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**CREATIVE LABOR IN TURKISH CULTURAL AND CREATIVE
INDUSTRIES: ISTANBUL-BASED VISUAL DESIGNERS**

MASTER'S THESIS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page Number
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	II
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	III
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	V
LIST OF TABLES.....	VI
LIST OF FIGURES.....	VII
RÉSUMÉ.....	VIII
ABSTRACT.....	XII
ÖZET.....	XV
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1. CULTURAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES.....	9
1.1. Cultural Production in Modern Societies.....	10
1.2. Cultural Industries.....	11
1.2.1. Cultural Industries' Characteristics.....	13
1.2.2. Cultural Industries in Contemporary Capitalism.....	16
1.3. Creative Industries and Knowledge-based Society.....	18
2. CREATIVE LABOR.....	22
2.1. A Definition for Creative Labor.....	22
2.2. Transformation of Labor Practices.....	24
2.3. Creativity and Labor.....	26
2.4. Creative Labor in Cultural and Creative Industries.....	27
2.4.1. Flexibilization.....	30
2.4.2. Individualization.....	32
2.4.3. Precarization.....	34
2.5. De-Westernization of Creative Labor Studies.....	35
3. CONDITIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF ISTANBUL-BASED VISUAL DESIGNERS.....	36
3.1. The Scope of the Study.....	37

3.1.1. Türkiye's Creative Ecosystem.....	37
3.1.2. Creative Labor in Turkish Cultural and Creative Industries...	41
3.2. Methodology.....	44
3.3. Findings and Discussion.....	46
3.3.1. Quality of Working Life.....	49
3.3.1.1. Insecurities, Pays, and Working Hours.....	55
3.3.1.2. Informality, Moral and Relational Work.....	61
3.3.2. Experiences and Subjectivities.....	65
3.3.2.1. Self-exploitative Subjects?.....	68
3.3.2.2. Entrepreneurial Subjects?.....	71
CONCLUSION.....	76
REFERENCES.....	80
APPENDICES.....	86
AUTOBIOGRAPHY.....	89

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

3D	: Three-dimension
AI	: Artificial intelligence
CCI	: Cultural and creative industry
DCMS	: Department of Culture, Media, Sports (United Kingdom)
GDP	: Gross domestic product
ICT	: Information and communication technology
IP	: Intellectual property
PEC	: Political economy of communication
TSI	: Turkish Statistics Institute
TV	: Television
UK	: United Kingdom
UNCTAD	: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNESCO	: The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
US	: United States

LIST OF TABLES

	Page Number
Table 2.1. Cultural Industries' distinctive features.....	14
Table 3.1. The table of interviews.....	47



LIST OF FIGURES

	Page Number
Figure 3.1. Trade performance of Turkish creative economy.....	38
Figure 3.2. Number of employees and enterprises in Turkish creative industries.....	38



RÉSUMÉ

Avec les récentes discussions autour du « post-industrialisme », de « l'économie de la connaissance », de la « société de l'information », de l'« économie créative » et de leurs variantes, la production culturelle est passée au premier plan dans les politiques publiques et les universités. Dans le récit de la nouvelle « économie créative », le terme créativité s'est imposé comme un « capital humain » et une forme d'input et d'output. Le terme a été utilisé dans les débats sur la croissance économique, la régénération urbaine et la création de nouveaux types de lieux de travail et de travailleurs. D'abord en Australie et en Grande-Bretagne, puis dans d'autres parties du monde, les « industries créatives » se sont imposées comme un terme générique désignant la production artistique et culturelle à l'ère des nouveaux médias. Dans ce contexte, les industries culturelles ont commencé à être considérées comme un sous-secteur qui fournit une variété de biens et de services informationnels à un secteur de l'information beaucoup plus étendu. Ainsi, les travailleurs créatifs se sont reconnus comme une main-d'œuvre multinationale de travailleurs qualifiés. Ils ont été qualifiés de travailleurs « sans col » et leurs emplois ont été salués comme « cool », « créatifs » et « égalitaires ». Cependant, les études critiques des spécialistes des médias et de la communication sur cette main-d'œuvre ont montré que les professions créatives étaient marquées de caractéristiques paradoxales sous cette image « brillante » du travail créatif dans les comptes rendus universitaires et politiques traditionnels. Presque tous les résultats ont mis en évidence une interrelation entre le néolibéralisme, l'élaboration de politiques néolibérales et la détérioration des conditions et l'évolution des subjectivités des travailleurs créatifs dans différents contextes industriels. Néanmoins, ces études ont été critiquées pour leur apparent ethnocentrisme épistémologique centré sur le contexte occidental post-industriel. S'inspirant de ces discussions récentes, cette thèse a entrepris de déterminer les conditions, les expériences et les subjectivités des travailleurs culturels dans les ICC turques, en réalisant une enquête de terrain sur les concepteurs visuels basés à Istanbul.

Le premier chapitre tente de définir les industries culturelles et créatives puisque les travailleurs culturels construisent et vivent leur carrière dans ces contextes industriels. Bien que les concepts d'« industries culturelles » et d'« industries créatives » utilisent des terminologies différentes et consistent en des classifications industrielles légèrement différentes, ils se chevauchent parfois. De plus, ces industries partagent beaucoup de points communs en ce qui concerne leur main-d'œuvre, car la « fabrication de symboles » est un aspect crucial pour ces deux industries. Cependant, bien que ces deux concepts se préoccupent de la création et de la circulation du « culturel » dans le capitalisme contemporain, ils diffèrent sensiblement à propos de leur manière de discours. Les discours que ces concepts déploient sont très significatifs pour déterminer les conditions, les expériences et les subjectivités des travailleurs culturels. Ces discours façonnent également les politiques publiques et les perspectives universitaires à l'égard de production culturelle. Alors que les « industries culturelles » sont un concept qui puise ses racines théoriques dans les approches critiques pionnières de la production culturelle telles que « l'industrie de la culture » et

« l'économie politique de la communication », les industries créatives sont un concept qui a émergé de la convergence des arts créatifs avec les industries culturelles dans le cadre de discussions récentes sur les technologies des nouveaux médias. Les chercheurs ont discuté du fait que ce changement terminologique a été déclenché par les décideurs politiques qui voulaient transformer la politique culturelle en une politique industrielle pour stimuler l'emploi et le PIB dans la nouvelle économie néolibérale basée sur l'information. Ces dernières années, les positions des travailleurs culturels dans ce nouveau discours de « créativité » ont fait l'objet de critiques importantes.

Le deuxième chapitre tente de définir les conditions, les expériences et les subjectivités des travailleurs culturels dans le cadre de ce changement terminologique. La plupart des travaux des ICC lesquelles étant réalisés dans le cadre de dispositifs post-fordistes, le chapitre met également en évidence les transformations des pratiques de travail dans le cadre de ces dispositifs. Dans le mode de production post-fordiste, le travail répétitif et routinier devient moins important et l'image d'un travailleur professionnel commence à se transformer vers les activités qui exigent l'utilisation de connaissances, d'informations et de créativité. Pourtant, alors que les travailleurs rompent avec les conditions de travail routinières et aliénantes du capitalisme fordiste, le travail précaire, précaire et irrégulier devient dominant dans le mode de production post-fordiste. Dans ce contexte, la précarité devient l'un des principaux concepts qui caractérisent le travail post-fordiste. Avec l'érosion des institutions sociales telles que l'État-providence ou les syndicats dans les régimes néolibéraux, la gestion du risque fait peser sur les individus. De plus, des concepts tels que « flexibilité » et « informalité » deviennent de plus en plus importants dans la restructuration néolibérale mondiale de l'économie. Les travailleurs culturels deviennent les enfants phares de cette nouvelle main-d'œuvre post-fordiste. Dans ce contexte, une littérature croissante émerge sur les conditions du travail créatif avec une attention particulière sur les questions d'inégalité, de précarité, de qualité du travail et des possibilités d'action collective des travailleurs culturels. D'autre part, en s'inspirant de la théorie gouvernementale du travail, les chercheurs ont discuté du fait que les travailleurs créatifs ne sont pas seulement des travailleurs aliénés passifs dans une industrie marquée par les effets cohésifs des processus tels que la flexibilisation, l'individualisation et la précarisation, mais sont également actifs mais des sujets gouvernés qui recherchent la réalisation de soi et le plaisir à travers leur travail, et qui adoptent les valeurs d'entreprise et d'autres idées néolibérales qui entourent le travail culturel précaire. Ainsi, les travailleurs culturels sont revendiqués comme des victimes auto-exploitées des lieux de travail créatifs néolibéraux. Cependant, la validité universelle de ces études a fait l'objet de débats parmi les spécialistes des médias et de la communication ces dernières années, car ces études ont principalement eu lieu dans le contexte occidental post-industriel du travail culturel. Ces chercheurs suggèrent que les notions tenues pour acquises du travail culturel établies par les chercheurs occidentaux, telles que le subjectivisme entrepreneurial, la précarité et l'informalité doivent être repensées et provincialisées.

Le troisième chapitre contextualise l'enquête de terrain en fournissant des informations générales sur l'économie créative turque et le travail créatif qui y opère. L'économie créative turque a été développée rapidement ces dernières années. Istanbul se distingue comme le fleuron de l'économie turque, accueillant près de la moitié de la main-d'œuvre culturelle du pays. Cependant, contrairement aux économies créatives de l'Occident, la Turquie n'a pas de politiques culturelles « appropriées » ou de lois du

travail spécifiques qui régissent le travail créatif. Le développement industriel dans les secteurs culturels turcs repose principalement sur les efforts individuels ou collectifs des entrepreneurs créatifs plutôt que sur des politiques culturelles bien adaptées. Après avoir examiné les résultats d'études antérieures sur les travailleurs culturels dans ce contexte, le chapitre passe à l'étude de terrain de cette thèse : les concepteurs visuels basés à Istanbul. Après avoir mené des entretiens semi-directifs auprès de 19 designers visuels basés à Istanbul qui ont été sélectionnés par une méthode d'échantillonnage en boule de neige, les résultats sont présentés sous deux chapitres principaux : l'un correspondant à la qualité de vie au travail des travailleurs sur le terrain et l'autre sur la les expériences et les subjectivités.

Les résultats indiquent clairement que le travail des concepteurs visuels basés à Istanbul prend une forme très flexible, individualisée et précaire. Sur la base de ce fait, l'étude a examiné le rôle de ces processus dans la formation de la qualité de vie professionnelle, des expériences de travail et des subjectivités des concepteurs visuels basés à Istanbul.

En termes de flexibilisation, on observe que le travail des concepteurs visuels basés à Istanbul est très flexible, tant en termes de pratiques de travail que de systèmes de recrutement. Presque tous les participants ont souligné la flexibilité de leurs pratiques de travail et de leurs processus de recherche d'emploi. Alors que la flexibilité peut être une source d'expérience positive car elle offre aux travailleurs une certaine liberté pour planifier leur propre programme de travail, ses effets sur la vie des travailleurs sont principalement négatifs. En raison de la flexibilité de leur travail, le travail des concepteurs visuels basés à Istanbul s'intensifie et ils assument des responsabilités supplémentaires en fonction des demandes de l'entreprise ou du client, généralement sans augmentation de salaire. On observe également que le travail dans les CCI turques est marqué par une forte précarité. En outre, a observé que les mécanismes d'avancement professionnel sont également très flexibles, informels et individualisés. La pige se distingue comme un modèle de travail très populaire et recherché parmi les concepteurs visuels basés à Istanbul. Avec l'érosion des institutions sociales telles que l'État-providence et les syndicats en Turquie, les problèmes structurels et les risques entourant le monde du travail pèsent sur les individus. Dans ce contexte, les designers visuels basés à Istanbul s'appuient sur des communautés informelles, principalement composées de leurs amis. Ce processus est lié à l'individualisation de la main-d'œuvre puisque les travailleurs utilisent ces réseaux comme une solution individualisée au problème systémique de flexploitation. Cependant, l'informalité et l'individualisation ne doivent pas censé être comme un processus qui conduit à la précarisation. Au-delà de son caractère individualisant, l'informalité crée également de nouvelles pratiques mondaines et solidaires chez les designers visuels d'Istanbul, qui sont « relationnelles ». Malgré les conditions difficiles présentées par le capitalisme post-fordiste, il semble que les designers visuels basés à Istanbul souhaitent continuer à travailler dans leurs activités créatives. On observe que les designers visuels basés à Istanbul ont un niveau élevé de passion pour leur travail créatif. Ils recherchent l'affirmation de soi, l'estime du public et l'estime de soi à travers leur travail. Cela les conduit à s'auto-exploiter. Une autre découverte importante concerne les subjectivités des concepteurs visuels basés à Istanbul. On observe que la plupart des concepteurs visuels basés à Istanbul semblent adopter les valeurs de l'entreprise. Il semble que les designers visuels basés à Istanbul soient des sujets créatifs entrepreneuriaux qui s'auto-exploitent, mais contrairement aux travailleurs culturels dans le contexte occidental post-industriel, ils ne montrent pas de

comportements d'auto-accusation. Au lieu de cela, ils blâment les problèmes structurels tels que l'économie, les clients, le secteur et la « culture ». Bref, afin de créer et valoriser leur potentiel entrepreneurial, ils souhaitent des changements structurels dans leur secteur, cependant, ils ne mènent aucune action collective pour le changer. Au lieu de cela, ils veulent déménager et travailler principalement dans des pays euro-américains, car ils trouvent ces pays plus "respectueux" de leur profession, où ils ont plus de clients "professionnels" que de clients en Turquie et où les paiements sont plus élevés. Cela apparaît comme une menace pour l'économie culturelle turque, car les travailleurs ne veulent pas travailler avec des clients ou des agences turques en raison des effets combinés de la précarisation et de l'informalité abusive.

Mots clés : Le labeur créatif, Industries créatives, Industries culturelles, post-Fordisme, Travail culturel



ABSTRACT

With the recent discussions around ‘post-industrialism’, ‘knowledge-based economy’, ‘information society’, ‘creative economy’ and their variants, cultural production has come to the fore in public policy and academy. In the narrative of the new ‘creative economy’, the term creativity has stood out as a ‘human capital’ and a form of input and output. The term has been used in debates around economic growth, urban regeneration, and creation of new kinds of workplaces and workers. First in Australia and Britain, and then the other parts of the world, ‘creative industries’ has shone out as an umbrella term for artistic and cultural production in the new media age. In this context, cultural industries have begun to be seen as a subsector that supplies a variety of informational goods and services to a much more extensive information sector. Within this frame, creative laborers have shone out as a multi-national workforce of skilled workers. They have been named ‘no-collar’ workers, and their jobs were hailed as ‘cool’, ‘creative’, and ‘egalitarian’. However, critical media and communication scholars’ studies on this workforce have shown that under this ‘glowing’ image of creative labor in mainstream academic and policy accounts, creative occupations were marked with paradoxical characteristics. Almost all of the findings pointed to an interrelation between neo-liberalism, neo-liberal policy making and the worsening conditions and changing subjectivities of creative laborers in different industrial settings. However, these studies have been criticized for their apparent epistemological ethnocentrism centered on the post-industrial Western context. Drawing from these recent discussions, this thesis set out to ascertain the conditions, experiences, and subjectivities of cultural workers in Turkish CCIs, with a field study on Istanbul-based visual designers.

The first chapter tries to define the cultural and creative industries since cultural workers build and experience their careers in these industrial contexts. Although the concepts of ‘cultural industries’ and ‘creative industries’ deploy different terminologies and consist of slightly different industrial classifications, they occasionally overlap. Additionally, these industries share much in common regarding their workforce since ‘symbol making’ is a crucial aspect for both of these industries. However, although both of these concepts are concerned with the creation and circulation of the ‘cultural’ in contemporary capitalism, they significantly differ in their manner of discourse. The discourses these concepts deploy are highly significant in determining cultural workers’ conditions, experiences, and subjectivities. These discourses also shape public policy and academic perspectives on cultural production. While ‘cultural industries’ is a concept that draws its theoretical roots from the pioneering critical approaches to cultural production such as ‘culture industry’ and ‘political economy of communication’, ‘creative industries’ is a concept that is emerged from the convergence of the creative arts with cultural industries in recent discussions around new media technologies. Scholars have discussed that this terminological shift was triggered by the policy-makers who wanted to turn cultural policy into an industrial policy to boost employment and GDP in the new information-

based neo-liberal economy. In recent years, cultural workers' positions in this new 'creativity' discourse have been a significant point of criticism.

The second chapter tries to define cultural workers' conditions, experiences, and subjectivities under this terminological shift. Since most CCI work is being performed under post-Fordist arrangements, the chapter also highlights the transformations of labor practices under these arrangements. In the post-Fordist mode of production, repetitive and routinized work becomes less significant and occupational profile changes towards the activities that require the use of knowledge, information, and creativity. However, while workers break from the routine and alienating working conditions of Fordist capitalism, insecure, casualized and irregular work becomes dominant in the post-Fordist mode of production. In this context, precarity becomes as one of the main concepts that characterize post-Fordist labor. With the erosion of social institutions such as the welfare state or trade unions in neo-liberal regimes, the management of risk places upon individuals. Additionally, concepts such as 'flexibility' and 'informality' become increasingly important in the global neo-liberal restructuring of the economy. Cultural workers become the poster children of this new post-Fordist labor. In this context, a growing body of literature emerged on the conditions of creative laborers with a particular emphasis on the questions of inequality, precariousness, quality of working life, and the possibilities of collective action among cultural workers. On the other hand, drawing from governmentality theory, scholars have discussed that creative laborers are not just passive alienated workers in an industry that is marked with the cohesive effects of the processes such as flexibilization, individualization and precarization, but also are active-but-governed subjects who seek self-realization and pleasure through their work, and who embrace enterprise values and other neoliberal ideas that surround precarious cultural work. Thus, cultural workers are claimed as self-exploited victims of neoliberal creative workplaces. However, the universal validity of these studies has been a matter of debate among media and communication scholars in recent years since these studies predominately took place in the post-industrial Western context of cultural work. These scholars suggest that the taken-for-granted notions of cultural work established by Western scholars, such as entrepreneurial subjectivism, precarity, and informality must be rethought and provincialized.

The third chapter contextualizes the field study by providing background information on the Turkish creative economy and the creative labor that operates under it. Turkish creative economy has grown rapidly in recent years. Istanbul stands out as the flagship of the Turkish economy, hosting almost half the country's cultural workforce. However, unlike the creative economies of the West, Türkiye does not have 'appropriate' cultural policies or specific labor laws that govern creative labor. Industrial development in Turkish cultural sectors primarily relies on creative entrepreneurs' individual or collective efforts rather than well-tailored cultural policies. After looking at the findings from previous studies on cultural workers in this context, the chapter moves on to the field study of this thesis: Istanbul-based visual designers. After conducting semi-structured interviews with 19 Istanbul-based visual designers, which have been selected by a snowball sampling method, the findings are presented under two main chapters: one corresponding to the quality of working life among workers in the field and the other on the experiences and the subjectivities.

The findings indicate that Istanbul-based visual designers' labor takes a highly flexible, individualized, and precarious form. Based on this fact, the study has

examined the role of these processes in shaping Istanbul-based visual designers' quality of working lives, work experiences, and subjectivities. In terms of flexibilization, it is observed that Istanbul-based visual designers' labor is highly flexible regarding working practices and recruitment systems. Almost all participants emphasized the flexibility of their laboring practices and job-finding processes. While flexibility can be a source of a positive experience as it provides workers some freedom to plan their own working program, its effects on workers' lives are mostly adverse. Due to the flexibility of their work, Istanbul-based visual designers' work intensifies, and they take additional responsibilities according to company or client demands, usually without a pay increase. It is also observed that work in Turkish CCIs is marked with high levels of precariousness. Additionally, it is observed that career advancement mechanisms are also highly flexible, informal, and individualized. Freelancing stands out as a highly popular and desired working model among Istanbul-based visual designers. With the erosion of social institutions such as the welfare state and trade unions in Türkiye, structural problems and risks surrounding the world of work are placed upon individuals. In this context, Istanbul-based visual designers rely on informal communities mostly consisting of their friends. This process is linked with the individualization of the workforce since workers use these networks as an individualized solution to the systemic flexploitation problem. However, informality and individualization should not just be thought of as a process that leads to precarization. Beyond its individualizing character, informality also creates new socialites and solidarity practices among Istanbul-based visual designers, which are 'relational'. Despite the harsh conditions presented by post-Fordist capitalism, it seems like Istanbul-based visual designers want to keep working in their creative occupations. It is observed that Istanbul-based visual designers have high levels of passion for their creative work. They seek self-affirmation, public-esteem, and self-esteem through their work. This leads them to self-exploit. Another important finding is on the subjectivities of Istanbul-based visual designers. It is observed that most Istanbul-based visual designers seem to embrace enterprise values. Istanbul-based visual designers seem to be entrepreneurial creative self-exploitative subjects, but unlike the cultural workers in the post-industrial Western context, they do not show self-blaming behaviors. Instead, they blame structural problems such as the economy, clients, sector, and 'culture'. In short, to create and enhance their entrepreneurial potential, they want structural changes in their sector, however, they do not take any collective action to change it. Instead, they want to move and work in mostly Euro-American countries, as they find these countries more 'respectful' to their occupation, where they have more 'professional' clients than clients in Türkiye and where payments are higher. This stands out as a threat to the Turkish cultural economy, as workers do not want to work with Turkish clients or agencies because of the combined effects of precariousness and abusive informality.

