Gypsies in the economy of Turkey: A focus on Gypsy flower sellers in two central districts of İstanbul

Gül Özateşler

Abstract

This article aims to explore the conditions and roles of Gypsies in the economy of Turkey through a focus on street flower sellers in two central districts of İstanbul, Şişli and Taksim. It proposes a multidimensional analysis that demonstrates different dynamics of social exclusion, socio-economic and political relations, and agency positions. After first reviewing several approaches to Gypsies' roles in non-Gypsy economies, Gypsies' conditions in Turkey are then examined in relation to their roles in the economy. Finally, their positions in the flower-selling sector in the two districts, Şişli and Taksim, are analyzed through working conditions, socioeconomic dynamics, social exclusion, and perceptions of Gypsyness.

Keywords: *Gypsy*, *flower sellers*, *informal economy*, *social exclusion*, *İstanbul*.

As in Europe, in Turkey Gypsies are highly likely to fall into poverty.[1] Their social exclusion, which functions through ethnic discrimination and poverty, reveals itself in their poor housing conditions, lack of education, and unemployment, in addition to presenting a threat to their identity and culture in the societies in which they live. Facing prejudices, stereotypes, and discrimination, a Gypsy may easily fail within the educational system of non-Gypsies—the so-called Gadjos—as well as failing to find his/her place in the formal economy dominated by Gadjos. Social exclusion works through both ethnicity and poverty, and ultimately it constitutes the subordinated positions of Gypsies in Turkey.

I find the concept of social exclusion useful for analyzing Gypsies' position in the economy, as it opens up a critical space within the power

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1 Dena Ringold et al, *Roma in an Expanding Europe: Breaking the Poverty Cycle* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2005), 2-3.

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dynamics of society as a whole, in relation to such issues as class, gender, race, and ethnic inequalities.[2] The significance of the concept of social exclusion lies in the multidimensionality of inequalities and the dynamics underlying these inequalities. It is closely related to historically constructed power relations, how they interact, and how they are currently positioned. Accordingly, it presses for a broader understanding of the socioeconomic and political contexts in which we live. In this way, the concept can also help us to comprehend Gypsies' positions in the economy in relation to their social and political positions, as well as to sociohistorical transformations in the economic context.

In analyzing Gypsies in terms of their social exclusion, I prefer to use the term "Gypsy" and its Turkish counterpart, *Çingene*. In Turkey, some Gypsies refer to themselves as *Roman* (Roma), hoping that this will protect them against discrimination. However, these different terms can also be used for in-group discrimination. For instance, in using the term *Roman*, some try to differentiate themselves from those labeled "real Gypsies," repeating and reinforcing existing prejudices and stereotypes about *Çingene* while situating themselves outside of such stereotypes. The term has grown popular during the process of incorporating it into the terminology of international Roma politics. However, in the case of Turkey, this also has the potential to exclude certain others in the country, such as the Dom and the Lom. On the other hand, the term "Gypsy" not only includes all of these different groups, but the negative connotations of the term also make it useful to draw attention to their social exclusion, categorization, and stigmatization. I believe that, rather than avoiding the term, it should in fact be preferred so as to subvert its pejorative meanings, stereotypes, and prejudices, as well as the attendant exclusionary practices, discourses, and related inequalities. Therefore, I use "Roma" or *Roman* when referring to those specific self-declared groups who identify themselves as such, and also, for the sake of clarification, in reference to certain literature as well as to international Roma politics.

In this article, I will focus primarily on Gypsy flower sellers in two central districts of İstanbul, Şişli and Taksim, while using insights drawn from other regions and economies in Turkey to enrich my findings. Contributing to the analysis will be narratives from four male and five female *Roman* street flower sellers; two *Roman* researchers; three Gadjo or non-Gypsy storeowners in the flower-selling sector; and several researchers

2 David Byrne, *Social Exclusion*, 2nd ed. (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2005), 75-78; Ronaldo Munck, *Globalization and Social Exclusion* (Bloomfield: Kumarian Press, 2005), 30-34.

and NGO representatives working on the Roma people in Turkey. My questions to my non-Gypsy interviewees mainly concerned the dynamics in the sector, their own working conditions, and their relationships and attitudes towards Gypsy street sellers. My questions to my Gypsy interviewees, on the other hand, mainly concerned their working conditions, their business strategies, the dynamics in the sector, and their relationships with their customers as well as with florists. When the interviews moved to the difficulties of the profession and to discrimination against Gypsies, the main topic became the extent and the effects of social exclusion.

Through the specific case of street flower sellers, I aim to demonstrate an exemplary instance of the socioeconomic conditions of Gypsies in Turkey, along with the effects of their social exclusion. I will elaborate on Gypsies' working conditions, their strategies in relation to their social exclusion and political power, the gendered division of labor in the profession, and power relations within the sector. Firstly, I will examine some approaches taken towards Gypsies working within the economy of non-Gypsy communities. Next, I will present a general framework of the conditions of Gypsies in Turkey and their contributions to the economy. Finally, I will lay out the working conditions of the Gypsy street flower sellers of two central districts of İstanbul, along with an analysis of power relations, socioeconomic conditions, the effects of social exclusion, and the construction of Gypsyness within the sector.

Approaches to Gypsies in the Gadjo-dominated economy

The roles of Gypsies in the Gadjo-dominated economy are closely related to their subordinate positions and their potential low status in society. Most Gypsies are trapped in such traditional occupations as blacksmithing, basket weaving, or musical performance. Others assume different places in the informal sector for a number of reasons, such as insufficient qualifications for better-paid formal jobs, the mistreatment and exclusionary attitudes that they face, dissatisfaction with the economic conditions of the jobs they can manage to find in the formal sector, or their sense of greater flexibility in informal jobs. Moreover, when they do find better chances in the formal sector, they generally attempt to hide their Gypsy identity.

