienced, but also allowed children to buy things for themselves.

**Beritan:** [My daughter] worked and bought herself shoes and clothes the first week. She spent it on herself. If she didn’t work, I would have had to buy those things for her. Then she bought me a skirt, she bought her siblings t-shirts....My son, his money I always spent it on groceries, because his father was out of work at that time. I was spending his money on buying bread and water and all.

**Gülcan:** Vaallah, I like that they work and make money for themselves. For instance, they buy themselves clothes and shoes. They have their own expenses. They buy themselves whatever they need. Sometimes they buy me things too, and I tell them not to worry about me and to buy things for themselves.

**Kader:** Umm, yeah. When Dicle doesn’t work, sometimes she asks for money to buy things and I tell her we don’t have any money. [But] when she works, she can buy whatever she wants.

As a matter of fact, both Kader’s daughters, especially her younger daughter enjoyed working because the workplace was an arena for socialization with girlfriends, especially since many of the girls their age were also working. As Kader’s daughters did not attend high school, the workplace was their opportunity to socialize with peers of their age.

**Kader:** But when she is out of work for two weeks, she gets bored. She was recently out of work for three months, and she said “I’m really bored mom, I wanna work”. All the girls here are working, and when they [my daughters] are at home, they say they get bored. They say “when we work, we have all our friends there. We work together and our day goes by better”.

Mothers also talked about other benefits. Nurbanu and Gurbet thought working kept their children out of trouble. Nurbanu believed her sons did not hang out with thieves and
“psychopaths” thanks to them working: “He [my son] worked and it was good. He didn’t go hang out with psychopaths, he didn’t become a thief…” Gurbet thought work kept her oldest son from going to and spending his lunch money at internet cafes, something she was really worried about.

**Gurbet:** Of course, it had an effect on him. He used to take money from me and spend it at internet cafes. He used to go on all day without eating anything [because he spent it at the internet café] and come home and say he was hungry. Sometimes he was spending even his pocket money at the internet café. Sometimes, he was asking money from his uncle to spend it at the internet café. He was telling his uncle he was gonna go to the youth center, but his uncle followed him and found out he was going to internet cafes. Now that he [my son] is working, he doesn’t have time to go to the internet café.

In addition to keeping them out of trouble, working provided learning opportunities for children. Gamze talked about how her daughter understood what moneymaking and the value of money were, and learned about working. Gamze’s daughter intervened when her siblings asked to buy things. She also made friends and learned about the “world”.

**Gamze:** She got to know herself better. She learned about making money, household budget, how the money comes. She didn’t know these things before. Now, when her siblings ask about buying this and that, she tells them “Do you think we have money to buy these things?” Now she knows [about all this]. She used to ask us why we didn’t have any money since we [me and my husband] were working. Now she’s working too, and do we have money? No. She now has an understanding of household budget. She knows more about the world out there. She got to know new people, she learned to work. So it’s all good.

Züleyha made a similar comment. She thought that her son became more knowledgeable about “things” such as prices, various types of fabrics, and getting around in the city.

**Züleyha:** He became more knowledgeable. He knows things. He understands things. I trust him with things. Whatever we buy, he knows the prices, he knows what type of fabric this (pointing to a piece of fabric) is. He knows how to get around and all.

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39 Mothers use the word psychopath to refer to criminals (e.g. drug dealers and thieves) in the neighborhood mostly due to their erratic and violent behaviors.
Beritan observed important changes in her daughter and son. Her daughter, whom she thought was easily irritable because she was going through adolescence, was now calmer when she interacted with her mother. Beritan attributed this change in her daughter’s behavior to the fact she was working.

**Beritan:** I mean, my daughter, I feel like her behaviors... I don’t know, it feels like she started understanding... she tries to behave better. Before when she came from school, I could not talk to her sometimes, I was afraid she’d yell at me, and I’d yell back or beat her up. Yet, she was all grown up. She’d tell me to leave her alone. And I was like, why are you like that, be more well-behaved....Anyhow, now after she started working, it feels like she is better. I mean, when I tell her something, she doesn’t talk back.

She also thought that her son better appreciated school after he worked in the summer.

**Beritan:** My son? I ask him which one is better, school or work? He says, “Mom, why are you like that? Of course school is better” (we laugh).

**Mothers’ Likes about Their Children’s Workplaces**

Mothers were usually happy with the workplace their children were at, mainly because they thought that their children were treated well by their bosses. Though Beritan was concerned about the first place her daughter worked at because of the boss’s questionable motives, she liked both her son’s and her daughter’s current workplaces.

**Beritan:** I’m happy with both their workplaces. Especially my daughter’s workplace is very nice. It’s a couple that owns the place, and they like my daughter very much. They’re very good people. My son’s boss was an old man, he was good too.

Züleyha was also happy that her son was treated well at his workplace. Except when the boss was there, he was pretty comfortable. Not only did they not exploit her son, other people who worked there included him in their activities outside work.

**Züleyha:** I like it [my son’s workplace]. They don’t exploit him there, they like him. They’re like friends with him, so he’s comfortable. The other workers there like my son like their own son. They take him to the picnic or to the movies, they
Züleyha also noted that his boss had been buying her son his school uniform for the last two years, which she appreciated. Similarly, Gülcan was grateful for the clothes her son’s boss gave him in addition to the salary he got.

**Gülcan:** Yes, he was buying things. I remember he bought shoes for my kids for a holiday. I know him from the village. Because he is rich, he gave things to my son to take home. My son said he felt embarrassed but I said it was okay.

Elif also appreciated her eldest son’s boss, but for a different reason. His boss was supportive of his son’s education. He let him leave early when he had exams the following school day, but still paid him the same amount of money.

**Elif:** His boss is helping him out too. For instance, when he has an exam the next day he lets him leave early, but he still pays him the same amount of money. He says he can go to school and work for him at the same time, that even two hours a day is enough for him.

In addition to the workplace being safe, Gamze was content about her daughter working in a pharmacy because she thought her daughter could continue to work there if she chose not to go to school.

**Gamze:** We are content [with the workplace]. We know the people [who own the pharmacy]. Its location is good, various people go in and out, and there are cameras. Everything is perfect. The workplace is good, the people are good. My daughter likes it there, and we like it there. The pharmacy is a good place [to be], it’s a good profession. That’s why I’m happy. One day regardless of whether she continues to school or not, she can work there.

Kader was more critical of her children’s workplace. Though she liked her younger daughter’s workplace, she did not like the fact that it was far away. She also acknowledged the shortcomings of her eldest daughter’s workplace. While she appreciated the proximity of the sweatshop, she criticized the intermitency of the work. She believed that it was disrespectful for the boss to tell her daughter not to come to work as he pleased.
**Kader:** Now, if you ask me, I’ll say I don’t like that sweatshop. I like it because it’s very close to our house. I know what time she gets out and all. But her boss, I don’t know how to say it, in the middle of the day while they’re working, he’ll be like “Sevim don’t come to work this week” or sometimes for two weeks or a month. They know very well that we send Sevim to work because we need to. He says “Sevim, stay home and wait for my call”. That’s not right. It’s like he owns her and can tell her when to come and when to go. That’s why I say I don’t like that sweatshop.

**Discussion**

This chapter explored child labor in the community. I included any child who started working at an age younger than 18 years old in my definition of child labor as the legal adult age in Turkey is 18. Moreover, with the expansion of compulsory education to eight years in 1997, I expected that the starting age of child labor would overlap with middle school graduation (14 to 15 years old) as opposed to elementary school graduation (about 11 to 12 years old) in the past.

Working children/adolescents are in positions of quasi-adults who contribute to the stability of poverty-struck households. The chapter’s findings are unique in that there is no literature that explores the family processes behind child labor. In other words, even though there is ample research on the determinants (e.g. Acar, 2010; Dayıoğlu & Assaad, 2003; Karatay, 2000; Yiğit, 2004) and psychological, physical, and educational consequences of child labor (e.g. Acar, 2010; Çağlayan, Hamzaoğlu, Yavuz, & Yüksel, 2010; Duyar & Ozener, 2005; Esin, Bulduk, & Ince, 2005), there is no research on other aspects of child labor, including who makes the decision to send children to work (It is assumed that parents do make this decision), how the workplace is chosen, and the concerns and likes about child work and children’s workplaces.

There were twelve mothers with children (a total of 23) who started working full- or part-time (in the summer) before the age of 18. The group was diverse in terms of work
experience and current work status. Some children started working full-time before the age of 18. That is, they quit school and started working. Others went to school and worked at the same time during the academic year. Finally, there was a group of children who only worked in the summer when the school year ended. There was only one child in the sample who worked for a couple of years before she started elementary school and stopped working afterwards. Children worked long hours regardless of whether they worked full- or part-time, usually without insurance.

The textile industry was an important source of income for families in the community, as also suggested in a qualitative study of another predominantly Kurdish community in Istanbul (Çağlayan et al., 2011). Nine of the 23 working children worked in the textile industry. Despite low wages, long and unpredictable work hours, and lack of insurance, many families preferred sending children to textile because the sweatshops were in or close enough to the neighborhood, and hence easier to keep an eye on children, as argued by Çağlayan and colleagues. The findings from this study suggest that in addition to their proximity, the fact that textile sweatshops were usually owned by relatives or acquaintances made mothers feel their children would be safer in those workplaces.

Contrary to other studies suggesting that low-income Kurdish migrant communities are at high risk for child labor on the street (e.g. Altuntaş, 2003; Karatay, 2000; Yılmaz, 2004; Yıldız, 2007), there was only one child, Nermin’s 13-year old son, who was working on the street at the time of the study. Nermin’s son was the oldest of his siblings and his father’s job as a porter was far from meeting the financial needs of their family of five. Even mothers with children of age that is typically depicted as at-risk for street work were not working on the street. On the other hand, there were two mothers in the sample whose children worked on the
street right after they moved to Istanbul. These were also families with a large number of children when they moved to Istanbul, likely straining the already limited income. The rare occurrence of street work in the sample may suggest that families are financially more “stable”, that is they are financially at a level that doesn’t require drastic measures such as street work.

The fact that Gülistan’s children stopped working on the street when they reached a certain age, but continued to work in a different industry supports the argument that children become “unattractive” as sellers on the street after a certain age, thus necessitating a transfer to another sector. Karatay suggests that children older than 15, as opposed to younger children, may be losing their “attractiveness” to elicit pity and empathy from potential customers on the street in order to sell their products (e.g. water, selpak), and may thus turn to other job opportunities such as construction work or textile industry. Yılmaz (2008) suggests a similar trajectory based on her ethnographic study in one of the inner-city neighborhoods of Istanbul. In her study, children between the ages of six and 13 were mostly engaged in street-vending activities such as selling selpak or shoe-shining. After the age of 12 or 13 however, they started working in textile sweatshops. However, it is also possible to explain this “transfer” by the fact that young children are not as “employable” as older children in informal sector (e.g. textile, mechanics). Thus street work may be a transitional period for families when financial needs are pressing. Once children reach an age when they can be employed in other industries, they switch from work on the street to other types of jobs in the informal sector.

Mothers’ accounts suggest that the decision to send children to work was mostly made by mothers and in some cases by children. Though mothers asked their husbands for approval, almost all seem to have taken the active role in the decision to send their children to work. This is a surprising finding since fathers are usually the main decision-makers in the family and in
charge of the household finances. Moreover, mothers are usually conceived as more protective of their children and more concerned about their well-being. However, it may be that mothers were concerned about the well-being of the overall family more than individual children. Thus sending some children to work was a family “survival” strategy for them. While men might have played a more active role in this process than what was portrayed by the women here, it is also likely that men were passive because initiating the process of sending children to work would have been the acknowledgment on men’s part that they were not able to fulfill their role as the breadwinner and head of the family.

It is also important to mention that there were a few children who approached their parents with the idea to work. Especially Elif’s son was very aware of the level of poverty his family was experiencing. He thought that the reason why his “rich” uncle was not visiting them was because they were poor. This underlined Elif’s son’s (and most likely other children’s) potential sensitivity/responsivity to implicit and explicit messages of poverty and its implications in the family context. Moreover, in a community where all families struggle financially and many children work, it is likely that Elif’s son and other children in the community watch their peers or older children work and hence “normalize” working at a young age.

The critical role mothers played in deciding to send children to work was mostly replaced by fathers in finding an appropriate workplace for children. In some cases, neighbors and other relatives stepped in to find a decent workplace for children. Social networks were essential in finding workplaces for children. Workplaces were usually owned by relatives or friends/acquaintances of the family, usually the fathers, and were not too far away from the neighborhood. The proximity of the workplace to families’ houses was facilitated by the abundance of textile sweatshops in the neighborhood and the neighborhood’s closeness to
Taksim, one of the post popular commercial centers of Istanbul. While mothers wanted their children to start working, they also had concerns mainly about their children’s safety. Mothers’ accounts suggested that families put in place many strategies to minimize risks associated with having children work, such as inappropriate behaviors towards girls at the workplace, exploitation, mistreatment, or risky behaviors children might engage in (e.g. leaving work early without their parents’ knowledge). Placing children at a workplace owned by relatives or family friends was an important strategy families used to keep an eye on their children. Not only did they know they could trust these people with their children, it was also easier for the parents to call their relatives or friends when their children were late. It is likely that relatives and friends were more careful with children as they knew they would be held personally accountable for anything that might happen to children at work, which could endanger family relations or friendships. Preference for workplaces in or near the neighborhood also allowed the families to stop by during the day to check on their children.

Other strategies were also in place to make sure that children were safe when working. For instance, in cases where children found their own workplace, mothers or fathers checked on their children’s workplace soon after they started working. In few cases, mothers checked on their children during the day even though they knew their workplace very well. Kader checked on her daughter working in a textile sweatshop in the neighborhood during the day because she could not trust the customers that stopped by the sweatshop. Similarly Gurbet had her youngest son check on her second eldest son who worked in the corner store to make sure he was not wandering off.

Children whose workplace was the street were susceptible to different dangers such as high risk of being run over or hit by cars (Aksit et al., 2001) and verbal and physical violence
from drug abusing street children and the police (Acar, 2010). The three mothers who had children working on the street did not report any concerns about potential car accidents, or verbal/physical violence from street children or other adults. However, they did report that their children were taken to the police station. In those cases, mothers did not have any choice but to go to pick up their children from the police station when they were taken in by the police, but developed the strategy of sending their children to work on the street with other relatives’ or neighbors’ children in addition to making sure to tell them not to go anywhere with any stranger. However, the effectiveness of this strategy remains questionable. Most mothers were also concerned that their children got tired at work. A few mothers told their children to refrain from work that would be demanding or risky for them. It is highly likely that many children would not be able to oppose their boss when asked to perform a certain task even it was physically demanding for them, especially those who did not work in places owned by acquaintances. Yet, for children whose bosses were relatives or friends of their parents, the amount of work given to children might be more open to be negotiated between their boss and their parents.

Though mothers thought they could control their children’s safety at the workplace (that is not the street) to a significant extent, some mothers were worried about children’s safety when children were commuting between home and work as they had less control over the risks of the street. Interestingly, while mothers expressed concern about their children’s commute, only Beritan took the measure of accompanying her daughter with her other children on her way back from work in the evening. Other mothers “relied on God” for their children’s safety.

There were also aspects mothers liked about the fact that their children were working and about their children’s workplace. Mothers’ main satisfaction was financial given that for all
these families' family budget was tight, especially in larger households. Hence, mothers were happy that their children could contribute to the family income, but also that they could buy things for themselves. In contrast to the adolescent “student workers” in the United States today who worked mostly to support their own consumer habits (Murphy & Newman, 2009), the fact that children could pay for their own needs simply meant for Kurdish mothers that their already tight family budget would be relieved from doing so. Some mothers also liked the fact that their children could stay away from trouble when they worked. In an inner-city neighborhood that is abundant in examples of street life, mothers saw sending children to work as a “protective” factor that would keep them under adult supervision, as will be further elaborated on in the next chapter.

Kader’s account also suggests that some children prefer working because they see it as a socialization opportunity with their peers, especially since many of their friends were also working. Mothers also were happy that their children learned about “the world” and became more “mature”, including money making, the value of money, and getting around in the city. Finally mothers were mostly content with their children’s workplace because they knew their children were safe and treated well. Only Kader complained about her eldest daughter’s irregular work schedule where her boss asked her to stay home for two or more weeks at times. This irregularity of the work schedule was characteristic of many textile sweatshops as the textile industry slowed down during the summer months.

There is an abundance of international literature documenting the negative physical, psychological, and educational consequences of child labor for children’s development (Acar, 2010; Blunch & Verner, 2000; Çağlayan et al., 2010; Emerson & Souza, 2007; Guarcello, Lyon, Rosati, 2008) as well as the perpetuating role it plays on chronic poverty (Das & Mukherjee,
2007; Heady, 2003; Khanam, 2008). On the other hand, Newman (1996) documented positive outcomes for working adolescents in the inner-city Harlem neighborhood in the United States. These positive outcomes (e.g. personal responsibility, dignity, work discipline, commitment to school) seem to be in accordance with what Kurdish mothers reported observing in their children as well. This may suggest that there might be some positive developmental benefits of work, for at least adolescent children of low-income Kurdish families who live in the inner-city.

However, various words of caution are necessary so as not to romanticize this picture. First of all, the benefits of child/adolescent work reported in this study solely reflected Kurdish mothers’ perspectives. Considering the various risks associated with child labor, mothers might have overemphasized these benefits in order to justify their decision to send their children to work in their minds. Thus, working children’s and adolescents’ voices should also be included in potential benefits –if any- of labor to their lives. Moreover, the work conditions and age group of working inner-city youth in the United States and of those in Tarlabası should be well understood before making any conclusion on the positive aspects of child labor. For instance, Newman’s study looks at the positive outcomes of labor for working students. Her findings may only be applicable to Kurdish children/adolescents who continue school and work at the same time (or during the summer). However, it is also possible that in an inner-city neighborhood with scarce resources for positive development and substandard quality of education in schools, engaging in labor after middle school might be more promising. However, more systematic investigation of the relationship between child labor and potential positive outcomes for inner-city youth is needed.
### Table 3. Working children in the community

<p>| CHILDREN | Kader | Age 19 (Female) | Working full-time in textile since 15 | Age 17 (Female) | Working full-time in textile since 15 | Gurbet | Age 13 (male) | Worked in textile for the summer for the first time (still in school) | Age 12 (male) | Working occasionally in the corner store in the summer (still in school) | Elif | Age 19 (male) | Has been working in a börekçi since 12-13 years old (still in school) | Age 17 (male) | Recently started working full-time in a börekçi | Nurbanu | Age 20 (male) | Worked part-time in a mechanics shop between the ages of 10 and 15 | Age 19 (male) | Worked full-time in a kuryemisçi after he dropped out of 9th grade | Gülistan | Age 23 (male) | Worked on the street for 6-7 years starting at age 10. Currently working as a waiter in a restaurant | Age 20 (male) | Worked on the street for 6-7 years starting at age 7. Currently working in his father’s coffeehouse | Age 18 (male) | Worked on the street for 6-7 years starting at age 5. Has been working full-time in textile for the last 4 years | Age 15 (female) | Has been working full-time in textile for a year |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age/Gender</th>
<th>Work Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gülcan</td>
<td>Age 24 (male)</td>
<td>Has been working full-time in textile since age 10-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age 20 (female)</td>
<td>Worked on the street for a couple of years when she was 6-7. Currently starting college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age 14 (female)</td>
<td>Has been working full-time in textile for a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nermin</td>
<td>Age 13 (male)</td>
<td>Works on the street in the summer selling water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beritan</td>
<td>Age 16 (female)</td>
<td>Started working this summer in a store (only for the summer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age 15 (male)</td>
<td>Started working this summer with a shoemaker (only in the summer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeynep</td>
<td>Age 21 (male)</td>
<td>Has been working on and off in the textile industry since age 16.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamze</td>
<td>Age 16 (female)</td>
<td>Has been working in the summer in a pharmacy for the last 2 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age 14 (female)</th>
<th>Age 13 (male)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ebru</strong></td>
<td>Started working full-time in the textile industry two months ago</td>
<td>Has been working in the summer since 5th grade (not working this summer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Züleyha</strong></td>
<td>Age 16 (male)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Has been working in a clothing store for the last 2 years during the summer</td>
<td></td>
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CHAPTER 7

SHOULD THEY WORK OR SHOULD THEY NOT? KURDISH MOTHERS’ BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES ABOUT CHILD LABOR

Though I usually avoided lunch hours, I arrived a bit early to Kader’s house that day to see her two oldest daughters. I had not seen them for about three years. They were never at home when I visited Tarlabasî because they were working. So when I came around 12:30, I knew they would be at home for lunch. I happily joined them on the floor to share their meal and to catch each other up in on what had happened in our lives. We did this in a hurry as they only had an hour break to rest, eat, and do their daily prayers, before returning to work. Sevim, age 18 now, was working in a textile sweatshop right around the corner, so her commute was short, but Dicle was working in a textile sweatshop further away and it took her a good 20 minutes to walk to work. That meant she only had about half an hour at home for her lunch break. She was exhausted by the commute, especially during the summer months when the heat soared into the mid 90’s. After we finished lunch, Dicle and Sevim did their noon prayers. As we hugged and kissed goodbye, they made me promise to come early more often to join them for lunch at home.

While I was helping Kader clear the “yer sofrasi” (floor table) after the girls were gone, I remembered that about three years ago, Kader had asked me whether I could go with her to an NGO that provided financial aid to children who continued their education after elementary school. At the time, it had been a year since Sevim had graduated from middle school and started working in a textile workshop. As Kader would later share in her interview, Sevim was a very good student. She also wanted very much to go to high school. However, Kader and her husband had to ask her to quit school because it had become impossible for the family to get by only with her husband’s income. Kader felt guilty about this decision every day because she knew how much her daughter wanted an education and how good she was at school. On the day we went to the NGO, Kader told Sevim that maybe if we could get a good financial aid from the NGO, she could return to school. Sevim was
ecstatic with the news.

On our way to the NGO, Kader and I were nervous. As Sevim had taken a year off, we thought they might refuse to help. Instead, they told us that if we brought them the documents that showed her good academic standing while in school, they would financially assist her with a monthly amount of 80 Turkish Liras (about $45). After we got the happy news, Kader called her husband as he had the final say. Though I did not understand a word of their conversation in Kurdish, I could tell from Kader’s tone that something was wrong. When she hung up, she said her husband thought the amount was not enough to allow Sevim to quit working. Unfortunately, 80 TL was far lower than the amount that Sevim was making at work to help her family of eight get by. It was a daunting task to tell Sevim who was excitedly waiting for us at home. Seeing Sevim’s disappointment and tears was heartbreaking (Field notes, June 10th 2011).

As Kader’s story reveals, low-income Kurdish migrant families are at risk of child labor due to significant levels of poverty they experience in the city (Altuntaş, 2003; Karatay, 2000; Yıldız, 2007; Yılmaz, 2004; 2008; Yükseker, 2006). While child labor facilitates the survival of the poor households in the short run, it also limits children’s access to education (Demir, Demir & Uygur, 2006; Ertürk & Dayıoğlu, 2004; Karatay, 2000; Müdderrisoglu, 2006; Yılmaz, 2008) as illustrated in Kader’s daughter’s case. Children’s education is especially critical for low-income households for potential upward social mobility in the long run (Yılmaz, 2008).

In this chapter, I explore Kurdish mothers’ opinions about child labor and the factors they take into account when they make decisions on child labor. I first lay out mothers’ thoughts and attitudes on child labor, including the rationale/justifications they provide to support or oppose child labor. Then, I discuss various child characteristics mothers consider in their decision-making process for child labor.

How parents within a given culture conceptualize childhood has ramifications for child
labor (Hendrickson, 2009). Cultures are important in providing parents with particular theories not only about how children become functional members of their culture (Gaskins, 1996), but also about what roles they are assigned in the family and how and to what extent they are expected to contribute to family life. Understanding these particular theories provides the basis for understanding parents’ cultural motivations that underlie the specifics of the way parents structure their children’s experiences and thus influence their development (Gaskins, 1996). Without such understanding, parents’ decisions about and actions toward their children are uninterpretable, misinterpreted, or superficial.

There is little research on low-income Kurdish parents’ beliefs and attitudes about child labor and about the factors they consider when they make decisions about sending their children to work. In this chapter, I discuss these issues, arguing that that the processes underlying child labor in the community are much more multidimensional than portrayed in the literature which presents poverty as the sole/primary reason for child labor (Altuntaş, 2003; Karatay, 2000; Yıldız, 2007; Yılmaz, 2004; 2008; Yükseker, 2006).

**Attitudes about Child Labor**

The families of mothers who participated in this study were all below the poverty level reported in 2011, the year when the study was conducted (2,950 TL for a family of four), and hence were at high risk for child labor. However, mothers’ narratives portrayed a much more complex picture of child labor in the community, one that cannot simply be explained by poverty. The sample included mothers with children of a wide range of ages and hence, varying levels of experience with sending their children to work. However, all mothers were familiar with child labor either because they or their siblings started working at a young age or because they watched their neighbors’ and relatives’ children go to work. A majority of the mothers were positive about child labor, but the sample also included mothers who were strictly against
“My kids will work”: Insights from Mothers in Support of Child Labor

Twenty of the twenty-six mothers who answered detailed questions about child labor were in support of child labor. Two additional mothers, Nermin and Ebru, did not have time to complete the interview to answer questions about child labor. Nonetheless, they had children younger than 18 working at the time of the study. This suggests that they also were not opposed to the idea of child labor.

Mothers talked about their attitudes on child labor and the rationale for their thoughts on this topic. Thus, this section is organized around the two major justifications that emerged: Financial reasons and alternative explanations which included protection of children from the dangers of an inner-city neighborhood and school dropouts.

“We can’t get by with only one person working”: Financial reasons for child labor.

Thirteen of the 26 mothers who answered questions about child labor stated that finances were the main reason they would send their children to work. These mothers had both working and non-working children at the time of the study. Seven mothers had at least one child who started working full-time before age 15. For some mothers with children who had been working since a young age, financial concerns were foremost in their minds. Kader, Elif, Gülistan, and Gülcan, for instance, all underscored how critical their children’s work was to their family’s financial survival. Kader’s daughters and Elif’s son started working at the age of 15 and 13 respectively, several years after they came to Istanbul (15 years and 7 years respectively).

Kader: We were in a lot of debt. Only their father was working. We could not buy anything. They [the kids] were also struggling. She (Sevim) said her friends at school were buying this and that and she was not able to. It was upsetting to us too. Her father could not cope with it all by himself. So when they finished middle school, I said they should start working. So that she [they] would not suffer anymore. We were suffering [as parents] too because she [they] would come and
say “we want this and we want that, our friends buy these things and we don’t”. I said it was best for them to work. Vallahi, they work and help us out. If they did not work, we would still be miserable because [if] only their father [works] is not enough.

**Elif:** He was still little. One day he went. He was still young. He was 13 years old. He said “I will work”. I said “Son, you’re going to school”. [He said] “I will work”. Back at that time, [when] we came here, [we experienced] a lot of hardship. We didn’t have money or anything else. He said “Dad, I will work”. There is a börekçi, he went there. He came back with, I don’t know, something like 15 TL monthly (about 8$). He gave it to me. I was happy that he was working...

With six children to take care of, the sporadic nature of textile industry, especially during the summer, extra income was more important than ever for Kader’s family.

**Kader:** Like I said, he [my husband] is working two months or three, then he is jobless for five months. He came back this afternoon and said they were out of work for he didn’t know how long. A week, two weeks, three weeks, that I don’t know, he said. He said “İnşallah there will be work soon” If there is no work for a week, we are eight people. There is electricity, water to pay. If Sevim didn’t work, it would have been worse. During the months he doesn’t work, we borrow money. Then when he starts working, we pay it back slowly. We use the money carefully and we pay our debts too. That’s how it happens.

In Gülistan and Gülcan’s cases, the financial needs became evident much earlier, right after they arrived in Istanbul. As a consequence, children started working already at the age of seven, selling water or selpak on the streets to support their families financially.

**Gülistan:** The most difficult...my husband was the only one working, the kids were young. Everything was difficult then. Sending them [the kids] to Taksim to sell selpak and they go to school too. What else could we do? Very hard. My husband was the only one working back then, and the kids were young. Paying for rent. Paying for water, electricity, taking care of children. They were obliged [to work]. The situation was different. When we are in good shape, I don’t send them to work, when we are not, I send them to work.

