

FOR WHOM THE PHONE RINGS: THE TURKISH CALL CENTER INDUSTRY
AND EXPERIENCE OF WORK IN MULTILINGUAL CALL CENTERS

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by
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Title: For Whom the Phone Rings: The Turkish Call Center Industry and Experience of Work in Multilingual Call Centers

This study scrutinizes the main features of the call center industry of Turkey and how the workers experience the work in multilingual call centers. The expansion of call centers is examined pertaining to the characteristics of workforce, the geographical distribution of centers, the relations with the state and public institutions, internationalization of services and the place of the Turkish call center industry in the world. Semi-structured interviews are selected as a research method in order to examine what kind of employment is being generated in these brand new workplaces, who works there, workers' skills, considerations of work, expectations and job satisfaction; in this sense interviews are conducted with workers from four different types of companies. Two different groups of workers are detected as immigrants and non-immigrants and it is suggested that different life experiences lead to different experiences of work. This study claims that contrary to widespread assumptions, even in relatively high-waged multilingual call centers, the generated employment is temporary and only those who have limited alternatives consider call centers as a job opportunity.

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Başlık: Telefonlar Kimin İçin Çalışıyor? Türkiye Çağrı Merkezi Endüstrisi ve Çok-Dilli Çağrı Merkezlerinde İşin Deneyimlenmesi

Bu çalışmada Türkiye çağrı merkezi endüstrisinin anahatları ve onun bir alt kolu olan çok-dilli çağrı merkezlerinde çalışanların işi deneyimleme biçimleri incelenmektedir. Çağrı merkezlerinin yaygınlaşması, işgücünün niteliklerine, merkezlerin coğrafi dağılımına, devletin ve kamu kuruluşlarının endüstri ile ilişkilerine, servislerin uluslararasılaşmasına ağırlık verilerek incelenmiş, Türkiye çağrı merkezi endüstrisinin dünyadaki yeri araştırılmıştır. Bu yeni işyerlerinde nasıl bir istihdam yaratıldığını, çalışma koşullarını, buralarda kimlerin çalıştığını, onların vasıfları, işe yaklaşımları, beklentileri ve iş tatminlerini tespit edebilmek için yarı-yapılandırılmış mülakat yöntemi seçilmiş, dört farklı tipteki şirketlerden işçilerle görüşülmüştür. Göçmen olanlar ve olmayanlar olarak iki farklı işçi grubu tespit edilmiştir. Çalışma, farklı hayat deneyimlerinin farklı iş deneyimlerine yol açtığını ve yaygın varsayımların aksine, görece yüksek maaşlı çok-dilli çağrı merkezlerinde bile geçici nitelikte bir istihdam yaratıldığını, ancak seçenekleri kısıtlı kimselerin çağrı merkezlerini bir iş fırsatı olarak gördüğünü iddia etmektedir.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on a unique working environment and those who are employed in there. The call center is a recent but huge social and economic phenomenon; it is frequently referred to as the most rapidly-growing employment generator in Europe. In the United States of America, millions of people are working in call centers and it is considered as a desired occupation by hundreds of thousands of fresh university graduates in developing countries. In this study, I will examine the Turkish call center industry which has been called as the “Hope of the Unemployed” by a national newspaper.¹ The newspaper gladly announced that employment in Turkish call centers would be doubled in the following five years. After almost a full decade of the establishment of call centers in Turkey, heralding the call center industry a job generator is frequent in newspapers, televisions and websites today. Journalistic accounts are very optimistic about this new area of employment: Call center work is promoted as a desirable occupation, an opportunity to work in a shiny office and get paid well and call center employees are presented as empowered, skilled and responsible knowledge workers by the industry’s supporters. This thesis questions this image in the case of a particular group of call center workers and lets bi- or multilingual call center workers talk about their job; it investigates how they

¹ *Sabah*, 17 November 2009. “İşsizlerin Umudu Çağrı Merkezleri” Available [online]: http://www.sabah.com.tr/Ekonomi/2009/11/17/issizlerin_umudu_cagri_merkezleri [15 December 2009].

experience the labor process in which their linguistic abilities are commodified and at the same time, their qualifications are undervalued.

Call centers can be defined as workstations where a group of trained people answer incoming calls (inbound), make outgoing calls (outbound) or both with the help of computer-telephone integration technology, generally in order to make sales, provide customer service, give technical support or any other specialized activity. The call center as a workstation looks like a typical office where workers spend their working days seated at their desks, usually organized as cubicles, wear headphones and interact with customers, surrounded by walls with signboards that say “Smile!” “What did you do for selling today?” “The client is the boss here.” However, when we move one step further from this physical outlook, call centers vary in size, types of call, workflows and purpose of calls. Taylor et al. state that despite the commonalities in the integration of telephone and computer technologies, work organization in this industry is not uniform and differences in “size, industrial sector, market conditions, complexity, and call cycle times, the nature of operations (inbound/outbound), the precise manner of technological integration, the effectiveness of representative organizations, and management styles, priorities and human resource practices”² directly affect the work organization and experience of the workers as well.

Apart from the inbound / outbound distinction, call centers can vary according to organizational types. Some call centers are parts of larger public or private organization while others are independent units. The formers are defined as in-house call centers, the latter as outsourced or “service supplier” call centers. Paul

² Phil Taylor, Gareth Mulvey, Jeff Hyman and Peter Bain, “Work Organization, Control and the Experience of Work in Call Centres”, *Work Employment and Society* 16, no.1 (March 2002), p. 134.

and Huws separate outsourced call centers as large and small centers; large outsourced call centers are often partly owned by large companies in the telecommunications, computer or banking sectors, while small outsourced call centers carry out work for private or public clients across a variety of sectors.³ In-house call centers are like any other departmental organization in the company. Large outsourced call centers are often established as “subsidiaries” to escape from regulations and trade union presence; not only with the same motivations, but also to reduce costs, focus on core activities, evade infrastructure costs, companies can contract out their call center to outsourcer companies.

Outsourcing call center activities can be made within national boundaries, a practice called *onshore*, or companies can make Service Level Agreement with outsourcer companies overseas, defined as *offshore*. Beyond any doubt, call center offshoring is directly related to capitalist globalization. Advances in information and communication technologies supply a “spatial fix”⁴ to reduce costs for transnational and multinational companies. Companies are able to relocate their service functions in countries faraway from their head-offices and enjoy cheap labor with relatively high skills. In the case of call centers, since the service is delivered over the phone, it is not important where the phone is picked up. The “distance shrinking technologies” give the opportunity of locating their call centers anywhere that they can reduce costs, particularly labor costs, which constitute 60% or more of total costs.⁵ In this sense, offshored call centers contribute to the rise of the new international division of labor in service work.

³ Jane Paul and Ursula Huws, *How Can We Help? Good Practice in Call-Centre Employment* (Brussels: European Trade Union Confederation, 2002), p. 12.

⁴ David Harvey, “The Geopolitics of Capitalism,” in David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital: towards a Critical Geography* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), pp. 312-345.

⁵ Phil Taylor and Peter Bain, “Reflections on the Call Centre – a Reply to Glucksmann”, *Work, Employment and Society* 21, no. 2 (June 2007), p. 354.

This thesis has two central aims. First, to demonstrate the establishment and expansion of call centers in Turkey by paying particular attention to the locational distribution of these brand new workplaces, the role of the state and public institutions in the emerging call center industry and the integration of Turkey into global call center industry by the offshore-outsourcing activities of multinational corporations. By focusing on the organizational features of call centers and workforce characteristics, I will attempt to analyze what kind of employment is rising at the crossroads of technological developments, the reengineering of business processes and a changing understanding of the state towards a more unstable, flexible and low-paid employment regime which shows the convergence of corporations and the state in the case of the “magical word” of employment. To situate the Turkish call center industry in its place in the global call center phenomenon is the final attempt of the first aim of the thesis. By a discussion of global call center industry in the light of the findings of the existing research, this study seeks to find similar and distinctive facets of Turkish call centers from those in other countries.

The second aim is to analyze how workers experience the labor process in multilingual call centers. The thesis focuses on a specific work environment and questions the nature of call center work in multilingual centers which is based on the commodification of the linguistic abilities of workers; at the same time, because of the standardization of the labor process, workers’ qualifications are undervalued. I investigate the characteristics of workers that serve international clients from Turkey by using their linguistic skills: Who are they, what are their qualifications and expectations, what brings them to the call center, why they choose to work in this workplace or did they really “choose”, why they stay or leave, what they enjoy about their work and what they do not enjoy and, is there any correlation between their

experience with call center work and their broader life stories and backgrounds? By stressing “life story” and background I am referring to two distinct groups of workers in multilingual call centers in Turkey. First, we can detect a group of workers who were born and raised in foreign countries as members of immigrant families. They learned their vocational language in these countries and, for some reason, came to Turkey and were employed in call centers. The other group of workers includes those who were born and raised in Turkey and have picked up their vocational language in Turkish schools. As will be seen in the related chapter of the study, these two distinct groups of workers hold different qualifications both in terms of formal education and “soft skills”; they consider call center work in different ways; their expectations differ according to these factors and they usually consider and experience the call center job as strongly associated with their backgrounds.

As the research questions indicate that this thesis does not deal with the labor process by only acknowledging workplace relations or the nature of the work. The cultural, educational and family backgrounds of the workers effect how they experience the labor process in multilingual call centers. For this reason, I focus on how they consider their jobs, and how they situate the call center experience in their lives. I attempt to discover the strategies of the workers in constructing meaning for their occupations and which factors shape different strategies for workers of different origins.

Furthermore, it would be a mistake to abstract workplace relations and the labor process from the broad political economy context. In this respect, contemporary trends in corporate circles such as downsizing, business reengineering, outsourcing, offshoring and as general model “flexible firm” should not be ignored. The rapid growth of call centers and their extended activities in peripheral and semi-

peripheral countries are related to these recent management strategies. In other words, twenty-first century capitalism manifests business process reengineering and not only for the manufacturing sector, but also for service sector, a new international division of labor occurs. Although offshoring to under-developed or developing countries began with the manufacturing sector, today the low-skilled, low-waged, degraded elements of service sector which require a wide employment pool and low costs are subject to offshoring with the help of advanced information and communication technologies. Call centers epitomize this kind of white-collar work. In this respect, growing outsourced and offshored call centers are a product of a neoliberal climate that proclaims liberalization, privatization, non-unionization, deregulation or light regulation of employment at the macro level under the name of globalization and atypical employment practices, subcontracting, fixed-term contracts and Service Level Agreements at the organizational level under the name of restructuring.⁶ Therefore, this thesis, finally, aims to demonstrate working conditions in a workplace which can be considered as typical to the twenty-first century's capitalist service economy and to analyze the structure of employment in these brand new workplaces.

Call Center Literature: Theoretical Insights and Practical Implications

Call centers have been the subject of academic studies over ten years and investigated from various perspectives including the Foucauldian, critical labor process theory, human resource management, regional development, gender, and

⁶ For a broad discussion of neoliberal impact on workplaces, see Chris Baldry, Peter Bain, Phil Taylor, Jeff Hyman, Dora Scholarios, Abigail Marks, Aileen Watson, Kay Gilbert, Gregor Gall and Dirk Bunzel, *The Meaning of Work in the New Economy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), Chapters 1-2; Marcus Taylor, "Power, Conflict and Production of the Global Economy", in *Global Economy Contested*, edited by Marcus Taylor (London & New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 11-32.

sociolinguistic perspectives. There are numerous special journal editions, collected books and hundreds of articles. In a decade that employment and investment in call center industry has risen and reached millions, academics have not been able to ignore this new source of employment. In addition, with the help of “distance shrinking technologies,” call centers always hold a spatial dimension and uneven distribution of centers across the globe paves the way for analyzing globalization, the new economy and the international division of labor in the case of call centers.

The first studies on call centers were concerned with the surveillance practices which are evident in the call center environment and by a Foucauldian approach, scholars defined call centers the “new sweatshops.” The managerial usage of information and communication technologies do the call centers “archetypical organization to represent Foucault’s application of Bentham’s Panopticon to the workplace.”⁷ This Foucauldian evaluation of the call center was criticized by many. Among others, Peter Bain and Phil Taylor, two “founding fathers of call center literature,” claim that the first students of call centers had erected a simplistic and false model which ignored the complexities of the employment relationship and the labor process and also underestimated, even eliminated, the potential and actuality of workers resistance.⁸

Considering Bain and Taylor as “founding fathers of call center literature” is not an exaggeration. They have published more than thirty articles in books and periodicals since 1999 and have discussed call center as a unique labor process which exemplifies various features of twenty-first century capitalism. Deriving from the

⁷ Sue Fernie and David Metcalf, *(Not) Hanging on the Telephone: Payment Systems in the New Sweatshops* (London: Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics and Political Science, 1998), p. 8. See also, Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

⁸ Peter Bain and Phil Taylor, “Entrapped by the ‘Electronic Panopticon’? Worker Resistance in the Call Centre,” *New Technology, Work and Employment* 15, no. 1 (January 2000), p. 3.

critical labor process theory of Braverman,⁹ they put the call center labor process as “an assembly line in the head” and demonstrated Taylorist¹⁰ elements that are embedded in call centers.¹¹

The managers’ constant attempt to control labor and the labor process in every possible way is central to Braverman’s analysis of the capitalist mode of production. Managers tend to control the organization of work, the pace of work and standardize every single movement of the worker in the workplace to maximize productivity. Since the managers are obsessed with controlling labor, the separation of work execution and work conception is unavoidable. In this sense, workers are expected to follow management-determined ways of doing a job which is forced organizationally and/or technologically. This separation leads to deskilling on the workers’ part, and the execution of work is demoted to acting like a tool or a part of machine. In this way, workers are transformed changeable objects of the labor process and as long as the execution of work is standardized and routinized, labor and training costs are reduced significantly.¹²

Braverman rightly matches the twentieth century capitalism with Frederick Taylor’s “scientific management.” Taylorist management seeks to find “one best

⁹ Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century (25th Anniversary Edition)* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998). See also, Jackie Krasas Rogers, “Deskilled and Devalued: Changes in Labor Process in Temporary Clerical Work,” in *Rethinking the Labor Process*, edited by Mark Wardell, Thomas L. Steiger and Peter Meiksins (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 53-79.

¹⁰ For Taylorism see, Frederick Taylor, *Scientific Management, Comprising Shop Management: The Principles of Scientific Management and Testimony Before the Special House Committee* (New York: Harper, 1947).

¹¹ Taylor et al. “Work Organization, Control” Phil Taylor and Peter Bain, “‘An Assembly Line in the Head’: Work and Employee Relations in the Call Centre,” *Industrial Relations Journal* 30, no. 2 (1999), pp. 101-117; Peter Bain and Phil Taylor, “Employee Relations, Worker Attitudes and Trade Union Representation in Call Centres,” paper presented in the 17th International Labour Process Conference (Royal Holloway College, London : 29–31 March 1999); Phil Taylor, Chris Baldry, Peter Bain and Vaughan Ellis, “‘A Unique Working Environment’: Health, Sickness and Absence Management in UK Call Centres,” *Work, Employment and Society* 17, no.3 (2003), pp. 435-438.

¹² Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*.

way”¹³ to perform a job, it separates mental work from manual work and has a monopoly over planning and organizing the work execution. Taylorism insists that workers perform every single task in a determined “one best way” and workers are controlled by close supervision and monitoring. Finally, Taylor suggest that workers salaries are motivating tools, hence, to increase productivity, performance related pay should be in effect.¹⁴

Following this analysis and criticism of the capitalist labor process in the twentieth century, Taylor and Bain adapt the Bravermanian approach to twenty-first century workplaces, particularly call centers. According to scholars, the development of the Automated Call Distribution (ACD) system, which routes the incoming call to the first available worker, lies at the heart of call center work and the capitalist exploitation of new communication technologies defines what a call center is. Nevertheless, scholars cautiously have avoided technological determinism and paid attention to putting their analysis in a socio-economic context. In this sense, Ellis and Taylor strongly stress the role of privatization, globalization, deregulation and as a whole the neoliberal environment in what call centers emerged and expanded¹⁵ and Taylor and Bain point to the cost-efficiency and profit maximization logic behind the call centers.¹⁶

Although they harshly criticize Fernie and Metcalf’s perspective, the works of Taylor and Bain also acknowledge the managerial attempts to control workers. They

¹³ George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society* (Thousand Oaks, California: Pine Forge Press, 2000), pp. 28-30.