Although diversity is a very important aspect when analyzing the conditions of Gypsies insofar as their current and historical conditions may be quite different in different countries, poverty can nonetheless be seen as one of their common features. In the former Soviet Union, the poverty of the Gypsies or Roma became clearer after the collapse of

socialism, as they had been employed to one extent or another during the period of state planning. However, in the harsh competition of the subsequent market economy, it became difficult for them to find a place in the labor force due to their relatively poor educational background as well as to ethnic discrimination. Moreover, they have tended to find jobs primarily in the informal sector, in such areas as petty trade and construction, where they do not receive such formal assistance as social security, health care, social insurance benefits, or unemployment benefits.[3]

Ladanyi argues that, in the post-socialist era, the Roma have constituted an "underclass;" that is, "a new social group [...] which is segregated from the rest of the society and discriminated against."[4] In the case of post-socialist states, Ladanyi points out that Gypsies had been ethnically discriminated against under state socialism as well, but that with the collapse, "poverty is becoming highly ethnicized."[5] What is more, the exclusion of Gypsies began to emerge in more explicit ways. However, due to the controversial connotation of the term "underclass" in that it stigmatizes the group as the deficit party and fixes people in this state of being, Stewart criticizes Ladanyi's application of this term to the Gypsies.[6]

The concept of an underclass has largely been used to evaluate the condition of black people in the United States after the 1960s.[7] Wacquant explains the usage of the term "underclass" in academic language as a counterpart of "the undeserving poor" and a conflation of poor people with a specific culture that is self-destructive and pathological.[8] As such, the conceptualization of the term works as a legitimization of ongoing inequalities and, as Wacquant indicates, it works through a dehistoricization, essentialization, and depoliticization of the ghetto. Stewart's definition, in his analysis of the term as applied to the conditions of Gypsies, underlines the basic features of the term in this manner:

3 Ringold et al., *Roma in an Expanding Europe*, 39.

4 Janos Ladanyi, "The Hungarian Neoliberal State, Ethnic Classification and the Creation of a Roma Underclass," in *Poverty, Ethnicity, and Gender in Eastern Europe during the Market Transition*, eds. Rebecca Jean Emigh and Ivan Szelenyi (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2000), 71.

5 Ibid., 68.

6 Michael Stewart, "Deprivation, the Roma and 'the Underclass,'" in *Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies, and Practices in Eurasia*, ed. C.M. Hann (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 133-156.

7 Bill E. Lawson, "Meditations on Integration," in *The Underclass Question*, ed. Bill E. Lawson (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 1-19; Michael Katz, *Improving Poor People: The Welfare State, the "Underclass", and Urban Schools as History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 60-99.

8 Loic Wacquant, "Decivilizing and Demonizing: Remaking the Black American Ghetto," in *The Sociology of Norbert Elias*, eds. Steven Loyal and Stephen Quilley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 106.

> An "underclass" is constituted by persons who are likely to remain unemployed and poor for their entire life because of their lack of education and marketable skills, and whose children are likely to be locked into a similar social position, thereby becoming separated from the rest of society as the "untouchables," the "'undeserving poor," or the "no-hopers."[9]

He instead proposes the term "social exclusion" for the analysis of Gypsies, inasmuch as this term refers to an "on-going process [...] and it focuses attention on the primarily political struggles that determine who is defined as 'in' and 'out,' rather than on 'deviant behaviour' and 'criminality.'"[10] Here, Stewart makes an effort to emphasize the dynamic side of exclusion and how it occurs in different stages. Ladanyi and Szelenyi also developed their arguments in a later study that highlights changes in the ethnic construction of Gypsies, although they still continue to use the term "underclass," with all its problematic associations.[11] Although I am suspicious of any usage of the term "underclass," I appreciate Ladanyi and Szelenyi's approach for their emphasis on the process and their reluctance to label, opting rather to understand the term in its historical context and as "a historically specific form of social exclusion."[12]

The concept of social exclusion can be traced back to Max Weber's term "social closure," which refers to certain groups that "secure and maintain privilege at the expense of those different from their own members."[13] However, the concept developed a more politically charged meaning in France in the 1970s and 1980s.[14] There, social exclusion's relation to poverty and the experience of poverty received more emphasis, with marginalized groups being analyzed not only through the concept of social exclusion but also that of social disintegration. The exclusion of an individual and/or a group mainly constitutes a position between a misrecognition of their specific identity and the maldistribution of resources in a society. Ultimately, social exclusion can be defined so as to include different manners of deprivation resulting from social, eco-

9 Stewart, "Deprivation, the Roma," 136.

10 Ibid., 143.

11 Janos Ladanyi and Ivan Szelenyi, *Patterns of Exclusion: Constructing Gypsy Ethnicity and the Making of an Underclass in Transitional Societies of Europe* (New York: Boulder Co, 2006), 8.

12 Ibid., 10.

13 Jan Berting and Christiane Villain-Gandossi, "Urban Transformations: The French Debate and Social Quality," in *Social Quality: A Vision for Europe* (The Hague/London/Boston: Kluwer Law International, 2001), 173-197, quoted in Ruth Lister, *Poverty* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 75.

14 Arjan De Haan, "Social Exclusion: Enriching the Understanding of Deprivation," *Studies in Social and Political Thought* 2, no. 2 (2000): 22-40; Lister, *Poverty*, 75.

nomic, political, and cultural dynamics. Madanipour defines the term in its broader context as "[a] multidimensional process in which various forms of exclusion are combined: participation in decision making and political processes, access to employment and material resources, and integration into common cultural processes."[15]

Social exclusion functions through different parameters, such as poverty and ethnicity, which overlap, co-exist, and intermingle with one another. It relies on hierarchies in society and leads to inequalities between different members of a society. The term actually came to be used at a time when the perception, representations, and experiences of poverty began to change. The concept may not have been altogether new, but the context and conditions in which it appeared had quite novel features, such as an increase in total unemployment, a decrease in the power of labor and job security as well as in state subsidies and responsibilities, erosion of traditional ways of social solidarity, and the intensifying power of the market.[16] Byrne points out that this has been rather a qualitative change, and, in this context, the phenomenon of poverty has become recognized not only through material forces, but also through marginalization and social relations.

Byrne warns us against the weak version of the discourse around the term "excluded" as the counterpart of "underclass," and instead emphasizes the stronger version, with its focus on "the role of those who are doing the excluding."[17] In this version, the term is used dynamically as it relates to time, change, the lives of individuals and collectivities, agency, and social structures. In light of this warning, the significance of the term lies in its emphasis on the multidimensionality of inequalities and on the dynamics underlying these inequalities and thus the exclusion of specific peoples and lifestyles as against the inclusion of certain others at different stages and in different degrees and manners in relation to circumstances. This is very much related to historically constructed power relations, how they interact, and how they are currently positioned. Accordingly, it presses for a broader understanding of the socioeconomic and political contexts in which we live. In this formulation, social exclusion is limited neither to the economic nor merely to the political and social world. Instead, it opens a space for comprehending the different dynamics that are at stake, such as the overlap between sociopolitical

15 Ali Madanipour, Göran Cars, and Judith Allen, eds., *Social Exclusion in European Cities: Processes, Experiences and Responses* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 1998), 22, quoted in Munck, *Globalization*, 22.

