

NEOLIBERAL DÖNÜŐÜM DÖNEMİNDE EMEĐİN KOŐULLARI:
TÜRK İNŐAAT SEKTÖRÜNDE EMEĐİN GÜVENCESİZLİĐİ

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Türk İnşaat Sektöründe Emegın Güvencesizliđi

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CONDITIONS OF LABOR UNDER NEOLIBERAL TRANSFORMATION:
THE INSECURITY OF LABOR IN THE TURKISH CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

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Abstract (In English)

Although the neoliberal policies transform every area of life, the most affected issue from these policies is the working conditions. It could be said that the neoliberal policies eroded the interests of labor by flexibility and insecurity. While the conditions of labor are worsening day by day, there are a lot of obstacles to struggle against this situation. Furthermore the importance of the debate of the alternative ways to overcome this situation of labor is increasing in this period in which the labor movement declined significantly. Therefore, in this study, the implications of the neoliberal policies to the labor are assessed according to the findings based on the field study analyzing the construction sector that has risen significantly in this period. At the same time the development and the financialization of the construction sector are elaborated both in a global scale and in the context of Turkey. This study also provides a debate about the obstacles and the prospects for the cause of labor in Turkey.

Özet (Abstract in Turkish)

Neoliberal politikalar hayatın her alanını dönüştürse de, çalışma koşulları bu dönüşümün en yoğun yaşandığı alanı oluşturuyor. Esnekleştirme ve güvencesizleştirmenin giderek yaygınlaştığı bu dönemde işçilerin kazanımlarının ciddi bir erezyona uğradığı söylenebilir. Aynı zamanda bu durumla mücadele etmesinin önünde birçok engel bulunan emeğin koşulları günden güne ağırlaşıyor. Bunun yanında, emek hareketinin büyük bir darbe aldığı bu dönemde mevcut zorlukları aşacak alternatif yöntemler üzerine tartışmanın önemi de artıyor. Neoliberal politikaların emeğe etkileri, neoliberal dönemde büyük bir gelişme sağlayan inşaat sektöründe bu çalışma kapsamında organize edilen saha çalışması verilerine dayanılarak değerlendiriliyor. İnşaat sektörünün gelişimi ve finansallaşması da hem küresel ölçekte hem de Türkiye bağlamında ele alınıyor. Bu çalışma aynı zamanda Türkiye’de emek hareketi önündeki engeller ve fırsatlar üzerine bir tartışma zemini sağlıyor.

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Abbreviations

ILO – International Labor Organization

MNC – Multinational Corporation

UBS - Union Bank of Switzerland

IMF – International Monetary Fund

WB – World Bank

TÜİK – Turkey Statistical Institute

AKP – Justice and Development Party

TOKİ – Housing Development Administration

DİSK - The Confederation of Revolutionary Workers' Unions

İnşaat-İş – Construction Workers' Union

Yol İş – Road – Structure – Construction Workers' Union of Turkey

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Chapter 1: Introduction

An enormous rise has been witnessed in construction sector in recent years. Although this tendency is not new, the level of the share of construction sector in the economy is increasing day by day. This tendency could be observed both in Turkey and in a global scale. By the neoliberal financialization, construction sector started to include different dynamics. The construction sector that is intertwined with financial sector in the neoliberal period became independent from its costs. The relations between speculative financial markets and construction sector became decisive.

The aim of this study is to understand the effects of neoliberal policies on labor. While neoliberal policies work in favor of the capital by bringing flexible and unsecured labor market, it brought a lot of restrictions to workers who struggle for their interests. Beside the advantages that are gained through the neoliberal conditions of labor market capital also gain advantages through direct effects of the neoliberal policies. Globalization is the most significant element of this process. Since globalization process helps the free capital movement in the world, the flexibility of labor market becomes one of the most significant criteria for capital to decide the place for making investments. Because of these situations the neoliberal policies initiate a process, which is against the labor. These issues are assessed by answering the following questions in this study: “how do the neoliberal policies affect the labor processes”, “by the growth and the financialization of the construction sector how are the neoliberal practices experienced by the construction workers in Turkey?”, “during this process what kind of difficulties and what kind of opportunities to overcome these difficulties, do workers face?” and “how does flexible working conditions separate the workers and is there a commonality between workers in flexible labor market?”

Flexibilization of labor market is the most important result of the neoliberal policies and it affects the work relations and damaged the gains of labor. This transformation aims to prevent the practices which secure the rights of workers and which lead to rigidity for capital. So this process created a pressure on labor. Capital could adapt the changes in market demand by flexibilization of the labor market. Also with the flexible employment forms the workers are separated and they are seen as individuals instead of a collective unit. This processes put forward the issues of what separates the workers and what homogenizes the workers.

By the flexibilization of the labor market, working process lost its stability and the security of the future of workers disappeared. The instable characteristic as a result of the flexibilization of the labor market leads to the insecurity. This situation affects workers in different aspects. While it could create an anxiety about the future it could also refers to the current conditions. So the insecurity creates a sense of pressure on the workers. This situation imply that while the flexibilization of the labor market separates the workers it also integrates them in a different level by the insecurity of labor.

To assess these issues a field study was organized and it is aimed to investigate the experiences of the workers since narratives are more useful than the standardized questions and answers. Since quantitative methods were not giving the opportunity to listen to the narratives of the workers, qualitative study was going to be more appropriate to understand the situation of workers under neoliberal conditions. 34 in-depth interviews and 3 focus group interviews were made in İstanbul. Bahçesehir and Atasehir were the places where the study is done and those are the places where the urbanization is seen intensively in the neoliberal period. The interviews were made in October and November 2015 and they were analyzed in December, 2015.

The reason why the construction sector problematized in this study is that it is one of the most significant sectors in the neoliberal period. One of the reasons for that is the

tendency of policy makers to encourage the construction investments because of the capability of these investments to decrease unemployment and the positive effect of it to the economic growth with a lot of related sectors. Another reason is the relations between the construction sector and finance in neoliberal period. The developments of the financial instruments provide the opportunity of the articulation of the construction sector and the financial system. This relation between the construction sector and financial markets leads capital to articulate to the global financial markets via construction sector. These situations increase the importance of the construction sector in neoliberal period therefore those important parts of the neoliberal practices could be seen mostly through the construction sector. For this reason construction sector is a field where the effects of neoliberal practices are observed intensively. This result is mainly because of the fast growth of the construction sector in the global scale during neoliberal period and the structural characteristics of the sector. Moreover, the existence of the complex subcontractor practices in the construction sector imposes the flexible and unsecured conditions for the workers.

On the other hand beside these conditions of labor market, work security is one of the most important problems in this sector. Since the working conditions in this sector include serious dangers, security precautions should be taken rigorously. So this sector includes different dimensions of the insecurity issue. This characteristic of construction sector would also provide the opportunity to observe the different dimensions of insecurity. To sum up, in order to see the effects of the neoliberal policies on labor, construction areas are the best places for the scientific observations.

While this study explains the transformation of economy, it is actually argued that how the flexible and unsecured labor market affect workers. To understand the effects of the neoliberal policies, this study mainly focuses on four issues. First of all, it explains the differences between Fordist period and the neoliberal period in terms of labor. This attempt

targets to remark the dispossessed rights, which were gained by the workers during the welfare state period and lost by the rise of flexible and unsecured labor market. After assessing the concepts of flexibility and insecurity, the effects of these practices to the labor are discussed. In this context informalization of labor market and the subcontracting practices have significant roles. It is tried to portray that how the practices those create the flexible and unsecured conditions transform the labor market.

Secondly, to explain the reasons of the increasing trend of the construction sector in the global scale in the neoliberal period, the relation between the rise of construction sector and the neoliberal policies are discussed. The effects of the construction sector to the whole economy and the financialization process of this sector should be understood for this purpose. The position of the construction sector in financialization process and the results of the articulation of the financial sector and the construction sector are explained. However the reflections of these policies to Turkey are the significant part of this study.

Thirdly, it is explained that how the neoliberal transformation is experienced in Turkey in terms of the labor markets. Then the significance of the construction sector in Turkey is assessed by the contribution of some statistics about this sector. Gentrification policies and the position of construction sector in the economy are explained. Finally the effects of the neoliberal conditions to the working life are depicted. By the field study in construction areas, it was observed that how the workers experience this processes and what sort of disadvantages do the neoliberal policies bring to the labor in the construction sector. As one of the purest forms of the neoliberal policies could be seen in the construction sector, the effects of these policies to the workers are tried to understand through the findings of the field study. As well as the intense observations about the transformation of the labor market, the attitudes of workers towards to the changing conditions are also discussed.

While this study queries the transformation of labor market and the effects of this transformation to the struggle of labor, it is limited with the construction sector. What makes significant this study is that while the effects of neoliberal conditions on labor are explained, the prospects for alternative ways of mobilization, which are practiced in the organization of workers in construction sector, are also investigated.



Chapter 2: Neoliberal Transformation and Rise of the Construction Sector

2.1 Mapping Neoliberal Transformation

To understand the effects of the neoliberal policies on labor first the difference in labor market before and after neoliberal period should be explained. By the social welfare practices including obstacles for low wages and social security systems, states could gain consent of the workers to the system before the neoliberal period (Özdemir and Özdemir, 2008 p: 56). With the decline of the welfare states these assurances also declined. After the collapse of the Bretton Woods international monetary system; while the labor struggle enter in a new period, the neoliberalization rose with Reagan, Thatcher, Kohl, Pinochet, and Deng governments in the world (Harvey, 2014, p: 9).

Standing evaluates these conditions in terms of workers, in his work Precariat (2011). According to him, millions of people entered the precariat that is a new phenomenon of the neoliberal period, although some characteristics of this phenomenon were seen in the past (Standing, 2011, p: 6). On the other hand another view describe these conditions as a return to the essence of capitalism. After II World War the Fordist period is an exception in the history of capitalism and the insecurity of labor is the essence of this system (Sandıkçı, 2014, p: 285). Whether the precariat is a new phenomenon or not, there are different characteristics of this phenomenon from the workers in welfare state period. Standing expresses the difference between the precariat and the working class or the proletariat: *“The latter terms suggest a society consisting mostly of workers in long-term, stable, fixed-hour jobs with established routes of advancement, subject to unionisation and collective agreements, with job titles their fathers and mothers would have understood, facing local employers whose names and features they were familiar with”*(Standing, 2011, p:6). The erosion of the long term, stable,

fixed hours job could be seen in the conditions of the precariat. Flexibility makes those points uncertain. Precarisation also affects the income of the workers negatively. This effect separates the precariat from the middle-class. The precariat does not have a stable or predictable salary or the status and benefits that middle-class people were supposed to possess (ibid. p: 6). So the increase of precarization reveals different anxieties in the society. This transformation of the working conditions is the main characteristic of the neoliberal period in terms of labor. This means a change in life standards of workers.

Another point is the level of precarization. In neoliberal period, an increase in the level of precarization could be observed. Standing (2011, p: 24) mentions that even there is not an exact number it could be guessed that at present, in many countries, at least a quarter of the adult population is in the precariat. This means significant number of people work under flexible conditions.

2.1.1 Flexibilization of the Labor market

The essence of the transformation of the economic system during the neoliberal period is the flexibilization of labor market to reduce the labor costs and maintain profitability. This process of the changing economic policies led the neoliberal repression on labor, welfare state and public ownership, by the governments of Reagan/Thatcher (Radice, 1999, p: 2). The reconfiguration of the economic system is shaped through limiting the rights of labor. Poulantzas expresses that the relative autonomy of the state was damaged because of the abandoned rights of workers, in favor of capital, and state and capital got closer (Coşkun, 2013, p: 63). According to the neoliberal perspective, countries should provide flexible labor market. If the labor market is not more flexible than it should be, the investors prefer to make their investments to the countries those have more flexibility than the others (Standing, 2011, p: 6). Global openness gives the opportunity to the capital to invest to where the wages are

lower and the labor organizations are weak. The sensibility of capital about costs of production leads a competition in issues such as reaching lower-cost labor and easier access to raw materials and market (Harvey, 2014, p: 96).

While capital could operate with high mobility, the low mobility is another disadvantage for labor. Harvey (1982) notes that, contrary to market theory, in each locality the low mobility of labor and the maintenance of spatial divisions in the working class, enhance the power of capital (Ramsay and Haworth, 1989, p: 292).

Nevertheless while the capital movements' itself are liberalizing, the share of the wages declines in the periphery countries; and the cost of fluctuations and the financial crises are reflected to the labor (Boratav, 2014) According to the Global Wage Report 2014/15 of ILO labor income shares declined in the world. Labor income share measures the distribution of national income between labor and capital. This report shows the disadvantage of the labor.