Keywords: Creative Labor, Creative Industries, Cultural Industries, post-Fordism, Cultural Work

ÖZET

Son dönemde ‘bilgi toplumu’, ‘yaratıcı ekonomi’ ve varyantları üzerine yapılan tartışmalar kültürel üretimin kamu politikasının ve akademik çalışmaların merkezine taşınmasına sebep olmuştur. Yeni ‘yaratıcı ekonomi’ anlatısında ‘yaratıcılık’ kavramı bir insan sermayesi olarak ele alınmıştır. Kavram ekonomik büyüme, kentsel dönüşüm, yeni işyerlerinin ve işçilerin yaratılması etrafındaki tartışmalarda kendisine yer edinmiştir. Bu bağlamda, ‘yaratıcı endüstriler’ tanımlaması, önce Avustralya ve İngiltere’de, ardından dünyanın diğer bölgelerinde yeni medya çağında sanatsal ve kültürel üretimi kapsayan bir çatı terim olarak kullanılmaya başlanmıştır. Bu dönüşüm dahilinde, kültürel endüstriler çok daha kapsamlı bilgi sektörüne çeşitli sembolik mal ve hizmetler sunan bir alt sektör olarak görülmeye başlanmıştır. Bu çerçevede yaratıcı emekçiler, vasıflı çalışanlardan oluşan çok uluslu bir işgücü olarak ön plana çıkmıştır. Bu emekçiler ‘yakasız’ çalışanlar olarak adlandırılmış ve işleri ‘havalı’, ‘yaratıcı’ ve ‘eşitlikçi’ olarak sunulmuştur. Fakat eleştirel medya ve iletişim akademisyenlerinin bu işgücüne ilişkin çalışmaları, ana akım akademik ve politika belgelerinde yaratıcı emeğin bu ‘parıldayan’ imajı ardında yaratıcı mesleklerin paradoksal özellikler barındırdığını göstermiştir. Bulguların neredeyse tamamı, neo-liberalizm, neo-liberal politika yapımı ve farklı endüstriyel ortamlarda yaratıcı emekçilerin kötüleşen koşulları ve değişen öznellikleri arasında bir ilişkiye işaret etmektedir. Fakat bu çalışmalar, post-endüstriyel Batı bağlamına odaklanan belirgin epistemolojik etnomerkezcilikleri nedeniyle eleştirilmiştir. Bu tartışmalardan yola çıkan bu tez, İstanbul merkezli görsel tasarımcılar üzerine bir alan araştırması ile Türkiye yaratıcı ve kültürel endüstrilerindeki kültür çalışanlarının çalışma koşullarını, deneyimlerini ve öznelliklerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Yaratıcı emekçiler kariyerlerini belirli endüstriyel bağlamlarda inşa ederler ve deneyimlerler. Bu sebeple ilk bölüm ‘kültürel endüstriler’ ve ‘yaratıcı endüstriler’i tanımlamaya çalışmaktadır. Konseptlerin her ikisi de kapitalizmin çağdaş döneminde ‘kültürel’ olanın yaratılması ve dolaşımıyla ilgili olsa da farklı akademik çevrelerde ortaya çıkmışlardır ve söylem açısından önemli ölçüde farklılık göstermektedirler. Bu iki konsept farklı söylemler ve terminolojiler kullansalar da sembol oluşturma bu sektörler için önemli bir unsur olduğundan konseptler işgücü dahil pek çok önemli konuda örtüşmektedirler. Fakat bu konseptlerin konuşturduğu söylemler, kültür çalışanlarının çalışma koşullarını, deneyimlerini ve öznelliklerini belirlemede oldukça önemlidir. Bu söylemler aynı zamanda kültürel üretime ilişkin kamu politikalarını ve akademik bakış açılarını da şekillendirmektedir. ‘Kültürel endüstriler’ teorik köklerini ‘kültür endüstrisi’ ve ‘iletişimin ekonomi politikası’ gibi kültürel üretime yönelik öncü eleştirel yaklaşımlardan alan bir kavramdır. ‘Yaratıcı endüstriler’ ise yeni medya çağında yaratıcı sanatların kültürel endüstriler ile yakınmasıyla ortaya çıkan bir kavramdır. Akademisyenler, bu terminolojik değişimin, yeni bilgiye dayalı neo-liberal ekonomide istihdamı ve GSYİH’yı artırmak için kültür politikasını bir sanayi politikasına dönüştürmek isteyen politika yapımcılar tarafından tetiklendiğini tartışmışlardır. Son yıllarda, kültür işçilerinin bu yeni “yaratıcılık” söylemindeki konumları önemli bir eleştiri noktası olmuştur.

İkinci bölüm, bu terminolojik değişim altında kültür çalışanlarının çalışma koşullarını, deneyimlerini ve değişen öznelliklerini tartışmaya açmaktadır. Kültürel ve yaratıcı endüstrilerdeki işin çoğu post-Fordist düzenlemeler altında yürütüldüğünden, bu bölüm ayrıca bu düzenlemeler kapsamında işgücü uygulamalarının dönüşümlerini ele almaktadır. Post-Fordist üretim tarzında, tekrarlayan ve rutinleşmiş işler önemini yitirir ve mesleki profil bilgi, enformasyon ve yaratıcılık gerektiren faaliyetlere doğru değişmeye başlar. Ancak işçiler Fordist kapitalizmin rutin ve yabancılaştıran çalışma koşullarından kurtulurken, post-Fordist üretim tarzında güvencesiz, geçici ve düzensiz çalışma egemen hale gelmiştir. Bu bağlamda prekerleşme post-Fordist emeği karakterize eden temel kavramlardan biri olmuştur. Refah devleti veya sendikalar gibi sosyal kurumların neo-liberal rejimlerde erozyona uğramasıyla, 'risk' yönetimi bireylere yüklenmiştir. Ek olarak, ekonominin küresel neo-liberal yeniden yapılanmasında "esneklik" ve "enformellik" gibi kavramlar giderek daha önemli hale gelmiştir. Kültür işçileri, bu yeni post-Fordist emeğin poster çocukları olarak görülmektedir. Bu bağlamda, eşitsizlik, güvencesizlik, çalışma kalitesi ve kültür işçileri arasındaki kolektif eylem olasılıkları konularına özel bir vurgu yapan ve hızla büyüyen bir literatür ortaya çıkmıştır. Öte yandan, Foucaultcu yönetimsellik teorisinden yola çıkan bazı akademisyenler, yaratıcı emekçilerin bireyselleşen, esnekleşen ve prekerleşen bir endüstride yalnızca pasif yabancılaşmış özneler olmadığını, aktif-ama-yönetilen özneler olduğunu tartışmışlardır. Bu bakış açısından yola çıkan akademisyenler, kültür işçilerinin neoliberal yaratıcı işyerlerinin kendi kendini sömüren özneleri olduğunu iddia etmektedir. Bununla birlikte, bu iki kanat çalışmaların ağırlıklı olarak post-endüstriyel Batılı kültürel çalışma bağlamında gerçekleştirilmesinden dolayı, bu çalışmaların evrensel geçerliliği son yıllarda medya ve iletişim araştırmacıları arasında bir tartışma konusu olmuştur. Bu akademisyenler, girişimci öznelcilik, güvencesizlik ve enformellik gibi Batılı akademisyenler tarafından kabul edilen sabit kültürel çalışma kavramlarının yeniden düşünülmesi ve yerleştirilmesi gerektiğini öne sürmektedir.

Üçüncü bölüm, Türkiye'deki yaratıcı ekonomi ve onun altında işleyen yaratıcı emek hakkında arka plan bilgisi sağlayarak saha çalışmasını bağlamsallaştırmaktadır. Türk yaratıcı ekonomisi son yıllarda hızla büyümektedir. İstanbul, ülkenin kültürel işgücünün neredeyse yarısına ev sahipliği yapan, Türk ekonomisinin amiral gemisi olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Ancak, Batı'nın yaratıcı ekonomilerinin aksine, Türkiye'de yaratıcı emeği yöneten 'uygun' kültürel politikalar veya özel iş kanunları yoktur veya uygulamada zayıf kalmaktadır. Türk kültür sektörlerindeki endüstriyel gelişme, iyi hazırlanmış kültürel politikalardan ziyade öncelikle yaratıcı girişimcilerin bireysel veya toplu çabalarına dayanmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, kültür işçileri üzerine daha önce yapılmış çalışmaların bulgularına baktıktan sonra, bu bölüm tezin saha çalışmasına konu olan İstanbul merkezli görsel tasarımcılara geçmektedir. Kartopu örnekleme yöntemiyle seçilen 19 görsel tasarımcı ile yarı yapılandırılmış mülakatlar gerçekleştirildikten sonra bulguların sunumuna geçilmiştir. Bulgular biri işçilerin çalışma koşullarına karşılık gelen, diğeri deneyimleri ve öznelliklerine karşılık gelen iki başlık altında işlenmiştir.

Bulgular, İstanbul-merkezli görsel tasarımcıların emeğinin son derece esnek, bireyselleştirilmiş ve güvencesiz bir biçim aldığını göstermektedir. Bu olgudan hareketle çalışmada, İstanbul merkezli görsel tasarımcıların çalışma hayatı kaliteleri, iş deneyimleri ve öznelliklerinin şekillenmesinde bu süreçlerin rolü incelenmiştir.

Katılımcıların tamamına yakını çalışma pratiklerinin ve iş bulma süreçlerinin esnekliğine vurgu yapmıştır. Esneklik çalışanlara kendi çalışma programlarını planlama konusunda bir tür özgürlük sağladığı için olumlu bir deneyim kaynağı olsa da çalışanların yaşamları üzerindeki etkileri çoğunlukla olumsuzdur. İstanbul-merkezli görsel tasarımcıların işlerinin esnekliği nedeniyle işleri yoğunlaşmakta ve genellikle ücret artışı olmadan şirket veya müşteri taleplerine göre ek sorumluluklar almaktadırlar. Ayrıca Türkiye'deki yaratıcı ve kültürel endüstrilerde çalışmanın yüksek düzeyde güvencesizlikle işaretlendiği gözlemlenmiştir. Ek olarak, kariyer ilerleme mekanizmalarının da oldukça esnek, enformel ve bireyselleştirilmiş olduğu gözükmemektedir. Serbest çalışma, İstanbul-merkezli görsel tasarımcılar arasında oldukça popüler ve arzu edilen bir çalışma modeli olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Türkiye'de refah devleti ve sendikalar gibi toplumsal kurumların erozyona uğraması ile çalışma dünyasını çevreleyen yapısal sorunlar ve riskler bireylerin sırtına yüklenmektedir. Bu bağlamda, İstanbul-merkezli görsel tasarımcılar, sektörde var olabilmek ve hayatlarını idame edebilmek adına çoğunlukla arkadaşlarından oluşan gayri resmi topluluklara yönelmektedir. İşçiler bu ağları sistemik esnek sömürü sorununa bireyselleştirilmiş bir çözüm olarak kullanmaktadır. Ancak enformellik sadece güvencesizleşmeye yol açan bir süreç olarak düşünülmemelidir. Enformellik, bireyselleştirici karakterinin ötesinde, İstanbul merkezli görsel tasarımcılar arasında 'ilişkisel' olan yeni toplumsallıklar ve dayanışma pratikleri de yaratmaktadır.

Post-Fordist kapitalizmin sunduğu zorlu koşullara rağmen, İstanbul merkezli görsel tasarımcılar yaratıcı mesleklerinde çalışmaya devam etmek istemektedirler. İstanbul merkezli görsel tasarımcıların mesleklerine karşı yüksek düzeyde tutkuya sahip oldukları gözlemlenmiştir; işleri aracılığıyla kendini onaylama, toplum saygısı ve öz saygı aramaktadırlar. Bu onların kendi kendini sömürmesine yol açan etmenlerden biridir. Bir diğer önemli bulgu ise İstanbul merkezli görsel tasarımcıların öznellikleri üzerinedir. İstanbul merkezli görsel tasarımcıların çoğunun kurumsal (enterprise) değerleri benimsediği gözlemlenmiştir. İstanbul merkezli görsel tasarımcılar, girişimci, yaratıcı, kendini sömüren özneler gibi görünse de post-endüstriyel batı bağlamındaki kültür işçilerinin aksine, kendilerini suçlayan davranışlar göstermemektedir. Bunun yerine ekonomi, müşteriler, sektör ve 'kültür' gibi yapısal sorunları işaret etmektedirler. Kısacası kendi girişimcilik potansiyellerini yaratmak ve geliştirmek için sektörlerinde yapısal değişiklikler istemekte ancak bunu değiştirmek için toplu bir eylemde bulunmamaktadırlar. Bunun yerine Türkiye'deki müşteri ve işverenlere göre daha 'profesyonel,' mesleklerine karşı daha 'saygılı' ve ödemelerin daha yüksek olduğu Avrupa veya Amerika ülkelerine taşınmak ve çalışmak istemektedirler. Bu, Türk kültürel ekonomisi için bir tehdit olarak göze çarpmaktadır çünkü işçiler, güvencesizliğin ve suiistimal edici enformelliğin birleşik etkileri nedeniyle Türk müşterilerle veya firmalarla çalışmak istememektedirler.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yaratıcı Emek, Yaratıcı Endüstriler, Kültürel Endüstriler, post-Fordizm, Kültürel İş

INTRODUCTION

Like almost all types of work and work organizations, cultural work and cultural organizations around the world have been a subject of rapid transformation under the conditions of contemporary capitalism and connected themes such as globalization, neoliberalism, and information and communication technologies (ICTs) revolution. While this transformation continues, new concepts have emerged, and old concepts have been reconsidered by different academic and policy environments, aiming to refer to how cultural products are created and circulated in modern economies and societies. Most of these concepts analyze changing organizational structures and modalities in cultural production and their external links to the wider economy. However, these studies predominantly show an apparent lack of attention toward creative labor within the cultural workforce, especially its links with changing working conditions and worker subjectivities. Furthermore, as Alacovska and Gill (2019) argue, the limited number of studies on creative labor around the world echo rather than challenge the Euro-American perspective on creative labor and its '*epistemological ethnocentrism*' (p. 2). Therefore, the main aim of this study is to investigate conditions, experiences, and subjectivities of creative laborers in Turkish CCIs with conceptual frameworks provided by critical media and communication studies.

Scholars from different backgrounds have produced various categories, such as 'immaterial labor,' 'knowledge labor,' or 'creative labor,' to refer to the type of jobs that cultural workers hold during their working lives. However, there has been no absolute agreement on which category cultural workers' activities fall into. Although they have emerged from different academic environments and point not so similar patterns of working experiences, these terms are often used as a substitute for each other. Consequently, they are all related to the transformations in working life under the impact of ICTs, globalization, and the oppressive face of post-Fordist capitalism (Neilson and Rossiter, 2005). However, not all of these terms seem to be practical in

the study of cultural work as some of them may overlook cultural work's distinctive characteristics, such as aesthetic expression, the tension between creativity and commerce, and creative autonomy, which are crucial to grasp the nature of cultural work in capitalist relations. Hesmondhalgh and Baker's (2011b) definition of creative labor holds a strong position on grasping the distinctive characteristics of the cultural workforce. According to their definition, creative labor centers "*on the activity of symbol making*" and can "*be found in large numbers in the cultural industries*" (p. 9), which host a massive cultural workforce. This definition not only limits creative labor with the activity of *symbol making* and presents an advantage for an empirical study but also leads to a connection between the labor practice and the industry this type of labor operates. The study of creative labor, then, needs to provide an analysis of the industrial and formational perspective as much of this type of work is being performed under these industrial conditions.

Although creative labor is under-explored in the contemporary academic landscape, cultural production has always been an important topic of analysis in modern societies. Until Fordism became established in the early modern era, Western thought was that cultural production was a unique and independent creation process and could not have similar standards with other production areas. However, resonating with technological progress and the introduction of the Fordist mode of production, capital's expanded accumulation circle has dramatically shaped cultural production in the late 19th century. Commentators who are critical of contemporary capitalism and its sources of domination in the early 20th century, such as Adorno and Horkheimer, developed a critical theory based on the commercialization of culture, claiming that the products of culture lose their aura under the influence of capitalist mode of production and in market relations. Their theory, which they named 'culture industry', paved the way for the later generation of critical communication and culture researchers.

During the 20th century, new variations of the capitalist mode of production and technological development have yet again impacted the formation of culture-producing institutions, thus invited new questions under new terms. One influential body of research was the political economy of communication (PEC), especially the works of Schiller and Smythe, who paid particular attention to the relationship between

monetary capital and communication industries. The scholars from the PEC school of thought had primarily focused on “*the interplay between the symbolic and economic dimensions of communications*” (Murdock and Golding, 2005, p. 60). These two approaches to cultural production, the former interpreting mainly the “*fate of art*” and “*aesthetic creativity*” and the latter on the “*domination of the economy*” and its “*consequences for democratic culture*” (Miege, 2011, p. 84) together became influential in the creation of a more nuanced conception of cultural production and its relationship with society in the age of post-Fordism.

Post-Fordism, together with post-industrialism, refers to a structural transformation in the economic activities of society from an industrial mode of production to a post-industrial mode of production with a particular emphasis on the rising influence of the service and knowledge work in economic and managerial landscapes. The emergence of post-Fordism in the 1970s with methods of flexible specialization mediated by ICTs was a response from the capital to the problems of the standardized assembly-line production model of the Fordist era, such as remaining incapable against advancing sophistication of products and failure to satisfy the differentiation of customer demand (Van Dijk, 2012). In this context, the idea of the culture industry, which portrays a singular, dominant, and standardized perspective on cultural production, lost its explanatory power and was replaced by the concept of ‘cultural industries’ in most academic and policy accounts. The cultural industries approach emphasized a complex and diverse relationship in the field of cultural production. For the followers of this approach, ‘cultural industries’ had its own set of industries competing in the same market, with their own limitations and problems.

Post-Fordism, globalization, and ICTs have not only made an impact on cultural organizations but also, together with neo-liberal interventions, transformed labor practices and employee-employer relations in a dramatic way. Since the 1970s, as Gray (2004; as cited in de Peuter, 2011, p. 419) puts into words, work has become increasingly like a “*resource to be turned on and off at will*”, emphasizing the short-term, flexible, and non-standard nature of this new form of labor presented by post-Fordist capitalism. On the other hand, according to Italian Operaismo thinkers who drew their theoretical roots from Karl Marx, this form of flexible and non-standard work was a reaction from the capital to the workers’ conscious revolt against the

alienated and standard work routines of the Fordist era. Nevertheless, whether it was a reaction from the capital or a reaction from the labor, it was certain that the qualities of labor were changing.

Related to the not-so-new discourses such as 'post-industrialism', 'knowledge-based economy', 'information society', 'creative economy,' and their variants, cultural production has yet again come to the fore in late capitalism and of public policy. This new attention to cultural production has come with a discursive change towards the term 'creativity'¹. Markets, academics, and governments have celebrated the term as a form of human capital (Florida, 2002) and as a form of input and output in the area of cultural production and production in general. They used the terms' mystic conations in debates around economic growth, urban regeneration, the creation of a new kind of workplace, and a new kind of worker who has the capabilities of symbol-making and solving specific problems and who has high levels of job satisfaction because of the "unalienated" nature of their work.

The discourse has also triggered a terminological shift in industrial classifications. First in Australia and Britain (DCMS, 1998) and then in the Far East and other parts of the world that have transitioned to a so-called 'knowledge economy' and where the ICT infrastructures are most advanced, governments have begun to use terms such as 'Creative Industries' or 'Entertainment Industries' to label their culture, creativity, and knowledge centered industries. Under these terms, the 'creative industries' was the most significant one, as it has been proven useful as an umbrella term for artistic and cultural production and distribution in the new media age (Hartley, 2005). In 1997, the new UK Labour government published its Creative Industries Mapping Document under the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and declared a foundational definition for creative industries. According to their report, creative industries were "*those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent which have a potential for job and wealth creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property*" (DCMS, 1998, p. 3). This definition included 13 subsectors: "advertising, architecture, art and antiques, computer games/leisure software, crafts, design, designer fashion, film and video,

¹ This discursive change was not only limited to the field of cultural production but was also to the wider economy, see Cunningham (2002), and Flew (2005).

music, performing arts, publishing, software, TV, and radio” (DCMS, 1998). Creative industries are claimed as the key innovation sites that produce creative and innovative content which fill the ICT networks and satisfy customers who become increasingly interested in ideas, knowledge, and experience (Hartley, 2005). With this shift in focus, cultural industries have begun to be seen as a subsector that supplies a variety of informational goods and services for a much more extensive information sector (Garnham, 2005). Although different industrial classifications have been made, or different terminologies have been deployed to capture the formational nature of cultural production in modern capitalist era, these industries share lots in common when it comes to the workforce. Workers from these industries share almost identical working experiences and similar distinctive characteristics of work.

Under the ‘creativity’ discourse, creative laborers from related industries have shone out as a multi-national workforce of skilled workers who use their ‘talent’ and ‘creativity’ to produce cultural and informational goods and services. They have been named ‘no-collar’ workers, implying the transformations in the new workplaces and work practices. Their jobs were hailed and presented as ‘cool,’ ‘creative’ and ‘egalitarian’ (Gill, 2002). However, despite the promotion of this new kind of worker in policy papers and liberal academic accounts, the actual working conditions, and experiences of this labor has hardly been mentioned. For Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011b), possible reasons for the general neglect of labor in the studies of cultural production, were, first, rather than analyzing cultural production as a complex division of labor, focusing on the individual producer thus, ignoring shared working experiences and second, until recently, cultural studies’ emphasis on cultural consumption rather than cultural production.