¹⁴ F. Taylor, *Scientific Management*.

¹⁵ Vaughan Ellis and Phil Taylor, “‘You Don’t Know What You’ve got till It’s Gone’: Re-contextualizing the Origins, Development and Impact of the Call Centres,” *New Technology, Work and Employment* 21, no. 2 (July 2006), 107-122.

¹⁶ Phil Taylor and Peter Bain, “‘India Calling to the Far Away Towns’: The Call Centre Labour Process and Globalization,” *Work, Employment and Society* 19 no. 2 (June 2005), pp. 261-282.

demonstrated to what extent call center managers use “targets” as controlling tools and make workers accountable objects.¹⁷ They employ the term “team Taylorism” to define team working as a controlling strategy in the call center environment.¹⁸ Call center work is very individualized and cannot be related to team-working organization in any meaningful way; however, van den Broek et al. demonstrate the hidden logic behind team-working is to create competition among workers.¹⁹

The usage of scripts in the labor process is another controlling tool in the hands of management; in this way call center work is standardized. Workers have to hold on to scripts during the conversations with clients, usually in inbound services. Taylor and Bain claim that the use of scripts “is an attempt to structure the very speech of workers into a series of predictable, regulated and routinized queries and responses.”²⁰ Furthermore, just like targets, scripts are used to evaluate the worker’s performance, in other words, make him or her an accountable object.²¹ The

¹⁷ Peter Bain, Aileen Watson, Gareth Mulvey, Phil Taylor and Gregor Gall, “Taylorism, Targets and the Pursuit of Quantity and Quality by Call Centre Management,” *New Technology, Work and Employment* 17 no.3 (2002), pp.170-185.

¹⁸ Chris Baldry, Peter Bain and Phil Taylor, “‘Bright Satanic Offices’: Intensification, Control and Team Taylorism’, in *Workplaces of the Future*, edited by Paul Thompson and Chris Warhurst (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 163-184.

¹⁹ Diane van den Broek, , George Callaghan and Paul Thompson, “Teams without Teamwork? Explaining the Call Centre Paradox,” *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 25, no.2 (2004), pp.197-218

²⁰ Taylor and Bain, “An Assembly Line,” p.109. On the other hand, Leidner claims that in some situations service scripts “help workers enforce their will over others, protect them from mistreatment, bolster their confidence in their abilities, or at least offer them some psychological distance from disagreeable interactions.” Robin Leidner, “Emotional Labor in Service Work” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, no. 561 (1999), p. 93.

²¹ Bain et al, “Taylorism, Targets,” Vicki Belt, Ranald Richardson and Juliet Webster, “Women’s Work in the Information Economy: the Case of Telephone Call Centers,” *Information, Communication and Society* 3, no.3 (2000), pp. 366-385; George Callaghan and Paul Thompson, “‘We Recruit Attitude’: The Selection and Shaping of Call Centre Labour,” *Journal of Management Studies* 39 no.2 (2002) pp. 233-254; Stephen Deery, Roderick Iverson and Janet Walsh, “Work Relationships in Telephone Call Centres: Understanding Emotional Exhaustion and Employee Withdrawal,” *Journal of Management Studies* 39, no.4 (June 2002), pp. 471–496; Nick Kinnie, Sue Hutchinson and John Purcell, “‘Fun and Surveillance’: The Paradox of High Commitment Management in Call Centres,” *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 11 no.5 (2000), pp.967–985.

Taylorization of work by the exploitation of technology, team-work and scripts results in worker alienation, dissatisfaction and emotional exhaustion. On the part of management, the call centers face high employee turnover because of the ruthless working conditions. The Taylorization of work is more evident in outsourced and offshored call centers. In this sense, scholars have documented high controlling, measuring and standardizing mechanisms in call center labor in developing countries.²²

The “skill question” in call center work also has been well analyzed and discussed in the literature. Stressing job standardization and work intensification, Ellis and Taylor raise the deskilling issue in the case of British Gas’s transition from traditional clerical work to a call center.²³ Ursula Huws suggests that call center workers are Taylorized, deskilled descendants of earlier forms of office workers, such as bank tellers, insurance salespeople, booking clerks and telephone operators.²⁴ In addition, the skill question divides scholars. While some insist on the term deskilling or deskilled work, others claim that not all call center jobs are deskilled, rather some forms of call center work create multi-skilling.

In a very early study on call centers, Frenkel et al. claimed that call center workers are employed according to their strong interpersonal skills and they should

²² Taylor and Bain, “India Calling to;” Phil Taylor and Peter Bain, “Work Organization and Employee Relations in Indian Call Centres,” in *Developments in the Call Centre Industry: Analysis, Changes and Challenges*, edited by John Burgess and Julia Connell (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 36-57; Rosemary Batt, Virginia Doellgast and Hyunji Kwon, “Service Management and Employment Systems in U.S. and Indian Call Centres,” in *Brooking Trade Forum 2005: Offshoring White-Collar Work*, edited by S. Collins and L. Brainard (Washington, D.C.: Brooking Press, 2006), pp. 335-372; Pawan Budhwar, Arup Varma, Virender Singh and Rohin Dhar, “HRM Systems of Indian Call Centres: an Exploratory Study,” *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 17, no.5 (May 2006) pp. 881–897; Karin Mirchandani, “Practices of Global Capital: Gaps, Cracks and Ironies in Transnational Call Centres in India,” *Global Networks* 4, no.4 (October 2004), pp. 355–373.

²³ Ellis and Taylor, “You Don’t Know.”

²⁴ Ursula Huws, “Material World: the Myth of the ‘Weightless Economy,’” in *Socialist Register 1999*, edited by L. Panitch and C. Leys (Rendlesham: Merlin Press, 1999), p. 40.

have been considered “semi-professional workers.”²⁵ However, this approach has been criticized by researchers’ themselves in later research. No consensus exists on whether call center work is skilled or not. For instance, Houlihan writes that “the agent job is mythologised as simple and routine, which is a surface fact beyond which there are many complex role and skill demands.”²⁶ Some scholars acknowledge the workers’ “perceptual skills.” In the call center environment it means recognizing nuances in clients’ voices on the phone and responding accordingly.²⁷ Colin-Jacques and Smith demonstrate some forms of call center work, like professional services, require strong skills and a strong occupation, nursing in their case, are able to influence specific design of technology and shape work methods.²⁸

While Taylor and Bain, among others, insist on the less skilled nature of offshored call centers in the developing world, particularly in India,²⁹ and claim that those which may be characterized as “high volume, low value, routinized” workflows, in other words, those suitable for mass production model are subject to offshore,³⁰ Russell and Thite argue that other aspects of offshoring such as additional emotional labor that getting heavily into a cultural and linguistic duality, locational and identity masking and accent neutralization could make call center work more

²⁵ Stephen J. Frenkel, May Tam, Marek Korczynski and Karen Shire, “‘Beyond Bureaucracy’: Work Organization in Call Centers,” *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 9, no. 6 (December 1998), pp. 957-979.

²⁶ Maeve Houlihan, “Eyes Wide Shut? Querying the Depth of Call Centre Learning,” *Journal of European Industrial Training* 24, no.2-3-4 (2000), p. 231.

²⁷ Haridimos Tsoukas and Efi Vladimirov, “What is Organisational Knowledge?” *Journal of Management Studies* 38, no. 7 (November 2001), pp. 973-993.

²⁸ Caroline Colin-Jacques and Chris Smith, “Nursing on the Line: Experiences from England and Quebec (Canada),” *Human Relations* 58, no.1 (January 2005), pp. 5-32.

²⁹ Phil Taylor and Peter Bain, “Call Centre Outsourcing to India: The Revenge of History?” *Labour and Industry* 14, no.3 (2004), pp.15-38; Taylor and Bain, “Work Organization and.”

³⁰ Taylor and Bain, “India Calling to.”

rather than less skilled.³¹ They employ the term “semi-skilled work.” According to them, two different forms of “multi-skilling” are evident in offshored call centers. First, “depending upon call volumes and the complexity of services on offer, workers could be assigned to two, three or even four clients/workflows simultaneously in designated ‘multi-skilled’ work teams.”³² Second, in what they call “flexible deployment of labour,” one group of workers (team) could undertake a whole suite of functions.³³ However, this level of flexibility from team to team, task to task does not necessarily imply highly skilled work design because of the “marketization of work processes and social relations that are entailed outsourcing.”³⁴

Investigating the skill question in call centers is always based on the distinction between hard or tangible skills and soft or intangible or social skills and the latter labels “have more potential for pejorative and gendered connections.”³⁵ In addition, studies particularly refer to Hochschild’s concept of “emotional labor.” Emotional labor is defined as the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display. In call centre case we may add “vocal display.” “Emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has *exchange value*.”³⁶ It is evident that emotional labor is a characteristic of the call center labor process which transcends its deskilled and standardized features because it is not possible to determine the customers’ attitude, needs and behavior, so managerial prescriptions

³¹ Bob Russell and Mohan Thite, “The Next Division of Labour: Work Skills in Australian and Indian Call Centres,” *Work, Employment and Society* 22, no. 4, (December 2008), pp. 615-634.

³² Ibid., p. 625.

³³ Ibid., p. 628.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 630.

³⁵ Marek Korczynski, “Skills in Service Work: an Overview,” *Human Resource Management Journal* 15, no.2 (2005), p. 5.

³⁶ Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling (Twentieth Anniversary Edition)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. 7

cannot be adequate for every interaction. Callaghan and Thompson claim that “far from being passive providers of emotional labour, employees are active and skilled emotion managers in their own right.”³⁷

Bradley et al. have claimed that contemporary service work is considered to be related to stereotypical “feminine qualities,” such as caring, communicating and making people feel good.³⁸ In this sense, employment relations emerge in a gendered way. Callaghan and Thompson observe the centrality of “social competencies” in the intensive recruitment and selection processes and also ongoing training in call centers.³⁹ Call center studies with a feminist perspective stress gendered relations in the workplace and demonstrate to what extent the skills that call center work requires are considered “feminine skills” by management and even the workers’ themselves. For instance, Belt et al. provide evidence for which skills call center managers demand from workers and how these skills are assumed as internalized by women. They rightly observe that “good communication skills” are absolutely crucial and “women *are* recruited by employers in part because they are deemed to ‘naturally’ possess the kinds of communication skills required.”⁴⁰ Furthermore, their interviewees stated that work in call centers requires “people skills,” which are associated with team-working, “team spirit” and “friendly competition.”⁴¹ Most importantly, Belt et al. documented how employers are frank about how they pay special attention to recruit people “with the ability to deal with repetitive and highly

³⁷ Callaghan and Thompson, “We Recruit Attitude,” p. 248.

³⁸ Harriet Bradley, Mark Erickson, Carol Stephenson and Steve Williams, *Myths at Work* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 78.

³⁹ Callaghan and Thompson, “We Recruit Attitude.”

⁴⁰ Vicki Belt, Randal Richardson and Juliet Webster, “Women, Social Skill Interactive Service Work in Telephone Call Centers,” *New Technology, Work and Employment* 17, no.1 (2002) p.26. [Italics in the original.]

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 27.

pressured work” and the scholars claimed that in the call center environment, women were assumed to have the kind of personality suited to repetitive, yet high pressure work.⁴² Mulholland also claims that gendered relations are embedded in the call center environment in different ways and states that flirtation, charm and sexual banter which are encouraged by the management floor are internal parts of the gendered labor process in call centers.⁴³ In addition, Durbin investigates women’s career progression in call centers and although call centers need women with their “customer service skills and personalities,” their representation in management is very low. This situation can be explained by gender-based stereotypes of a male managerial elite and barriers to career progression for women, such as training, promotion opportunities, lack of support and family commitments.⁴⁴

As noted above, the spatial dimension of call centers and their uneven distribution all around the world supplies a broad research agenda for scholars. In the case of call centers, scholars study globalization, the new economy and the international division of labor. Particularly studies on Indian call centers, the most popular offshore destination for call center activities, document not only the work experiences of the workers but also the cooperation between state and corporations, and the governmental support behind the call center industry. This thesis will focus on Indian and other experiences with call centers in the developing world in the related section of the second chapter. However, before that, scholarly attempts at analyzing to what extent national differences impact call center management should be noted.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 29-30.

⁴³ Kate Mulholland, “Gender, Emotional Labour and Teamworking in a Call Center,” *Personnel Review* 31, no. 3 (2002), pp. 283-303.

⁴⁴ Susan Durbin, “Gender, Skills and Careers in UK Call Centres,” in *Developments in the Call Centre Industry: Analysis, Changes and Challenges*, edited by John Burgess and Julia Connell (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 117-133.

Some scholars have paid attention to national differences between call center activities. For instance, by challenging existing studies which stress the Taylorist tendencies of offshored call centers, Koskina claims that foreign call centers in Greece have internalized Greek attitudes towards work and “distinctive cultural dimensions of Greek workforce” have forced managements to introduce a more flexible managerial strategy.⁴⁵ By relying on her findings, Koskina claims that “the Greek call centre workers involved in this study occupy work roles in which the roles of different forms of control are far from ‘Taylorist’ traditions.”⁴⁶ What is significant in the labor process in both in foreign-owned and Greek call centers in Greece is the absence of electronic surveillance. Furthermore, there are no reported qualitative or quantitative targets and workers do not have to rely on scripts except for the billing section of the surveyed foreign telecommunication company. The only tools that the workers have, as a manager states, are “their intelligence, confidence, expertise, knowledge and diplomacy.”⁴⁷ Job discretion and autonomy is evident on the part of Greek workers, whether they work for Greek or foreign employers. This situation also leads to a high level of job satisfaction, as is obvious from the workers’ own words.⁴⁸ Although it is very controversial, Koskina explains this working environment which is far different from other case studies from different countries, by the cultural characteristics of the Greeks. According to her, the political history of the country has shaped the cultural traits of the workers which are individualism, autonomy and internal control, and these traits have shaped the management style in

⁴⁵ Aikaterini Koskina, “How ‘Taylorised’ Is Call Centre Work? The Sphere of Customer Practice in Greece”, in *Developments in the Call Centre Industry: Analysis, Changes and Challenges*, edited by John Burgess and Julia Connell (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 170-188.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 176.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.179.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.180.

Greece. In line with Koskina, Lindgren and Sederblad have explained the term “flexible autonomy” in the Swedish context, which has made companies stay in business.⁴⁹ They exemplify flexible autonomy by documenting how management has allowed workers to choose their own working hours and supplied them with “coffee percolators, the fax machine room and the dining room.” Scholars “read” these managerial favors in a positive way; they claim these facilities give employees autonomy, freedom and privacy; but also they acknowledged that all these attempts intend to balance high levels of technical control.⁵⁰ On managerial strategies, van Jaarsveld et al. investigated effects of national institutions on call center management and found significant differences between call centers in liberal market economies (UK, USA and Canada).⁵¹ Another study has focused on temporary work in coordinated market economies (Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Spain and Sweden) in the case of call centers and finds to what extent differences in regulatory regimes shape managerial strategies and employment practices.⁵² The second chapter of this thesis will deal with the differences between national experiences with call center industry more broadly.

There is a considerable literature on the effects of call centers on regional development. Particularly geographers have looked at the economic relationship between call centers and the areas in which they are sited. Bristow et al. analyzed the

⁴⁹ Antoni Lindgren and Per Sederblad, “Escaping the Electronic Birdcage: Workplace Strategies in Swedish Call Centres,” in *Developments in the Call Centre Industry: Analysis, Changes and Challenges*, edited by John Burgess and Julia Connell (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 189-198.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 196-197.

⁵¹ Danielle D. van Jaarsveld, Hyunji Kwon and Ann C. Frost, “The Effects of Institutional and Organizational Characteristics on Work Force Flexibility: Evidence from Call Centers in Three Liberal Market Economies,” *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 62, no. 4 (July 2009), pp. 573-601.