To sustain these practices the reactions of workers to them needed to be prevented. By globalization state provided ground for exploitation of labor and suppressed organized labor movement to incorporate the global capitalism by inviting capital (Aykaç, 2009, p: 42). So the possible obstacles of the flexible labor markets are prevented by this way.

So from the workers' side globalization means the decrease of the labor costs and the relocating of the capital to where cheap, unskilled and unorganized labor exists. (ibid. p: 37). Multinational corporations became an important instrument for this process. MNCs those are operating in more than one countries aim to increase profit rates by relocating production activities to the places where the costs are lower (ibid, p: 39). Removing the obstacles on capital accumulation process provides a room for the further activities of those companies having strong capital power. The increase of the global openness and improvements in technology provides to substitute low-wage Southern labor for higher- paid Northern labor

and contribute to lower global wage inequality but reduces global labor income (Crotty, J, 2000, p: 3).

Therefore flexibility is an important aspect of the new accumulation regime. Organizations become more flexible, more adaptable and there is a change from permanent employment of labor to the short-term contractual arrangements, temporary or part time (Balaneasa and Manolescu, 2012, p: 259). While Fordism was abandoned, welfare and security regime was also abandoned (Özdemir and Özdemir, 2008, p: 59). And flexibility occurred by the disappearance of the working with employment security, unionization, high wages and social rights (Buğra, 2010, p: 159). So it could be said that there are different existing dimensions of flexibility. To understand this concept, these dimensions should be expressed first. They are wage flexibility, employment flexibility, job flexibility, skill flexibility (Standing, 2011, p: 6). Each of them makes it easier to take position for capital against the change of demand. “Wage flexibility meant speeding up adjustments to changes in demand, particularly downwards; employment flexibility meant easy and costless ability of companies to change employment levels, particularly downwards, implying a reduction in employment security and protection; job flexibility meant being able to move employees around inside the company and to change job structures with minimal opposition or cost; skill flexibility meant being able to adjust workers’ skills easily.”(ibid. p: 6). The flexible worker is perceived as a self-reliant and self-responsible employer of his or her labor (Bonefeld, 2006). So collective rights of labor ignored and it is accepted that every people is free to decide about their labor individually.

2.1.2 The Dimensions of the Security of the Labor

The world economy in the 1990s accommodates with only one model of development: export-oriented production based on flexible labor markets, lower real and social wages, and

freer trade (Albo, 1997, p: 6). The labor market flexibility created a situation that workers do not have any guarantee to continue to work with the same job or with the same conditions. The ambiguity about the future of the labor leads the workers to the insecurity issue. According to ILO Report conducted in 90 countries in 2004, 73% of the workers work under unsecured conditions (Oğuz, 2011, p: 8). There are also different dimensions of the security. Standing (2011, p: 10) defines the different dimensions of the security:

The first dimension of the security is the labor market security, which means “adequate income opportunities”. The nonexistence of the income opportunities creates the risk to have difficulties to access the basic necessities for people. The second dimension is employment security. Employment security provides an assurance for not to lose of jobs for labor. The third dimension is work security. Working security covers the protection against accidents and illness at work. The protection of the workers means cost and also might be an effect which slows the work. The fourth dimension is skill reproduction security, which means the opportunity to gain skills, through apprenticeships, employment training and so on, as well as opportunity to make use of competencies. Income security is the fifth dimension. Income security provides an assurance of an adequate stable income. The income security could be ensured by minimum wage implementations, social security policies or taxation to reduce the inequality. The sixth dimension of the security is the representation security. The most common instrument of the representation of the labor is through labor union membership. This dimension of security expresses to have a voice in the labor market, for example independent trade unions and to have the right of strike. All of these dimensions of security increase the rigidity of the labor markets. Because of this, insecurity is a result of flexible turn of the labor market.

2.1.3 The Informalization of the Economy and the Subcontracting Practices

The economic system were restructured through informalization of the market through flexibility, increasing subcontracting practices and limitations to wage and rights of workers who works in formal sectors (Özdemir and Özdemir, 2008, p: 140). This situation changed the working conditions against the labor.

The cause of the rise of the informal sector is the encouragement of the global competition for formal companies to look for workers who would work for low wages and low social security, so this led the erosion of the labor relations (Buğra, 2010, p: 71). It could be seen that the characteristics of the informal sectors are actually the characteristics of the neoliberal labor market. On the other hand, those who work in formal sectors to look for another job to increase their income could see informal sectors as an opportunity. This situation also might increase the level of informalization. By the increase of the informalization the share of informal economy in total economy has rose up to 40% today in developing countries (Uyanık, 2010, p: 220). While the informal workers could work with a temporary labor contract, the informalization of labor could be seen in the formal sectors through subcontracting practices (Erdut, 2005, p: 20).

As the flexibility is the main characteristic of neoliberal period, informal economy became a permanent characteristic of the capitalist accumulation in neoliberal era. The globalization of the economy brought the informalization of the labor force in a lot of sector in a lot of country (Buğra, 2010, p: 71). Since the rise of informalization means the increase in off the record employment, the workers of these sectors work in worse conditions than the workers in formal sectors. The characteristics of the informal labor market are low skill, low productivity, low wages and low social security (Özdemir and Özdemir, 2008, p: 144). So the expansion of the informal sectors could not be thought separately from the neoliberal period.

Subcontracting practices have an important role in the expansion of informalization of labor. Subcontracting means to employ workers of different companies to reduce the cost of labor and also for deunionization of labor (Coşkun, 2013, p: 68). Because of this it could be seen that the subcontracting practices are against the interests of labor. While subcontracting dispossesses the rights of workers it constitutes difficulties for the collective struggle or bargaining of workers for their rights. While unions could not play any role in the labor process subcontracting divides labor spatially and institutionally (Özdemir, 2010, p: 43). Because of this separation, building a collectivity is more difficult among the workers of subcontractors. Different contracts in different sectors lead to the separation of the work relations and employment relations. Although there are different factors of the separation of workers insecurity is the common characteristic of this period. In this sense insecurity has a homogenizer characteristic for flexible employment forms.

2.1.4 The Social Erosion of the Neoliberal Policies

During the neoliberal period it could be seen that social rights were exposed to limitations by the practices of this era. Neoliberal social policies which depend on neoliberal claims aim to pass from society to individual and from state to market (Özdemir and Özdemir, 2008. p: 52). Market system became widespread in public services. According to Sennett the neoliberal perspective does not perceive people who need state, they perceive people as “social parasite” (Türkmen, 2012, p: 97). This perception dispossessed the social security rights from workers. By these regulations the relation between society and public services became economic. Their social dimension is not considered. The dispossession of these rights rationalized under neoliberalism and reinforced through austerity (Harvey, 2014, p: 49). This process is related to the effort to reduce the share of public expenditures from the state budget by reducing the social security mechanisms, after 1980s (Buğra, 2010, p: 115). These

practices could be seen in many sectors those were benefited publicly before, such as education or health sectors. Due to the marketization it became hard to access these services. Because of this situation, life standard of the workers decrease after the dispossession of social rights. During globalization period welfare practices is not seen as popular as it was before because of the effects of them to decrease the competitiveness according to the neoliberal discourse. On the other hand by globalization governments are discouraged for taxation to prevent capital flight and to compete with other states (Rudra, 2002, p: 411). In this competitive atmosphere welfare spending became difficult for states.

While marketization affects society it also affects the workers of these sectors. To work according to the neoliberal market conditions means to start to work flexible, without security for low wages. Neoliberal policies worsened the life standards of workers by this two-sided pressure. On the other hand this situation contributes to the expansion of the flexible and unsecured conditions in labor market. Although these conditions expanded to a lot of sectors, they are experienced more intensive in some sectors.

2.2 Construction Sector: A Key to Understand Neoliberal Expansion

The crisis of the Fordist accumulation period had been tried to overcome by neoliberal policies. The over accumulation problem in the world economy caused to turn the investments to the urban areas and gentrification became the way of capital accumulation (Yalçintan, et. al. 2014, p: 51). It could be observed that the neoliberal urban policies are one of the most important components to sustain the economy during this period. Urbanization became a significant way of the extraction of the surplus capital at the expense of urban rights (Harvey, 2008, p: 10).

After the crisis of the capitalism in 1970s construction sector become one of the most significant ways to improve economic policies to overcome the effects of the crisis. The

reason of this tendency is that the construction sector is perceived as an efficient way that contributes to the economic development (Abidin, 2010). Capital could accumulate surplus through real estate investments if it is made in a profitable place in terms of commercial investments and a source of mass consumption (Aalbers, 2012, p: 17). The relationship between construction sector and other sectors is one of the most important reasons to make the investments to the construction sector. For example in Taiwan the government decided to make investments into construction sector to achieve economic development because of the economic power of the construction sector and the other sectors which are induced by construction sector (Su, Lin and Wang, 2003).

There was a conviction about the positive potential of the construction sector for the whole economy that motivates a lot of state to support construction investments (Balaban, 2011). The growth of the construction sector would also provide the growth of the related sectors. So, this conviction might have been led construction investments spread significantly and became the locomotive sector of the economy. It could be seen from the example of the Asian region. The significant economic growth of the Asian region was experienced simultaneously with the urbanization in 1990s (Aveline, 2009, p: 20). This tendency in the world is an important factor of the growth of the economies.

On the other hand changing conditions of the world economy brought new structure to the metropolitans and this structure triggered construction sector. Financial liberalization revealed the need of prime office buildings, luxury housing for expatriates and newly rich households (Avelin, and Li, 2009).

Another result of this transformation is that, the proportion of the service sector started to rise within the whole economy. For example the service sector increases 75% in proportion to the other sectors in England in neoliberal period as Tallon points out (Şahin, 2011, p: 4). Such a shift in the economy had a remarkable effect on the socio-economic structure in

societies. People of high income replaced with the unskilled or semi-skilled labor classes in the city centers after the rise of the service sector (ibid. p: 6). Therefore the construction sector rose in accordance with the demands of the new population in the cities. These conditions also increase the growth of construction sector.

However, housing and property markets are significant options to absorb the surplus capital. Harvey (2012, p: xvii) explains this issue as such:

“The virtue of housing and property markets from the standpoint of capital is that they have the capacity to absorb the vast amounts of surplus capital and surplus labor that capital perpetually produces. While investments in the land cannot move, property titles to them certainly can (as Marx noted when looking at the booms and busts in railroad investment in the nineteenth century). Surpluses of money capital in one place can easily be absorbed, therefore, by the building of a new geographical landscape for production consumption, and daily life elsewhere. This does require, of course, adequate techniques of mediation in financial markets and the advent of securitization and various other financial instruments after 1980 or so certainly created new speculative possibilities.”

In much of the advanced countries housing is commoditized speculatively (Harvey, 2014, p: 20). Because of this possibility financial markets become significant for the construction sector. To understand the financialization indebtedness should be mentioned first. During the neoliberal period, a general rise occurred in indebtedness (Lapavistas, 2012, p: 2). The growing up of the debt might make the economies more vulnerable. On the other hand it articulates the countries to the financial system more. But this articulation could be experienced in different ways. For example in Europe, periphery countries focus on boosting domestic demand through investment in real estate and consumption and support the demand by credit generated by the growing banks. (ibid. p: 92). But a different situation is observed in Germany. Germany exists in this system by the current account surplus inside the Eurozone,

resulting from pressure on pay and conditions rather than on superior productivity growth (ibid. p: 2).

After the crisis of capitalism, in order to overcome the over accumulation problem financial or state institutions are required to generate credits (Harvey, 2004, p: 64). The help of the financial developments could sustain the growth of the construction sector. Also this situation leads the articulation of many people to the financial system. While the growth of financial sector is increasing consumption and the real estate investments, this growth also means the rise of speculative markets. “The increased efficiency and flexibility of the credit system, coupled with low interest rates, did not lead to inflation in the late 1980s but to the emergence of speculative bubbles exclusively concentrated in real estate and share prices.”(Itoh and Lapavistas, p: 201).