16 Byrne, *Social Exclusion*, 4.

17 John Veit-Wilson, *Setting Adequacy Standards: How Governments Define Minimum Incomes* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 1998), 45, quoted in Byrne, *Social Exclusion*, 5.

and economic (in)justice as well as personal and communal experiences. Moreover, the concept allows us to approach poverty as a way of depriving people of economic resources and related advantages in a manner that is at the same time connected to such social and political categories as ethnicity and citizenship.

Similar to this focus, along with Gypsies' disadvantaged positions, some theorists interpret their place in the economy as a survival strategy they adopt and adapt for the place that is left over for them in society. According to Beynon, Gypsies—or as he calls them, "pariah people"—usually try to find niches in the economy and occupy low-status professions while having relatively high earnings and/or respect through certain of their occupations, such as that of musician.[18] Thus, Gypsies occupy certain professions and survive in certain sectors in relation to the Gadjos' positions in those professions and sectors: if there is a niche and they think that they can survive or find themselves in relatively advantageous positions, they concentrate on those particular professions and sectors. The same premises led Acton to introduce the term "commercialized nomadism."[19] With this term, he points out how niches in specific sectors influence Gypsies' occupations and decisions to move. For Acton, Gypsies detect certain niches according to their skills and, after they have satisfied the demand in one particular place, they move somewhere else to look for a similar demand. In his analysis of the Gypsies of Turkey, Mischek follows a similar approach, indicating Gypsies' search for particular benefits by finding such niches and dominating certain sectors. He exemplifies this with the Gypsy monopolies over such sectors as selling flowers on the street.[20]

These approaches emphasizing the Gypsies' positions in non-Gypsy economies as a kind of survival strategy focus primarily on the Gypsies' agency in response to their exclusion. In this type of analysis, Gypsies undertake more and more active roles in their lives and economic situation. Instead of being merely passive receptors of conditions dominated by Gadjos, they analyze the market, seek out certain niches, and take on active roles. As we will see, this niche-seeking approach as a survival strategy even grants them relatively advantageous positions within their socioeconomic conditions. Below, I will elaborate more on the niche-

18 Erdmann Beynon, "The Gypsy in a Non-Gypsy Economy," *American Journal of Sociology* 42, no. 3 (1936): 369.

19 Thomas Acton, "The Roma/Gypsies/Travellers—A Tale of Two Genocides," 2006, http://www.docstoc.com/docs/34104901/The-RomaGypsiesTravellers---a-tale-of-two-genocides.

20 Udo Mischek, "The Professional Skills of Gypsies in İstanbul," *Kuri: Journal of the Dom Research Center* 1, no. 7 (2002), http://www.domresearchcenter.com/resources/links/mischek17.html.

seeking argument in parallel with ethnic economies, and also on the effects of social exclusion, after first introducing a more general framework of the Gypsies' place in the economy of Turkey.

Gypsies in the economy of Turkey

Gypsy communities are not homogenous in Turkey, not only because of the socioeconomic differences between individuals in a particular community, their degree of social integration with the majority, and local differences, but also because of different groupings and identifications. We can roughly distinguish three main groups in Turkey: the Rom, who are concentrated in the western regions; the Lom, in the north and northeast; and the Dom, in the southeast and east. Apart from geographical distinctions, this rough typology can also be used to distinguish linguistic and cultural variations among Gypsies.

Throughout their journeys, they are believed to have interacted with varied groups of people, and were included in the group called "Egyptians," who mostly worked as artisans, craftspeople, and entertainers in the domains of the Byzantine Empire.[21] In Ottoman times, certain Gypsies even had special status, like the Gypsy sanjaks who provided service for the military, alongside other professions such as those of musician, blacksmith, or ironworker. The Gypsies' position in the economy of the Ottoman Empire was far from negligible and was by no means limited to such professions, as they also had a place as horse traders, coppersmiths, tin sellers, miners, and "dirty jobs" such as the collection of street dogs.[22]

In the empire, the law relating to Gypsies—initiated by Süleyman the Magnificent in the sixteenth century as the Code of Regulations for the Gypsies of the Province of Rumelia (*Kânûnnâme-i Kıbtiyân-ı Vilâyet-i Rumeli*)—reveals the rules regarding taxation and the authority of the Gypsy sanjak. The law aims at regulating the collection of taxes from Gypsies, with the taxation of nomadic and non-Muslim Gypsies being higher. According to this code of regulations, the Gypsy sanjak was responsible for taxation as well as the implementation of certain punishments.[23] Barany indicates that, although their position was subordinate to other groups in the empire, the Gypsies were still relatively well off under Ottoman rule as compared to other regions, where they faced

21 Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Çingeneler* (İstanbul: Homer Kitabevi, 2006), 19.

22 Nazım Alpman, *Başka Dünyanın İnsanları Çingeneler* (İstanbul: Ozan Yayıncılık, 1997), 55; Marushiakova and Popov, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda*, 79.

23 Marushiakova and Popov, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda*, 37-39.

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slavery and harsh discrimination.[24] However, as Barany also asserts, Muslim Gypsies were taxed more than other Muslims, as they were not considered faithful practitioners of Islam.[25]

In recent times, the most widely circulated number for the population of Gypsies in Turkey is 500,000, estimated by way of deduction from the Ottoman population census of 1831.[26] However, some Gypsy representatives claim higher numbers, up to between two and five million.[27] Most Gypsies, both sedentary and itinerant, live in the Thrace and Marmara regions. Some of the names used to identify Gypsies in Turkey are *Çingene*, *Kıpti*, and *Poşa* or *Boşa* (in eastern Anatolia), *Mıtrip* (a variant of an Arabic word for "musician" and often used for Gypsies in Hakkari, Siirt, and the southern part of Van), and *Karaçi*, while sometimes they are referred to by their occupational sub-group, such as *Arabacı* (horse carter), *Demirci* (ironworker), *Kalaycı* (tinsmith), *Elekçi* (sieve maker, used in central Anatolia), or *Sepetçi* (basket weaver, used in the Mediterranean and Aegean regions).[28] As these names show, Gypsies in Turkey occupy certain particular professions that are seen as traditional Gypsy occupations and are even used to directly identify them. Following the same logic, if people from different ethnic backgrounds engage in such traditional Gypsy professions, the majority may also consider them Gypsy. Although some of these professions have more recently been replaced with new ones, their identification with Gypsies continues to exist.