Nonetheless, in recent years, media and communication scholars, drawing from various theoretical approaches, have embarked on a critical and progressive exploration of creative labor within the cultural, creative, and knowledge-based industries. Italian Autonomist Marxists’ presented one of the most influential bodies of work on cultural production from a labor perspective. They emphasized workers’ subjectivity and their role as active agents in the production process. They termed post-industrial labor as immaterial labor and defined it as the “*labor that produces an immaterial good, such as service, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication*”

(Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 292). Another significant contribution to the study of creative labor was from the Marxist accounts, who emphasize new forms of exploitation and inequalities presented by post-Fordist capital. Moreover, Marxist theories of cultural production and creativity tried to shift the focus from a person-centered understanding of cultural production and creativity to a complex division of labor in these areas (Wolff, 1993), thus helped to develop a more historically situated understanding of capital-labor relations in cultural production. Other critical accounts included PEC and cultural studies. Although political economy cares very little about the labor dimension in cultural production, their effort to explore the dynamics that shape cultural production has made important contribution to an understanding of creative labor in CCIs.

As the focus of cultural studies shifted to cultural production from cultural consumption, recently, we are witnessing a growing body of literature on the studies of creative labor with a particular emphasis on the questions of inequality, precariousness, working life conditions and the possibilities of collective action. These studies have successfully pointed out the paradoxical characteristics of creative occupations. For example, while creative and cultural occupations have been presented as ‘open’ and ‘diverse’, Conor et al. (2015) have found that CCIs contain high levels of gender, ethnicity, and class inequalities. Furthermore, Jeffcutt and Pratt (2002) has shown the extremely long hours and ‘bulimic’ work patterns workers have been imposed on. Ursell (2000) emphasized the short-term and project-based nature of this labor, the declining unionization in the workforce, their negative effects on television workers’ lives and new formations in labor market, as well as changing worker subjectivities.

This afresh interest to creative labor has created a set of concepts that can be used in the study of creative labor. Almost all of the findings point to an interrelation between neo-liberalism, neo-liberal policy-making, and worsening conditions and changing subjectivities of cultural workers in CCIs, and thus the quality of the product of their labor. However, these studies have been criticized for their apparent epistemological ethnocentrism centered mostly on white middle-class Euro-American males. Furthermore, studies conducted outside the West also have been a target of

similar criticism, as they ‘mirror’, rather than challenge the validity of West-based theorizing and empirical findings (Alacovska and Gill, 2019).

Drawing from empirical findings around the globe, this thesis will ascertain the conditions, experiences, and subjectivities of cultural workers in Türkiye with a field study based on semi-structured interviews with Istanbul-based visual designers. Despite the Turkish CCIs’ huge economic potential and growing workforce of hundreds of thousands of cultural workers, a very few studies have been carried out on the labor perspective in CCIs in Türkiye. However, these studies are predominantly from a theoretical perspective and must be supported by empirical findings.

This thesis uses interviews and a literature review to produce empirical data on the labor dimension in cultural production in Türkiye. The importance and originality of this study is that it explores the distinctive characteristics and conditions of visual designers in Istanbul, which have never been a subject of a similar study from an ex-centric labor perspective. At the same time, it seeks to analyze the political and economic dimensions of Turkish CCIs. With its limited but distinctive scope, it is hoped that this thesis will contribute to a deeper understanding of Turkish CCIs and the creative labor that operates in them and help the 'de-Westernizing project' (Alacovska and Gill, 2019) of creative labor studies. Also, considering the lack of appropriate cultural policies and labor laws (Kaymas, 2020) that would regulate the Turkish creative ecosystem, this thesis is expected to be a guide for the prospective national and local cultural policies as it provides meaningful data on the Turkish cultural workforce.

Cultural work underpins cultural production, and as du Gay (1997, as cited in Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011b) puts into words, “*process of production are themselves cultural phenomena [...] that construct certain ways for people to conceive of and conduct themselves*” (p. 54). Thus, by looking at cultural workers who produce content that may contribute to the common good by providing cultural products that can entertain, inform or educate the public, a study of cultural production and work could help media and communication scholars uncover this cultural phenomenon. The study of creative labor is concerned with cultural producers and the way they construct

or conceive themselves by their work, and by looking at this, we may gain valuable insights into the production process of this content that may enrich human life.

A qualitative method is chosen based on semi-structured interviews to collect data from the research participants. Semi-structured interviews helped to explore and interrogate the conditions and subjective experiences of actors in the field. According to McIntosh and Morse (2015), semi-structured interviews are “*designed to ascertain subjective responses from persons regarding a particular situation or phenomenon they have experienced*” (p. 1). After conducting all the interviews, a narrative analysis has been deployed. A total of 19 semi-structured interviews have been conducted within the scope of the research. Interviewees have been chosen with a snowball sampling method. It is tried to interview subjects from the same or similar professions, such as motion graphic designers, graphic designers, and multimedia designers, and they all have been named under the umbrella term ‘visual designers’.

The thesis is divided into three main chapters. The first chapter provides a theoretical framework for the study and draws together various empirical findings and concepts of CCIs. The second chapter combines mainstream and critical studies' main concepts and theories on creative labor. The third chapter examines the experiences and conditions of cultural workers in Türkiye from an ex-centric perspective by taking Istanbul-based visual designers as a case. Lastly, the conclusion compares and discusses the gathered data from the field study to Euro-American theorizing and findings on creative labor. Thus, while revealing the distinctive experiences and conditions of cultural workers in Türkiye, it will be discussed how their situation overlaps or differs from the experiences of cultural workers in the world.

1. CULTURAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

Cultural workers build and experience their careers in specific industrial contexts (Cohen, 2012; Thompson et al., 2015); hence, a study of creative labor must first define the industry context in which this kind of labor operates. Therefore, this chapter defines the CCIs, determines their boundaries, and tries to link the discussions around CCIs to creative labor studies. After the presentation of industrial perspectives, the chapter will draw the prominent concepts in creative labor studies together to create a toolbox for an ex-centric study on Istanbul-based visual designers.

The confusion about the relationship between the terms ‘cultural industries’ and ‘creative industries’ is understandable as both of them refer to the production of the ‘cultural’ in modern societies. However, these terms have emerged from different academic landscapes, and although they are both concerned with the creation and circulation of the ‘cultural’, they differ significantly in their manner of discourse. This is important because the discourses they deploy are one of the most significant determinants of the conditions and experiences of cultural workers, as these discourses shape public policy, worker subjectivity, and academic perspectives on cultural production. The concepts are also practical as they present functional industry classifications and help to explore cultural production's nature in market-oriented economies.

This chapter does not aim to open new discussions about various changes within discourses between the terms ‘creative industries’ and ‘cultural industries’. Rather, it aims to bring the discussions that have already been made into consideration to develop an understanding regarding the formation of cultural workers in these industrial contexts. Rather than stressing only one of these terms, the preferred term for this study is ‘cultural and creative industries’. Although the concepts consist of different industrial classifications and deploy different terminologies, they

occasionally overlap with each other and most importantly these industries share lots in common when it comes to their workforce. That is to say, the pages that follow attempt to bring the literature on CCIs together and aim to contextualize creative labor's organizational form in contemporary capitalist societies.

1.1. Cultural Production in Modern Societies

In his book, *Culture* (1981), Raymond Williams stresses the importance of exploring the dynamics of institutions and formations of cultural production to understand each mode of cultural production's relationships with wider social organization. He makes a historically contextualized periodization of European cultural production by focusing on the social relations between cultural producers and patrons or businesses that use their services. According to his periodization, cultural production can be roughly divided into three eras (as in Hesmondhalgh, 2013). These eras include:

- a) Patronage and artisanal,
- b) Market professional and,
- c) Corporate professional

In the patronage model, which was the dominant mode of cultural production until the 19th century, cultural producers are offered hospitality, reward, or direct monetary support in exchange for their work. In some models, they are offered reputation and protection for their continuous services (Williams, 1981). Examples include artists supported by the Church.

The advancement of cultural technology in the 19th century with methods of reproducibility created a new era in cultural production. In this period, the division of labor in cultural production expanded rapidly because of the emerging agents in the new relations of production, such as publishers and booksellers. Copyright and royalty became the primary source of income for most cultural producers, who increasingly gather around in an organized professional market.

In the corporate professional state, which is the dominant form of the early 20th century and onwards, cultural producers are identified as employed and salaried professionals in companies through retainers and contracts, most notably in the institutions of the new media. According to Hesmondhalgh (2013), “*one of the most crucial features of this era [corporate professional] is the increasing complexity of the division of labor involved in making texts*” (p. 67). Moreover, drawing from Williams’ epochal analysis, Hesmondhalgh (2013) uses the term ‘complex professional’ to refer to the era from the 1950s onwards. He states that the ‘complex professional’ era consists of a mix of different forms such as patronage, artisanal and market professional together with the dominant form of corporate professional. According to this classification, “*we can think of the cultural industries from the 1950s onwards as being composed of three different forms, each corresponding to term developed by Williams*” (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p. 68).

Therefore, even though cultural industries emerged in modern capitalist societies and its contemporary form relies mainly on corporate employment, it does not mean that it contains only this form of social relation. However, as Williams (1981) explains, even though cultural industries are composed of three main forms, the conditions of corporate professional are still dominant in cultural production’s contemporary form.

1.2. Cultural Industries

Cultural industries are set of industries that are based on the exploitation of cultural work and the production and circulation of cultural commodities in modern economies. In addition, ‘cultural industries’ is a concept that draws its theoretical roots from the pioneering critical approaches to cultural production, such as the concept of ‘culture industry’, which was introduced by Adorno and Horkheimer, and the political economy of communication, which studies the power relations in media and communication industries and its consequences for the ‘democratic’ society with references to Marxist critical political economy approach.

In their influential work *Dialectic of enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer (1997) claim that with the advancement of the capitalist mode of production, cultural products have become the targets of the process of standardization and

commodification. The term ‘culture industry’ does not directly refer to the production process of cultural products; but it refers to the standardization process of these products, the rationalization of the circulation techniques, and Marxist concepts such as worker alienation and capital concentration (Garnham, 2005). For Adorno and Horkheimer (1997), the industrialization of the ‘cultural’, causes cultural products to lose their authentic aura and become commodities that can be sold and bought in market relations, thus, cultural production becomes both a subject and an object to ‘instrumental reason’. Moreover, as Garnham (2005) stresses, this standardization process defined by Adorno and Horkheimer also refers to a general shift to an *“alienation of the cultural producer as a wage laborer within increasingly concentrated large-scale corporations”* (p. 17).

The idea of ‘culture industry’ became influential in the intellectual environment of the late 1960s, both in the academia and policy discourses. This time, commentators have taken a different attitude towards the term and forsaken the culture industry approach’s stress on a singular cultural production process which suggests a ‘unified field’ in cultural production which had assumed different components and players in ‘culture industry’ follows the same capitalist logic that supposedly originates from the same source (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). The idea of the culture industry then, which portrays a singular, dominant, and standardized perspective on cultural production, was replaced by the concept of ‘cultural industries’ in most academic and policy accounts.

The cultural industries approach emphasized complex and diverse relationships within the province of cultural production and was concerned with the differentiations in the ways of various industries’ (such as broadcasting, recording, or publishing) operative processes and symbol-making practices since they were actually concretely different at the point of production, circulation, and consumption (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Additionally, since cultural commodities can affect public and individual opinion², the production processes and ownership structures of cultural enterprises’ were seen as an essential topic of study among the sociologists and communication scholars. In this regard, political economy scholars’ efforts to analyze the differing economic modalities of various institutions and actors in cultural production have

² Or the capacity of agenda setting, see (McCombs and Shaw, 1972).

successfully pointed out the distinctive characteristics of the industries in the cultural sector. Moreover, their “*ethical and normative*” (Hesmondhalgh, 2008, p. 553) disposition has significantly contributed to the critical vocabulary of media and communication studies and forced cultural policy to take necessary actions in various nations.

On the other hand, ‘cultural industries’ was not just a critical approach to cultural production but also was, and in some part of the world still is, a label for a sector of production, which operates by exploiting various forms of labor, but more particularly the creative labor. Hesmondhalgh (2013) defines ‘core’ cultural industries as follows: broadcasting, film industries, music industries, print and electronic publishing, digital game industries, advertising, and web design. All core cultural industries have unique qualities, but they also interact and connect on different levels. Drawing from a critical political economic approach to cultural industries, the following pages try to determine cultural industries’ organizational characteristics related to the study of creative labor in contemporary capitalism.

1.2.1. Cultural Industries’ Characteristics

In its contemporary organizational form, creative labor is predominantly organized and managed around the CCIs. Therefore, to understand the experiences and conditions of cultural workers and the potential transformations this type of labor might endure, one must first demonstrate the defining features of these industries. In this regard, pioneering works of political economy scholars such as Garnham, Murdock, and Miede remain crucial to our wider understanding of the distinctive characteristics of cultural industries as opposed to other capitalist production forms. Drawing on an extensive range of sources, Hesmondhalgh (2013) provides a good summary of these characteristics and presents them in his own unique and useful way. This summary includes the mutual problems cultural industry companies encounter and the popular solutions they find to solve the problem. According to his summary, cultural industries share below characteristics in common:

Cultural Industries' distinctive features*	
Problems	Responses
Risky business	Misses are offset against hits by building a repertoire
Creativity versus commerce	Concentration, integration, and co-opting publicity
High production costs and low reproduction costs	Artificial scarcity
Semi-public goods: the need to create scarcity	Formatting: stars, genres, and serials
	Loose control of symbol creators [cultural workers]; tight control of distribution and marketing

Table 1.1. Cultural Industries' distinctive features, Source: (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p. 26).

*The items in each row do not directly correspond to each other and are placed side-by-side for reasons of space.

The table indicates that cultural industries share joint problems due to their distinctness from other production areas at the points of production, distribution, and consumption. Capital's problems and popular responses to these problems mark cultural industries' characteristic features.

In the cultural sector, the demand from the consumer is uncertain (Garnham, 2005), and growth depends on the constant production of novelty (Garnham, 2011). Combined with the granted autonomy to cultural workers at the point of creation in the hope that they would come up with an original and marketable idea (Hesmondhalgh, 2013), one could easily assume that cultural industries involve high amounts of unpredictability and risk. However, cultural industry companies, especially the larger ones, manage this risk and make their businesses profitable through the processes of concentration, integration, repertoire building, formatting, and tight control over distribution and marketing (see Ryan, 1992; Garnham, 1990; Hesmondhalgh, 2013).

Another shared problem in the cultural sector is the supposed antagonism between creativity and commerce. Cultural workforce primarily produces symbolic goods. As Bilton and Leary (2002) show, those who produce these symbolic products are not primarily motivated by financial outcomes. Therefore, to create value from workers' 'creativity' and gain competitive advantage in the market, companies, and managers grant 'creative values' such as flexibility or autonomy to cultural workers to overcome the supposed antagonisms between creativity and commerce for a profitable production.

High production-low reproduction costs mean that the reproduction and distribution costs are close to zero once a cultural product is produced. This leads businesses to the processes of audience maximization and concentration to maximize the profit from each unit of cultural product (Garnham, 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Additionally, cultural products do not wear out by use and can easily be transferred to other people by various means of distribution, such as digital technologies. Therefore, cultural products' these two characteristics mark them as what Garnham (2005) calls "*inherent public goods*" (p. 19) or, as Hesmondhalgh (2013) puts into words, "*semi-public goods*" (p. 26), referring to their immaterial and easily accessible nature. Hence, even cultural products usually are not likely to be scarce, companies create artificial scarcity to maximize their profit from these products. According to Garnham (1990, as in Hesmondhalgh, 2013), they are creating this artificial scarcity by advertising, putting limits on reproduction, and using copyright methods to protect intellectual property rights. Then, stemming from these characteristics, especially the ones concerning relations over intellectual property, another important aspect would be the relations of production and the question of exploitation in the cultural sector since as Garnham (2005) put into words:

"(...) The political economy analysis of cultural industries stressed, in contrast to the original Frankfurt School analysis of the rationalization and alienation of cultural labour as wage labour under industrial conditions, the survival of older relations of craft production and subcontracting for key 'creative' labour inputs, governed by complex contractual relations over intellectual property. From this perspective, the cultural industries are seen as complex value chains where profit is extracted at key nodes in the chain through control of production

investment and distribution and the key 'creative' labour is exploited not, as in the classic Marxist analysis of surplus value, through the wage bargain, but through contracts determining the distribution of profits to various rights holders negotiated between parties with highly unequal power” (p. 19-20).

Thus, although exploitation changes form, it still remains a crucial process that shapes workers' experiences. Cohen's (2012) study on freelancer writers shows that, while freelancers step out of an employment relationship with corporations, these corporations develop new ways of extracting surplus value from workers such as an “increase in unpaid labor time” and “aggressive pursuit of copyrights” (p. 141).

All of these distinctive features are important on different levels and need to be addressed in a study of creative labor. However equally important is the transformations in contemporary capitalism and its effects on the organization of cultural production and cultural work.

1.2.2. Cultural Industries in Contemporary Capitalism

Cultural production began to change in the early 1980s with the combined dynamics of politic-economic, technological, and cultural processes (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). One of the leading agents of change was the rise of neoliberalism in the late 1970s among liberal economists. Its political implications lingered into the 1980s to the present day. The neo-liberal way of thinking helped to maximize capitalist enterprises' freedom of action in economies worldwide.

Murdock (2005) highlights the prominent common features of contemporary capitalism and tries to unfold their impacts on cultural production³. According to Murdock (2005), the marketization process, which is a combination of privatization, liberalization, re-orientation of regulatory regimes and corporatization processes, has become an endemic feature of major capitalist economies from the 1980s to through the 2000s. When linked with the advancement of digital technologies and globalization, the marketization process extended and gained momentum, and its

³ With references to the emergence of new media technologies.

impact on cultural production has been significant (Murdock, 2005). Murdock (2005) lists the main impacts of the marketization process on cultural production as follows:

- a) Concentration
- b) Casualization
- c) Commodification

Concentration refers to industrial concentration, which means fewer firms increasingly dominate an area of production (cultural production in our scenario) by buying smaller firms in the same sector or buying firms from different sectors to increase operational efficiency. Thus, a new actor arises: the international multi-media conglomerate (Murdock, 2005). This process is considered as a threat to democratic culture and the diversity of cultural products. Furthermore, by controlling distribution and production gateways, conglomerates influence production trends and thus affect a huge cultural workforce. Their corporate mentality based on deploying cost-cutting production strategies to reduce financial risk is another important process that shapes cultural workers' experiences (Christopherson, 2008). Examples include reducing core creative personnel and relying more on a peripheral workforce, time pressure which derives from tighter production deadlines and strict control over the creative process (Christopherson, 2008).

For Murdock (2005), the marketization process' second major impact on cultural production is the casualization of the cultural workforce. The term refers to changing contractual relations among employers and employees from direct subjugation of workers as waged labor in full-time hiring-based employment to project-to-project short-term contracts, and freelancing. This gives creative laborers a chance to escape from the alienated working routines of Fordist production. However, in return, it takes away their income security and diminishes boundaries between work and leisure time.

Commodification, on the other hand, refers to the transformation of things (material or immaterial) into commodities that can be bought and sold in the market mechanism. For Murdock (2005) and other critical theorists, with the advancement of ICTs and liberalization of the economy, an increasing amount of cultural experience is turning into commodities. The process of commodification also applies to humans

as more and more workers in contractual relationships design their ‘self’ as an ‘enterprise’ (Scharff, 2016; McRobbie, 2002a) to gain a more advantageous position in the cultural sector. This, in turn, causes adverse effects on their lives outside and inside of work.

The process of marketization which stems from the neo-liberal restructuring of the economy and policy in the 1980s is one of the most fundamental political and economic contexts that surround cultural industries, together with discussions around the term ‘information society’. Since the 1990s, cultural industries have begun to be seen as a subsector that supplies a variety of informational goods and services for a much more extensive information sector as a result of ongoing discussions around the term post-industrialism and its policy repercussions. Furthermore, the traditional focus of cultural industries policies as a supporter of arts and crafts has shifted into a more economically motivated one. Therefore, the next chapter will focus on the role of information and creativity in cultural productions’ contemporary organizational form.

1.3. Creative Industries and Knowledge-based Society

Since the late 1960s, there has been a structural transformation from industrial capitalism to informational capitalism. During this transformation, the rising influence of the service, computer, and knowledge work in the economic landscape led scholars to formulate new concepts such as ‘post-industrial society’, ‘knowledge society’ ‘post-modern society’, and most commonly, ‘information society’. Scholars have used these emerging concepts to understand the transformation of modern society’s new social and societal relations under the influence of new information and communication technologies.

In the 1970s Daniel Bell spoke of a transformation from an industrial to a post-industrial society. According to Bell (1976), this was the second major change in modern times after the shift from an agricultural to an industrial way of life which began about 150 years ago. While pre-industrial societies' labor force is mainly based on extractive industries like mining, fishing, or agriculture; industrial societies are ‘goods producing societies’ (Bell, 1976). The world in the industrial society is technical and dominated by the machine. On the other hand, post-industrial society is

based on services in health, education, research, and government, “*what counts is not raw muscle power or energy; what counts is information*” (Bell, 1976, p. 576). Bell’s pioneering work signaled a movement from capitalism’s classic state that relies on the manufacturing of tangible goods, to a new state, where information and knowledge are key players in economic relations and beyond. Bell emphasized a direction through a service economy based on the manipulation and dissemination of information and knowledge. Since then, the globalization of the information economy has gained momentum with the advancement of digital technologies and the internationalization of neo-liberal economies.

In the 1990s, the idea of 'new economy' has emerged. It is claimed that we are on the brink of a new epoch in the economy that takes a network form of economic organization. A 'new economy' based on networks and information where the products turned into experience goods; production is decentralized, and the capital and control are centralized. The 'new economy' thinking claimed that a permanent or a temporary rise in labor productivity and economic growth was possible with the growth of ICT businesses and new control mechanisms that combine vertical and horizontal control in organizations. (Van Dijk, 2012). However, there was an ongoing economic growth problem and a productivity paradox of ICTs where it was unclear whether ICTs affected productivity or growth (Van Dijk, 2012). Therefore, governments saw the economic growth problem's solution not only in technological development but also in the shortage of cultural products to fill the networks to meet unsatisfied customer demand (Garnham, 2011). Since then, information, knowledge and cultural industries have been seen as a new growth sector, and creativity has become the language and currency of today's knowledge economy (Bilton and Leary, 2002). With this shift in focus, cultural industries and the concepts of culture and creativity have become the focus of public policy (Venturelli, 2005).