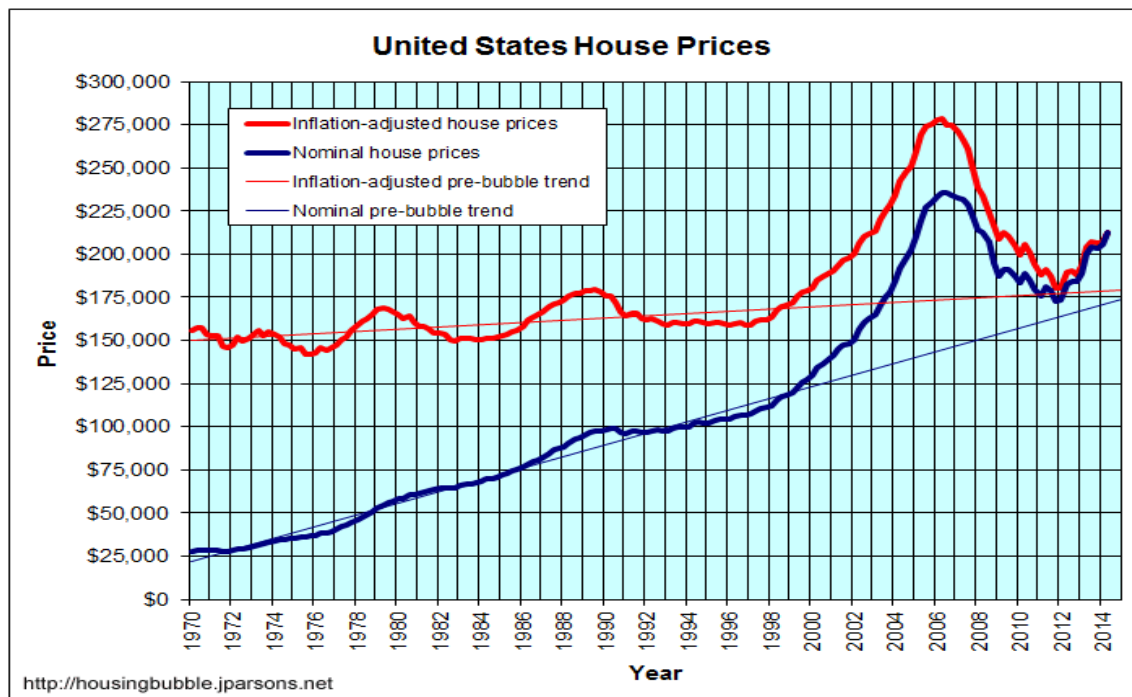
Financialization provides such a profit-making process that is through financial markets rather than through trade or production (Aalbers, 2012, p: 10). It could be said that during the neoliberal period while the share of investments on production is declining, the share of financial investments is increasing. Securitization is an important component of financialization. By securitization, the value of commodities is non-transparent and localized, standardized and rationalized (Gotham, 2012). While securitization creates new opportunities for capital investment and growth, it destabilizes mortgage markets and national economies around the world. It was seen recently in the financial crisis of the US that how this instability might occur and spread out of the other countries.

Subprime mortgages are one of the most important causes of the recent financial crisis of the US in 2008. “Subprime” refers to the credits those are given to the poor people who could not pay the credit back. This practice was different before. The credits are generally given to those who prove the capability to repay the money before the mid-1990s. These

control mechanisms could reduce the risks of the fails of repays of the credits and it prevents the indebtedness of the poor people. National banks tried to stop the regulations of state and in 2007, the US Supreme court ruled that; state could not regulate the mortgage lending subsidiaries national banks (Gotham, 2012). So the control mechanisms on credits disappeared. The national banks could give credits everyone without checking the capability of the ones who applied for the mortgages. And the US mortgage bubble became global because of the securitization of the subprime assets (Lapavistas, 2012, p: 5). So although limiting the area of risk taking behavior can prevent the systemic fragility, thus regulating the financial markets, financial liberalization creates interests that also prevent the regulation of these markets (Onaran, 2007, p: 2).

The increasing demand supported by the mortgage loan opportunities contributes to the increase of the real estate prices. The overvaluation of the real estate prices because of this situation created the bubble risk in the real estate sector. The graph below shows the situation in the US.

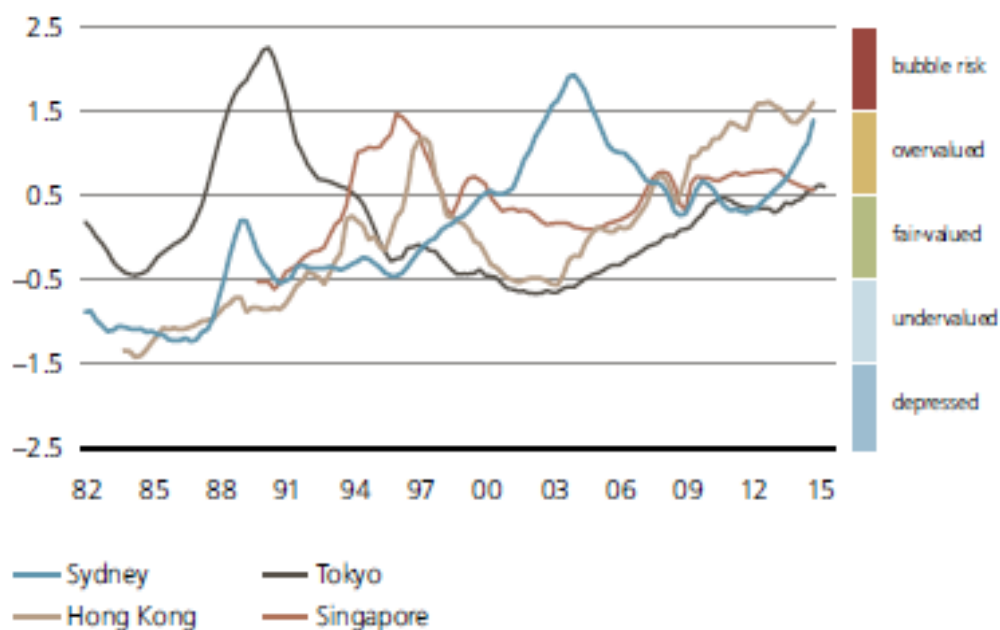
Figure 1: The House Prices in United States



Source: <http://www.jparsons.net/housingbubble/>

After the decline of the house prices in the crisis period, they started to increase again since 2012. And the increase trend of the prices points a new bubble risk in the future in the US. This example can also be shown in other countries as a threat.

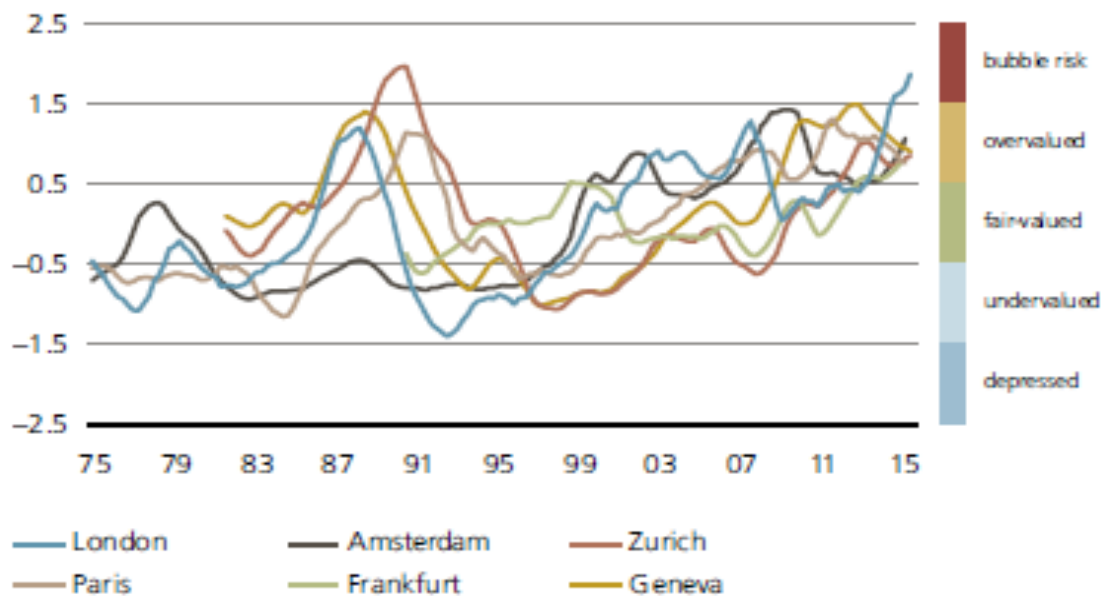
Figure 2: The House Prices in Asia Pacific Countries



Source: UBS

In Asia Pacific countries bubble risk is seen in Hong Kong according to UBS global real estate bubble index (2015). Also the trend of the prices in Sydney has the risk to reach the level of bubble risk. While Tokyo and Singapore are not at the bubble risk level, the prices in these cities are overvalued as well.

Figure 3: The House Prices in Europe



Source: UBS

As Paris, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Zurich and Geneva are at the level of overvaluation London has the risk of bubble effect as well.

While construction sector is growing with the financial developments, increase the vulnerability of the economy, and includes such neoliberal conditions those are low wages, flexible conditions, dispossession of the social rights, the working security is the most important problem in this sector. According to the figures of ILO every year 60.000 deadly accidents happens and a worker dies because of work accidents in every 10 minutes (Gürcanlı, 2013, p: 50). The share of the construction sector in this figure shows the significance of the work accidents in this sector. Although the share of the construction sector is 6-7% in total employment, the share in total work accident is one third (Ibid, 2013, p: 69).

Aside the deadly accidents, another problem is the health problems occurred by the working conditions. They also might end with deaths or loss of the ability to work. A chronic health effect resulted from the conditions of the workplace is expressed by the term “slow

Health hazards” (Cook, 2015). This issue is also as significant as deadly accidents. The effects of unhealthy conditions might also appear in the long term. “Major health issues found were failure to control dust (12% of sites) insufficient welfare (12%) and asbestos (10%). Other health issues included noise, vibration and manual handling. (As far as safety was concerned, working at height issues attracted 42% of the Improvement Notices)” (Cook, 2015). So, as well as the decrease of the wage security, job security or labor market security one of the most important problems of this sector is work security as the figures shows. As the flexible conditions are imposed to the labor markets to abolish the different dimensions of the security, it is the main obstacle to solve these problems.

2.3 Neo-liberal Transformation and Degradation of Labor Market in Turkey

While the global economic system was experiencing the neoliberal transformation the economy of Turkey also started to transform according to the global neoliberal policies and labor markets started to adapt to these policies. From 1980s the economic system was started to restructure according to structural adjustment programs of IMF and WB (Onaran, 2000, p: 207). Therefore the policies, specifically the labor policies, in the world have common characteristics. Flexibility is mentioned as the main characteristic of neoliberal period above. From 1980s the labor markets have been restructuring in to increase the level of flexibility, informalization, the low wages and minimized rights of the workers in formal sector in Turkey (Özdemir and Özdemir, 2008, p: 137). So the crisis of the economy was tried to overcome by the flexibility and informalization of labor markets. These practices became the most important aspects of neoliberal period.

The policies sought after 24th January 1980 decisions show the essence of the economic policies of neoliberal period. But there was not any apparatus that could prepare an

appropriate ground for these policies (Boratav, 2013, p: 148). But military coup in 1980 could give this chance to these policies to be implemented. The neoliberal program of 24th January 1980 implemented according to the demands of the capital (Boratav, 2013, p: 150). So state organized the legal background in favor of capital. It could be said that the rights of the workers were the targets of these implementations. The labor side faced with serious repression on their rights from the beginning of 1980s. In this process legal limitations were implemented to the collective rights of the labor (Köse and Öncü, 2000). This situation could be observed from the situation of the labor unions. After the military intervention the practices of the state attempt to obstruct the labor class policies (Yalman, 2004).

As a result, this perspective of the state led to significant decline in the unionization. The limits on unionization are projected to repress the reactions of workers against the neoliberal policies. The neoliberal policies were established on these repressive state practices on collective labor law (Özdemir and Özdemir, 2008, p: 97). Although there were some unions their main activities were prohibited. New union law prohibited the politic activities of unions and a lot of bureaucratic obstacles were brought against unions (Nichols and Suğur, 2005, p: 193). The activities of unions were suspended, strikes were prohibited and collective bargaining transformed to the High Board of Arbitration and so the real wages declined, in the military government period in 1980 (Boratav, 2013, p:150). There are also other factors of the decline of the unionization. According to the statistics of January 2015 1.297.000 workers are union members from 12.181.000 workers. But these are not net figures. Because when the workers who could benefit from the right of collective contract are considered the number may change. The number of workers who could benefit from collective contract is 825.000¹. The reason of these different numbers is the barrage practiced for the unions to make collective contract. Unions must meet the barrage in terms of the number of members to make

¹ Aziz Çelik, 2015, *Sendikalaşma gerçekten artıyor mu?*, T24, Access, 27 January 2016, <http://t24.com.tr/yazarlar/aziz-celik/sendikalasma-gercekten-artiyor-mu,11132>

collective contract. As a result of this obstacle 272.000 workers could not benefit from collective contract right.

