

The Labour in Temples of Capitalism: Superstores Employees and a Case from Turkey¹

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As it's known well, Max Weber's 'protestant ethic' thesis argues that there was an obvious relation between Protestantism and capital accumulation which is necessary for developing of capitalism. The thesis emphasizes the teachings of Protestantism especially Calvinism that preaches to its followers to work and earn more but not spend these earning for their pleasures. On the other hand Weber also states that the relation between capitalist development and protestant ethic is temporary and this relation has validity just for the first stage of capitalism. Looking at 20th century of capitalist development it could be seen easily that the dominant culture had been changed. The name of the dominant culture was consumer culture and it was no longer suggesting keeping earnings but consuming these. Fordism and postfordism have accelerated this tendency and the most well known places of this trend are and have been shopping centres and hypermarkets.

This paper intends to examine the workforce of these places and especially the labour process and working conditions of superstore employees. We will supply some information about the retailer sector and its workforce in Turkey and its development trends during the recent years. We will focus on Sakarya city, a city located in Marmara region of Turkey. During the last decade, several big scale hypermarkets (lika Carrefour, Tesco – Kipa-, Migros) have set up new branches in that city.

We will conduct survey and make deep interview with the workers who work for these superstores or hypermarkets. Our aim is to depict the working conditions of cashiers, and show if there is a relation between these conditions and economic formation.

The paper is consisting of several parts. At first, we are presenting a brief explanation of capitalist control of workplace and workforce: the origins of the control and capitalist control, classical and new form of workforce control, hegemony and ideology as a control tool are some themes of this part. And then we are supplying a depiction from Turkey retail sector workers, labour of hypermarkets the central places of consumption society or the hearts of new capitalism.

The essences of labour control under the capitalist mode of production

In one of his most prominent works, Michel Foucault (2000) explores the government question. He showed us a transformation in the political power from a point that focuses on sovereignty to one that focuses on government. The last one has an intention for not only to maintain sovereignty of the, say, king but only keep the whole population in a discipline. "Accordingly, we need to see thing not in terms of the replacement of a society of sovereignty by a disciplinary society and the subsequent replacement of a disciplinary society by a society of government" says Foucault (2010: 219) and goes on "in reality one has a triangle, sovereignty-discipline-government, which has as its primary target the population and as its essential mechanism the apparatuses of society". What this transformation implies is that modern power operates in a sophisticated way on population. Foucault's main interest has been this characteristic of modern power almost in his all works. In *Discipline and Punish* (1991), explaining of the history of prison he begins with an irritating explanation of a torture scene that is happening at 18th century France. Foucault stated that in the following one or one and half century the punishment practice went into a form that not on torture but on keeping bodies in closed places, prisons.

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One of his most known terms is ‘panopticon’, a type of building that allows an observer to observe all imprisoned without the incarcerated being able to tell whether they are being watched or not. The logic of this design keeps all prisoners in a strong discipline without using coercive power. The shift of punishment area also shows a transformation in power character from sovereignty to governmentality. Shortly new form of power employ in a capillary way that is not depend on coercive power but on, say, more hegemony-like power.

What can this explanation say about labour process? Both ‘panopticon’ and ‘governmentality’ have direct implies on labour control issues. These concepts include the motivations of managing the masses using the subtle ways. Governmentality is about the controlling, say, all population of a country; on the other hand panopticon has an intention to keep observed people (say, workers, students, prisoners etc.) under control. The rise of the technological society has increased the power of panoptic applications. In workplaces, CCTV applications, internet networks facilitate to control labour force or keep them in discipline using panoptic logic (or surveillance techniques).

The history of labour control also has a similar development. The basic explanation of this similarity could be the rise or development a new economic formation, say capitalism. Although there is not a consensus on when capitalist system has formed and what its meaning is, roughly it’s possible to say that the transformation from feudal system into capitalist one began almost five hundred years (of course we are aware of that it’s a critical way to state a certain dates for great transformations but sometimes it’s an inevitable way to make that for depict a big picture) ago. During that period history of Europe witness some other great transformation that accompanying with the transformation of economic area. Modern era or the Enlightenment as the beginning of this era paved the way to the new world that has completely different tool comparing with the previous society, feudal society, for economic activities and interpretation of the nature. The Enlightenment was discovery of reason. Known as the father of Enlightenment Immanuel Kant (1784) said in his short article ‘What is Enlightenment’ that: “Enlightenment is mankind’s exist from its self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to make use of one’s own understanding without the guidance of another. Self-incurred is this inability if its cause lies not in the lack of understanding but rather in the lack of the resolution and the courage to use it without guidance of another.” Kant goes on with the motto of Enlightenment: “Have the courage to use your own understanding.” On the other hand, great changes occurred on religious area. Reformation movement spilt the strong Catholic Church and open a softer way for interpretation of world or nature.