The afresh attention to cultural production has come with a discursive change towards the term ‘creativity’. Markets, academics, and governments have celebrated the term as a form of human capital (Florida, 2002) and as a form of input and output in the area of cultural production. They used the terms' mystic conations in debates around economic growth, urban regeneration, the creation of a new kind of workplace and a new kind of worker who has the capabilities of symbol-making and solving

specific problems and who has high levels of job satisfaction because of the ‘unalienated’ nature of their work.

In 1997, the new UK Labour government published its Creative Industries Mapping Document under the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and declared a foundational definition for creative industries. According to their report, creative industries were “*those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent which have a potential for job and wealth creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property*” (DCMS, 1998, p. 3). This definition included 13 subsectors: “advertising, architecture, art and antiques, computer games/leisure software, crafts, design, designer fashion, film and video, music, performing arts, publishing, software, TV, and radio” (ibid). Various neoliberal economies around the world have adapted their definition.

For Hartley (2005), the idea of creative industries emerged from the convergence of the creative arts with cultural industries “*in the context of new media technologies within a new knowledge economy for the use of newly interactive citizen-consumers*” (p. 6). The term ‘creative industries’ has begun to be used as an umbrella term for artistic and cultural production and distribution in the new media age (Hartley, 2005). One of the reasons behind this shift is claimed to be the term cultural industries’ limited scope in the policy context since it fails to combine ‘art and culture’ and ‘culture and creativity’ (Hartley, 2005). For others, this terminological shift was triggered by the policy-makers who wanted to turn cultural policy into an industrial policy to boost employment and GDP in the new information-based neo-liberal economy. For Lee (2014), relabeling of the cultural sector under the term ‘creativity’ was a discursive project driven by the economic motives that were in line with information society, post-Fordism, and new economy narratives.

“Creative industries discourse provides a strong economic justification for culture, and thus for the mobilization of cultural investment, on the other hand, it is subject to unceasing debate on not only its ambiguous definiens and boundaries of creative industries but also its neoliberal implications, especially the market-centered reductive view of culture and romanticization of cultural

workers whose economic life tends to be notably perilous.” (Lee, 2017, p. 1078-1079).

Elsewhere, Lee (2014) emphasizes the discourse’s depoliticizing effect on cultural production since as he puts into words, it has a “*tendency to remove concerns of politics, power and structural issues*” (p. 1), which have been important topics of discussion for the analysis of culture and economy for decades.

In recent years, cultural workers’ positionings in this new ‘creativity’ discourse have been a significant point of criticism. Under the ‘creativity’ discourse, creative laborers from related industries have shone out as a multi-national workforce of skilled workers who use their ‘talent’ and ‘creativity’ to produce cultural and informational goods and services. Their jobs are presented as ‘cool’ and ‘egalitarian’ in policy papers and in recent discussions about creativity’s role in economic growth and job creation (Florida, 2002). However, in the last few decades, there has been a surge of interest in the effects of neoliberalism and neo-liberal policy making on cultural workers’ lives and their work; and this newly emerged literature offers contradictory findings about the conditions and experiences of cultural workers’ in CCIs.

2. CREATIVE LABOR

Today, most CCI work is being performed under post-Fordist arrangements (Neilson and Rossiter, 2005). Thus, the following pages will try to highlight the transformations of labor practices under these arrangements, and then will move on to our distinctive area of study, which is creative labor. However, before all, a definition of creative labor is needed.

2.1. A Definition for Creative Labor

In 2002, Richard Florida wrote about the rise of a new ‘creative class’. According to Florida, the rise of the creative class is evoked by creativity’s new role as the main driver of the knowledge economy. Florida argues that although every human is creative and a potential member of the creative class, not all of them are lucky enough to get paid for their creativity. For Florida (2012), the people in the creative class usually work in jobs “*whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology, and new creative content*” (p. 8), such as design, arts, music, entertainment, engineering, and architecture. Rather than this ‘core’ creatives, people who engage with problem-solving activities in their work are also included in the creative class. However, Florida is widely criticized for his apparent optimism about the conditions and experiences of creative workers. His broad definition of creative work has also been the target of criticism for being too ‘fuzzy’ (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011b).

Other concepts have emerged to address the type of work in cultural occupations and the labor process in these occupations, such as ‘knowledge worker’ (Mosco and McKercher, 2008). For Mosco and McKercher, a knowledge worker is a worker who is “*involved in the chain of producing and distributing knowledge products*” (p. 24).

This definition subsumes those who work in CCIs to the broad category of ‘knowledge worker’ along with a vast group of occupations such as librarians or postal transportation workers. However, as Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011b) argue, if our topic of analysis is the symbol makers in the CCIs, this definition may lead to the exclusion of fundamental problems and the diminishing of crucial distinctive features that is unique to the practice of symbol-making.

Another possible concept to refer to cultural work in CCIs is ‘artistic labor’. However, employing the term ‘artistic labor’ in a study of cultural work in CCIs has several problems. The main problem is the difficulty in determining what can be considered ‘art’ or ‘artistic product’. Additionally, because the workers in CCIs are involved in monetary relations and sometimes experience strict control over their creative autonomy, they might not even consider themselves artists because of the supposed creativity and commerce antagonism. Furthermore, as Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011b) stress, CCIs involve various kinds of symbol-making that can be considered very opposed to the ‘general concept of art’, such as journalism.

The preferred term in this thesis to refer to cultural work in CCIs is ‘creative labor’ (Hesmondhalgh, and Baker, 2011b; McKinlay and Smith, 2009). The term creative labor holds a strong position on reflecting cultural work’s distinctive characteristics such as aesthetic expression, the tension between creativity and commerce, and creative autonomy. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011b) use the term ‘creative labor’ to refer to “*those jobs centered on the activity of symbol making, which are to be found in large numbers in the cultural industries*” (p. 9). Elsewhere (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011a), they stress this kind of labor’s connection to aesthetic, expressive and informational elements of work. Cultural worker, on the other hand, refers to those workers in CCIs whose job is centered on the creation of symbolic commodities that produces social meaning (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011b). For Banks (2007), the ‘creative cultural worker’ is the worker who is at the center of the CCI labor process and whose main responsibility is “*the production of those symbolic commodities judged to be essential components of the transition to a ‘post-industrial’, ‘creative’ or ‘knowledge-based economy’*” (p. 7).

2.2. Transformation of Labor Practices

Worldwide neo-liberal interventions and the advancement of ICTs have made not only an impact on cultural organizations but also transformed labor practices and employee-employer relationships. Most commentators who investigate this shift claim that there has been a structural transformation in the dominant mode of production in modern societies starting from the early 1970s. According to this view, industrialized societies' dominant mode of production shifted to post-Fordism. Unlike Fordism's standardized assembly-line production model that produces generic goods for the masses, in the post-Fordist mode of production, industries use methods of flexible specialization mediated by ICTs (Van Dijk, 2012).

Repetitive and routinized work has become increasingly insignificant in the production process as it cannot answer the demands of post-Fordist capitalism. Therefore, the occupational profile has begun to change toward the activities that require the use of knowledge, information, service, and creativity (Morgan and Nelligan, 2018). Moreover, capital has established a global division of mental-manual labor by moving factories to developing countries, thus, conception and execution are separated on a global scale. Subsequently, post-Fordist labor has taken a more flexible and non-standard form. However, while workers have eluded from routine and alienating working patterns of Fordist capitalism; insecure, casualized and irregular (Gill and Pratt, 2008) work have become the dominant characteristics of post-Fordist labor. With neo-liberal interventions short-time contracts and self-employment models have become the norm, and work has become “*a source to be turned on and off at will*” (Gray, 2004, p.4) for capital.

In this context, ‘precarity’ has become one of the main concepts that characterize post-Fordist labor. According to Neilson and Rossiter (2005), precarity “*refers to all possible shapes of unsure, not guaranteed, flexible exploitation*” (p. 10). Most common in post-Fordist society are freelancers or self-employed employees. The concept not only refers to unstable working and living conditions and short-term contract-based employment but as Gill and Pratt (2008) state, it also signifies “*new forms of political struggle and solidarity that reach beyond the traditional models of the political party or trade union.*” (p. 3). Not only capitalism created new forms of

exploitation that expanded beyond the workplace into the workers' lives, but it also caused a change in the organization of labor, as workers deviated from their positions as mass laborers to individualized, short-term project-based employees who work outside of the factory walls for a different boss in each project.

On the other hand, Italian Autonomists claim that this form of flexible and non-standard work was a reaction from the capital to the workers' conscious revolt against the alienated and standard work routines of the Fordist era (see Lazzarato, 1996). Autonomists emphasized workers' role in the production process as active agents. Lazzarato (1996) argues that work in the post-Fordist era requires workers to become 'active subjects' since production requires more cooperation and coordination than ever with the use of ICTs. He calls this type of labor 'immaterial labor'. According to his definition 'immaterial labor' is "*labor that produces the informational and cultural content of commodity*" (p. 133) and combines intellectual, manual, and entrepreneurial skills. Lazzarato (1996) further emphasizes this type of labor's capacity to manage its own activity and ability to "*act as the coordinator of the immaterial labor of others*" (p. 137).

"The capitalist entrepreneur does not produce the forms and contents of immaterial labor (...) For economics, there remains only the possibility of managing and regulating the activity of immaterial labor and creating some devices for the control and creation of the public/consumer by means of the control of ICTs and their organizational processes." (Lazzarato, 1996, p. 145).

Thus, exploitation extends beyond the factory walls.

Bourdieu (1998), on the other hand, introduces the concept of 'flexploitation'. For Bourdieu (1998), with precarious conditions becoming the norm for post-Fordist labor, 'flexploitation' emerged as a new mode of domination. The "*permanent state of insecurity*" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 85) presented by post-Fordist capital to workers, forces workers into submission and "*acceptance of exploitation*" (p. 85).

Beck (1992) argued that we are on the verge of a 'risk society'. According to Beck (1992), with the erosion of social institutions such as the welfare state or

collective allegiances like trade unions, people in ‘risk society’ become more individualized, and the management of ‘risk’ is placed upon individuals.

For many commentators, the work in CCIs is one of the typical examples of post-Fordist labor. With creativity coming to the fore as a source of economic competition (Florida, 2002; Hartley, 2005) in the era of ‘new economy’ and ‘information society’, the work in CCIs drew considerable attention from mainstream and critical media and communications scholars. A considerable body of literature has recently grown around this interest and has reached some established notions in creative labor studies, such as precarity, individualization, informality, and flexibility. Furthermore, scholars have critically investigated the crucial processes that are vital in the analysis of creative labor, such as exploitation, autonomy, control, and tensions between creativity and commerce.

2.3. Creativity and Labor

Considering that creative laborers’ conditions and experiences are shaped by the logic of the industry they work in; it is attempted to contextualize the CCIs in the previous pages of this thesis. It is argued that the cohesive effects of advanced ICT infrastructures, globalization of neoliberalism, and their political extensions have had structural effects on cultural production. In addition, considering the work in CCIs being performed under the post-Fordist arrangements, it is tried to highlight the changes in labor practices under these arrangements. The following pages are explicitly concerned with the creative labor process in these industries.

As discussed above, creativity has been seen as one of the primary sources of competition for nations, companies, and individuals who want to gain advantageous positions in global knowledge-based economies (Florida, 2002; Hartley, 2005). Related to its positive connotations, the idea of creativity as a source of economic regeneration quickly diffused in modern economies. It led to new concepts such as creative economy, creative class, creative capital, creative industries, and creative labor. However, ‘creativity’ has always had much-debated and ambiguous connotations.

Most Western commentators have focused on a person-oriented understanding of creativity (Bilton and Leary, 2002). This understanding has led Western society to imagine creative people as geniuses, dreamers, or visioners who suddenly receive great ideas out of thin air. However, this view is considered ‘romantic’, and has been debated among sociologists for many decades. In his influential work *Art Worlds*, Becker (2013) made it clear that the creation process of cultural artifacts cannot be considered as works of one person since these are the products of collaboration among individuals and occupational groups. Like Becker’s emphasis on the division of labor in cultural production, Marxist scholars also highlight the role of the division of labor in the production process. For Marxists, all human activity is creative since human work combines conception and execution at the point of creation. Like all activities, the creative activity must be seen as historical, situated, and produced, not as a divine inspiration of genius people (Wolff, 1993). Weisberg (1993), on the other hand, introduces the concept of ‘incremental creativity’ and claims that creative people are not dreamers or visioners but “*intellectual beachcombers, skillfully reclaiming ideas and experiences from the past and reapplying them in the present*” (as cited in Bilton and Leary, 2002).

Creative industries policies worldwide (DCMS, 1998) are criticized for adapting the person-oriented and so-called ‘romantic’ view of creativity to their definitions. This is especially apparent in DCMS’s definition of creative industries for the critical scholars who investigate the policies. According to DCMS, creative industries are “*those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent*” (p. 9). To some degree, the emphasis on individual creativity and talent is considered the ‘romanticization’ of creative labor (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011b; Lee, 2017). Thus, structural problems that surround this type of labor are claimed to be hidden in plain sight.

2.4. Creative Labor in Cultural and Creative Industries

One of the reasons behind the celebration of creative labor in recent discussions about the transformation of working practices in modern economies is its possibility

to present an example of what Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011b) call ‘good work’⁴. The concept of alienation⁵ carries a vital position in these discussions. Unlike the alienated industrial working experience, cultural work offers a potentially unalienated working experience to workers, where conception and execution are not separated, work is not routinized, and creative expression is endorsed. In other words, cultural occupations seem to offer better fulfillment or self-actualization through work than other kinds of work. Ursell’s (2000) study on freelance TV workers in the UK shows that workers choose to work in these kinds of occupations for the reasons of self-affirmation, possibilities of self-actualization and creative activity, aesthetic self-expression, and social recognition. To some extent, this work-related self-actualization derives from the relative autonomy that some cultural workers experience at the point of idea creation. The granted relative autonomy stems from cultural work’s distinct relationship with capital.

As discussed above, the notion of ‘artist’ as genius who uses their talent and creativity to create unique cultural artifacts is still dominant today. As Pang (2009) explains, the creative economy today still relies on this ‘romanticist’ notion of the artist as genius to “*reify creativity, while at the same time overcoming the inefficiency associated with artist discourse*” (p. 58). Drawing from Ryan’s (1992) account⁶ on art-capital relations, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011b) state that, the “*attachment of artistic value to the expressive artist lead to a tendency for artistic objects to appear as the product of recognizable person, paramount and must be preserved*” (p. 84). This creates a problem of control for the capital because direct control of the workforce and the Taylorist mode of worker management does not seem relevant in the case of cultural workers. Therefore, to create value from cultural workers’ labor, companies, and managers in cultural sector grand creative values such as flexibility or autonomy to cultural workers. Thus, cultural occupations appear to present a desirable working experience since alienation seems to diminish and possibilities of self-actualization

⁴ Hesmondhalgh and Baker’s normative category of ‘good work’ in CCI goes beyond the concept of alienation but alienation is one of the crucial concepts for their normative frame.

⁵ For Marx (2020 [1844]), human beings share a common characteristic that distinguishes them from other animals. Human work combines conception and execution, and this creative activity is humans’ species-being. Under the capitalist mode of production, conception and execution are separated, free human activity is inhibited and consequently humans are alienated to their own existence; the product of their labor; and the other people in society.

⁶ Drawing from PEC, Ryan discusses how artistic labor’s specificities shape organizational dynamics in cultural sector and how capital makes profit from cultural products which seem to stand contractionary to the capital accumulation regime. (see Ryan, 1992).

through work arise. The attractiveness of cultural work as a site of de-alienated working experience, and cultural workers' desire for self-actualization and creative expression through work in neo-liberal economies are some of the processes which can also be a source of exploitation (Ursell, 2000). This situation is called 'self-exploitation'. For Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011b), 'self-exploitation' appears when *"workers become so enamored with their jobs that they push themselves to the limits of their physical and emotional endurance"* (p. 6).

One of the other sources of self-exploitation is the process of self-commodification among cultural workers (Ursell, 2000). As stated by Ursell (2000), in an era where contractual relations are changing from wage labor to short-time project-based contracts, cultural workers are expected to organize their own labor markets on an as-needed basis in a network of individuals. Stemming from this situation, workers are involved in the process of self-commodification, where they seek to gain an opportunity to land a rewarding job. However, Cohen (2012) argues that, focusing on 'self-exploitation', based on the idea that cultural workers being so self-motivated for their work may mask the actual relations of exploitation in CCIs. Cohen further argues against the concept of self-exploitation without an analysis of power relations and structural effects presented by capital, while accepting subjectivity as a crucial aspect of the worker experience. She introduces two methods cultural firms use to extract surplus value from freelance cultural workers. One of them is related to the process of labor casualization:

"Rather than continuously employing people, cultural industries maintain loose affiliations with networks of cultural producers constantly developing ideas from which firms can pick and choose." (Cohen, 2012, p. 148).

Thus, cultural firms are reducing their financial risk by offloading the risk to workers. Also, labor costs are decreasing since this process creates competition for jobs. Thus, together with the spatialization process where value extraction extended through freelance workers' homes (Mosco 2009, as in Cohen, 2012), 'the exploitation of unpaid labor time' becomes more intensive. This strategy intensifies with the exploitation of IP through aggressive copyright regimes (Cohen, 2012), which is the second method cultural firms use to extract surplus value from workers. However, self-

exploitation is still one of the most crucial concepts in creative labor studies since it helps to develop an understanding of workers' subjective experiences of labor, and questions such as why they are working in a sector full of struggles. Nevertheless, drawing from Marx, and Harvey (2006), Cohen (2012) discusses the difficulty of understanding cultural workers' experiences primarily through workers' subjective experiences of labor without understanding the objective conditions of that labor.

Drawing from the literature, the following pages will examine the three most central concepts that supposedly characterize cultural work in CCIs. The field study of this thesis will critically deploy the three concepts of flexibilization, individualization, and precarization to develop an ex-centric perspective on the experiences and conditions of cultural workers in Turkish CCIs.

2.4.1. Flexibilization

Concepts such as 'network' and 'flexibility' have become increasingly important in the global neo-liberal restructuring of the economy. While 'flexibility' may have positive connotations to a possible de-alienated working experience and autonomy, it is also debated that the liberatory potential of this kind of work presented by the post-Fordist new economy *"is systematically undermined by the structural conditions of its reproduction under capitalism"* (Gortz, 1999; as cited in Shorthose and Strange, 2004). The term flexibilization refers to two processes. On the one hand, it refers to the deregulation of labor markets and the casualization of the workforce where contractual relationships changed from direct subjugation of workers as waged labor to flexible working and recruiting models such as short-term project-to-project portfolio careers and freelancing. Data shows that (UNESCO & The World Bank, 2021) globally, 33% of all workers in the creative sector are self-employed⁷. This is the highest self-employment rate among all sectors. As Shorthose and Strange (2004) put into words, *"the informality of this ecology is usually accompanied by continuous financial insecurity, a lack of career structure, lack of social benefits (...) and a lack of trade union organization"* (p. 52-53). Financial insecurities associated with flexibilization are well documented. A survey on European freelancers in 2018 has

⁷ The numbers are higher in terms of total flexible employment worldwide. The category of flexible work not only contains self-employers but also part-time work and temp work and so on.

shown that 89% of all freelancers in Europe do not have adequate social security coverage (Malt, 2018). During the Covid-19 pandemic, freelancers experienced an average 60% drop in their income. According to International Cinematographers Guild (2020), 120.000 film industry workers lost their jobs until April 2020, and most of these workers were freelancers who had not received any relief or compensation prior to cancelation of their labor contracts (as in UNESCO & The World Bank, 2021). Insecurities and uncertainties associated with cultural work produce negative emotional states such as anxiety, frustration, and self-doubt (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011b), thus possibly impacting the diversity and quality of cultural products. The flexibility of work also creates new network-based recruitment systems where individuals organize their own informal labor markets, and where entrepreneurial individualism is vital for self-promoting. However, reliance on networks may be a source of lack of diversity in workplaces and in the cultural sector.

On the other hand, flexibilization refers to flexible working practices, working hours and work skills according to the needs of post-Fordist capital. Drawing from McRobbie's (2002b) argumentation on a 'being flexible' worker in CCIs, Banks (2007) notes that:

"Being flexible essentially means that one must do whatever is required to support commercial interests. It increasingly requires working longer or unsocial hours, taking on-board additional responsibilities, relocating according to company demands and certainly committing oneself to the commercial imperatives of the firm over and above non-work commitments." (Banks, 2007, p. 56).

While being a flexible worker is not unique to CCIs, its most vigorous examples exist in the cultural sector (Banks, 2007; Wittel, 2001). McRobbie's (2002b) study on British cultural workers shows that working in the cultural sector requires holding down several projects simultaneously to supplement income. These projects are often short-termed, and during or after each project, workers find themselves looking for a job again to maintain their career progress. Furthermore, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011b) have found that flexible working hours in CCIs lead to an intensification of work without a pay increase. Long working hours and diminishing the line between

work and leisure are also endemic in the cultural sector (Ross, 2004). However, relative autonomy as a feature of flexible cultural work is highly valued among cultural workers, especially in terms of working and leisure time (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011b) since it appears to create freedom against the nine-to-five job routines. Banks (2007) states that, *“to be in control of one’s destiny is what encourages workers to endorse the systems put in place to expedite flexible production”* (p. 55). Furthermore, flexible working practices in CCIs are also related to the informality of creative workspaces, involving a bohemian and playful experience in the work environment where *“traditional forms of managements and organizations rejected”* (Banks and Hesmondhalgh, 2009, p. 417). Thus, work is understood as non-work.