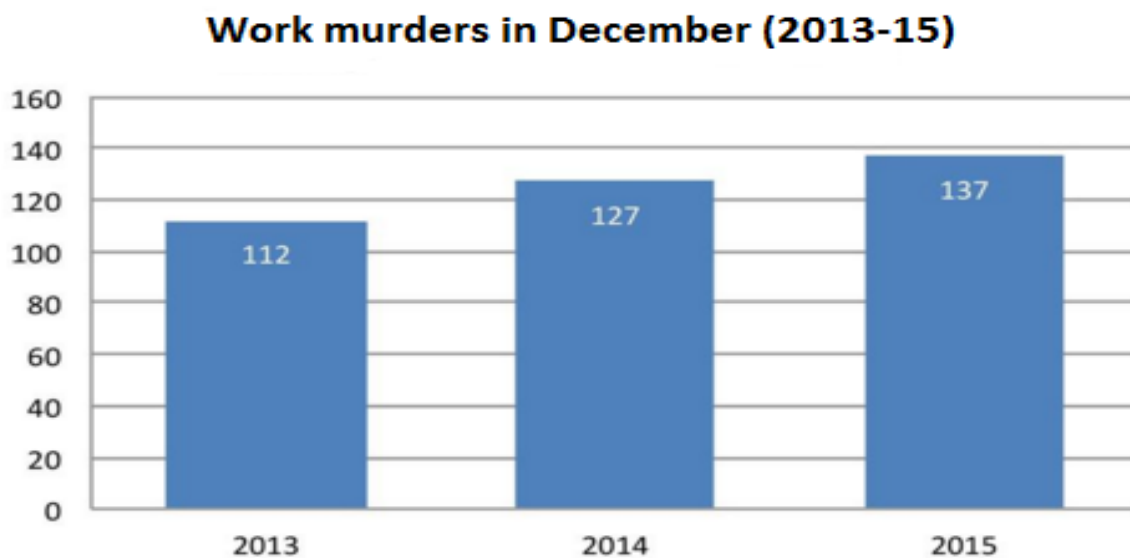
Nevertheless flexibility of the labor markets is one of the significant obstacles for unionization. Also the insecurity of the labor caused by flexible labor markets is another factor that might damage the motivation of the unionization. So beside the direct juridical limitations, neoliberal conditions of the labor markets can be mentioned as the indirect limitations for unionization. So the obstacles to practice these policies were repressed by military intervention. In 1982 the military regime regulate the new working life with a new constitution and with a lot of legal regulation (Boratav, 2013, p: 150).

Subcontracting is also another mechanism which obstructs organization of labor and which intensifies flexible and unsecured conditions in labor markets. From the beginning of the 1990s but especially after the crisis in 1994 subcontracting increased its pressure on labor market. (Özdemir and Özdemir, 2008, p: 112). This form of employment reinforces flexibility. Subcontracting increased after decline of the unions after the military coup in 1980 (Nichols and Suğur, 2005, p: 139). In Turkey “subcontracts continues less than a year generally employers are free from paying severance and subcontracted workers are only paid minimum wage. They are not members of union and they do not have any off-days” (Nichols and Suğur, 2005, p: 139). So the expansion of the subcontracting practices serves to the interest of capital. Between the mid-1980s and the end of 1990s the rate of the subcontracted workers who work in the state owned enterprises increased from 4% to 15%, and this ratio increased to 25% in privatized companies (Nichols and Suğur, 2005, p: 139). The increase of subcontracting practices means that the number of workers who works under flexible conditions and without security increased.

Privatization is another dimension of this period in Turkey, compatible to neoliberal era. In the beginning, the discourse of privatization was “efficiency” but the following years

this discourse was abandoned and the privatization became an important tool to finance the public deficit. (Boratav, 2013, p: 176). Moreover the essence of the privatization practices did not work in favor of workers. By Yeldan's (2005, p: 17) words, "the ideology of privatization has openly turned into a state-led weapon for the capital's assault on labor unions". Yeldan (2005, p: 11) expresses that although the increase of productivity after privatization, real wages declined. However the increasing unsecured conditions by these neoliberal practices also lead to increase the number of work accidents. The table below shows the number of work murders in December from 2013 to 2015:

Figure 4: The number of work accidents resulted with deaths in December (2013-2015)



Source: http://guvenlcalisma.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=16800%3A2015-yilinda-en-az-1730-isci-aralik-ayinda-ise-en-az-137-isci-yasamini-yitirdi&catid=149%3Ais-cinayetleri-raporlari&Itemid=236

While the number of work accidents, which resulted with death, is 112 in December 2013, it becomes 137 in the same month of 2015. The table below shows the number of deaths of workers between 2003 and 2013:

Table 1: The number of the deaths of workers according to years, between 2002 and 2013.

Years	Deaths
2002	872
2003	810
2004	841
2005	1072
2006	1592
2007	1043
2008	865
2009	1171
2010	1444
2011	1700
2012	744
2013	1356

Source: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/iste-yillara-gore-isci-olumleri-27588984>²

However these figures include only the registered workers. When the number of informal workers are thought these figures may increase significantly. The share of the informal workers in non-farm sectors is 22.3% and the share of informal workers in construction sector is 36.6% according to the figures of TÜİK in July 2015.³ Although the 98% of the work accidents could be prevented⁴ the neoliberal competition is an obstacle to prevent them. As the precautions require cost they also could lead to deceleration of the work. So these practices are not compatible with the neoliberal competition. As a result the preventable accidents become inevitable.

In conclusion the economic transformation of Turkey followed the neoliberal direction from the 1980s. The military coup prepared the ground for these policies and repressed the labor significantly. The increase of unsecured conditions by the flexible working conditions,

² Hürriyet, *İşte Yıllara Göre İşçi Ölümleri*, 16.11.2014, source available: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/iste-yillara-gore-isci-olumleri-27588984>, Access: January 2016

³ TÜİK, *Basın Odası Haberleri*, 09.07.2015, source available: http://tuik.gov.tr/basinOdasi/haberler/2015_43_20150709.pdf, Access: 28.01.2016

⁴ *A panel of The Chamber of Mechanical Engineers*, Zonguldak 02.05.2008. source available: http://www.mmo.org.tr/resimler/dosya_ekler/f8229696f7a3bb4_ek.pdf?dergi=110, Access: January 2016

subcontracting and low wages could describe this period in terms of labor. The decline in the rate of unionism and the restrictions on the unions makes it clear that the state also intends to weaken the struggles and the bargaining power of labor against capital.

The workers of construction sector, which grew up dramatically in the neoliberal period, experienced the insecurity more than the workers of many sector. The structural characteristics and the rise of this sector in this period are the reasons of this situation. The subcontracting system as a common practice and strategy in the construction sector is increasing the insecurity of the workers of this sector. The construction sector in which one could also observe serious problems of getting organized via labor unions, namely unionization, represents drastic effects of neoliberal period.

Chapter 3: Mapping Construction Sector in Turkey and Implications on the Labor

3.1 Construction Sector in Turkey: A Growth by Gentrification

It is possible to see the repercussions and impacts of the neoliberal practices on the labor markets in Turkey as well. And the construction sector became the locomotive of the economy in this period. Many projects have been done in a lot of neighborhoods to reproduce the urban area. Construction sector constitute a significant part of the growth rate. There is a high correlation between economic growth rate and construction sector growth rate. The table below shows the figures of the economic growth and the construction sector growth rates of Turkey in between 2005 and 2014. These are the figures of the Institute of Statistics of Turkey (TÜİK) to which are referred in the report of the union of the construction sector employers in February 2015.

Table 2: GDP and the Construction Sector Growth Rates in Turkey: 2005-2014

Years	GDP growth rate (%)	Construction sector growth rate(%)
2005	8,4	9,3
2006	6,9	18,8
2007	4,7	5,7
2008	0,7	-8,1
2009	-4,8	-16,3
2010	9,2	18,3

2011	8,8	11,5
2012	2,2	0,6
2013	4,0	7,0
2014	2,8	2,9

The table above shows that the movement of the construction sector growth and economic growth figures are in the same direction. In the years the economic growth rates increase construction sector grows faster than the whole economy. And the table below shows the share of the construction sector in GDP between 2005 and 2011.

Table 3: The Share of the Construction Sector in GDP in Turkey between 2005 and the 1st Quarter of 2011

Years	The Share of Construction Sector in GDP (%)
2005	4,4
2006	4,7
2007	4,9
2008	4,7
2009	3,8
2010	4,1
2010 1st Quarter	4,1
2010 2nd Quarter	4,4
2010 3rd Quarter	3,8
2010 4th Quarter	4,1
2011 1st Quarter	4,5

Source: Özorhon, B. (2012). Türkiye’de İnşaat Sektörü ve Dünyadaki Yeri. p:27

Nevertheless during the periods of crisis, it could be seen that there is a serious shrinking in this sector. While the growth of construction sector started to decrease in 2007, it fell seriously in 2008 and 2009 with the significant decrease of the economic growth rate. This means that the construction sector that experienced high growth rates in the periods in which the GDP growth rates increase, makes the crisis even worse.

During AKP government period, the policies to increase the construction investments practiced mostly through gentrification discourses. The transforming structure of the cities and the demands of the “new” population have created the reasons for the gentrification practices. While the enriched groups in the cities were looking for new places for their new lifestyles, the practices of AKP government helped to this purpose in a process in which shanties lost their legitimacies (Erder, 2015. p: 252).

The gentrification practices legitimized through various hegemonic discourses. “To attract investments to the cities”, “to transform the desolated, collapsed areas”, “a life like in the dreams”, “to increase the life standard” or “security” are the examples to these discourses (Penpecioglu, 2011). Another incident, which helps to strengthen the legitimacy of the gentrification, is the earthquake in 1999. According to the official reports 17.480 people were died and more than 500.000 people became homeless in 17 August 1999 (Birgün, 2015)⁵. This incident caused to be queried the safety of the houses. While the earthquake in 1999 shows the poor quality of the buildings, it also provided a source of legitimacy for gentrification, to AKP government (Deneç, 2014, p: 67). Even there is a factual condition; the gentrification policies could not consider increasing the safety of houses. These practices displace people in many experiences to open urban areas to the rent.

⁵Source: Birgün, *17 Ağustos Depreminde Yaşamını Yitirenler Anılacak*, (15.08.2015). source available: <http://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/17-agustos-depreminde-yasamini-yitirenler-anilacak-86842.html>, Access: October 2015

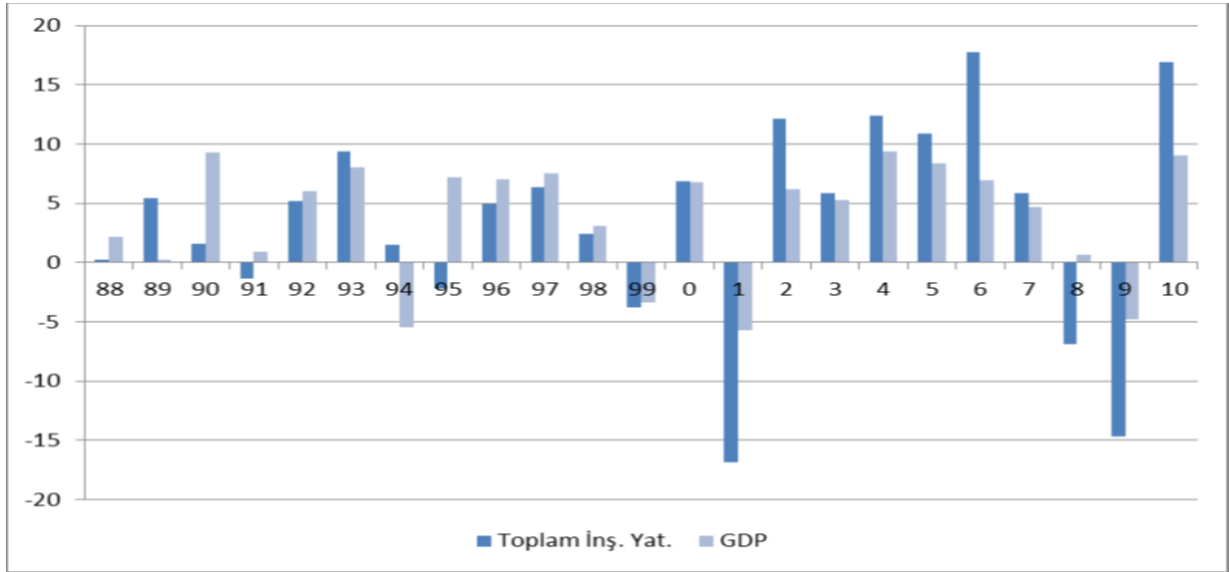
After 2002 gentrification policies practiced by AKP government. These policies aimed to renew the poor neighborhoods through related municipalities or the Administration of the Congregate Housing (TOKİ) (Yalçın, et. al. 2014, p: 53). Gentrification projects continued with the encouragement or the direct practices of state. Especially Istanbul can be taken as one of the most important cities of this new formation. The existence of the suburbs ensures new areas for the construction sector to spread out easily. It could be expected that as a city having the highest level of the migrant population and full with suburb neighborhoods, İstanbul can be defined as the most important center of the gentrification. These policies might displace poor people from the neighborhoods those are planned to be practiced gentrification. The examples in Istanbul; Sulukule or Tarlabası are the most known ones of gentrification practices. The aim of these policies is to displace people and transform the population in these neighborhoods. With these practices the marginalized worker class who live in these neighborhoods loss their right on urban and TOKİ transfer this right to the middle class, with the private sector (Gülhan, 2011).