This means that some barriers (e.g. interest that prohibited in the former interpretation) that hinder developing capitalism began to be an insignificant issue (Huberman 1952, Heaton 1963). These developments construct a secularist world and vision. Reformation teachings and the Enlightenment ideals constructed a strong fundamental for new economic formation. New economic formation was standing on the reason of modernity and stimulated ‘the modern subject’ to conquer the nature to use it for his / her own purposes (Bauman 2004). The key word of this new economic formation was and has been ‘market’. The market logic preaches that the best way of living is to follow your benefit. This principle required a minimal state which implies that the role of state is just to protect market and natural rights (e.g. see Nozick 2001).

What about the transformation of labour force control during all these development? On the eve of this new economic formation there was a production type, ‘putting-out’ system in Europe. In this simple system the “firm” (that is the merchant-entrepreneur) owned the raw materials, the goods in process and often the tools and equipment as well, and outsourced physical production to workers’ homes (Mokyr 2001: 3). In this system the control of owner of raw material or the goods on the production and labour process was so weak that he / she couldn’t raise his / her gains in accord with the modernity ideology that preaches the profit maximization. One of the most important reasons that underline the first generation factories was that: to construct a strong control on the production and labour process, which was absent or very weak in former production system, putting-out. This process reached and produced a complex management relations or with Weber’s concept a great ‘bureaucracy’ for the capitalist firms. One of the key concepts of management or bureaucracy has been ‘control’.

Exploring the meaning of control, Burawoy (1979: 13-30; 1985: 30-31) compares the feudal and capitalist mode of production. Burawoy (1985: 31) reaches that conclusion, under the capitalist mode of production the very act of production not only contributes to the making of commodity (a use value), but also produces on one side the capitalist (surplus value) and on the other side the labourer (necessary value).

He goes on, “ the transformation of nature as defined by the labour process reproduces the relations of production and at the same time conceals the essence of those relations.” Then Burawoy goes on to explore the nature of control on the capitalist mode of production and showing the management role and the importance of separation of conception and execution in that process quotes a passage from Braverman.

“A necessary consequence of the separation of conception and execution is that the labour process is now divided between separate sites and separate bodies of workers ... The physical processes of production are now carried out more or less blindly, not only by the workers who perform them, but often by the lower ranks of supervisory employees as well. The production units operate like a hand, watched, corrected, and controlled by a distant brain” (Burawoy 1985: 33).

We should state that the first generation of labour process literature was highly on blue collar worker’s labour process. In other words Braverman’s work or his successors had missed the contemporary shift on labour relations and production type. Because as McKinlay stated (2009: 2523) on the one hand, the emergence of team working the dominant organizational form in manufacturing and clerical and service work over the last two decades has placed a question mark over the continued relevance of scientific management as the key driver of labour process change. On the other hand, analytically the first generation (or first wave) labour process debates have been pushed aside as the cornerstone of radical interpretations of work in favour of eclectic borrowings from postmodernism. But both the narrative of this first generation literature and poststructuralist analysis such as Foucault’s analysis is operational to examine a labour process of service industry or white collar labour process. On the one hand this first generation of labour process analysis facilitates to see the nature of production and labour process which is invisible when looked through the mainstream management concepts. On the other side, Foucault’s concepts such as ‘governmentality’ and ‘panopticon’ supply a prominent ground for examining the changing form of control or surveillance and power and how control practices operate on workplaces. Before examine the labour process of workers of hypermarkets, that is our case, the next section of the paper will be on the importance of retailer sector in economy, its growing and its place on Turkey.

A Case: Labour Process and Working Conditions at Superstores or Hypermarkets

According to a report, on retail industry in Turkey, which was published in May 2011 by Deloitte, a leading professional service business, the size of the industry has reached to US\$ 187 billion in 2010 in Turkey (Deloitte 2011a; Deloitte 2011b). The same report forecasts that the industry size will reach to US\$ 250 billion by 2014. On the other hand the report presents some figures on food retail sector: Food retail size reached US\$ 96 billion in 2010. Food retail had the largest share in the total retail sector in 2010. International players in Turkey include Metro, Carrefour and Tesco. This figure shows a great cake and all economic players who participate in that industry try to get a bigger slice from that cake.