**Gülcan:** My daughter Özge, we came here, we did not have any money. He [my son] was working, we didn’t send him to school so that he would work....Vallahi, a neighbor said “you’re in bad financial situation, why doesn’t Nurcan go sell selpak.” then Nurcan went. I told her dad; he said okay. I was telling Nurcan “you’re girl, you’re young. Don’t go [with people] if people call you. If you can

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40 Taksim is at about 10-minute walking distance from Tarlabaşı
sell in Taksim, do it. If not, don’t go anywhere else.”...It’s because we didn’t have the financial means. For instance, my son was 10 when we came here. We had a relative who had a textile sweatshop. He said “Gülcan you don’t have the means.” He [the relative] said it himself “you don’t have the means. Let your son come work with us.” I said he was still young but our relative said he could work with them, that nothing bad would happen, and that they would teach him slowly. Their children were same age as our son.

Beritan’s two children, her eldest daughter and son, were working during the summer when I undertook the study. With a household of seven people, Beritan also underscored how difficult it was for his family to meet all the needs of their household. While Beritan was still unsure about whether she would take her children out of school to work as she very much them to pursue a higher education, she recognized the importance of their income during the summer and how it helped to satisfy more immediate needs they had.

**Beritan:** He [my husband] doesn’t say anything either. I guess he wants them to work too. He says “I can’t do it all by myself anymore, we can’t buy [everything] with only me working. You see it”. I can’t buy anything. For example we probably haven’t bought anything for my oldest daughter this year. My son, he didn’t have shoes, he needed boots or sneakers or something and we could not buy them. Finally, he [my husband] borrowed money from my brother. He bought him [my son] shoes and he bought my oldest daughter a coat. He bought her a coat with that money because she said her coat wore out. My husband wants them [the children] to work too. He says “I did not work one winter and look at our situation”. Even though we had borrowed money, we still could not afford many things. I think he wants them to work too. Either they are gonna work and not continue with school, or... I don’t know. If we aren’t in good shape financially, I think that’s what’s gonna happen. We can never buy what they want. Sometimes we can’t buy it right away. We say “wait, we’ll buy next week or the week after. But I thought maybe them working would help with that. I said maybe they would contribute a bit or they could buy what they wanted. For example, my son could work and buy himself shoes. If he doesn’t work, maybe we won’t be able to buy them. My husband works and can barely afford paying the rent. If my son works, he can buy himself clothes, shoes. School will start soon, he can make himself some pocket money.

Like Kader’s husband, Beritan’s husband was also working in the textile industry, which made their income unpredictable. Even though Beritan’s son worked a month and a half that summer, his weekly salary became indispensable for buying groceries for the family as her
husband’s work in textile stopped around the same time.

**Beritan:** I was spending my son’s money because his dad wasn’t working at the time. I was spending it on food, like going to the corner store to buy bread and water and all that. So his money was spent on those [things]. He worked for a month and a half only, and I spent all his money. He was making 80 TL a month (about $45), but if he wasn’t working, I don’t know what we would have done, because his dad wasn’t working at the time.

Züleyha was also concerned about the financial limitations of her family. For the past two years, Züleyha’s eldest son had also been working in the summer at a clothing store. She thought her other older children could work in the summer, but she complained that her children’s young age and the fact that they were only to work in the summer limited their work opportunities.

**Züleyha:** Now, we’re in a difficult financial situation. It’s hard to get by because we have a lot of expenses, but no one [is] working. We thought about sending [our] kids to work, but no one takes them for only three months, plus they are also young....We wanted to send the other kids to work because it was gonna be easier to make ends meet. We would want to give them ample money when they go to school.

When I asked her to confirm that she felt at peace with her decision to send her children to work, she said she was as long as they worked in a place she knew. Her willingness to send her children to work was contingent upon them not being exploited at their workplace. If she knew that was the case, she said she would not send them “even if we are starving”. She mentioned that her husband had the same perspective. Though he wanted his children to work, when a clothing store whose owner his son knew to be very demanding and strict became an option, he said he did not want his children to work under those harsh conditions.

**Züleyha:** His dad [my husband] told him to go work at a store where they were giving 500 TL (280$) monthly. My son, I think he knew the owner, he said he knew people working there and they said they were on their feet all day not allowed to talk, and that they were being reprimanded if they sat down. So his dad told him not to go if it was that demanding. He said he didn’t want his son to work under those conditions.

Narin, Lale, Şükrüye, Dilan, Serap, Ayşegül, and Faraşin did not have children who were
working at the time of the study, but they all thought they would consider sending their children to work if financial needs arose. When Şü克riye was asked about her thoughts about sending children to work, she noted a similar experience in her own family when they arrived in Istanbul. When her father could not find a job in the city, her two younger brothers (age 7-8 years old at the time) were sent to sell water on the street in the summer and selpak in the winter. She and her mother helped them by carrying water bottles when they ran out. Her brothers continued to sell water on the street for a year until her father found a job as a janitor in a cultural center. Şü克riye emphasized how vital her brothers’ work on the street was for her family at the time.

Şü克riye: When we first came here, we had a lot of financial hardship, we did not have money. We didn’t know anybody. It wasn’t like that before. There were only Turkish people here [in the neighborhood]. Now everyone is someone we know [acquaintances]. We had a lot of hardship. There was no job. My siblings sold selpak. If they didn’t bring money, we were hungry. We didn’t have money to buy bread. It went on like that for a year. They were selling selpak in the winter and water in the summer. We would take bottles of water to them. We were taking the water to them, and they were selling them. We made ends meet like that. Then we worked. And my dad found a job [as a janitor] at the Cultural Center.

Şü克riye and her brothers started working in a garment/textile workshop owned by relatives after her father started work “not for the income this time, but to learn the job so that they could go work in other places later”. Şü克riye’s two children were young (a four year-old and an eight month-old) at the time of the interview, and thus were not working. Yet, Şü克riye stated that she would also send her children to work after middle school if she and her husband were financially in need. She emphasized that she thought they could get by if they didn’t have to pay a rent. So whether they owned a house or not at that time would be critical in making that decision.

Şü克riye: For example, I would send them to work. One of my brothers was going to school in the morning and working after school....Now there is no morning/
afternoon shift in school, it’s all day long….Sending [my kids] to school will depend on my financial situation at that time. If my financial situation is good, if we own a house, I will send them to school. I won’t have any hardship [if I own a house]. It’s easier to make the ends meet when you don’t have a rent to pay. But if not, I will have to [send them to work].

Lale, Ayşegül, and Faraşin also thought they would send their children to work if needed. Lale thought that her children could help her husband financially when they were 15 years old. According to Faraşin, there were a lot of expenses associated with children, including having money when they got married. She thought that if she didn’t have the means, she would ask her children not to continue on to high school.

**Faraşin:** If we don’t have the means, then they will go to work after they finish middle school. If we don’t have the financial means, one person can’t take care of 3-4 people. For them to go to school, it’s a lot of expenses, it needs a lot of money. These [kids] will grow up and get married. We’ll take a daughter-in-law and give a daughter away to marriage. These are all expenses.

Ayşegül worried about expenses associated with school, including registration fees (though state schools should not have registration fees), books, and uniforms. Like her aunt’s children, she thought her children could work in the summer when they were 14-15 years old so that they could cover their own expenses.

**Ayşegül:** I wouldn’t recommend it now. When my child is 15-16 years old, maybe then. They [my children] can make money for their own expenses. For example, my aunt’s children are going to school. One is 14 and the other one 15 years old, one boy and one girl. They both work, and make 300 TL (about 160$). Their mother sends them to work so that they can make money for their own expenses, clothing and school expenses. Now, when you register your child at school, you have to pay 200-300 TL, plus books and all. All children work in the summer. They work two to three months to pull themselves together.

Narin, Dilan, Seda, and Serap also considered financial constraints as an important reason to send their children to work, but their accounts were more ambiguous. Like Beritan, they were not ready to give up their children’s education for labor, but also were aware of its potential inevitability. The fact that their children were still young allowed them to go back and
forth and not make a final decision. Narin, Kader’s sister-in-law, endorsed Kader’s decision to send her children to work. She thought that under similar circumstances, she would do the same.

Narin: Yes, but they [Kader’s daughters] have to work. We will do the same if we don’t have the means. They will work and make their own money. Now, with only their (Kader’s daughters’) father working, how could he pay the rent, water, electricity, and what would they have left? If they work, they help their father and themselves.

But later in the interview, she said:

If they [want to] go to school, I won’t send them to work, I will send them to school. Regardless of whether I have money or not, I will send them to work. If they are good students, I will send them to school regardless of whether I’m poor or rich. I won’t make my children drop out of school, neither my son nor my daughter.

As I rephrased what she had thus far told me in the interview to make sure I understood her correctly, she noted that whether her children were good students or not would be the deal breaker in her decision of sending them to work in the case that their family was in financial need.

Narin: If I don’t have a good financial situation, I will send both of them.

Özge: Hmm, you also said even if you didn’t have the means, you would send both of them (the children) to school as long as they wanted to [go].

Narin: Yes I will even if I don’t have the means. (Özge: But if they don’t want to go to school, then you will send them to work?) Yes.

Seda’s account also showed that she had not quite reached the final verdict on the issue.

When first asked about her thoughts on child labor, she stated that both she and her husband would not want their children to work, but wanted them to continue their education. She also emphasized that her husband did not want any mention to be made of work for his children because he wanted them to have a proper education and profession.

Seda: I don’t want them to work. I want them to go to school ...and grow up, that’s it. You know, just for them to go to school and grow up. With God’s will, I
won’t let anyone walk over them. Whatever God grants us, we’ll eat. My husband doesn’t wanna send them to work either. He says “don’t talk to me about work”. He says they will go to school, only go to school. Then they will have a profession and do that.

Interestingly, towards the end of the interview, when asked where she saw her family in ten years, Seda referred to her older sister Elif’s children and how they were helping their family out financially. She then added that when her daughters were 14 or 15 years of age, they could go to their father’s workplace (a small gyro restaurant) to help him out in the summer. As I followed up her statement with the question of whether she might send them to work elsewhere, she stipulated that the workplace must be a trustworthy place.

*Seda: I want very much for my kids to work but I want very much for them to go to school. I will send them to school, and when the school is closed they can help out their father at his gyro place when they’re 15 years old....They will go to school and then bring some money back [in the summer]. It’s only their dad [working] and he is sick, sick from his lungs. [They’ll] go to school and work at the same time.

*Özge: Only with their dad or would you send them somewhere else as well?
*Seda: If it’s a proper place, I’ll send them....For example a textile sweatshop or a clothing store. Those kinds of place, you know, a proper place.

Seda’s account suggests that only full-time jobs involving a child leaving school may be considered as “work” for some mothers, whereas summer work is not perceived as child labor even though children may work under similarly demanding conditions, such as when working in textile sweatshops. It is also possible that some mothers are more lenient towards child work when it is limited to the summer months and does not interfere with their schooling.

Serap had a similar dilemma. She wanted her children to continue their education if they had the means, but also recognized the possibility that she and her husband might need to rely on their children or financial assistance. Serap’s going back and forth between the two options is evident in the account below, a dilemma, which she tried to resolve by entertaining the idea that her children could work and attend school at the same time.
**Serap:** Vallahi, I don’t know how to put it. If we have the means, we’ll send them [the children] to school. If not, they’ll work, that’s what we think. It depends on whether we have the means. If they want to go to school, we’ll send them. But maybe if we don’t have the means we won’t. If I say now that we’ll send them to school, who knows, maybe I wouldn’t in the future and would have lied, right? But if we have the means in the future, we will send them to school....For example some kids work and go to school at the same time, maybe they [my kids] can do the same when they grow up. They can work and go to school at the same time, right?

Despite her husband’s reassurance that he would not let anyone in the family but himself work, Serap thought she might have her children to work if need be, but she would only do this as a very last resort.

Among the mothers who considered sending their children to work for financial reasons, Dilan was the only one who mentioned she would try to work herself first to keep her children in school.

**Dilan:** He [my husband] thinks he will work day and night but won’t let us (her and her kids) work, I don’t know.. İnşallah, it will be like that. İnşallah we won’t work and we won’t take the kids out of school. If we don’t have the means, then we’ll have to [send them to work]. But I’ll try to work first. I’ll go sweep the stairs, the windows but I don’t plan to take my kids out of school.

“**No Vallahi, not for money…**”: **Alternative explanations to child labor.** Though poverty is a real life challenge for Kurdish families in Tarlabası, mothers did not just talk about finances as a barrier. While some mothers saw financial constraints as the main driving source that might keep their children from attending school, they also took other factors into account in their decision making and thinking. Protecting children from the dangers of an inner-city neighborhood was an important motivation for mothers for who considered sending their children to work in the summer, or full-time if their children did not attend high school. Other explanations for sending children to work included teaching children work discipline, learning to be a hardworker in life, understanding the value of money and what it takes to take care of a
household, and appreciating school more after having seen how difficult work is.

Gurbet lived in a household with 12 other people, including her husband and four children, two single brothers-in-law, a single sister-in-law who came and went periodically for work, and a brother-in-law who was married to Narin, along with their two children. In the past, Gurbet’s husband had a textile sweatshop. He had not been working for a couple of years and refused to do any work despite pressure from his brothers. Gurbet’s two single brothers-in-law were working and paying for the household needs, including rent. Her single sister-in-law was sending the money she made back to her mother who lived in their hometown in the Southeast. Narin’s husband was also working, but he was paying off the debt from having opened his cell phone store. He also paid half of the rent and stepped in for other expenses only when the household ran out of money. Though much embarrassed by her husband’s disinterest in working and depending on her brothers-in-law for money, Gurbet’s main motivations to send her children to work in the summer were not about money. She was convinced that her two sons’ going to internet cafes around the neighborhood meant trouble. She believed that sending them to work in the summer would keep them away from mingling with the wrong crowd.

_Gurbet:_ So that they don’t stay out on the street and hang out with bad friends. God forbid, this street is no good. This neighborhood is no good. If they [my children] were in the hamlet...maybe there are bad children in the hamlet too. I mean wherever you look or go, there are bad children. That’s why we sent him to work....My oldest son has been going to work for the last two weeks so that he doesn’t go to internet cafes or hang out with bad friends. Now, I want my other son to work too so that he doesn’t go to internet cafes or hang out with bad friends...

Narin, her sister-in-law also agreed that internet cafes were trouble. Although financial need was the main reason for her to send both her daughter and son to work, she thought it was better for children to work even after school so that they would not have time to hang out with friends. In the city, hanging out with friends meant trouble.
Narin: No no, even when they go to school, it’s better if they work after school so that they don’t go out, go to internet cafes, and have friends. I don’t want them to go out to the street at all. If a friend says he/she’ll go somewhere, he/she will want to go too and he/she’ll get used to it too. I don’t want them to have any friends at all. If we were in the hamlet, it would be okay. There is no going anywhere in the hamlet. Maybe he/she’ll go to his/her aunt or uncle or play with his/her cousins a bit and come back. But here, it’s not like that. Here those who don’t work go to internet cafes, hang out with friends. God forbid, they become things [thieves, drug dealers]. It’s very hard to raise kids here.

Züleyha was also worried about children going off the rails. Her older sister encouraged her to send her children to work somewhere she could trust as early as possible so that they would stay out of trouble. According to Züleyha, her older sister tells her: “If they [children] don’t work, they will go off the rails. Don’t have pity on them, send them to work. Send them somewhere you trust. No one dies from working. Don’t worry, nothing bad will happen.” Züleyha thought her sister was right because when children were “idle” and when they had money, they could go off the rails. She did not want that to happen to her children because if it did “It’s the mothers who cry at the end of the day, they’re the ones who suffer”.

Züleyha was particularly worried that her children would hang out with the wrong people if they did not continue on to high school. As much as she was concerned about financial needs, this was another motivation for her to send her children to school in case they did not want to go to high school.

Züleyha: If my kid didn’t go to school, I’d send him to work so that he’d learn [to work]. He can start when he is 15-16 years old. If he stays home, either he’ll hang out on the street or go somewhere with the wrong friend, he’ll go astray. Even though he is the best kid, he’ll get bored if he stays home.

Especially for children who did not want to continue high school, the worry about hanging out with the wrong crowd was a major concern. For example, although Elif’s primary reason behind child work was financial like Narin, she did not want her eldest son to go to work because he was a good student. On the other hand, she put up a fight with her second eldest son
who dropped out of ninth grade, because she was concerned that he would start hanging out on
the street and get in trouble if he spent his days at home.

_Elif_: If you’re not going to school, go to work, right? You’ll stay home doing
nothing.... I tell [told] him to work....For instance, right now I don’t want my
eldest son to work but the other one should work. If not, he’ll go out to the street
and hang out with the wrong crowd, right?

Similarly, Nurbanu gave up when her sons refused to continue high school despite her
desire and attempts to keep them in school. Nurbanu thought her sons would become thieves if
they did not work.

_Nurbanu_: He’ll work, he didn’t go to school, so he’ll work. If he stays out, he’ll
become a thief. If he makes money, he won’t have his eyes on other people’s
money. No Vallahi, I don’t want him to work for money, I want him not to develop
bad habits..

Since their sons did not go to high school, both Nurbanu and Zeynep thought that sending them
to work would be the only way they could learn a profession.

_Nurbanu_: So that he has a profession.(_Niece_: So that he doesn’t acquire bad
habits) If he has work/profession, he won’t envy other people.

_Zeynep_:....Since you’re not going to school, you’ll find a vocation, like a
makinaci41 or whatever your friends do. You do whatever you wanna do.

Narin thought she would still send her son to work after school or in the summer even if
they had the financial means because she thought a boy should learn to be hardworking already
from a young age. However, under such circumstances, she thought she would keep her
daughter at home if she didn’t want to continue to high school. Gurbet, Narin, and Elif all
thought boys would be the too lazy/loose if they didn’t experience work at a younger age.

_Gurbet_: I want them to start working now, so that they get used to working and
not become loose42.

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41 Makinaci is a person who works the sewing machine in textile
42 Used in the sense of “lazy, undisciplined”
Narin: But my son will absolutely work....I make him work so that he won’t be lazy if he gets married one day and has his own house.

Elif: My other [son] should work, for instance, since he is gonna go out and hang out with bad people, right? I’m saying he should learn a vocation when he’s young. If he works like in a “börekçi” or gyro place, it’s better. If he works when young, he learns better. I say he should work.

Zeynep’s reasoning for why her sons did not like going to work now paralleled their own rationale. Zeynep thought that if her sons started working when they were younger, they would not be lazy now.

Zeynep: I mean the kids don’t work, they don’t like to work, because we didn’t send them to work when they were younger. For example, these [neighbor’s] kids didn’t go to school, kids in this neighborhood didn’t go to school. They were going to Taksim to sell water and selpak, but our kids we kept them with us, we didn’t let them [work]. If we had sent them to work when they were young, maybe they would be working now. If they had experienced work then, they would be working now.

Gurbet was clear that she would only send her two eldest children to work in the summer because she wanted them to concentrate on their school during the academic year, especially because their grades were not that good. By going to work in the summer, she believed her children would appreciate school more.

Gurbet: We want them to go to school and do well in school....Their dad said if they work, they’ll come to their senses. I tell them to do well in school, do their homework. If they work, they will be tired [at work] and come to their senses. They will regret [not doing well in school] and go to their school.

Beritan had the same reason for why she wanted her children to work in the summer. Beritan’s oldest daughter had been working in the summer mainly because of financial concerns. However, Beritan wanted her son to work not only for the extra income but also so that he would appreciate school more.

Esra did not have any children working at the time of the study, and she expressed that under no circumstances did she and her husband want their daughter to work. On the other
hand, she sometimes thought if they worked in the summer, they would see how hard work was and be more likely to value school.

**Beritan:** I say maybe if they work, going to school will feel sweeter [better] to them. For instance, because work will be too hard, school will be [feel easier].

**Esra:** If they go to work, they will see how hard it is to work, then they will value school more, that’s what I want. I swear to God, I’m not after their money....For instance, they don’t work and they don’t care about school. I’m saying if they work, maybe they will understand the value of school and go to school. That’s what I want.

In Beritan’s son’s case, this strategy seemed to have led to the desired effect. After a long tiring work day, her son recognized that school was more appreciative/enthusiastic about school.

**Beritan:** Then I said “I have a question for you, which one is better school or work?” He said “Look at what mom is asking! Of course school, school is far better. Life in school is better”. Then I said “okay if you go to school, you’ll be home like this. If not, you’ll be working all the time. Because it can’t be any other way.” He says “Vallahi this year, once the school starts, I will [work very hard in school] ...

Another reason for parents to send their children to work was to help children to understand the value of money and how hard it is to earn money. All mothers who had children who worked in the summer expressed this view.

**Gurbet:** If he [my child] makes money, he’ll appreciate money better. If he works, he’ll appreciate it better.

**Beritan:** I say they [my children] will understand life better. Where the money is coming from and where it goes, they’ll understand better. For instance, you give them money, they’re like “you don’t even give 5 TL, what’s this! What kind of family are you? I want 5-10 TL and you don’t give it to me” But they don’t say.. When there isn’t money, there isn’t money even if it’s 10 TL. When you don’t have it, where will you bring it from? But if they work, maybe they’ll understand [these things] better.

**Gamze:** She is working two months in the summer. I’m saying [this] so that she gets used to it, understands what working is like, what taking care of a household is like, what money making means, that’s why I sent her to work.
"I only want them to go to school, nothing else": Insights from Mothers Who Are against Child Labor

Six mothers said they would not send their children to work under any circumstance. Their demographic characteristics were not much different than mothers who were not against child labor. Mothers against child labor were only slightly younger (mean=31) than those who supported child labor (mean=34). The mean number of children in each group was also very close (3.2 in against child labor group compared to 3.5 in positive on child labor group). Moreover, only one mother in this group owned her house compared to seven mothers in the group who supported child labor. Thus, the financial burden on mothers who were against child labor also included rent.

Despite similar demographic characteristics, Aslı and Zarife had a strong reaction to those who sent their children to work at a young age, especially on the street. Giving an example of her neighbor, Zarife blamed those parents of taking advantage of their children and emphasized that it was the parents’ responsibility to take care of their children properly.

Zarife: I’m against them working [on the street]. They send kids at that age, anything can happen to them. They’re vulnerable to all the dangers. They put a sheep in front of a wolf. There is the organ mafia, all kinds of things happen to boys, some escape by chance. They absolutely exploit their children. If one really loves her kids, he won’t send them to the middle of danger. The wife of this supermarket owner is sending her kids to sell selpak and clean car windshields all the time. Her 12 year-old, they probably went to the police station to pick him up maybe thousand times. If you give birth to a child just because you want to, then we have to take care of them properly.

Aslı also thought that sending children to work on the street at 10 or 12 years of age would ruin their childhood and impact the rest of their lives. She also thought that her children would rightfully blame her forever if she were to ever send her children to work at such a young age. She figured they would sacrifice on some things as a family now so that her children could have a better life in the future.
**Aslı:** How can children work?! What would a 10-12 year-old working do? Won’t he say to me in the future “Shame on you! You sent me to work at that age to wash windshields and this and that”. Won’t he say to me “what kind of childhood did you make me live? We couldn’t live our childhood because of you. You woke us up in the morning to sell selpak, sell water, clean cars. People were yelling at us. We suffered so much because of this woman. We did all kinds of things to make money under the hot sun”. They’ll say all these things. Why would I raise my kids like that?! We’d eat little, not enjoy some things but at least their future would be better.

While five of the mothers said they would not send any of their children to work, Sevda had a more ambiguous explanation. Though she first said she would not want her daughters to work because she wanted them to continue their higher education, and that she would be fine with her sons working, she later said she did not want any of her children to work. She also sounded pretty ambitious about it. Considering that Sevda had one of the largest number of children in the sample (seven children), her dedication to keeping them in school was noteworthy.

**Sevda:** Vallahi, they work. The kids work but I won’t send my daughter to work. Boys can work but not my daughter....Girls shouldn’t work but go to school. If she becomes something [has a profession], she can work in an office. I don’t want her to work in textile. Same with boys. I won’t send them [under any circumstances]. I’m adamant about this, I won’t send them [to work] ever.

Fatma’s main reason for not wanting to send her children to work was that she could not tolerate to see her daughters working under difficult circumstances. Though she was not as determined as Sevda in her response, she did not think they could not send them even after they were 14 years old.

**Fatma:** Now they are young. Even when they are older, one can’t have the heart to send them. I don’t know whether it’s because it’s the first child. At the end of the day, that child puts so much effort in it until she deserves the money. One has mercy for her own child. For example, now you won’t want them to do any hard work, it’s similar to that. Here, children when they are 14 years old, people send them to work in textile. Even younger ones go, some people send their kids. I don’t think I can have the heart to send them. Their dad too says he won’t send them to work.
The motivation behind many mothers’ opposition for child labor was their aspiration for their children to continue to high school and beyond. They thought that by pursuing their education, children would be able to have a proper profession like a doctor, teacher, or lawyer.

**Yasemin:** If they’re younger than 18, they shouldn’t work....Even if we don’t have the means, I want them to get their high school diploma.

**Özlem:** He should only go to school until he grows up. If he passes the exam for college, then good. If not, then he’ll go to work with his dad. I think that for both my daughters and my son. But of course if you send your kids to work when they are young, then you make a mistake. For instance, if you send them to work when they’re 16, what do you do? You ruin your child’s life.

**Aslı:** It’s not a good thing. A child shouldn’t be working. Which one would the child concentrate on, going to school or working to take care of her dad and mom? Did I give birth to her to take care of me? No. I won’t send her to work before she’s 18-19 [years old].

Moreover, contrary to mothers including Gurbet, Narin, and Züleyha, Özlem thought that sending children to work would not keep them out of trouble but cause more problems. According to Özlem, once children started making money, they would be less obedient to their parents and more likely to get in trouble.

**Özlem:** They sell heroin and cocaine around here. Many kids go to them and they smoke with them and all. They don’t respect their parents anymore, they don’t come home, they become no good. Like I said, their parents send them to work when they turn 15 or even younger when they’re 12. And what do the kids do? Once they start making money, they’ll go buy cigarettes and things [drugs], they’ll buy everything. Once they start making money, they stop listening to their parents.

**Who Goes to Work?**

In this section, I present the different child characteristics mothers take into account in deciding which children might or should be sent to work. Four major child characteristics emerged as potential “determinants”: Age, birth order, school, and gender. Mothers’ narratives are “neatly” organized around these categories, but the same narratives also reveal the presence
of more complicated processes involving negotiations and interactions among these categories.

Age

Seven mothers had children working full-time at the time of the study. All children started working before age 18, which is the legal adult age in Turkey. Of these seven mothers, Gülistan and Gülcan expressed a sense of dire financial urgency for their families when they first came to Istanbul. Their oldest children thus started working as young as seven or eight years old. Gülistan’s three eldest sons worked on the street for three to five years when they were between ages seven to eight years and attended elementary school at the same time. Gülcan’s eldest son started working in the textile industry when he was age 10 and did not attend school. He has been working in the textile industry since then. Her two eldest daughters were sent to sell selpak on the street when they were around seven years old. These were the youngest children to start working either full-time or after school.

Nurbanu and Elif both had sons who started working while they were still going to school, but they were the ones who asked to work on their own. Nurbanu’s son started working at a mechanics shop when he was 10 years of age. When he said he wanted to work, his family did not object. While he was not very invested in academics, he still continued to go to school and work after-school. He dropped out of 10th grade and started working full-time. Elif’s eldest son also approached his parents with a wish to work when he was age 13. While they first objected, they let him work.

Elif: He was still young, one day he came. He was 13 years old, he said he’d work. I said “son, you’re going to school”. He said he’d work. At the time, we came here and had a lot of financial difficulties. We didn’t have money or nothing. He said “Dad, I’m gonna work at the börekçisi” and then he went there.

Elif’s son was still working at the same “börekçisi” and, eager to go to college, he was getting ready to start senior year of high school.
Children working full-time in the remaining households started work after they finished middle school or dropped out of high school. At that time, they were at least 14 or 15 years of age. When asked when children should start working, Zeynep said:

_He is now.. He didn’t start working when he was 10. He turned 16 and his brother started taking him to work. He was 16 or 17, we didn’t send him [to work] when he was a child._

Mothers whose children were still very young or not currently working full-time (in other words, working only in the summer) also had a minimum age in mind for when they thought it would be appropriate for their children to start working full-time or in the summer. Most mothers who considered sending their children to work agreed that age 15 would be appropriate for their children to start working either in the summer or full-time. Again, this age coincided with the time around which children finished 8th grade (end of compulsory education) and could either stop or continue their education.