⁵² Karen A. Shire, Hannelore Mottweiler, Annika Schönauer and Mireia Valverde, “Temporary Work in Coordinated Economies: Evidence from Front-Line Service Workplaces,” *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 62, no. 4 (July 2009), pp. 602-617.

distribution of call centers in the United Kingdom regions and stated that “spatial division of labour is likely to continue to be uneven.”⁵³ According to them, the low-cost advantages of peripheral regions are attractive for companies to locate a call center. On the other hand, “other factors such as minimize the risk and to stay close to existing premises, allied activity and suitable concentrations of labour supply exert a significant influence on locational decisions.”⁵⁴ Richardson and Marshall define two principle locational requirements as telecommunication infrastructure and available labor, but financial incentives offered by government, low occupancy costs and transportation facilities are also taken cognizance of by companies.⁵⁵ Russell, on the other hand, claims that locational decisions are related to the type of work conducted and the labor and skill markets created.⁵⁶ Richardson and Gillespie asked the question of to what extent call centers can be considered as an opportunity for rural areas and scholars identified the benefits and limitations of call centers for rural development.⁵⁷ According to them, first and most obviously, call centers create employment in less favored regions; however, this employment can be characterized as low-quality: “Call centers perpetuate a rural low wage economy.”⁵⁸ Other benefits can be listed as “bringing new capital and technological investment to a region,” “the

⁵³ Gillian Bristow, Max Munday and Peter Griparios, “Call Centre Growth and Location: Corporate Strategy and the Spatial Division of Labour,” *Environment and Planning A* 32 (2000), p. 535.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 534.

⁵⁵ Ranald Richardson and J. Neill Marshall, “Teleservices, Call Centres and Urban and National Development,” *The Service Industries Journal* 19, no. 1 (January 1999), pp. 106-107.

⁵⁶ Bob Russell, “Making, Re-making, Managing and Controlling Customer Service Agents: Brownfield and Greenfield Call Centre Sites,” *Research and Practice in Human Resource Management* 10, no.1 (2002), pp. 35-52.

⁵⁷ Ranald Richardson and Andrew Gillespie, “The Call of the Wild: Call Centers and Economic Development in Urban Areas,” *Growth and Change* 34, no. 1 (Winter 2003), pp. 87-108.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 100-101.

potential to bring new types of employment” and “up-dating of skill sets in regional areas.”⁵⁹

Call center work and workers also have been the subject of academic studies with a sociolinguistic perspective. The language demands of call centers and the standardization of interaction with customers with scripts were questioned. In her analysis of call centers in the United Kingdom with a linguistic approach, Deborah Cameron offers the term of “styling the worker” to define commodification of language in call center industry.⁶⁰ She rightly states that as long as the professional persona of the call center is created entirely through speech, call centers are a good example of service work as language work where the commodification and regulation of language are at their peak.⁶¹ She says that “scripting standardizes *what* is said, but styling is an attempt to standardize *how* it is said.”⁶² Furthermore, Cameron demonstrates that “styling the worker” policy is a reflection of popular consideration of “female speech styles,” including expressiveness, caring, empathy and sincerity.⁶³ In line with Cameron, Monica Heller discusses how language turns into a marketable commodity on its own, rather than being a maker of ethnonational identity in francophone Canada in the case of the call center industry and also tourism.⁶⁴ Also, Alexandre Duchêne focuses on how multilingualism emerge as a

⁵⁹ Ibid. It should be noted that Richardson and Gillispie also acknowledge the ongoing skills debate on call center literature, although they claimed “up-dating of skill sets.”

⁶⁰ Deborah Cameron, “Styling the Worker: Gender and the Commodification of Language in the Globalized Economy,” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 4, no.3 (August 2000), pp. 323-347. See also her larger work on “commodification of language”, Deborah Cameron, *Good to Talk? Living and Working in a Communication Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 2000).

⁶¹ Cameron, “Styling the Worker,” p. 328.

⁶² Ibid., p. 331.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 342.

⁶⁴ Monica Heller, “Globalization, the New Economy, and the Commodification of Language and Identity,” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 7, no. 4 (November 2003), pp. 473-492.

key promotional and marketing strategy and communication skills, particularly when a diversity of languages becomes a selling point in a call center in Switzerland.⁶⁵

In addition, scholars have paid attention to the nature of multilingual call center work and accent neutralization processes in offshored call centers in the developing world. Apart from Taylor, Bain and others work on Indian call centers that serve in English and require a neutralized accent;⁶⁶ philologists also have investigated the commodification of language in the offshore environment. In her ethnographic study of a training agency which is responsible for neutralizing call center workers' accents, Claire Cowie argues the interpretation of "neutral" and trainees' responses to accent training and she demonstrates the attempts to erase mother tongue influence and make workers' English a salable commodity.⁶⁷ Tariq Rahman, on the other hand, observes that the neutralized accent may cause the alienation of worker from his/her society in Pakistan.⁶⁸ The accent that corporations demand and workers desire to have in many cases created a new identity which belongs to a corporate culture but is alien to Pakistani culture around it.⁶⁹ In addition, in a very recent article, Selma K. Sonntag discusses the broad and contrasting

⁶⁵ Alexandre Duchêne, "Marketing, Management and Performance: Multilingualism as Commodity in a Tourism Call Centre," *Language Policy* 8, no.1 (March 2009), pp. 27-50.

⁶⁶ Taylor and Bain, "Call Centre Outsourcing;" Taylor and Bain, "Work Organization and;" Mirchandani, "Practices of Global Capital;" Karin Mirchandani, "Making Americans: Transnational Call Centre Work in India," paper presented at the Third Critical Management Studies Conference (Lancaster University, Lancaster, UK, 2003); Mahuya Pal and Patrice Buzzanell, "The Indian Call Center Experience: A Case Study in Changing Discourses of Identity, Identification, and Career in a Global Context," *Journal of Business Communication* 45, no. 1 (2008), pp. 31-60.

⁶⁷ Claire Cowie, "The Accents of Outsourcing: the Meanings of 'Neutral' in the Indian Call Center Industry," *World Englishes* 26, no. 3 (2007), pp. 316-330.

⁶⁸ Tariq Rahman, "Language Ideology, Identity and the Commodification of Language in the Call Centers of Pakistan," *Language in Society* 38, no. 2 (2009), pp. 233-258.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 250.

conceptualizations of linguistic globalization and suggests the “linguistic hegemony framework” for analyzing multilingual call centers.⁷⁰

Call center studies in Turkish literature are rare and there has been no large academic call center survey. Ümit Akçay’s two articles should be mentioned. Based on the early call center studies of Taylor and Bain, Akçay employs the critical labor process theory to investigate the working conditions of call center workers in Turkey and collects his data from an online survey of the Association of Call Center Employees.⁷¹ Akçay refers to the “electronic Panopticon” debate and the Taylorism approach and shows examples of the call center labor process in the call centers of Turkey. Furthermore, he demonstrates how Turkish workers resist managerial strategies; in other words, he adapts Taylor and Bain’s approach to the Turkish experience. However, he neglects other debates in literature. Another study on Turkish call centers focuses on emotional labor. By examining two call centers in the banking sector, scholars investigate how workers mask, shape and are forced to commodify their emotions in call center work and question the space of resistance on the workers’ part.⁷² Apart from these mentioned studies, there are pro-industrial, non-academic articles in corporate journals which usually are dedicated to giving “advice” to the management floor and also develop new managerial strategies. Additionally, a master’s thesis should be noted. Alina Belinda Neitzert’s study on

⁷⁰ Selma K. Sonntag, “Linguistic Globalization and the Call Center Industry: Imperialism, Hegemony or Cosmopolitanism?,” *Language Policy* 8, no.1 (March 2009), pp. 5-25.

⁷¹ Ümit Akçay, “Genç, Ucuz, Esnek, Örgütsüz: İşçi Sınıfının Yeni Üyeleri-Çağrı Merkezi Çalışanları”, *Türkiye Sınıf Araştırmaları Merkezi, 3. Sınıf Çalışmaları Sempozyumu Kitabı, “Türkiye İşçi Sınıfı ve Emek Hareketi Küreselleşiyor Mu ?”* (İstanbul: SAV Yayınları, 2008), pp. 377-397; Ümit Akçay, “Çağrı Merkezlerinde Emek Süreçlerine Bakmak: Çağrı Merkezleri Örneği”, *İktisat Dergisi*, no: 494-495 (2008), pp. 47-53.

⁷² Fuat Man and Cihan Selek Öz, “Göründüğü gibi Olamamak ya da Olduğu gibi Görünememek: Çağrı Merkezlerinde Duygusal Emek,” *Çalışma ve Toplum* 20, no.1 (2009), pp. 75-94.

German call centers in Istanbul⁷³ which shares the same case to some extent as this thesis. From a sociological-anthropological perspective, Neitzert investigates the relationship between return migration and the call center industry. Her findings are based on her own experience in a call center where she had worked for nineteen months. However, this attempt was unfortunately limited to one case and mostly neglects the non-immigrant workers in the industry.

Although call centers have been the subject of many academic studies in universities around the world for about ten years, articles and thesis are still limited in the Turkish social science literature in this field. In this sense, my study intends to fill the gap of in-depth academic studies on Turkish call centers by a multi-perspective analysis of the industry in general, and specifically the work experiences of multilingual call center workers. Thus, it derives its analytical concepts from both critical labor process theory and a broader political economy perspective. This thesis analyzes the structure of the employment in call centers by focusing on workers' own experiences. It seeks to cover all facets of multilingual call center work, and hence, to derive evidence from different organizational types, different workflows and different elements of workforce and then, compares them to each other.

Sources and Methodology

The data that I used in this thesis come from several sources; different aspects of the study demanded different methodological approaches. First of all, in order to understand the Turkish call center industry with its place in the global call center phenomenon, I used the findings of an international project entitled “Global Call

⁷³ Alina Belinda Nietzert, “German Call Centers in Istanbul: Beyond the Global and the Local”, (Master’s thesis, Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, Turkey 2008).

Center Report: International Perspectives on Management and Employment,”⁷⁴ which was led by Cornell University, and also numerous case studies on national experiences with call center industry which mainly have been published in academic journals. The Global Call Center Project is a product of three years (2004-2007) work covering almost 2500 call centers and 475,000 call center employees. Under the leadership of David Holman (University of Sheffield), Rosemary Batt (Cornell University) and Ursula Holtgrewe (Working Life Research Center, Vienna), research teams from 17 countries conducted the first major large scale international survey of call centers. This study gives us “a detailed account of the similarities and differences in operations across widely diverse national contexts and cultures.”⁷⁵ The participating countries are Austria, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Israel, the Netherlands, Poland, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, the UK, and the US. Thanks to this giant project and individual articles which address different national contexts (such as the Philippines, Malaysia and New Zealand) from different perspectives, I have been able to detect international trends and national distinctions in the call center industry. Afterwards, I employed these findings as a background for assessing the Turkish call center industry.

I used mainly sectoral publications (e.g. *Call Center Magazine*), company documents, websites, brochures, a catalogue⁷⁶ which covers a large amount of registered call centers in the country and also I conducted informal interviews with two call center managers and the editor of *Call Center Magazine* in order to

⁷⁴ The global report and national reports are available from <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/globalcallcenter/>.

⁷⁵ David Holman, Rosemary Batt and Ursula Holtgrewe, *The Global Call Center Report: International Perspectives on Management and Employment*. Available [online]: <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/globalcallcenter/upload/GCC-Intl-Rept-US-Version.pdf> [10 July 2009], p. v.

⁷⁶ *Turkey Call Center Catalogue 2009-2010 Call Centers and Suppliers* (IMI Fuarçılık, Istanbul, October 2009).

understand the establishment and expansion of call centers in Turkey. In this way, I attempted to put Turkey in its context in the global call center industry. Especially, searching company websites gave me the opportunity to see how Turkish companies promote themselves and the Turkish multilingual workforce to international clients. By scanning business journals, brochures and relevant newspaper articles, I was able to understand industrial trends, demands and prospects. Furthermore, the surveys that has been conducted for business circles which are unfortunately limited in scope, supplied some statistical data for me. To see what is actually happening in a call center and physical conditions, I visited two call centers in Istanbul and one in Yalova, as an ordinary guest.

In order to find out what kind of skills are demanded by multilingual call center work and the skill perceptions of workers, the characteristics, qualifications and expectations of them, in what ways they are satisfied or dissatisfied with their jobs, and finally, how their “life-world” as a context impacted their work experience, I conducted seventeen interviews with workers who are or were employed by a variety of companies, Turkish in-house, Turkish offshore outsourcer, foreign in-house and foreign offshore outsourcer so that I would be able to see the differences between different types of companies. These were contacted via friends, the Internet and the Association of Call Center Employees. I paid special attention to select them from different origins, educational backgrounds, ages and gender. The ages of interviewees vary between 23 and 50, the average is 29. Eleven of them came from immigrant families and had lived in foreign countries part of their lives. Six interviewees who did not have a “migration story” learned their vocational languages in Turkish schools. The educational levels of the interviewees demonstrate a variety. Six of them are or were students while working, four of them were university

graduates; one was a college graduate, five held secondary education diploma and one had only a primary school education. Particularly, the workers from immigrant families include those with relatively fewer years in schools. Six interviewees were dealing with English calls and other six with Dutch calls, five worked in German services. Nine interviewees were female and eight were male.⁷⁷ Interviews were semi-structured and the questions aimed to understand their life-narratives, work experience, skill considerations and job satisfaction. I particularly focused on these themes that emerged out of the interviews, although the participants mentioned about various aspects of call center work.

I conducted seventeen semi-structured interviews, which means I had a framework of the questions prepared to understand basic facts about their background, their motivation to take this job and how they considered their work environment, their qualifications, the skills that they brought the job and the skills that they developed during the call center experience. Further questions were asked depending on the responses of the interviewee to questions. I particularly tried to understand where they situated the call center experience in their life stories; for this purpose I encouraged them to share their life outside the workplace with me.

All interviews were recorded on a digital recorder and lasted between 20 minutes to one hour depending on the oral skills of participant and obligatory situations; some had to return to their work-seats as soon as possible. I conducted interviews in several places, eight of them were conducted in their workplace in a separated room where I had the consent of management to interview employees. Others were conducted in public coffee shops and one in a media building where an interviewee was working at the date of research. All interviews were conducted in

⁷⁷ For detailed profiles of interviewees, see Appendix.

Istanbul, except for one which was conducted in Yalova. All were on a one-to-one basis. I explained them my research interests and the structure of my study, guaranteed them that I will anonymize their statements and they could stop recording and if they wished I could delete it completely or partially at any time during interview or later. These interviews constituted the major source of analysis in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER TWO

THE GLOBAL CALL CENTER INDUSTRY

Call centers constitute a vast economic and social phenomenon. The number employed in this industry and growth ratios are impressive. Furthermore, call centers can be considered as the best exemplary of the twenty-first century capitalist workplace in many ways. In this sense, Bob Russell claims that call centers resemble the same thing as automobile factories or textile mills were meant for their age.⁷⁸

Journalistic and academic attention in call centers has been rising for over a decade. However, the first type of call center was established in the late 1960s when the Ford Motor Company and AT&T developed the '800' number to facilitate the recall of faulty cars in order to comply with a legal obligation.⁷⁹ The fundamental innovation that paved the way for the mushrooming of call centers as a dedicated unit was the Automated Call Distribution (ACD) system, "enabling calls to be routed to available operators within (of for that matter between) call centres."⁸⁰ During the 1980s, business became more aware of the potential of information and communication technologies (ICT) to increase the efficiency of their operations and to provide a wide range of customer services.⁸¹ Contacting customers via telephone

⁷⁸ Bob Russell, "Call Centers: A Decade of Research," *International Journal of Management Reviews* 10, no. 3 (2008), p. 195.

⁷⁹ Sebastiano Bagnara and Patrizia Marti, "Human Work in Call Centres: a Challenge for Cognitive Ergonomics," *Theoretical Issues in Ergonomics Science* 2, no. 3 (2001), p. 224.

⁸⁰ Ellis and Taylor, "You Don't Know," p. 109. See also, Marcela Miozzo and Matias Ramirez, "Services Innovation and the Transformation of Work: the Case of UK Telecommunications", *New Technology, Work and Employment* 18, no.1 (March 2003), p. 69 and Taylor and Bain, "Reflections on the Call Centre," p. 353.

bean to supply a competitive advantage to companies, especially where similar services were provided.⁸² In this sense, the banking and finance sector was always the trail blazer of the call center industry.