2.4.2. Individualization

For Beck (2000), the ‘first modernity’, which was governed by the Fordist accumulation regime, was *“characterized by the standardization of work”* (p. 55), whereas the ‘second modernity’ which is governed by post-Fordism, is characterized by the individualization of work. The individualization of work takes place in what Beck (2000) calls ‘the risk regime’. In this regime, with the erosion of social institutions such as the welfare state and trade unions, structural problems and risks surrounding the world of work are placed upon individuals. Furthermore, as Beck (2000) states, *“people are expected to make their own life-plans, to be mobile and to provide for themselves in various ways”* (p. 70).

The process of individualization is intensified with popular discourses that operate at a level of individual subjectivity. For example, the ‘creativity’ discourse operates through the idea that work can be pleasurable, rewarding, and full of emotional intensity (Lee, 2012) for the individual. As Lee notes (2012), *“the governmentalizing aspects of this discourse are most apparent in the claims that ‘everyone is creative’ and in the valorization of creativity as means of self-actualization”* (p. 482). Drawing from the neo-Foucauldian approach of governmentality, scholars such as Gill (2002), McRobbie (2002a), and Ross (2004) show that these discourses have positioned cultural workers as ideal entrepreneurial subjects which validate flexible work, productiveness, personal responsibility, and other neoliberal ideas that surround precarious cultural work. Cultural workers are

claimed self-exploited victims of the neoliberal creative workplace at this level of individual subjectivity. Scharff (2016) states that cultural workers are “*paradigms of entrepreneurial selfhood due to the cultural sector’s emphasis on autonomy, self-realization and competition*” (p. 4). Her study on cultural workers as entrepreneurial subjects has shown that cultural workers manage themselves as if they were a business. Additionally, they are always active due to the competitiveness of the cultural sector and thus are always short in time. Scharff’s (2016) study also shows that although cultural workers encounter extreme difficulties and challenges related to precarious working conditions of cultural work, they rarely evoke structural problems, and their desires for change are turned inwards. This situation creates anxieties and self-doubt (Scharff, 2016).

In an era where risk is placed upon individuals and where popular discourses promote entrepreneurial subjectivity, the possibility of collective action weakens, and new modes of collective agency emerge among cultural workers to manage precarious working conditions. Networking becomes a necessity for cultural workers to escape the isolation of individualized work and to secure and pursue a creative career. Christopherson (2008) notes that, in CCIs, “*personal networks are recognized as the central mechanism both for individual career advancement and risk reduction*” (p. 89). These networks also act as a stage for cultural workers to market their skills and socialize⁸. However, Christopherson (2008) also highlights the exclusionary nature of these networks. His study shows that, in the US, contrary to creative workspaces’ recognition as ‘open’ and ‘diverse’ places, career-building opportunities via networks favor almost exclusively white men. This phenomenon both creates and perpetuates inequalities in creative workspaces, and it is a threat to the diversity of cultural products. On the other hand, the study of Saundry et al. (2006) shows that, exclusionary networks are not always the case. According to Saundry et al. (2006), in some examples, networks can act as a support mechanism for workers in freelance labor markets. However, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011b) emphasize the lack of knowledge and experience of these networks have, compared to trade unions.

⁸ Wittel (2001), argues that the obligation to network created an emerging mode of ‘network sociality’ where the social relationships between workers are commodified and instrumentalized.

2.4.3. Precarization

The category of precarious work indicates the erosion of the standard employment relationship of the Fordist era, where the relationship between labor and capital was regulated, and workers experienced relative economic security via guaranteed employment and the welfare state. Linked with the flexibilization and individualization of contemporary work, now it is well established that cultural workers in CCIs engaged in highly insecure and casualized employment. Thus, they are identified as the poster children of the recent emerging social class of the precariat (Gill and Pratt, 2008; Standing, 2014). Precarity has a double meaning. As explained by Gill and Pratt (2008), it both signifies “*the multiplication of precarious, unstable, insecure forms of living*” related to work (p. 3) and, at the same time, “*new forms of political struggle and solidarity that reach beyond the traditional models of the political party or trade union*” (p. 3).

Precarious working conditions and their consequences on cultural workers’ lives have been well documented in recent critical media and communications studies. These studies have shown that, in CCIs, long working hours and bulimic working patterns are typical (Jeffcutt and Pratt, 2002), and ‘crunch times’⁹ are normalized. Additionally, payments are usually low if the worker is not ‘above the line’ and working for no payment in the hope of securing a permanent job is another common feature (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011b). According to Siebert and Wilson (2013), a majority of creative aspirants see unpaid work as the legitimate way of finding a job in CCIs. The expectation of mobility is high (Ursell, 2000), the boundaries between work and play are erased, and workers are expected to be ‘always on’ (Gregg, 2011) and always ready for a job. They must keep their skills up to date by funding their own training and equipment (Morgan and Nelligan, 2018). Consequently, the precariousness of work deepens the lack of social diversity in CCIs, since only people from advantageous social classes can afford to work in such a precarious sector (Siebert and Wilson, 2013).

⁹ Refers to over intensification of work caused by extreme time pressure (de Peuter and Dyer-Witthford, 2005).

2.5. De-Westernization of Creative Labor Studies

The studies discussed above have shown that concepts such as flexibilization, informality, individualization, entrepreneurial subjectivism, and precariousness characterize the work in CCIs. However, universal validity of these studies has been a matter of debate among media and communication scholars in recent years since these studies predominately took place in the large metropolitan centers of West Europe and North America (Alacovska and Gill 2019; Conor et al., 2015). Alacovska and Gill (2019) discuss that, to form an empirical heterogeneity in global creative labor studies, one must raise the question: “*what are the experiences elsewhere?*” (p. 3). To answer this question, the taken-for-granted notions of cultural work established by Western scholars, such as entrepreneurial subjectivism, precarity, and informality must be rethought and provincialized. As Alacovska and Gill state (2019), “*a view from elsewhere can potentially help us re-image alternatives to the ‘trouble’ intrinsic to creative work, such as precarity, social inequality and psychosomatic illness caused by the neoliberal logic of aspiration, informality, and entrepreneurial subjectivity*” (p. 4). To develop an ex-centric view on creative labor from Türkiye’s perspective, this thesis will engage with and think through above-mentioned established concepts and try to ascertain the experiences and conditions of cultural workers in Turkish CCIs.

3. CONDITIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF ISTANBUL-BASED VISUAL DESIGNERS

The apparent economic growth potential and growing employment numbers in CCIs drew considerable attention from academia and public policy in recent years. While some of these accounts have been criticized for their apparent optimism about economic re-structuring and job satisfaction (Florida, 2002) around creativity, some have been criticized for their connivance about the actual working conditions and experiences of the growing cultural workforce in CCIs (DCMS, 1998; Florida, 2002). Together with critical studies that investigate the conditions and experiences of cultural workers in the post-industrial Western context, these studies have created some established notions in creative labor studies. However, the universal validity of these studies has been a matter of debate among media and communication scholars (Alacovska and Gill, 2019; Conor et al., 2015) in recent years.

As Türkiye tries to take advantage of the economic potentialities of CCIs, the number of cultural workers in this sector has increased rapidly. Although this situation has led some Turkish scholars to a critical exploration of creative labor within the Turkish CCIs, very few of these studies have generated empirical data to unfold the actual working conditions and experiences of Turkish cultural workers.

This chapter contextualizes the research by providing background information on the Turkish creative economy and creative labor that operates under it and then moves on to the field study of this thesis, Istanbul-based visual designers. After the gathered data is analyzed critically in comparison with West-based empirical findings and theory building, the thesis will attempt to present an ex-centric and distinctive perspective on the creative labor dimension of Turkish CCIs.

3.1. The Scope of the Study

The study tries to ascertain the conditions, experiences, and subjectivities of cultural workers in Turkish CCIs. It engages with findings and theorizing from post-industrial Western context to develop an ex-centric and critical understanding of Turkish CCI's labor perspective. The study deploys a set of prominent concepts. In the data collection part of the research, the following concepts that stand out in creative labor studies will be used and Turkish creative laborers' working conditions, experiences and subjectivities will be examined in light of these concepts:

- a) Flexibilization
- b) Individualization
- c) Precarization

After conducting semi-structured interviews with 19 Istanbul-based visual designers, the findings will be presented under two main chapters: one corresponding to the conditions of the workers in the field and the other the workers' subjective experiences. Before the presentation of methodology and findings, in the next sections, the study will be contextualized by looking at the creative ecosystem of Türkiye and Istanbul and cultural workers' positions under this ecosystem.

3.1.1. Türkiye's Creative Ecosystem

Türkiye shares both similarities and differences with Western countries regarding the formation of CCIs and the cultural workforce. Similarities mainly consist of economic ones as Türkiye tries to take advantage of the economic potentialities of CCIs to gain a competitive advantage in the global economy. In 2015, Türkiye was ranked the 14th country in the globe and the fourth country among the developing countries in creative goods exports, with its exports increased from 3.3 billion US Dollars to 9.8 billion US Dollars between 2005 and 2014 (UNCTAD, 2018) (Figure 3.1). An important part of this export is realized by the contribution of audio-visual and handcraft products.

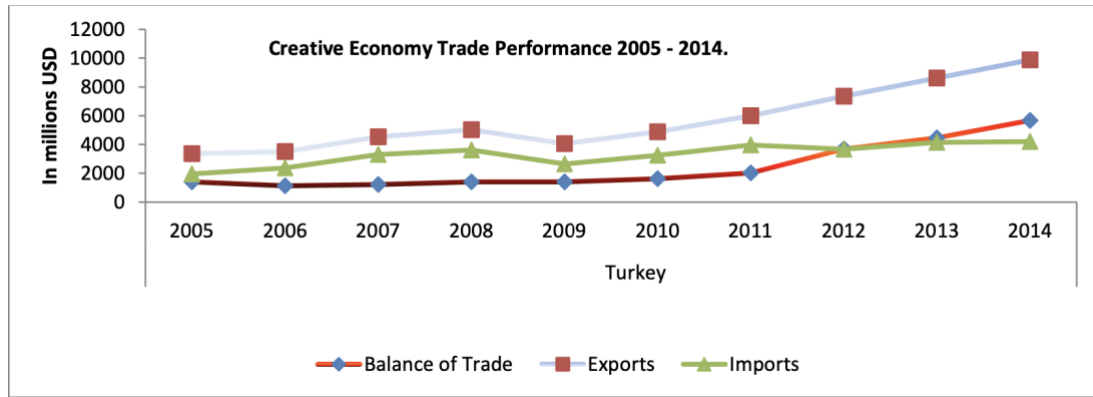


Figure 3.1. Trade Performance of Turkish Creative Economy. Source: (UNCTAD, 2018).

As Türkiye's creative sector grows steadily, the number of enterprises and employees in this sector also increases. According to TSI data (2017, as in Demir, 2018), the number of enterprises in creative industries increased by 44% between 2009 and 2014, and the number of employees employed by these enterprises increased from 206.000 to 331.00 in the same period (Figure 3.2). Looking at this data, we can see that the Turkish creative economy and the rate of employed people in this economy are in an upward trend.

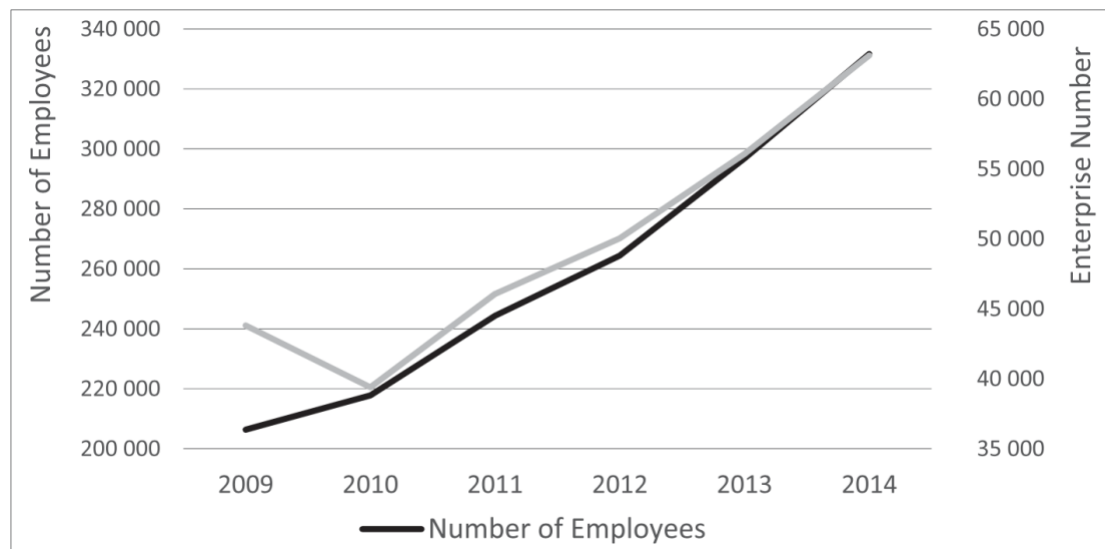


Figure 3.2. Number of employees and enterprises in Turkish creative industries. Source: (Demir, 2018).

However, according to TSI's latest cultural economy and cultural employment statistics (2021), the total number of employees in the Turkish cultural sector decreased by 6.2% between 2019 and 2020. The total number measured in 2020 was

592.000, whereas it was 631.000 in 2019. There may be two possible reasons for this decrease in total cultural employment. One apparent reason is the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on cultural workplaces and cultural labor markets. As Comunian and England (2020) show, precarious conditions that cultural workers encounter become more visible in moments of crisis. The spread of the Covid-19 pandemic was one such moment, and globally hundreds of thousands of cultural workers lost their income and job security during this time. Türkiye was no exception regarding the conditions of cultural workers in the pandemic era. Many artists and cultural workers lost their income and job security during the Covid-19 pandemic in Türkiye (Yiğit, 2021). Another possible reason for the decrease in total cultural employment rates might be the illegal contractual relationships between cultural workers and cultural employers due to cultural firms' efforts to bend the laws that protect some key cultural workers in Türkiye, such as journalists and other media workers. For example, the Turkish Press-Labour Law (Law No 212) gives media workers additional rights and secure employment chances due to the scope of their profession; however, when a media worker applies for a media job in Türkiye, some firms authenticate them as 'office worker' to escape the 'burdens' of regulations that come with the Law No 212 (Uzunoglu, 2017). This unlawful act might be endemic in the Turkish cultural sector. Especially in recent years, with the combined effect of the economic crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic, legislators' insufficient control over the law, and the erosion of trade union memberships. However, this assertion should also be supported by quantitative data.

Another characteristic that Türkiye shares with western creative economies is the neoliberal political-economic restructuring of the field of cultural production. Türkiye's introduction with the liberalization of the economy in the 1980s has left deep scars on the formation of the labor market and labor relations. With the newly prepared constitution in 1982 after the 1980 *coup d'etat*, the Turkish labor market has met with wage compressions, restrictions on workers' organizations, labor mobilization, and collective bargaining (Bozkurt-Güngen, 2018). As Bozkurt-Güngen stresses, the 2003 Labour Law has also "*provided a legal justification for a variety of fixed-term contracts and part-time working schemes*" (Bozkurt-Güngen, 2018), presenting a great flexibility in the labor market for cultural workers. On the other contrary, what is distinctive about Türkiye is that, unlike the creative economies of the West, Türkiye

does not even have 'appropriate' cultural policies or specific labor laws that govern creative labor (Kaymas, 2020). As Kaymas (2020) shows, industrial development in Turkish cultural sectors primarily relies on creative entrepreneurs' individual or collective efforts rather than well-tailored cultural policies. Thus, leaving cultural workers vulnerable in a market-oriented economy.

With a population of 16 million, Istanbul is the biggest city in Türkiye and one of the biggest cities in the region. As the flagship of the Turkish creative economy (Lazzeretti et al., 2014), according to 2011 data (TSI, 2011), Istanbul is the home of 52.43% of the total creative industries workforce in the country. Furthermore, according to Lazzeretti et al. (2014), Istanbul is the most concentrated city in Türkiye regarding the geographic distribution of CCIs and one of two cities in Türkiye that can be qualified as a 'creative city' together with Ankara, the capital of the country. While creative businesses related to ICTs, such as software and programming, are more centered in Ankara, sectors such as 'film and video', 'advertising' and 'radio/television' are more concentrated in Istanbul's creative ecosystem (Lazzeretti et al., 2014). Combined with Istanbul's heterogeneous demographic structure formed with individuals from all over Türkiye and neighboring countries, this concentration makes Istanbul an ideal city for a study of creative labor. This demography also provides an opportunity to generalize the research results to the broader creative economy of Türkiye.

Furthermore, the concentration of CCIs in Istanbul is also vital at the level of occupational networks and network sociality. As mentioned, Istanbul is the home for the majority of cultural workers and cultural enterprises in the country. Thus, to live in or to have strong connections with Istanbul is essential for cultural workers who want to promote themselves and their work to other creatives and creative firms inside and outside of Türkiye. Moving to Istanbul is sometimes the only way for cultural workers who wish to get hold of a promising job opportunity and to access industry-specific knowledge exchange activities. However, Istanbul is the most expensive city to live in Türkiye, and it is a challenge to live and continue a career in Istanbul for most Turkish creative aspirants. Seeking entry into the cultural sector is also a struggle because of the combined effects of living expenses and low salaries, especially at the start of the creative career.

3.1.2. Creative Labor in Turkish Cultural and Creative Industries

What we know about the conditions and experiences of creative laborers in Turkish CCIs is largely based upon the emerging empirical studies that investigate the subjectivities and objective conditions of Turkish cultural workers in industries such as TV production (Bulut, 2016; Yörük, 2018; Çora, 2019; Kara, 2019), industrial design (Kaymas and Yakın, 2021), documentary production (Şen, 2017), digital game (Sezgin, 2019) and press (Uzunoglu, 2017). These scholars have deployed some established concepts such as precarity, entrepreneurial subjectivity, informality, and individualization to investigate the conditions of cultural workers such as industrial designers, journalists, scriptwriters, TV production workers, and game developers. The results of their studies have widely shown that Turkish cultural workers share common precarious conditions due to the flexibilization of the Turkish labor markets and working practices. Furthermore, these studies have also observed that the individualization of the workforce and the weakening of collective action are common features in Turkish CCIs. Additionally, just like their Western counterparts, Turkish cultural workers operate at a level of individual subjectivity, but they are not claimed to show strong tendencies toward entrepreneurial subjectivity (Demir, 2018).

In terms of individualization, Turkish cultural workers seem to operate at a level of individual subjectivity who seek self-actualization and self-affirmation through their creative practice (Kaymas and Yakın, 2011; Demir, 2018, Şen, 2017; Sezgin, 2019) and who do not believe the effectiveness of collective agency, especially the role of trade unions. According to Demir (2018), creative workers in Türkiye value concepts such as originality, creativity, creative autonomy, freedom, and self-improvement. They also want to work in skilled and congruent teams which respect aesthetic expression. These findings align with the outcomes of the ‘creativity’ discourse that operates at the level of individual subjectivity (see Lee, 2012). However, unlike the discussions and findings around ‘entrepreneurial subjectivism’ (Scharff, 2016), Demir’s (2018) findings do not reveal an existence of competitive tendencies among peers in the case of Turkish creative workers. However, Demir (2018) does speak about ‘patience’ and ‘adaptation’ in existing conditions. According to Demir, Turkish creative laborers are always trying to be employable through self-learning

practices and responsibility-bearing, which are some qualities scholars have observed in entrepreneurial subjects (Scharff, 2016). Sezgin's (2019) study on creative labor in the Turkish game industry have also revealed that game developers do not see their jobs (and activities related to their job, such as self-learning) as work, and they feel lucky to work in the game industry, which is also in line with the findings on cultural workers as entrepreneurial subjects (McRobbie, 2002b).

Kaymas and Yakın (2021) have also explored Turkish creative laborers' subjectivities and self-actualization practices, but in a context that is determined by neoliberal authoritarianism. According to Kaymas and Yakın (2021), the harsh conditions presented by contemporary capitalism and neoliberal authoritarianism have led to new modes of self-realization among Turkish cultural workers, such as improving new co-working spaces, establishing close working groups, and developing occupational relations with their peers. They suggest that a study of creative labor must reconsider the 'passions' and 'feelings' of cultural workers since passions and feelings have the potential to form new sources of self-confidence and new forms of identity. Another interesting finding of their study is about job-finding strategies. Kaymas and Yakın (2021) state that *"in Europe, finding a new job mainly relies on creative professional's individual strategies, in case of Turkish experience, they frequently addressed the significance of their social relations such as families, relatives or their friends"* (p. 8). Yörük's (2018) study on scriptwriters has also revealed similar tendencies in the Turkish cultural workforce. Studies suggest that in an era where collective action has weakened, and structural risks and responsibilities related to work are placed upon individuals, Turkish cultural workers rely mainly on their close relationships with their friends and families to overcome these problems.

The studies have also revealed that the oppressive face of post-Fordist capitalism is also significant in the case of Turkish cultural workers. Turkish cultural sector is marked by high levels of insecurities, flexibility, and casualization, which refers to the precarization of the Turkish cultural workforce (Uzunoglu, 2017; Kaymas and Yakın, 2021; Sezgin, 2019; Bulut, 2016). Overwork, diminishing the line between work and leisure, working for little or no money, and simultaneously working on several projects are highly normalized in the Turkish cultural sector. These conditions are also normalized among Turkish cultural workers. This, in turn, leads to self-exploitation.