**Gamze:** _If they don’t go to school, they can work after age 15, but their education is more important... If they don’t go to school, they can work after 15._

**Ayşegül:** _I wouldn’t recommend it [work] now. Once they turn 15 or 16, then maybe after that they can provide for themselves. They can pay for their own expenses. For instance, my aunt’s son, one is 14 and the other one 15. Both the daughter and the son are working. They make 300 TL. Their mother send them to work so that they can pay for their own clothes and school expenses. I don’t think about it [sending them to work], my kids are still young._

**Gurbet:** _My kids have grown up. My oldest is 13 years old. How can a 13 year-old take care of us? Now my other son says he wants to work. He tells his dad to find a job for him. After they’re 15, if they wanna work, they will. If they wanna pursue with their education, they’ll do that._

Ayşegül also thought that 14 or 15 years of age would be appropriate but only if her children could work with people they knew.

**Ayşegül:** _Once they turn 13-15 [years old], then slowly I will have him work as an apprentice for him to learn a vocation. He’ll go to school during the academic year, and to work at the end of school year. Once he is 14-15 [I’ll send him to_
work] but only under the condition that it will be with someone I know. I won’t send him to work with just anyone.

When Gurbet and Gamze were asked about why they thought age 15 years was appropriate as a time to start working, they stated that children are then more mature physically and mentally to handle work.

**Gamze:** Up until 15, they can’t do any work because they’re young, they can’t take it, they don’t have the strength. They can’t do any work until they’re 15. What work can a child do until 15? Let’s say he started working, his boss said to carry something over there. Can he lift it? No, he can’t. And he forces himself to lift it, he’ll hurt himself and not finish the job. So, he can’t do it [before 15].

**Gurbet:** We think they can’t do any work before that. When they’re 15 they’re gonna be mentally more mature.

Only Sakine thought children should start working at an earlier age. While she thought that 10 years of age or younger was still too young to work, children could start spending some time at work with their father or a relative after school once they were 11 years old to get acquainted with working.

**Sakine:** I think a child younger than 10 should not be sent to work. Sometimes I see kids that age selling water on the street or in the bus, or they sell simit. They endanger children’s lives like that, plus children become miserable like that. Nobody should expect anything from a child that age. A child that age should be in school. 11-12 years of age is when they’re older. Like I said, they can start working somewhere appropriate at that age, not in the middle of traffic. But, since they’re still young, they should teach [children] to work little by little. For example, a kid should be doing some work after school for an hour or two. I mean, once the child is 11, if his father has a job, he can take his child with him, or to people he knows, somewhere trustworthy where the child can do work suitable for his age.

Sakine had three children, none of which had been living with her at the time of the study. Her two children from her previous marriage stayed with her ex-husband and her third child from her second marriage was in state care as she could not support him. They were all young when they were separated from Sakine. It is possible that if Sakine’s children were with

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43 Turkish bagel
her, she might have felt more connected and more attuned to her children’s developmental needs, which could potentially change her thoughts about the age children could start working.

There was one group of mothers who thought children should not work until they were 17 or 18 years of age. These were mainly mothers who did not want to send their children to work under any circumstances. Their main rationale for not sending the children before that age was for them to pursue higher education, at least high school graduation.

**Yasemin:** If they’re younger than 18, they’re still young, they should be in school at that age.

**Sevda:** Yes, I don’t want to [send my children to work] so that they continue their education

**Zarife:** If they’re children, I’m against them working anywhere until they finish school all the way through. After they finish school and get appointed to work somewhere, then they can work. I’m not against that.

**Şükriye:** When she’s completely grown up, then she should work to help her father out. When she’s 18 or 17 [she can work].

Aslı also thought that children should wait until they are age 18 to go to work. She wanted her children to pursue higher education, but in case they did not want to go to college, she thought that at age 18, her two daughters would be more mature and less likely to be vulnerable to bad influence.

**Aslı:** I don’t support sending children to work. I don’t want her [my daughter] to work, but for instance let’s say she doesn’t wanna go to college, I’ll force her I’ll tell her she can become something that way. But if she doesn’t want to go, she’ll work. Not before [they’re] 17 or 18 though. Because she’s still ignorant at that age. After 18 she can defend herself. Children younger than that, you can pull them in any direction you want. But when she’s 17 or 18, she can [stand by herself].

Interestingly, there were a few mothers who had a minimum age limit for when it would be appropriate to send children to work, but, when asked, they were not opposed to the idea of sending their children to work earlier. Beritan and Züleyha, for instance, said their children
could work in the summer even when they were younger because they were in financial need.

Serap and Züleyha also said that their children actually wanted to work.

*Züleyha:* If my son didn’t go to school, I would have sent him to work so that he learns [to work]. He can start at 15 or 16 [years of age]. Even now (she is 12 years old) she wanna work, if there was a textile sweatshop we knew and trusted, I would have sent her to work. They want it too. And we need it [them to work].

*Beritan:* As a matter of fact, it’s probably not good for them to start working when they’re young. Hmm, I don’t know how old, but I think they are still too young to work when they’re 12-14. It’s more normal when they are age 16 or 17. [My son] is 14 now and works. I mean, if you have the financial means and you can make ends meet, you won’t make them work at that age.

*Serap:* When they’re 15 or 16 years of age. This one (pointing to her daughter who is in the room with us) asks her dad to go to the textile sweatshop with him and work. Her dad tells her she is still too young. I can send them before that age too. If I let them, *(Daughter: Can I go [to work]?)* they will go now and work. She says “my dad is there, I go there and serve them water, clean the place. I give them pieces of garment”. If I let them, they’ll go now but their dad says they’re too young. He says if they go now, people will mistreat them. He doesn’t let them work. He doesn’t want them to go with him.

As illustrated above, if Serap’s husband did not think his children would be pushed around too much before 15 years of age, Serap would not oppose the idea of them working even now (when her oldest was nine years old), possibly because they would be with their father.

It is important to mention that mothers’ perception of what age childhood ended did not usually predict the age mothers thought their children could start working. The age that marked the end of childhood and the age children could start working overlapped only for seven mothers (14 to 15 years of age for five mothers, and 17 to 18 years old for two mothers). Thus, it is likely that mothers deem their children fit for work once they grow out of childhood. As a matter of fact, Gurbet’s earlier account shows that childhood ends at age 15 years because that is when the child is considered “capable of doing work”.

For the remaining 19 mothers, the relationship between the end of childhood and the age
for children to start work was more complex. For some mothers, the end of childhood came as early as age seven, because that was the time children could start understanding and listening to their parents. Yet, the age to start work came much later. In other cases, childhood lasted up until age 18 or 20 years. However, mothers stated their children started or could start much earlier (around age 13 or 14). In those cases, perceptions of childhood were not related to or exclusive of work for children. Taken together, the end of mandatory education in Turkey may be seen as a more significant correlate of why age 15 years is considered as a possible time for children to start working than mothers’ perceptions of when childhood ends.

**Birth Order**

Birth order naturally followed age restrictions mothers had. As older children were the first ones to attain the minimum age mothers thought children could start working, they were the ones to be sent to work first.

*Kader:* Vallahi Sevim because she is the oldest....We asked her not to go to high school and she worked. When it was Dicle’s turn, she said she didn’t want to go to high school anyway, she said she wouldn’t go to school. So when she said that, I told her she’d work too. So, she worked too.

*Gurbet:* My son is the oldest of all four. So, he’ll do better at work.

*Gülistan:* I sent the three boys, the oldest ones. Girls didn’t go. Boys worked because they were the oldest.

But the rule that work according to birth order was not always enforced. For instance, Beritan asked her three oldest children to work in the summer. The two oldest were girls, and the third a boy. While the eldest daughter and the son found a job and worked, the other daughter could not find a job and, hence, did not work. However, she was also not pressured by the family to work.

*Beritan:* Nope, this one doesn’t work (pointing to her daughter who was in the room with us, her second oldest child). As a matter of fact, she was looking for a
job too when the school year ended. She has never worked before. My son hadn’t worked before either, he started this summer. This one [daughter] couldn’t find a job. She said she couldn’t find a job and now she is at home. You see, she says she is bored at home with the school being closed and all. The other one [daughter] is working.

Similarly, Gülcan asked her two eldest daughters to sell water/selpak on the street when they were very young. The older daughter went a couple of times, but when she said she could not do it, she was not forced to go.

_Gülcan:_ My second oldest daughter was going [to sell selpak on the street]. My oldest daughter went a couple of time, but said she could not sell anything. So, only my second oldest daughter was going.

Birth order was also complicated by school attendance. For instance, Elif’s eldest son worked after school and in the summer. Not only was he never asked to drop out of school to work even though he was the oldest child, his parents did not want him to work because he was doing well in school. His younger brother, on the other hand, decided he did not want to finish high school and dropped out of 9th grade. He was required to work full-time. A similar situation occurred in Gülcan’s household. Except Gülcan’s oldest son who continued to work in the textile industry and the oldest daughter who stayed home to help her mother (hence never attended school), the other siblings all continued with school, including Nurcan who worked on the street before she started school. At the time of the study, Nurcan and her younger sister were getting ready to attend college, something Gülcan was proud of. Neither child was asked to work. On the other hand, their much younger sister who decided not to attend 9th grade started working in the same textile sweatshop with her brother that summer.

**Gender**

Even though the community was mostly conservative about gender roles, especially when it came to acceptable behaviors and expected roles for girls and boys, most of the mothers
did not think that gender mattered when it came to work until the girls married. After marriage, it was up to the husband to decide whether he wanted his wife to work, to which the answer was almost always negative (see Chapter 8). In families with children working full-time or only in the summer, girls worked if they were old enough. Some worked on the street when they were very young because of pressing financial needs, like in Gülcan’s case. Others like Kader, Beritan and Gülistan waited until their daughters were old enough (15 years) to send them to work either full-time or in the summer. Gülistan’s and Gülcan’s daughters along with Kader’s second oldest daughter started working full-time because they did not want to continue to high school, whereas Kader’s eldest daughter started working because she was the first-born. Kader’s following account illustrates that in some families, school continuation and/or birth order mattered more than gender.

Kader: Vallahi Sevim worked because she was the oldest. I wanted her to work to help her father and buy what she wants so that we don’t have this hardship anymore. We took her out of school and she worked. When it was Dicle’s turn, she didn’t wanna go to school (chuckles). I told her she would then work too. If my son was the oldest, I would send him to work. But Sevim and Dicle are oldest….There is no discrimination at all between girls and boys, not at all.

However, there were four mothers for whom gender was an important factor in sending their children to work. While Elif and Nurbanu thought girls should not be sent to work, Esra and Faraşin said they would not mind their daughters’ working but that their husbands would not want it. Elif had two sons who were working (one after school, and the other full-time). They were also the oldest among their siblings. Even though at the time of the study Elif’s daughter was still young (10 years old), she thought she still would not send her to work when she was old enough. Nurbanu, on the other hand, did not have any daughters, but she still thought that she would want them to stay home if she had had any.
Elif: I won’t send my daughter to work. She will go to school. [If she doesn’t] she’ll stay home and not work.

Özge: If you had daughters, what type of jobs would you want them to work at?  
Nurbanu: Nothing. I would want them to stay home. I don’t like it [when girls work]

Both Esra and Faraşin stated that their husbands were the ones who would not let their daughters work. Faraşin made it clear that her husband would have the last word on whether her daughters worked.

Esra: I won’t let my daughters work even if they don’t go to school. Their father says girls won’t work. I would send them but my husband doesn’t want it.

Faraşin: Girls, God willing, won’t go to work (we laugh). Her father says he won’t let her work. Because he’s jealous you know, he does the same to his daughter....I have three [kids]. If necessary, it’s up to their dad whether he’d send his daughter to work or not. But the boys, he’d send them. Job decisions will be up to their dad. If he wants he’ll send [his daughter], if he doesn’t he won’t. I say if they’re good\textsuperscript{44}, it doesn’t matter where they go. I don’t see a difference between girls and boys both in terms of work and school.

While other mothers did not elaborate on why the girls should not be working, Esra articulated that the main reason her husband did not want their daughter to work was his concern about boys making a move towards her.

Esra: Their father says they won’t work. He says they won’t go. He says a boy can say something to her, he doesn’t want it.

Though Elif, Nurbanu, and Faraşin did not elaborate on why they would not want girls to work, other conversations with them around gender and appropriate behaviors for girls in public suggested they had similar concerns.

Narin had a more nuanced approach to gender. Her adherence to more traditional gender roles for her children depended on their level of financial need. She thought that, if in financial need, her children would go to work regardless of gender. However, if they were financially

\textsuperscript{44} Very likely used in the sense of “chaste”.
stable and the children did not pursue higher education, she would still want her son to work because he needed to be prepared as the breadwinner of his future family. On the other hand, her daughter would most likely stay home to learn house chores as a future house wife.

**Narin:** If they’re not good in school, what are they gonna do in school? Both my son and my daughter, they’ll go to work instead. My daughter, if I’m in a stable financial situation, if I’m rich, maybe I won’t send her to work. If I have the means, she’ll stay home and help me out. But my son will absolutely work. He is a boy, I make him work so that he is not lazy in the future when he gets married in the future and have his own house. But my daughter, if she doesn’t go to school, she’ll be a housewife when she gets married anyway. So, it’s better that she learn how to do house chores. Even if she works, she’ll still be a housewife after she gets married. So if I have the means, why would she work? She’ll stay home. But a man when he gets married, [it’s not good] if he says he’s not working. So, it’s better if he finds a job and works [if he doesn’t go to school] and learns something.

While most mothers did not think that gender mattered in their decision of which children would work, gender became more critical when the discussion revolved around where or what types of jobs their children would work at. Six mothers, Gurbet, Şükriye, Dilan, Gülistan, Nermin, and Faraşin specifically emphasized that their daughters could only work with relatives or with people they knew and trusted, mainly because they were girls and their honor needed to be protected. These jobs were mainly in the textile industry.

**Gurbet:** I’ll teach my daughter house chores, will have her read the Kor‘an. Of course it’s not good for girls to go out. If it’s a place I can trust, I can send her to work too. Kader’s daughters are working, she trusts their workplace. If there is a place like that we can trust.

**Şükriye:** I won’t send my daughter to somewhere far for instance, I won’t. If it’s people I know, I’ll send her.

**Dilan:** No, I don’t want to send her to work with people I don’t know of course, a relative of my husband. A stranger for instance, a stranger, I don’t know, it’s better if it’s someone we know.

**Gülistan:** No, I send her to work in a textile sweatshop of our relatives. I won’t send her anywhere else. You can’t trust anyone in İstanbul with you daughter alone.
Faraşin: For instance somewhere we know in textile. Or my sister-in-law works somewhere or his aunt’s daughter works somewhere and it’s trustworthy and they call her to work there, I can send her there. I’d first talk to the boss and see what type of place it is and then..

Nermin clearly articulated that it was a matter of protecting her daughter’s honor and that her husband did not want any of their daughters to work. When asked about how she would feel about them working with a relative or someone they knew, Nermin was positive. Contrary to many mothers who thought that it was acceptable for girls to work but not acceptable for married women to do so, Nermin thought that it was the same matter of honor regardless of whether a female was married or not. She thought that families should be consistent whichever way they went.

Nermin: Girls don’t work after they marry. It’s true. If it’s a matter of honor, it should be both for girls and women. I say even if I have 10 daughters, I won’t send them to work. Her father says the same “I won’t make my daughter work. She won’t work after she gets married and she won’t work when she’s still with me”. If it’s somewhere we know, like with her maternal uncle or paternal uncle, then fine. But we won’t let her work anywhere else. We won’t let her work with people we don’t know, we won’t let her. But boys, they can work as much as they want. Some people say “my daughter works, she won’t work when she gets married”. That’s a cursed thing. If it’s honor, it’s honor everywhere. You won’t let her work when she’s a girl and you won’t let her work she gets married. Some people let their daughters work even when they’re engaged. Then once the girl is married, they say “I don’t want my daughter to work”. If I were them, I would make her work. I would have made her work when she was a girl anyway.

Types of jobs appropriate for girls were rather limited to mostly to the textile industry. Some mothers also mentioned working as a cashier in a supermarket, as a salesperson in a store, or as a clerk if they were educated enough. For boys, mothers were more lenient in terms of where they could work. Four mothers said their sons could work at any type of job. Having said that, they did not think bars were appropriate places for their sons to work.

Narin: Any job, anything he wants.

Dilan: For my son? Anything he sees fit for himself.
**Gülistan:** Boys can work anywhere, they are males.

**Aslı:** I wouldn’t interfere in with boys, except of course bars and places of that sort, I wouldn’t want those.

Seven mothers specified that their sons could work anywhere as long as it was a good, honest, and trustworthy workplace, as illustrated in the accounts of Kader, Lale, and Elif.

**Kader:** I absolutely want a decent, good place. I want that it’s a good person and gives him halal money\(^{45}\).

**Lale:** He’ll go to whatever job. I’ll ask people whether it’s a good job or a bad job. I don’t want him to work with bad people, that he doesn’t get into drug dealing business, that’s bad job.

**Elif:** For instance, this is a decent place he can go work there, that’s how I think. For instance, I don’t want him to go work in bars and all. I want a decent environment, that’s what I want.

Also while seven mothers thought cafes and restaurants were not appropriate workplaces for girls, none of the fourteen mothers who talked about inappropriate jobs for boys mentioned those. As a matter of fact, five mothers specifically mentioned restaurants and/or cafes as potential places for their sons to work at. However, bars were considered inappropriate for boys and girls.

**School**

As an alternative explanation to child labor, mothers discussed the need for children to continue with or succeed at school. Mothers thought children who were not successful or dropped out of school should be sent to work to learn some type of vocation since they would not have a chance to become the professionals (e.g. doctor, teacher, accountant) that their parents hoped they would be. Hence, school success or continuation became a factor that was taken into account when deciding whether a child would be sent to work. Fourteen mothers mentioned school success/school continuation as a factor that determined decisions on child

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\(^{45}\) Honest earning
labor. Mothers emphasized that as long as their children were successfully in school, they would not be asked to drop out of school to work.

**Narin:** Until they finish school. For as far as they wanna go in school, I won’t send them to work. It doesn’t matter if it’s a girl or boy for me. But if they don’t do well in school, if they’re not good students, what are they gonna do staying in school? Then, they’ll go to work.

**Özlem:** Vallahi my opinion, I say they’ll go to school, as long as they can. If they don’t wanna go to school, then I’ll take them out of school. Let’s say he finishes high school but can’t get into college, then I’ll put him to work. If he’s old enough I’ll put him to work, if not he’ll stay home.

**Gamze:** Like I said, first I want them to get an education. I don’t want their [financial] contribution. But if they don’t go to school, then they’ll have to work and help out their family. It’s very important for children to be educated these days. If they don’t go to school, they can start after 15. But their education is more important. Even if I don’t have the financial means, God willing they’ll go to school. If they don’t want to, then they can work at age 15.

Elif and Serap illustrated how school success and continuation created a differential response for different children in the family about working. Elif described how she still opposed to her eldest son working after school because she thought he was a good student, and he could save his life by concentrating only on his schoolwork.

**Elif:** I told him many times not to go to work. I say “Go to school and save your life”. For instance now instead of working, it’s better if he focuses on his schoolwork. That’s why I tell him not to work. It’s better if he does his schoolwork. Now he’s at work at this hour, better if he focuses on his studies.

Her second eldest son, on the other hand, did not want to continue high school and hence had to work.

**Elif:** ...but the other one doesn’t go to school, so he works. Vallahi it was him who didn’t wanna go to school. Now, since he didn’t go to school, if he didn’t work and stayed home, it would be worse, right? He’ll work a bit. Since he didn’t go to school, he’ll work.

Serap’s children were still young and thus not working, but based on their current school performance, she concluded that her younger daughter was probably not hardworking enough to
succeed in school. For that reason, she thought that her younger daughter would be more likely to be working and her oldest daughter (oldest of the siblings as well) would continue with school. She thought that if her children were not good enough students, it would be a waste to send them to school.

**Serap:** If they’re good students, they can go to school. If not, I can’t send them to school in vain. For instance this one (pointing to her daughter in the room) I know she is lazy, she won’t be any good [in school]. But the other one is smart, I’ll send her to school. This one if she wants to go, of course we’ll send her too. It depends on her wish. If they wanna go to school in the future, they will. Those who wanna go to school will, those who don’t will work.

Both Nurhanu and Zeynep repeatedly emphasized in their interviews how much they wanted all of their children to pursue higher education. They were really upset when some chose not to. Even though they were ready to support their children in their education, they thought children needed to work since they were not attending high school.

**Nurbanu:** We told them both that we would take care of them if they went to school. Both their father and I told them whoever wants to go to school will go to school, whoever drops out of school will work. They’ll work, they didn’t go to school, they have to work.

**Zeynep:** If they would be going to school, I wouldn’t send them to work. Why didn’t they go to school? What can I do?

Not all children, however, had the option to decide whether they wanted to attend or continue school. These were usually the oldest ones among the siblings. For instance, Kader’s oldest daughter was a good student with aspirations to continue on to high school. However, her parents were in a financial crisis that required one of the children to work. As she was the eldest and the only one to graduate from middle school, she was sent to work. Kader’s second eldest child, another daughter, started working a year later when she did not want to go to high school. With both girls working, the family guaranteed that the younger siblings could attend school as long as they wanted. Gülcan’s two eldest children never attended elementary school. When they
first came to Istanbul, they went to work to help their families. Interestingly, the family had two daughters who at the time of the study were getting ready to attend college. When older siblings worked, it made it easier for younger ones to continue school if they chose to.

**Discussion**

This chapter portrayed low-income Kurdish mothers’ beliefs and attitudes about child labor as well as the characteristics mothers took into account when considering which child would be sent to work. Parents’ understanding of children and their development, and what should be expected of them is largely shared by members of a cultural group or subgroup (Gaskins, 1996; Goodnow, 1996; Harkness & Super, 1996). These understandings are developed within a particular cultural place and time and are called “parents’ cultural belief systems” or “parental ethnotheories” based on the idea that cultural understandings that parents hold are organized into larger categories of mutually supportive beliefs (Harkness & Super, 1996). Understanding parental ethnotheories are important because they relate in systematic ways to parental action such as childrearing practices and thus, child labor. Parents use both individual interpretations of specific situations and previously learned social and cultural directions in formulating their reasoning (Harkness & Super, 1996).

It is argued that, for families from rural areas of Turkey, childhood is not a period that is solely devoted to play and education, and children start working at an early age to contribute to family farm work (Karatay, 2000). Working in the family farm is perceived as a normal part of a child’s development (Bakırcı, 2002). Thus, when families migrate to cities, parents don’t find it out of the norm to have their children work in various industries to contribute to family income especially given that they struggle to find a job themselves (Bakırcı, 2002; Yılmaz, 2007).
Until recently, parents in Turkey prioritized children’s economic value (e.g. their contribution to household economy and household chores) (Kağıtçibaşı, 1998). However, in the last decades, the values that Turkish society attached to children have changed (Kağıtçibaşı & Ataca, 2005). Compared to their data from 1975, Kağıtçibaşı and Ataca noted that in 2005, families emphasized the psychological benefits of having children (e.g., joy, fun, and companionship) more than children’s economic value. Nonetheless, rural and less affluent urban groups still attached greater value to children’s actual contribution to the family economy compared to better-off urban groups. While, these findings suggest that low-income families in Turkey are likely to favor child labor because they still place more value to children’s economic value, we know little on what low-income Kurdish families in urban areas think about child labor.

As depicted in Figure 5, the findings suggest that mothers’ views on child labor and their rationale behind their views were not homogeneous. Two opposing views emerged: Those who were against child labor and those who were positive about it. However, mothers who were positive about child labor were not homogeneous in the reasons they provided for why they considered child labor as a viable option. Twelve of the eighteen mothers who had a positive take on child labor stated their financial situation was or would be the main reason why they did or would send their children to work. As suggested in other studies (Blunch & Verner, 2000; Dayıoğlu & Assaad, 2003; Goncu et al., 2009; Yılmaz, 2004), poverty made these families vulnerable to child labor. Especially, in larger households where the budget available to the family was further strained, child labor became a survival strategy for the family (Altuntaş, 2003; 2006; Karatay, 2000; Yükseker, 2006). In some cases, children were asked to drop out of school (such as Kader’s oldest daughter) or not attend school at all (such as Gülcan’s oldest son).
so that their children could work. These represented cases where child labor clearly interfered with children’s education, like suggested in the literature (Demir, Demir & Uygur, 2006; Ertürk & Dayičoğlu, 2004; Karatay, 2000; Müderrisoğlu, 2006; Yılmaz, 2008). Müderrisoğlu (2006) states that many students from poor families are asked to drop out by the time they reach the age of 13 or 14 to join the workforce and miss the last years of primary education to support their families. Other studies in Turkey also show that working children fall short in their education. The findings from the study Karatay (2000) conducted after mandatory education had been extended to eight years were not any more promising. Of 905 children working on the street, 29 percent dropped out from school at some point, 17 percent never went to school. On the other hand, some continued to attend school while working and others worked in the summer when the school year ended. Thus, child labor did not always lead to dropping out of school when children were sent to work for financial reasons.

Mothers’ accounts did not reflect any tone of abuse or lack of affection towards their children, but rather a dire tone of necessity. Given this context, child labor should not be tied to parental abuse or weak family ties, but potentially to family cohesion (Altuntaş, 2006; Yılmaz, 2004). Having said this, it is important to acknowledge that mothers gave precedence to child labor over the notion of themselves looking for a job. This was largely due to the fact that traditional gender roles where women were expected to stay home and raise children was still largely accepted in the community. While mothers did not make this connection explicitly, it is plausible that the fact that they also worked to support their families until they married (in the city or when they were back in their hometown) and that children back in their hometown also helped their parents with sheparding or other agricultural chores may have made them more tolerant to the idea of their children working to support the family.
While the literature points to poverty as the main reason for child labor (e.g. Dayıoğlu, 2006; Dayıoğlu & Assaad, 2003; Yılmaz, 2004), not all mothers who considered child labor as plausible did so because of family financial concerns. Two other main reasons emerged for why children were or would be sent to work, which have not been discussed in the literature to date. Given the dangers of the inner-city neighborhood they lived in, some mothers’ main motivation to send their children to work was to keep them out of trouble. Mothers wanted to keep their children from mingling with the wrong crowd in their spare time. The spare time included summers, and for some mothers even after school hours. Considering that illegal activities (drug dealers, purse snatching gangs) were abundant in the neighborhood, mothers’ worries were well warranted. Especially in cases where children “chose” not to continue to school, these worries were stronger. For children not attending school, these worries were accompanied with the motivation for children to learn some type of vocation, especially since they lost a chance to have a profession by choosing not to go to school. Thus, the relationship between child labor and education was complex. It was not always work that led to children’s dropping out of school. In some cases, children’s reluctance or lack of interest in pursuing high school education resulted in child labor. In those cases, child labor seemed like the second best alternative for securing a “better” future for children.

Another important rationale mentioned by some mothers was that child labor could constitute a learning experience for children. This was mostly mentioned by mothers whose children worked in the summer. They thought that by sending their children to work, children would get to know how hard money making is and would think twice before spending their money. They would also start learning how to take care of a household financially. In other words, labor was seen as an investment for children’s future for when they had their own
family. Mothers also thought that children would learn work discipline as well as learn not to be lazy, which were also, according to them, important building blocks in becoming a successful adult in the labor force in the future.

A few mothers also articulated the idea of having children better understand the importance of education by showing them what the alternative would be if they did not continue school. Mothers like Beritan and Esra thought that if their children saw how difficult working was, they would be more motivated to continue with school and get a profession where work conditions would not be as physically demanding and the pay as low. This tactic seems to have worked for Beritan’s son who stated that he was even more enthusiastic about school after he worked for the summer. While using labor as a strategy to motivate children for further education may work in some cases, it is one that needs caution. As addressed by Nurbanu, it is also possible that once children start making their “own” money, they may become less interested in what opportunities education can provide them. In other words, immediate financial gratification may jeopardize their interest in better opportunities that education may bring them in the long-run.

The findings also suggest that some mothers’ opinions about where they stood on the issue of child labor regarding their children were not quite settled. These mothers provided conflicting accounts on whether they would send their children to work or not. A similar explanation can be offered for these mothers. For some of the mothers, as they are not in immediate financial need to send their children to work, they still are in the process of negotiating where they stand on the issue of child labor. Thus, their thought process is still fluid.

Finally, there is a non-negligible number of mothers who opposed the idea of child labor in the community. While fewer in numbers (seven mothers), the fact that there are mothers who
resist child labor and are aware of the potential consequences of child labor for children’s future is promising. There were two main reasons for why mothers opposed the idea of child labor: because parents must be taking care of children and not vice versa, and because child labor interferes with children’s education that provides them with a better future. Mothers thought that sending children to work did not fit into a concept of parenthood that entailed parents’ taking care of their children’s needs and providing them with a better future. Some mothers thought that, in particular, sending children to work on the street was a way of taking advantage of them. Mothers also talked about how sending children to work would hurt their chances to get an education that could offer them a better future.