The rise of call centers can be “situated at the intersection of rapidly expanding information and communication technologies (ICTs), reengineered business processes, a changing (or changed) profile of customer needs and expectations and prevailing culture of occupational restructuring.”⁸³ Since the service was delivered over the phone, it was not important where the phone was picked up. The “distance shrinking technologies” gave the opportunity of locating their call centers anywhere that they could reduce costs, particularly labor costs,⁸⁴ which constituted a least 60% of total costs. Moving to deindustrialized towns where large labor pool was attractive for profit maximization was the first trend. For instance, the Highlands and Islands of Scotland were “discovered” as an ideal call center location in the United Kingdom and the number of call center workers in the region increased from 300 to 2,300 during the 1990s.⁸⁵ Finally, the 2000s have witnessed a move of call center activities to periphery countries. Companies have exploited the technological advances to relocate service sector activities internationally.⁸⁶ However, all of this process can not be explained solely by technological advances.

It would be a mistake to abstract the relationship between technological advances and the world of work from its larger political-economic context. In this

⁸¹ Richardson and Marshall, “Teleservices, Call Centres,” p.98.

⁸² Bristow et al, “Call Centre Growth,” p. 521.

⁸³ Houlihan, “Eyes Wide Shut,” p. 228.

⁸⁴ Taylor and Bain, “Reflections on the Call Centre,” p. 354.

⁸⁵ Richardson and Gillespie, “The Call of the Wild,” pp. 93-94.

⁸⁶ Larnier, “Calling Capital,” p.136.

respect, contemporary trends in business circles such as downsizing, business reengineering, outsourcing, offshoring and as a general model “flexible firm” should not be ignored. The rapid growth of call centers and their extending activities in periphery or semi-periphery countries are related to these recent management strategies. In other words, twenty-first century capitalism manifests restructuring business processes and not only for manufacture sector, but also for service sector, the cost reduction and profit maximization logic paves the way for a new international division of labor in the case of call centers. Bristow et al. clearly state that the two distinct facets of corporate organizational change lead to the mushrooming of call centers: First, the process of decentralizing back-office or routine corporate functions in-house to sites away from the corporate core and second, the process of contracting out of noncore corporate functions to a third party outside the firm, that is, outsourcing.⁸⁷ Also Ellis and Taylor, among others, strongly emphasize the role of the political and economic environment of neo-liberalism, deregulation and privatization, the financialization of markets and the growth of the “new economy” in the expansion of call center world.⁸⁸ In this climate, not only business but also state or local governments have noticed the importance of call centers. Governments have begun to make generous offers to companies as tax reductions, forgivable loans, and incentives to locate in specific areas. State and business cooperation in establishment and expansion of call center industries in many national contexts is evident.

This chapter aims to present the dimensions and features of call center industries in the world. In order to understand the global call center phenomenon, the findings of the first major large scale international survey of call centers, Global

⁸⁷ Bristow et al., “Call Centre Growth,” p. 521.

⁸⁸ Ellis and Taylor, pp. 108-110.

Call Center Project is used. The survey, which was a product of three years (2004-2007) work, covers almost 2500 call centers and 475,000 call center employees from 18 countries. This study gives us “a detailed account of the similarities and differences in operations across widely diverse national contexts and cultures.”⁸⁹ Not only a global report, but also individual country reports which constitute the main source of this chapter are available online.⁹⁰ I employ the *Project*’s “varieties of capitalism” typology which emerges as the subheadings of this chapter.⁹¹ Beyond any doubt, the claims, suggestions and data in following pages are not limited to the *Project*.

Call Centers in Liberal Market Economies

It is estimated that three percent of total workforce in United States of America is employed in the over 50,000 call centers in 2004.⁹² In the United Kingdom, 790,000 people (2.8 percent of total workforce) work in call centers.⁹³ This employment number is 500,000 in 14,000 call centers in Canada.⁹⁴ The numbers are significant; it is obvious that in liberal market economies, call centers are one of

⁸⁹ Holman et al., *The Global Call Center Report*, p. v.

⁹⁰ <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/globalcallcenter/>

⁹¹ However I refer their “Recently Industrializing or Transitional Economies” as “Developing World.”

⁹² Rosemary Batt, Virginia Doellgast and Hyunji Kwon, *The U.S. Call Center Industry 2004: National Benchmarking Report, Strategy, HR Practices & Performance*, Available [online]: <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/globalcallcenter/research/upload/US-CC-report.pdf> [10 July 2009], p. i.

⁹³ David Holman, Stephen Wood and Chris Stride, *Human Resource Management in Call Centres*, Available [online]: <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/globalcallcenter/research/upload/UK-CC-report.pdf> [10 July 2009], p. 8.

⁹⁴ Bruce McCracken. September 2002. *Calling Canada... A Red Hot Spot Develops for Call Center Outsourcing*. Available [online]: <http://www.outsourcing-canada.com/canada.html> [19 December 2009].

the major sources of new employment. Call centers in liberal market economies “with more relaxed labor market regulations and less influential labor market institutions”⁹⁵ demonstrate similarities frequently. For instance, call centers in the USA, the UK, Canada, Ireland and Australia are dominantly in-house organizations, dealing with inbound calls, serving the national market rather than the international market.⁹⁶ The majority of the workforce are female (percentage varies between 63 and 69, Ireland and Canada, respectively) and the leading sectors in the call center industry are always telecommunications, banking and finance.

On the other hand, the educational levels of employees vary in national contexts. The percent of call centers that primarily hire college graduates is higher in Canada and Ireland, 54.1% and 40%, respectively.⁹⁷ The participation of college graduates to call center workforce is below 20% in the USA, below 30% in the UK⁹⁸ and only 6.1% of Australian call center workers holds a three-year university education degrees.⁹⁹ This discrepancy between the educational levels of employees can be understood according to target markets.

Although call centers in liberal market economies mostly serve national markets rather than international markets, Canada and Ireland represent different situations in this context. Call centers that serve internationally are much more common in these countries: 33.1% in Canada¹⁰⁰ and almost 40% in Ireland¹⁰¹ are

⁹⁵ Holman et al, *The Global Call Center Report*, p. iv.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 13.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Steve Frenkel, Catriona Wallace, Marc Orlitzky, Ariane Zouroudis and Mark Stephens. *The Australian Call Center Industry: Work Practices, Human Resource Management, and Institutional Pressures*. Available [online]: <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/globalcallcenter/research/upload/Australian-CC-report.pdf> [10 July 2009], p. 21.

international call centers. On the other hand, only 1.4% in Australia,¹⁰² 5% in U.S.¹⁰³ and 15% in the UK¹⁰⁴ serve international market. The Canadian and Irish experiences with call centers epitomize serving the developed world from the developed world; these two countries are the first destinations of call center offshoring, or as it is sometimes referred “near-shoring”. Lots of big U.S. and European corporations have found it “cost-efficient” to locate a call centers in Canada and Ireland thanks to the countries’ locational, cultural and linguistic closeness to the US and Europe.

The governments in these two countries have played leading roles in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) to locate call centers in Canada and Ireland as a means of employment creation. Furthermore, the birth and rise of call centers in Canada and Ireland have been at the same time as the neoliberal transformation. For instance, Joan McFarland demonstrates that the establishment and expansion of call centers in New Brunswick, a western maritime province in Canada, has emerged under globalization and neoliberal preconditions.¹⁰⁵ In the historical context of the region New Brunswick, which is marked by traditional high unemployment and low labor participation, McFarland shows the attempts of the neoliberal McKenna governments (1987-1997) to develop a knowledge-based service sector which includes mainly call centers in order to achieve the goal of job creation:

¹⁰⁰ Danielle van Jaarsveld, Ann Frost, and David Walker. *The Canadian Contact Centre Industry: Strategy, Work Organization Human Resource Management*, Available [online]: http://www.gccproject-canada.com/docs/CA_Call_Centre_Report_2007.pdf [19 December 2009], p. 12.

¹⁰¹ Holman et al, *The Global Call Center Report*, p. 5

¹⁰² Frenkel et al, *The Australian Call Center Industry*, p. 1.

¹⁰³ Batt et al, *The U.S. Call Center Industry*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁴ Holman et al, *The Global Call Center Report*, p.5.

¹⁰⁵ Joan McFarland, “Telling the Story of Globalization: Neoliberalism and the Call Centre Industry in New Brunswick”, *Socialist Studies: The Journal of the Society for Socialist Studies* 5, no.1 (2009), pp. 24-50.

The new strategy signaled a major departure from old-style development strategies, which had focused on expanding male job opportunities in the resource extraction and manufacturing sectors. The new approach meant that, for the first time, the government's job creation activities were aimed at non core segments of the labour market.¹⁰⁶

This state-sponsored project succeeded in attracting a number of American multinationals to operate in New Brunswick and created 15,000 jobs; in other words one out of fifteen job in province, by the year of 2001.¹⁰⁷ The government directly support focused labor costs of companies, the crucial budget item for most call centers and offered cash incentives to businesses to locate call centres in the province. These incentive agreements were signed as “three-year forgivable loans”, which meant it was not necessarily need be repaid if the specified employment targets were met.¹⁰⁸ The total amount of forgivable loans was, as stated by the author, close to \$50 million.

The government's neoliberal strategy was not limited to subsidiaries. The McKenna government also followed a way of “making the alternatives to paid work increasingly unattractive, rather than making the paid work more attractive through improve wages and labour standards.”¹⁰⁹ In this sense, cutbacks to social programmes and restrictive fiscal policies produced the stagnation of falling real incomes and this situation lead women to participate in employment, in particular call center jobs under the pressure of additional wage necessity. Furthermore, the cost of non-participation in the workforce was increased for students and mainly cuts in governmental grants for post-secondary education and higher tuition fees forced the students to have part-time jobs. This process was very beneficial for call center

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 28-29.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 29. In 2007, it is estimated that there are 21.000 call center workers in the province.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 30-31.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 32.

companies and, in one example McFarland gives, a company made a deal with a local university “in which the company designated certain part-time positions for students and the university provided the workers to fill them.”¹¹⁰ The scholar also points to the anti-union industrial relations policy and the attempt to create a weak and divided workforce of neoliberal governments.

Wendy Larner also investigates the New Brunswick experience comparatively with New Zealand.¹¹¹ Both of the surveyed areas are in need of foreign investment in order to accomplish economic growth and job creation. However, in respect of call center strategies, New Brunswick and New Zealand have significant differences. Larner, like McFarland, emphasizes the “McKenna miracle” and claim that New Brunswick resembles the “developmental state” found in Southeast Asia and Ireland. On the other hand, in New Zealand, private sector actors played the leading role while state was positioned as a facilitator rather than an instigator.¹¹² The scholar accepts that the most call centers continue to serve domestic markets, but the growing trend of transnational call centers can not be ignored. Larner’s contribution to understanding the neoliberal policies of McKenna government is worth noting. As an addition to the above claims by McFarland, Larner points to a different facet of the neoliberal assault on the working class: “The term of ‘accident’ was also redefined to exclude stress-related diseases; with the consequence that claims for soft tissue and repetitive strain injuries became all but impossible.”¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 33.

¹¹¹ Wendy Larner, “Calling Capital: Call Centre Strategies in New Brunswick and New Zealand”, *Global Networks* 2, no.2, (2002), pp. 133-152.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 134.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 140.

Larner insists on the New Brunswick experience as the state policy of attracting FDI and in this way creating jobs exemplifies a shift in the economic practices of the state: A shift from protecting domestic economy through inventionalist strategies and federal subsidies to integrating local activities into global flows and networks through market driven employment.¹¹⁴ In this changing strategy, the province's historical features like high unemployment, official bilingualism and advanced telecommunications help the neoliberal governments to open borders to the call center activities of multinational corporations.

This is also the case for Ireland. Proinnsias Breatnach gives important insights into the Irish call center industry, in particular offshored call centers in Dublin in his early article.¹¹⁵ Depending on the very early data that gathered from different surveys of the late-1990s, the scholar demonstrates the birth and rise of offshored call centers in an industry-supported context. The turning point for the Irish call center sector was the Industrial Development Agency's introduction to its call center programme in 1992, which means that the country began to promote itself as an ideal pan-European call center location at the very beginning of the call center offshoring phenomenon.¹¹⁶ The highlighted advantages of Ireland as an offshore destination were "existing grants and tax incentives, the cheapest rates in Europe for international freephone calls as well as low-cost, high-calibre, flexible bilingual staff."¹¹⁷ By the date of the article, the sector was employing 6000 persons in 50 centers. US-based companies strongly dominate Irish call centers and employ 80% of

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 142.

¹¹⁵ Proinnsias Breatnach, "Globalisation, Information Technology and the Emergence of Niche Transnational Cities: The Growth of the Call Centre Sector in Dublin," *Geoforum* 31, (2000), pp. 477-485.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 481.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 481.

the total workers. Also, it is worth to note that 23% of all employees are foreigners. Breatnach claims that call center activities have helped Ireland to escape the bounds of geographical peripherality. This does not mean however that being the call center hub of Europe has changed Dublin's dependent position in the international division of labor.¹¹⁸ As a conclusion, although FDI has raised the living standards in Ireland to that of the world's core economies, the scholar warns about the externally determined future of this process.¹¹⁹

Public assistance for companies that locate call centers in less-favored areas is not limited to the Canadian and Irish contexts. 42% of call centers in the USA use various forms of public sources including local government incentives and subsidies, public job recruitment and placement services, public training resources or programs.¹²⁰ Likewise, 42% of call centers in the UK use public sources a lot or a great deal, 16% not at all and in about 10% of employees participate in a publicly funded training programme.¹²¹ Also, Australian call centers benefit from federal, state or local public resources: 41.9% use public resources for recruitment, 51.5% for training and 11.5% take incentives for locating in targeted zones.¹²²

To conclude, call centers are one of the dramatically rising employment generators in liberal market economies. Most of the call centers in the USA, the UK, Canada, Ireland and Australia are in-house organizations, handling incoming calls and serving national market rather than the international market. However, particularly in Canada and Ireland a considerable percentage of internationalization

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 482.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 484.

¹²⁰ Batt et al, *The U.S. Call Center Industry*, p.27-28.

¹²¹ Holman et al, *Human Resource Management in Call Centres*, p. 37.

¹²² Frenkel et al, *The Australian Call Center Industry*, p. 85-6.

is evident. Since these countries have linguistic and cultural ties with two biggest call center offshorer countries, the USA and the UK, offshored-outsourced call centers have grown significantly. The governmental role in Canada and Ireland to attract big multinational companies to locate their call centers overseas by offering generous incentives is undeniable. Simultaneously with the internationalization of call centers, the educational level of the workforce rises. Therefore, in the case of Canada and Ireland, multinational giants enjoy a more educated workforce with cultural and linguistic ties and governmental support in the developed world. The following pages will focus on the offshoring phenomenon in the developing world, but before that, call centers in more regulated economies should be examined.

Call Centers in Coordinated Economies

In their global report, Holman et al. employ the term coordinated or “social market” economies to refer to countries with relatively strong labor market regulations and relatively influential labor market institutions.¹²³ These countries in the report are Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Israel, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden. Also it is possible to add other European countries like Belgium, Finland, Greece, and Italy to this list by acknowledging the similar market conditions, employee demographics, organizational structures and regulations.¹²⁴ Their national experiences with the call center industry can not be considered as uniform, but call centers in this type of capitalism are quite similar to each other.

¹²³ Holman et al., *The Global Call Center Report*, p. iv.

¹²⁴ Sebastiano Bagnara, *Towards Telework in Call Centres*. Available [online]: <http://www.telework-mirti.org/bagnara.htm> [10 July 2009].

The domination of in-house call centers and inbound services, serving mostly national markets rather than international markets, a feminized workforce, concentrating mainly in urban areas but tending to go to more peripheral areas are common features of call centers in these countries which also resemble a great deal of international trends in the call center industry. Additionally, the most important common feature of these countries is a high percentage of trade union representation compared to call centers in liberal market economies and the developing world. For instance, 70 percent of call centers in a Swedish report state that workers are represented by trade unions.¹²⁵ 68 percent of Dutch call center workers are covered by collective bargaining agreements.¹²⁶ Half of the call centers in France are under union representation.¹²⁷ Also, labor market regulations like “by law, any firm in the Netherlands with more than 50 employees is required to have a works council”¹²⁸ and the presence of unions directly affects on the job quality, pay levels and employee satisfaction. It is evident that turnover rate, absenteeism and quit rates are low in these countries. On the other hand, even call centers in coordinated economies tend to make greater use of subcontracting and part-time contracts as strategies to

¹²⁵ Christer Strandberg and Åke Sandberg, *Call Centres in Sweden: A Description of Orientation, Human Resource Practices and Performance in Internal and External Call Centres*. Available [online]: <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/globalcallcenter/research/upload/Swedish-CC-report-English.pdf> [10 July 2009], p. 45.