However, in his study on Turkish television production workers, Bulut (2016) explains that this does not mean Turkish cultural workers are condemned to self-exploitation. According to Bulut (2016), in some cases, workers develop means of resistance against poor conditions, meaning that they are not just passive neoliberal subjects but also activist subjects who desire change and try to improve the poor working conditions in the cultural sector. Bulut (2016) also challenges the established notion of precarity as mere financial insecurity and claims that in the case of Turkish television production workers, precarity covers the human body and its physical condition since injuries and even deaths are expected in the production process of cultural commodities in Türkiye. We learn from Bulut's (2016) findings that supposed established notions in creative labor studies may not always be relevant. These notions must be challenged to develop a deep understanding of the conditions outside the post-industrial Western context.

Looking at the findings from previous studies, one can also suggest that the Turkish cultural work field can also be understood as a site for 'moral work' (Banks, 2007; Lee, 2012). As Lee (2012) states, "*creative occupations are sites of exploitation and intense insecurity fueled by the desire for self-actualization*" (p. 480), more importantly, "*they are also spaces where workers have an ethical commitment to, and passion for their cultural work*" (p. 480). Lee's (2012) findings on workers in British independent TV production has shown that cultural workers' attachment to their work is not always about individual subjectification but is also about the ethical passion for cultural work. Similarly, Şen's (2018) and Yörük's (2017) studies on freelance scriptwriters and documentary makers in Türkiye have shown an ethical passion for cultural work. However, contrary to Lee's (2012) argument, where he states, "*to survive long term in the television industry, you have to be entrepreneurial*" (p.492), Şen's (2018) interviewees do not show tendencies toward entrepreneurial subjectivity. Instead, Şen's subjects emphasize a strong social responsibility attached to their passion for their work. Her interviewees claim they do not expect a monetary or social reward from their cultural artifacts as long as they work in autonomous conditions. Furthermore, Şen's (2018) subjects say they work hard even though they know they will earn nothing. Usually, cultural workers work hard in the hope that they will land stable and promising jobs¹⁰. However, Şen's subjects knowingly keep producing without hope for job opportunities or monetary rewards. They mainly gain money from

¹⁰ This type of labor is called 'hope labor' (see Mackenzie and McKinlay, 2021)

secondary jobs, and many quit their jobs as documentary makers or migrate to other countries where they feel their work would be respected more and where they feel working conditions would be better than in Türkiye.

3.2. Methodology

Previous studies conducted on cultural workers in Türkiye have dominantly focused on settings where work is more collective than it is individualized, such as digital games, TV, or film industries. These studies have generated valuable data on their research subjects. However, the distinctive conditions and experiences of cultural workers outside these settings remain underexplored.

This thesis aims to help diversifying empirical evidence on the creative labor process in Turkish CCIs. Thus, the chosen research population of this thesis is Istanbul-based cultural workers who perform visual design practices in Turkish CCIs. Unlike a cultural worker in the digital game or TV industry, visual designers' profession is more suitable for remote working conditions. Thus, visual designers' experiences about their work are supposedly more individualized and flexible than a TV production worker since workers in industries such as TV production or digital game are generally working within large working groups or crowded sets where they share and work in the same workplace and usually for the same employer. Working with visual designers will allow this research to achieve high levels of conceptual validity since the research intends to gain knowledge about theoretical concepts such as flexibility, precarity, and individualization among Turkish cultural workers.

To collect data from the research participants, a qualitative method is chosen based on semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews helped to explore and interrogate the conditions and subjective experiences of actors in the case. According to McIntosh and Morse (2015), semi-structured interviews are “*designed to ascertain subjective responses from persons regarding a particular situation or phenomenon they have experienced*” (p. 1). After conducting all the interviews, a narrative analysis has been deployed to understand how interviewees construct their stories and narrative from their own personal experiences. Earth and Cronin (2008) state that narrative

analysis is “*an approach taken to interview data that is concerned with understanding how and why people talk about their lives as a story or a series of stories*” (p. 3)

A total of 19 semi-structured interviews have been conducted within the scope of the research. Interviews have been conducted in Turkish and translated into English. Interviewees have been chosen with a snowball sampling method. The median age of the interviewees was 28.

It is tried to interview subjects from the same or similar professions, such as motion graphic designers, graphic designers, and multimedia designers, and they all have been named under the umbrella term ‘visual designers’. This allowed the researcher to check the interviewees’ accounts against each other. However, most interviewees have said that they do not have a strict title and perform in various visual design stages to survive in the sector. Additionally, it is also tried to interview both freelance visual designers and full-time employed visual designers. Interviewing with freelancer visual designers helped to gain insight into the working conditions and experiences of cultural workers in the Turkish creative economy in general, as freelancers generally work for various clients from different sectors. On the other hand, interviewing subjects who are full-time employees in advertising agencies or design studios helped to gain information about the companies they worked for and cultural workers’ working conditions and experiences in the cultural company setting. In this way, freelance workers’ and full-time employed workers’ experiences could be compared. However, since working simultaneously in multiple jobs or on multiple projects is highly normalized in Turkish creative sectors, full-time employee interviewees also had freelance work experiences. Additionally, since the researcher of the thesis has been working as a research assistant in a design-related department at the university and has a short experience as a graphic designer, applying a reality check to the interviews have been possible.

The questionnaire is composed of a total of two sections. The first section aims to gather the interviewees’ demographic information, such as their age, residence, occupation, education level, employment status, and social security coverage. The second section of the questionnaire is composed of a total of 22 open-ended questions. It is tried to select the questions carefully, considering the scope and purpose of this

thesis, and tried to keep guidance and direction to a minimum. The questions have been asked under six main topics: work description, opinions, working conditions, usage of time, collective action, and future expectations. With the deployment of these topics, it is tried to gather data for the main research concepts of this thesis, which are precarization, individualization, and flexibilization.

Sixteen interviews were conducted on Zoom and recorded by the researcher with the permission of the interviewees. Three interviews were conducted face-to-face and recorded with a mobile phone with the permission of the interviewees. Interviews lasted between 21 minutes to 60 minutes. After carefully listening to the recordings, the interviews are transcribed and stored anonymously. After, interviewees' answers were analyzed according to the research concepts: precarization, individualization, and flexibilization. However, not all answers corresponded to a single concept. Thus, some answers were analyzed under multiple concepts. After analyzing the data, the findings are presented under two main topics: one corresponding to working conditions and one corresponding to subjective experiences of workers in the field.

3.3. Findings and Discussion

Under the 'creativity' discourse (Lee, 2017), creative laborers have shone out as a multi-national workforce of skilled workers. Their jobs are presented as 'cool', 'creative', and 'egalitarian'. However, recent critical studies on creative labor in various workplace settings have shown the paradoxical characteristics of creative occupations. Drawing from this literature, previous chapters discussed that cultural workers and occupations are increasingly marked with the processes of flexibilization, individualization, and precarization. As a result of neo-liberal interventions, globalization, and the advancements of ICTs, these processes have shaped contemporary creative labor practices and worker subjectivities.

Similar critical studies investigating cultural workers' objective conditions and subjectivities have also been conducted in Türkiye. These studies have focused on workplace settings where work is more collective than individualized such as television sets and game studios. To amplify the empirical data on Turkish cultural workers, this study has focused on Istanbul-based visual designers, which have never

been a subject of a similar study. To ascertain the conditions and experiences of visual designers in Turkish CCIs, 19 semi-structured interviews have been conducted. Interviewees' demographic information can be seen below.

Interviewee	Age	Gender	Education	Job Title	Social Security
Interviewee 1	30	Female	M.A	Video editor/ Motion graphic designer	Yes
Interviewee 2	26	Male	B.A	Freelance graphic designer	Yes
Interviewee 3	29	Male	B.A	Freelance motion graphic designer / Lecturer	Yes
Interviewee 4	33	Female	M.A	Freelance visual communication designer / Teaching assistant	Yes
Interviewee 5	37	Male	PhD	Multi-disciplinary designer / Academic	Yes
Interviewee 6	25	Male	B.A	Motion graphic designer	Yes
Interviewee 7	28	Male	M.A	Freelance visual communication designer / Lecturer	Yes
Interviewee 8	27	Male	B.A	Midweight designer	Yes
Interviewee 9	35	Female	B.A	Freelance multi-disciplinary designer	No
Interviewee 10	29	Male	B.A	Freelance multi-media designer	No
Interviewee 11	28	Male	B.A	Freelance multimedia designer / Part-time art director	Yes

Interviewee 12	30	Male	M.A	Freelance motion graphic designer	No
Interviewee 13	26	Male	B.A	Freelance visual communication designer	No
Interviewee 14	24	Female	B.A	Freelance graphic designer / social media manager	Yes
Interviewee 15	34	Female	B.A	Freelance graphic designer / experience expert	Yes
Interviewee 16	28	Male	B.A	Art director / Motion graphic designer	Yes
Interviewee 17	23	Female	B.A	Motion graphic designer	Yes
Interviewee 18	22	Female	B.A	Visual communication designer	Yes
Interviewee 19	27	Female	B.A	Freelance visual designer	No

Table 3.1. The table of interviews

The table shows the interviewees' ages, genders, education levels, job titles, and social security information. After analyzing the interviews, the findings are gathered under two chapters. The first chapter ascertains the quality of working life among Istanbul-based visual designers. This chapter aims to help gain a deeper understanding of the working conditions in Turkish CCIs. It deploys some established concepts in creative labor studies, such as flexibility, individualization, and precarization. At the same time, it explores the inequalities, insecurities, and shared distinctive experiences among the Turkish cultural workforce. However, the study approaches these established concepts critically, as one of the targets of this thesis is to challenge Western-based theorizing of creative labor. The second chapter tries to illuminate Istanbul-based visual designers' subjective experiences of work. The chapter deploys

concepts such as self-exploitation, entrepreneurial subjectivity and autonomy and explores the experiences and subjectivities of Istanbul-based visual designers.

3.3.1. Quality of Working Life

Scholars have discussed that in the age of post-Fordism, labor has taken a more flexible and non-standard form. In contemporary capitalism, flexibility not only shows itself in labor practices but, according to the needs of post-Fordist capital, it is also present in labor markets. This, in turn, creates increased insecurities but also creates new socialites for the post-Fordist workforce. One of the most rigorous examples of the flexibilization process is highly visible in CCIs. Banks describes being a flexible worker as follows:

“Being flexible essentially means that one must do whatever is required to support commercial interests. It increasingly requires working longer or unsocial hours, taking on-board additional responsibilities, relocating according to company demands and certainly committing oneself to the commercial imperatives of the firm over and above non-work commitments.” (Banks, 2007, p. 56).

Istanbul-based visual designers are generic examples for the flexibilization of the cultural workforce. Almost all of the interviewees emphasized the flexibility of their laboring practices. For example, when asked ‘do you take extra responsibilities when working’, Interviewee 16, who is working for an Istanbul-based animation studio as a motion graphic designer for seven years says:

“A lot. I do project management; sometimes, I have to act like an animation director in various projects; I even write scripts sometimes, they are not that big scripts, but I sit and think about them; I do graphic design, which is not my field. I basically do everything right now, there is nothing I do not do” (Interviewee 16, 05.12.2022).

Interviewee 19 says that she was the only designer in the start-up company where she worked as a full-time employee. She was doing all of the design work the company needed by herself:

“I was designing collections, doing brand identity for various companies, and responsible for product designs. I mean, I actually worked on social media, collections, and photo shoots; Since it is a start-up, I worked in a field such as designing the website, designing all the design elements of a company that has just started from scratch, it is a bit complicated” (Interviewee 19, 21.12.2022).

Interviewee 18’s situation is very similar to Interviewee 19. She says that after graduating from the visual communication design department in 2022, she started working with a start-up company that is active in CCIs-related sectors. After her three months of unpaid internship, she got a part-time job in the company where she was responsible for all design-related work:

“I make websites, arrange existing websites, and create micro websites from scratch for various projects. I also do illustrations, videos, and graphics.” (Interviewee 18, 21.12.2022).

While Interviewee 18 was doing all of the design-related work by herself, she did not get paid for the first three months, and she was only getting paid half of the minimum wage after that. This situation, where a single employee does all the design work is also observed in other interviewees who work in start-up companies or other small-sized advertising agencies as part-time or full-time workers.

Istanbul-based freelance designers’ situation is no different than Istanbul-based inhouse designers in most cases. While some freelance designers are able to work only in their original field area, most of them have to learn and practice different design disciplines to survive in the sector:

“In Türkiye, you cannot exist only as a designer. (...) I do graphic design, and 3D. Everywhere around the world there are people called 3D artists, texture artists, and light artists. These people are from different fields. But in Türkiye,

yes you involve the project as a motion designer, but you also do render cowboying, designing, adding textures; you have to do various other disciplines by yourself unfortunately. You cannot work in a single field.” (Interviewee 5, 10.11.2022).

Istanbul-based visual designers not only jump through different design disciplines for various projects, but sometimes they have to undertake various extra work unrelated to their profession. Freelance illustrator and animation designer Interviewee 9 explains such a situation in a tedium tone:

“The copywriter may be ill, and I have to edit their incomplete texts to use in my visuals. I may have to do the copywriter’s job. (...) In the same way, when something happens to the customer representative, or there is something they must care of, I may have to communicate with the clients” (Interviewee 9, 15.11.2022).

When Interviewee 9 was asked why she was doing other people’s jobs, she said for the sake of the project. These findings on the flexibility of laboring practices are in line with Banks’ (2007) explanation of being a flexible worker, where he explained, *“Being flexible essentially means that one must do whatever is required to support commercial interests.”* (p. 56). If workers do not act this way, where they do all the required work for the sake of the project or job, they fear to face losing their jobs and incomes. For example, Interviewee 14, who is a freelance graphic designer, and a full-time social media manager, says, *“in order not to lose the job, we sometimes work free for small requests”* (Interviewee 14, 24.11.2022). Interviewee 14 later said that because she is working in such an insecure position, she tries not to conflict with the employers and clients. When Interviewee 14 asked ‘are you trying not to conflict because you are afraid you will not get paid?’ she said, *“Yes. There are situations such as not getting my salary, and the sudden termination of my employment contract”* (Interviewee 14, 24.11.2022). Situations such as this, where designers cannot get their payment from their clients, are quite common among Istanbul-based visual designers. A substantial number of designers talked about the same situation. Interviewee 3, a motion graphic designer with almost ten years of work experience, says, *“I did not get exactly half of the freelance money I worked for in the year two*

thousand and nineteen” (Interviewee 3, 04.11.2022). This situation will be elaborated on in the next chapter, where the informality of creative labor is discussed.

The flexibilization of labor practices among Istanbul-based visual designers is usually coupled with the flexibilization of their working hours. Although the interviewees are observed to value flexible working hours for the reason of planning their own times, it is also observed that flexible hours create unwanted experiences about work and life. According to Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011b), flexible working hours in CCIs lead to an intensification of work. This intensification usually comes without a pay increase. The intensification of work is not only limited to the workplace but extends through workers’ homes. When asked how many hours do they work in a day, a full-time motion graphic designer Interviewee 16 said, *“I work from ten in the morning to six”*, he then stopped and said *“normally,”* and added, *“but of course, somehow there is always an hour or two of extra work”* (Interviewee 16, 05.12.2022). He later said that this extra work extends through his non-work time:

“I plan my day in the morning, I say ‘I’ll do these things today, I’ll finish them by the evening’, but at six in the evening, a knock-on job comes, and I say [to myself] what is going on! All the balances are broken. Or a new job comes in that morning and all the work I’m going to do that day is drooping and where is it going? It extends through the evening. (...) it is such an unbalanced working system.” (Interviewee 16, 05.12.2022).

Other in-house Istanbul-based visual designers have also raised the same issues. Only a few of the interviewees did not speak of an uncertainty of work time. However, ‘Uncertain’ was the most common answer for the majority of the interviewees when they asked how many hours they work in a day. This uncertainty was most visible for the freelance Istanbul-based visual designers. For example, when working hours were asked, Interviewee 19 laughed and said, *“It is so uncertain. Sometimes I start at ten in the morning and work until two at night. Sometimes I work very little, but I work without sleeping the next day”* (Interviewee 19, 21.12.2022).

The uncertainty not only comprises working practices and working hours, but with the increasing domination of casual work among cultural workers, it also shows

itself in the labor markets. Istanbul-based visual designers' jobs are highly casualized and individualized, since, using Bourdieu's words, "*the absolute reign of flexibility is established*" (1998, p.1) in the Turkish cultural sector. For Bourdieu,

"Casualization of employment is part of a mode of domination of a new kind, based on the creation of a generalized and permanent state of insecurity aimed at forcing workers into submission, into the acceptance of exploitation" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 85)

Most of the interviewees already stated that they were freelance designers. However, the interviewees who stated to work in full time jobs were also taking freelance projects to supplement their incomes. Also, it is observed that some freelance designers get jobs from other sectors to escape from the permanent state of insecurity. Interviewee 7 described the situation as:

"I never want to have only one job because working as a freelancer is very stressful. Will there be work every month? (...) It's important for me to always have passive income or another regular job in a different field. (...) [If freelancing is your only job] there is nothing to do, you will take every other project that comes to you, you have to take those projects. Otherwise, it will be difficult to make a living" (Interviewee 7, 12.11.2022).

Interviewee 7's solution to this problem is an individualized and competitive one. He said, "*of course, it is possible to get out of this situation. If you reach a certain level, you can charge your customers more, and as a result, you can be more selective*" (Interviewee 7, 12.11.2022). His answer brings to mind Ursell's (2000) discussion on the self-commodification process among cultural workers. Ursell (2000) argues that cultural workers are expected to organize their labor markets in an era where work is casualized. In these markets, they involve the process of self-commodification to land more rewarding jobs. Ursell (2000) further argues that freelancer cultural workers are required to be vigorously self-promoting and entrepreneurial to secure important short-term contracts. This situation is observed in many of the interviews. Interviewee 16, who works in an animation studio but who also takes freelance projects simultaneously, said:

“Everybody is started to try to stand out. It seems to me that the era of agencies [design or advertising etc.] is about to end, because even if I open a company or try to continue my freelance life right now, I believe that I can do it perfectly. (...) But of course, [I can do it] if I am tough and if I am a person who stands out with his character or if I am more courageous. Otherwise, we are doomed to companies and agencies” (Interviewee 16, 05.12.2022).

Not only Istanbul-based designers’ solutions to structural problems are individualistic, but also their work is more individualized. Almost all of the interviewees, even those who work in full-time jobs mentioned that they work remotely, vastly from their homes. This in turn creates isolation and leads to depoliticization of work. The individualization of work takes place in what Beck (2000) calls ‘the risk regime’. In this regime, with the erosion of social institutions such as the welfare state and trade unions, structural problems and risks surrounding the world of work are placed upon individuals. Furthermore, as Beck (2000) states, *“people are expected to make their own life-plans, to be mobile and to provide for themselves in various ways”* (p. 70). Christopher (2008) argues that, to reduce the risk, networks become central mechanisms in cultural sectors. Networks act as individual career advancement mechanisms, and as a stage where cultural workers market their skills and socialize. Similar to Kaymas and Yakin’s (2021) findings where they state, *“in Europe, finding a new job mainly relies on creative professional’s individual strategies, in case of Turkish experience, they frequently addressed the significance of their social relations such as families, relatives or their friends”* (p. 8), Istanbul-based visual designers also addressed the significance of their social relations, mostly their friends, on their job finding strategies. In an era where collective action has weakened, and structural risks and responsibilities related to work are placed upon individuals, Istanbul-based visual designers mainly rely on their close relationships with their friends to overcome these problems. This phenomenon can be named as a ‘network of friends’. Almost all of the interviewees said that they find jobs via their friends. Freelance motion designer Interviewee 5 says, *“the projects I got from abroad has mainly come to me from Behance, but the situation is different in Türkiye, friends call, we are becoming a team and go on”* (Interviewee 5, 10.11.2022). When asked how he finds his customers, freelance visual communication designer Interviewee 13 says, *“actually I do not have an active effort in this regard. It is mostly from friends and*

people I know from the university. I contact them, or they contact me, that's how" (Interviewee 13, 25.12.2022).

It is observed that this situation creates new socialites among Istanbul-based visual designers. This phenomenon will be examined in the second part of this chapter, where a discussion has been made on the informality of recruitment mechanisms and creative workplaces. It will be discussed that the informality of creative labor and creative labor markets not only has individualizing effects but may also lead to collectivized community help (Alacovska and Gill, 2019) and moral work (Banks, 2007). Before that, in the following pages, we will look at insecurities, pays, working hours, and some distinctive experiences Istanbul-based visual designers encounter.

3.3.1.1. Insecurities, Pays, and Working Hours

Above, it is discussed that working hours for Istanbul-based visual designers are very uncertain and flexible. For Istanbul-based visual designers, flexibilization of working hours comes with an extreme intensification of work. Overwork, diminishing the line between work and leisure, working for little or no money, and simultaneously working on several projects or jobs to supplement income also is very common for Istanbul-based visual designers. When asked her working hours, Interviewee 14, who works in a company as a graphic designer and who also takes freelance projects to supplement her income, laughed and said;

"My job is more than flexible. It is a timeless, twenty-four-seven working tempo. I am saying this laughingly, but this is really true. They can call you at eight in the morning, or four in the night. It is really timeless and flexible" (Interviewee 14, 24.11.2022).