As an important determining factor in employment, educational background is significant for Gypsies' position in the economy. There is no nationwide study of Gypsy education in Turkey; however, one exemplary study on Gypsy-dominated neighborhoods in Turkey's third largest city, İzmir, documents and exemplifies their typically low level of education.[29] Covering 253 Gypsy individuals (28.9% female, 71.1%

24 Zoltan Barany, *The East European Gypsies: Regime Change, Marginality, and Ethnopolitics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 83-112.

25 For higher taxation of Muslim Gypsies in eighteenth-century Thessaloniki, see Eyal Ginio, "Neither Muslims nor Zimmis: The Gypsies (Roma) in the Ottoman State," *Romani Studies* 14, no. 2 (2004): 117-144.

26 Karpat pointed out the separate recording of Gypsies, although other Muslims would not be registered with different terms, such as ethnic names. Kemal Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1830–1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 20.

27 Adrian Marsh, "Ethnicity and Identity: Who are the Gypsies?" in *We are Here! Discriminatory Exclusion and Struggle for Rights of Roma in Turkey*, eds. Ebru Uzpeder, Savelina Danova/Roussinova, Sevgi Özçelik, and Sinan Gökçen (İstanbul: Mart Matbaacılık, 2008), 24.

28 See Ana Oprişan, "An Overview of the Romanlar in Turkey," in *Gypsies and the Problem of Identities; Contextual, Constructed and Contested*, eds. Adrian Marsh and Elin Strand, (İstanbul: Swedish Research Institute, 2006), 163; Suat Kolukırık, "Perceptions of Identity Amongst the Tarlabasi Gypsies, İzmir," in *Gypsies and the Problem of Identities; Contextual, Constructed and Contested*, eds. Adrian Marsh and Elin Strand (İstanbul: Swedish Research Institute, 2006b), 133.

29 Zerrin Toprak et al., *İzmir Büyükkent Bütününde Romanlar* (İzmir: Nobel Yayını, 2007), 186.

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male), the study indicates that only 5.2% were high-school graduates or above, 8.7% secondary-school graduates, 52.2% elementary-school graduates, and 34.4% illiterate. Kolukırık's study of another neighborhood in İzmir reveals very similar figures for a total of 90 Gypsies (22 female, 68 male), with 25.6% illiterate, 6.7% literate without formal education, 17.8% with some elementary-school attendance, 37.8% elementary-school graduates, 5.6% with some secondary-school attendance, and 1.1% high-school graduates.[30]

In terms of Gypsies' economic situation, in spite of the fact that certain differences may be observed according to individual and regional background, there is more or less a general framework for their social exclusion. Especially among Gypsies in the poor neighbourhoods of İstanbul, poverty is rampant due to inadequate housing, education, employment, and health. The research of Toprak et al.[31] draws attention to the high rate of irregular jobs and unemployment among the Gypsies of İzmir, showing that 68.4% of 253 respondents did not have regular work. The same study reveals that the most frequent reason given (in 24.51% of cases) for Gypsy children quitting school was related to economic factors (poverty and high expenses).[32]

However, it would nonetheless be inaccurate to state that all Gypsies are poor, as this would risk false generalization and contradiction. There are also observable differences in terms of class. Whereas most Gypsies experience poverty due to their generally inadequate educational background, difficulty in obtaining formal jobs with a high salary, and lack of social security, there are also wealthier Gypsies. For instance, İncirlioğlu observed three groups of Gypsies in Edirne: those who had been assimilated, "good Gypsies," and poor Gypsies. As these groups were determined according to their class differences, their professions also varied, from businessmen to garbage collectors and the unemployed.[33]

Moreover, as will later be exemplified in the case of flower sellers, the informal economy has perceived advantages as well as disadvantages. A lack of social security coupled with difficult working conditions are among the most significant disadvantages, while flexibility and a relatively loose working schedule are among the attractions. Avoiding prejudice as well as the Gypsies' tendency to minimize their interaction with

30 Suat Kolukırık, *Dünden Bugüne Çingeneler* (İstanbul: Ozan Yayıncılık, 2009), 28.

31 Toprak et al., *İzmir Büyükkent*, 26.

32 Ibid., 72.

33 Emine İncirlioğlu, "Secaat Arzederken Merd: Türkiye'de Çingenelerin Örgütlenme Sorunları," in *Türk(iye) Kültürleri*, eds. Gönül Pultar and Tahire Erman (İstanbul: Tetragon İletişim Hizmetleri, 2005), 167-189.

the state are also among the motives that drive them to informal jobs. In addition, there are some Gypsies who explain their significant presence in the informal economy by means of their "Gypsy nature," which is seen as being incompatible with discipline or with dependence on and surveillance by another person.

Consequently, in Turkey, what drives Gypsies into certain professions is an ethnic-based social exclusion, poverty, socioeconomic conditions, skills, and personal and communal desires. Whereas their poor educational background and limited marketable skills may prevent them from finding desirable jobs in the non-Gypsy formal sector, they generally manage to make a living in the informal sector. Their ability to penetrate the non-Gypsy formal sector depends on the degree of their integration into the dominant social codes as well as the degree of their assimilation, even to the extent of hiding their Gypsy identity. What is more, their significant presence in the informal sector stands both as evidence of their social exclusion in society and as an example of their reluctance to incur disadvantages in the non-Gypsy formal sector.

The working conditions of Gypsy flower sellers in the streets of İstanbul

The ornamental plant and flower sector is a developing one in Turkey. Until the 1980s, the need for ornamental plants and flowers was met with the support of imported products. However, since 1985, the region of Antalya has been engaged in export as well.[34] The export values of the cut flower sector for 2011 show that 294,597,187 flowers, with a value of 27,275,764 TL, were exported, out of a total of 399,081,280 ornamental plants and flowers, with a value of 76,322,447 TL.[35] These values indicate a developing sector in terms of overall production and trade. This has also influenced demand in the domestic market, thus affecting job opportunities in the sector and the conditions of street flower sellers, even if they are engaged not in export but in petty business.