¹²⁶ Andries de Grip, Inge Sieben and Danielle van Jaarsveld, *Employment and Industrial Relations in the Dutch Call Center Sector*. Available [online]: <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/globalcallcenter/research/upload/Dutch-country-report-English.pdf> [10 July 2009], p. 57.

¹²⁷ Caroline Lanciano-Morandat, Hiroatsu Nohara, and Robert Tchobanian, *French Call Centre Industry Report 2004*. Available [online]: <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/globalcallcenter/research/upload/French-CC-report.pdf> [10 July 2009], p. 6

¹²⁸ de Grip et al., *Employment and Industrial Relations in the Dutch*, p. 54.

increase organizational flexibility in order to circumvent labor market regulations.¹²⁹ However, diversity between national experiences should not be ignored.

It is estimated that there are about 300-400 call centers and that the industry employed between 20,000 and 25,000 workers in the year of 2004 in Denmark. This number constituted around 1% of the total Danish workforce.¹³⁰ Danish call center workers generally hold permanent contracts. Only 5.5 percent of the workers work on a temporary basis.¹³¹ A typical Danish worker has some sort of vocational education; however, only 8 percent of call center managers report that they mainly employ university graduates.¹³² The majority of call centers in Denmark are located in big cities where the headquarters of companies are. Local public support, like special education programs and unemployment subsidies are used at a very low level by only a few independent centers. For instance, “in the low wage area around the Danish city of Vordingborg, where the local business school has developed a vocational call centre education programme based on a grant from the EU ‘Social fund’, in cooperation with one of the largest Danish independent call centres.”¹³³ Although there is no dedicated trade union for call center workers, nearly half of the call centers negotiate wages and working conditions with trade unions.¹³⁴ However, as it is expected, management trends like business process reengineering, downsizing

¹²⁹ Holman et al., *The Global Call Center Report*, p. 44.

¹³⁰ Ole H. Sørensen and Nadia El-Salanti, *Call Centres in Denmark 2004: Strategy, HR Practices & Performance*, Available [online]: <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/globalcallcenter/research/upload/Danish-CC-report.pdf> [10 July 2009]. p. 8

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 17

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 16.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. vii.

and outsourcing directly affects the union presence and independent call centers have less union representation than in-house call centers.

The Netherlands has the second (after Ireland) highest percentage in Europe of its population employed in the call centers. Nearly 2.5 % of Dutch workforce is employed in almost 2,000 centers.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, the most important feature of the Dutch experience with the call center industry is the high presence of international call centers in the country: About one third of Dutch call centers handle international calls and 55% of subcontractors serve international clients.¹³⁶ In the 1990s, particularly, but not exclusively, US-based transnational companies established their multi-lingual call centers in the Netherlands to handle their pan-European operations.¹³⁷ The main factor for companies to choose the Netherlands as a hub for their European calls is the country's multilingual capacity. It is estimated that "no fewer than 77 percent of the population speak one foreign language fluently, with 44 percent speaking two other languages."¹³⁸

As is evident in many other national contexts, there is a positive correlation between serving the international market and the educational level of workers. In the Dutch call center industry, 52% of workers have higher secondary education and 18% have tertiary education.¹³⁹ Because international orientation is more frequent in subcontractor call centers, the more educated workforce participation is higher in these workplaces; 24% of workers in outsourced call centers have university

¹³⁵ de Grip et al., *Employment and Industrial Relations in the Dutch*, p. 5.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 8

¹³⁷ Peter Bain, "Some Sectoral and Locational Factors in the Development of Call Centres in the USA and Netherlands," Occasional Paper 11, Department of Human Resource Management, University of Strathclyde, (2001), pp. 9-10.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ de Grip et al, *Employment and Industrial Relations in the Dutch*, p. 22.

educations.¹⁴⁰ Subcontractors mainly employ workers on a part-time basis¹⁴¹ (77%), which can be understood as high student participation in outsourced call centers. Students who do call center work often quit because they have finished their educations.¹⁴² In this respect, it can be assumed that international call center work particularly in English is considered as a pocket money supplier by students. Furthermore, Dutch subcontractor companies enjoy local public funding for new developments in the peripheral areas where unemployment tends to be higher.¹⁴³

In the French context, the development of call centers is a recent phenomenon. The scholars who have prepared the only non-private/non-business report on French call center industry state three main factors that have influence call center development: The liberalization of the telecommunications market, raising the strategic importance of customer relations management and rapid progress in information and communication technologies.¹⁴⁴ However, all these movements have been relatively slower in France:

The French telecommunications market was liberalised at the end of the nineties. Deregulation of banking and insurance sectors is still underway. French companies have taken a long time to realise that call centre operations involved a major organisational innovation at the level of the corporation.¹⁴⁵

By referring to previous research on the French call center industry, the scholars estimate that for 2004, there were 3,300 call centers and 205,000 call center workers in France. This number constitutes 0.75% of the total workforce of the country. Also

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁴³ Bain, "Some Sectoral and Locational Factors," p. 11.

¹⁴⁴ Lanciano-Morandat et al, *French Call Centre*, p. 7.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

it is estimated that between 9000 and 12,000 workers were employed in foreign countries including Morocco, Senegal, Tunisia, and Maurice Island for the French market in 2004.¹⁴⁶

The French call center industry is typical in terms of domination of in-house call centers, serving generally a national market, with a high percentage of female participation in the workforce. Only 12% of call center activities in France target the international –probably European– market and international affairs are more frequent in retail (catalog selling) and business-to-business IT services, 21 and 23%, respectively.¹⁴⁷ Although pay levels are relatively higher in Paris region, it is the most attractive localization for call centers (20% of total call centers); however, there is no detection to what extent this choice is related to access to skilled labor.¹⁴⁸ French call center workers seem highly educated. Managers in the report state that they primarily recruit those who have two years of tertiary education.¹⁴⁹ Only 14% of workers are employed on a part-time basis and one-quarter of the workforce is made up of temporary workers.¹⁵⁰

Using public resources is common in the French call center industry. As the report states “local and state governments often complete to offer incentives to new companies seeking to locate call centre operations.”¹⁵¹ Obviously, this generosity is about creating new jobs in certain areas that have suffered high unemployment rates for a long time. 20% of call centers in the French sample reported having benefited

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 40.

from tax incentives. Taking advantage of tax incentives is more common in subcontractors than in-house call centers; scholars assume that it is correlated with relatively larger sizes of subcontractor centers, which mean more job opportunities for local people. Additionally, call center managers report that they use public recruitment and placement services and training programmes at very high levels.¹⁵²

Half of the centers in the French sample reported having a union present, as quoted above; however, the union presence is very limited in outsourced call centers, “especially in outbound call centres, where three quarter of establishments do not have any union.”¹⁵³ The union presence directly affects pay levels, tenures, quit rates and absenteeism. For instance, the median annual pay in centers with union presence is 7% higher than that in non-union centers; quit rates are approximately 50% higher in non-union centers. On the other hand, median tenure is 50% higher in centers with union presence, compared to non-union centers.¹⁵⁴

According to a German report, there were 2,700 call centers in the country for the year of 2005.¹⁵⁵ The report is based on a sample of 300 centers, 53.6% of which are in-house, 33.1% is service contractors and as the report introduces a category of call centers that are legally separated, but with close ties to their mother companies, 13.2 % of the centers are outsourced subsidiaries.¹⁵⁶ The internationalization of German call centers is very limited, compared to the countries like the Netherlands

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 43-44.

¹⁵⁵ Ursula Holtgrewe, *Call Centres in Germany: Preliminary Findings from the Global Call Centre Project-Germany*. Available [online]: <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/globalcallcenter/research/upload/German-CC-report.pdf> [10 July 2009] p.4

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p.5.

and Ireland: Most of the centers serve at the national level (58.8%) and only 13.7% of all centers are serving internationally; others are regional or local call centers.¹⁵⁷

In Germany, 74.3% of call centers are collective agreement-free workplaces; furthermore 85.2% of subcontractors and 80% of outsourced subsidiaries are not covered by collective agreements.¹⁵⁸ Based on these numbers and the low percentages of other worker organizations like works council in outsourcer or subcontractor centers, Holtgrewe rightly claims that “outsourcing and subcontracting strategies ‘work’ for German companies – in the sense that they provide escape routes from collective agreements and co-determination in the core industries.”¹⁵⁹ Companies do not use the entire range of flexible and contingent working arrangements for institutional reasons and labor market regulations in Germany;¹⁶⁰ nevertheless companies seek to create flexible workforce through part-time work: “On average of 42.5% of CSRs [Customer service representatives] in the call centres work part-time.”¹⁶¹ As can be expected, most of the part-time workers in German call center industry are women.¹⁶²

The educational level of German call center workers can not be considered to be low. An average worker has a lower secondary education (62.4 %), and 39.6% of workers have higher secondary education certificates, as managers in the report state.¹⁶³ However, workers with university degrees are quite rare, 10% and university

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 17-18.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p.19.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁶² Claudia Weinkopf, “German Call Centres between Service Orientation and Efficiency: ‘the Polyphony of Telephony,’” in *Developments in the Call Centre Industry: Analysis, Changes and Challenges*, edited by John Burgess and Julia Connell (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 63.

students constitute 9.5% of the total call center workforce in the report sample.¹⁶⁴

The great majority of students, as is evident in other national contexts, are employed as part-time workers.¹⁶⁵

The Swedish experience with call center industry is also typical. For 2002, it is estimated that 60,000 employees in 1290 call centers were working in Sweden; in the report sample, 73% of them are internal, 24% are external and 3% are mixed organizations.¹⁶⁶ Female participation in the workforce is very high, 70%,¹⁶⁷ as is evident in elsewhere. A typical Swedish call center worker has upper secondary education but only 2% of workers have a 4-year university degree.¹⁶⁸ Swedish call centers are dominantly (71%) serving the domestic market while only a few companies are international centers; others are regional or local.¹⁶⁹ Although the number of international call centers in Sweden is still low, Lorentzon acknowledges the role of the Investment in Sweden Agency (ISA), authority for the support of foreign investment in the country, in substantial increase in the number of employees during recent years.¹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, using public resources is not very common for call centers in Sweden. Only a few centers report using tax reduction and special loans or grants, 9 and 10%, respectively.¹⁷¹ Grants for localization in a specific area

¹⁶³ Ursula Holtgrewe, *Call Centres in Germany*, p.33.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Lutz P. Michel, "Call Centres in Germany: Employment Market and Qualification Requirements," *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 22, no. 1 (February 2001), p. 151.

¹⁶⁶ Strandberg and Sandberg, *Call Centres in Sweden*, p. 10-12.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p.28.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁷⁰ Sten Lorentzon, "Call Centres: a Swedish Geographical Perspective Exemplified by Conditions in the West of Sweden," *Networks and Communication Studies* 18, no. 3-4 (2004), p. 205.

are used by only 16% of centers. However, usage of public training resources is more frequent, 61% of centers use this kind of public support.¹⁷²

To sum up, as above examples indicate, call centers in coordinated market economies epitomize the international trends in the industry. However, in these countries where relatively strong labor institutions and regulations are more frequent and influential, trade unions and other forms of labor interest representation can still affect working conditions. In this sense, the Global Call Center Industry Report documents relatively a high quality of jobs, low turnover rates and low wage differences across call centers in coordinated market economies.¹⁷³ Companies in these countries, beyond any doubt, seek to extend flexibility in working relations and subcontracting/outsourcing seems instrumental to transcending tradition structure of industrial relations and regulation. Employment in call centers is significantly rising, in some cases with the help of governmental organizations, particularly together with the externalization of workforce by business process reengineering.

Call Centers in the Developing World

In this section, I will examine call centers in the developing world with an emphasis on the growing tendency of multinational companies to move their call centers overseas. In the case of call centers, serving to developed world from developing world has a history of less than 15 years; however as will be seen in numbers, employment in and market size of call centers grow significantly in the developing world. Particularly, former colonies have the advantage of linguistic and

¹⁷¹ Strandberg and Sandberg, *Call Centres in Sweden*, p. 69.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Holman et al., *The Global Call Center Report*, pp. 16-23 and 36-39.

cultural awareness to call center-sending countries in the competition of attracting foreign investment. Besides, multinational companies enjoy low labor costs and governmental support in terms of tax incentives and other means. As Holtgrewe et al. rightly observe that “Lower cost is a central motive for international relocation in labour-intensive services specially, and that outsourced and offshored services are connected to a standardization of work and an intensification of monitoring.”¹⁷⁴ Call center offshore-outsourcing is a contested terrain; hence, this section is devoted to the tensions and contradictions of call centers in the developing world. These emphasized facets of call centers in India, Philippines, Malaysia, South Africa, South Korea and Brazil will give us some insights with which to assess the Turkish call center industry in the following two chapters of this study.

According to the survey, in 2003, it is estimated that between 75,000 and 115,000 were employed in Indian call centers.¹⁷⁵ There are five organizational types in the Indian Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES) and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) market which are captives,¹⁷⁶ third-party providers, Indian software/IT firms, Indian business houses and global IT and BPO companies.¹⁷⁷ The first generation of offshoring service sector activities in India was not call centers, but back office processing centers, which were in-house, directly owned organizations, in another word “captives”. This experience paved the way for offshoring call centers to India by demonstrating the capabilities of the Indian

¹⁷⁴ Ursula Holtgrewe, Jessica Longen, Hannelore Mottweiler and Annika Schönaauer, “Global or Embedded Service Work: The (Limited) Transnationalisation of the Call-Centre Industry,” *Work Organisation, Labour and Globalisation* 3, no. 1 (Summer 2009), p. 13.

¹⁷⁵ Phil Taylor and Peter Bain, *Call Centres in Scotland and Outsourced Competition from India* (Stirling: Scotcon, 2003).

¹⁷⁶ Captives are “the wholly owned subsidiaries of well-known multi-national corporations that remain headquarters in the country of origin.” Russell, “Call Centers: A Decade, p. 210-211.

¹⁷⁷ Taylor and Bain, *Call Centers in Scotland*, p. 9.

workforce and the required infrastructure in the mid-1990s.¹⁷⁸ Among others, Bain and Taylor strongly emphasize the role of central and local governments' policies, including telecoms deregulation, tax exemption and financial incentives in India and their commitment to be an ideal offshore destination for call center activities.¹⁷⁹

In the largest study on Indian call centers available, which covers sixty centers in six cities and a total workforce of 34,289 employees, Rosemary Batt et al. state that 74% of Indian call centers serve international market.¹⁸⁰ This situation makes the country the only one among 17 countries (Austria, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Israel, the Netherlands, Poland, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, the UK, and the US) that dominantly serve the international market rather than national market.¹⁸¹ The growing academic interest in Indian call centers can be understood better if we think of this exceptionality. The leading sector in international call center activities in India is banking (41%), which is followed by telecommunications (19%) and utilities (10%). International call centers primarily make both service and sales (43%); only sales centers constitute 39% and 9% of call centers performs only services. An important feature of international call centers is that they are 7 times larger than domestic operations: "While international centres average 741 employees per worksite, domestic centres average 104 employees."¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Peter Bain and Phil Taylor, "No Passage to India? UK Unions, Globalisation and the Migration of Call Centre Jobs", paper presented in *Work, Employment and Society Conference* (1-3 September 2004, Manchester), p. 5.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Rosemary Batt, Virginia Doellgast, Hyunji Kwon, Nudit Nopany, Priti Nopany and Anil da Costa, *The Indian Call Centre Industry: National Benchmarking Report*, 2005. Available [online]: <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/globalcallcenter/research/india.html> [10 July 2009].

¹⁸¹ Holman et al., *The Global Call Center Report*.

¹⁸² Batt et al., *The Indian Call Center Industry*, p.8.