Interviewee 14 said that, while working as a freelancer in Ankara, she worked an average of twelve to thirteen hours a day. Later she found a full-time social media manager position in Istanbul where she also makes graphic designs for the company, but she was still taking freelance projects to supplement her income and survive in Istanbul's expensive conditions. She said that, after her nine hours shift ends at the company she works for, she goes home and starts doing her freelance works. With this

extra workload, her working hours can be up to 16 hours on busy days. Many interviewees talked about more than ten hours of workload on an average day, sometimes up to twelve to fifteen hours. On more busy days, work can even prevent workers from sleeping or taking showers and can lead to burn-outs. Interviewee 3, who is a freelance motion graphic designer and who also works as a lecturer at the university to supplement his income, said:

“Event works are very busy and sometimes in an intense work pressure which takes about three to four weeks, you have to stay completely awake, and you can only sleep three to four hours in two days. I do not sleep for the last five days in the projects where I am the director. For example, I wake up on Tuesday and can only sleep on Saturday. You cannot even see the results of your work [when it is showing] because you pass out somewhere [laughs] (Interviewee 3, 04.11.2022).

A similar working tempo is also mentioned by Interviewee 5, who is also a freelance motion designer:

“I slept a total of 9 hours in a week on my last job. So, how many times does it happen in a year? It used to be a lot; I went through this process a lot until I was thirty-two. We slept in the office for weeks, we were up all night for weeks, we didn't take a shower for weeks” (Interviewee 5, 07.11.2022).

The informality of work, overwork, and other flexible practices cause serious health problems in some cases. Most of the interviewees spoke about health issues related to their work:

“I went to the doctor (...), I am repeating the doctor's direct line, ‘you are having a heart condition right now because you are under stress, we can get you hospitalized for this heart condition next time you come here.’ He did not give me any medicine, he said only one sentence, ‘either you resign from your job, or we will see you again here at the hospital’” (Interviewee 5, 07.11.2022).

“There were times when I was falling into depression. Working too long... without any breaks... I have got some problems. There were some projects that I had to stay awake till the morning for eight days in a row. This lack of sleep does some real damage to a person after one point” (Interviewee 12, 12.11.2022).

Not only freelancers but also full-time designers stated they experienced health issues related to the flexibilization of their work. Interviewee 16 says he experienced a panic attack when he was on his way to Izmir for the holiday. He explained that, after a very busy schedule, the project his company was working on was still unfinished, and he was afraid that his holiday would be wasted because of this unfinished project. These findings confirm Bulut’s (2016) findings on Turkish television workers, where he argued that precarity cannot only be understood as mere financial insecurity in the Turkish case, but it also covers the human body and its physical conditions.

Financial and social securities are also documented in the interviews. As a qualified motion graphic designer with more than ten years of experience in the sector, Interviewee 5 still complained about financial insecurities:

“You cannot get your efforts worth, and that is probably unique to Türkiye. The main reason designers go out of Türkiye, and they go a lot these days, is that they do not get paid properly for their hard work. Unfortunately, I do not feel [financially] secure because I cannot meet the conditions and living standards I want. That is the reason one. And reason two, I need equipment and the equipment costs are very high” (Interviewee 5, 07.11.2022).

In general, qualified designers usually spoke less about financial securities in their late careers. However, when asked, ‘do you feel financially secure?’, twelve interviewees out of nineteen said they do not feel any financial security. Three of the ones who said they feel financially secure were working secondary jobs to supplement their incomes. Fresh graduate Interviewee 17 said:

“Feeling financially secure means you have to be secure for more than a few months, and not means living pay-check-to-pay-check. It never gives that feeling, and you know that after two months, your security will expire” (Interviewee 17, 09.11.2022).

Another fresh graduate, Interviewee 8, who is working in a streaming company as a full-time midweight designer says he feels financially secure but immediately adds:

“I feel [financially secure] right now, but that is only because I rented out before rents went up. If I were looking for a house [to stay] right now, I would not be able to make a living. Let me put it this way; if I were to move to a new house, I would not be able to live under humane conditions at the moment with the money I earn” (Interviewee 8, 12.11.2022).

Interviewee 8 refers to the situation in which house rents have sky-rocketed in Istanbul in recent years. Housing rents in Istanbul have increased by 144 percent in the last year and 319 percent in the last two years (“Beş büyük ilin konut analizi”, 2022). While the minimum wage was still 5500 Turkish lira in Istanbul at the time the study was conducted, average rents were between 10299 to 28000 Turkish lira (“Beş büyük ilin konut analizi”, 2022). Living expenses in Istanbul increasingly creates a situation where workers from low-income groups cannot afford to live in Istanbul. This situation creates inequalities regarding class and very threatening for the diversity and the quality of cultural products. What interviewee 16 said about the situation was very striking. Interviewee 16, who has been working as an art director and motion graphic designer in a motion design studio for seven years, said:

“When the pandemic started, I came here [Izmir]. Since we will experience a lockdown, I thought, it would be best to experience it with my family. My house [in Istanbul] was still standing [at that time]. Then I saw that the pandemic would continue, and I would not be able to go anywhere [from Izmir]. Then I thought it would be best to live in Izmir, and I should not pay rent to my house in Istanbul for nothing. Later, everything [prices] sky-rocketed and I could not go back [to Istanbul]” (Interviewee 16, 05.12.2022).

When Interviewee 16 asked are you planning to go back to Istanbul at some point, he said “yes, I will, at some point, because there is no sector in here [Izmir]” (Interviewee 16, 05.12.2022). He both evokes the lack of creative sector concentration in Izmir, and a situation where he was depriving from industry-specific knowledge exchanges.

Istanbul-based visual designers not only usually work for little or no money, but they frequently face situations where they cannot get their payments from their clients. I will discuss in the next chapter that one of the reasons for this situation is the abuse of informality and the acceptance of this situation in Istanbul’s cultural ecology.

Another thing to be addressed is the social security coverage rates among the interviewees. Thirteen interviewees out of nineteen stated that they have some sort of social security coverage, mostly from Turkish Social Security Institution which governs the Turkish social security system. The system covers work accidents, sicknesses, maternity insurances and presents retirement options.

Six interviewees stated that they do not have social security coverage. All of these six interviewees were freelancers. It is observed that the lack of social security coverage among Istanbul-based visual designers includes almost entirely freelancers. Those freelancers who said they have social security coverage were working in full-time or part-time jobs simultaneously, and their social security coverage was a part of their full-time or part-time jobs and not from their freelance position. Interviewee 5, who is a highly experienced motion graphic designer, says:

“One of the biggest problems of the freelancers is the issue of social security. (...),there are a lot of freelancers out there who are not registered to any kind of social security coverage. It gives them a fear. Yes, they are happy to be a freelancer but if you are not an above-the-line designer, you are living in a fear; you do not feel secure” (Interviewee 5, 07.11.2022).

The insecurities, which include financial, social, and health-related uncertainties, increasingly create a situation in which Istanbul-based visual designers do not want to work in Türkiye anymore and want to work in mostly Euro-American countries. Seventeen interviewees out of nineteen said they would want to live and work in a creative occupation in other countries. The main reasons were financial and social insecurities and extreme working hours related to cultural work in Istanbul's present conditions. Other frequently addressed problems by the interviewees were the presence of 'unprofessionalism', 'lack of creative autonomy and artistic expression', 'underestimation of the profession', 'lack of respect to designers', and 'customers who do not know anything about design'.

It is also observed that Istanbul-based visual designers increasingly want to work with clients from abroad, usually Euro-American countries because of their 'professionalism', 'focus on work', and most importantly for higher pays.

"What I can say with my limited experience; there is a more professional working environment, I worked remotely, but even there I could observe that everyone is very professional and focused on the work done. Unnecessary things are not talked about outside of work and what is requested from you is stated very clearly, there is no problem as long as you get the job done" (Interviewee 7, 12.11.2022).

"Everything goes as it is spoken; nothing more is required than what is agreed. Your payments come to you on time. In general, everything goes as it should. Not because they are extra good, but because something is missing here" (Interviewee 19, 21.12.2022).

This, in turn, creates a situation where Istanbul-based visual designers do not want to work with clients from Türkiye. This, in turn, is a serious threat for the Turkish creative economy as cultural workers are the most important aspect of the cultural production process.

3.3.1.2. Informality, Moral and Relational Work

Informality has been claimed as one of the fundamental characteristics of creative labor. Alacovska and Gill (2019) state that, “*the informality of creative work is so far dualistically tackled: first, as an inherent feature of creative workplaces and, second, as an unregulated, network-based recruitment mechanism*” (p. 3). As discussed above, after the 1982 constitution and the 2003 Labour Law which in Bozkurt-Güngen’s words (2018) “*provided a legal justification for a variety of fixed-term contracts and part-time working schmes*”, a great flexibility is established in Turkish labor markets. With these interventions from the state, cultural labor markets in Türkiye have taken an unregulated and network-based turn (Kaymas and Yakın, 2021).

Within the scope of this thesis, it is discussed that, Istanbul-based visual designers’ recruitment mechanisms and working practices set an example for such an informality. It is argued that labor markets for Istanbul-based visual designers are informally governed through social networks which usually consist of close friends. This process is linked with the individualization of the workforce since workers use these networks as an individualized solution to systemic flexploitation (Bourdieu, 1998) problem. However, beyond this understanding of informality, Alacovska and Gill (2019) argue against the “*individualizing characterization of [informal] creative work*” (p. 8) and state that:

“*Creative work is infused in long-term kinship, friendship and neighbourhood relational ties which do not always or necessarily abide by the monetary, profit-seeking, utilitarian logic of social networks, but by the non-monetary logic of community, morality, reciprocity and mutuality*” (p. 8).

From this perspective, we have an opportunity to approach informality beyond its individuating characterization. As Alacovska and Gill (2019) state, “*critical creative labour scholars often establish a link between informality and precarity*” (p. 7). The individualizing effect of informality indeed causes Istanbul-based visual designers to live in such precarious conditions. However, in the case of Istanbul-based visual designers, informality not only leads to the precariousness of the cultural

workforce but also creates new socialites and informal solidarity practices among them. These socialites and solidarity practices are highly informal and do not take a collective action form. In fact, Istanbul-based visual designers feel very uncertain about the value of institutionalized collective action forms such as unions and occupational organizations. Many interviewees do not even have an opinion on trade unions and occupational organizations. Freelance illustrator Interviewee 9 stated that:

“I mean... they [unions] seem so far from our world to me. I grew up as a unionist family’s child, but it was labor union. Ours is different from their thing; we do not have such a formation like them. We do not have such an organization that supports each other, or an organization that seeks [designers’] rights. I wish we had but I did not really thing about it until now [laughs]” (Interviewee 9, 15.11.2022).

Freelance motion graphic designer Interviewee 12 commented:

“Well, this union or association thing seems to me that... is starting to become a bit outdated because it tides you to their bureaucracy. Informal communities are more active. (...) There are not many organizations on this regard in Türkiye. Since everyone is very close friends, you usually meet and drink with them” (Interviewee 12, 17.11.2022).

None of the interviewees stated they are a member of a trade union and only few of them mentioned they are a member of an occupational organization. However, almost all of the interviewees did speak about the role of their close friends (who are also designers) in their job-finding strategies and working and socializing practices. This, in turn, brings to mind what Alacovska (2018) theorizes as a ‘relational work perspective’. Alacovska state that, *“creative workers’ informal labour practices and economic activities are constituted by the meanings and quality workers attach to personal relations”* (p. 1563). The role of personal relations in Istanbul-based visual designers’ labor practices is observed to be very significant. When asked about his job-finding process, Interviewee 13 said that,

“Actually, I do not want to go out of my comfort zone, because those are the people that I know. [I think] ‘I can get along with this person, or this person’s work is close to work that I can do’. Like I mentioned, I see the works I take as my own. Because of that, I try not to connect with people that I do not know, or I do not trust because I want work with sincerity” (Interviewee 13, 25.11.2022).

A similar situation is also stated by Interviewee 4. She said that *“in Türkiye, you cannot get paid without finishing the job. When I work with familiar people, it relaxes me, I can say I can get my payment. It gives me a trust”* (Interviewee 4, 07.11.2022).

Friends also, with the interviewees’ own phrases, ‘pass’ other friends various projects and jobs if they are not available at the moment, mostly without any monetary exchange. Interviewee 14 and Interviewee 12 say:

“Your freelancer friend who makes websites passes you a social media job. Or when you take a social media job and the employer also wants a website from you, you send it to your friends. You naturally enter into such a cooperation” (Interviewee 14, 24.11.2022).

“Animation is such a small community in Türkiye, and everyone slowly gets to know each other. They see and know the work you have done on Instagram. From here and there, they pass each other projects. (...) a friend got a job, but they are too busy, and they send it to you saying, ‘I have something like this in my hand, do you want to take it?’” (Interviewee 12, 17.11.2022).

These are some processes that do not directly related to a monetary relation, but a relation that is based on kinship. Other examples to relational work include putting extra effort to projects that comes from friends, or from former clients who left a positive impression on the designer. Additionally, it is observed that designers sometimes charge less or do not charge at all those projects they like or believe to create positive outcomes for themselves and others. For example, when asked ‘do you take extra responsibilities in your work’, Interviewee 13 said,

“It happens, but it happens voluntarily. Because I choose which job to take, I sometimes do things beyond what I am normally supposed to do, but I do it willingly. When you work full time, you take [extra responsibilities] without consent. The difference is whether or not you have consent [to do the extra work]” (Interviewee 13, 25.11.2022).

When the same question was asked to Interviewee 12, he laughed and said something similar to Interviewee 13:

“It is inevitable [to work extra]. We are trying to learn to draw the boundaries clearly. Sometimes we reject extra work requests but sometimes we do it. It is very related to the intimacy or trust with the client” (Interviewee 12, 17.11.2022).

However, this does not mean that Istanbul-based visual designers only care about their relations and responsibilities in their work activities. Monetary relations are still an important aspect of working life in Istanbul, as ongoing economic crisis in Türkiye continues to reduce purchasing powers. Additionally, because relational work activities are important for Istanbul-based visual designers, sometimes they can find themselves at the undesirable ends of the work contracts. For example, Interviewee 7 said that, after high inflation rates, he could not charge his customers more because they were his friends.

On the one hand, informality opens room for ‘moral work’ and community-based production for Istanbul-based visual designers, but on the other hand, it undermines their financial securities. Additionally, because of the informal nature of creative work and the lack of collective action among Istanbul-based visual designers, workers remain vulnerable to various forms of exploitations. Interviewee 2 says that *“Most of the time there is no contract at all, and in these kinds of situations, [work] can become an area that the employer can easily exploit” (Interviewee 2, 02.11.2022).* Examples include, not paying for the work Istanbul-based visual designers did because of the lack of formal contracts between two parties; wanting extra work from designers without any pay increase due to the intimacy between the designer and customer; and over-interference to the designer in production process.

3.3.2. Experiences and Subjectivities

The previous chapter sought to highlight the conditions presented by neoliberalism, such as individualization, flexibilization, and precarization in Istanbul-based visual designers' work lives. It is discussed that Istanbul-based visual designers' collective representation and production mechanisms are undermined, and their solidarity practices have gained an informal form.

This chapter will use concepts such as 'autonomy', 'subjectivity', 'self-realization' and 'alienation' to ascertain Istanbul-based visual designers' subjective experiences about their work from an ex-centric perspective.

It is observed that Istanbul-based visual designers highly value concepts such as creativity and workplace autonomy. Interviewee 1 says, "*creative autonomy is absolutely important. I mean, I would love to have that autonomy. In my work, I expect a room for my creative autonomy and creative decisions*" (Interviewee 1, 27.10.2022). Almost all of the other Istanbul-based designers said they would expect relative creative autonomy in the projects they take or jobs they work. However, most of them complained about the lack of creative autonomy in their jobs.

"Sometimes I say at the beginning of the job interview that 'I hope you will give me a space' and everyone is like 'of course, you are the designer, you know what to do'. It always starts like this, and it mostly never happens" (Interviewee 4, 07.11.2022).

"They define you as a creative person in the industry, but they do not give you the opportunity to be a creative person. It is more like you do what they say you to do (...) and in time, your creativity goes away. You become a technical person" (Interviewee 8, 12.11.2022).

Istanbul-based visual designers value creative autonomy but to a certain extent. They also value the role of the brief they have got from their clients or employers, and they want to meet the expectations. Interviewee 6 commented:

“I definitely think there should be creative autonomy to a certain extent. I think it is necessary for self-actualization or putting something from you into your work. But I do not want it to be hundred percent, you know, as in my job. Because then, a person cannot see their job as something independent from themselves and have no boundaries” (Interviewee 6, 11.11.2022).

Due to the overwhelming push toward marketization (Murdock, 2005) in neoliberal economies, including Türkiye, commercial imperatives have become more important than artistic ones. In this context, extreme time pressure becomes one of the most significant determinants of the experiences of Istanbul-based visual designers. Almost all of the interviewees complain about extreme time pressure and its effects on their working lives, lives outside of their work, and their creative autonomy. It is observed that extreme time pressure both creates precarious conditions and causes alienation. Most of the interviewees describe their work process as ‘fabricated’. When asked why he chose to work in a ‘creative’ occupation, Interviewee 16 highlighted the feeling of alienation:

“Mine is a childhood passion. I wanted to study cartoon as long as I have known myself (...) I am not happy with the point it has come because it turned to ‘what can we do in the shortest time possible’, we [designers] have turned invisible. Everybody only speaks when the work will end. We have no effect whatsoever, that is why I am not happy with the point it has come” (Interviewee 16, 05.12.2022).

This extreme time pressure also creates anxieties about creative autonomy. Interviewee 8 says, *“You have to produce something very creative in a really short time (...) to try to be creative, and to create original ideas all the time is really exhausting”* (Interviewee 8, 12.11.2022).

Istanbul-based visual designers not only talked about the role of extreme time pressure on their creative autonomy but also about over-interference from clients or employers to their work. Almost all interviewees mentioned the lack of ‘aesthetic perception’ of Turkish clients and how this negatively affects their end-products. Interviewee 9 says she loves her job but does not like doing it in Türkiye because she

finds the production process ‘fabricated’. When asked, ‘do you mean interference to creative autonomy by saying fabricated?’, she said:

“Yes, Turkish clients want you to produce the same image they saw somewhere before because they do not have any aesthetic perception. It makes the job a little bit boring. This is why I work as a freelancer and not in advertising agencies. I want to choose my own kind of clients” (Interviewee 9, 15.11.2022).

Interviewee 8 commented:

“In the end, clients affect the design. Somehow, they must be trained (...) You have to show the client what is good and what is bad, you have to say, ‘look you want this but for these and those reasons the other design is better, it works better etc.’. But clients really force you in terms of design decisions and deadlines” (Interviewee 8, 12.11.2022).

Later, Interviewee 8 talked about the issues concerning his passion for his creative occupation. It seemed that he felt highly alienated when he was not given an opportunity to create ‘good’ products. Interviewee 8 said that *“In the place I was working before, our client was not open to new ideas, and time to time, he would not let us to create beautiful pieces. That does not satisfy me, and I cannot make sense of what I'm doing”* (Interviewee 8, 12.11.2022).

The passion towards creative work was highly apparent in almost all of the interviewees’ comments. Interviewee 9 says, *“My top priority is to feel that I create pieces that will satisfy me. When I cannot create pieces that satisfy me, or create pieces that I do not like, I do not want to work”* (Interviewee 9, 15.11.2022).

When asked about satisfaction from work, Interviewee 7 commented:

“Yes, of course. You are continuing your career because creating gives you a satisfaction. I sometimes talk to my friends, and they all say the same thing; after a while, that satisfaction starts to go away. In fact, at my early ages, when I had no anxieties about money, the most important thing was the creative satisfaction.

After a while, when you start doing this job for money, that creative satisfaction loses its importance, and you seek for economic satisfaction” (Interviewee 7, 12.11.2022).

Almost all of the interviewees said that their interest in working in a creative occupation comes from their childhood. For example, Interviewee 7 said,

“Ever since I could remember myself, I am in this field. It is something from my childhood, just like everyone else. I started by making drawings at a young age, after that, as I got older, my interest changed and developed as I learned new methods and fields” (Interviewee 7, 12.11.2022).

In her study on cultural workers in UK, Ursell (2000) writes that:

“The willingness of individuals to work in television production is partly to be explained by the tantalizing possibilities thereby for securing social recognition and acclaim, that is self-affirmation and public esteem, and partly by the possibilities for self-actualization and creativity (be it aesthetic or commercially entrepreneurial). For the workers, television production is simultaneously a source of potential rewards, both material and existential, and a source of definite exploitation. At its heart are processes of commodification, in large part activated and realized by workers themselves” (2000, p. 819).

It is observed that Istanbul-based visual designers’ desire to work in creative occupations is also strongly related to feelings of self-affirmation, self-esteem, public esteem, and possibilities for self-actualization. However, as Banks (2007) states, *“the love of art can lead workers to neglect the care of the self”* (p. 58). Banks (2007) refers to self-exploitation here.

3.3.2.1. Self-exploitative Subjects?

Above, it is discussed that, on the one hand, Istanbul-based visual designers work in precarious conditions marked by over-intensification of work, long working hours, and lack of union representations. On the other hand, they seek self-affirmation,

public esteem, and self-esteem through their work. This brings to mind the concept of self-exploitation, where workers are so emotionally invested in their jobs that it leads them to self-exploit.

Drawing from Gill's (2002), McRobbie's (2002b) and Ursell's (2000) studies on cultural workers in post-industrial Western creative work environments, Banks discusses the role of self-exploitation among workers:

"it is not uncommon to find self-employed fashion designers, web designers, television workers, artists and so on working long hours, often through the night or over weekends, taking no holidays, drawing a minimal (if any) salary, skipping meals and rest, for- ever pushing themselves to the limit in order to not only satisfy their own passion for creative self-realization but also (and perhaps more often) to meet deadlines and contractual obligations imposed by others" (Banks, 2007, p. 58).

When Interviewee 3 asked, 'have you ever considered joining a union or occupational organization?', suddenly, he started talking about his sleepless nights at work, how he chooses to stay sleepless, and how this is not anybody's fault but his.