A short search using internet on this industry gives an idea about the mainstream tendencies. The industry has various publications, journals, papers. After reading all these materials it is possible to get a brilliant snapshot on economic development or the developments on the industry in Turkey. Because the publications or comments on retail industry are generally focusing on the economic power of the industry and its effects on Turkish economy. The presented picture of the industry doesn’t show any clue on labour or working condition apparently. The labour is almost an invisible actor or subject and just its number is shown to indicate the economic importance of the industry. According to a report from Hurriyet Daily (Bilgin 2011), ‘the organized retail industry’ has employed 520 thousand people in 2010 in Turkey (A report published in 2007 present a employment figure for the whole industry and that figure is 2.5 million people who consist % 12 of total employment in Turkey – PWC 2007).

On the other hand it is also impossible to catch a snapshot or to get an idea about the working conditions and labour process of the employees on that industry. In the process of the getting a bigger slice from the cake, labour seems like a tool and its main role is to realize the expected aims. Ellen Gladers(2011), international affairs director of Tesco, says: The main principle of Tesco Kipa is ‘nobody could work more than us for the customer’. This quotation can be read as an extension of the discourse of the post fordist era: ‘customer the king’. This motto also implies the importance of consumption, hence consumer society. The focus is on more consumption than social issues in consumer societies. Thus, invisibility of the labour in retail industry can be understandable only in that logic.

This paper intends to make a mass visible with their labour process or working condition. When we decided to conduct a research on superstore employees, we wouldn't think it will be so difficult. During the research we noticed that for researchers who aims to reach some fact about working conditions there are great wall that prevent to access to these facts. Especially the big players, say national or international companies, are so sensitive to inhibit the researchers. Thus, it is very difficult to get a picture from these places. You will find the research process details and some short remarks on research method in following.

A short definition: This study doesn't focus on the whole retail industry but just on a part of it. The paper intends to make a depiction labour process or working conditions of employees who work in superstores, supermarkets, hypermarkets. So, are all of these names different from each other or they imply the same thing?

“According to most definitions, ‘hypermarket’ is the name used for superstores which exceed a certain size. In practice, the use of the different terms varies. In the UK, the term ‘hypermarket’ is more rarely used than in other parts of Europe, with retailers preferring to use the better-known ‘superstore’ tag. The more precise definition of the two terms is explained by the Unit for Retail Planning Information: Superstores are defined as single-level self-service stores selling a wide range of food, or food and non-food goods with at least 2.500 square metres trading floor space and supported by car parking. Stores with 5000 square metres or more are commonly referred to as hypermarkets” (Dibb and Simkin 2001: 180).

Although there is a place for usage of the term ‘hypermarket’ in Turkish, we will not adhere to this precise distinction strictly. In the text we will use the terms supermarket, superstore and hypermarket for each other occasionally.

The Research Process: Method and some difficulties

When a researcher begin his/her research with a question, he/she has to take a decision on which method or methods he/she should use or which methods that is pertinent to her/his research question. May be the first question that she/he come up against is that which methods or methodology is pertinent to the research, quantitative or qualitative? If the researcher has a aim of focusing on a narrow area or if she/he intends to uncover some realities, in that case qualitative methods can be useful. Then, the researcher has to choose a tool to collect information for uncovering process.

This paper intends to explore or uncover the nature of relations (e.g. labour relations or social relations) that is ongoing on superstores or hypermarkets as workplaces. Because for us, as consumers, the working conditions or the nature of work relations on those workplaces are unknown or all these relations are invisible. The visible scene is just well dressed, clear, young boys and girls who have always smiley faces when they interactive with their customers. At first sight or with a superficial view the visible picture presents that the workplace is very clear, healthy, and attractive and the employees are happy to be there. The study aims to confirms whether or not this depict is correct by making in-depth interview with the workers of these workplaces. In another words, achieving this aim, we need to explore the experiences of the workers of these places deeply. In-depth interview has a sound effect to discover deeply the nature of workers’ experiences. This method focuses on their experiences, ideas or beliefs by questions that the researcher asks. Some comments explain the in-depth interview as mining, because this method gives chance to researcher to reach to deepest levels of interviewee (Legard et al. 2003: 139-140).