Almost every international call center employee works on full-time basis (99.1%). Scholars also state that a typical Indian call center employee has a bachelor's degree. Initial training takes six weeks on average in international call centers, and the typical employee in these centers deals with 90 calls per day. 41% of international call centers India obligate their employees to rely on scripts and they dominantly employ electronic monitoring systems (92%). Batt et al. suggest that "script use may be driven by multinational clients, who may not be comfortable with allowing subcontractors to have discretion over they respond to international customers."¹⁸³ A worker in call centers that serve international market earns US\$ 2,687 (in 2004) per annum on average. There are also some indicators of worker dissatisfaction in this study. For instance, although it was not confirmed officially, Batt et al. claim that turnover can be higher than 50 percent annually.¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, the percentage of "employees promoted to higher positions" that call center managers in the survey report is only 17, which also needs a justification by workers. As Batt et al. state that "As anecdotal evidence has suggested, this data confirms that call centre jobs typically do not serve as entry-level positions for careers outside of the centres in the larger corporation."¹⁸⁵ Also, call center managers in the survey report 5.6% of absenteeism on a typical day. This number also needs a justification as is stated by the management itself rather than workers.¹⁸⁶

Beyond this statistical data, qualitative studies based on the experiences of worker's themselves can provide a better way to understand the other aspects of Indian call centers that serve the international market. In their numerous works which

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

rely on labor process theory, Phil Taylor and Peter Bain insist that more standardized, routine, repetitive and low-valued elements of the service sector are being moved offshore and that call center offshoring epitomizes that kind of white-collar work. In this sense, what makes the offshoring of call centers possible is the Taylorist characteristic of call center work.¹⁸⁷ In their own words, “India largely hosts an extreme version of the mass production model.”¹⁸⁸

Scholars suggest that the types of services offshored to India resemble those outsourced within the UK; they are both outbound, overflow and out-of-hours calls.¹⁸⁹ The main reasons for offshoring call center activities are cost reduction, which seems to be the logic of going overseas and the availability of a low-waged and relatively skilled workforce. “A review of evidence suggests that cost savings in the range of 40-60% could occur when ITES process are outsourced to India.”¹⁹⁰ Also the colonial history of India makes it possible for firms to find a skilled, in other words, English-speaking, workforce in India. Furthermore, the competitive drive to improve customer service by receiving calls 24 hours is another leading advantage behind offshoring call centers to India. However, there are also disadvantages of India as an offshore destination. First and foremost, the language accents or cultural differences seem challenging issues about offshoring. “Difficulties in exercising control over distant and remote operations” and start-up costs are other disadvantageous factors of migrating services to India. Taylor and Bain claims that the size of firms and their call centers are related to decisions to go overseas. In this

¹⁸⁷ Taylor and Bain, *Call Centres in Scotland*, Taylor and Bain, “India Calling to the Far away Towns...;” Taylor and Bain, “Work Organization and Employee.”

¹⁸⁸ Taylor and Bain, “India Calling to the Far away Towns, p. 277.

¹⁸⁹ Taylor and Bain, *Call Centres in Scotland*, p. 6.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

respect, larger centers which have higher call volumes are those that tend to be offshored.¹⁹¹

In the sense of labor process, Taylor and Bain insist that the types of calls handled in India tend to be routinized, repetitive and with short cycle times and also since the Service Level Agreements are translated into targets for workers aggravate the burden on their shoulders: “India is no exception to the internationally recognized phenomenon that much call centre work can be experienced as intensive, demanding and frequently stressful.”¹⁹² Additionally, there is no significant difference in the case of technology employed in Indian call centers and those in developed countries.

As Taylor and Bain describe it:

ACD systems distribute calls, electronic wallboards display queue numbers and waiting times, and agents in Mumbai receive calls through headphones plugged in to the same turrets as found on workstations in Melbourne or Manchester. Agents navigate familiar screens and menus, entering data on globally-branded computers.¹⁹³

However, the Indian call center “agents” or “customer service representatives” as they call themselves who work in international centers experience a different labor process in many ways from their colleagues in parent-company’s home country. Indian workers have to adopt anglicized pseudonyms, hide their Indian locations, speak in “neutral” accents or even emulate their customers’ dialects.¹⁹⁴ As noted above, scripts are largely employed in international call centers to secure standardization. In this respect, Taylor and Bain note language and cultural training are central priorities and quote from a call center manager that “accent

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁹² Ibid., p.12.

¹⁹³ Taylor and Bain, “India Calling to,” p. 270.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p.273.

training is perhaps *the* most important criterion.”¹⁹⁵ Also, Mirchandani’s work gives examples of how Indian call center workers encounter discriminatory, humiliating and racist customers such as “One day a person went, you know, I don’t want to speak to you. You have broken English. Please give me someone American.”¹⁹⁶ On the other hand, there could be some customers who like to be talking someone from India, even if they recognized that they are being lied to over location.¹⁹⁷

In a comparative study, Batt et al. investigate similarities and differences between three types of call centers: in-house centers in the United States, outsourced centers in the US and offshored centers that are owned and operated by subcontractors in India and serve the US market.¹⁹⁸ Scholars found that “in-house centers tend to adopt more quasi-professional approach to employment than either outsourced or offshored centers.”¹⁹⁹ They employ fewer call monitoring and performance management systems than outsourced American or offshored Indian call centers. Workers in American in-house call centers have more discretion over their work and opportunities for problem solving. On the other hand, although the Indian workforce is more educated and relied on a full-time basis, the work system in offshored Indian call centers is the most tightly constrained and standardized one. In other words, Indian workers in offshored call centers that serve the US market have the lowest level of work discretion.

The nature of call center work in international centers is a contested terrain. On the one hand, work in offshored call centers to India demonstrates the Taylorized

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 275. (Italics in the original.)

¹⁹⁶ Mirchandani, “Practices of Global Capital,” p. 366.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Batt et al., “Service Management and Employment Systems.”

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 349.

elements of service work, that is most routine, repetitive and low-skilled. This kind of work is in need of a broad unemployment pool because the turnover rate and absenteeism tend to be high. On the other hand, Russell and Thite also acknowledge that since their work is under rigorous surveillance and closely scripted, Indian workers have less discretion and less autonomy over how they perform their work. However, in their comparative study scholars claim that the work in call centers that serve international market demonstrates more job variety, more involvement in special off-line and use of greater numbers of software programs than their Australian colleagues.²⁰⁰

Russell and Thite strongly emphasize that as BPOs are polymorphic creations, they provide whatever processes overseas partners or parent company's demand; this situation paves the way for greater variation in the work and a necessity for "multi skilled" team-working: "Depending upon call volumes and the complexity of services on offer, workers could be assigned to two, three or even four clients/workflows simultaneously in designated 'multi-skilled' work teams."²⁰¹ Another aspect of this multi-skilling is evident in another case as the movement of team members from task to task, is what scholars call "flexible deployment of labour."²⁰² However this level of flexibility from team to team, task to task does not necessarily imply highly skilled work design because of the "marketization of work processes and social relations that are entailed outsourcing."²⁰³

As Russell and Thite note a specific aspect of Indian workforce, "[w]hile in Australia university students may be recruited on a temporary basis to work in call

²⁰⁰ Russell and Thite, "The Next Division of Labour."

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 625.

²⁰² Ibid., p. 628.

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 630.

centres as a means of funding their studies, in India university graduates assume permanent positions in similar work environments.”²⁰⁴ Another study focuses the managerial discourse of professionalism in Indian call centers. D’Cruz and Noronha demonstrate how organizations invoke the concept of professionalism in their employees and results of this managerial attempt, such as the internalization of employee-defined professionalism by workers.²⁰⁵ Scholars define “being professional” as the notion at the heart of organizational control. The managerial demand of a “professional attitude” contains a desire to satisfy customers, putting aside personal problems and concentrating on services, accepting stringent monitoring and shift timings, being able to withstand the tensions and pressures of work, and being sympathetic to the idea of taking on another identity in the interest of the organization and the customer.²⁰⁶ Article documents noteworthy experiences of workers as “prideful professionals.”

On the other hand, less-critical studies also add important dimensions to research Human Resource Management strategies in Indian call centers. For instance, Budhwar et al. claim that in order to provide “total customer satisfaction,” the work structure of Indian call centers that serve international market is highly structured, tightly controlling, bureaucratic, formalized, monitored, and scripted.²⁰⁷ However as an effective HRM tool, “employment career development strategies” is not generally in use because of large unemployed graduate pool.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 630.

²⁰⁵ Premilla D’Cruz and Ernesto Noronha, “Being Professional: Organizational Control in Indian Call Centers”, *Social Science Computer Review* 24, no. 3 (Fall 2006), pp. 342-361.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 347.

²⁰⁷ Pawan S. Budhwar, Harsh Luthar and Jyotsna Bhatnagar, “The Dynamics of HRM Systems of Indian BPO Firms,” *Journal of Labor Research* 27, no. 3 (Summer 2006), pp. 339-360.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 355.

It is obvious that the Indian case has been well-researched and well-documented by numerous case studies. However, there are other national experiences with call center offshoring to the developing world which are equally important but still waiting for broader research. In the following pages, I attempt to complete the “global picture” of the call center offshoring phenomenon by using available studies that focus on different national contexts and thus, epitomize different aspects.

Call centers in the Philippines are also much internationalized. It is estimated that there were over 150 U.S.-based call center companies and over 50 other international call centers from Australia, the UK and other European countries located in the country in the year of 2007 and outsourced call centers employed around 150,000 and 170,000 Filipinos as of March 2008, providing services to Americans.²⁰⁹ Obviously, the “Philippines is becoming a heavily-favored alternative to India”²¹⁰ in terms of call center offshore-outsourcing. According to scholar, the most important competitive advantage of the country is high number of English-speaking college graduates of the Philippines. By producing over 400,000 graduates with English as a second language, Philippines can compete with heavily populated countries like India and China.²¹¹ However, the cultural difference between costumers and overseas workers is still a problem in the Filipino context. In this sense, Friginal suggests “a well-designed language and culture training” and programs aiming to build cultural awareness for call center agents.²¹²

While focusing on the voices of women workers themselves from a gender perspective, Cecilia Ng and Swasti Mitter produce new empirical data and discuss

²⁰⁹ Eric Friginal, “Threats to the Sustainability of the Outsourced Call Center Industry in the Philippines: Implications for Language Policy,” *Language Policy* 8, no. 1, (March 2009), p. 52.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61 and 63.

the relationship between the burgeoning call center industry and the feminization of work in Malaysian and Indian contexts.²¹³ The authors note from previous research that Malaysia is considered as attractive offshore destination, thanks to its well-developed, low cost infrastructure and strong governmental support. “Currently, Malaysia has 320 contact centers with 12,000 employees clustered around financial services, telecommunications and the IT sector.”²¹⁴ However, there is no exclusively third party international call center in this country and fewer than 10 companies serve both domestic and foreign clients. But in recent years, some big multinationals like Shell and HSBC have begun to locate their regional call centers in Malaysia, though these centers are totally owned and operated by companies themselves, in other words, they are “captives.”²¹⁵

Research demonstrates that young, single and fresh graduated women are the preferred workforce in call center industry as a certain type of dynamism, communication and IT skills are required to handle in call center work. By highlighting the worker women’s own experiences, Ng and Mitter claim that they are relatively satisfied and enjoy what they do at work.²¹⁶ Although there is still a gender bias in the work structure, scholars are optimistic about a more equal gender division of labor. As a conclusion, scholars emphasize the need of state attention in developing countries to ensure the sustainability of the industry so that poorer women and men can become accredited and professionalized call center workers.²¹⁷ Even if the scholars seem to acknowledge that call center work can become routine

²¹³ Cecilia Ng and Swasti Mitter, “Valuing Women’s Voices: Call center Workers in Malaysia and India,” *Gender, Technology and Development* 9, no.2 (2005), pp. 209-233.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 214.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 214-215.

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 228.

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 230-231.

and boring, they appreciate the managements' facilities like "reading rooms, Internet browsing centers, gymnasia, free transportation after night shifts and recreational and cultural activities for the staff."²¹⁸

Chris Benner draws a more colorful picture (good-waged and skillful) of work South African call centers. Since the country is being thought as an ideal call center offshore destination from United States and Europe, the author suggests the government take the initiative and develop a long-term perspective for economic development through attracting multinational companies to operate call centers in South Africa.²¹⁹ According to Benner, low educational levels, a lack of customer service management skills and inattention to the temporal challenges of call center work seem the disadvantageous factors that government should face and deal with. As a previous survey noted it, there are currently 80,000 workers in South African call center industry, which is greater than the call center industries in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, the Philippines, Italy and Spain.²²⁰ However, foreign investment participation (30% of all operations) in this industry is not satisfactory for the scholar, but it can be hoped to increase.²²¹ Benner claims that since South Africa's land-line telecommunication infrastructure is under the monopoly of Telkom, the competitive telecommunication cost advantage of the country is in danger. In this sense, Benner's between-the-lines suggestion can be considered to be realized by neoliberal governments in different contexts, particularly in Canada's New Brunswick as mentioned above.

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 229.

²¹⁹ Chris Benner, "'South Africa on-call': Information Technology and Labor Market Restructuring in South African Call Centers," *Regional Studies* 40, no. 9 (December 2006), pp. 1025-1040.

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 1026.

²²¹ Ibid., p. 1031.

On the other hand, the South African call center industry is distinct in many ways from other national contexts. First of all, there is still a race issue in employment. Africans are highly under-represented in the industry; only 27% of workers in the agent positions are African who constitutes the vast majority of the total population. However, the colored and white population is significantly over-represented in call centers. For instance, overall while the colored population makes up 9% of the total population, they comprise 35% of core workers, 33% of team leaders, and 22% of managers in the largest survey of the industry in South Africa.²²²

Furthermore, female participation in the call center workforce and the educational level of workers are quite below global averages in the industry. Only 57% of call center workers in the survey sample are women and a typical South African agent is less-educated than his/her colleagues in other countries.²²³ Only 2% of workers hold a university degree, and vast majority of them (84%) have a matric, high school certificate. Trade union representation in the South African call centers is also below global average. Overall, only one quarter of call center in the survey have a recognition agreement with a trade union for collective agreement.²²⁴

According to a national survey of Korean call centers, the call center industry is becoming an important service and employment generator in this country, as elsewhere.²²⁵ One of the important feature in the Korean call center industry is externalization. The non-regular employment of call center workers constitutes

²²² Chris Benner, Charley Lewis and Rahmat Omar, *The South African Call Center Industry: A Study of Strategy, Human Resource Practices and Performance*, Available [online] <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/globalcallcenter/research/upload/South-Africa-GCC-Report.pdf> [10 July 2009], p. 17.

²²³ Ibid., p. 18.

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 35.

²²⁵ Byoung-Hoon Lee and Hye-Young Kang, "A National Survey of Korean Call Centres", in *Developments in the Call Centre Industry: Analysis, Changes and Challenges*, edited by John Burgess and Julia Connell (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 75-92.

90.8% for in-house call centers, 39.2% at subcontractors; in this sense, 93% of total workers are externalized in various forms of non-regular employment. In scholars' words "the employment of Korean call centres is 'externalized' to an extreme extent."²²⁶ This situation paves the way for a union-free environment in the Korean call center industry and the scholars claim the feminization of workforce as another factor of the low unionization.²²⁷ The Korean call center workforce is the most feminized one in the surveyed countries for the Global Call Center Project.²²⁸

Usually there is a correlation between the internationalization of call center activities and the education level of the call center workforce, but the Korean experience with call centers represents an exception. Although only 1.6% of call centers in the country serve international market,²²⁹ workers in Korea are highly educated with 38.5% of them holding 2-year college degrees and 28.7% have 4-year college degrees and above.²³⁰ On the other hand, governmental support for Korean call centers is very low; only 7% of workers in the surveyed call centers had participated in government-supported training programs. Also the usage of other public resources subsidized by local governments, such as job placement services, site location assistance, regional aid incentives, tax abatements and special loans or grants, is very low.²³¹

The Brazilian call center industry is another example of the high externalization of the employment. According to a national report, 53% of centers in

²²⁶ Ibid., p. 80.

²²⁷ Ibid., p. 84.

²²⁸ Holman et al., *The Global Call Center Report*, p. 9.