"I mean, I said I stay sleepless, but nobody tells me to stay sleepless. I prefer to be sleepless because I want the work to be beautiful. Therefore, it not the boss's or agency's or client's fault that I am sleepless there. It is my own choice; I choose to do that. In fact, it is an enjoyable process and that's why I did not feel in need of a union or something" (Interviewee 3, 04.11.2022).

Interviewee 3's sleepless nights in the pursuit of creating an excellent cultural product originate from several different aspects which are somewhat distinctive to cultural work and creative entrepreneurial subjects. First, just like observed in cultural workers in the Western context, Interviewee 3 has a strong emotional attraction to his work. When asked before, 'why do you choose to work on a creative occupation?' his answer was, *"because I always tended to work using my creativity; since middle school, I was drawing graffiti, cartoons and such"* (Interviewee 3, 04.11.2022). Second, Interviewee 3 believes that by creating 'good' cultural artifacts, he will be able

to attract more advantageous contracts, thus, can earn more money. He said, "*the more creative, unique, and different you are, and the more you can add something to your work from yourself, the better you earn*" (Interviewee 3, 04.11.2022). Third, because jobs and projects are mostly found via close friends, and freelance teams mostly consist of friends for Istanbul-based visual designers, favors also may lead to self-exploitation. Interviewee 3 said, "*sometimes, for example, when the graphic designer's job takes too long, I say, 'I can do it right away'*" (Interviewee 3, 04.11.2022).

Like freelancer designer Interviewee 3, other interviewees have also talked about the self-exploitative aspects of their creative labor practices. For example, freelance visual designer Interviewee 16 said, "*I take drawing projects, but if I think it will be adorable, I also animate it*" (Interviewee 16, 05.12.2022).

As discussed above, sometimes the relational nature of creative labor also leads to self-exploitation. This situation is observed in both freelance and inhouse Istanbul-based visual designers. Interviewee 18, who is a part-time visual designer in a newly established start-up company says that:

"[the company she works for] is a team I love very much. It is a small but transforming team, and frankly, I am not afraid to make sacrifices. I do not actually work on Tuesdays, but we had a two-hour meeting this [Tuesday] morning, and then I sat down and did some work for [the company] even though it was my free day" (Interviewee 18, 21.12.2022).

It is observed that, Istanbul-based visual designers are prone to self-exploit when (1) they want to attract more advantageous contracts, thus, they put an extra amount of effort to the project they are working on – this is both prevailing for freelance and inhouse designers as portfolios are the main determinants for attracting ‘good’ projects; (2) they usually have a strong passion toward their creative occupation, most of them talked about how their creative passion is inherited to them from their childhood – this causes them to work extra hours or put extra efforts to the work they are working on, as they want to create beautiful pieces; (3) creating good cultural products are sources of public and self-affirmation, esteem and self-esteem among Istanbul-based visual designers, thus, they usually work extra hours to experience these

feelings; (4) when they are working with big stars – they put extra effort when they are working with reputed teams and individuals, so they can achieve prestigious positions in the sector; (5) they self-exploit as a favor to other designers who are their close friends, this arise from the relational nature of creative labor among Istanbul-based visual designers – because Istanbul-based visual designers usually work in teams consist of their friends, or work with clients who are also their friends they sometimes tend to put extra effort to make the project more beautiful or help a friend in need.

Why do Istanbul-based visual designers tend to self-exploit? In the first chapter of the findings, it is discussed that, although the condition of neo-liberalism leads workers to work in individualized and highly precarious settings, they developed some kind of informal solidarity practices among them. However, they also tend to self-exploit in the situations that is discussed above. Are they ‘active-but-governed subjects’ (Banks, 2007) who interiorize enterprise values?

3.3.2.2. Entrepreneurial Subjects?

Drawing from governmental theory, scholars such as Ursell (2000), McRobbie (2002b) and Banks (2007) have discussed that creative laborers are not just passive alienated workers, but they are ‘active-but-governed subjects’ (Banks, 2007). As stated by Banks (2007), governmental theory “*theorizes the immanence of power in all social contexts and seeks to evaluate the everyday discourses and procedures that help social structures (and subjects themselves) to reproduce relations of power*” (p. 41). According to this approach, cultural workers are being governed, not by force, but the “*subjectivizing discourses of enterprise*” (Banks, 2007, p. 64). Banks (2007) states that:

“In the context of cultural work, techniques of governmentality have been doubly evidenced, first, in the construction of cultural policy (and other supporting) enterprise discourses and second, in the situated practice of constructing the entrepreneurial, creative self” (Banks, 2007, p. 64).

Studies conducted in the post-industrial western context of creative labor have dominantly found that work in CCI is surrounded with these discourses. Scholars

have discussed that cultural workers seek to self-actualize through their work; sacrifice themselves to work; feed from motivations such as love and passion and put monetary rewards to second plan; embrace insecurities and risk; and individualized (Sezgin, 2019). Sezgin's (2019) study on game developers in Türkiye has also found that 'neoliberal subjectification' is also relevant in the case of Turkish cultural workers. In this context, as Banks (2007) states, "*workers are being conditioned to adopt a self-exploitative, self-blaming mode*". In addition, when individuals are positioned as their own entrepreneurs and executives, background economic and cultural factors are rendered invisible. Thus, as Sezgin states, "*the questionability of the capitalist system decreases, and accordingly, the relations and mechanisms of exploitation continue to be internalized, concealed, and legitimized*" (Sezgin, 2019).

Above, it is discussed that Istanbul-based visual designers show self-exploitative behaviors. Based on this, can an argument be developed which suggests Istanbul-based visual designers are entrepreneurial subjects?

Scharff (2016) states that cultural workers are "*paradigms of entrepreneurial selfhood due to the cultural sector's emphasis on autonomy, self-realization and competition*" (p. 4). Her study on cultural workers as entrepreneurial subjects has shown that cultural workers manage themselves as if they were a business. Istanbul-based visual designers have evoked similar attitudes:

"If you are working as a freelancer, the freelancer individual is a brand. It [freelancer] has to promote itself (...) As a designer, every job you take is your showcase. That is why freelance designers especially choose to take projects which they can share, and which they can show as a reference, because it attracts more jobs" (Interviewee 5, 10.11.2022).

A similar attitude where freelancer workers see themselves as 'enterprises' or 'brands' is prevalent among other freelance Istanbul-based visual designers. Interviewee 11 said, "*freelancing is some kind of a one-man's studio. It is like managing a studio; project management, pricing etc*" (Interviewee 11, 16.11.2022). Then he emphasized the importance of self-branding "*when I say self-branding, I mean better marketing of the projects I do. Because I think like this; yes, the things*

you have done is really important, but the more you market yourself, the more you exist” (Interviewee 11, 16.11.2022).

The situation where Istanbul-based visual designers seem to embrace enterprise values is also observed in the interviews with full-time or part-time visual designers. Interviewee 18 says:

“This is something I talk about with the people around; If you are a designer and not working in a studio or a team, you are your own brand. Nobody is working for you; you are not working for anybody; you are making everything with your own name, and naturally, if you are self-branding yourself, then your brand should reflect you in order to satisfy yourself, to be able to do more continuous work that suits you and to ensure that people who are suitable for you come to you. I think every designer, if money is not their only concern (...) chase that satisfaction” (Interviewee 18, 21.12.2022).

Additionally, as Banks (2007) explains, *“workers view the enterprise culture that subjugates them as the only means through which meaningful and autonomous work can be obtained”* (p. 52). Let us remember what Interviewee 16 said when he was asked his foresight about the sector:

“It seems to me that the era of agencies [design or advertising etc.] is about to end, because even if I open a company or try to continue my freelance life right now, I believe that I can do it perfectly. (...) But of course, if I am tough and if I am a person who stands out with his character or if I am more courageous. Otherwise, we are doomed to companies and agencies” (Interviewee 16, 05.12.2022).

Other in-house Istanbul-based designers have also talked about their goals to become a freelance designer. There are two reasons for this, one, Istanbul-based visual designers think that working as a freelancer they can earn more money; and two, they think that working as a freelancer gives them a greater chance to be autonomous. For example, Interviewee 16 proudly states that in the projects that he takes as a freelancer, his feedback ratio is lower than the projects he does in his full-time work. When asked

‘what is your career goal’ Interviewee 6, who is a young full-time designer with less than one year of full-time work experience says, “*At the end, I want to be a freelance motion graphic designer (...) I would definitely prefer to work as a freelancer than working in a studio*” (Interviewee 6, 11.11.2022). Subsequently, Istanbul-based visual designers are prone to be self-exploitative since they want to attract more advantageous contracts or job offers, with their portfolio.

Another outcome of entrepreneurial subjectivism is ‘self-blame’ (the other is self-exploitation). Scholars have discussed that when they face a structural problem, entrepreneurial subjects rarely evoke these problems, and their desires for change are turned inwards (Scharff, 2016). However, it is observed that, although some Istanbul-based visual designers are prone to self-blame, most frequently evoke structural problems that surround their labor process, even when they are not asked about it. It is observed that even when they self-blame, they simultaneously evoke structural problems. For example, Interviewee 2 said, “*because there is no regulation, it is easy to exploit [designers]*” (Interviewee 2, 02.11.2022). Interviewee 14 said, “*job security must be provided. If freelancing or home office work is increasing, then I would demand that legislative proposals be submitted, and the law guarantees the rights of the workers*” (Interviewee 14, 28.11.2022). Interviewee 5, who frequently addressed the entrepreneurial character of his work, says, “*I would like to change the ‘culture’, first, the deadlines, it always come too late, because deadlines are too congested, the quality of the work decreases*” (Interviewee 5, 10.11.2022). Examples such as these, where Istanbul-based visual designers evoke structural problems, can be amplified. The important part is that it seems like Istanbul-based visual designers are entrepreneurial creative self-exploitative subjects, but unlike the cultural workers in the post-industrial western context, they do not show self-blaming behaviors. Instead, they blame structural problems such as the economy, clients, sector, and ‘culture’. In short, to create and enhance their entrepreneurial potential, they want structural changes in their sector; however, they do not take any collective action to change it. Instead, they rely on more informal solidarity practices among themselves to survive in the sector.

However, there are also those Istanbul-based visual designers who do not evoke any structural problems, and whose desire for change turned inwards. For example,

when Interviewee 11 is asked ‘what would you want to change in your sector?’, he laughed and said, “*I don’t know, myself I guess*” (Interviewee 11, 16.11.2022). Nevertheless, this pure self-blaming attitude was less common.



CONCLUSION

This thesis aims to gain a better understanding of the creative labor process in Turkish CCIs. Within this scope, the thesis takes Istanbul-based visual designers as a case.

In the study, a qualitative method based on semi-structured interviews has been deployed. The data gathered from the interviews with 19 Istanbul-based visual designers are gathered, analyzed, and discussed in the findings chapter. The findings chapter consists of two subchapters. The first chapter set out to ascertain the conditions of cultural workers in Turkish CCIs and deployed some established concepts in creative labor studies, such as flexibilization, individualization, and precarization. The second chapter set out to ascertain the subjective experiences of Istanbul-based visual designers and deployed concepts such as alienation and autonomy. Additionally, the chapter sought to gather information regarding Istanbul-based visual designers' subjectivities.

The findings indicate that Istanbul-based visual designers' labor takes a highly flexible, individualized, and precarious form. Based on this fact, the study has examined the role of these processes in shaping Istanbul-based visual designers' labor processes and working lives.

In terms of flexibilization, it is observed that Istanbul-based visual designers' labor is highly flexible regarding working practices and recruitment systems. The findings support the general opinion, which scholars have discussed, in the age of post-Fordism, labor has taken a more flexible and non-standard form. Almost all participants emphasized the flexibility of their laboring practices and job-finding processes. While flexibility can be a source of positive experiences as it provides workers some sort of freedom in planning their own working program, its effects on

workers' lives are mostly adverse. As Banks (2007) explains, being a flexible worker means *“working longer or unsocial hours, taking on-board additional responsibilities, relocating according to company demands and certainly committing oneself to the commercial imperatives of the firm over and above non-work commitments”* (p. 56). Findings support Banks' (2007) discussion on being a flexible worker. Due to the flexibility of their work, Istanbul-based visual designers' work intensifies, and they take additional responsibilities according to company or client demands, usually without a pay increase. Flexibility creates very uncertain situations for Istanbul-based visual designers, thus creating unwanted work experiences and threatening the quality of the cultural products and workers' lives.

It is also observed that career advancement mechanisms are also highly flexible, informal, and individualized. Freelancing stands out as a viral and desired working model among Istanbul-based visual designers. The uncertainty of cultural work in Istanbul not only comprises working practices and hours, but with the increasing domination of casual and freelance work among cultural workers, it also shows itself in the labor markets. With the erosion of social institutions such as the welfare state and trade unions in Türkiye, structural problems and risks surrounding the world of work are placed upon individuals. It is observed that Istanbul-based visual designers feel very uncertain about the value of institutionalized collective action forms such as unions and occupational organizations. Many interviewees do not even have an opinion on trade unions and occupational organizations. However, to overcome risks and uncertainties, Istanbul-based visual designers rely on informal communities that mainly consist of their friends. This process is linked with the individualization of the workforce since workers use these networks as an individualized solution to systemic flexploitation (Bourdieu, 1998) problem. However, informality and individualization should not just be thought of as a process that leads to precarization. Beyond its individualizing character, informality also creates new socialites and solidarity practices among Istanbul-based visual designers, which are 'relational' (Alacovska and Gill, 2019). However, this does not mean that Istanbul-based visual designers only care about their relations and responsibilities in their work activities. Monetary relations are still an important aspect of working life in Istanbul, as the ongoing economic crisis in Türkiye continues to reduce purchasing power.

It is also observed that work in Turkish CCIs is marked with high levels of precariousness. Almost one-third of the participants do not have any social security coverage. Lack of social security coverage is most apparent for freelance Istanbul-based visual designers. Those freelance designers who have social security also work simultaneously in a full-time or a part-time job, and their social security coverage comes from their secondary jobs. Financial insecurities are also highly common among Istanbul-based visual designers. Most of the participants say that they do not feel financially secure. Payments are usually low, and because working without a contract is very common, sometimes they cannot even get their payments. This makes living very hard in the conditions of Istanbul, a city marked by extreme inflation in recent years. Most workers have to work in secondary jobs or projects to supplement their income. For the designers who are not ‘above the line’, saying no to a project is not an option. They have to jump from project to project to advance their career progresses.

Additionally, due to the push toward marketization in the Turkish neoliberal economy, Workers feel alienated and “*invisible*” (Interviewee 16, 05.12.2022) as they feel they are not given creative autonomy. This is most apparent for Istanbul-based visual designers who work in studios or agencies. Extreme time pressure is also widespread and creates unwanted experiences and health problems. Extreme time pressure also creates anxieties about creative autonomy, as Interviewee 8 puts into words: “*you have to produce something very creative in a really short time (...) it is really exhausting*” (Interviewee 8, 12.11.2022).

Despite the harsh conditions presented by post-Fordist capitalism, it seems like Istanbul-based visual designers want to keep working in their creative occupations. It is observed that Istanbul-based visual designers have high levels of passion for their creative work. They seek self-affirmation, public esteem, and self-esteem through their work. This leads them to self-exploit. It is observed that Istanbul-based visual designers are prone to self-exploit because they want to attract more advantageous contracts, they have a strong passion for their creative occupation, and they want to experience feelings of affirmation and esteem. Additionally, when working with big stars, they put extra effort into their projects. They can also be self-exploitative as a favor to other designers.

Another important finding is on the subjectivities of Istanbul-based visual designers. It is observed that most Istanbul-based visual designers seem to embrace enterprise values. Istanbul-based visual designers seem to be entrepreneurial creative self-exploitative subjects, but unlike the cultural workers in the post-industrial western context, they do not show self-blaming behaviors. Instead, they blame structural problems such as the economy, clients, sector, and ‘culture’. In short, to create and enhance their entrepreneurial potential, they want structural changes in their sector, however, they do not take any collective action to change it. Instead, they want to move and work in primarily Euro-American countries, as they find these countries more ‘respectful’ to their occupation, where they have more ‘professional’ clients than clients in Türkiye and where payments are higher. This stands out as a threat to the Turkish cultural economy, as workers do not want to work with Turkish clients or agencies because of the combined effects of precarization and abusive informality.

This is the first study to investigate the working conditions, experiences, and subjectivities of Istanbul-based visual designers from a critical perspective which also deploys a relational work perspective. The generalizability of these results is subject to certain limitations. Empirical studies must be amplified to gain a better understanding of the Turkish creative economy and the cultural workforce which operates under it. A future study investigating cultural workers’ working conditions and subjectivities in different industry settings would be very interesting, especially at workplaces where outsourcing is widely used. Additionally, future case studies which investigate the role of informal networks among cultural workers in Türkiye would be very illuminating. In addition, with the emergence of new AI technologies as means of cultural production, cultural workers’ labor practices might undergo profound changes. A future study must also take this change into account.

Lastly, considering the lack of cultural policies and labor laws (or poor application of the law) that would regulate the Turkish creative ecosystem (Kaymas, 2020), this thesis is expected to be a guide for the prospective national and local cultural policies. Strong cultural policies and labor laws that aim to provide better conditions for cultural workers must be developed to avoid losing the Turkish cultural workforce’s potential.

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APPENDICES

A. Demographic Questions (In Turkish)

Sayın katılımcı,

Bu araştırma Galatasaray Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Medya ve İletişim Çalışmaları Yüksek Lisans Programı dahilinde sürdürülmekte olan “Creative Labor in Turkish Cultural and Creative Industries: Istanbul-Based Visual Designers (Türkiye Yaratıcı ve Kültürel Endüstrilerinde Yaratıcı Emek: İstanbul Merkezli Görsel Tasarımcılar)” isimli yüksek lisans tez çalışması kapsamında yürütülmektedir.

Sorulara verilen tüm yanıtlar yalnızca bahsi geçen araştırma kapsamında anonim olarak kullanılacak ve üçüncü kişiler ile paylaşılmayacaktır.

Yunus Emre Öztaş

Yaş:

Hangi şehirde yaşıyorsunuz?

Eğitim durumunuz?:

Meslek:

Kaç yıldır bu meslekle uğraşıyorsunuz?:

Çalışma modeliniz?:

Sosyal güvenceniz var mı?:

Sosyal güvence çeşidiniz nedir?:

B. Semi-structured Interview Questions (In Turkish)

- Yaptığınız işten bahsedebilir misiniz?
- Kendi emek sürecinizi nasıl tanımlarsınız?
- Yaratıcılık size neyi ifade ediyor. (Neden ‘yaratıcı’ bir işte çalışmayı tercih ediyorsunuz?)
- Mesleğinizden memnun musunuz? (Yaptığınız iş sizi tatmin ediyor mu?)
- Yaratım sürecinde özgürlük sizin için önemli mi? (Neden?)
- Ürettiğiniz ürünün ‘iyi’ olması sizin için ne kadar önemli? (Neden?)
- Yaptığınız işlerde sorumluluk hisseder misiniz? (Kime veya neye karşı?)
- İş/proje seçerken ne kadar seçicisiniz? (Neye göre?)
- Çalışma ortamınızı nasıl tarif edersiniz?
- Çalışma koşullarınızdan ne derece memnunsunuz?
- İş başında yaşanan veya işten kaynaklandığını düşündüğünüz bir sağlık sorunu yaşıyor musunuz?
- Yer aldığınız projelerde/işlerde, iş tanımınız dışında yüklendiğiniz görev ve sorumluluklar oluyor mu?
- Proje/iş almadığınız zamanlar oluyor mu? (Bu zamanlarda nasıl geçiniyorsunuz?)

- İş dışı bir gününüzü anlatabilir misiniz?
- Mesleki bilgi ve becerilerinizi geliştirmek için zaman ayırabiliyor musunuz?
(Hangi zamanlarda bu beceriler üzerine çalışırsınız?)
- Çalıştığınız işlere/projelere nereden veya kimler vasıtasıyla ulaşıyorsunuz?
- Herhangi bir meslek örgütü veya sendika üyeliğiniz bulunuyor mu?
(Sendikalar ve meslek örgütleri hakkında düşünceleriniz nelerdir?)
- Yaptığınız işi Türkiye dışında herhangi bir ülkede yapmak ister miydiniz?
(Neden?)
- Sektörünüz hakkında değiştirmek istediğiniz şeyler olur muydu?
- Kariyer hedefiniz nedir?



C. Demographic Questions

Age:

City you live:

Education:

Occupation:

Years in occupation:

Working model:

Do you have social security coverage:

The type of your social security coverage:

D. Semi-structured Interview Questions

- Can you tell me about the job you do?
- How would you describe your work process?
- What does creativity mean to you? (Why do you prefer to work in a 'creative' job?)
- Are you satisfied with your profession?
- Is creative freedom important to you in the production process (Why?)
- How important is it for you to create a 'good' product (Why?)
- Do you feel a sense of responsibility in the work you do? (Towards whom or what?)
- How selective are you when choosing a job or a project? (Based on what criteria you choose them?)
- How would you describe your work environment?
- How would you describe your working conditions?
- Do you experience any health issues as a result of your job?
- Are you take extra tasks and responsibilities that are outside of your job description in the projects you are involved in?
- Are there times when you do not take work or project? (How do you spend and fund that time?)
- Can you describe a typical day outside of work?
- Are you able to make time to develop your professional knowledge and skills? (When do you work on them?)
- How do you find the jobs and projects you work?
- Are you a member of any occupational organizations or trade unions? (What are your thoughts on trade unions and occupational organizations?)
- Would you rather be doing the same job in a different country? (Why?)
- Are there any changes you would like to see in your industry?
- What is your career goal?

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