State encouraged the production of space through the regulations. Two periods came up with these regulations. The first period that state encourages the production of the built environment is between 1983 and 1987 (Penpecioglu, 2011). The regulations which gives the authorization of reconstruction to the municipality was given in this period and by the 80s the importance of the municipalities increased (Doğan, 2009). The project based municipal work is not the practices of today but the leaders of this practices are rely on this period. But the growth of construction sector in 2000s is different from the growth when the infrastructure investments increased 1982-8 since in 2000s the housing investments increase and the financial instruments like credits and securities developed (BSB, 2015, p: 280). On the other hand the construction policies of AKP period is not start with this period. So, recent developments in the construction sector did not start by the practices of current government.

But they rely on the neoliberal practices of the center right government of 1980s. During this period the increase of squatters especially in İstanbul creates the opportunity for municipalities for their urban policies (BSB, 2015, p: 281). Various policies implemented to prevent squatters. But after 1994 municipality elections, the municipality of İstanbul established KİPTAŞ, which is the premise of TOKİ to organize congregate housing projects (BSB, 2015, p: 281). In conclusion, neoliberal municipality work serves to urbanize the capital, focuses on the speculative demands of construction sector, decreases costs of labor and commoditizes the collective consumption services. This perspective which starts between 1984-89 with the municipalities which were governed by ANAP started to be implemented again during the end period of SHP government in İstanbul and by these policies while the share of personnel expense decrease to 30% from 35.5% in 1994, the share of buying goods and services from outside and the infrastructure investments done by building contractors through tenders (Doğan, 2005, p: 80).

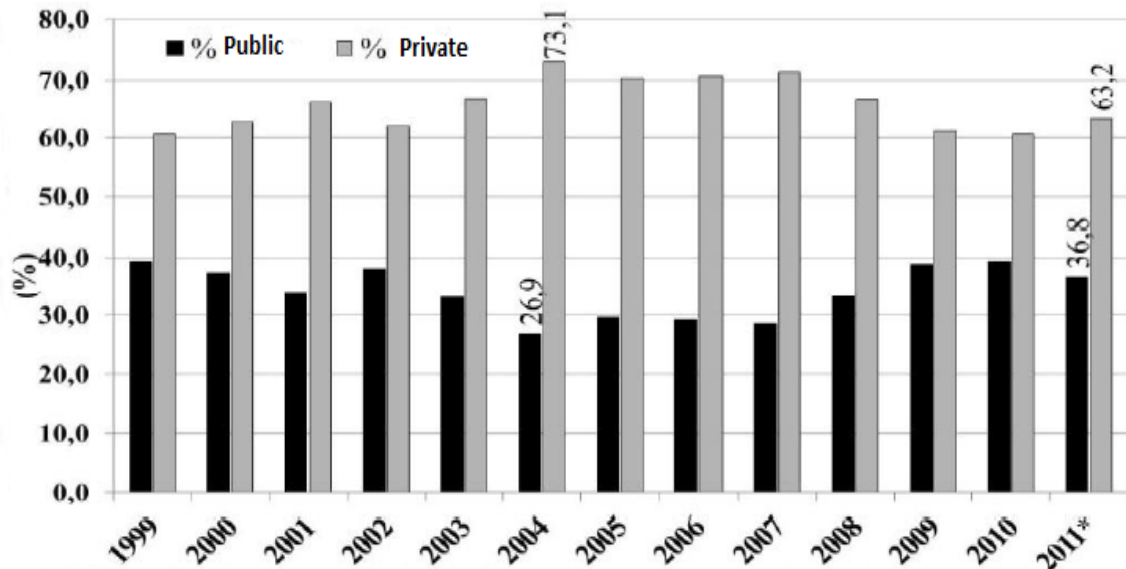
The second period of the encouragement of the production of the built environment, which is still continuing is the AKP period. In this period state made 198 legal arrangements those encourage the production of the urban built environment (Penpecioğlu, 2011). And TOKİ emerges with its new wide authorizations as a state institution. As well as the public investments on the construction sector private investments constitute the significant part of these investments. The first graph below shows the growth speed of GDP and construction sector investments between 1988 and 2010. And the second one shows the share of the public and private investments to the construction sector between 1999 and 2011 (Eşkinat, R. and Tepecik, F. 2012, p: 31).

Figure 5: The Growth Speed and the Total Construction Investments during the Period of 1988-2010



Source: (Kaya, et al. 2013, *Ekonomik Büyümede İnşaat Sektörünün Rolü: Türkiye Örneği (1987-2010)*).⁶

Figure 6: Public and Private Investments on Construction Sector: 1999-2011



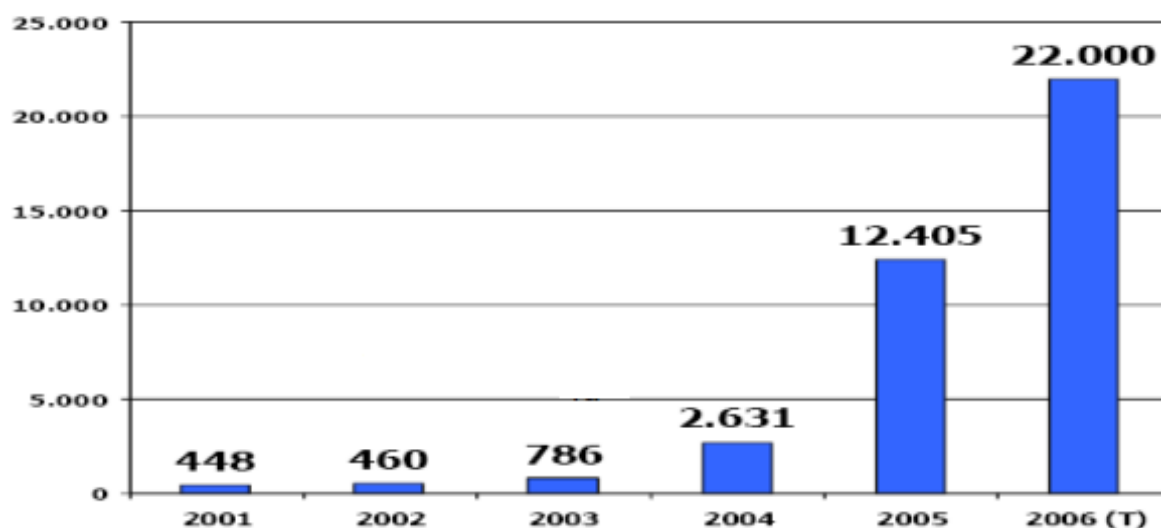
source : <http://yapiveri.com/BilgiArivi/ozel-sektor-ve-kamu-sektoru-insaat-yatirimleri-donemlik-1210.html>

⁶ Eşkinat, R. And Tepecik, F. (2012). "İnşaat Sektörüne Küresel Bakış" Afyon Kocatepe Üniversitesi, *İİBF Dergisi*, p: 31

While the authorizations of TOKİ increased, the public control on this establishment was weakened even it is included in the Public Tender Law. Public Tender Law that was enacted in 2002 determines the principles of the establishments those are subjected to the public control or which uses the public sources.⁷ Although TOKİ is included in the Public Tender Law, the congregate housing projects are included in the exceptions of this law (Ateş, 2010). These projects include maximum 500-1000 apartments with the claim of meeting the house requirements of many families (Mortgage Bankası, 2010). Currently these projects are identified with the gentrification practices of TOKİ and KİPTAŞ. The projects carried out in the shantytowns to transform these areas into the congregate housing areas are the examples of these practices. The weakening of the control on these projects of TOKİ because of the exclusion from the Public Tender Law is an obstacle for transparency of the activities of TOKİ. With the exclusion of TOKİ from the control of Court of Auditors it became an autonomous institution with a high budget (Mukul and Sarı, 2015, p: 913).

Furthermore with the legal arrangement in 2004, the state institution, TOKİ taking over the public lands and properties, possess a significant proportion of land stock and has special authorizations to dispossess the private lands (Çavuşoğlu, 2011). Today the sign of TOKİ could be seen in most of the urban project in cities of Turkey. This institution has almost a monopoly power in the construction sector. Also it possessed the authorization of the credit facility according to the Mortgage law (Çavuşoğlu, 2011). Housing production is articulate to the financial system with this authorization of TOKİ. The relation between the housing production and the production costs disappeared and housing sector is opened to financial speculation via urban land rent (Gülhan, 2011). It is possible for the savings of households to be articulated to the financial system through credits or securities via TOKİ.

⁷ TBMM, Law Number: 4734, source available: <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/kanunlar/k4734.html> Access: December, 2015

Figure 7: Balances of the Mortgage Loans (Million TL)

Source: Aykut Demiray, the 3rd conference about mortgage loans

The increasing capacity of mortgage loans might increase the demand and prices in the real estate sector. According to Knight Frank Global House Price Index, Turkey has the fastest rising in house prices.

Figure 8: Knight Frank Global House Price Index in 2015

Knight Frank Global House Price Index, Q3 2015

Ranked by annual % change

Rank	Country	12-month % change (Q3 2014-Q3 2015)	6-month % change (Q1 2015-Q3 2015)	3-month % change (Q2 2015-Q3 2015)	Latest data if not Q3
1	Turkey	18.9%	10.5%	5.1%	Q2
2	Hong Kong	16.7%	5.5%	1.9%	
3	New Zealand	12.6%	6.3%	3.6%	
4	Sweden	11.1%	7.7%	3.7%	
5	Luxembourg	10.1%	1.0%	0.1%	Q2
6	Australia	9.8%	6.3%	4.7%	Q2
7	Hungary	9.5%	4.2%	1.1%	Q1
8	Estonia	9.1%	-2.8%	-3.9%	
9	Ireland	8.9%	5.8%	4.5%	
10	Kazakhstan	8.7%	3.5%	4.9%	

Source: http://www.theguardian.com/money/2015/dec/01/turkey-tops-global-house-price-index-knight-frank?CMP=share_btn_tw

And according to the figures of the analysis of the Constructors Union of Turkey, in April 2012 (p: 13), the housing price index in March 2012 increase 1.28% according to the previous month, this index increase 11.62% according to the same period of the previous year and it increase 19.10% according to the figures of January 2010, the beginning of this index. The growth of the construction sector also affects the economic indicators positively. The share of the employment in this sector in the total employment is increasing. According to the statistics of 2013, December the share of construction sector in total employment is 6,9%.

Table 4: The Share of the Construction Sector Employment in Total Non-farm Employment

Years	Non-Farm Employment/Person	Construction Sector/Person	Construction Sector/ Non-Farm Employment
2005	15.553.000	1.171.000	7.53%
2006	15.241.000	1.189.000	7.80%
2007	15.558.000	1.224.000	7.85%
2008	15.959.000	1.125.000	7.00%
2009	16.324.000	1.297.000	7.94%
2010	17.082.000	1.442.000	8.44%
2011	18.079.000	1.512.000	8.36%
2012	19.080.000	1.647.000	8.63%
2013	19.755.000	1.753.000	8.87%

Source: Households labor force statistics, TUIK (The report of construction sector, Intes, 2014)

While a significant level of GDP growth was provided from the growth of construction sector, this sector also provides an area of employment. The table above shows the share of construction sector in non-farm employment. The share of construction sector is 7.53% with 1,171,000 employees in 2005 increases 8.87% with 1,753,000 employees in 2013. In most of the years the share of construction sector employment in non-farm employment increases. This characteristic of the construction sector might make it attractive for the policy makers. Because of this, policy makers target to decrease the unemployment temporarily and periodically (Balaban, 2011).

As more people are employed year by year in construction sector it includes significant number of people so the conditions in construction sector affect a significant part of the total labor force. Beside the flexibility and insecurity issues in labor markets, one of the most important problems of this sector is the security, as it is mentioned above. According to the statistics of the Social Security Institution the share of the construction sector in total deadly accidents is average 30.5% which is five times of the share of the construction sector in total employment share (Gürcanlı, 2011, p: 69). On the other hand the statistics of the Social Security Institution includes only registered work accidents. But also unregistered work accidents happen and they increase the real number of work accident. The 2014 report of DİSK explains that only a work accident is shown from 10 work accidents in the report Social Security Institution. The same report mentions that the number of the work accidents of TUIK is 9,5 times of the numbers of the Social Security Institution statistics (DİSK-AR, 2014). It could be understood from these figures that while informalization is increasing through the flexible labor markets and subcontractor practices it makes harder to observe the situation of labor. By this situation the regulations of the conditions of workers are left to the employers. In such a situation the working conditions could be shaped by arbitrary practices, according to the interests of the employer.