Both in terms of mean age and mean number of children, mothers in this group were similar to mothers who were positive about child labor. Moreover, proportion-wise there were more mothers who lived on rent compared to those mothers in the other group. The fact that they had to worry about paying the monthly rent did not affect their negative attitude towards child labor. Having said that, children of the mothers in this group were much younger (6.3 years of age) than children in the group who were positive about child labor (11.1 years of age). Although both groups had mothers with really young children, they were more in number in the group that opposed child labor. It may be possible that children of mothers opposing child labor were still too young to consider the possibility of child labor. In other words, while mothers’ ethnotheories were negative regarding child labor, it is likely that as children grow up, contextual factors such as financial constraints might make child labor a feasible option for these mothers as well.

Mothers also talked about factors they considered when deciding which of their children could work. While the data is neatly categorized here for the purposes of analysis, mothers’
processes or thoughts were much more fluid, “messy”, and complex, usually full of “ifs and buts” when it came to factors that determined which children were or would be sent to work. Age, birth order, school success/continuation, and gender emerged as categories mothers took or would take into account when sending their children to work. In terms of age, mothers had varying views. A few mothers sent their children as young as age six or seven years to work on the street for various durations of time when they first came to Istanbul. They explained this decision was due to an urgent sense of financial survival. Other mothers had children who started working and attending school around the time when they were age 10 to 13 years of age. However, the majority of the mothers thought that the appropriate age for children to start work was at the age of 14 or 15. Mothers thought this was the age children would become strong and mature enough to handle work. While this age did not coincide with the age when most of the mothers considered the period of childhood to be over, it did coincide with the age when children usually graduate from 8th grade (which has been the mandatory grade of minimum education in Turkey since 1997). Mothers who were against the idea of child labor, on the other hand, thought that children should finish at least high school to consider work, which is around age 17 to 18.

Birth order naturally followed age in that the oldest children were the first ones to be considered for work. However, child birth order was not always reinforced if a child did not want to work or could not find a job. Birth order was also complicated by who continued to attend school. There were instances where younger children chose not to continue to high school. These children were sent to work whereas older siblings who chose to continue their education were encouraged to do so. Thus, school success or attendance became another factor that came into play in decision-making. Fourteen mothers mentioned that their children’ school
success and continuation mattered in their consideration for child labor. Those who did not want to go to school were sent to work to contribute to family income, to learn a vocation, or to stay out of trouble. All mothers expressed they wanted all their children to have an education, and some were very upset when their children chose not to. The interplay of these different factors determined which child(ren) would go to work in the family. When some of the siblings started work, they subsidized for more positive developmental pathways (e.g. higher education) for their siblings and better financial situation for the family as a whole (Altuntas, 2003; Yükseker, 2006).

Çağlayan et al. (2011) suggest that the answer to work or education changes depending on when it is asked. They argue that the first years after the migration, work came first. This was illustrated in Gülcan’s and Gülistan’s cases, with the exception that the ones who worked on the street started attending elementary school when they had to. According to Çağlayan et al., work and education could go hand in hand later after the migration, but when one needed to be chosen, it usually was work. While this argument holds for some families in this sample, I argue that the relationship between child labor and education was bidirectional rather than unidirectional as portrayed in the literature. In other words, some children were asked to drop out from school to work, but in many cases parents sent or planned to send their children to work only if children were not continuing school because they chose not to or because they were not successful in school.

Considering the dynamic relationship between education and child labor that is supported in both this chapter and the previous one, other structural and contextual factors that contribute to children’s attendance and success in school should be taken into consideration. For instance, rather than thinking of school attendance and success as related to children’s personal
motivation, ability, and success, the quality – or lack thereof - of the educational system in inner-city neighborhoods also warrants close attention as a structural/contextual factor that contributes to or facilitates child education, and hence child labor.

Gender seemed to play a much less important role in decisions to actually send children to work than expected. However, it was important in determining where or what types of jobs boys and girls could work at. Dayıoğlu (2006) found that boys were more likely to engage in labor compared to girls when the employment prospects of the father were poor. Also, while boys were more likely to work as they got older, age did not exert an impact for girls. The findings in this study were different. Though some mothers mentioned they would not want their daughters to work under any circumstances, they were few in number. Their main concern was the “honor” of their daughter in that men/boys could make inappropriate advances towards their daughter, which would ruin her reputation and cause gossip. These concerns were aligned with traditional gender definitions that encourage girls to stay at home, and not act in ways (e.g. interact with male non-family members) that would shame the family (Goncu et al., 2009). Thus, these expectations created a strict gender division of labor and limited girls to stay at home, as suggested by Ertürk and Dayıoğlu (2004).

On the other hand, most mothers in the sample did not have any problem with their daughters’ working. Especially if girls were the oldest among their siblings in families that prioritized financial need as the reason for child labor or if they chose not to attend high school, they were sent to work. The fact that mothers did not oppose their daughters’ working did not necessarily mean that they were not concerned about their daughters’ honor. By limiting their daughters’ (potential) working to only with people the family knew or by sanctioning certain types of jobs for girls, families reached an optimity that allowed them to ensure adherence to
traditional gender norms and secure girls’ honor while bolstering the thinly stretched family budget. For instance, five mothers specifically mentioned that their daughters could only work with relatives or with people they knew and trusted, mainly because they were girls, and hence their good name needed to be protected as also pointed out by Goncu et al. (2009). These jobs were mainly in textile as textile industry was the most common industry in the neighborhood with many family members or people they knew from their hometown already owning or working in textile sweatshops. Types of jobs appropriate for girls were rather limited to mostly to the textile industry, with only few mothers mentioning being a cashier in a supermarket, a salesperson in a store, or clerk if girls were educated enough.

For boys, mothers were more lenient in terms of where they could work. Four mothers said their sons could work at any type of job and seven mothers said their sons could work anywhere as long as it was a trusted place doing honest business. Also, while restaurants and cafes were mentioned as inappropriate places for girls to work, five mothers mentioned them as potential workplaces for their sons. None of the fourteen mothers who talked about inappropriate places for boys to work mentioned restaurants or cafes. In short, gender played a more critical role in determining what types of jobs children could work at rather than whether girls could work or not.
Figure 5. Mothers’ beliefs and attitudes about child labor

1. Poverty
2. Protecting children against dangers in inner-city
3. Teach children work discipline
4. Help understand adult responsibilities (e.g. value of money, taking care of household)
5. Help appreciate school more

Mothers' beliefs and attitudes about child labor

Positive about child labor

- Children go to work part-time
- Children go to work full-time

Against child labor

1. It is parents’ responsibility to take care of children and not vice versa
2. Work will interfere with school
3. Children who work are more likely to disobey their parents
Zarife: I don’t remember how old I was, but I had loved a boy very much since I was twelve. One day, as he was passing by, he told me he loved me too. I repeated it to myself for days. His sister’s house was right across ours, and he’d come and visit his sister. First love really comes from one’s heart, and I’ve always remembered him. One day, as he was passing by, he told me he was gonna get married before me. It turned out later that he was joking with me…. [Around that time] my in-laws had been coming to ask for my hand…. My mother-in-law was begging my brother to give me away to them. I was very upset by what he [this boy I loved] told me. So when my brother asked me what I thought about it], I remained silent. But remaining silent means yes in our culture. My brother’s wife asked me again, and I said okay as I thought about what that boy told me…. I saw my fiancé after the engagement. Two months after the engagement, he sent me his phone number [and we started talking]…. We were engaged for three years because my mother-in-law said “we’ll do the wedding after he comes back from his military service. Right now, we don’t have the money to buy her the gold 46”…. [When I came to live with my in-laws after I got married], it was me, my husband, my mother-in-law, my father-in-law, my two sisters-in-law, my three single brothers-in-law, my married brother-in-law, his wife, and their two kids, so thirteen people in the same house. I swear to God I was working all day long…. [But] after the wedding, my mother-in-law didn’t want me anymore…. She started telling her son “Divorce her, I’ll find you another one, a more beautiful, more hard-working, taller one.” And he believed her. As far as I know, he’s still single. It’s how it is in Kurdish culture, if the mother-in-law doesn’t want her, the husband’s word doesn’t count. She can separate them [the couple] or bring them together…. She didn’t want me, she didn’t like me. She was the one who wanted me in the first place. She said “I won’t let you; I’ll take you as a wife to my son. You’re a good person”. Her son went to the military service and I waited for him. And shortly after he came back, [we got married and] I got pregnant. When my baby was born, she got sick. They didn’t take her to the hospital and my daughter died 4 days later. When the baby was born, my mother-in-law told my [ex] husband “Let her breastfeed the baby for four or five months. Then we’ll send her away and I can take care of the baby…. He divorced me 47 three or four days after my baby died.

As illustrated in Zarife’s account, patriarchal gender ideologies and practices directly impact women’s lives. Patriarchal gender ideologies are widespread in most of the traditional

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46 It is customary for the groom’s family to give the requested amount of gold to the bride in the form of bracelets, necklaces, or actual gold coins.
societies in the Middle East, including Turkey (Kaya, 2011). Patriarchy is a form of power that is closely connected with men, age, and paternity (Kaya, 2011; Sunar & Fişek, 2005).

Tradition-oriented and usually resistant to change, patriarchal societies invest in customs and traditions or conventional notions based on moral, religious, and cultural traditions and values (Kaya, 2011). While capitalist developments and modernization have played an important role in alleviating power/sanctions entailed by patriarchy entails in parts of Turkey, capitalism and modernization movements reached the heavily Kurdish east and southeast regions much later due to geographic and political reasons (Çağlayan, 2007).

Patriarchy imposes different hierarchies and roles on women and men (Çağlayan, 2007). Men have predominant power and authority in the family, especially when it comes to making decisions concerning the family and related kin (Kaya, 2011). Women’s power in decision-making is mostly limited to immediate everyday issues that are traditionally considered as the domain of women (taking care of children, hosting visitors) (Akbay, 2003). Moreover, a patrilocal household structure is adopted where the children of the males are considered as members of the patrilineage and sons stay in the household after the marriage (Baştug, 2002). Women, on the other hand, join their husbands’ household after marriage and their children become members of the husband’s lineage (Baştug, 2002).

In addition to differential roles and status between men and women, Yalcin-Heckmann (2002; cited in Çağlayan, 2007) points to a hierarchy among women dependent on their marital status, age, and affiliation with family. According to this hierarchy, oldest women (usually mothers-in-law) have the highest status and are in charge of the household and the household work of younger women in the family. Newest daughters-in-law have the lowest status. Elder

47 Since it was a religious marriage, there was no court involvement. The divorce took place right away.
women are also in charge of controlling their daughters-in-law’s and young girls’ interactions with the outside world.

Turkish civil law does not recognize religious marriage as lawful unions and has required a minimum age of 18 years for both women and men for a civil marriage since 2002 (Resmi Gazete, 2001). Parental consent is required for couples that have not completed their 17 years of age. However, religious marriage is common in the Kurdish community, usually followed by civil marriage years later. Sometimes a civil marriage never takes place (Ertem & Koçtürk, 2008; Ilkkaracan & Women for Women’s Human Rights, 1998; Kaya, 2011). A religious marriage not followed by a civil one also makes it difficult for women to claim their rights in the rare occurrence of divorce.

Arranged marriage continues to be practiced in rural areas of Turkey including the Middle, North, South, and East (heavily populated by Kurds) Anatolian regions of Turkey as well as less educated populations of metropolises in Turkey (Nauck & Claus, 2005; 2008). Hortaçsu’s (1994) comparison of couple- (love) and family-initiated (arranged) marriages revealed that couples in arranged marriages reported fewer interactions alone with their partner, and tended to report lower levels of reciprocal disclosure in their relationships than did individuals involved in couple-initiated/ love marriages. As an extension of practices of patrilineage, if a woman leaves the marriage or divorces, she has to leave her children behind with the husband’s family (Çağlayan, 2007; Kaya, 2011).

Married at a young age, mostly through arranged marriages (Ertem & Koçtürk, 2008; Ilkkaracan & Women for Women’s Human Rights, 1998), women are expected to conform to the traditional gender roles which prescribe women to stay at home and take care of the household and the children, while men work outside the house as “breadwinners” (Akbay, 2003; Gündüz
Hoşgör & Smits, 2008). Women justify their husbands’ lack of contribution to housework through cultural expectations (Akbay, 2003). The division of roles is considered to be a part of Kurdish traditions, and is widely accepted.

Gender ideologies and roles comprise an important part of Kurdish women and their families in that they determine how Kurdish women should live their lives. These values are transmitted to members of the culture through socialization that is reinforced using gossip, physical punishment, social control, and exclusion when necessary (Kaya, 2011). Cultural gender values are more strictly imposed in Kurdish families (Akşit et al., 2001; Ilik & Türkmen, 1994; Yılmaz, 2007). Gender-determined ways are usually considered normal and the only socially acceptable way (Akbay, 2003; Kaya, 2011).

These gender-determined ways in turn have ramifications for various decisions made within the family. While education and migration challenged some of the patriarchal structures in the Kurdish community, patriarchal pressure on women remains largely unaffected (Çağlayan, 2007). The societal changes that have occurred in the Kurdish community have not been enough to change the Kurdish woman’s position in the family and the larger society (Çağlayan, 2007).

The literature suggests that gender roles and ideologies are revisited within the family when the family migrates to a new environment (Baluja, 2002; Parrado & Flippen, 2005). Parrado and Flippen argue that some elements of the gender ideologies/roles families had been abiding by are discarded, while others are modified or still reinforced in the new context. In this chapter, I explore gender ideologies and roles in the Kurdish culture related to marriage and how they have affected Kurdish women’s lives. I also look at how and which aspects of gender ideologies Kurdish women challenge, reshape or reinforce gender roles in the urban setting.

This chapter takes a closer look at marriage in the community. First, it describes how
women married their husbands, followed by what it meant for the women to be a sister- or daughter-in-law in their husband’s family. It then explores the role division in the marital relationship including women and work, men and household chores, and decision-making. The last section discusses women’s images of an “ideal” wife and husband.

“My father gave me away like I was a cow”: Getting Married

Arranged marriage was common in Tarlabası. Acquaintances, relatives, neighbors, parents-in-laws, and sometimes husbands themselves “found” women. However, contrary to patterns that are found in traditional communities, marrying relatives was not all that common. Only five participants were married to relatives, mostly cousins. Moreover, the mean age of marriage or women in the study was higher than what is usually found in conservative Muslim communities. Although about half of the women married before age 18 (and some as young as 12 to 15), the mean age for marriage was 18.5 in the study. All except Gülcan had their religious marriage first. The civil marriage followed the religious marriage, sometimes years later. In four known cases, women had never had a civil marriage.

Most mothers were married through traditional customs of marriage in the community such as arranged marriages, including bride exchanges. Fifteen, mothers had never seen their husbands before they married. However, there were five mothers who married men they were in love with (see Table 4 for marriage patterns). There were no clear sociodemographic patterns discerning women who had love marriages from those who had arranged marriages. Even though women who had love marriages were overall younger, there were also younger women who had arranged marriages. Moreover, four of the five mothers who had love marriages migrated to Istanbul with their families when they were children, which could be interpreted as the “westernization” effect of living in the city on marriage. However, there were also women who
came to the city at a younger age, and yet still married through arranged marriages.

Five mothers eloped with their husbands, but not necessarily out of love. Seda chose to elope with a man who expressed interest in her. Though Seda knew him only for a couple of months, she agreed to marry him not because she loved him, but because her relationship with the man she loved fell apart and because she felt her sister-in-law (her brother’s wife) was not happy that Seda was living with them. Another woman, Kader, stated that she eloped with her husband when she was 15 years old because the married son of her uncle wanted her as a second wife. She did not want to be a second wife to a man much older than herself. When she told her older brothers and sisters that she did not want to marry him, her older sister let her elope with her husband, someone she had feelings for. As she and her family were afraid about the older cousin’s rage if Kader was “given” to someone else, Kader and her husband escaped and got married in another village. Only months later did they return.

Kader was not the only woman in the study who was asked to be a second wife. Nermin and Ayşegül were also asked to be second wives. Though only civil marriage is recognized as legal/official in Turkey, the practice of religious marriage that requires only the presence of an imam and two witnesses is especially widespread in rural parts of Turkey, making it easy for men to have a second wife. Though none of the women in the study were in that situation, they talked about this pattern especially in older generations. Both Ayşegül and Nermin refused to be second wives. In a way, Kader’s elopement with her husband was also an act of resistance, in that case supported secretly by her family. Normally women’s elopement with men created friction between the woman and the family even though they marry. Women told stories of families not speaking to their daughters/sisters for many years because of it. In the case of Nermin, when her father did not want to hear her objections to being a second wife, she
threatened to kill herself if they ever agreed to give her away as a second wife.

**Nermin:** I don’t know how he convinced my dad. My dad said he was a rich man. I hadn’t seen the man. He was an old man. My dad said one day “you’ll marry him”. I said “dad, I don’t wanna get married”. I was 15 years old at the time. I called my brother and told him “Brother, here is the situation. He [Dad] wants me to marry a married man”. He said “don’t marry him”....I went to the bridge, I was gonna kill myself. I said “I won’t marry that man”. As I was there, a friend of mine came after me. She took me to her house for three weeks. She told me “don’t do that. He can’t do anything. You can’t marry someone you don’t love. Go to the police, report your dad to the police.” I said I could never report my dad to the police. [Then] I told my dad multiple times I didn’t wanna marry him. Finally he said “okay, go [to Istanbul] with your brother”....My brother got on a plane from Istanbul and came right away. That’s how I came to Istanbul.

Despite her protests, Zeynep was forced to marry the son of the family who adopted her when she was three years old. She was 12 or 13 years old at the time she married him. Other women had never seen their husbands before. Gülcan, for instance, was “reserved” for her husband by her father-in-law when her mother was still pregnant with her. Gülistan and Beritan married as a result of bride exchange where they were given to their in-laws in exchange of the in-laws’ daughter for one of their brothers. Whether women were asked for their opinion before they were given away, and how women reacted when and if their opinion was solicited varied. Some of the women were not even asked whether they wanted to marry a man who had been proposed as their future husband.

**Aslı:** It was an arranged marriage, they gave me away to whomever pleased them and that was it.

**Gülcan:** No they didn’t ask [me]. They [the in-laws] had brought the engagement ring. I was at the cotton field and I came back and everything was already agreed upon. What could I do? I didn’t say anything....I wasn’t upset because my dad said he knew them.

**Elif:** My husband’s brother...asked my dad why he didn’t give me away to that other man who asked my hand. And my dad told him it was because I was too young. My dad and my husband’s brother were close, they liked each other. So, my husband’s brother asked him “But you have a daughter?”; and my dad said “yes, but she is still too young”. And he [my husband’s brother] said “give it to us” like...
I was a cow. And my dad said “she’s still too young”. And one day, they just came, and I don’t know they just gave me away. They didn’t ask me, they didn’t tell me anything.

Some were asked but their answer did not matter.

Sevda: I said no. I said no but my dad brought the [engagement] ring and put it on my finger. My mom cried and protested. She said “How could you give my daughter away? She doesn’t even have a dowry yet”. My dad said “It was God’s will”....My dad didn’t ask me whether I liked him or not. Nothing like that. What difference would it do if I cried and protested [at that point]

Züleyha: I didn’t wanna get married but my dad gave me away and I couldn’t say anything. They [My husband’s family] were three siblings and didn’t have a father and a mother. Plus, they were relatives so they gave me away to him. I came to Istanbul within a week [after that] and we got married here....They [my parents] asked me [if I wanted to marry him] but I hadn’t seen him before. That night when they came to our house [I saw him] and I didn’t like him. But they gave me away anyway.

When asked, Dilan said she did not want to marry, but her parents thought that the candidate was a “good catch”, and convinced her to marry him.

Dilan: They [my parents] asked me but I said I didn’t want to get married now. They said they [my husband’s family] looked like nice people, that I might not get such a good opportunity again, and that they wanted their daughter to end up in a good place. My parents asked people around about what kind of people my husband’s family were like, and people said they were good people. So, I said okay. I said if they [my parents] liked him and approved of him [as a spouse] for me, then no problem for me. So, my parents convinced me.

Others, when asked, said that if their parents thought it was a good match, they would agree to get married.

Esra: My mom asked me what I thought, and I said “I don’t know, if you liked him, I’m okay with it”.

Gamze: They asked me, my older sister asked me, and I said “Do however you see fit. How would I know? I’ve never seen the guy or met him. So, you’ll ask around about whether he is good or not”.

Ayşegül: He [my husband] saw me Saturday and they came to ask for my hand on Tuesday. My uncle asked me whether I wanted to marry him, and I said “Whatever
my elderly says [thinks is right]. If my elders say no, I will never accept it [the proposal]. I will never go against what my elders say”.

Gurbet, Fatma, and Zarife remained silent when they were asked by their parents. They indicated that not answering when asked whether they wanted to marry that particular candidate meant they agreed to marry. Fatma thought that the fact that she did not speak up was probably an act of fate since she did voice her lack of interest in previous candidates.

**Gurbet:** They [my family] said to them [my husband’s family] that they would first ask me and let me think about it. Then my younger brother called me and said “It will only be with your consent. Even if all our relatives opposed to it, if you say yes, I’ll back you up. But if you say you don’t wanna marry him, I won’t let them force you. I won’t give you away”. Then I didn’t say anything to him. He said “You’re not saying anything, so you want to [marry him]. If you’re not saying anything, that means you want to.” I still didn’t say anything. And he said “okay then”.

**Fatma:** Like I said, my dad was a little stern, he didn’t let me [decide]. He said “My older sister came from Istanbul, and I want to give you away to her [her son]. I didn’t want to say anything. I guess it was the fate because I used to say no to previous candidates [to be a groom]. I guess when it’s someone’s fate, she doesn’t say anything. The previous candidates, the minute they left, I would come up with reasons for why I wouldn’t wanna marry them. But with this one, I didn’t say anything. And my dad said “Okay, I find him appropriate for you”.

**Zarife:** One day, he [the boy I had feelings for] said, when passing by, that he would marry before I do. It turned out later that he was joking.... [Around that time] my in-laws had been coming to ask for my hand....My mother-in-law was begging my brother to give me away to them. I was very upset by what he [this boy I loved] told me. So when my brother asked me what I thought about it, I remained silent. But remaining silent means ‘yes’ in our culture.

During an informal conversation with Duygu, Faraşin’s sister-in-law who was with us during part of the interview with Faraşin, said she had been recently engaged to a young man by her family (Field notes, August 18th 2011). Her family and she had known the man for a long time. When he asked her family to marry Duygu, Duygu said she remained silent. Not only did she not have feelings for this man, she also had someone else she loved. When I asked her why she chose to remain silent when she was asked, she said that everything happened so fast that she
did not have time to think about it thoroughly. She was in a conundrum. On the one hand, she regretted remaining silent because she did not love him. On the other hand, she thought this man was much more trustworthy than the man she loved. Moreover, she said, her parents would be more likely to back her up in this marriage if something went wrong because they made the “deal”, even though that meant that they would only try to reconcile the couple and send her back once they were reconciled. Whereas if she were to marry someone she loved, she thought her parents would be less likely to support her during tough times. She said she felt constrained by their traditions. She was hesitant to oppose her parents, she preferred having her parents’ support if something went wrong in her marriage but was frustrated that this only meant efforts to reconcile the marriage. She also felt pressured to get married because she was 19 years old, and that meant that people would think that she is not good enough to marry if she did not marry any time soon.

In Beritan’s case, who was married through bridal exchange, she was not asked by her father about the marriage. Rather, he asked her brother, who was only a few years older than her, whether he would want to marry the daughter of the family who asked for Beritan’s hand. Beritan’s brother was working in Istanbul at the time and his parents asked him to come back to the village to discuss the situation. Though at first Beritan’s brother stated he was too young to marry and did not want to, his father said that the (future) in-laws came to the house every day to insist on the bride exchange and that he thought they were good people. Finally, Beritan’s father gave in to his parents who already seemed to have made their mind, suggesting that even man sometimes let it up to their parents to make decisions about their own marriages.

**Beritan:** Umm, vallahi I remember when my older brother came to the village, my dad told him “Son, I know you guys are still young, both you and Beritan are still young, but they [future in-laws] don’t let it go. Every day they come and ask me to give them Beritan as a bride ... They really want her, and they look like nice
people. We wanna say yes, what do you think?” He asked my brother, he didn’t ask me. And my brother said “Dad I don’t know, you know best. It looks like you figured it out all. They [future in-laws] came and you went, and everybody saw the girl [I’m supposed to marry] including my aunts, except me … So I’ll do whatever you say” That’s what he said to my dad.

Unfortunately, Beritan’s brother was killed by the Turkish military on that visit to the village after the engagement took place. Upon her brother’s killing, Beritan told her mother and her paternal grandmother that she did not want to proceed with the marriage, but her grandmother said that was out of question because the deal was done. The marriage still took place with Beritan’s younger brother having to marry the in-laws’ daughter.

**Beritan:** I was telling my paternal grandma, I was telling my mom to ask my dad to go talk to them and tell them that I didn’t wanna marry their son now that my brother is dead, and that I was still too young. And my grandma said “That’s impossible, it’s shameful/embarrassing. We promised you as a bride to them, we have to give you away to them. We don’t have the right not to”. So we stayed engaged for a year, and then I married their son, and my younger brother [instead of my older brother] married their daughter.

Seven women in the study had other people they loved, but had to marry their husbands instead for various reasons. Three of the women could not marry their “boyfriends” because their parents did not let them. Sevda was in love with her paternal cousin. Despite Sevda and Sevda’s mother opposition to the father, she could not marry him because her father decided to give her to her current husband even though he was aware of the feelings between his daughter and his brother’s son. Özlem’s mother refused to let her marry the man she had dated secretly for a long time because he was Turkish. Nermin’s brother told her she could love anyone but that man, because he was Alevi.48

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48 Alevis are a religious group combining Shi'ism (as opposed to Sunni sect of Islam which the majority of Muslims in Turkey affiliate with) with Sufi elements. They mainly live in Turkey. Rituals are performed in Turkish, Zaza, and other local languages—not in Arabic, as in other Muslim groups. The relationship between Alevis and Sunnis is one of mutual suspicion and prejudice dating back to the Ottoman period. To this date, there is discrimination against Alevis. Sunnis have accused Alevis of heresy, heterodoxy, rebellion, betrayal and immorality. There are Kurdish Alevis in Turkey, though exact numbers are unknown.
Özlem: When I was young, I had one [boyfriend] before my husband. And when he went to do his military service, I had to marry my husband. I told my mom about him once, and she said they would not give me away to a Turkish man. She said “You’re Kurdish and they’re Turkish, that can’t happen”. I said “Why does it matter? I speak his language, and he doesn’t have to speak mine”. She said “No, we can’t get together, and I don’t speak much Turkish”....I asked her many times, and she said no.

Sevda: They brought it [the engagement ring] and put it on my finger, but I didn’t want it. I was in love with my paternal uncle’s son. We loved each other very much. Perhaps you’ve been in love and you know. I loved my cousin very much, we loved each other very much. And everybody knew about it.

Nermin: I was looking at him [that boy I liked) from the window and he was looking at me. And my brother said “Why is that guy looking at you?” And he pulled the curtain and said “you’ll never ever talk to that guy ever”. I swore to my brother that there was nothing between us, I was 18 at the time. I said there is nothing going on between us. And he [my brother] said “If there ever is, I’ll break your leg. You can love any man but him”....He [the boy] was a good man, but he was from Malatya. And they [my brother and others] didn’t like people from Malatya because they are Alevi.

In some cases, husbands had other women they loved but could not marry. Gülistan and Ebru knew that their husbands had other girls they were in love with before they got married to them. Gülistan’s husband could not marry the woman he loved, because the girl’s family refused. Hence, they married him to Gülistan. In Ebru’s case, his wish to marry the woman he loved was not even honored because his mother had Ebru in mind for her son.

Gülistan: My husband loved a girl but they did not give her to him. I knew about her later. He loved a girl who was a relative, but they said they would not give her to him, they gave her to someone else.

Ebru: My husband loved a girl [before marrying me] and asked his mom to go ask her family for her hand. And his mom said no. Then he went to his sister-in-law [his brother’s wife] and told her. And his sister-in-law told him “Vallahi your mom said she would bring that girl”, referring to me. And my husband said “What am I gonna do with her?! She is too young” (she laughs). I was very young. And his aunt told him “It won’t be anybody else than her for you”.