²²⁹ Lee and Kang, "A National Survey of Korean," p. 79.

²³⁰ Ibid., 81

²³¹ Ibid., p. 88.

the sample are subcontractors, unlike the global domination of in-house call centers.²³² On the other hand, the vast majority of Brazilian call center workers are employed on a full-time basis (87%).²³³ Internationalization of Brazilian call centers is still low (2.6%),²³⁴ although 22% of workers hold college degree.²³⁵ This situation can be considered as a result of the language barrier. Portuguese-speaking world is very small comparing to English-speaking one and “producing a sufficient number of English speakers remains a challenge for Brazil.”²³⁶

As seen, considerable research has been done on call centers in the developing world. Studies on India and other popular offshore destinations for call centers have documented not only work experiences of the workers, but also the cooperation between state and companies, and the governmental support behind the call center industry. Call centers are some of the biggest employment generators in these countries. Although, used technology, organizational structure and employee demographics are quite similar to those in liberal or coordinated market economies, call centers and call center workers in the developing world have distinctive characteristics. In the case of labor force, workers in developing world are more educated than their counterparts in other countries; they usually hold a bachelor’s degree. Furthermore, it is not a “just passing through”²³⁷ industry in India and other

²³² Moacir de Miranda Olivera Junior, Arnaldo Jose de Hoyos Guevara, Leonardo Nelmi Trevisan, Arnaldo Jose França M. Nogueira, Paulo Robert Giao, Maria de Fatima Silva and Pedro Lucas de Resende Melo, *Brazilian Call Center Industry Report 2005*, Available [online]: <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/globalcallcenter/research/upload/Brazilian-CC-report.pdf> , [10 July 2009] P. 17.

²³³ Ibid., p. 29.

²³⁴ Ibid., p. 22.

²³⁵ Ibid., p. 28.

²³⁶ John W. McCurrey, [July 2006] “Same Time, Next Hemisphere,” Available [online]: <http://www.siteselection.com/features/2006/jul/callCenters/> [12 January 2010].

offshore destinations for many fresh college graduates, contrary to their peers in liberal or coordinated economies who tend to see the call center as a temporary pocket money supplier. Hence, companies can take the advantage of more skilled, more “professional” and loyal workforce when they relocate their call centers in the developing world. Governments in these countries also welcome call center investments in order to create employment and articulate their countries to global capitalism. As the above examples indicate, call centers bring not only employment overseas, but also socio-cultural problems. Accent neutralization, hiding location and identity are considered prerequisites of working in international call center service. Besides, the labor process in the call centers of the developing world tend to be more routine, standardized and closely monitored than those in other experiences. Since the twenty-first century capitalism has manifested the business process reengineering internationally, a new global division of labor has emerged not only for the manufacturing sector but also for the service sector. Although offshoring to under-developed or developing countries began with the manufacturing sector, today the low-skilled, low-waged and degraded elements of the service sector which are in need of a wide unemployment pool and low costs are subject to offshoring with the help of advanced information and communication technologies. After this evaluation of global call center industry, now the focus of this thesis moves on to the Turkish experience with call centers.

²³⁷ Ursula Huws, “Working at the Interface: Call-Centre Labour in a Global Economy,” *Work Organization, Labour and Globalisation* 3, no. 1 (Summer 2009), p. 3

CHAPTER THREE

MAPPING THE TURKISH CALL CENTER INDUSTRY

Turkish Call Centers at a Glance

Between January-February 2008 and 2009, the number of available job positions in call centers increased from 1010 to 2523 on a popular career website. At the same time applications rose approximately five times and reached 247,542, which means a quarter million of people in Turkey seeking to be employed in a call center today.²³⁸ But where and under which conditions will they work? What are the features of the Turkish call center industry? What factors impact the establishment and expansion of call centers? In this chapter, these and related questions will be answered.

In the absence of official data, an accurate detection of the number of call centers and call center workers in Turkey is difficult. The call center industry is not classified in traditional government categories.²³⁹ Additionally, since there is no generally accepted definition of a call center, studies which are particularly conducted for business circles can vary in their findings. The disparity in number of centers could be due the methodology used. Additionally, it is estimated that there is a remarkable number of call centers which are unregistered, usually referred as

²³⁸ *Ekonomik Krizde Firmalar Çağrı Merkezi Elemanı Arıyor*. Available [online]: http://www.callcenter.com.tr/sizden_gelenler/sg_sektorden_gelismeler/423-ekonomjek-krijezfjermalar-zarri.html [10 December 2009]

²³⁹ Ministry of Labor and Social Security puts call center labor under the large category of “Commerce, Office, Education and Fine Arts,” Republic of Turkey, *T.C Resmi Gazete*, no.27200, 14 April 2009.

“below stairs.” Another reason for the disparity in numbers which can be understood by the nature of call centers; for example, a call center supplier company may operate various “projects” of parent-companies. In this respect, there is no standard to determine how we can calculate the total number of call centers if a parent-company outsources its call center service to more than one call center supplier company; or a call center supplier company, as usual, operates more than one “project.”

The latest catalogue of Turkish call centers includes the most recent survey; however, the published findings are limited to market size, usage trend in vertical sectors, service utilization by functions and technology usage level. According to John Morton Institute’s study, in 2009, the number of call centers in Turkey is estimated to grow by 4.1 percent, reaching 979; 948 of these centers are owned and managed by larger companies, in other words in-house and 31 call centers are outsource service providers.²⁴⁰ In addition, the growth of outsourcers has been rapid; the number of outsourcers has grown from 18 to 31 in a two-year period. In this sense, although in-house call centers are dominant in Turkish industry, as elsewhere in the world, the outsourcing activities are increasing dramatically. The most common function of call centers in Turkey is outbound collection calls; that is, call center activities mostly focused on calling customers to collect their awaiting payments. This situation can be understood by the large participation of the banking sector in the Turkish call center industry. Also some banks outsource their collection call activities to suppliers. Customer services, technical support, tele-sales and tele-

²⁴⁰ *Turkey Call Center Catalogue 2009-2010*, prepared by İMİ Fuarçılık, İstanbul: October 2009, p. 25. [Hereafter *Catalogue*].

marketing come after.²⁴¹ The high number of collection calls in total call center activities makes the sector resistant to economic crises, even stronger.²⁴²

The general manager of Global Bilgi, a leading call center company, and president of Call Centers Association, Bahadır Pekkan, says that the total investment in last five years reached a level of 150 million TL and that the sector size would be doubled in the next five years.²⁴³ According to another source, in 2008, the market size of industry is about \$250 million and there were approximately 35,000 workers employed in Turkish call centers.²⁴⁴ Call center workers are predominantly young and female as elsewhere in the world. Sources state that 69 percent of call center workers in Turkey are female; and only one out of five of total workforce is above 30 years old. According to one source, 44.9 percent of workers are between 25 and 29 and 24 percent is between 18 and 21 and 45.5 percent of workers have university degrees.²⁴⁵

The leading sectors in the call center market are telecommunication and banking; both constitute 40 percent of total call center activities in Turkey, according to CMCT. However, this percentage is much higher in ÇMD's estimate, more than half of the total call centers are dedicated to the telecommunication and finance

²⁴¹ Ibid., p. 27.

²⁴² "Ekonomik Kriz Çağrı Merkezlerini Teğet mi Geçiyor?" *Call Center Magazine*, no. 9, (February-March 2009), p. 10-12.

²⁴³ İlker Pehlivan. 28 January 2009. "Çağrı merkezleri bu kez tahsilat için arıyor." Available [online]: <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetay&ArticleID=918991&Date=07.02.2009&CategoryID=80> [4 August 2009].

²⁴⁴ Customer Management Center Turkey. *Türkiye Çağrı Merkezi Pazarı Özet Raporu*. Available [online]: <http://www.cmcturkey.com/crm-dunyasi/crm-ipuclari/turkiye-cagri-merkezi-pazari-ozet-raporu-2008.aspx> [24 July 2009] [Hereafter CMCT].

²⁴⁵ Çağrı Merkezleri Derneği. *Dünya ve Türkiye'de Çağrı Merkezi Sektörü*. Available. [online]: <http://www.cagrimerkezleridernegi.org/index.php/sektorumuz/browse/sunumlar/> [31 July 2009]. [Hereafter ÇMD].

sector; the figure below which is taken from ÇMD shows the percentages of call centers according to the sectors:

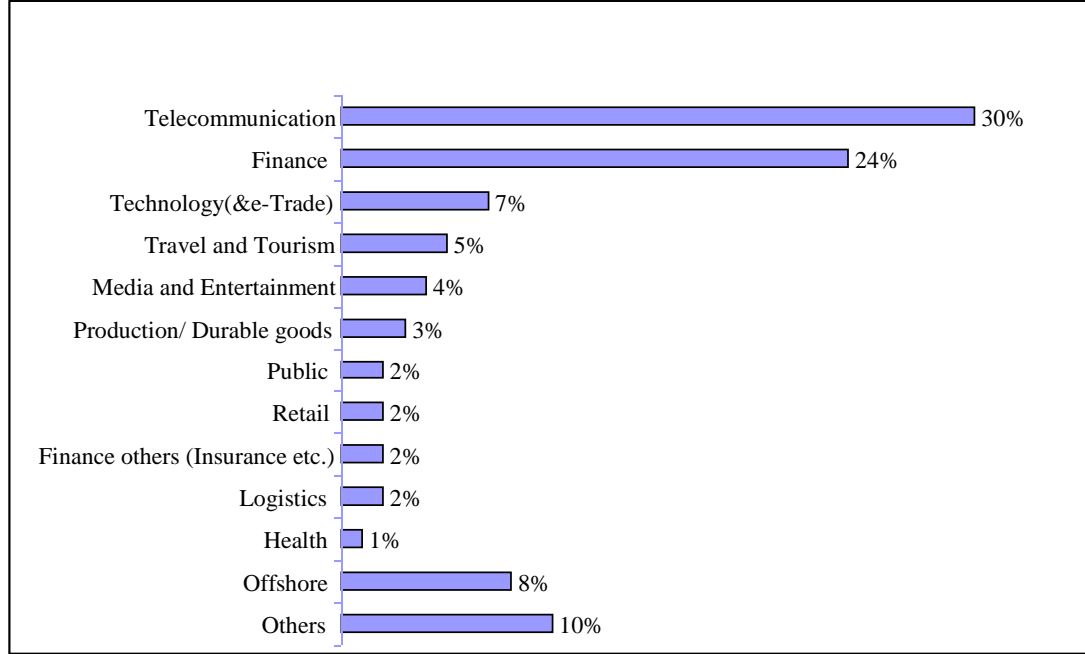


Fig. 1 Sectoral Breakdown

Source: Çağrı Merkezleri Derneği, Dünya ve Türkiye’de Çağrı Merkezi Sektörü, (www.cagrimerkezleridernegi.org)

On the other hand, the John Morton Institute estimates that the telecommunication and healthcare sectors are the fastest growing sectors; call center usage in these sectors grew by 26.7% and 17.2%, respectively, in 2009. However, the main driving factor behind the overall growth was the increase in the seat capacity of existing centers.²⁴⁶ Further, the public sector grew during 2009 by introducing new outsourced call centers or enlarging the traditional governmental call centers. State and local governments’ call center activities will be examined later pages of this chapter.

According to the employment sizes of 61 in-house and 22 outsourcer call centers in the *Catalogue*, outsourcer call centers are larger organizations. 16 of the

²⁴⁶ *Catalogue*, p. 26.

outsourcers employ more than 100 workers and three of them employ more than 1000. Since the outsourcers are usually not dedicated to one sector and operate “projects” from different sectors at the same time, they tend to be huge organizations. For instance, the biggest company in outsource market of Turkey employ approximately 7000 workers and operates the call centers of a telecommunication giant, an Internet supplier company, a digital TV service and many other parent-companies. In-house call centers, on the contrary, are dedicated to one company and are managed as any other department of organization, by definition. Hence, they are smaller units; only one of them, a call center of a Turkish bank employs more than 1000 workers and half of the in-house call centers employ fewer than 50 workers. This discrepancy in employment size is evident in other national experiences and previous research usually consider this as an indicator of a mass production model in outsourced call centers.²⁴⁷

Locations of Turkish Call Centers

“Though call centres are locationally mobile, they do not find all places equally appealing;” Richardson and Marshall state eight main factors considered by firms when locating a call center:

1. The availability of advanced telecommunications suitable for data and voice transmission and capable of hosting intelligent network services;
2. Telecommunications costs are also important, particularly when the call centre can be located in several countries;
3. A pool of labour of sufficient quality to carry out the particular tasks required in the call centre;
4. Labour costs;
5. Financial incentives offered by government;

²⁴⁷ For a discussion of mass production model in call center environment, see Rosemary Batt and Lass Moynihan, “The Viability of Alternative Call Centre Production Models,” *Human Resource Management Journal* 12, no. 4 (2002), pp. 14-34.

6. An attractive living environment to attract management and other key staff;
7. Low occupancy costs, e.g. rents, rates, servicing and parking;
8. Access to good local public transport; and in some cases national and international transport systems.²⁴⁸

Most importantly, large call centers which operate 24-hours a day require sufficiently large labor pools to keep the operation during “anti-social” hours.

Because of this, companies tend to find locations where a large pool of quality, flexible and low-cost labor is available.²⁴⁹ Buchanan and Koch-Schulte emphasize the main factor behind choosing a call center location is suitable workforce at a relatively low cost:

Labour costs compromise the great majority of call center operating expenses and can range between 60-80 percent, depending on the type of center. Therefore the quantity, quality and most importantly, cost of labour in a given location will play a significant role in the firm’s location decisions.²⁵⁰

If they did not offshore their call center activities, companies in liberal market and coordinated market economies found the solution to find low-cost skilled labor by locating their call centers to deindustrialized regions where unemployment is high. Significant studies demonstrate to what extent companies take advantage of high unemployment rates in peripheral regions and also local governments that herald the call center industry as a job generator, compete to attract companies to locate their centers in their areas by offering incentives and offer other kinds of public support.²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ Richardson and Marshall, “Teleservices, Call Centres,” pp. 106-107.

²⁴⁹ Bristow et al., “Call Centre Growth,” pp. 522-523.

²⁵⁰ Ruth Buchanan and Sarah Koch-Schulte, *Gender on the Line: Technology, Restructuring and the Reorganisation of Work in the Call Center Industry*, Report for Status of Women in Canada, (2000), p.5.

²⁵¹ Bain, “Some Sectoral and Locational,” Lorentzon, “Call Centres: a Swedish,” Ed Rose and Gillian Wright, “Satisfaction and Dimensions of Control among Call Centre Customer Service Representatives” *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 16, no.1 (January 2005), pp.

However, the call center is still an urban phenomenon in many countries.²⁵²

The pattern is locating a call center which handles the core activities of company that require more skilled labor to city centers but tending to move the sub-activities to the periphery where it is possible. For instance, the banking sector, which constitutes the majority of call centers in almost every country, needs an available labor pool with some university education, particularly in operating fields like banking, finance or insurance. Because of that, companies in this sector tend to locate their call centers in urban areas; nevertheless, some of them might open branches or outsource to call center suppliers in small cities to operate their low-skilled operations, like collecting awaiting payments.

In the Turkish case, beyond any doubt, the leading location for call centers is Istanbul. The major factor for locating a call center is the city's traditional dominance in the country's economy. Choosing Istanbul as a call center location can be considered obligatory in the case of available skilled labor. Since call centers usually employ university students or graduates, Istanbul has the largest population with some university education in the country. In-house call centers are usually settled close to existing concentrations of allied activity or as a department in the company's head-office. Hence, Istanbul as a trade, financial and industrial center is also a hub for telephone services activities. Additionally, call center service supplier companies tend to locate their centers in Istanbul in order to be close to parent-companies. Closeness can be a demand from the parent-company or it can be a must

136–160; Weinkopf, "German Call Centres," On the other hand, some scholars claim that "There is no evidence that labour costs influence call center locations." Paul Bishop, Peter Grippaious and Gillian Bristow, "Determinants of Call Centre Location: Some Evidence for UK Urban Areas," *Urban Studies* 40, no. 13 (December 2003), pp. 2751-2768.