3.2 The Implications of the Neoliberal Policies to the Construction Workers

This study was conducted in Istanbul between June and October 2015 and the findings of the field research were analyzed and reported in December 2015. Two different construction areas are the fields of this study. The first field is in Bahçeşehir in a project of KİPTAŞ. And the other construction area is in Ataşehir, a project of TOKİ. Bahçeşehir and Ataşehir are two areas where the prices of real estates are increasing rapidly and where TOKİ or KİPTAŞ organize projects with the subcontractor companies by revenue sharing model that means to organize projects by the partners from private sector on the lands which acquired without charge (Deneç, 2014, p: 67).

In Bahçeşehir the field of study is a project of KİPTAŞ. KİPTAŞ is an establishment that is affiliated to the municipality of Istanbul. This project includes five different subcontractor companies. Interviews with workers were done in one of the construction areas of one of the companies of this project are named as X Company in this study. The number of workers working in this area was approximately 60. In this field 10 in-depth interviews and 2 focus group interviews were made.

The second construction area in Ataşehir is different from the first project. While the second area includes the 54-floor residence it also includes shopping mall, offices for businesses and the buildings for financial establishments. This field is an area that includes all components of the neoliberal era. Ataşehir is a district where one can see “new” urbanization intensively.

The field of study is one of the biggest projects in Ataşehir and also in Istanbul. So there are huge construction areas of this project. On the other hand this study in Ataşehir was done in the place where the workers stay in construction area. So this situation provided the chance to see the shelter conditions of the workers too.

The project in Ataşehir was organized by TOKİ. Subcontractor companies also operate it. The interviews were made with the workers of the residence construction in this project. The name of the company in the second part of the field study is named as Y Company. 24 in-depth interviews and a focus group interview were made in this part of field.

Since KİPTAŞ and TOKİ are important actors of the gentrification practices they would provide an appropriate field to study. While KİPTAŞ organizes congregate housing projects in İstanbul, TOKİ organizes these projects throughout Turkey. Another reason that makes these establishments significant is that they are public institutions those have high budgets. This situation makes these institutions the most influential actors in the construction sector.

In construction sector insecurity is growing up and on the other hand there are a lot of obstacles on the struggle to overcome insecurity. However in the AKP period Turkish economic growth strategy is built on construction sector. There has been a high level of growth in construction sector by neoliberal policies during AKP government. Therefore construction sector is a field reflecting the effects of the neoliberal policies. One of the administrators of the union of the construction workers (İnşaat-İş), Serdar Ben, expresses this situation by this sentence: “Construction sector is like a prototype of the neoliberal policies.”⁸

Before the interviews with construction workers, the first interview was made in the union of construction workers (İnşaat-İş). Serdar Ben who is one of the administrators of İnşaat-İş remarked the demands of construction workers. After the interview with Serdar Ben the observations were made in the field.

In the project of KİPTAŞ the construction supervisor welcomed this study with pleasure but after he learnt the context of the study he was worried and asked that if the study

⁸ 1st interview in the union of the construction workers (İnşaat-İş), 11 September 2015

would be a problem for them in the future. Because of this anxiety he hesitated to do this study in the beginning.

Later in the second part of the field in Ataşehir, Istanbul, officers or managers of the projects do not approach positively about this study because of the anxiety of showing the construction area and negative conditions there. An officer says that in the office of a construction of TOKI:

“If you will study here we need to check your study after you finish it. You should not use the name of the company. All of us against injustices but sometimes we could not do anything in real life. You should not use negative expressions about the company in your study if you will study here”.⁹

The manager of the project did not accept the study in that construction. His reason for not to accept the study was that there were not sufficient number of workers in that construction, for this study. This reason could be right; on the other hand this attitude also could be caused by the anxiety about the study. Then the study continued by the direct communication with workers in another construction in that project.

3.2.1 The Proliferation of the Subcontracting Networks

Subcontracting is one of the most important problems in the construction sector. While this system leads to decrease of costs of production it also divides the workers. Although there are criteria of subcontracting determined by the law these criteria do not meet by the employers. Every work could be subcontracted to another company by the parent companies. At this point the objection of the İnşaat-İş appears. The administrator of the İnşaat-İş, Serdar Ben says:

⁹ A dialog with an officer of one of the subcontractor companies while trying to organize a study, in Ataşehir, 23 October 2015

“A company could subcontract a work for the requirement of technological specialty and could not be done by the parent company according to the labor law. But we could see subcontractor in every level of work. Companies usually subcontract their own work. They consider only the costs.”¹⁰

As a result of this tendency, subcontractor networks became widespread and complex. During the İnşaat-İş interview there was a meeting, which shows this situation purely. A group of workers those could not get wages committed by their employer argued what could they do to get their wages. After the officer of the union asked workers the name of parent company they could not remember the name of it. They were the third level subcontracted workers. Thus a complexity about payer appears because of subcontractor networks. On the other hand it could be said for the examples such as TOKİ and KİPTAŞ that the responsibility of state about the problems in this sector is disappeared by subcontracting the work.

The ambiguity about the employer was seen in the field also. One interviewer, whose company works for the Y Company, answers the question about the company that he works: “I guess I work for the parent company”¹¹. But the company that he works for is not the parent company. It is a subcontractor of another subcontractor.

Another dimension that affects this employer perception is the kinship between employer and workers. Some of the workers work with their relatives and because of this tie they do not question the employer or other problems generally. Because workers those work with their relatives perceive their relative as the employer. So they do not inquiry anything.

¹⁰ 1st interview in İnşaat-İş, 11 September 2015

¹¹ 19th interview in Y Company in Ataşehir, 24 October 2015

“We come to work with our relatives. We do not have any concern on anything. If we get our payments 3 or 5 months later it is not a big problem for us. We are relatives in the end.”¹²

So the subcontractor system constitutes a barrier between the workers and the parent company. While they reduce the cost by this system also they do not face with the workers. Employers convince workers for their conditions through subcontractors without facing with workers about any problem. Many of them do not know their employer or from whom could they ask for their demands. The complexity of the subcontractor networks and the informal relations between subcontractors and workers brings this situation. Also the layers of the subcontractors thicken the wall between the employers and the workers.

Another dimension of the subcontracting is the ambiguity that originates from the flexibility of labor and subcontract system. These characteristics of labor affect the consciousness of workers. The perception about labor process becomes blurred. Ben expresses this situation:

“By subcontractor networks, workers see themselves as semi employee, semi unemployed and semi employer. This perception eradicates the motivation of workers to organize. For example a parent company gives the job by contract to workers. The workers become subcontractor until they fulfill the job. After they fulfill the job they might go to their homeland and they become unemployed. So to be organized become harder for construction workers.”¹³

Subcontractor system damages the consciousness of the workers. While it creates ambiguity about the work relations, it also causes the decomposition of workers. The complex labor-employer relations are a very common characteristic in construction sector. It could be

¹² 11th interview in X Company in Bahçeşehir, 14 October 2015

¹³ 1st interview in İnşaat-İş, 11 September 2015

said that although the employer is actually the company, which is on the top of subcontractors, they get lost among the subcontractors. And also it becomes insignificant for the workers. Workers only accept their subcontractors as employers. Ben mentions that by an example: If a worker could not get his wage he could demand his wage from the parent company. But many of the workers are not aware of this right. In fact many of them do not recognize their parent company.

A worker explains the subcontractor system with an analogy of thigh:

“Think about a thigh. All of the subcontractors bite it. Then the bone is left to the workers”¹⁴

3.2.2 Insecurity of Construction Workers

Security is the most significant problem in constructions. According to İnşaat-İş union, everyday 2 people die because of work accidents. Therefore the first issue that should be considered is work accidents in construction areas. Because many time these accidents have no return. On the other hand the sanctions of the accidents are not deterrent. The situation in the field shows that the security problem is under the responsibility of workers. The answers about work security are almost the same. They are all about “helmet, shoes, and safety belt”.

“Security precautions are taken. Helmet, protector shoes... Controls are done. They sometimes walk around the construction area.” (Focus group-3)¹⁵

Even if these precautions are sufficient for the protection of workers from the accidents, the most important aspect of this process is the control of the security. The union of construction workers mentions the control of the work security is not done rigorously. Although work security education is given in some construction areas the precautions are not sufficient. In the field while some workers mentions about the controls of security

¹⁴ 1st focus group interview in X Company, 13 October 2015

¹⁵ 3rd focus group interview in Y Company, 25 October 2015

precautions, the number of workers who mentions a constant control is lower. One reason of different responses of the workers could be that the work security specialists could not control the whole construction area as 13rd interviewer express:

“There are a lot of workers in this construction. Work security specialists could not control all of them.”(13rd interviewer)¹⁶

A worker who started to work 8 days before the interview says:

“We take our precautions by ourselves. We were already educated about work security before. They control us. I have not seen any kind of control for 8 days. Our friends say that the controls are done time to time” (18th interviewer)¹⁷

One of the recent examples for this problem happened in the construction of the new stadium of Beşiktaş sport club, in İstanbul. A construction worker has died after he fell down from the scaffolding in 20.01.2016. The sport club declared that this accident happened since the worker did not fasten his belt.¹⁸ Although according to labor law the security precautions must be taken and controlled by the employers, the sport club sees the security precautions as the responsibility of the workers in this case. Another accident happened in Uşak in 23.01.2016. After the falling of the scaffolding, a worker could survive by hanging off the ceiling for 4 hours¹⁹. These cases also show the insufficiency of the control of the security precautions.

¹⁶ 13th interview in X Company, 14 October 2015

¹⁷ 18th interview in Y Company, 24 October 2015

¹⁸ T24, *Vodafone Arena İnşaatında İskeleden Düşen Bir İşçi Hayatını Kaybetti*, (20.01.2016). source available: <http://t24.com.tr/haber/vodafone-arena-insaatinda-iskeleden-dusen-bir-isci-hayatini-kaybetti,324902>, Access: January, 2016

¹⁹ T24, *İnşaat İskelesinin Çökmesi Sonucu 20 Metre Yükseklikte, 4 Saat Hayata Tutunan İşçi Kurtarıldı*, (23.01.2016). source available: <http://t24.com.tr/haber/insaat-iskelesinin-cokmesi-sonucu-eksi-6-derece-sogukta-20-metre-yuksekte-4-saat-hayata-tutunan-isci-kurtarildi,325333>, Access: January, 2016

Work security practices and the control of them are seen in the construction areas according to the expressions of the workers. But the main problem is how it is done and if it is really sufficient.

“I see a control in 3 months”. (22nd interviewer)²⁰

“Controls are done sometimes. I see controls 5 or 6 times in 9 months” (34th interviewer)²¹

In such situation a worker should practice his own security precautions. But when the main purpose is to finish the work as soon as possible, security precautions could be neglected.

“Construction workers are uneducated and do not have a security culture. Employers blame workers for not to practice security requirements. But for example if a worker does not put his helmet dismiss him! Then nobody could break this rule. Also if there is a dangerous work a worker have the right of not to do this work. Employer could not dismiss because of this reason. But due to the subcontractor want continue to work these rights never practiced.”²²

While there is a repression on workers to finish the work as fast as possible it is hard to expect that to take the precautions completely. These precautions might make workers uncomfortable while they are working so the time that workers finish a work could lengthen.

“The company warns about the necessary precautions. Some precautions could be obstructive about working. There is not a rigorous control”²³ (3rd interviewer).

²⁰ 22nd interview in Y Company, 24 October 2015

²¹ 34th interview in Y Company, 25 October 2015

²² 1st interview in İnşaat-İş, 11 September 2015

²³ 3rd interview in X Company , 7 October 2015

Before the interviews with the workers of Y Company, a dialog with the guard of another construction area in that project summarized the situation exactly:

“Most of workers come from East. And most of them are uneducated. The employers put pressure them to finish the work as fast as possible. But sometimes the security precautions obstruct workers to work fast. So workers do not consider security”

The subcontractor system increases the pressure on workers to finish the work fast.