These statements suggest that men did not always get to make decisions about their own marriages. Interestingly, other accounts that reflected current attempts for arranged marriages
also underlined young men’s passivity in the process. During an informal conversation with
Fehime, Nurbanu’s sister-in-law, who also lived in the neighborhood, she mentioned that she
was looking for a nice bride for her son and that her son agreed to marry whomever his mother
chose for him (Field notes, September 12th 2011). The girl Fehime found was from their
hometown and she had already sent them her son’s picture and received the girl’s in exchange.
They were now waiting to hear back from the girl’s family upon which Fehime would go and
visit them to ask for the girl’s hand for her son (a couple of weeks later, Fehime said that the
arrangement did not work out because the girl said she did not want to move away from her
family). Gülcan mentioned that she went to ask for the hand of her uncle’s daughter for her son.
She did not mention that her son had seen the girl or asked his mother to ask for her hand. Narin
and Gurbet also mentioned that the family was actively looking for a girl for their single brother-
in-law who was staying with them. These accounts suggest that arranged marriages continue to
be practiced in the city, and are not always done with the man’s approval or request.

“It was like hell”: Being a Daughter/Sister-in-Law in the Husband’s Family

One of the important consequences of getting married for women was to become a
daughter- and sister-in-law in the husband’s family. When women moved in with their in-laws
upon marriage as it is customary in the Kurdish culture (as well as in other rural parts of Turkey),
their new status had an immediate impact on their daily lives. Even though many women
continued to live in the same apartment building with their husbands’ brothers, at the time of the
study only Gurbet and Narin (married to brothers from the same family) were still sharing the
same apartment. However, all but three women lived with their in-laws for varying periods of
time when they first married. Co-residing with the husband’s family seems to be a widespread
practice in the community with both financial and practical benefits, especially for the husband’s
family. While women did most of the household chores as the daughter- or sister-in-law, the husbands handed their salary over to their parents or pooled it together with their brothers’ and sisters’ if their parents were not living with them.

The configuration of households varied. Eight women lived with their parents-in-law and their husbands’ brothers and sisters in their husbands’ hometown. In their cases, their husbands were working in a city away from their hometown, and only came back to spend a few weeks at a time. Ten mothers lived with their parents-in-law in the city, in which case their husbands were with them full-time. Seven women joined their husband who was already living and working away from his parents in the city upon marriage. The husbands usually shared the house with their other brother(s) – and in some cases also with sisters who were single. Thus, when the women came, it was their responsibility to take care of all the brothers’ needs such as cooking, laundry, and cleaning. Sometimes, there was already a married brother in the household, usually with kids. So, the household chores were split between the two women. Some women stayed with their in-laws as short as one year whereas others lived as long as eight to nine years. Some of the households that women moved in included as many as fifteen people.

Women like Beritan, Nurbanu and Kader experienced a variety of living arrangements. Beritan, Nurbanu, and Kader all lived first with their parents-in-law back in their husbands’ hometown while their husbands were away working. They all moved to the city some time later to join their husbands. Upon their arrival, Nurbanu lived in the apartment building with her sister-in-law and her family. Even though they did not live in the same apartment, Nurbanu stated that her sister-in-law who was older than her did not let her go outside. Kader came to the city to join her husband but also to take care of all his brothers and sisters who were working in Istanbul and sharing the apartment with him. Beritan also came to join his husband, but her
father-in-law and some of her husband’s siblings also followed her and lived in the same apartment. Whichever form the living arrangements took, women expressed the emotional and physical drain of living with their in-laws.

**Zarife:** When we first get married, we go to live with mother-in-law and sister-in-law....Your mouth is shut all the time, you can’t eat with them, you can’t drink water when they’re around. You absolutely can’t speak or cough because your father-in-law, mother-in-law, your brother-in-law, even your brother-in-law who is five years younger than you should not hear your voice. One lives like a robot [in her in-laws’ house].

**Dilan:** My mother-in-law was nice but because the house was very crowded, I was uncomfortable. I had to do house chores non-stop. We didn’t have any fights, but I was exhausted. I had eight brothers-in-law. One would come and take off his socks, the other would throw his shirt there. Sometimes I didn’t realize how the day went by.

**Faraşin:** I was cleaning my mother-in-law’s house every morning and make it spotless. And she [mother-in-law] would come and say there was some dust here and there. And when people came over to visit her, she’d talk to them about me and I was offended by it but there was nothing I could do so I had to keep quiet. If not, we’d either fight or I’d have to leave. It was either one or the other [keep quiet or fight/leave]. So I was telling myself to keep quiet, especially because I loved him and my family would have said “You chose to marry him”.

Women’s moves were restricted by their in-laws in the house and outside to the extent that they could not visit their own relatives and even parents. In some households, the extent of the tension in the house turned into emotional and physical abuse from the in-laws.

**Nermin:** I couldn’t do what I wanted to. I couldn’t eat, I couldn’t visit a friend or a relative or sit outside. I couldn’t talk with her....She [my mother-in-law] would meddle in everything. If I went somewhere, she’d tell my husband “why did she go there?” I was the new daughter-in-law, she had the right to interfere.

**Beritan:** It was like hell [when I lived with them]. As a matter of fact, after we came here [to Istanbul], they again came and stayed with me. It was difficult, very difficult. My parents were living very close to their [my in-laws’] house and they would never let me go visit them ever. We were fighting for the smallest thing, and they were beating me. My mother-in-law was attacking me and she was tearing my hair off, then my father-in-law and sisters-in-law [were attacking me] .... There was a lot of beating.
Yasemin: I [we] went to live in his brother’s house. And within few days, the fighting and arguing started. His brother’s wife was telling me stuff like “this is not your house, so you’ll do as I say. If I tell you to go somewhere, you’ll go. If I tell you not to go, you’ll stay”. And my husband was telling her “She [my wife] is not your child. If I allow her to go somewhere, you don’t have the right to say anything”.

Living with the in-laws took a toll on women’s marital relationship as well. Serap, Zarife, and Gamze complained that they could not spend quality time with their husbands as a couple when they lived with their in-laws. Zarife thought that women did not have time to spend with their husbands because of all the household chores they needed to do or both their husbands. Serap and Gamze talked about how they and their husbands held back on showing affection towards each other out of respect for the elderly.

Serap: When one is alone with her husband or when they live in their own place, it’s more comfortable. When you live with your in-laws, you hold back because it’s your mother-in-law, it’s your elderly. So you hold back, and you can’t show affection to your husband or he can’t show affection to you.

Zarife: You don’t get to see you husband’s face, how can you get used to him or feel like you’re living in the same house? You clean the house and cook until he comes home. And when he comes home, it’s not just him. His sisters and brothers come too, they all come together. They take off their work clothes, you do their laundry, wash their feet, prep the bathroom so that they can take a shower, prep the towels, the clean clothes. Then you clean up the bathroom and get the beds ready and it’s already midnight. You don’t even get time to rest. You go to bed and fall asleep without being able to have two words with your husband because you’re very tired.

Gamze: My husband wanted to do things for me, but he was under his family’s pressure. There [back in the village], it’s [you do] whatever the elderly says. He wanted to buy things for me but he couldn’t out of fear of his mother. Here, he buys me thins whenever he has the money…. Back then, even if he had the money, he couldn’t buy things [for me].

Özlem mentioned that the tension between her and her in-laws took a toll on her relationship with her husband. When Özlem talked to her husband about the things her mother- and sisters-in-law did to her during the day, he became upset with her and not his family because
he could not say anything to them.

Özlem: Before [when we were living with the in-laws], we [my husband and I] liked each other but not that much. Because there were [often] fights and arguments [with the in-laws], we [my husband and I] were not getting along that well either. But thank God we fixed it now....When I told him “Your mom did this and that, and your sisters don’t treat me well and don’t help me out”, he’d get angry. And because he couldn’t say anything to his parents, he’d be angry with me and tell me not to complain.

Though in Özlem’s case, the tension of living with the in-laws never turned into physical from her husband towards her, living with the in-laws sometimes led to physical violence by husbands in other families. Interestingly mothers-in-law and husbands’ sisters played the main role in instigating the husbands against their wives.

Zarife: I was living with my mother-in-law and I swear to God I was working from morning till night. When my husband came home, my mother-in-law was telling him “Your wife didn’t do any work today, she sat around all day. She didn’t cook”, just to get him to beat me. And my husband would tell her “So who did all that?” and she’d tell him “What did she do!? It’s dirty everywhere”. And my husband would say “I’ll look everywhere and if there is no dirt...” And he’d look around and not find a piece of dust, and would tell his mom “Mom, I couldn’t find anything, why are you doing that to her?” And she’d tell him “You’re scared of your wife. What kind of a man are you?” And then he’d get upset and beat me. Because he couldn’t do anything to his mom, he’d beat me.

Kader: I got beaten so many times when I was there [living with my in-laws]. If I didn’t do one thing she said, she’d be like “Why isn’t she doing what I tell her to do?” She’d make an issue out of nothing and say “I’ll tell your husband to beat you”. Back then he was beating me.

Some of the women’s co-residence with their brothers- or parents-in-law ended naturally after a new daughter-in-law joined the family such as with Serap, or when they moved to the city to join their husbands such as in the case of Elif, Gamze, and Zeynep. Kader moved out because Gurbet’s (the new daughter-in-law joining the family) family required that Gurbet would not share the house with the wife of another brother. Thus Kader who had been taking care of all the siblings of her husband until then moved out with her family. According to Kader, Gurbet and
her husband (the brother of Kader’s husband) refused to give them any furniture or money, or any help with other household needs, which made the transition financially very difficult for Kader’s family. This created a big fraction between the two families. Kader was particularly upset about that incident because her husband and she used up their savings to contribute to the expenses associated with Gurbet’s wedding. Interestingly, Kader’s parents-in-law did not offer any financial support either to help the family transition to a new apartment, which obliged them to borrow money from other relatives. Kader thought that since then, they could not pull themselves together financially.

Others were asked to leave by their in-laws. In the case of Nermin, her mother-in-law asked them to leave when her husband did not have work for a week. The mother-in-law said that they could not afford to have them in the house any more.

_Nermin:_ My husband didn’t work for a week, and my mother-in-law told us that we were now three people and cost too much for them to take care of us. And she asked us to leave. I was fine with it, but my husband said “No, we can’t take care of ourselves, we’d starve. And I said “I’ll be okay with everything, I just wanna leave and have some peace of mind.

Özlem and Beritan started living as a nuclear family after their husbands had a fight with their own family.

_Özlem:_ [My sisters-in-law] were holding teacups at the table, and my daughter was on my lap. [As they were fighting with each other], they spilled hot tea on my daughter’s foot….I tried to take her to the hospital while they continued to fight…. [Then] my father-in-law said “Why did you take it to a private hospital and not a state one?” The state hospital was so far away, whereas the private hospital was right next to our apartment…. We left them my husband’s ID because we couldn’t pay for the cost of the hospital. After that we moved out.

_Beritan:_ One day his sisters [who were staying with us] came home from work and didn’t give their salary to him [my husband]. Before that, they used to give their salary to my husband and he used to put all the money together and send it back to the village to his parents. So, his sisters didn’t give him the money. And when he asked why, they said they wouldn’t give it to him anymore because now he had kids and would spend it on them. Then, they started arguing. My husband
for the first time was on my side. He said “She [my wife] does everything for you, she washes your laundry by hand, she cooks, she sets the table for you, she cleans it up, she makes your beds. What else do you want? I haven’t said a word until now, but it’s not gonna be like that anymore”. So then his sisters were upset because he took my side. They argued, and his sisters moved out.

Others had to exert their agency as they could not take the agony anymore. For instance Gülcan left the house to live in one of her relatives’ house with her children when her husband left for work in another city. Fatma, Esra, Yasemin, Faraşin and Şükriye all left the house and went stay with their family until their husband or in-laws agreed to rent or buy a place separate for the couple. Şükriye who was living with her brother-in-law and his family as well as her husband’s other siblings finally left the house and said she would divorce her husband after multiple discussions of getting their own place did not yield any results. She even left her daughter behind with her husband as it is customary in the Kurdish culture.

Şükriye: I talked to my brother-in-law and proposed that one of us [either them or us] leave. I didn’t say we wanna leave. His wife had been taking care of all the single brothers for ten years, she had the right to leave. So that’s why I didn’t say I wanted to leave. I told him “Take your wife and kids, and move out. And I’ll stay and take care of my brothers-in-law”. And he wanted us to be all together. But five brothers-in-law, me and the wife of one the brothers, it was really crowded. But they said wait until you buy a house….Sometimes we [my husband and I] were having a fight, and I was telling him that we should move out and he wanted us to stay with his family. Finally, I had enough with it and came to stay with my parents. It came to a point where I considered divorce. I called him [when I was staying with my parents], and gave him his [our] daughter, and told him “We either move out or we get a divorce”. A week later he came back and said “Let’s look for a house”.

Fatma and Esra were pregnant when they decided to leave their in-laws’ house because they could not take it anymore.

Fatma: I got pregnant with my first baby right away. And I told my mother-in-law that she had promised to find a house for us and furnish it. She said she wouldn’t do it, which started an argument. Then my dad came and told her she had promised to do those things and she said no. So, I ran away.
Esra: We had a fight. Then I called my dad to come pick me up and take me back to our village. He came within a week and took me back to stay with my parents. I told my dad I hated Istanbul and wouldn’t go back until they rent a house for me [and my husband]. Then my husband’s relatives came to talk to me. I was pregnant then. I stayed with my parents for two months.

Faraşin’s husband could not afford to rent a house on his own but Faraşin could not take it anymore. In Yasemin’s case, her brother-in-law had promised Yasemin’s brother to buy an apartment for the couple when they asked for Yasemin’s hand, but kept delaying it after the wedding. Moreover, her brother-in-law’s wife gave her a hard time. Finally, she left to stay with her brother.

Faraşin: If they [my family-in-law] had treated me a bit nicely... Who would wanna leave her house leaving her children behind? They put me in a tough spot. I went to my family. They asked me why I came back. I told them I couldn’t get along with his family. My brother asked why we were not getting our own place. I told him my husband didn’t make enough money to afford renting an apartment....And my brother said “okay, you can stay”.

Yasemin: They [my brother-in-law and his family] said they would buy us an apartment. And my brother said okay. Then when we went there [after the wedding], they hadn’t bought anything. They also took from me all the gold that was given to me at the wedding. Then, we had a fight with them. My brother-in-law’s wife and I could not get along. So, I left the house and went to stay with my brother...I went to my brother and didn’t go back to them. They [my brother-in-law and his family] came to take me back but my brother didn’t let them. I stayed with my brother for about a month.

The period during which women had to live with their in-laws was painful for them. Even though not all women experienced domestic or emotional abuse by their husbands or in-laws, women were tired, tense, and unable to spend quality time with their husbands. Mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law created the highest level of stress and friction for the women. Wives of married brothers-in-law also created tension. It is likely that this was a way to establish dominance and/or make their territory for these females. While some women’s co-residence naturally ended, women took initiative to end their co-residence with their in-laws.
“Everybody has his/her own job”: Roles in the Marital Relationship

Women’s accounts show that women and men followed traditional gender roles in their marriage.

**Women and Work**

While women stayed at home and took care of their children and the household, men were responsible for providing financially for their family.

**Gurbet:** *In our family, women are housewives doing their own work, cleaning, and men bring in money. Of course, in our culture men work. They [men] say women should not work, should look after their children, and should attend to their home. They say women are the guardian of the house.*

**Lale:** *Everybody has his own job. He works outside the house, I work in the house [as a housewife]. They say ‘‘you do your own job. You’re a housewife. Of course you’ll cook, wash the dishes, and do laundry. You have to, that’s your profession, that’s your responsibility”. And men will work and make money. That’s how there will be peace [in the house]. That’s better.*

Only two men, Gülcan’s husband and Gurbet’s husband, had not been working, about which Gurbet and Gülcan expressed their discontent. Gülcan’s husband worked as a street vendor selling toys and other good until three years ago when street vending with no license was banned. He had not been working since then. Gülcan thought that her husband did not work anymore because he was illiterate and not fluent in Turkish.

**Gülcan:** *He [my husband] hasn’t been working for years. Sometimes, I tell him to work. You know [he can’t work because] he is illiterate, he doesn’t speak Turkish. I tell him to work. He says “forget it!”*

Gülcan’s husband could probably afford not working because his three children were working. Gurbet’s husband who owned a garment workshop until a few years ago (where most of siblings worked at) refused to work under somebody else after he had to sell his business. The fact that his two single brothers and one of his married brothers (Narin’s husband) who lived in the same household worked and paid for the expenses of the household made it easier for him
not to work.

Women were expected to stay at home after they married, even though most of the mothers worked before marriage. There were only three women who worked regularly in the study. Aslı worked because she was a single mother and her daughter’s father only paid for rent. Gamze started working despite her husband. Even though she knew they needed the extra income to ensure a good future for their children, her husband did not want to let her work.

When she started working, her husband had still not completely come to peace with her wife’s working.

**Gamze:** [He told me] to stay home and look after the kids. He never told me to go work. He begged me not to go to work but I said “We can’t make ends meet, our kids are still young. We are renting and the kids are going to school, we can’t manage. Let me give you a hand, let me help you out”. It was my decision. He didn’t let me but I said I would work... He didn’t say okay. But I worked anyway and he didn’t say anything.

Gamze’s account suggested that her persistence in wanting to work led her husband to give up, or at least not to say anything about it. He might also have been realistic about the necessity to have another income to support the family budget. The fact that the family came to Istanbul so that their children could go to school might also have made the option to send children to work full-time (even though their daughter worked in the summer) less desirable, hence leaving no option but for Gamze to work. It is also likely that if women pushed hard enough, like Gamze did, the husbands might yield. However, even though Gamze provided extra income for the family, she still saw her breadwinner role as secondary.

**Gamze:** Of course there are times we are running low on money when my husband doesn’t work. As much as I say I’m working, I’m a woman. What can I do? But you can’t do without a man. For instance, a man can borrow money from somewhere to take care of his family but I can’t.

Zarife’s situation was more complex. At the time of the study, she was working because
her husband was in prison. However, she also worked before that. Her husband, while he was against women working, let Zarife work because he was a gambler and needed the money. He did tell his wife not to tell anyone, especially his relatives in the neighborhood, that she worked. Unfortunately, he spent most of the money, and sometimes all of it, on gambling.

**Zarife:** My husband would tell me “Don’t let my relatives hear about it”. But when I found a cleaning job, I’d tell my husband and he’d say “don’t tell anyone [that you’re going]. If somebody comes and asks me where you went, I’ll tell them you went to your brother’s house and you do the same.” So I’d work and bring him back the money. I wouldn’t mind [giving him the money] if he spent it on us. I’d leave at eight in the morning and come back at five. I’d make 75 liras and give it all to him and he wouldn’t even give me 5 liras out of it.

Once Zarife’s husband was incarcerated, she had to work as a cleaning lady at a hotel nearby because they had no savings, and her husband’s relatives were not providing any financial assistance. As soon as her husband’s relatives found out that she was going to work a couple of days a week, Zarife was warned frequently by both men and women in the extended family that she should not work. While her husband’s brother who owned a corner store finally told her she could get food from him for free, this favor was extended not because he was concerned about his nephews and niece, but because he wanted to put an end to her going to work according to Zarife. The warnings also included threatening her to tell on her to her husband so that he could teach her a lesson when he got out. These endless rounds of criticisms and pressure left Zarife in tears each time as all she wanted was to feed her children and was sure that the offer her brother-in-law extended to her will disappear once she stopped working (Field notes, August 8th and 17th 2011).

The fact that Zarife had to leave her children (the oldest four and the youngest one-and-a-half years old) at home unattended -because none of the relatives wanted to take care of them, also stirred up reaction from neighbors living on her block (Field notes, July 23rd 2011). Both the
neighbors and the relatives’ reaction was an illustration of how the social control played a role in making sure gender roles were not violated.

**Zarife:** I’ve been working for the last three or four days. They called me from the hotel and asked me to come work. So I’ll go twice a week and get 200 liras a month. I have to leave the kids alone at home because nobody looks after them. My brother’s wife can only take care of her kids. I took my kids to my husband’s relatives, none of them accepted to look after them [my kids].

Şükriye, Özlem, and Esra worked for a short period of time after they married. Şükriye worked after they moved out from her brother-in-law’s house and got their own apartment. Her daughter was still very young at the time. She had only worked for a couple of months when her mother, who was looking after Şükriye’s daughter, told her that her daughter was a handful and that she could not take of her anymore. Thus, Şükriye had to stop working. Özlem’s husband told her that his boss was looking for someone to make and serve tea at his workplace. Özlem had been working at her husband’s workplace for a month when she found out that she was pregnant for her first child. When her husband heard about it, he asked her not to come to work anymore. Özlem had two more kids since then and never worked again.

**Özlem:** His [my husband’s] boss said he needed someone to make tea at the workplace. My husband told him that I worked as a cook and çaycı[^49]. So, his boss told him to bring me in. I said okay and went for a month. But then I found out I was pregnant. So he [my husband] changed his mind and told me not to come anymore. He said “God forbid you may fall down the stairs”. So I stopped.

Esra worked as a cleaning lady in an elementary school for a year. However, she stopped because she was tired of working and then returning home to do the house chores. She also did not want to leave her children alone even though her husband would let her if she wanted to.

**Esra:** He would [allow me to work]. He’d tell me to work but I don’t want to work. It’s hard for women to work [outside the house], then work at home too, cook etc., it’s hard for me….I can’t leave my children behind to go to work. Even if we’d be without a house for 20 years, I’m here and can keep an eye on my kids.

[^49]: Çaycı is a person whose job is to make and serve tea to people at a workplace
Ayşegül and Sevda occasionally did some beading work at home. With little pay, this meticulous work primarily came from garment workshops in the area and involved sewing beads on various garments. It was easier for women to do this type of work because they did not have to leave their children alone at home and could work on them at their convenience as long as they met the deadline. Ayşegül’s husband said he did not want her to do that kind of work because it was bad for her eyes. Similarly, Beritan who also did beading work at home for a year said her husband did not want her to continue. He went as far as throwing the garments she had beaded out of the window. For a while, Beritan did the beading after her husband went to sleep and stayed up late to finish them. Finally she gave up both because her husband did not want her to do it and because she was tired of being sleep-deprived because of it.

**Ayşegül:** For the last two-three weeks, we’ve been sewing beads to night gowns. Each piece [gown] is 5 liras, but it tires my eyes. My husband tells me “Don’t do it even though it gives you 20 liras a week. It’s bad for your eyes. You sacrifice your eyes to make 5 liras”. I wanna contribute to the household [income] too. 50 liras a week is not enough for us. [If I work] I can spend it on my kid. For instance, I worked for a week and bought myself my asthma medication and gave the hospital the 20 liras I made.

**Beritan:** Before I had my last child, I used to bring [garment] piece work to the house, beading or anything like that. And he’d get angry and say “Why do you bring these things?”....He didn’t want it. Every day he complained. He threw a couple of garment pieces out of the window along with my needles and threads....He’d say “I’m coming home and you do these [beading etc.] right in front of my eyes. I’m exhausted from work and come home and see garment pieces again 50. I don’t wanna see them.” So I was doing it [the beading] after everybody went to bed. I was giving them dinner, doing the dishes, and when he went to bed, I was doing the beading until the morning prayer, and then was going to bed. But then it was hard to get up in the morning, I was aching everywhere. I did it for a year and then stopped.

Though some women initially said that their husbands did not let them work because they wanted the women to take care of their children, when asked whether they could work when the

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50 Beritan’s husband worked in a textile workshop
children were older, they said their husbands would still not allow this. This suggests that the underlying reason for not wanting women to work is not necessarily the children that need to be taken care of.

**Gurbet:** I told my husband “My daughter is old enough, I’ll work 2-3 hours a day too for myself and my kids. At least for food for my children and the household needs.” He told me “Don’t get on my nerves. [You] won’t work. Don’t even mention it to me. You won’t work.”

**Lale:** He [my husband] says that I have kids and it’s good enough for him if I take care of my kids. He wouldn’t let me work if my kids were old or we didn’t have any either.

These women, when asked about why they thought their husbands would not let them work even when their children were older, thought that it was because “That’s the way it is where we come from, that’s our tradition”. Other women also agreed that was the main reason for why they did not work.

So when women were asked about why they thought that was the way it was, they paused to think about it, suggesting that these values are so culturally engrained that they are not always questioned. After some thought, women offered two main explanations that they thought were plausible to explain this practice. One explanation was that if married women worked, people would think that the husband was not able to fulfill his role as the breadwinner - hence the husband would be embarrassed. This would also challenge the traditional gender role of men as the breadwinner.

**Elif:** I don’t know. Now, if I work here, they’ll hear about it all the way in Mardin and say “Oh she’s working, her husband must not be working”. In our culture, it’s considered inappropriate. I mean it’s not a bad thing but women don’t work. [If they do], the news will go all the way to Mardin and they’ll say “Her husband must not be working, or he’s not making enough money. He must be no good and that’s why his wife is working”.

**Dilan:** My husband didn’t let me [work]. He said “in my book, such a thing doesn’t exist. You can’t work. A woman should stay home and do housework.”
said I would work, even my mother-in-law wanted me to work but my husband said no. He said “don’t work, people will gossip about it and say we’re making the new daughter-in-law work”. So maybe it was because of that, he was concerned about what my parents would think, like “He married our daughter and now is making her work”. Maybe it’s because of that.

**Yasemin:** Why he says no? He says “I’m working and we can manage with the money I’m making even though it’s not a lot. How can I send my wife to work? That’s out of question”. Kurdish women don’t usually work after they get married. He says “No, your dad will be angry with me. He’ll say that I don’t work and make you work….So I don’t want you to work”.... Us Kurds, if a woman works after marriage, people say “Your wife works” and I guess it hurts the man’s pride. That’s why they don’t allow women to work....Even those who don’t have kids don’t work.

Another reason women thought their husbands did not let them work was because men were concerned about their wives’ honor.

**Serap:** I don’t know, men don’t allow [their wives to work] maybe because they’re concerned that somebody [a man] will say something [inappropriate]. At the end of the day, she is a married woman working among men. If one of the men says something inappropriate, then it will hurt the husband’s pride (she laughs). I guess that’s why they don’t let their wives work, I think that’s it, no other reason.

**Aslı:** As befits the name, she is a woman. And just because she’s a woman, she can’t come home at eleven at night. They say “Why a woman would be out at eleven?” It would hurt her honor. A man comes home at 1 am, so nothing happens to his honor?

**Zarife:** My husband thinks that a woman shouldn’t go to anyone’s house or go outside. He thinks that a woman goes to someone’s house only when she needs food or did something wrong. A woman goes to someone’s house only if she is a prostitute. So he tells me “you don’t need food, you aren’t a prostitute, so you won’t go outside nor will you go to someone’s house”.

Sakine and Nermin said they agreed with that perspective that working women would be more likely to cheat on their husbands and that it was thus better for women to stay home and existing gender roles and codes of honor for women.

**Nermin:** I don’t know, it’s a sin to work among men, isn’t it? One can be tempted. People may have wrong intentions, sometimes women are not chaste, sometimes men aren’t.
Sakine: I don’t know, when women work outside the house, their attitude and behaviors change, they’re not like women anymore. They come up with these new ways, they are more likely to cheat. It’s better if a woman stays home and take care of her children and husband.

There were few mothers who thought their husbands would let them work in the same workplace as they did when their kids grew older. This suggests that some men are more concerned about their wives’ honor rather than harming their reputation as breadwinners. It is likely that working in the same workplace makes it easier for men to protect their wives (or rather their wives’ honor) and more difficult for other men to make a move towards the women.

Farasín: I can work only if my daughter is 15-16 years old and can take care of her siblings. When they’re younger, I can’t work because you leave in the morning and come back in the evening. Kids can’t take care of themselves under those circumstances. [My husband would let me work] only if we worked at the same workplace.

Özlem: He’d not allow me to work with people he doesn’t know. He said I could work only if I worked in the same place he did....I don’t know [if I work with people he doesn’t know], somebody may say something inappropriate. They may not know I’m married and say something inappropriate [of sexual content] and if my husband hears about it, it will be hard on him and it will hurt our relationship. That’s why he said if we worked together, we could both have a peace of mind.

Seda:....He doesn’t let me work because he’s jealous. He’ll never let me go among strangers, but if I work with him....The other day I said to him “this job is tiring you. When the kids get older, I’ll help you”. And he said “We’ll talk about it when the day comes insallah.”. But he will never let me work with people he doesn’t know.

Narin thought her husband would let her do beading work or other types of work they could do from home.

Narin: If I had a job I could do from home, I’d do it. He [my husband] wouldn’t say anything. Sometimes, we used to do beading or stitching buttons on garments, and he didn’t say anything. We’d do our house work and then do the other work.