Yet, when we put our intention (as a scientific research) into practice, we met enormous difficulties. The places that we intend to examine are superstores. We can divide the superstores that located in Sakarya, a city from Marmara region which is the most developed geographical region in Turkey, into two categories: local superstores and nationwide superstores. The second group is including the big-size national (e.g. BİM, A101, Migros) and multinational superstores (e.g. Carfour, Kipa-Tesco) and the first group is just implying the small scaled superstores that are just operating in Sakarya City (e.g. BizimKiler, Essen, Esmer). But these also are not as small as grocery; they have at least several local branches. We conducted our research with participants from local, national and multinational superstores (in total five participants). But the number of our participant has not been so much as we intended at the beginning. The main obstacle in the way accessing to employees is attitudes of management of superstores. Especially multinationals and nation-wide superstores have strict rules to prevent researchers into their workplaces. The procedure that they follow is to ask aim of study with a ‘letter of application’. The branch management faxes or e-mails the letter to headquarter to ask permission.

We supply the letter to two superstores (a multinational and a national-wide superstore), but we have not yet got any respond after waiting more than three weeks (when we write our report). The way that we obtain the participant has been with the social networks and sometimes one-on-one interaction with workers. In short, this report could be read as preliminary findings of a narrow-scoped study.

Findings

This section of the study is focusing on the working conditions. Under the ‘working conditions’, we are supplying some facts on wage, working hours, emotional labour and some other issues.

Wage: One of the most attention-grabbing things is the pay level of the employees of superstores. But the macroeconomic indicators imply a different scene. Economic indicators show that economy of Turkey has shown a remarkable performance, although there is a global economic crisis. Approximately the last ten years have witnessed the steady growth of GDP and hence of GDP per capita. The GDP levels more than tripled to USD 736 billion in 2010, up from USD 231 billion in 2002, GDP per capita soared to USD 10,079, up from USD 3,500 in the given period (IIT 2011; AOTC 2011). Turning back to our case, according to information that obtaining from the participants, the wage of cashiers is about the half of GDP per capita. The wage of superstore employees is generally minimum wage. The minimum wage in Turkey is about US\$ 400 for the second half of 2011. Just some title owner, for example supervisors who are responsible for a group or a team of employees earn slightly more than his/her group members. A store manager of a local store who is responsible for the all stuff and work flows stated that he earns TL (Turkish Lira) 1.200 a month (around US\$ 730).

On the other hand, some nation-wide and multinationals apply a flexi work regime. This policy depends on a division between personnel: there are two types (apart from those who are working with sub-contracts) workers; full-time and part-time. The company recruits the candidates as part-time employee when they begin to work for the first time in the company. Depending on their performance and social relation with their supervisors or high-rank chiefs they are appointed to full-time position. But there is not any guaranty to get full-time job. One participant stated that she has been working for three and half years as a part-time worker and still waiting to get full-time job. Between those workers there is difference on the point of wage. While the full-time workers get the minimum wage, the part-time employees get less than this figure (TL 450; around US\$ 275 for a month).

Working hours: Emile Zola presents the dark scenes of working conditions from 19th century capitalism. One of his most known works *Germinal* depict the long-working days in mines bitingly. The protagonists couldn't see the daylight; they wake up too early before dawn and get back home too late. Depending on official reports, Karl Marx also tells the similar scenes in *Capital the Volume One* (e.g. see Marx 2007, Chapter X). Of course 21st century capitalism is not same as the 19th century capitalism exactly. Both Zola's and Marx's narratives were on blue collar workers. 21st century capitalism has turned highly white collar character. But the working hours of superstores workers brings to mind the 19th century working days inevitably. This statement is true especially for the local stores. Especially the multinationals pay attention to not exceed the limits of labour law, but they also do not adhere strictly the rules. One participant tells that nobody tends to left from the workplace unless all the jobs finishes. But in the local superstores there are definitely suchlike 19th century working hours. A graduated participant says that their working days consist of thirteen hours and six day in a week. This means approximately, the length of weekly working is 78 hours. According to labour law of Turkey this length, if there is no any flexi application, should not exceed 45 hour per week. Also, in these workplaces there is not any regular lunch and coffee/tea break. Depending on workload of the day, employees make arrangement for these needs by themselves or by their supervisors. During a conversation a worker in the meat counter says: ‘There is no certain time for working, we are always working. For months I have not used any free day.’ Nevertheless we should state that superstores are generally applying a six-day working schedule for full-time workers.