In Turkey overall, there are around 9,000 tradesmen in the flower-selling business, with more than half of these settled in İstanbul. Cut flower production and marketing in İstanbul began in the 1940s.[36] The consumption of cut flowers in the country, on the other hand, comes to $200–230 million, according to the values from the year 2012.[37] Most

34 Faruk Sönmez, *Kesme Çiçek Sektör Raporu*, (Ankara: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Kalkınma Bakanlığı, Doğu Karadeniz Kalkınma Ajansı, 2012), 7.

35 Ibid., 62.

36 Ankara Commodity Exchange Official Website, http://www.ankaratb.org.tr/pages.aspx?pageId=887152da-e793-483f-8a30-ee0ecbb76faf.

37 Sönmez, *Kesme Çiçek*, 56.

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of this consumption occurs in the region of İstanbul and intensifies on certain special days, such as Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, weddings, or funerals. Within the sector, street flower sellers can only address the domestic markets, while florists can work internationally. This change in scope influences not only the working conditions and the extent of business, but also the flower sellers' organizational structure, level of education, and target customers in the domestic markets. One florist in the Şişli district (non-Gypsy, born 1971, university graduate in engineering) pointed out some of these differences:

> We have been in this business since 1962; from father to son. Street sellers only address people in the street. We address big companies and elites. There is a difference in quality. They represent the business out under the sun and in the rain, and out in the middle of traffic, which is nice. We have more security, of course. People who understand flowers would choose us. There is a difference, and this is reflected in prices. We work as a team, and as a country we are becoming more successful in the flower sector. (Florist, Şişli)

Most Gypsies entered the flower-selling business in the 1950s, and since then it has become a Gypsy profession, passed down from parents to children. They do business in the streets in ways that are—as compared to the florists—less organized, less secure, and less educated. Nonetheless, for most of them, it remains the best option within the economy. Although the exact number of people in the sector cannot be precisely determined due to the unregistered nature of the profession and the fact that it is seasonal work, overall in İstanbul the profession is considered to be a traditional one among Gypsies. Some neighborhoods, such as Kuştepe in European İstanbul and Küçükbakkalköy in Asian İstanbul, appear to have an especially significant percentage of Gypsy flower sellers. This is compatible with the notion of the division of profession among Gypsies according to the neighborhoods in which they live.[38] However, Gypsies from other neighborhoods—such as Gültepe, where one of my interviewees comes from—may also find a place in the sector.

To be an actor in this sector, network relations and connections are significant. Firstly, in order to purchase flowers one should go to the auctions (*mezat*) organized by cooperatives. In these cooperatives, flowers are sold by auction, the rule being that whoever pays more gets the flowers. There are different ways of making a purchase at the *mezat*s,

38 Alpman, *Başka Dünyanın*, 47.

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such as prepayment for purchases, signing vouchers to pay later, and straight cash purchases. To sign a voucher at a *mezat*, a newcomer usually requires reference from an already established, trustworthy, and well-known flower seller. As such, this requires a presence within a community network. The owners and organizers of *mezat*s are all non-Gypsies, while the buyers are made up of a mix of Gypsies and non-Gypsies, although the number of Gypsies in those *mezat*s that serve street sellers is relatively high. A Gypsy interviewee, Nazim (born 1968, elementary-school graduate) emphasizes the Gypsies' role in the market and the solidarity that exists among them:

> The cooperative was founded in 1946. We joined in 1955. With our involvement, people began to like flowers. We know the special days. We have our own customers and do not need any competition. We do not fight over customers.

However, networking and solidarity among sellers are not enough to enable one to survive in the business. There is also a bureaucratic and political procedure to enable one to secure a place or zone of business, with a good and permanent place being crucial for success. Permanent street flower sellers require permission from the municipality for the place that they intend to sell flowers. They typically prefer busy and crowded places on main streets and in city squares. Street corners are among the more desirable places owing to visibility and a larger pool of customers. Choosing to stay in the same place and/or region is a business strategy that can preserve customer loyalty and regularity, ensuring that the sellers can have regular customers who know and trust them. Moreover, when they remain in certain fixed places, their relations with local shopkeepers are strengthened, which helps to curtail negative reactions against them as well as providing a certain level of support from local people. All of my interviewees asserted that it was for such reasons as these that they had been doing business in the same places for many years, ranging from a low of five years to a high of twenty-seven.

However, obtaining permission from municipalities for some places can be difficult. What is more, municipalities can sometimes restrict business, and certain street sellers may face poor treatment by security forces. Cihan (born 1976, elementary-school graduate) has been in the business for seven or eight years, working on the borders of the Şişli municipality, and he indicated such restrictions, his sense of being trapped by these restrictions, and his lack of other business opportunities:

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> Like fifteen days ago, they [policemen] warned us, "Do not sell flowers here or we will take you to the police station." Then, they came again, cuffed us, and took us to the station. There they beat us and said, "We keep warning you but you keep coming back." But I tell them, "What else can I do? Shall I steal instead?"

Political relations and orientations have an influence on the attitudes of municipalities. Interviewees from the Taksim area declared that the Beyoğlu municipality was not very tolerant and wanted to bring some order to Gypsy flower sellers in streets, although the Şişli municipality was generally claimed to be more helpful and to maintain more or less good relationships with Gypsies. According to my interviewees, the reason for this difference between the two municipalities lay in the district mayors' respective political parties. At the time of interviewing, the Şişli district mayor was Mustafa Sarıgül, a member of the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP), while the Beyoğlu district mayor was Kadir Topbaş, a member of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP). The interviewees believed that they were better off in Şişli owing to their good relations with the CHP and their loyalty towards the party in elections. Moreover, the existence of a flower sellers' association in Kuştepe had an effect on their better treatment by the Şişli municipality: Kuştepe, located within the Şişli district, is known as the Gypsy neighborhood that hosts the majority of Gypsy flower sellers in European İstanbul, and as such the interviewees' comments on the municipality's attitude regarding considerations of potential votes from the neighborhood seem plausible.

Another issue in regards to the claiming of a space for selling is power relations among the Gypsies themselves, as a newcomer is not readily permitted to do business in already established territory. It was expressed, in a joking manner, that a newcomer might be met with violence to prevent him/her from daring to enter another's territory. In line with this attitude, and according to Alpman's observations, there is a subdivision of work spaces between Gypsy neighborhoods. Whereas portside squares in the Kadıköy, Üsküdar, Beşiktaş, Taksim, Emirgan, and Ortaköy districts belong to the Kuştepe neighborhood, the areas of Fenerbahçe, Çiftehavuzlar, Caddebostan, Erenköy, Şaşkınbakkal, and Bostancı belong to the Küçükbakkalköy neighborhood.[39] This mechanism of subdivision and its concomitant power relations prevent harsh competition and may create a monopoly-like business, as referred to by

39 Ibid.

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Mischek.[40] Moreover, according to my two *Roman* interviewees who were not in the sector but shared their observations on their community, these power relations may be criminalized as well. They asserted that there may even be powerful mafia intervention in the sector. However, *Roman* flower sellers did not mention this issue, and denied it when asked directly. On the contrary, as mentioned earlier, they emphasized solidarity among themselves. My interviewees stressed that, with the exception of certain small fights that might occur when attracting customers, they worked to help one another by warning about municipal visits and by loaning and purchasing flowers.