Kader also thought that women would be more likely to work if they could have work they could do from home.
Kader: If there was work they could bring home and do from home, that type of job women could do.

Not all women wanted to work outside the house in any case. They thought there was already enough to do at home. There were also mothers who were happy that they did not have to work like they used to back in the village. Most women did not complain about the fact that they did not work because they also saw their primary role as being a mother and taking care of the house.

Nurbanu: For women, working is not good. I don’t know. I don’t like it. I don’t know. I don’t like it. She should be a housewife. If she works, she’ll come home and when her son asks for/wants something, she’ll say “I’m working too [so I can’t do it/ I don’t have time to do it]. She should not say that.

Şükriye: He wouldn’t object [to my working] but right now, there is no one to take care of the kids. If I only had my daughter, I could leave her with my mother and work, but I can’t do that with two kids.

Kader: Six kids, I couldn’t leave them home alone. I couldn’t go to work because my job was more important [then going to work], because I was taking care of my children. If I only had one or two, I could send them to school and go to work. But I was sending 3 kids to school, and the other 3 were staying with me at home. I couldn’t leave them at home, so I couldn’t work.

Nermin stated that her husband would not let her work because “when a man is married, it is his job to look after his wife. However, Nermin was not interested in working anyway because she thought she could not take working and taking care of the household and children at the same time.

Nermin: How are you gonna do it? You’ll take care of your children and cook, [and work]. I’m speaking for myself, I can’t do it.

In Esra’s case, even though her husband would let her work, she did not want to because she wanted to take care of the house and the children.

Esra: I can’t work, I have my kids and they’re going to school. When you have kids, you can work only if there is someone to look after the kids. [If I wanted to
work], he would [let me], but I don’t wanna work. It’s hard for women to work. It’s hard for me to work, then come home and work at home too, and cook.

Men and Household Chores

Except a few women whose husbands helped out at home, no husbands were involved with household chores. Gurbet’s husband and brothers-in-law did not help with everyday household chores. They also did not help Gurbet with heavier tasks such as moving furniture around even when they asked for help. Gurbet described an incident where her husband asked her to push the refrigerator from the kitchen to the front door of the apartment where he was standing.

Gurbet: Neither my brothers-in-law nor my husband helps me out at all. They won’t help me if I wash the rugs, or move the TV from here to there, or if I moved the whole bedroom furniture to another room. To tell you the truth, they don’t help with those things. [The other day], my husband was at the front door telling me to bring the fridge to the front door. I was in the kitchen and he was by the living room’s door. I was like what fridge are you talking about? How am I gonna bring the fridge? How am I gonna carry it? He said it had wheels and that I could just push it.

Dilan, Nurbanu, Sevda, and Zarife also emphasized that their husbands would not help them with household chores under any circumstances.

Dilan: My husband, even if he was dying of hunger, he wouldn’t go to the kitchen and get himself some food.

Nurbanu: Never! He wouldn’t even make tea vallahi.

Sevda: I would [like my husband to help], but he doesn’t help. I don’t know. Vallahi he doesn’t help, it’s out of his character.

Zarife: Who? My husband [is helping me]? I swear to God, he sits right here and if the remote is on the other couch, he calls me even when I’m all the way on the other side of the room or sweeping the stairs. He calls me and asks me to give him the remote.

Dilan contrasted Turkish men for whom it would be okay to help their wives with Kurdish men who should not. She thought that if a man helped his wife with household chores,
he would be labeled as a “light man”\textsuperscript{51} and made fun by people, showing the social pressure that is in place to conserve traditional gender roles.

\textbf{Dilan}: In our culture, a man never does a woman’s job [housework]. [Turkish] guys do. I saw a man in Güneşli\textsuperscript{52} helping his wife wash a carpet. If a man were to do that here, they’d make a fool of him. They’d call him a light man because he helped his wife.

Şükriye’s, Serap’s, and Esra’s husbands were exceptions that offered help to their wives regularly, suggesting they were more open to more egalitarian roles in marriage. Şükriye stated that her husband was the only one among his brothers to help his wife with chores as the other brothers thought it was the women’s job to take care of these types of things. Her account supported Dilan’s point of how these husbands were made fun of. In Şükriye’s husband’s case, it was his own relatives who made fun of the fact that he went grocery shopping for his wife among other things.

\textbf{Şükriye}: He helps me with everything, but his other brothers never do [help their wives]. They don’t, they say it’s the responsibility of the woman [to do the household chores]. For instance, when my husband comes to the farmers’ market with me, they find it strange. They say “It [going to the farmers’ market] is the woman’s responsibility. Why would a man do it?” Women should take care of children all day long, that’s how they think in our [my husband’s family], but my husband is different. I didn’t go to the farmers’ market this week because my son was sick. My husband told me himself to make a list of what to buy, and he went to the farmers’ market. Then when I told his side of the family that he went to the market for me, they are surprised, they’re like shocked (I laugh). They’re like “How can he go and do the shopping!”

Serap’s husband also helped her regularly. In addition to doing the grocery shopping each time she was pregnant, he always helped her putting things in place when she came from the farmers’ market. He also kept children occupied when Serap had some other things to attend to or needed to clean the house. Esra’s husband also did the grocery shopping at the farmers’

\textsuperscript{51}“Light man” is an expression that was frequently used in a Turkish TV series by a “macho” man to refer to his friend who never objected his wife, and gave in to her demands -and since was not a “real “man.

\textsuperscript{52}A neighborhood in Istanbul
market regularly. He also helped his wife with setting up the beds (as they slept on handmade floor mattresses as many other families) when she had other work she needed to do in the house. Yet, he did not get involved in cleaning the house, which Esra was happy about because she only trusted her own cleaning.

Gamze’s husband helped Gamze with simple daily tasks such as cleaning up the yer sofrası (floor table)\(^{53}\) when she had to go to work. However, she did not let him do “heavier” tasks such as laundry, cleaning because she thought those were not men’s jobs.

**Gamze:** If I have to go somewhere and the meal is still on the floor, I tell him “I have to go, I can’t do it all vallahi, please put the floor table to the kitchen after the kids are done eating”. And he does. He lives in the same house too at the end of the day. If he leaves it to me to do everything, I can’t, I’m a human being [and can’t do it all]. So it’s normal that I say “I have to go and I don’t have time to do this, can you put the floor table away?” [That’s normal] but it’s not a man’s job to do the dishes, or the laundry, or swept the house.

Fatma’s husband did not help her with household chores but looked after their children.

**Fatma:** He’s not home much, but he wouldn’t [help even if he were home more]. He’ll keep an eye on the kids [if needed] and that’s about it.

Özlem went to the farmers’ market herself but on the weekends her husband accompanied her to the supermarket or sometimes did the shopping himself. However, Özlem did not let her husband do any other household chore except when she was sick. Her husband helped her with the kids and cooked when she was sick. He occasionally helped her with cleaning up the floor table.

**Özlem:** When I was pregnant with my first child, he helped me a lot. I was sick, I had nausea so I couldn’t cook. He’d come and cook sometimes, or he’d bring takeout food. Now, sometimes he’ll clear the floor table, but I never let him do the dishes unless I’m sick. But when I get sick, he does the dishes, he takes care of the kids, puts them to bed. He helps me out.

\(^{53}\) No households ate their meals on a table and none had a dining table in their house. They continued to use the traditional floor table where they put a large piece of cloth on the floor and sat around it to eat. All the utensils and food were placed on that piece of cloth.
When Seda had her first baby, her husband brought her food and helped her with the baby. He also helped a little when she had her second baby, after which he stopped. Seda attributed the fact that her husband did not help her when she had her other two kids to his working longer hours.

*Seda*: When I had my first kid, my husband helped me a lot. He helped me when I got my second child too. He’d get up and make me some food and bring it to me. He’d take the baby clothes down from the drying rack and fold them. He helped me a lot. He helped me like a woman would. But he has changed lately. I don’t know, he works long hours, he gets tired.

Yasemin’s husband also did some chores when she was sick or was not home, but mostly he did his “job” and she did “hers”.

*Yasemin*: I don’t meddle in his business, and he doesn’t meddle in mine....If I’m sick or I’m not home, he does some stuff but I do everything myself, cooking, cleaning etc.

Interestingly, some women thought that husbands should not be helping with household chores as those were women’s jobs. Narin thought that she would want her husband to help her out at home if she also worked. However, according to her, given that she was staying home all day, it would not be right to expect her husband to help with household chores.

*Narin*: I don’t oblige my husband to do the household chores, it doesn’t suit him anyway. He already works all day long. He shouldn’t do more work when he comes home. I’m not working anyway, so I take care of my house. But if I tell him to do house work when he comes home, even though I’m not working [outside the house], that is not right. I shouldn’t say that. I’m a housewife, I can do my own work. And when he comes home, he should rest. That’s how I want it to be.

Lale endorsed the patriarchal gender role division. She stated that it was her job to stay home and take care of her house and her husband’s job to go out and work. She was clear that she would not allow her husband do household chores.

*Lale*: I won’t let my husband to do the dishes etc., and my husband doesn’t let me work outside the house....We have different responsibilities. His responsibilities
and my responsibilities are clear. He works outside the house and I work inside the house [doing house chores].

Zeynep and Elif also thought that men should not get involved in household chores. According to Zeynep, her husband would help her with anything if she wanted but she did not want him in the kitchen.

**Zeynep:** Vallahi if I ask him, he’ll help. He’ll cook, set the table, and sometimes do the dishes, but I don’t let him. I don’t like it when men are in the kitchen….They make a mess.

The relationship between men and household chores was not homogenous. Even though there were some men and women who abided by or perpetuated existing gender role divisions, other men acted against the prescribed roles by regularly or occasionally helping their wives with various household chores and child care despite social pressure not to do so.

**“A good spouse should…”: The Ideal Wife and the Ideal Husband**

When discussing what a good husband and a good wife should be like, women oscillated between the traditional and “modern” gender roles. On the one hand, women endorsed traditional gender roles, especially when talking about a good wife. On the other hand, they also introduced a more “westernized” understanding of a marital relationship when discussing the characteristics of a good/ideal husband.

**A Good Wife**

Many women talked about obeying and serving their husband (e.g. preparing his food, cleaning and ironing his clothes), and being genial to their husband, all reflecting traditional gender roles. Kader thought that if the wife was not working, she needed to do her part of the work at home. She thought that since the husband was working for her, a good wife needed to reciprocate that by making sure that her husband had all.

Lale, Şükriye, Elif, Nurbanu, Sevda, and Esra all emphasized that a good wife should
take good care of her household and her husband. Similarly, Özlem mentioned that a good wife should make her husband comfortable at the end of a long work day, starting by giving her a warm welcome and asking about his day.

**Lale:** A good wife’s responsibilities include cooking, take good care of him and cook the meals he likes, and do his ironing so that he could look good when he’s with his family.

**Şükriye:** [A good wife] should respect her husband, should make his clothes ready and help him out when he comes back from work or gets out of the shower.

**Özlem:** A good wife welcomes her husband when he comes back from work. She can either use his name or call him “sweetheart”, whatever she feels like. She’ll give him his clothes, ask if he’s hungry when he comes home. She’ll treat him nicely and ask about his day etc.

Dilan talked about how a woman should serve her husband when he returned home from work. She also criticized women who did not treat their husbands that way or talked back to their husbands when they wanted something.

**Dilan:** A good wife should welcome her husband when he comes home from work, be nice to him, say “Kolay gelsin”\(^{54}\), and bring him his food. For instance, if you say or yell “what do you want?” to him when he comes home, and then if you say “wait a bit, I’ll bring it” when he says he wants his food, that is not good. For instance, I’ll give an example from my own experience. When he comes home, I’ll bring him his meal right away while he is washing his hands. Some women aren’t like that. They treat their husbands badly. When their husbands ask for their meal, they make their husbands say it 100 times, and then they say “not now. Wait a bit, you just arrived”. It drives me crazy, how can they treat their husbands like that. And I’ve seen it [women doing that] with my own eyes.

For Dilan, it was also important for a woman to listen to her husband and not do things he did not want his wife to do. She illustrated this point by giving examples from her own relationship with her husband.

**Dilan:** If your husband doesn’t allow you, don’t go out. You’ll be a good wife if you do as he says. For example, if my husband tells me not to go out or go to so

\(^{54}\) The literal translation for “Kolay gelsin” is “May it come/be easy for you”. It is a very frequently used expression in Turkish when you see someone working or busy with something, also with the connotation that you hope for that person that he will easily finish what she is working on.
and so’s house, I won’t. If I insist on going against his will, then I’ll be bad and we’ll always fight, right? So if your husband tells you he doesn’t want you to go somewhere, you should say okay….My husband isn’t like that, but he asked me to stay home and not go out and sit with other women, I’d do what he wanted so that our relationship didn’t suffer.

Other women, including Gurbet, Fatma, and Yasemin also emphasized the importance of respecting and obeying one’s husband as well doing her best to get along with him.

**Gurbet:** Of course I’ll be loyal to my husband. I’ll do whatever he says. I won’t yell or raise my voice to him. I’ll protect my honor. Whatever he says, I won’t say I won’t do it. I’ll get along with him.

**Fatma:** You have to not disobey your husband, not do the things he doesn’t like [approve]. You’ll do your best to get along with him.

**Yasemin:** For instance, when your husband comes home at night, you’ll prepare his dinner and make him some tea. Then, you’ll show him respect. If a friend of his comes visit him, you’ll be respectful to your husband when he’s there. That’s what makes a good wife.

Some women also mentioned that women showing love and respect to their husband will reciprocate the same from the husband.

**Kader:** Your husband will love and respect you as much as you respect him. Respect is very important [in a marriage].

**Narin:** It should be reciprocal and not one-sided. The husband should treat his wife like she treats him and vice versa. That’s how I want it to be.

**Aslı:** Both in terms of sex and loyalty to the husband, if a woman has those, the man won’t neglect her.

Nermin thought that a good wife should not only respect her husband but also her husband’s relatives. She thought this was key to the husband treating his wife well too.

**Nermin:** [A good wife] should treat her husband well, should love and show respect to him. She shouldn’t answer back to her parents-in-law, should visit her sisters- and brothers-in-law. That’s how she should be….If she treats his family badly, her husband will treat her badly in return.

Narin had a similar perspective. She thought that a good wife should be nice to her
husband’s relatives and friends and be a very good host when they come to visit. This, she thought, would make the woman’s husband very proud of her.

Narin: She should treat him and his relatives and friends well. For instance, if a guest of his comes, his wife should treat her nicely. And when the guest compliments on her hospitality to her husband afterwards, the husband will be happy and proud of his wife.

Faraşin said that she would do all the chores her husband needed her to do, and love and respect him as long as her husband was also nice to her.

Faraşin: I think if a husband is nice to his wife...I want everything to be reciprocal. If my husband is nice to me, I’ll cook him his dinner, say “Welcome home”, massage his body, iron his clothes, and show him love and respect.

Ayşegül said that in addition to being loyal to her husband and taking care of the household and her husband, a woman should never talk about problems at home with anybody as she thought this would not help the situation but aggravate it.

Ayşegül: She should not talk about her problems at home with other people because that ultimately leads to a fight or something. So, it’s not good. Personally, I never mention my problems with my husband to anyone. What good would that do? They can’t fix them. But if I don’t talk about it to other people, it will gradually be okay.

Both Gamze and Özlem thought a woman should ask her husband for permission when she wanted to go visit a neighbor a relative. Özlem thought that her husband was the head of the family and needed her respect, hence she asked him for his permission. Gamze said she did not like women going to places all the time. She also thought a husband needed to know where his wife was going for practical reasons, such as in the case something happened to her.

Özlem: I can’t just tell him I’m going. I ask him whether I can go or not. I ask for his opinion. At the end of the day, he’s the head of the family, I show him respect.

Gamze: If I come visit you, I’ll ask my husband “I’m going to this neighbor, will you allow me?” That’s how I like it to be done. I don’t like it when women are here and there all day long. Let’s say I went to a neighbor and something
happened to me. How will my husband know I’m there [if I don’t let him know in advance]? That’s how I like to do it.

Even though Dilan did not explicitly say that a woman needed to ask for permission to go places, her account suggested that she did ask her husband or at least let him know when she wanted to go somewhere. Contrasting her experience to other women, she said her husband always let her go where she wanted to.

As illustrated by their accounts, women mostly endorsed traditional gender roles in describing a good/ideal wife.

A Good Husband

When defining a “good” husband, women emphasized qualities such as being loyal to his family, and also providing for the family, qualities mostly associated with patriarchal gender roles for men.

*Fatma*: A husband should love his wife and kids, work and do everything he can. He shouldn’t be lazy and sit back, right?

*Özlem*: He should be nice to his wife and children. He should be loyal to his family. If he cheats on me or is interested in other women, I call him a bad husband.

*Züleyha*: He doesn’t make us be dependent on others, he doesn’t make me work. He doesn’t beat my children. He doesn’t smoke, he doesn’t give his money away to others. He doesn’t cheat. He’s loyal to me and his children. So I don’t complain.

Similar to Züleyha, women thought that a good husband should also not abuse his wife either physically or emotionally. Esra thought that in addition to taking care of his family financially, a husband should not beat his wife not just for the wife’s sake, but also not to set a bad example for his children.

*Esra*: He should work and bring money home. We see it on TV that men beat or kill their wives. Thank God, I haven’t seen anything like that with him. I haven’t
seen anything like that so far. If a man beats his wife in front of the children, they learn it too. They are both scared by it, but they also learn it.

Zarife also thought that there should be no physical violence. Yet, she thought there could be instances where the wife deserved to be beaten. In that case, she thought the husband should first hear the wife’s version of the story and decide.

**Zarife:** First of all, he shouldn’t beat his wife. Okay, he can beat me or be angry with me if I made a mistake. But he should ask me why I did it before that. I’ve seen it both in my own family and with my husband. They execute without listening first and start the beating. For instance, I dropped this vase, did I do it deliberately or was it an accident? Or maybe somebody else broke it and I just walked in. At least listen and find out what happened, then say whatever you have to say.

Some women, such as Narin, Dilan, and Nermin also thought that men should not be belittling or hurting the wife’s pride by criticizing her in front of other people. While Dilan appreciated that her husband never criticized her in front of people, Narin expressed her discontent with her husband’s habit to reprimand her when there were other people around.

**Dilan:** For instance, if I make a mistake, let’s say I blurt something out when we have guests, he asks me why I said those things only after they leave. He’ll never say anything to me when there are people in the room. He’ll tell me “Why did you say those things? It’s inappropriate. Don’t say it again”. I like that he doesn’t say anything to me or hurt my feelings when there are other people….He’s considerate man, he’s never hurt my feelings with other people around.

**Narin:** He gets angry all of a sudden and yells me to get up [to do this or that] when there are other people in the room, but it shouldn’t be like that. He shouldn’t be behaving like that when we have a guest or a relative with us. Once they leave, he can tell me what he wants. Instead, if I’m outside with the neighbors, he’ll say “What are you doing here! Go home!” It shouldn’t be like that. Tell me after I come home that you don’t want me to be outside and I won’t.

**Nermin:** He doesn’t recognize anyone when he gets angry, not even his own father. He can disgrace me in the middle of a whole crowd. Sometimes I tell him he can do anything to me including beating and breaking my head if I made a mistake, but only after we come back home, not among other people. But he doesn’t understand.

Women also appreciated that their husbands did not interfere with what they bought for
themselves or for the house, or where they went during the day.

**Dilan**: He doesn’t interfere with what I wear or where I go or what I do. Some husbands do interfere but mine doesn’t. He tells me “As long as you take care of my kids, you can do whatever you want”.

**Elif**: My husband is good. Some husbands keep questioning their wives about where they went or what they did, but mine isn’t like that. He doesn’t say anything if I go somewhere or if there isn’t dinner at home. He doesn’t say anything. Kader knows, he won’t say a thing if I am here on the street talking all day. And no beating either. So my husband is good.

**Yasemin**: There are husbands who meddle/interfere with everything, they say “don’t do this, don’t do that”. I don’t like that, I don’t want that. Thank God my husband doesn’t have habits like that.

Women also wanted a more egalitarian and affectionate marriage, concepts that are usually associated with a more “westernized” understanding of marriage. For instance, some women wanted to be listened more when it came to making decisions. Kader complained about the fact that her husband did not listen to her opinion when it came to certain things. Kader’s husband always wanted to have the last word, whereas Kader wanted her opinions and wishes to be honored too.

**Kader**: I like some of his characteristics and don’t like others. He wants everything to be his way. He says he’s the head of the family (chuckles), I don’t like that. I say everything should be equal. If I say something, he should agree, and when he says something I should agree. We should decide together. He makes all the decisions himself. He asks [me my opinion], but he does it his way afterwards.

Gurbet and Narin who were also sitting with us during that part of the interview eagerly commented that they experienced the same problems. Gurbet attributed this to their husbands being brothers and hence sharing the same genes.

**Gurbet**: We have the same fate (we all laugh) because they’re brothers, you know. If they say don’t talk, we can’t talk. It has to be their way. They never listen to us, they never agree with what we say. Like I said, we have the same fate (we laugh). We have the same problems.
Özge: Is that so Narin Abla\textsuperscript{55}?  
Narin: Yes (we all laugh), it’s worse, mine [my husband] is even worse.  

Narin elaborated further on this in her own interview. While she appreciated that her husband took good care of her and her children, she was not happy about the fact that he always wanted things to be his way.  

\textbf{Narin}: He always does what \textbf{HE} (emphasizes) wants to do. He takes care of his kids and gives me what I want, but I don’t like this habit of his. We always do it his way, never my way.....So even though he says okay to me, he goes on and does the way he wants to do (she laughs). He doesn’t listen to me.  

Yasemin criticized husbands like that and thought that men and women should be equal when it came to making decisions.  

\textbf{Yasemin}: There are some men who say “I’m the head of this family, we’ll do as I say”. That’s not nice. At the end of the day, it doesn’t matter whether you’re a man or a woman. You call him/her my spouse. At the end of the day, you’re each other’s spouse, so you’re equal\textsuperscript{56}.  

Similarly, they wanted their husbands to show more affection, take them out, and spend more time with them. Not only did the women want their husbands to ask them about their day, they also wanted their husbands to talk about how their own day went.  

\textbf{Sevda}: I went to the park the other day and saw that man helping out his wife. They ate and drank together, and went home together. I wish my husband was like that, coming to places with me and spent time with me and the kids. He doesn’t tell me about his day. I tell him everything, he doesn’t tell me anything.  

\textbf{Kader}: When my husband comes home, he wants us all out of the living room. He says “Go somewhere else! I will watch TV in this room by myself. Don’t come near me, don’t talk in this room”. I go to other people’s houses and see that women converse with their husbands and sip their teas together. I really envy that.  

\textsuperscript{55} In Turkish “Abla” means older sister. We use it in everyday language after someone’s name when we refer to or speak with someone older than us, but relatively close in age. Abla conveys a certain level of respect for the person’s older age, but also a level of intimacy.  
\textsuperscript{56} In Turkish, “\textit{eş}” means both “spouse” and “same/identical”. “Eşit” means equal. They come from the same origin. So, she does play with words to make her point.
Nermin: I tell him not to go to the coffee house, he tells me “It’s none of your business. I don’t spend any money there”. And I say “Okay, but stay home with your kids. Show them some affection. Let’s chat together”. But no, he doesn’t sit at home. He comes from work, barely spends an hour at home, eats his dinner, and goes to the coffee house. He doesn’t have an hour to spare us. Sometimes, I say “Let’s go to the park or to the picnic. Let’s chat”. But he says no.

Beritan and Gülcans wanted the husbands to be romantic and remember the special days with a gift.

Beritan: For example, some men show their affection. They buy gifts for their wives on special days. I mean, I can buy that stuff myself too, but I don’t know, I appreciate those kinds of gestures. My husband has never done anything like that for me. So I do say “I wish [he had given me presents like that]”.

Gülcans: I want him to take me to places, to love me, to get me presents. I want him to be romantic, and call me “My dear wife” or “My sweetheart”.

Gülcan continued to say that her husband bought her a pair of gold earrings recently, and complimented on her when she looked nice, which she appreciated.

This section illustrated the wide range of women’s perceptions of and expectations from a good wife and a good husband. Women’s accounts also portrayed their experiences of marital relationships with their husbands varied. Both women’s experiences with their husbands and their descriptions of good husbands/wives showed characteristics of traditional and more “westernized” gender roles.

Discussion

This chapter looked at how gender roles and ideologies affected women’s experiences with marriage as well as how women’s perspectives and attitudes in turn have challenged or reinforced gender roles in marriage. As suggested in the literature (Ertem & Koçtürk, 2008; Ilkkaracan & Women for Women’s Human Rights, 1998), women’s marriage patterns showed that arranged marriage was the preferred type of marriage in the community. The most recent marriages in the community, including those of Fehime’s daughter, Gülistan’s son, and a friend
of Kader’s daughters, also occurred through arranged marriages.

In their qualitative study with Kurdish migrant women in Istanbul, Çağlayan et al. (2011) observed a move towards more voluntary marriages. While women older than 40 years of age had arranged marriages in their study, for younger generations, their consent was at least taken before they were married. Participants in Çağlayan et al.’s study said it was more that the times changed rather than leading to more voluntary marriages. The marriage patterns among women in Tarlabası were mixed. While older women in the study were more likely to be married through arranged marriages, love marriages were mostly seen among younger women. Yet, arranged marriages continued to be widely practiced. Religious marriage was also practiced in the community. Though usually followed by civil marriage, there were also cases where civil marriage had never taken place. Considering the attachment to traditions and the importance of religion in the Kurdish community, this finding was not surprising.

Whether women were asked their opinion about marriage or about what their response (e.g., silence, reluctance, and resistance) meant varied across women. Some women actively resisted being forced into a marriage, whereas others did not. In some cases, women’s reluctance to marry was respected. In other cases, women were given away anyway or were convinced by parents and relatives that this was a good catch. Women’s silence was interpreted as consent. However, silence did not always mean that women really wanted the marriage. As illustrated by women’s accounts, in some cases, women chose to remain silent to get out of a situation or out of respect for their parents. Mothers’ narratives and the field notes suggested that some men were also caught in a similar web. In other words, when it came to make decisions about who children would marry, parents’ status as elderly sometimes had more decision-making power regardless of the gender of their children. However, it is possible that even though men are not actively
engaged in the search process for a spouse, parents will be more likely to listen if their sons objected to the arrangement at any point during the process.

As described in other studies (Akbay, 2003; Çağlayan et al., 2011), co-residence with parents- or married brothers-in-law was common. The majority of women had experienced living with their in-laws after they were married. The duration of this stay varied from woman to woman, yet it was unanimously described as a difficult and sometimes physically and emotionally abusive process. The co-residence with in-laws exerted significant levels of patriarchal control for newly married women as also pointed out in the literature (Çağlayan et al., 2011; Yalcin-Heckmann, 2002; cited in Çağlayan 2007). The mothers-in-law had the highest hierarchy, followed by their own daughters. More “seasoned” daughters-in-law also had more power relative to new daughters-in-law. Women in the study reported that they worked all day to do house chores, usually with not much help from other female members of the family-in-law. Not only were they physically exhausted from the work, but their co-residence took an emotional toll on them and their relationship with their husbands. As also reported by Akbay (2003) and Çağlayan et al. (2011), women reported that they were constantly scrutinized and criticized for the things they did (or did not) and/or said (or did not say) by their in-laws. Similar to Çağlayan et al.’s findings, women in the study also reported instances of physical abuse from their in-laws or from their husbands as a result of the provocations of the in-laws. Interestingly, most of the emotional abuse and pressure came from the female members of the family, including more “seasoned” daughters-in-law. Considering mothers-in-law and the wives of brothers-in-law had potentially been subject to the same level of aggression when they stayed with their own parents-in-law, it is interesting to see that they would want to create the same dynamic. As suggested earlier, this could be to mark their territory and make the new daughter-in-law know where she
should stand within the hierarchy of the husband’s family.

Women’s accounts suggested that in-laws used women as “man power” to do household and/or agricultural chores and benefited from their husbands’ financial contributions. Many women noted that the money their husbands made directly went to their parents-in-law or the most senior brother-in-law in the family if there were no parents-in-law. Husbands’ reluctance or inability to stand up against their own family or to protect their wives potentially stemmed from the hierarchy in the family and men’s financial dependence on their family as also noted by Akbay (2003). The family-in-law also put in a mechanism that blamed and humiliated the men for siding with his wife and acting against his “own” blood. This social pressure also made it difficult for men to confront their families. While some women yielded to this power battle and waited for the natural course of the things to move out, other women fiercely resisted to staying with their in-laws and went as far as leaving the house and threatening their husbands with a divorce. This usually ended in women convincing their in-laws and their husbands to get them a place, even though the in-laws did not always provide the financial support they normally could afford.