Emotional labour: The term ‘emotional labour’, invented by an American sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild (for details see Hochschild 2003), implies ‘the stress of managing emotions when the work role demands that certain expressions be shown to customers’ (Grandey 2000: 95). Also displaying emotion is an inseparable characteristic of human, but getting emotions into labour market or commercializing emotions for business success is a part of new capitalism. In the service works, employees generally keep in contact with customers interactively. So, as stated above, in an era that customers are regarded as ‘king’, the role of employees’ emotion is to satisfy those ‘kings’.

We have to make a distinction on that issue between local and nation-wide superstore. Emotional labour practices are more common for the second groups than the first. The participants indicated that separation clearly. Nation-wide stores (we mean by that term national and multinationals) pay great attention to appearance of the staff. Although both local and nation-wide stores have a specific dress code, the latter is more sensitive on that issue. This is a case about the target group. A participant from a local store told that: 'Yes, we have a certain dress code but our management policy does not pay more attention to the other issues of appearance, for example we do not have to make up. Because the target population of our store different from the big stores' target population. Our store focuses on the lower social class.' On the other hand the rules on appearance in big stores are strict. A participant says: "We have to apply make-up. You do not have chance to say 'I do not feel well today so I do not want to do make-up'. In that case your supervisor will warn you."

On the other hand the employees have to display a smiley-face appearance. A participant from a multinational said that we have the periodical meeting and in those meetings our chiefs, supervisors or managers always tell us that 'be merry, be cheerful'. She says: 'But we also have some expectation. The management just think of the customers. So, the customers are so saucy. And this has a bad effect on our motivation.' Another participant says: 'I try to empathize with customer and I put on a smile. But occasionally I do not get back any respond so I get angry because I am not a robot. I am affected the way of interaction between me and customers.'

Other Issues: Under that title we present some remarks on different issues related to employment. The first issue that is worthy to mention is 'trade union'. The employees of a multinational are organized under a trade union. We interviewed with two workers from this store. We can say the role of trade union is clear. Because the working hours are not long as the other stores and employees get bonus three times per year. But a participant says: 'We have a more serious problem such as working as part-time. Most of cashiers are working part-time. Trade union always says that we solve this problem but does nothing.' But the other participant states that the management do not want the existence of trade union. Owing to trade union our working conditions (wages, work hours) is better than the employees of the other stores.

Another issue is control. Control practices are different depending on each store. There is CCTV in all stores. Some stores periodically watch the videos and this application have a 'panoptic effect' on employees. Another control form is classic. A participant says: 'Regional director visit twice per week to observe to work flow of store. So everybody pay more attention to make his/her work as expected.' Another control form is ideological. This form works different for each store. Local stores have generally developed a discourse that refer it small family structure: 'There are not any question between us and employees. Because we do not see them as subordinates and they do not see us as chief. We see them as brothers and sisters, and they see us as an elder brother.' The discourse of nation-wide store refers their institutional importance. The discourse could be summarized such as: working for us is a privilege.

Concluding Remarks

One of the most remarkable figures of the contemporary sociology, Zygmunt Bauman (2001: 11), says: 'To think sociologically can render us more sensitive and tolerant of diversity. It can sharpen our senses and open our eyes to new horizons beyond our immediate experiences in order that we can explore human conditions which, hitherto, have remained relatively invisible.' With this paper we tried to do that focusing on a certain workplaces. The shopping centres or huge superstores / hypermarkets are seen mostly as a symbol of modernism or developed capitalism. Those places that include some employees are just components of our everyday lives. But a surface view do not care what those employees feel, how they earn their lives, what their struggles in their labour process is etc. And also mostly the outer cover causes false consciousness. When we meet a white collar worker with a smiley face we feel better but we do not think of his / her feelings.

It is hard to say the work relations on the superstores is smooth or the working conditions are decent. On the contrary, the wages are too poor, almost the half of the average income per capita of the country; the working day is too long and monotonous is too high. A cashier from a multinational says: 'You have to keep your pace above an average. You have to pass 27 items per minutes at least. If your pace is under that reference, you will be warned.'

This study intended to supply a closer look into the back side of the coin. Sociological perspective on work can help to reveal the nature of the work. Thus, it may be possible to create awareness for all workplaces and it may help to pave the way to decent work.

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