Conditions of Internal Migration and Contemporary Industrial Relations in Turkey (Utku Balaban)

This project aims to reveal the impact of internal migration-related dynamics on different industrial labor processes in a peripheral city quarter in Istanbul, Bagcilar. The primary objective will be to understand the interaction between migration conditions of workers and their workplace experiences.

With the 1980s, industrial relations have been going through a significant transformation along with the conditions of migration. As new groups of migrants join the urban space of peripheral neighborhoods, industrial practices become more multifarious: factories are complemented with the sweatshops and home-based work networks. In return, these workplaces are populated with workers having different migration experiences: how are these differences reflected onto the everyday realities of production?

The hypothesis is that different conditions of migration funnel individuals to different forms of labor. Thus, the variety of the conditions of migration for a given population eases the use of multiple forms of industrial labor. Characteristics of the pull factors, origin point of migration, and characteristics of the push factors will help to identify the differences in migration conditions. These dimensions will clarify the association between migration experiences of workers and their conditions of employment. In order to cover the variety of experiences, three different forms of industrial labor will be the focus of the study: factory system, sweatshop labor, and home-based work. The reason why these three forms are chosen is that they can be investigated within one single supply chain. The method to investigate the dynamics regarding factory system and sweatshop labor will be participant observation, in-depth interviews, and structured interviews. For the home-based work; in-depth interviews, structured interviews, and time-use surveys will be the means of data collection. Some data for the home-based work was generated in 2003 and 2006. Through a pilot study in Summer of 2007, target workplaces were located: managers of an export-oriented garment factory will provide access to their facilities, their subsidiary sweatshops, and the middlepersons organizing the home-based work. Consequently, it will be possible to distinguish between the differential impacts of migration-related dynamics in different workplaces connected as parts of one unitary supply chain.

As a result of previous research in 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2006, Bagcilar was chosen as the site of research. Bagcilar is the fourth largest and second poorest city quarter of Istanbul: it is 22 square km in size and has a population of 850,000. Three factors led to this decision: Bagcilar houses industrial establishments and organizations using these three forms of industrial labor, it has been a migrant-receiving region for four decades, and migrant groups are not spatially concentrated in certain neighborhoods of Bagcilar.

I will rent an apartment in Bagcilar to get involved in neighborhood dynamics. The project will last one year. The methodological position will be a synthesis of Michael Burawoy’s ‘extended case method’ and Glaser and Strauss’s ‘grounded theory’.