The households followed pretty traditional gender role divisions. Women conformed to the traditional gender roles which prescribed them to stay at home and take care of the household and the children while men worked outside the house as “breadwinners” (Akbay, 2003; Gündüz Hoşgör & Smits, 2008). Women said they did not work because their husbands did not allow them and that was the way it was in their culture. Even though mothers primarily thought that it was because their husbands wanted them to take care of their children, a closer look revealed that men did not want their wives to work primarily because they were concerned that people would think they could not provide for their family. Men were also concerned that their wives could be
subject to inappropriate behaviors from male strangers and that their honor would be damaged. There were few women who wanted to work but they said their primary duty was to their children and that they could not leave them alone at home. Other women were happy that they did not work because they thought there was already enough to do at home. Men also followed traditional gender roles. Except men in some younger couples, men did not help their wives with household chores. Most of the women justified their husbands’ lack of contribution in housework by cultural expectations (Akbay, 2003) and reinforced these expectations by saying they did not want their husbands to be involved in household chores. Social control by relatives and other community members also made sure that these gender roles were strictly adhered to.

Women’s oscillation between traditional and “modern” gender roles became most apparent in their discussions of a good wife and a good husband. Similar to Akbay’s (2003) findings, women’s description of a good wife reflected mostly traditional gender roles, such as taking care of children, respecting the husband and his family, cooking for and serving for the husbands. The expression of affection on women’s part was less pronounced. The description of a good husband, on the other hand, reflected a more “westernized” expectation from a husband. This expectation was a result of women’s shifting conceptualization of marriage towards a more “modern” one with emotional satisfaction and intimacy and where the wife was treated as an equal. This shift towards a more modern understanding of marriage may be due to the influence of mass media that portrays the companionate, egalitarian Western view of marriage as well as the influence of women’s exposure to love marriages in their community (Hortaçsu, 2007).

Similar to the literature (Hortaçsu & Oral, 1994; Hortaçsu, 2007), women in arranged marriages reported having a less intimate spousal relationship and fewer interactions with their husbands, yet wanted this to change. Hence, while women still expected their husbands to have
traditional gender roles such as providing for and protecting the family, they also wanted more overt expressions of affection from their husband. Contrary to Akbay’s findings that suggested that only women who had love marriages wanted or expected an emotional connection with their husband, women in arranged marriages also wanted their husbands to listen to them more, show them more affection, and spend more time with them. Considering the fact that women pointed to the reciprocity of love and respect in a marital relationship, it is likely that if men are emotionally more available to their wives, women will also be more comfortable showing affection to their husbands.

In short, while women abided by and reinforced some aspects of patriarchal gender roles, they avidly resisted others. Their effort to juggle the traditional and the ‘modern’ illustrates the notion of ‘patriarchal bargain’ put forward by Kandiyoti (1988). Kurdish women made the gender ideologies and their practice fluid and negotiable by resisting certain aspects.
Table 4. Marriage patterns in the community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marriage age</th>
<th>Type of marriage</th>
<th>Relation to spouse</th>
<th>History of living with in-laws</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kader</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Eloped with her cousin</td>
<td>Relative (son of her aunt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>First lived with parents-in-law (husband away), then with brothers-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurbet</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Arranged</td>
<td>Relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Still lives with her married and single brothers-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narin</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Arranged</td>
<td>Non relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Still lives with her married and single brothers-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatma</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Arranged</td>
<td>Relative, son of her aunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lived with her parents-in-law (husband together)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lale</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>22-23</td>
<td>Love marriage</td>
<td>Non relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Never lived with in-laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Şükrüye</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Love marriage</td>
<td>Relative (son of her aunt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lived with her married and single brothers-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elif</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Arranged</td>
<td>Non relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lived with married brother-in-law and his family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dilan</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Arranged</td>
<td>Non relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lived with married and single brothers-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serap</td>
<td>27 (33 on ID)</td>
<td>22-23</td>
<td>Love marriage</td>
<td>Relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lived with parents-in-law (husband together)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurbanu</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>15-16</td>
<td>Arranged</td>
<td>Non relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lived with parents-in-law (husband away), then with sister-in-law and her family in the same building</td>
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<tr>
<td>Özlem</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20-21</td>
<td>Arranged</td>
<td>Non relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lived with parents-in-law (husband together)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sevda</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Arranged</td>
<td>Non relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lived with parents-in-law (husband away)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gülistan</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Bride exchange</td>
<td>Non relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lived with parents-in-law (husband away)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aslı</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Arranged</td>
<td>Non relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Never lived with in-laws</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
<th>Marriage Type</th>
<th>Family Status</th>
<th>Where Lived</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Esra</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Arranged</td>
<td>Non relative</td>
<td>Lived with parents-in-law (husband together)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zarife</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1st marriage at 20, 2nd marriage at 22</td>
<td>Arranged</td>
<td>Non relative</td>
<td>Lived with parents-in-law (husband together)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gülcan</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Arranged</td>
<td>Non relative (same village)</td>
<td>Lived with parents-in-law (husband away)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seda</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Eloped with a man (as she did not feel wanted in her brother’s house)</td>
<td>Non relative</td>
<td>Lived with married and single brothers-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yasemin</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15-16</td>
<td>Love marriage</td>
<td>Non relative</td>
<td>Lived with married and single brothers-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nermin</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20-21</td>
<td>Arranged</td>
<td>Non relative (not same village not neighbor)</td>
<td>Lived with parents-in-law (husband together)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beritan</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Bride exchange</td>
<td>Non relative</td>
<td>Lived with parents-in-law (husband away first), then with brothers- and sisters-in-law as well as the father-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeynep</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>12-13</td>
<td>Arranged</td>
<td>Married the son of her adoptive parents</td>
<td>Lived with parents-in-law (husband together)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakine</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17-18</td>
<td>Arranged</td>
<td>Non relative</td>
<td>Lived with parents-in-law (husband away)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamze</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Arranged</td>
<td>Non relative</td>
<td>Lived with parents-in-law (husband away)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayşegül</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Arranged</td>
<td>Non relative</td>
<td>Never lived with in-laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Züleyha</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Arranged</td>
<td>Relative (her uncle’s son)</td>
<td>Her husband’s young brother and sister stayed with them because their parents were not alive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faraşin</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Love marriage</td>
<td>Relative (her mother’s cousin)</td>
<td>Lived with her parents-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebru</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>14-15</td>
<td>Arranged</td>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>Lived with her parents-in-law</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

Özge: Is there anything I haven’t asked that you’d like to share?
Zarife: No, you asked me everything. I’ve learned so much from this interview. There were so many things that I didn’t know and that I learned, so many things about my own thoughts. I found out about my thoughts about myself and people around me that I haven’t thought before. I didn’t know I had so many thoughts [in my mind]. I thought you’d only ask me a few things. Yet, you uncovered me. I really didn’t know what I thought and felt about my future. You uncovered things I’ve never thought about. You got me out of my shell.

This study explored low-income Kurdish migrant women’s lives and their meaning-making of their experiences in the inner-city neighborhood of Tarlabası. Situating women in their larger social, cultural, and historical contexts, I have portrayed and “analyzed” different facets of their lives, primarily by focusing on migration, inner-city life, poverty, parental attitudes, and gender. In so doing, I have sought to centralize Kurdish women’s voices and agency. While highlighting the uniqueness of Kurdish women’s individual experiences and meaning making, I also have identified shared perspectives, struggles, and coping strategies among Kurdish women who participated in the study and have drawn parallels to the experiences of other Kurdish migrant communities as well as other populations that share similar characteristics.

In this final chapter, I revisit the key findings of my study in relation to the larger ecological framework and research questions that I laid out in the Introduction. Following the discussion of my findings, I address the implications of my study for policy and practice, the strengths and limitations of the study, and future directions for research.

A Closer Look into Kurdish Women’s Ecosystem and Its Impact on Their Lives

In order to provide a holistic understanding of their lives, the study situation the low-income Kurdish migrant women within the multiple contexts they were embedded in, ranging
from the family, the smallest and closest context for women, to most “distant” macro-level contexts such as the historical, political, and cultural contexts. Regardless of their “distance” to individual women, all these contexts had an immediate impact on women’s lives and posed various challenges for women and their families. However, within these contexts and at every point, Kurdish women also actively resisted or coped to varying degrees with the challenges they encountered in their lives.

In this section, I summarize the various factors in Kurdish women’s lives that challenge women and their families. As I look into the macro-, mezzo-, and micro-level contexts of Kurdish women’s lives, I seek to underline the interaction among these contexts and to highlight women’s agency and resilience through the strategies women have aptly developed to cope with the challenges they and their families encounter.

**Politico-Historical Context of Kurdish Women’s Macrosystem**

The politico-historical context of Kurds in Turkey has affected many Kurdish women and their families at the most intimate level where they witnessed firsthand the violence inflicted by the armed conflict in their hometown in the southeast of Turkey on a daily basis. While some families were evacuated from their homes, others “chose” to migrate from their hometown because they were concerned about their safety. Unemployment in the area and the poverty that resulted from this politico-historical context, more specifically from the combination of devaluation of agricultural activities due to neoliberal practices, underinvestment in the area, and increasing levels of threat to one’s safety due to armed conflict became a structural factor that also led many families to migrate to cities, especially in the west, for better work opportunities. Kurdish women either joined their husbands who were already working in the city right away after the wedding or after they stayed back with their in-laws for
varying periods of time.

As the migration of Kurds bears similarities to transnational migration of other ethnic groups studied in the literature, Grabolle Çeliker (2013) conceptualized Kurdish migration as “translocational”. Kurdish women and their families not only moved from a rural to urban life, they also underwent a linguistic shift where they needed to speak Turkish in order to get around in the city. The fact that many other Kurdish families settled in the same areas mirrored the congregation of transnational migrants in the same areas of the host country. Women who came to the city as a result of the armed conflict or the unemployment in their hometowns faced various struggles in the city when they first arrived. These included feelings of loneliness, limited mobility in the city, and poverty. This study suggests that while feelings of loneliness and limited mobility gradually decreased, poverty continues to be a structural force that limits the lives of many Kurdish families living in Tarlabası.

While Kurdish women could not take any action that would directly impact the politico-historical context, they developed strategies to deal with the consequences of migration that resulted from the armed conflict and the unemployment in their hometowns. Women’s repertoire of coping strategies included individual (e.g. learning Turkish, applying to financial assistance) and collective strategies (e.g. reliance on neighbors/relatives, in-kind support), showing their resourcefulness in using their human and social capital. The strategies women developed to cope with the challenges of the aftermath of migration points to the agency and strength of Kurdish women.

**Patriarchal Gender Context of Kurdish Women’s Macrosystem**

Another critical macro-level context for Kurdish women in the study was the cultural context, specifically in relation to gender and gender roles prescribed to men and women in the
Kurdish culture. Kurdish culture, like many other cultures in the Middle East including Turkey, is a patriarchal one that prescribes well-defined and separate roles for and expectations from men and women. As a structural force, gender also shapes the opportunities and choices available to men and women. Gender roles and expectations were played out and reinforced in women’s immediate mezzo-level contexts of family and community, with direct impact on Kurdish women’s lives. In this study, I looked at how traditional/patriarchal gender roles affected women’s marriage decisions, living arrangements after marriage, husbands’ and wives’ roles in the family, and finally Kurdish women’s perceptions of an ideal wife and husband.

Women’s narratives suggest that their lives and their perceptions of gender and gender roles were deeply shaped by patriarchal gender roles and expectations. Most women had arranged marriages with varying degrees of say in the marriage decision. Almost all women lived with their parents-in-law and/or other members of their husbands’ families and depicted various emotional and physical difficulties this traditional living arrangement created for them. The study showed that female members of the husbands’ families exerted significant levels of emotional and physical pressure on Kurdish women to establish a power hierarchy over the bride and likely to render her submissive. This practice showed that women could play a critical role in creating an oppressive environment for other women. Whether women who participated in this study will be able to break the cycle of this practice based on their lived experiences with their in-laws, and hence how they will approach their own daughters-in-law remain to be seen.

Kurdish women’s descriptions of the roles that wives and husbands should have in the family mostly mirrored traditional gender roles, and showed that the patriarchal understanding of gender was also perpetuated by women themselves. In their accounts, women talked about how their communities back home and in Tarlabası reinforced adherence to the patriarchal
gender roles through gossip or open criticism of those who deviated. Thus, family and community/neighborhood as mezzo-level contexts played the dual role of providing the contexts where larger cultural practices of gender were executed and of functioning as contexts that also reinforced these practices.

Kurdish women asserted varying levels of resistance to the patriarchal gender system that affected their lives. For instance, only a few women showed resistance to the arranged marriage decisions that their elders made on their behalfs. However, it should also be noted that at times men were also forced into marriages they did not want by their elders as well. This suggests that the gender system is further complicated by the hierarchy of power between the older and younger generations. In other words, both men and women (though women more often than men) had to surrender to their elderly when it came to certain issues.

Women’s reactions to their co-residence with their in-laws also varied. While most women complained about this living arrangement, a few actively resisted it. Their resistance usually took the form of leaving or threatening to leave their in-laws’ home until they were able to move out to get their own place (rent or buy) at times without any financial support from their husbands’ families. Women’s narratives revealed that both men and women followed and supported the traditional gender roles in the family. Yet, many women also voiced their wish to have a more emotional connection and spend more quality time with their husbands, reflecting a more “westernized” expectation from marriage. Taken together, Kurdish women’s stance on gender and gender roles illustrates an attempt to reconcile a more traditional understanding of gender and gender roles in marriage with a more “modern” one, showing that women engage in a selective “patriarchal bargain”. Hence, while women’s resistance to the patriarchal gender roles and expectations should not be romanticized, it should be recognized as a potential source
to build upon for women’s empowerment.

If women pass these “ideologies” down to their children, daughters and sons, this gradual shift in expectations in the marriage – even though not necessarily in practice at this time - will potentially lead to changes in the dynamics of marriage, at least in future generations. These ideologies could lead to more “love” marriages in the community and more egalitarian relationships in marriage in the future. For that, it will also be critical to explore and understand the beliefs and attitudes of children/adolescents in Kurdish migrant families in the community.

**Neighborhood as the Mezzo-Level Context of Kurdish Women’s Lives**

Tarlabası, a neighborhood marked by criminal activities and informal employment, was home to many low-income Kurdish migrant families and provided the environment where women and their children spent most of their time during the day, given that the majority of the women did not work. As poverty continued to be a persistent structural force that impinged upon Kurdish migrant families, they had no means to move out of the inner-city neighborhood. Tarlabası became both a risk and a protective factor for Kurdish families.

The fact that the Kurdish community gradually grew in the neighborhood provided a sense of comfort and safety for Kurdish women. Women believed that being surrounded by one’s “own” people allowed a sense of solidarity and helped better understand each other, even though there was tension at times among neighbors. Many women expressed that neighbors were like their fictive kin and provided the emotional and practical support they longed in the city.

At the same time, Tarlabası was also a risk factor for its residents, especially children. Tarlabası’s inner-city characteristics posed an immediate concern for Kurdish mothers,
especially when it came to their children’s safety. While the relationship of Kurdish women and their families with the gangs of drug dealers and thieves in their community was more complex, and, at times, more positive than one would expect, Kurdish mothers were always worried that their children could be lured in or hurt by the gangs. Moreover, the lack of parks and playgrounds in the neighborhood pushed children to play on the street, which increased their exposure to danger, especially when traffic is taken into consideration. Women were also concerned that their children could be snatched away by strangers while playing on the street as the city itself was a dangerous place. The two institutions that were mainly targeted to serve the Tarlabası community had varying degrees of success. While the Youth Center was older and reached out to a larger number of children in the study, the policy on age they had in place left out younger children. The more recently established Tarlabası Community Center was known and used to a lesser extent among women in the study. One can speculate that its limited use by the women in the study may be due its being relatively new in the community, insufficient outreach efforts, or lack of financial or in-kind benefits associated with attending the center (as opposed to the Youth Center). The facts that classes were held only once or twice a week and that children did not find the classes helpful were also mentioned as problematic by Narin and Dilan. While women in the study mainly expected academic gains -and some financial/in-kind benefit from the Youth Center- from these institutions, the time children spent in these institutions exposed them to other good adult role-models and decreased the time they would otherwise spend playing on the streets of Tarlabası.

Kurdish women’s agency came to the fore as they developed multiple strategies to protect themselves and their children from the dangers of living in an inner-city neighborhood. Most women stayed away from the gangs in Tarlabası and did not interfere in their “business”
in order not to get in trouble with them. They also used numerous strategies to keep their children safe. These strategies relied both on women’s individual skills and on their skills to maintain a good relationship with their neighbors. In addition to personally supervising their children, warning them to stay away from trouble, putting a curfew on the time their children could play outside, Kurdish women heavily relied on their neighbors to keep their children safe. This collective supervision and protection of children proved to be a very effective strategy at times when Kurdish mothers could not attend to their children. Though used by many parents across socioeconomic groups, these strategies are especially critical and yet difficult to achieve in an inner-city environment.

**Parental Ethnotheories on Child Labor in Kurdish Women’s Microsystem**

Turkey was among the first six countries to join International Labor Organization’s (ILO) International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labor in 1992 (ILO, 2009b). In 1995, Turkey also ratified the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Akşit et al., 2001), followed by the ILO Minimum Age Convention in 1998, thereby increasing the minimum age of employment to 15 years (ILO, 2009b). Yet, there continues to be children who start working at a young age in Turkey. According to the literature, poverty is the main reason for child labor (e.g. Blunch & Verner, 2000; Dayıoğlu & Assaad, 2003; Strulik, 2008; Yılmaz, 2004). Work shifts the role of children/adolescents from being a dependent child to that of a “junior” adult that helps poor families stabilize their budget (Newman, 1996). As children/adolescents are placed in jobs mostly in the informal sector, their prospects in investing in their human capital to move up the ladder of social mobility are compromised.

Children of low-income Kurdish migrant communities are at-risk for child labor due to the levels of poverty these families experience in the city (Altuntas, 2003; Karatay, 2000;
Yıldız, 2007). Little is known however, about how families think of child labor and make decisions “behind the closed doors”. Thus, in this study I explored women’s thoughts and attitudes about child labor. My main argument was that parental ethnotheories on children and child labor affected the decisions they made on sending their children to work.

While poverty presented as the reason for child labor, the findings from this study suggested a more complex picture for why children started working at an early age. Kurdish women’s attitudes and beliefs about child labor were influenced by both external factors as well as their beliefs about how to raise a hardworking and disciplined child. Even though mothers did not make any direct reference to the fact that they also worked when they were younger, it is likely that this might have contributed to their being open to the idea of their children working. For many women, their family’s financial situation was the main reason why they sent (or would consider sending) their children to work. Yet, they also mentioned other reasons that policymakers and practitioners should take into consideration while addressing child labor in the community.

One of the factors Kurdish women in Tarlabası most often took into account, after financial situation, was that they wanted to protect their children from the dangers of the inner-city. They thought that any time their children spent in the neighborhood doing “nothing” increased the risk that they would get in trouble, especially during the summer when the school was off or if their children did not attend school beyond the mandatory schooling of eight years. Thus, in women’s eyes, sending their children to work was a way to keep them away from mingling with the wrong crowd. Some mothers also thought that if their children started working at an early age, they would be more hardworking, responsible, and disciplined. According to them having a job and earning money would teach them about taking care of a
household and show them how difficult and valuable earning money was.

However, there were also mothers who thought quite the contrary and were thus against sending their children to work. These mothers saw it as the parents’ responsibility to take care of their children and hence perceived child labor as adultification of children. Kurdish mothers who were against child labor also thought that sending their children to work would make them less obedient to their parents as children would be earning their own money.

For those mothers who were positive about child labor, children’s age, birth order, school attendance and success were child characteristics they took into account when deciding which of their children would work. Contrary to expectations, for most mothers gender did not matter in determining which child would work. In other words, girls were as likely as boys to work as long as they were old enough. This is a surprising finding in a patriarchal gender context that confines girls and women to domestic work, and highly values female honor. Hypothetically, sending girls to work would increase girls’ exposure to behavior that could harm their honor, and hence family honor. Any harm to girls’ honor would also damage their marriageability. However, most women in the study worked either as seasonal workers or in garment production until they married. Interestingly, they were asked to stop working after their marriage. When asked about why girls could work but married women could not, women stated that the husband would be considered as not being able to care of his wife and thus be humiliated if his wife continued to work. Some women mentioned that the husband would be jealous or concerned that his wife’s honor would be hurt. Yet, they could not explain why it would be okay for girls to work. While women thought both girls and boys could work, they differentiated on where boys and girls could work. They thought there were jobs both girls and boys could do and jobs that were only appropriate for boys or girls. It is likely that given the
luxury to keep their daughters out of the labor force, yet allow them to work only in industries they perceive suitable for girls.

The relationship between education and child labor was also more complex, in contrast to the unidirectional causal relationship presented in the literature where child labor interferes with education (e.g. Blunch & Verner, 2000; Emerson & Souza, 2007; Müderrisoğlu, 2006). At the maternal ethnotheories level, the views of the mothers who were against child labor aligned with the literature as they saw child labor as interference with children’s education. Yet, some mothers who were positive about child labor thought when children worked during the summer when the school was off, they would be more likely to see how hard working was and would appreciate school more. Mothers also thought that it would be acceptable for children who were not good students to continue school beyond the mandatory eight-year schooling. According to them, it would be futile to try to keep their child in school if he/she did not want to be there.

Some women in the study had children who were asked by their parents not to attend school so that they could work to support the family financially. However, there were also children who, despite their mothers’ wishes and in some cases persistent efforts for them to continue school, refused to do so. In those cases, children were asked to work because they chose not to continue their education beyond middle school. Thus, as much as children were asked to drop out of school to work, children were asked to work because they did not want to continue school, showing the bidirectional relationship between child education and child labor.

Considering many children in the community attend public schools (elementary, middle, and high schools) in and around the inner-city neighborhood of Tarlabası, one needs to be wary about the quality of education, attention, and encouragement provided in these schools to motivate students to pursue and be successful in higher education.
It is also important to note that according to TUIK’s statistics on youth, the unemployment rate among high school graduates was %21.8 and 30% among college graduates (TUIK, 2012). These percentages are not to discourage high school education, but to be realistic about employment opportunities available to high school graduates. It is likely that job opportunities are wider for those who do not graduate high school as they also include unskilled labor in the informal sector. Thus, policymakers, practitioners, and researchers working on child labor should take into consideration the bidirectional relationship between child labor and education as well as the economic realities of Turkey in studying and addressing child labor in Turkey.

The years of compulsory education was increased from eight years to 12 years in 2012, a year after this study was conducted. The ramifications of this new law on child labor are yet to be seen.

Policy and Practice Implications of the Study

Migration and Adaptation to the City

Most of the women experienced similar problems regardless of whether they came to the city through “voluntary” migration or forced migration. As the Tarlabası neighborhood grew to become largely Kurdish, the problems with feelings of loneliness and Turkish fluency seem to be eased by the existence of Kurdish community. The support from neighbors and other relatives in the neighborhood and the fact that Kurdish is widely spoken and understood in the neighborhood make it easier for newcomers not to feel alienated and away from home, even though they miss their family members back in their hometown. The mobility in the city also seems to be facilitated by other members of the family or neighbors, at least until women get used to their surroundings. The existing human and social capital can be reinforced by
expanding the services (e.g. reading courses for women) that exist in the community. For those who are motivated to learn Turkish and other reading and math skills to navigate the rest of the city where Turkish is the primary language, the existing community centers should continue to provide services in these areas. With more outreach efforts in the community and adjustments to women’s busy schedules with house chores and child care, attendance to the courses offered in these institutions can be increased. The outreach efforts should also target informing women – and hence families - about resources available in and around the community. Including or increasing the number of Kurdish-speaking staff in these institutions will also likely increase attendance.

Poverty continues to be a persistent problem in the community. Women seem to be the main agents in identifying and applying to institutions that provide financial and in-kind assistance to low-income families. If more social workers are available in community centers, they can act as liaisons/caseworkers and advocates between women and institutions providing assistance. This may lead to a more effective use of resources and more efficient service delivery in the community. Social workers and policy makers can also think of creating culturally-appropriate ways to include women in the workforce. Even though many women may see their primary responsibility as taking care of their households and children, providing opportunities for women to work, for example from home, can be a smooth transition to including more women in the workforce and support the family budget.

**Child Labor**

Interventions and policies should be closely informed by research and target multiple levels. As poverty is a major determinant of child labor, government efforts to eradicate poverty should continue. As a means to increase household income, vocational trainings can be offered.
to parents who migrate from rural areas to cities and do not have the necessary skills to hold jobs in an urban environment. Microcredit programs can also be considered as potential resources. Some researchers caution against microcredit programs with this population because family business may increase the risk of child labor (Dayıoğlu, 2006). Thus, official agreements can be signed between microcredit providers and users not to use child labor. Social workers can also lobby to create developmentally appropriate paid summer internships for older children where they can learn skills (e.g. computer skills, basic accounting) that can be of use in their future jobs in the formal sector. Local governments can partner with middle and high schools in low-income communities to create paid internship opportunities for children with regular school attendance. The availability of such internships may also encourage families to send their children to school.

As school continuation and success was also mentioned as a factor that affected family decisions on child labor, efforts should be made to improve the quality of education and support provided in and around inner-city neighborhoods to retain students in school and motivate them to pursue higher education. Drop-out prevention programs can be put in place to promote school attendance. For that to effectively happen, school resources and needs should first be identified.

Women also mentioned that they extensively made use of a youth center that was close to their community as an academic support for their children. Given that families in Tarlabası are invested in the positive development of their children and are interested in using the resources provided to them, community and youth centers should be supported. Their services, along with their outreach efforts should be expanded. These centers play a critical role in facilitating the positive development of children in the neighborhood. Not only can they provide academic support to children, they also can become oases in the inner-city neighborhood where
children can be exposed to positive role-models.

**Neighborhood**

The neighborhood as described by Kurdish migrant women created various challenges for children and families. The existence of criminal activities concerns women both in terms of the safety of their families and children and the street lifestyle that may lure their children. The marginalized populations that inhabit the neighborhood and the poverty they endure make it easier for criminal activities to persist, especially when coupled with the inconsistent efficiency of the police in the area. As much as many families do continue to support conventional values and not the street values, they are also scared to fight with the criminals as they are discouraged by the interventions—or lack thereof—of the police. They feel helpless against drug dealers and thieves in their community and still think that the police should solve these problems. While the police force should take the necessary precautions or steps to eliminate the criminal activities, existing community centers can attempt to help the community organize and communicate their wish to eliminate criminal activities in the neighborhood to relevant authorities.

Kurdish migrant women also voiced their wish to have parks and playgrounds in or around the neighborhood to provide safe spaces for their children to play. These public parks and playgrounds should be nearby, include well-equipped and maintained facilities, and contain developmentally-appropriate equipment. Neighborhood schools can also serve as physical activity settings that provide structured physical activities for children if necessary resources are provided\(^ {57}\). As also mentioned in the child labor section of the implications, existing institutions

\(^ {57}\) As I write the implications section, the neighborhood is going through a gentrification project that will turn the neighborhood into an upscale residence and shopping area. Many families are being evacuated from their apartments and are moving to other parts of the neighborhood. Buildings are being bought from those who owned their own place to a much lower price than the price they will be sold after the completion of the project. Moreover, people who are not currently being evacuated because the physical boundaries of the project do not include the areas where they live will most likely not be able to survive in Tarlabasi upon the completion of the project as the prices for rent will skyrocket. It is also important to note that currently one of the biggest public parks in Istanbul and one of the
(community and youth centers) should continue to provide and expand their services to address the needs of children in the community.

**Gender**

This study noted some changes in women’s understandings of gender roles, which is promising in achieving balance in gender roles and expectations in the marriage. As many other cultures in the Middle East, the Kurdish culture is a patriarchal one (as is the Turkish culture) and various patriarchal gender expectations continue to exist and be perpetuated, at times by women themselves. Considering the deep-rooted nature of patriarchy both in the society and in women, any steps to challenge the patriarchy should be taken with careful consideration.

Opportunities should be created, by existing community centers for instance, to inform women about “basic” issues such as their rights in civil marriage, birth control, and the actions they can take and institutions they can go to in case of domestic violence by husbands or in-laws. However a more comprehensive approach to address gender inequalities and oppression should also be thought about. In a community that is not fully ready to see changes in women’s roles and rights, one risks further alienation of women if only women are targeted for intervention.