“You work very much for subcontractor. You have to gain much for subcontractor for not to make loss. If you work for the parent company, they want clean work but you work less. But in subcontractor they do not want a clean work. They want workers to finish the work quickly”.²⁴

So the focus of workers is not the work security but finishing the work quickly. This is also another problem but security controls have to be done more carefully in these conditions. Ben says that by this weak control practices the work security specialist only impose sanctions to the workers for the violations like not putting helmet on. He also mentions that it is impossible to be protected from the accidents by putting helmet in the constructions, by giving examples from the work accidents in constructions. The deaths in constructions happen because of the accidents like falls from the heights or electrical fault. Since workers might work in high places in constructions there should be sufficient precautions in order to prevent the fall of workers. On the other hand the accidents caused by electrical fault have a significant share in total work accidents. For example electrical current caused one of the recent work accidents in a construction in Kocaeli. A worker injured after touching an open

²⁴ 20th interview in Y Company, 24 October 2015

cable²⁵. The table below shows the shares of the types of work accidents in total work accidents in constructions, in Turkey. The figures shows that a significant number of accidents could not be prevent by the widespread security precautions.

Table 5: The Number and the Share of the Types of Work Accidents

No.	Main Groups Accident Type	Death		Injury		Total	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1	Falls	1028	42,9	934	32,9	1962	37,4
2	Falling Objects	251	10,5	278	9,8	529	10,1
3	Object Crashes	10	0,4	211	7,4	221	4,2
4	Collapse on the Sides of Excavations	138	5,8	53	1,9	191	3,6
5	Structural Collapses	167	7	73	2,6	240	4,6
6	Electrical Faults	293	12,2	80	2,8	373	7,1
7	Explosive Material	50	0,2	82	2,9	132	2,5
8	Building Machine Accidents	206	8,6	97	3,4	303	5,8
9	Organ Caught in a Machine	2	0	804	28,3	806	15,3
10	Getting Hit by Tools	0	0	42	1,5	42	0,8
11	Injuries Caused by Sharp Tools/Objects	0	0	75	2,6	75	1,4
12	Traffic Accidents in the Construction Area	168	7	38	1,3	206	3,9
13	Others	85	3,5	74	2,6	159	3
	Total	2398	100	2841	100	5239	100

Source:http://www.imo.org.tr/resimler/dosya_ekler/2aaf8683619acde_ek.pdf?dergi=150

Although these figures shows that all dangers in the work environment should be considered while the security precautions are taken in the construction areas, it could be seen in construction areas that the security precautions are limited with the practices of workers.

²⁵ Source: Cihan News Agency, *Elektrik Akımına Kapılan İşçi Yaralandı*, (26.11.2015). source available: <https://www.cihan.com.tr/tr/insaatta-is-kazasi-elektrik-akimina-kapilan-isci-yaralandi-1889642.html>, Access: November, 2015

“The security precautions are generally taken but they are not sufficient. For example, there are barriers at some spaces to prevent falls but some of the spaces are without any protection”²⁶

The figures in the table above also show the significance of the control of all dangers in construction areas, not only the precautions of the workers individually. Due to the fact that the work security specialists are also working for those companies, it is unlikely for them to expect to interfere the work if there is an inappropriate situation in terms of work security. Many accidents in Turkey are caused by these reasons. One of the accidents happened lately in Torunlar case. A work accident happened which is caused by the crash of the elevator and 10 workers were died in Torun Center building in 2014. The demand of the İnşaat-İş union about this issue is to stop the activities of this company.

“After the work murder in Torunlar the licence of this company was not stopped. Its activities continued. Only job security specialists got arrested. But there was not any sanction for the employers. They blame job security specialist. But they are also workers who work for the employer. So it could have not been expected that workers prevent employers to do their business.”²⁷

On the other hand the continued judgment process is problematic in Torunlar case. Because the court did not allow to inquiry the officials of the Social Security institution those have responsibilities in that case according to the expert report (Bianet, 2015). People whose responsibilities were detected in that case were excluded from the inquiry. So there is not a sufficient investigation about the causes of this accident. While there were 3 detainees about

²⁶ 33rd interview in Y Company, 25 October 2015

²⁷ 1st interview in İnşaat-İş, 11 October 2015

this investigation they were also released and there is not any detainee because of this case²⁸. However the company continues its activities after this accident²⁹.

Also Soma mine disaster is another case that resulted with a similar result. Soma work accident is one of the most deadly work accidents in history. 301 miners were died in this disaster in 2014. One of the reasons of this disaster is the subcontractor practices. After 2002 the mine disasters happened in establishments where the practices those are based on cheap labor and against unionization exist according to the report of Turkish Engineers' and Architects' Association (TMMOB, 2014). Also the same report remarks that the increase of the speed of production tenfold by the contractor company might have been affected the physical structure of the field. These problems and insufficient controls contributed to the process which caused to this disaster. And there are criticisms to the Soma case judgment. Human Rights Watch pointed out that for a proper inquiry the responsibility of state should be considered³⁰. And the activities of the company continued in this case, too (Milliyet, 2014). There are same scenarios in both cases. Some people were arrested but the companies continue to operate. The subcontractor networks do not reveal the real responsibility of the cases such as Soma and Torunlar. Serdar Ben expresses the demand of the union:

“The license of the companies in which deadly work accidents happened must be stopped. But work security specialists who are the workers of the employer are arrested, in such cases. But the company continues to operate”³¹.

²⁸ Source: Evrensel, *Torunlar Center Davası Sanık İfadeleriyle Devam Ediyor*, source available: <http://www.evrensel.net/haber/114006/torunlar-center-davasi-sanik-ifadeleriyle-devam-ediyor>, Access: December, 2015

²⁹ Source: Evrensel, *Torun Center: Bir Kent Suçu Örneği*, (7.9.2014). source available: <http://www.evrensel.net/haber/91433/torun-center-bir-kent-sucu-ornegi> , Access: December, 2015

³⁰ Source: BBC, Arslan, R. *9 Soruda Soma Davası İddianamesi*, (15.04.2015). source available: http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/04/150415_soma_iddianame, Access: December, 2016

³¹ 1st interview in İnşaat-İş, 11 September 2015

Another issue is the health conditions of the places where workers stay in the construction area. Health of workers is one of the crucial problems in construction sector. Workers stay in construction areas until the work would finish. This problem is criticized in the context of housing right. Workers stay in crude places in the construction area and the unhealthy conditions causes health problems in long term.

“A construction company could make a place for workers to stay temporarily, easily. But they do not. The places workers reside have primitive conditions. Also these places must be out of the construction area. But workers stay in the construction areas in an unhealthy environment. The conditions of housing cause serious health problems in the long term.”³²

Although the field of this study is more developed it still has problems. First of all, as Ben says they are in the construction areas. There are prefabricated places in construction areas where workers stay. They include hot water and radiator. But according to the observations during the study and some workers’ speech there are some problems.

“Security is not bad but the main problem is health here. Foods are very bad. There is not any soap and any light in the toilets.”³³

“There are chinchies here. We reported this problem. They disinfected here once or twice. But there are still chinchies. We said again but they did not solve this problem”³⁴.

The environment is not clean enough. Grounds are dusty. Workers try to keep clean there by themselves but they could do that in a cursory way. Although the shelters of Y Company are more developed, bigger and seen cleaner than the shelters of X Company similar problems could be seen in both places.

³² 1st interview in İnşaat-İş, 11 September 2015

³³ 1st focus group interview in X Company, 13 October 2015

³⁴ 3rd focus group in Y Company, 25 October 2015

“There are problems about baths and toilets. They are not clean. They are not enough. When we wake up in the morning there is always a queue in the toilets. There are a lot of workers here. Baths and toilets do not meet the needs of workers here.”³⁵

Many workers do not consider these issues as significant but “health conditions” is crucial point in construction areas because of the effects of these conditions in the long term.

Although the unsecured conditions in the construction areas there are provisions about the security in the labor law. According to the labor law employer must take all precautions about occupational health and safety and the workers must fit these precautions (Aksoylu, 2015, p: 105). But in practice because of some obstacles this provision could not be implemented. The problems, which obstruct to take security precautions, are the informalization of labor, occupational insufficiency of construction workers, weakness of the control of building contractor and the rise of this sector with these problems (Aksoylu, 2015)

However the insecurity affects the wages as well. While there is a reduction in the wages, the widespread problem is the nonpayment of the wages. Delays are normalized. In many situation workers do not complain about delays of wages. Because they think wages are delayed in every company. Many of the workers are glad to be able to get their wages although the wages are not paid in time. Because according to the results of the field study all participants were migrants and almost every workers support the budget of their family. This responsibility might make getting wages more important for workers, although the delays.

Ben remarks that most of the folders those come to the union is about the nonpayment of wages. So the activities of the union are about the unpaid wages generally. On the other hand it is observed that the workers of parent companies are more satisfied with their wages. But while the layers of subcontractor increase the level of satisfaction decrease.

³⁵ 33rd interview in Y Company, 25 October 2015

“If we were the workers of the subcontractor we could be faced with problems but since we are the staffs of the company there is not any problem”³⁶.

The 3rd Interviewer explains this situation with the subcontractor relationship. But as it is mentioned above, the company he works for is also a subcontractor. But it is the first party subcontractor. And it also has other subcontractors.

“Construction workers could not get their wages. Aside from security, shelter condition, foods etc. they could not get their net wages”³⁷

“Wages are delayed. Sometimes we could not get our payments for 2-3 months”³⁸

Although the company perceived as the parent company is also subcontractor, the situation changes in one-step down. So it could be said that while the “wall” between worker and employer thicken the conditions of workers are changing also according to subcontractor level. According to the findings of this study, workers of the parent company are more satisfied with their wages but in subcontractors problems about wages are commonly observed. Many workers of subcontractors see this situation as “normal”. They do not complain about this issue. Delays become a characteristic of the system for them. One of the interviewers those work in Y Company compares the company with the other companies he worked before:

“Sometimes I could not get my wage before. But here delays are a general situation. This happens everywhere. But here it happens more than the others.”³⁹

³⁶ 3rd interview in X Company, 7 October 2015

³⁷ 1st interview in İnşaat-İş, 11 October 2015

³⁸ 20th interview in Y Company, 24 October 2015

³⁹ 24th interview in Y Company, 24 October 2015

The problem is not the delays itself for the interviewer but the relatively more delays of the wages are problems for him. Because he believes that there is not any company that pays wages on time. He experienced delays in his old experiences, too.

“Wages could be delayed. We can solve this mutually. The rule is already this in the construction sector!”⁴⁰

Many workers do nothing when they face such a situation. They accept this situation and just wait the wage and hope to get the wage.

“Once I could not get my money from the employer. I wait for a while but then I understand he would not pay me my money. I have never got my money from him”⁴¹.

On the other hand some workers say they demand their money from the employer when they could not get wages. They also normalize the delays in construction sector but if there is such a situation they show reactions to get their money.

“Wages are delayed but you get your wage at the end by smashing in. Sometimes we could not get our money then we stopped the work and go to the employer then smashed in there and finally we get our money. Maybe they do not pay wages in 3 months but we get our money by smashing in”.⁴²

3.2.3 Decomposition of Workers

While neoliberal policies violate the rights of workers, they obstruct workers to struggle for their rights. Especially in construction sector both of them are seen in the most serious form. The structural characteristics and the neoliberal growth of this sector lead to this result. One of the most important characteristics of this sector is the subcontractor system. It

⁴⁰ 28th interview in Y Company, 25 October 2015

⁴¹ 1st focus group interview in X Company, 13 October 2015

⁴² 33rd interview in Y Company, 25 October 2015

has different dimensions those affect collective action negatively. Collective actions, which include all workers in a construction, became harder under these conditions. The first dimension is flexibility and the unsecured working conditions. Workers do not react to any problems because of the fear of losing their job. This situation damages to the motivation of organization to demand the rights. A worker explains this situation:

“A worker of subcontractor could not demand anything. If he goes to court it takes too long. There is no point in going court”.⁴³

This sentence implies that the workers feel themselves without protection. By subcontracting system the responsibility of parent company disappeared they work in unsecured conditions for subcontractor. However subcontracted workers do not see law as a protection. So there is not any protection according to their perception. The only purpose of workers is seen as to continue to work and make money to live.

Another dimension of subcontractor is the separation of the workers temporally and spatially. There is a division of labor in constructions. Subcontractors take the work and every of them do their own work. And their teams work separately from each other. Their communication is weak and their labor process could carry different characteristics. So their feelings could not be same at the same time. This system creates different units those act with different motivations and times.

“When workers could not get their wages they react to this situation collectively. But every team organizes in itself. They make decision and they stop working. They say ‘if we could not get our money we would not leave the construction area’”. (Focus group 3)⁴⁴

⁴³ 1st focus group interview in X Company, 13 October 2015

⁴⁴ 3rd focus group interview in Y Company, 25 October 2015

In addition to these points another issue that might affect the separation of workers is the identity issues. Workers who are from different cities of Turkey and belong to different identities work together. According to observations in the field although many of the workers do not face with discriminatory approaches there are some examples of the separation because of identity.

“There are some racist workers. We do not contact them and we keep the distance with them. We do not speak with them”⁴⁵

A worker explains his experience after the Ankara massacre.