The solidarity among sellers is substantial, especially considering the difficult working environment and daily schedule of a street seller. An ordinary working day for a Gypsy flower seller usually starts around seven o'clock in the morning and may last until ten o'clock at night, depending on sales. The early starting hour is essential for purchasing good quality products. According to Fatma (born 1973, elementary-school graduate): "Buying flowers from the *mezat* has special hours. If you go early in the morning, you can buy from the front seats. If you go late, you can [only] buy from the back seats and will not even see whether the flowers are fresh or not."

The difficult conditions are also a product of the unpredictability of sales and of seasonal effects within the business. The lack of ways to preserve products in good condition according to various environmental factors and changes in the weather can influence not only the prices at *mezat*s but also customer demand. Flowers are cheaper in summer, when most Gypsies take a break due to low customer demand and the risk of losing money owing to flowers wilted by the hot weather. Therefore, for most sellers the working period usually lasts from the beginning of September to the end of May, although some do continue business in summer, albeit on a smaller scale and with more effort required. This dependence on weather and demand leads to an irregular income and a sense of insecurity among street flower sellers. In addition, the sellers have no real social security regarding their job, with the only way for them to benefit from a kind of social security being to acquire a state-issued green card (*yeşil kart*) providing free health care to the poor.

Child care is another issue related to poor working conditions and the lack of social security. Some street flower sellers, mostly female, have to bring their young children to their place of business because they generally have no other option. This creates a double burden on the seller,

40 Mischek, "The Professional Skills."

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as she must then take care of her child while also working. Moreover, the workplace is not always a healthy, suitable, or comfortable environment for a child to spend his/her whole day in. Working out in the open air creates difficulties for the sellers, as they must work outdoors in cold and/or rainy weather during the winter, and out under the sun during the summer. They also work in streets that are exposed to exhaust smoke, and spend most of their time either standing or sitting on plastic flower baskets.

Child care is also connected with the running of a family business, with only a few exceptions, such as widows. A family business relies strongly on a particular gendered division of labor. Whereas most actual sellers are women, their husbands are generally the ones who provide the flowers, buying them from the auctions organized by the cooperative. My interviewees asserted that they found women more skillful at selling, as they were more social and, probably, more easily accepted in Gadjo society. However, this puts an extra burden on women, who are responsible both for domestic labor, including child care, and for doing business. In some cases, like my female interviewee Nihan (born 1962, elementary-school graduate), the burden can become even greater, as she also goes to purchase flowers. Her husband is illiterate and "untalented in understanding the language of a customer," and so she feels the necessity to do the majority of the job on her own. In one way or another, certain features of patriarchy—such as domination by men, subordination of women, and a gendered division of labor—make the lives of female Gypsy flower sellers particularly difficult. Ayla (born 1950, literate) similarly expressed her complaint about gendered inequalities and women's troubles: "Among our *Romans*, men's words are more valuable. The women work outside, do their work [inside the house], and put the money in his hand. What more could he want?"

Although Gypsy flower sellers complained about such problems as those presented above, they also had positive things to say regarding their work. For some, it was the only work that they could find. For others, especially significant are the flexibility that the work provides and its relatively high earnings as compared to those formal jobs that they would be able to find given their poor educational background and skills. Furthermore, some stated that they had no other qualifications and that being a flower seller in the streets was their destiny. Below, I will elaborate on the reasons and explanations given by my interviewees regarding their presence in the sector by looking at the issues of identification, self-identification, and social exclusion.

The effects of social exclusion and Gypsyness

The difficulties of the profession and the experiences of Gypsy flower sellers raise a larger question: is this a matter of force, or of choice? There is no easy answer to this question. Social exclusion interacts with the construction of Gypsyness in a manner that situates Gypsies within the sector. Gypsyness is established along with the profession and in just such a construction: it is romanticized in such a way as to demonstrate Gypsies' "natural" compatibility with and adaptation into the business. In this way, the nature of Gypsyness is believed to provide a potential that would answer to the requirements of the profession. Individuals, moreover, act on the idea of this nature so as to formulate their group identity, make professional choices, and achieve success in the sector. On the other hand, the social exclusion that Gypsies have historically faced becomes a structural factor influencing their level of education, socio-economic conditions, and limited choices within the economy.

As mentioned above, network relations and solidarity are essential for ethnic economies based on ethnically defined communities, especially among immigrants and minorities.[41] Although further research is required for an extensive analysis, the situation of Gypsy street flower sellers resembles an ethnic niche with a high concentration of community members, a transmission of necessary skills and information across generations within the community, and a connection between the profession and group identity.[42] Among Gypsy groups, as already mentioned, the connection between professions and group definition is significant: certain professions not only become traditional, but also formulate the group identification. Research on Gypsies has also demonstrated the significance of such niche-taking for Gypsies' survival within Gadjo economies.[43]

Although working in such ethnicized sectors can provide certain opportunities to group members, the gains within these sectors may be limited. Niches with high earnings demonstrate the benefits of ethnic economies, but there are also niches that may become undesirable jobs. Logan and Alba refer to this as a "'ghettoization' into undesirable jobs"[44]

41 Edna Bonacich and John Modell, *The Economic Basis of Ethnic Solidarity: Small Business in the Japanese American Community* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1980), 33-34.

42 Stanley Lieberson, *A Piece of the Pie: Blacks and White Immigrants since 1880* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) and Roger Waldinger, "The Other Side of Embeddedness: A Case Study of the Interplay of Economics and Ethnicity," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 18, no. 3 (1995), referenced in Rath, "A Game of Ethnic Musical Chairs? Immigrant Businesses and the Formation and Succession of Niches in the Amsterdam Economy," in *Minorities in European Cities: The Dynamics of Social Integration and Social Exclusion at the Neighbourhood Level* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 2000), 26-44.