**Strengths and Limitations of the Study and Future Directions**

A major strength of the study is its methodological approach. The triangulation of the data, thick description, and member checking and peer debriefing procedures that strengthen the trustworthiness of the study, and hence its strength were described in detail in the methods section. The ethnographic data collection methods allowed me to study women in the naturalistic context of their neighborhood and families, to describe the interactions that occur between women and their immediate ecological environment, and to offer intimate insights to closest to Tarlabasi that some women said they frequented with their families especially in the summer is under threat of being replaced by a shopping mall (June 4th 2013).
Kurdish women’s lives. The engaged and sustained nature of the study facilitated establishing trust with my participants and allowed for informal interaction and participant observation. Informal interactions and participant observations, in addition to demographic surveys, were used to triangulate data, and compare and contrast women’s narratives. The triangulation of the data collection methods also enhanced the trustworthiness of the study.

The use of semi-structured interviews not only supported the overall purpose of highlighting women’s agency and making their voices heard, but it also helped discover unforeseen issues (e.g. co-residence with in-laws) that were critical to women’s lives. These issues would have gone unnoticed had another data collection strategy been used.

The sample included both Kurdish women who were internally displaced due to the armed conflict and those who “voluntarily” migrated. The inclusion of both groups reflected the current profile of Kurdish migrant women in Tarlabası, and facilitated a more complete depiction of Kurdish migration experiences in the neighborhood. The inclusion of two different groups of migration also helped to compare and contrast the circumstances that surrounded the Kurdish migration and the adaptation process that took place in the city.

The focus on a particular neighborhood with inner-city characteristics allowed an in-depth study of the lives of its residents and their coping strategies and comparison of Kurdish migrant families’ lives in Tarlabası to the inner-city neighborhood literature in different cultural/ethnic contexts. Through this comparison, I was able to highlight the similarities in experiences and strategies of people enduring similar circumstances regardless of where they were geographically located.

The study also has limitations. First of all, only Turkish speaking participants were recruited for the study as I did not speak Kurdish. The fact that Turkish was not the native
language of the women in the study might have limited their narratives. Though women’s accounts were rich, nuances and further elaborations might have been missed. It is likely that those women who learned to speak Turkish are better adapted (or more resilient) to their lives in the city. By including only Turkish speaking women in the study, I might have missed the struggles or coping strategies—or lack thereof—of other Kurdish women. The continuing difficulties might be different for only Kurdish speaking women. For instance, may women who learned how to speak Turkish more easily navigated the city and were less reliant on neighbors and relatives after they learned Turkish. For only-Kurdish-speaking women, these might be continuing challenges.

While focusing on one neighborhood facilitated an in-depth exploration of women’s lives there, it might not necessarily reflect the experiences of low-income Kurdish migrant women in other parts of the city. Kurdish migrant women in other neighborhoods of the city might have a somewhat different set of concerns, problems, and hence a different set of coping strategies. For instance, those families who live in low-income neighborhoods that do not have the criminal characteristics of inner-city neighborhoods may not have to worry about protecting their children and other members of their families from the dangers of the inner-city. On the other hand, they may still need to deal with lack of resources that support a healthy development of children and adolescents as well as the overall well-being of the family.

Finally, the parental ethnotheories on child labor and education were only explored from women’s perspectives. Even though some mothers talked about their husbands’ opinions on child education and labor, future qualitative research should have larger samples that include fathers’ views as well, considering that fathers may have more power in making decisions in these families with traditional gender roles. Including fathers in future qualitative studies can
provide important and more comprehensive insight to parental ethnotheories on child labor and education in Kurdish families as well as their decision-making process. Future research should also include other low-income populations that are at risk of child labor in order to understand the commonalities and differences of parental ethnotheories across various groups, and tailor interventions accordingly when necessary.
EPILOGUE

“I miss my participants”: My Feelings in the Aftermath of Fieldwork

Leaving behind a community where I spent an extended period of time was more difficult than I imagined. I became particularly close with some of my participants during that time and leaving them with lingering issues (e.g. continuing domestic violence by husbands, unemployed husbands, wishes to move out of co-residing households, longings for a baby) makes me uncomfortable. In addition to particular participants I am concerned about, I also miss the days I spent in the community with other women. While life goes on for my participants, it was hard for me to go back to my life as a “PhD student in the United States”, a life that I have known for a long time. Upon my return to the United States, I found myself often wandering off in my mind thinking about what my participants were having for dinner that day or whether Gurbet’s husband finally started working. I also caught myself telling many people how much I missed my participants.

I continue to think about my participants and communicate with some of them. I call Kader at least once every other month and on religious holidays. She gives me news and updates from the neighborhood. I also keep in touch with Aslı and Zarife via phone calls. I continue to visit the neighborhood when I return to Istanbul to see my family and cherish the time I spend with them.

What Has Happened in Tarlabası Since the Fieldwork?

Since I completed my fieldwork in Tarlabası, I returned to visit my participants a couple of times in the spring and the summer of 2012. I last visited them in July 2013. During the almost two years after my fieldwork, there have been many changes, including losses as well as new additions to the community. One of my participants lost her husband, which deeply saddened
everyone on the block where they lived. He was a beloved member of the community. There were also many babies who joined the community. I recently heard there were three new babies on their way.

Six of my participants moved out of the neighborhood. I heard that some continued to rent in their new neighborhood whereas others took up a mortgage to buy an apartment. One of my participants finally ran away from her husband who consistently abused her. She now happily lives with her children in a city far away from Istanbul. Even though she is still scared that her husband could find them, she works and cherishes the peaceful time she has with her children. In addition to moves outside the neighborhood, there was also some movement within. One of my participants who used to live with her brother-in-law and his family finally moved out. This had been a long-time dream of hers. She proudly welcomed me in their new apartment when I went to see them in the summer of 2012. I was pleasantly surprised to find out that Kader, my key participant, finally moved out from her very tiny apartment with her family to a larger apartment in the neighborhood. She also proudly gave me a tour of her new home that was way larger and brighter than their previous home. There were also some participants who moved to other apartments on different blocks because they were evacuated from theirs due to the gentrification project that has been taking place in Tarlabası.

In the summer of 2011, the evacuations had started as part of the controversial gentrification/restoration project in Tarlabası. This gentrification project that included the restoration of existing buildings aimed to turn part of the neighborhood into an upscale residential and shopping area. The municipality was still working on buying out the houses that were to be restored (some voluntarily sold their property to the municipality while others refused and pursued legal action). It is important to note that while the municipality eagerly
pursued this project, it fell short in demolishing buildings that were about to collapse and were a threat to the safety of the residents in the community. During my stay in Tarlabası, I could see that some buildings were empty. However, when I went back to visit the neighborhood in April 2012, about eight months after my fieldwork, I was shocked to see how empty the upper parts of the neighborhood felt. I had a hard time locating the main street I took countless times to get into the neighborhood. It looked like a deserted city out of sci-fi movies. As these parts were evacuated, those who used to live there moved to lower parts of the neighborhood. On my last visit in July 2013, I found out that many of the streets were boarded up on both sides (which gave me the sense that I was walking in a tunnel) to avoid trespassing to evacuated buildings.

Most of my participants continue to live in the neighborhood. However, how long they will be able to stay is questionable. Even though the gentrification project does not yet branch to the blocks where they live, it is very likely that once the project is completed and the upper-class residents move in the newly restorated or built houses along with the upscale stores that will be open, the low-income residents will either be unwanted or will not be able to afford the rents that will most likely skyrocket. And once again, the Kurdish community (as well as other marginalized residents of the neighborhood) will be forced to move from their homes.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

1. Age ___________
2. Ethnic background ______________
3. Number of Kids ___________

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Current occupation</th>
<th>Education attained</th>
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4. Mother’s educational level. Please choose the one that applies
   - Did not attend school
   - Attended elementary school
   - Finished elementary school
   - Attended middle school
   - Finished middle school
   - Attended high school
   - Finished high school
   - Other

5. Mother’s occupation ______________

6. Father’s educational level. Please choose the one that applies
   - Did not attend school
7. Father’s occupation ____________________

8. Where would your monthly income fall? Please choose the one that applies? (UPDATE BASED ON THE POVERTY and HUNGER RATES in TURKEY at the TIME the study is conducted. HUNGER RATE WILL BE THE LOWER LIMIT. POVERTY RATE AND ABOVE WILL BE THE UPPER LIMIT).
   - Below 350 Turkish Liras
   - Somewhere between 351 and 250 Turkish Liras
   - Somewhere between 251 and 350 Turkish Liras
   - Somewhere between 351 and 450 Turkish Liras
   - Above 451 Turkish Liras
   - If above please put an approximate amount of the income ___

9. How satisfied are you with your financial situation 1 being very dissatisfied and 7 being very satisfied? Please circle the one that applies
   1                  2               3              4              5               6             7
   Very Dissatisfied    Neutral    Very Satisfied

10. When did you move to the big city? ______________

11. How long have you been living in this neighborhood? ____________

12. Do you own or rent your house?

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO FILL OUT THE SURVEY
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

ABOUT THE FAMILY:

- Tell me about your family. Who is in your family?
- What are some of the things you enjoy/like about your family?
- What are some of the strong things about your family?

LIFE BEFORE MIGRATION:

- Can you tell me a little bit about your life before you came to Istanbul?
  Probing questions:
  - Where were you living (rural/urban, house/apartment building etc.)?
  - Can you tell me about a memory of a typical day back when you were living in your hometown? (What were the things you were doing from the time you got up until you went to bed?)
  - Can you tell me about your childhood as much as you can remember? What were some of the things you were doing on a typical day?
  - How was your family financially supported back then?
  - Who was living with you in the house?
  - Who did you talk to when you had problems (family members, neighbors, God)? Tell me more about it (each one she mentions)? How important was it for you to have that support? In what ways?

THE MOVE:

- You told me earlier that you came here a while back. What were the reasons that made you decide to move to Istanbul?

- What made you choose this neighborhood? (POTENTIALLY TAPPING INTO SOCIAL NETWORKS, IF NOT PROBE)
  - Relatives or people of your hometown
  - Employment opportunities
  - Affordability

- Who helped with your move?
LIFE AFTER MIGRATION

- How do you feel about this neighborhood? (Follow up question: What in particular makes you feel that way?)
Make sure to address the below questions if not brought up by the participant)

- How do you feel about your safety? What characteristics of this neighborhood make you feel safe or unsafe?
- Do you feel attached to this neighborhood? Why or why not?
- How do you feel about raising your family in this neighborhood?
- How would you feel about your children living here when they grew up?
- How would you feel about moving to another neighborhood?
- What are some of the things you like about this neighborhood?
- What are some of the things you don’t quite like about this neighborhood?

- How are neighbor relations in this neighborhood in general? How is your relationship with your neighbors?

- How would your ideal neighborhood look like?

- I see that most children play outside in this neighborhood. How do you feel about your children playing outside? What makes you feel that way?
  If they say they don’t feel comfortable:
  - What are some things you do to make sure they are safe?

- Can you tell me a little bit about your life here?
  Probing questions:

  - Can you walk me through your typical day from the time you get up until you go to bed? What are some of the things you do during the day? How is your typical day now compared to your life back in your hometown?
  - How is your family supported financially now?
  - How did your husband find a job?
  - What do you do when you have a problem? Who do you trust sharing your problems with here? Who do you go to/talk to if you have a problem (family, neighbors, religion etc.)? How is that different from before you moved here? How important is it for you to have that support? Why?
- How has living here been like for you?
- What has been your best experience since you came here?
- What has been your worst experience since you came here?
- What are some of the things you struggled with when you came here?
- What were(are) the things that helped (help) you overcome or deal with those struggles?
- What are the things you continue to struggle with (e.g. discrimination, poverty)?
- What are some of the ways you deal with those struggles?
- What are some of the aspects you enjoy about your life here? Why?
- What would be some of the things that might help/have helped with your adaptation or your life here?
- How has living here been for your family?
- What are some of the things your family struggled with when you came here?
- What did your family do to/what were(are) the things that helped (help) your family overcome or minimize those struggles?
- What are the things your family continues to struggle with (e.g. discrimination, poverty)?
- What are some of the ways your family deals with those struggles?
- What are some of the aspects your family enjoy about your life here? Tell me more about it.
- What would be some of the things that might help/have helped with your family’s adaptation or life here?

- Some families keep in touch with people from their hometown and some families do not. How is your relationship with people/relatives who are still in your hometown? How do you feel about your hometown? How do you feel about going back?

- From what I have been hearing, it sounds like they are starting to restore the buildings in this neighborhood and a lot of the current residents will be evacuated to move to another neighborhood. What can you tell me about this? What are your thoughts/feelings about this potential move?
MARRIAGE AND GENDER ROLES:

- Can you tell me about how you met your spouse?
- How old were you when you got married?
- Can you tell me about your wedding ceremony?
- Where did you live after you got married and before you moved here?
- How was your relationship with your in-laws? (If they lived with them)
- What do you think are the most important qualities for a wife to possess?
- What do you think are the most important qualities for a husband to possess?
- Can you tell me a little bit about your marital relationship with your husband?
- Sometimes when families move to a new place, some things change between husband and wife but sometimes they stay the same. How has your experience been like?
  - Do you think your role as a wife has changed since you came here? How so? How do you feel about that?
  - Do you think your husband’s role as a husband has changed since you came here? How so? How do you feel about that?
- What are the most important things a mother can do for her sons? For her daughters?
- What are the most important things a father can do for her sons? For her daughters?
- What do you think would be a good age for your children to get married (ask separately for son and daughter)? Why do you think that would be a good age?
- What would consider a good spouse for your son? For your daughter?
- How do you think your son will find/meet his spouse?
- How do you think your daughter will meet her spouse?
- What are some of the things you want your children (daughters & sons ask separately) to be doing when they grow up?
- A more general question for you. Some people think that how one should think about what women and men should be doing at home or outside home affect their family life or
how families operate a certain way and some people don’t feel like this is the case at all. What are your thoughts about this for your own family?

**DECISION MAKING AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

- In every family, there are times when decisions need to be made. What are some of the decisions you have made in your family?
  - How about the decision to move? Tell me a little about how you guys came to that decision? How did you feel about it?
  - Can you tell me how money issues/decisions (e.g. how much pocket money children get, how much money is spent on food or other household needs are handled)? Who keeps the money?
  - What about decisions on children’s schooling (e.g. who goes to school, who goes to work, when children stop going to school)? Can you tell me about how you come to these decisions?

- There usually are various things that need to be taken care of in the house? Can you tell me what sorts of things keep you busy in the house? How do you work around these things?
  - Does anyone in the family help you with these chores? Can you tell me about it.
  - How much time approximately is spent on these activities

**PERCEPTIONS OF CHILDHOOD**

- How would you describe a “child”?

- What should a child be doing during childhood?

- When/what age do you think a child is not a child anymore?

- How do children usually spend their day in your hometown? How about your children? How were they spending their day when you lived in your hometown? How are they spending it now?

- Tell me more about your relationship with your children. How was it before you came to Istanbul? How is it now?

- What are some things (expectations) you want your children to be doing now? How about when they grow up? How has your move affected your expectations?

- Some families expect different things from their daughters versus their sons, some families have similar expectations. How about you? Can you tell me more about that?
INCOME FLUCTUATIONS

- Sometimes family income changes from month to month making it harder to make the ends meet. How has it been in your family?
  - If it fluctuates: what are some of the reasons that cause it to change? When is this more likely to happen? How does it affect you and your family? How do you handle when it goes down or up?
  - If it does not fluctuate: What are some of the things you do to keep it stable?

CHILD WORK

If the child is working:

I remember you mentioning that some of your children are working

- How do you feel about your child’s contributing to family income? (What are some of the things you are concerned about or you like about him working?)

- Can you tell me a little bit about how you came to make the decision to send your child(ren) to work?
  a) who made the decision?
  b) what were some of the things you considered (e.g. gender, birth order, school success etc.) in making your decision?

- How was it like to come to that decision?

- What were some of the other things you tried or thought about before considering child work?

- When did he/she/they start working? (How old were they?)

- What do they do? Where do they work?

- How did you choose the workplace?

- Are there any type of jobs you would not want your daughter and/or son to do? Why?

- How many hours a day do they work? Or what time do they leave home and what time do they come back?

- How do you feel about him/her working there? (What are some of the things you are concerned about or you like about him working there?)
- Have they experienced anything negative while they were at work? What did you think about that?

- Have they experienced anything positive when they were at work? What did you think about that?

- What are some things you use to protect them?

If the child is not working

- Some families send their children to work to support their family, some families do not. What are your thoughts about this?

- (If positive), what types of job would you want them to have and not to have? What are some of the reasons you would want them to do these types of works but not others?

- What are some of the reasons you chose not to send your child to work at this point?

CHILD EDUCATION

- Where do you see the place of education in your child’s life (do you think education would make a difference)? Tell me more about it.

  Probing questions:

  - How do you feel about their school, their teachers?

  - How involved are you with your child(ren)’s school? What are some of the things you might be doing at school?

  - If you were to make a list of things that would make your child’s life better now, how would that list look like?

  - If you were to make a list of things that would help your child have a better future, how would that list look like?

- Tell me about where education stood for you and your family when you were growing up?

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- We have talked about some things you did not like about this neighborhood. What do you think would be some things that can be done to eliminate them?

- You mentioned some things you experienced personally when you came to the city? What would be some things that would have made things easier for you? Any advice for women who are going through similar things? How do you think the government can help?
• We also talked about some problems you as a family experienced getting used to living in Istanbul? What advice would you give to families who are going through the same experience or are new to the city? What kinds of things can the government do to help you and other families?

ASPIRATIONS:

• Where and how do you see yourself in the future?
  - Where do you see yourself 10 years from now?
  - What are your aspirations for yourself?
  - How do you think you can accomplish them?

• Where and how do you see your family and your child in the future?
  Probing questions:
  - Where do you see your family 10 years from now?
  - What are your aspirations for your family?
  - How do you think you can achieve this future?
  - Where do you see your family 10 years from now?
  - What are your aspirations for your children?
  - How do you think you can achieve this future?

• If you had a magic stick that could do anything, what would you do with it? How would you use it?

EXPERIMENTAL QUESTION

• If a film director approached you to make a TV series about your life and wanted to tell him about it, what would be the things about your life you would want him to include?
# APPENDIX C

## DISTRIBUTION OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS BY GUIDING QUESTIONS

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>GUIDING QUESTIONS</th>
<th>METHODS</th>
<th>INTERVIEW QUESTIONS</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>How do low-income Kurdish displaced mothers reconstruct their lives after migration to Istanbul?</strong></td>
<td>• Participant observation (e.g. neighborhood and family observations) • In-depth interview</td>
<td>All interview questions do have aspects that answer that more general question (e.g. All questions under Life Before and After Migration sections of the interview protocol and some of the questions related to gender relations)</td>
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<td><strong>What challenges do low-income Kurdish displaced mothers experience in the urban context at the individual and family level?</strong></td>
<td>• Participant observation (e.g. neighborhood physical and social features, house features) • In-depth interview • Historical data (discrimination, internal displacement, oppression)</td>
<td>• How are neighbor relations in this neighborhood? • How is your relationship with your neighbors? • What are some of the things you don’t quite like about this neighborhood? • What has been your worst experience since you came here? • What are some of the things you struggled with when you came here? • What are the things you continue to struggle with (e.g. discrimination, poverty)? • What are some of the things your family struggled with when you came here? • What are the things your family continues to struggle with (e.g. discrimination, poverty)? • Sometimes family income changes from month to month making it harder to make the ends meet. How has it been in your family? -If it fluctuates, why and when? How do you handle when it goes down or up? -If it does not fluctuate, what are some of the things you do to keep it stable?</td>
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<td><strong>What strengths do low-income Kurdish displaced mothers and their families have and what are the coping strategies they use against</strong></td>
<td>• Participant observation (e.g. social networks, collective supervision, interpersonal interactions)</td>
<td>• What are some of the things you enjoy/like about your family? • What are some of the strong things about your family? • What made you choose this neighborhood? • Who helped with your move? • How is your relationship with people/relatives who are still in your hometown? • What are some of the things you like about this neighborhood?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Challenges they face?</td>
<td>In-depth interview</td>
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| - How are neighbor relations in this neighborhood? How is your relationship with your neighbors?  
- What do you do when you have a problem? Who do you trust sharing your problems with here? Who do you go to/talk to if you have a problem (family, neighbors, religion etc.)? How is that different from before you moved here? How important is it for you to have that support? Why?  
- What were(are) the things that helped (help) you overcome or deal with those struggles?  
- What are some of the ways you deal with those struggles?  
- What are some of the aspects you enjoy about your life here? Why?  
- What did your family do to/what were(are) the things that helped (help) your family overcome or minimize those struggles?  
- What are some of the ways your family deals with those struggles?  
- What are some of the aspects your family enjoy about your life here? Tell me more about it.  
From what I have been hearing, it sounds like they are starting to restore the buildings in this neighborhood and a lot of the current residents will be evacuated to move to another neighborhood. What can you tell me? |

| How are gender roles and ideologies re-negotiated in the urban context? What are the ramifications of this negotiation for mothers and their families? | Participant observation  
(e.g. how much time women spend outside the house to take care of family related issues, household chores allocations)  
In-depth interview  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| - Can you tell me about how you met your spouse?  
- How old were you when you got married?  
- Can you tell me about your wedding ceremony?  
- Where did you live after you got married and before you moved here?  
- What do you think are the most important qualities for a wife to possess?  
- What do you think are the most important qualities for a husband to possess?  
- Can you tell me a little bit about your marital relationship with your husband?  
- Sometimes when families move to a new place, some things change between husband and wife but sometimes they stay the same. How has your experience been like?  
PROBING QUESTIONS:  
- Do you think your role as a wife has changed since you came here? How so? How do you feel about that?  
- Do you think your husband’s role as a husband has changed since you came here? How so? How do you feel about that? |
• What are the most important things a mother can do for her sons? For her daughters?
• What are the most important things a father can do for her sons? For her daughters?
• What do you think would be a good age for your children to get married (ask separately for son and daughter)? Why do you think that would be a good age?
• What would consider a good spouse for your son? For your daughter?
• How do you think your son will find/meet his spouse?
• How do you think your daughter will meet her spouse?
• What are some of the things you want your children (daughters & sons) to be doing when they grow up?
• Some families expect different things from their daughters versus their sons, some families have similar expectations. How about you? Can you tell me more about that?
• A more general question for you. Some people think that how one should think about what women and men should be doing at home or outside home affect their family life or how families operate a certain way and some people don’t feel like this is the case at all. What are your thoughts about this for your own family?
• In every family, there are times when decisions need to be made. What are some of the decisions you have made in your family?
  a) How about the decision to move? Tell me a little about how you guys came to that decision? How did you feel about it?
  b) Can you tell me how money issues/decisions (e.g. how much pocket money children get, how much money is spent on food or other household needs are handled)? Who keeps the money?
  c) What about decisions on children’s schooling (e.g. who goes to school, who goes to work, when children stop going to school)? Can you tell me about how you come to these decisions?
• There usually are various things that need to be taken care of in the house? Can you tell me what sorts of things keep you busy in the house? How do you work around these things?
  - Does anyone in the family help you with these chores? Can you tell me about it.
  - How much time approximately is spent on these activities
What are low-income Kurdish mothers’ beliefs on childhood, child labor, and education? What are the implications of these beliefs for children and their families?

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<th>In-depth interview</th>
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<tr>
<td>• How would you describe a “child”?</td>
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<td>• How do children usually spend their day in your hometown? How about your children? How were they spending their day when you lived in your hometown? How are they spending it now?</td>
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<td>• Tell me more about your relationship with your children. How was it before you came to Istanbul? How is it now?</td>
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<td>• What are some things (expectations) you want your children to be doing now? How about when they grow up? How has your move affected your expectations?</td>
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<td>• Some families expect different things from their daughters versus their sons, some families have similar expectations. How about you? Can you tell me more about that?</td>
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If the child is working:

| • How do you feel about your child’s contributing to family income? (What are some of the things you are concerned about or you like about him working?) |
| • Can you tell me a little bit about how you came to make the decision to send your child(ren) to work? |
| a) who made the decision? |
| b) what were some of the things you considered (e.g. gender, birth order, school success etc.) in making your decision? |
| • How was it like to come to that decision? |
| • What were some of the other things you tried or thought about before considering child work? |
| • When did he/she/they start working? (How old were they?) |
| • What do they do? Where do they work? |
| • How did you choose the workplace? |
| • Are there any type of jobs you would not want your daughter and/or son to do? Why? |
| • How many hours a day do they work? Or what time do they leave home and what time do they come back? |
| • How do you feel about him/her working there? (What are some of the things you are concerned about or you like about him working there?) |
| Have they experienced anything negative while they were at work? What did you think
| What are low-income Kurdish mothers’ aspirations for themselves and their children | In-depth interview | Where and how do you see yourself in the future?  
- Where do you see yourself 10 years from now?  
- What are your aspirations for yourself?  
- How do you think you can accomplish them? 

- Have they experienced anything positive when they were at work? What did you think about that?  
- What are some things you use to protect them?  

If the child is not working  
- Some families send their children to work to support their family, some families do not. What are your thoughts about this?  
- (If positive), what types of job would you want them to have and not to have? What are some of the reasons you would want them to do these types of works but not others?  
- What are some of the reasons you chose not to send your child to work at this point?  
- What are some of the reasons you chose not to send your child to work at this point?  
- Where do you see the place of education in your child’s life (do you think education would make a difference)? Tell me more about it.  

Probing questions:  
- How do you feel about their school, their teachers?  
- How involved are you with your child(ren)’s school? What are some of the things you might be doing at school?  
- If you were to make a list of things that would make your child’s life better now, how would that list look like?  
- If you were to make a list of things that would help your child have a better future, how would that list look like?  
- Tell me about where education stood for you and your family when you were growing up?
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<th>Context/Background</th>
<th>Families?</th>
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<td>(Cultural, societal, political, family)</td>
<td>Probing questions:</td>
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<td>- Where and how do you see your family and your child in the future?</td>
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<td>- Where do you see your family 10 years from now?</td>
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<td>- What are your aspirations for your family?</td>
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<td>- If you had a magic stick that could do anything, what would you do with it? how would you use it?</td>
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- Tell me about your family. Who is in your family? |
- Can you tell me a little bit about your life before you came to Istanbul? Probing questions: |
  - Where were you living (rural/urban, house/apartment building etc.)? |
  - Can you tell me a memory of a typical day back when you were living in your hometown? (What were the things you were doing from the time you got up until you went to bed?) |
  - Can you tell me about your childhood as much as you can remember? What were some of the things you were doing on a typical day? |
  - How was your family financially supported back then? |
  - Who was living with you in the house? |
- Where did you live after you got married and before you moved here? |
- You told me earlier that you came here a while back. What were the reasons that made you decide to move to Istanbul? |
- How do you feel about your hometown? How do you feel about going back? |
### Recommendations

- **In-depth interview**

  - What would be some of the things that might help/have helped with your adaptation or your life here?
  - What would be some of the things that might help/have helped with your family’s adaptation or life here?
  - We have talked about some things you did not like about this neighborhood. What do you think would be some things that can be done to eliminate them?

  - You mentioned some things you experienced personally when you came to the city? What would be some things that would have made things easier for you? Any advice for women who are going through similar things? How do you think the government can help?

  - We also talked about some problems you as a family experienced getting used to living in Istanbul? What advice would you give to families who are going through the same experience or are new to the city? What kinds of things can the government do to help you and other families?

### Context/Background

(Cultural, societal, political, family)

- **Census data, newspaper articles, historical data**

- **Demographic survey**

- **In-depth interview**

  - Tell me about your family. Who is in your family?
  - Can you tell me a little bit about your life before you came to Istanbul?

  Probing questions:

  - Where were you living (rural/urban, house/apartment building etc.)?

  - Can you tell me a memory of a typical day back when you were living in your hometown? (What were the things you were doing from the time you got up until you went to bed?)

  - Can you tell me about your childhood as much as you can remember? What were some of the things you were doing on a typical day?

  - How was your family financially supported back then?

  - Who was living with you in the house?
| Other       | • In-depth interview | • Where did you live after you got married and before you moved here?  
|            |                      | • You told me earlier that you came here a while back. What were the reasons that made you decide to move to Istanbul?  
|            |                      | • How do you feel about your hometown? How do you feel about going back?  
|            |                      | • If a film director approached you to make a TV series about your life and wanted to tell him about it, what would be the things about your life you would want him to include?
CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION

AWARDED TO

KADER CELIK

For her outstanding contribution to Ozge Sensoy Bahar’s research project.

We couldn’t do it without you!

Awarded this 23rd day of August, 2011

Teresa Ostler, PhD