“Sometimes we meet with discrimination. For example after Ankara massacre some workers passed us by laughing”⁴⁶

Some workers mention the problem as “speaking Kurdish”. They see negative reactions when they speak Kurdish.

“We see discrimination sometimes. But the main problem is Kurdish language. Sometimes we understand the discomfort while we are speaking Kurdish. They do not say anything but they turn back and go away.”⁴⁷

Some workers say that there is not discrimination among workers but they could see it from employers. One of the workers feels that his identity is the reason why he lost his job.

“I worked in Ankara before. I am from Van. While I was working there I argue with another person because of any reason. Then it became a politic argument. Then I was dismissed. Our employer was from Kayseri”⁴⁸.

⁴⁵ 24th interview in Y Company, 24 October 2015

⁴⁶ 22nd interview in Y Company, 24 October 2015

⁴⁷ 23rd interview in Y Company, 24 October 2015

⁴⁸ 21st interview in Y Company, 24 October 2015

Differently from these workers another Kurdish worker defines the discrimination with another dimension:

“We meet with discrimination. Working class is always the last class in the society. There is class discrimination in the society”⁴⁹.

However the worsening working conditions could make workers closer. Some workers say that:

“We gain money to live on, from the same place in the same conditions. There is not any discrimination between us. We are from different cities but we work together.”⁵⁰

So the worsening conditions could remove the divisions among workers. On the other hand according to observations of this study although discrimination is not so common problem among workers it still could be seen as one of the reasons of separation of workers.

3.2.4 Prospects for the Organization of Labor in Turkey

While a lot of workers complain about some problems of the sector, many of them do not react to this situation and continue to work in the precarious conditions. Many workers do not react because of the threat of being dismissed. This process continues as 28th interviewer explains. He mentions that wages are delayed and they solve this situation mutually. According to him this is the rule of the construction sector.

The workers of this sector constitute the most unorganized workers and the characteristics of this sector make struggle of labor harder. The results of the neoliberal policies those are seen as unsecured conditions and flexible working are the causes of this situation. In this context subcontracting constitute an important problem for workers because of its effects to intensifying these conditions. One of the effects of these conditions is the

⁴⁹ 31st interview in Y Company, 25 October 2015

⁵⁰ Focus group 1 in X Company, 13 October 2015

negative effect on organization of workers. To construct a collectivity becomes harder for workers because of working short-term jobs. In construction sector there is not a permanent working process. As a result of these collective contracts become impossible because of the impermanent working conditions of workers. In this context the works of state are relatively guaranteed. But subcontractor system is becoming widespread in state sector too.

“In construction sector union is like an association. We could not make a collective bargaining because of the flexible working. Workers could not work permanently. Because of this we define ourselves as a street movement. And we also struggle for our union rights.”⁵¹

So because of the division of the worker and impermanent working conditions, organization of labor becomes harder in the construction sector than the other sectors. Ben explains this problem by his own experience about organization:

“I worked in textile sector before. I thought that the weakest organization of workers exists in this sector. But there is a relatively easy atmosphere in this sector because although there are few workers there is the chance to work together for these workers. There is not the opportunity to work together in construction sector. And this aspect of this sector obstructs organization of the construction workers.”⁵²

Another reason is the kinship relations. This relation between worker and employer is also an obstacle for contesting to working conditions or other problems. Their relation with the employer is shaped according to the family ties. So the rights could become more flexible. As the 11st interviewer says that they do not concern any situations. They are not being problematic about anything because they work for their relatives.

⁵¹ 1st interview in İnşaat-İş, 11 September 2015

⁵² 1st interview in İnşaat-İş, 11 September 2015

On the other hand some reactions are seen as it is mentioned above. But it is hard to see collective actions which include significant number of workers. Some of the workers say they are organized and stop working. But these organizations just include workers of subcontractor separately. All workers do not act together. Because it is perceived that they do not face with the same situations.

“The employer always delays the wage. In the end workers organize and stop working. Then they could get the money.”⁵³

“We boycotted against the delay of wages once. One of our friends attempted to suicide. The cops came. Then the other teams could not work.”⁵⁴

As the workers say the reactions are experienced in the base of team. There is not a collective action such that includes every workers of a construction. They work for different companies and many times complain of the workers do not develop simultaneously. This situation is an obstacle for the collective actions of workers. Every workers carry different anxieties. For example while a worker complain about the nonpayment of wage another worker could try to sustain his current wage because of the differences of the conditions of their firms.

The most seen method of the workers actions is to stop working and demanding their money. In such a situation workers organize by themselves. Union struggle is very weak in this sector. Workers do not see union as an apparatus for their working life. Many of them work under the condition that employers impose. Some of them stop working for their demands. But in the situations those were cited by workers, the demand of them is their wages. There is not any reaction about work security or another problem. The common complain that observed among the interviewers was about their wages. It could be understood

⁵³ 20th interview in Y Company, 24 October 2015

⁵⁴ 21th interview in Y Company, 24 October 2015

that the life conditions and the flexible working conditions of workers makes their wages the first concern. Security became relatively unimportant. And also this situation would create the tendency of thinking individually for workers.

Although these unorganized actions the chairman of the first branch of Yol-İş in İstanbul, Ahmet Uçar expresses that⁵⁵, by the regulation in the labor law workers could be a member of a union by online registration and this situation led to an increase in the number of unionized workers. But he mentions that this increase is virtual and do not give the chance of collective contract. Also according to him another problem is the subcontracting. Workers could not act together even though they are unionized because of the subcontracting system since they formally work in different sectors in this system. As the workers could organize in different unions because of the subcontractor companies are registered to different sectors, the organization of construction workers is divided.

On the other hand the separation of workers through subcontracting system divides the reactions of the workers because the problems of the workers do not develop simultaneously. As the subcontractor companies divides the work to several different companies, each worker facing with different conditions depending on the standards of the company they are working for.

“If the subcontractor has money he supply from his pocket. But if he does not have when he could not get his money from the parent company, he could not pay the money to the workers. Everybody does not experience the difficulties at the same time.” (Focus group 3)⁵⁶

Another obstacle for unionization is the considerations of many workers about organizing for their rights. The chairman of İnşaat-İş says that some worker see the union as an illegal foundation. So they do not look at unions positively. This situation is also observed

⁵⁵ The chairman of the Yol İş first branch of İstanbul, 7 January 2016

⁵⁶ 3rd focus group interview in Y Company, 25 October 2015

in the field. The reaction of one of the workers in the first focus group shows his negative perception about organization:

“We do not organize. We are against such things”⁵⁷

However the chairman of İnşaat-İş Mustafa Adnan Akyol⁵⁸ says that they could change this perspective of workers to whom they could reach. According to him the main problem is to reach the workers in a way that they could embrace the union and the hierarchical structures of many unions obstruct this feeling. But if they see someone among them in the union this situation makes sense of belonging. Because the workers know their problems but they do not know the ways to overcome these problems. These ways should be explained in a way which the workers could admit them. He criticizes bureaucratic structure of unions. He says that their all administrators are construction workers and all unions should belong to workers. This is one of the rules of İnşaat-İş. On the other hand they also developed a strategy to eliminate the division between construction workers and the informalization of labor market as well. To eliminate these obstacles for unionization İnşaat-İş developed de facto membership to the union for the workers who work in construction sector without looking at their registration. Akyol says that if a worker works in construction sector they admit him as a member of the union and by this practice the number of members is increasing.

This practice also leads to overcome the organization problem caused by the subcontracting. If subcontractor companies are registered in a different sector the workers of these companies could not be organized in labor organizations of construction sector. So, de facto membership practices could also be a solution for the problem of organization of labor, which is caused by the division of labor by subcontracting practices. Akyol expresses that

⁵⁷ 1st focus group interview in X Company, 13 October 2015

⁵⁸ The chairman of İnşaat İş, İstanbul, 8 January 2016

although to develop the struggle of labor it is necessary to work more, they could get favorable results by their strategies. They are actually continuing this process informally. So the pervade of informalization in labor market and division of labor through subcontracting might lead to the informalization of unionization as the İnşaat-İş example shows. As they could not do collective contract they identify themselves as a street movement.

Another problem is the impossibility of the permanent working in this sector. But Akyol says that this problem is also could be an advantage in some examples. If a worker worked in the activities of the union and gain consciousness about the struggle of labor in the past he could also struggle for his interests by himself even in another place. So this situation could become an opportunity for the dissemination of labor movement.

Although the neoliberal conditions obstruct the organization of labor there could still be strategies to overcome these obstacles. The most important result of these quests is the de-facto membership to overcome the obstacles for being a member of a union. On the other hand obstacles for collective contract might change the ground of struggle as İnşaat İş example shows. As they do not have the right to represent workers for collective contract they react to this situation through resistances in the construction areas or other work places. Also the impermanent jobs could be an opportunity to sustain the struggle in different places. It could be said that the obstacles could create the alternative strategies for the organization of labor.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Neoliberal policies affected different dimensions of the working life. As the labor lost many rights in the last three decades, the labor movement may face many difficulties as well. While neoliberal policies worsen the working conditions and life standards of labor by the flexible labor market, these policies may also be considered as obstacles on the organization of labor in a global scale. This situation was also experienced in Turkey with the 1980s, respectively with the 24th January decisions and corresponding military regime. While they served to transformation of the economy, the labor movement was oppressed dramatically with the implementations of the military government.

This transformation experienced in construction sector more than many sectors. As the statistics shows this sector is one of the locomotive sectors of this period and experienced a dramatic rise during this period in a global scale and also in Turkey. Since this rise experienced with the neoliberal practices, the growth of this sector deepened the problems experienced in this sector. And problems about organization make struggle harder for the interest of labor.

And the observations in the field show that the construction sector experiences all aspects of neoliberal policies. Insecurity is experienced with different dimensions in construction sector. The participants in this study generally got used to the situation in the sector. Although there are some complains about the sector they are mostly about the wages. They mostly do not consider the other dimensions of security as significant problems as wages. The neoliberal repression on the people in every aspect of life forced workers to accept these working conditions. Economical anxieties became a primary issue for workers.

Nevertheless the neoliberal policies do not mean only the loss of rights for worker but this system is also an assault to the substantial rights of workers. There are some regulations

in the labor law about rights of workers. But because of the unconsciousness of the workers and insufficient control mechanisms and sanctions, rights of workers are violated. In such an atmosphere some workers tend to participate union when they could not get their wages. And many of them is not a permanent member of the union as it is mentioned by the respective labor union. However Ben complained about that their struggle is seen only when there are deaths. It could be understood that while neoliberal policies weaken the tendency of unionization, also the existing union movement become invisible during this process.

On the other hand another observation of this study is that although unionization and the actions for demanding rights are weak; there might be a big potential for the struggle of labor rights in construction sector. Because some workers those participated to this study feel that there is nothing to lose and their rights are stolen. Also Akyol mentions that the nature of construction workers is appropriate for struggle but the problem is to organize them. One of the workers in the second focus group says:

“We have no money, nothing to lose. They have money. They fear of their lives”⁵⁹

These observations show that although the workers are segmented to different units by the flexible labour market the insecurity is the common characteristic for the workers in the neoliberal period. So while the neoliberal employment relations separate the labor, the increase of these practices and the worsening conditions in labor market leads workers to share a common destiny and integrate them in that sense.

However while the organization of labor was also damaged seriously by the legal or practical limitations some alternative ways for the labor movement to overcome neoliberal obstacles could be occurred. The interview with the chairman of the İnşaat İş shows this situation exactly. Although the neoliberal policies limited unionization significantly there are

⁵⁹ 2nd focus group interview in X Company, 13 October 2015

some opportunities to develop labor struggle in this period. Informalization of labor market could be reflected to the labor unions as “informalization of unionization”. At the same time the temporary characteristic of jobs in this sector could create an opportunity to disseminate the struggle. Since the workers started to work in different place after his current work finishes, this situation could be seen as a way to reach the workers in different places in construction sector to organize them.

In conclusion while this transformation of economy limited the rights of labor and the opportunities to struggle for these rights there are still alternative ways to overcome these limitations for struggle or this transformation could create new opportunities. In this context the worsening working conditions especially in construction sector could create the feeling of togetherness and sharing the same destiny although the different cultural and ideological orientation. As the neoliberal policies destroy the labor, the increase of the repression on the labor could create a common consciousness to overcome this repression. So although the labor movement is still weak in construction sector, the flexibilization of the labor market and the worsening of the working conditions make these alternative strategies of organization of labor a current issue.

The main contributions of this study to the existing literature are the arguments about organization of labor in neoliberal conditions. Because while the worsening working conditions and the increasing insecurity of labor are argued in the literature, it is necessary to think about the alternative strategies of labor in such situations.

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