43 Acton, "The Roma," 2; Beynon, "The Gypsy," 369; Mischek, "The Professional Skills," 1.

44 John R. Logan and Richard D Alba, "Minority Niches and Immigrant Enclaves in New York and Los

that results from a lack of resources in a community. Wilson similarly draws attention to the disadvantages of such ethnic niches in that they can limit "[community members'] employment to the least desirable and lowest-paying jobs."[45] He acknowledges the effects of historical discrimination and exclusion against minorities, factors that also have an influence on the occupational choices of Gypsies. Their disadvantaged position limits their choices, as dual labor theory would suggest in explaining the reduced income and status of women and minorities: "[D]isadvantaged groups are locked into an inferior secondary labor market that does not offer access to the more desirable jobs in the primary sector of the labor market."[46]

Within this secondary labor market and its lower-class conditions, Gypsies develop their own "habitus," which Bourdieu defines as the systems of perception, taste, and action acquired through the social construction of individuals under objective socioeconomic conditions and subjective internalizations.[47] Gypsies' cultural framework in relation to their class position within the Gadjo-dominated society and economy is intertwined with their Gypsy identity. They act and take positions of agency in the sector in accordance with their Gypsy identity, their socioeconomic position, and the social exclusion that they face. Their lower-class position, exclusion, and limited cultural capital lead them to a poor educational background, skills less suitable for the primary labor market, and limited access to formal jobs. Eren similarly recognizes certain trends and dispositions in Gypsies' pursuit and choice of occupations in Tepecik, İzmir, as part of their "work habitus." Traditional occupations have lost their significance, while lack of education and qualified skills, along with the effects of poverty, have limited Tenekeli Gypsies' choices in the job market.[48] Gypsy flower sellers also choose their professions under the effects of similar structural factors and group reactions to these factors. Moreover, their community networks, solidarity, business strategies, and appreciation of group identity still provide a relative degree of betterment, agency, and success within the sector.

Angeles," in *Immigration and Opportunity: Race, Ethnicity, and Employment in the United States*, eds. Frank D. Bean and Stephanie Bell-Rose (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999), 173.

45 Franklin D. Wilson, "Ethnic Concentrations and Labor-Market Opportunities," in *Immigration and Opportunity: Race, Ethnicity, and Employment in the United States*, eds. Frank D. Bean and Stephanie Bell-Rose (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999), 133.

46 Ivan Light et al., "Beyond the Ethnic Enclave Economy," *Social Problems* 41, no. 1 (1994): 67.

47 Pierre Bourdieu and Loic J.D. Wacquant, *Düşünümsel Bir Antropoloji İçin Cevaplar*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2003), 117.

48 Zeynep Ceren Eren, "Imagining and Positioning Gypsiness: A Case Study of Gypsy/Roma from İzmir, Tepecik" (master's thesis, METU, 2008), 93.

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A certain "Gypsy essence" also receives emphasis in relation to the group habitus. "Gypsy nature" stands as significant for group identity and commonalities, as well as constituting a demonstration of or even proof for the compatibility of Gypsies with the profession. At the same time, it reveals the traces of their lower-class position and the social exclusion attached to it. Gypsies' socioeconomic conditions and relations with their profession reflect on their identity as Gypsies, and the reverse is also true. In this sense, their distance from, for example, education and formal jobs is highly based on their habitus, while some tend to find explanations for this distance in connection with "Gypsy nature." Bourdieu argues that educational level, the value attributed to education, and related expectations depend on one's class position and cultural capital.[49] Success in education is directly related to socioeconomic inequalities. Someone from a higher-class position and with greater cultural capital will accordingly have greater opportunities in the system of education, which in turn reproduces and legitimizes social inequalities.

Obviously, there are certain features of the Gypsy way of life, and being a Gypsy influences one's choices. However, leaving unquestioned socioeconomic and political inequalities and instead emphasizing "Gypsy nature" unintentionally serves those discriminative approaches, such as the underclass approach, that put blame on the Gypsy for sufferings incurred as a result of these inequalities. In Turkey, "Gypsy nature" connotes a number of features, such as wandering; closeness to nature; music, art, and dance; being relaxed and full of life; wearing colorful clothes; having golden teeth; having a high birth rate; and working in the informal economy. These features noticeably identify or classify a Gypsy through a process of mystification and romanticization related to their talents and manners. As Mayall warns us,[50] such a romanticization can be tricky, as it easily becomes a way to otherize Gypsies. Together with certain other assumed features—such as idleness, thievery, and immorality—these elements are also used to demonize and discriminate. The link between romanticization and demonization can easily become a part of common perception. This has been openly expressed by a well-known journalist in a mainstream newspaper who describes Gypsy flower sellers as people both to be admired for their freedom, originality, and bravery, and to be avoided for their dishonesty, shamelessness, prostitution, and drug dealing.[51]

49 Alice Sullivan, "Bourdieu and Education: How Useful is Bourdieu's Theory for Researchers?" *The Netherlands Journal of Social Sciences* 38, no. 2 (2002): 144.

50 David Mayall, *Gypsy Identities 1500–2000: From Egipcyans and Moon-men to the Ethnic Romany* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2004), 14-18.

51 Engin Ardıç, "Yemezler," *Sabah*, July 22, 2012, http://www.sabah.com.tr/Yazarlar/ardic/2010/07/22/

Some of my interviewees stated that they would be incompatible with formal jobs because being Gypsies would prevent them from performing "the Gadjo way." Moreover, selling flowers answers to their expressed desire to be flexible and close to nature while avoiding surveillance and regularity, all of which they consider peculiar features of being a Gypsy. According to my interviewee Ahmet (born 1953, elementary-school graduate), as a Gypsy he is more talented than a Gadjo seller because of his natural gifts: "They [Gadjos] cannot do [this work] like us. You need to understand the language of flowers like a Gypsy [does]." Kolukırık quoted similar statements from his Gypsy interviewees: "We have genetics that desire freedom. We cannot work under someone else's orders;" "Gypsies cannot stand boredom or discipline."[52] Eren also draws attention to Tepecik, İzmir's Gypsies' disbelief in education and the mobility it can provide, as well as the resulting unwillingness they display towards education. She reveals how Gypsy musicians in Tepecik perceive a conservatory education as a threat to their natural talent. But in spite of their own emphasis on "Gypsy nature," Eren points out the misrecognition of the structural forces that prevent them from receiving a formal education, explaining this situation with Bourdieu's term "the choice of the necessity."[53]

Some of my interviewees, on the other hand, emphasized their lack of knowledge, limited job options, and overall unemployment. An important issue, of course, is their lack of sufficient education to enable them to acquire more qualifications. None of my interviewees had further education after elementary school, while some were even illiterate as a result of economic problems and a reluctance to acquire formal education. All of them, however, wanted their children to have a good education and to find another job. One male interviewee, Kadir (born 1962, elementary-school graduate), indicated that, although some children went on to acquire an education in vocational schools, they did not engage in the work they were trained for there, but instead chose the flower-selling sector. Thus, children's access to the system of education was interrupted by their families' economic problems and/or by their lack of hope of finding a better job after receiving a higher education. For some of my interviewees, being literate and having a basic knowledge of practical algebra was sufficient.

yemezler.

52 Suat Kolukırık, "Çalışma Yaşamında Çingeneler: Çingene İş ve Meslekleri," (Paper presented at the Edirne Roman Symposium, Edirne, 2006), 3-4.

53 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 77, quoted in Eren, *Imagining and Positioning*, 63.

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Under such circumstances, Gypsies' lack of education coupled with their social exclusion decreases their chances of finding a "good" job in the formal sector. Their own experiences and comparisons with other Gypsies acquiring low-status jobs in the formal sector, such as a street cleaner for a municipality or a laborer in a small workshop, reinforce their beliefs in the impossibility of finding a better job with better earnings. My interviewees also mentioned the low salaries of formal jobs, which would not even cover their expenses. In his study on Gypsies in İzmir, Kolukırık[54] similarly emphasized the effects of such a dissatisfaction with the low rate of formal employment. Ultimately, my interviewees sought to simply do their best in the informal sector, in such jobs as selling flowers on the street. Nevertheless, some of them revealed a desire to work in the formal sector and have a job with social security, regularity, and better working conditions. Kadir, for example, said, "I would like to work as a civil servant at a state institution," while Nihan stated, "My husband would be better if he could find a job as a garbage collector for the municipality."

Gypsy flower sellers experience different phases of exclusion not only in direct, but also indirect ways. Systematic structures regarding educational, locational, and cultural hierarchies that automatically situate Gypsies in the lowest strata of society are not usually considered to be directly connected to exclusion, and most of my interviewees declared that they did not encounter any kind of direct exclusion while they were doing their job. Even so, certain individual experiences did reveal examples of direct exclusion. They felt insulted, for instance, by people pointing them out as "*Çingene*," and they were also kicked out of certain markets because "they looked like Gypsies."

The term "*Çingene*" is not a preferred name; instead, in its place they prefer the term "*Roman*" or Roma, and indeed identify themselves as such. Their opposition to the term "*Çingene*" comes from the word's socially and historically constructed negative connotations: it has been used in negative meanings related to begging, dirtiness, shamelessness, impudence, being uncivilized, being untrustworthy, thievery, and an inclination towards criminality.[55] The term also carries negative connotations in certain set Turkish phrases: "'*Çingene düğünü*' ('Gypsy wedding' – something which is not done as it is supposed to be done), '*Çingene kavgası*' (a 'Gypsy fight' – one that is overly violent), '*Çingene borcu*' ('Gypsy debt' – when a debt is tripled by other debts), '*Çingene çalar*,

54 Kolukırık, "Perceptions of Identity," 136.

55 Suat Kolukırık, "Türk Toplumunda Çingene İmgesi ve Önyargısı," *Sosyoloji Araştırmaları Dergisi* 2, no. 8 (2005): 52-71.

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Kürt oynar' ('the Gypsy sings, the Kurd dances" – the wrong people in the wrong place, or an unprepared person doing something he cannot actually do)."[56]

My interviewee Ceylan's (born in 1970, elementary-school graduate) strategy for selling flowers ironically clarifies the social exclusion Gypsies face in regards to Gypsyness and how their struggle is enacted in their business strategies. She asked me to pay attention to her accent and language in order to see how she used the Turkish language different from other Romani people, and explained that she purposefully tried to talk like a Gadjo because she thought she could attract more customers when she did not show her *Roman*-ness: "Look, they cannot tell my *Roman*-ness from how I talk. I will talk like them. They will like the way I talk and buy from me." Hiding one's accent may in fact be a common strategy to conceal Gypsyness, as confirmed by Eren's interviewees.[57] As a result, Ceylan's attempt to hide the features of Gypsyness in her business itself exemplifies how social exclusion can be internalized and taken into consideration in business.

Conclusion

Gypsy flower sellers in İstanbul face harsh working conditions, and they are deprived of alternative choices due to their lack of education and comparable marketing skills for formal jobs. The effects of the overall social exclusion of Gypsies in Turkey—which depends on their lower-class position, status, and ethnicity—are an essential factor for their condition in the sector. Nonetheless, they do the best they can to maximize their income and improve their living conditions within the limitations of their socioeconomic environment and "habitus." Their efforts at networking, creating solidarity, and building strategies display their power of agency and struggle in the sector and in the economy as a whole.

I do not support the usage of the term "underclass," especially given this term's tendency to dehistoricize and depoliticize, along with the fact that it disregards Gypsies' power and struggles. The term itself obscures the dynamics of poverty, hierarchies, and the exploitation of certain groups and classes in favor of the interests of certain others, and it works for the status quo by focusing on poor people as deficient elements. As such, using the term "underclass" for Gypsies essentially dismisses a critique of the power inequalities affiliated with being a Gypsy. These inequalities result in degraded standards of living for Gypsies, guarantees

56 Oprişan, "An Overview," 165-166.

57 Eren, *Imagining and Positioning*, 151-152.

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them a limited share in the distribution of resources, and marginalizes their cultures within society.

Consequently, in the flower-selling sector, Gypsies' struggle with both formal and informal parties consigns them to the margins of the city and makes them visible as a group, in contrast to more isolated positions. Nevertheless, and in spite of the difficulties of their job, they express a certain amount of gratitude for their relatively high earnings as compared with those formal jobs that they might be able to find with their poor education. When he used the term "monopoly," Mischek may have been considering the noticeable number of Gypsies and their relative power in the street market. However, occupying a niche of a market does not always bring higher profits and living standards, as research on "ethnic economies" shows. Given their low standards of living, difficult working conditions, and limited profits, the case of Gypsy flower sellers seems far from a monopoly, but they nonetheless do struggle against the conditions of a harsh social exclusion.

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