²⁵² Richardson and Gillespie, "The Call of the Wild," p. 92; Bagnara, *Towards Telework in Call Centres*; Yoshio Arai and Kazuhiro Sugizaki, "Concentrations of Call Centers in Peripheral Areas: Cases in Japan," *Network and Communicational Studies* 17, no. 3-4 (2003), pp.187-202; Breathnach, "Globalisation, Information Technology," p.482.

to establish business-to-business relations; because Istanbul with country's top (national and international) transporting facilities and also business activities like expos or conferences. Call centers in Istanbul, however, are not in the heart of the city. They are usually located in districts away from the center, such as Kartal, Güneşli, Ümraniye and Maltepe, where office rents are relatively low. Also, the Istanbul hinterland, particularly Gebze and Yalova, have significant concentrations.

On the other hand, recent years have witnessed a boom in call centers in the provincial areas of Turkey. Although, they have kept the existing ones in Istanbul, some companies have opened second call centers in small cities. A few outsourcing companies also have moved some of their "projects" to provincial areas. Migrating to small cities is not so common for outsourcing companies that operate at the international level because of language requirements. Potential international call center workers are usually bi- or multilingual persons, language graduates or foreign spouses. These categories of staff are not easily available in provincial areas. Even so, there are a few call center locations internationally served in Anatolia, especially in touristic regions. Former employees in the tourism sector in cities like Denizli and Antalya constitute the labor pool for multilingual call centers in these cities.²⁵³

Cities in which at least one call center is located are Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Antalya, Denizli, Uşak, Yalova, Erzurum, Erzincan, Diyarbakır, Malatya, Samsun, Sivas, Gebze, Gümüşhane, Kahramanmaraş, and Kayseri. According to the Council of Ministers' "Decision on State Support for Investments" in July 2009, regions were divided into four groups and state support in varying degrees and shapes were offered to investors.²⁵⁴ Erzurum, Erzincan, Diyarbakır, Malatya and Gümüşhane

²⁵³ Call Center Manager-1, interview by the author and Sinan Erenşü, note taking, Istanbul, Turkey, 29 July 2009.

²⁵⁴ Republic of Turkey, *T.C Resmi Gazete*, no. 27290, 16 July 2009.

where bigger call centers were located situated in the fourth group; hence, companies are offered support for the social security contribution of their workers for 7 years and tax breaks reaching 90%. Uşak, Samsun, Sivas, Kahramanmaraş and Kayseri were listed in the third group; thus, social security contribution support for 5 years and 60% tax breaks were offered in these cities. Although public support as tax reduction is not dedicated only to the call center business, call center companies constitute one of the biggest benefitters of incentives in provincial cities, particularly in Erzurum and Diyarbakır the most popular and the biggest locations. Traditionally, these cities also offer a large unemployment pool, which is a prerequisite for call center locating, since the turnover rate is considerably high. Furthermore, labor and occupancy costs are lower in provincial areas.

Although companies promote their investments in provincial regions as “social responsibility projects,” the main logic behind it is significant cost savings. One of my manager interviewees claimed that workforce cost is 30-40% lower in distant cities than in metropolitan areas.²⁵⁵ Call centers managers also accept the fact that the main pull factor of provincial cities is cheap labor. Nonetheless, they strongly stress the role of call centers as job generator in provinces where people suffers from unemployment. For instance, the assistance director of Global Bilgi emphasizes their contribution to the people of Erzurum;²⁵⁶ the company has become the biggest employer in the city just in one year. Human resources director of Doğan Call Center, which operates in Gümüşhane, stresses the social and cultural role of call center more: “Back in the day, a university was thought to be the only vehicle to

²⁵⁵ Call Center Manager-2, interview by the author, note taking, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010.

²⁵⁶ “Anadolu’nun Kapıları Çağrı Merkezlerine Açıldı,” *Call Center Magazine*, no. 10 (April-May 2009), p. 28.

modernize a particular region. But, nowadays we observe a similar trend in the cities in which call centers are located. Nowadays, Anatolia [central Turkey] is modernized with call centers.”²⁵⁷ The manager of the Finansbank call center pointed the employment of women in their Erzurum branch, where 82% of workers are female.²⁵⁸ However, he did not mention the wage differentiation between them and their colleagues in Istanbul. On the other hand, while analyzing location’s specific influence on human resource management practices in call centers, Paulet claims that workers tend to compare their salaries with other jobs in the same place, not with the same job in other (metropolitan) cities.²⁵⁹ It may be evident for call center workers in Turkey; nonetheless, further research is required for a genuine analysis of this wage differentiation and workers’ consideration of it.

Another advantage of moving to provincial cities for companies is low turnover rates and workers’ professionalism. Managers state that the Anatolian people are very self-disciplined, loyal and hardworking; workers tend to consider their jobs as life long occupations and turnover is very low comparing to Istanbul; additionally the CFO of a large outsourcer company claims that employees can focus on their job better because there is no chaos in Anatolian cities, contrary to metropolitan cities.²⁶⁰ In actual fact, workers in provincial cities tend to be more conscientious of their jobs in the absence of employment alternatives. The director of Doğan Call Center very frankly indicated that low rate of turnover was related to the

²⁵⁷ Ibid. “Önceleri bir bölgeye üniversite kurulursa oranın çağdaşlaştığı belirtilirdi. Ancak artık çağrı merkezlerinin kurulduğu yerlerde böyle bir yönelim görüyoruz. Artık Anadolu’yu çağrı merkezleri çağdaşlaştırıyor. Çünkü bu merkezlere büyük eğitim yatırımları yapıyoruz.”

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p.29.

²⁵⁹ Renee Paulet, “Location Matters: The Impact of Place on Call Centres,” *Journal of Industrial Relations* 50, no. 2 (2008), p.314.

²⁶⁰“Anadolu’nun Kapıları Çağrı Merkezlerine Açıldı.”

absence or rareness of other employment choices in the province.²⁶¹ This is evident also in other national contexts. For instance, Richardson and Gillespie demonstrate how call center companies took advantage of limited work opportunities in Highlands of Scotland, where this situation resulted in low turnover of staff.²⁶² Furthermore, the presence of a university in the city supplies a young and skilled workforce to companies; managers' statements also confirm that. Beyond any doubt, the university factor is not unique to Turkey. In the Swedish context, Lorentzon states the role of a local university in supplying qualified and flexible labor well adapted to call center tasks.²⁶³ Also, Kirov and Mircheva demonstrate the cooperation between the local university in a big town in Bulgaria, which is trying to prevent its young population from migrating to larger cities, and two foreign call center companies; under the terms of the agreement, the university provides office space and the call center offers part-time jobs to students and recent graduates.²⁶⁴ In the Turkish context, it would be asserted that the establishment of new universities in every city during the Justice and Development Party governments may have increased the locational alternatives for companies related to available workforce.

The entrance of a call center to a provincial city brings not only employment opportunity, but also social and cultural problems. As call center managers acknowledge, the accent of workers is something that should be modulated according the companies' customer relations policies. A director claims that their "accent neutralization training" which is obligatory for employment in call centers, aims to

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Richardson and Gillespie, "The Call of the Wild," p. 97.

²⁶³ Lorentzon, "Call Centres: a Swedish," p. 217.

²⁶⁴ Vassil Kirov and Kapka Mircheva, "Employment in Call Centres in Bulgaria," *Work Organization, Labour and Globalisation* 3, no.1 (Summer 2009), p.147.

meet their customer-oriented approach.²⁶⁵ Furthermore, another call center manager states that the company he works for is not moving its call center activities to Anatolia because of the “accent problem.” They have opened their new branch to a city close to Istanbul.²⁶⁶ Accent neutralization as an issue arises usually in offshore call centers in peripheral countries which target an English-speaking market and is well documented by scholars. For instance, Mirchandani insists on regarding the extensive training and involving practices as linguistic and cultural imperialism and claims that “the justification provided for ‘neutralizing’ accents draws heavily on discourses of human resource development whereby Indian labour is constructed as a flexible commodity that can be trained to meet client needs.”²⁶⁷ D’Cruz and Noronha also demonstrate evidence for the emotional impacts of reducing the mother tongue influence as a job requirement on workers.²⁶⁸ However, as is clear by managers’ statements, workers’ accent is an issue in domestic call centers in Turkey which operate in Eastern cities. On the other hand, Turkish multilingual call center workers do not seem to have an accent problem, because of the fact that the majority of them were born and raised in the country of their vocational language; this situation constitutes one of the main themes of the following chapter. Further research should penetrate into the workers’ consideration of this neutralized accent obligation in call centers in the Eastern cities of Turkey.

²⁶⁵ “Anadolu’nun Kapıları Çağrı Merkezlerine Açıldı.”

²⁶⁶ *Sabah*, 22 July 2009, “Yeni Teşvikler Siemens’i Düzce’ye Yatırımı Çekti,” Available [online]: http://www.sabah.com.tr/Ekonomi/2009/07/22/yeni_tesvikler_siemensi_duzceye_yatirima_cekti [17 January 2010].

²⁶⁷ Mirchandani, “Practices of Global Capital,” p.360.

²⁶⁸ D’Cruz and Noronha, “Being Professional,” p. 353.

Turkey As an Offshore Destination

The term offshoring means locating a function of the firm abroad. While categorizing outsourcing activities, the World Trade Organization defines two different types of offshoring: Captive offshoring, which describes a situation in which future supplies are sourced from an affiliated firm abroad, and non-captive offshoring which refers to the case when the new supplier is a non-affiliated firm and located abroad.²⁶⁹ In the case of call centers, as was obvious in the second chapter of this study, popular offshore destinations for companies are India, Canada, Ireland and more recently South Africa and Philippines. Turkey is, nevertheless, considered as an ideal offshore destination by many companies, particularly by those which serve the German and Dutch-speaking world. However, offshore call centers in Turkey are still limited, constituting 8% of total centers. Before focusing on why companies move their call centers to Turkey as captive-offshoring and how Turkish call centers promote the Turkish workforce to multinational companies which seek to find a destination to non-captive offshoring, the reasons behind offshoring should be mentioned very briefly.

Srivastava and Theodore state a set of factors which have made developing economies attractive and accessible locations for the relocation of customer service functions. These include:

1. Improvements in telecommunications capacity and reductions in telecommunication costs;
2. Increased use of standardized enterprise software platforms that allow for a common set of employee skills across organizations;
3. Widespread fluency in English (as well as Spanish, French and German) in parts of developing world; and

²⁶⁹World Trade Organization, *World Trade Report 2005: Exploring the Links between Trade, Standards and the WTO*. Available [online]: http://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/anrep_e/world_trade_report05_e.pdf [10 July 2009], p. 310.

4. Marked pay differentials between US workers and workers possessing equivalent skills but who reside in low-wage countries.²⁷⁰

As is well documented, the central motive for the migration of call centers to developing world is reducing labor costs.²⁷¹ Additionally, companies can afford more highly skilled labor forces for lower skilled jobs by moving to peripheral countries where the desire to work for an international company is high among recent graduates, although the offered jobs are standardized and low-value added.²⁷² For instance, Batt et al. demonstrate that offshored call centers in India have the lowest levels of work discretion with work processes more standardized, constrained and highly monitored compared to their counterparts in the sending country, US.²⁷³ The workforce in offshore destinations tend to be not only more educated but also indicate a better work ethic, professionalism and willingness to learn.²⁷⁴ Besides these favorable advantages of workforce, the incentives and support offered by developing countries' governments provoke the companies to relocate their customer service functions, particularly call centers to the developing world.

The internationalization of call centers in Turkey is still limited; however this is not an exception in the world of call centers. In other national contexts, the majority of call centers are dedicated to domestic market. The striking point about offshored call centers in the country is their target countries. Although, as a global

²⁷⁰ Snigdha Srivastava and Nik Theodore, "Offshoring Call Centres: The View from Wall Street," in *Developments in the Call Centre Industry: Analysis, Changes and Challenges*, edited by John Burgess and Julia Connell (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 20.

²⁷¹ Rosemary Batt, David Holman and Ursula Holtgrewe, "The Globalization of Service Work: Comparative Institutional Perspectives on Call Centers," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 62, no. 4, (July 2009), pp. 453-487.

²⁷² Holtgrewe et al, "Global or Embedded Service," p.13.

²⁷³ Batt et al, "Service Management and Employment."

²⁷⁴ D'Cruz and Noronha, "Being Professional," Vishal Shah and Rejendra K. Bandi, "Capability Development in Knowledge Intensive IT Enabled Service," *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* 12, no. 4 (2003), pp. 418-427.

phenomenon, offshored call centers target the English-speaking world, the Turkish offshored call center sector is mainly dedicated to Germany and the Netherlands. Nonetheless, there are also call centers serving in English, Russian, French and Greek. From a leading German commercial economy newspaper, Niklas Hoyer claims that there are 3000 workstations (seats) in Istanbul serving the German market and workers make 800 Euro per month in these centers while the average German call center worker makes 1700 Euro.²⁷⁵ The general manager of an outsourcer call center which specialized in German and Dutch market, states that a call center worker serving Dutch customers earns 750 Euro per month in his company,²⁷⁶ while in the Netherlands the average hourly pay of call center workers is about 13.8 and 11.4 Euros for in-house and subcontractor call centers, respectively.²⁷⁷ In both cases, the average monthly salary of Dutch workers is double or triple that of their counterparts in Istanbul. Deriving from these numbers, the cost advantage of Turkey is evident, which constitute the basic logic of offshoring of call centers.

Call centers have a less than 15-year history in Turkey; and the offshore outsourcing of call centers to Turkey is a more recent phenomenon. The entrance of Siemens Business Solutions (SBS, one of the biggest 10 companies in this sector worldwide) to the Turkish market in 2003 was a turning point for the Turkish call center industry. SBS located a major call center in Istanbul, and then in Ankara. Just after SBS, with an investment of approximately 2 million Euros, Lufthansa opened up a center (one of seven international call centers) in Istanbul, mainly to serve

²⁷⁵ Niklas Hoyer. 15 October 2007. "Istanbul lockt deutsche Call-Center." Available [online]: <http://www.handelsblatt.com/unternehmen/it-medien/istanbul-lockt-deutsche-call-center;1336688> [1 August 2009].

²⁷⁶ Call Center Manager-1, interview by the author and Sinan Erensü, note taking, Istanbul, Turkey, 29 July 2009. It should be noted that this monthly salary is for workers in the Istanbul station. Workers in the other locations of the same company earn 10-15 percent less.

²⁷⁷ de Grip et al, *Employment and Industrial Relations*.

German-speaking customers. The director of Lufthansa Global Tale Sales, Jurgen Husemann clearly stated that Siemens and Avaya were important references to locate a call center in Istanbul.²⁷⁸ Furthermore, Husemann added that the technical support facilities are better than those of other offshoring candidate states (Czech Republic and Italy) and bi- or multilingual personnel are available at low costs in Turkey.²⁷⁹ By 2003, there are more than 100 workers employed in Lufthansa's call center in Istanbul, mainly take incoming calls to make reservations and other ticket operations. Furthermore, some Turkish call center outsourcing companies began to serve multinational companies and to operate pan-European centers by employing multilingual workers. In the *Catalogue*, 14 companies advertise themselves as offering services in foreign languages. As a conclusion, in the offshored call centers' part, Turkey has "captives", foreign offshore outsourcers and indigenous third-party providers.

Apart from those cited above, generally accepted advantages of Turkey for handling pan-European calls are listed as an ample and low cost workforce; the availability of a large number of qualified people who are able to speak fluent German (also other European languages); low staff turnover; dynamic and practical culture, "can do" attitude; general interest in working in call centers; flexible labor laws (monitoring, extended working hours); the availability of qualified blue chip suppliers; low set up and operation costs and proximity to Europe.²⁸⁰ According to an article from a Turkish daily which stresses the success of SBS in handling calls from

²⁷⁸ Şeyma Öncel Bayıksel. 1 June 2003. "Çağrılarda Sanal Dönem." Interview with Jurgen Husemann, Available [online]: http://www.capital.com.tr/haber.aspx?HBR_KOD=937 [17 July 2009].

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ "Turkey: A Strong Candidate for Offshore Call Center Outsourcing." Available [online]: http://www.crm2day.com/content/t6_librarynews_1.php?id=EpVyykkZAVsNbDgZrm [1 August 2009]

the United States, Canada, Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxemburg, Spain, England, France, Italy, Scandinavia, Poland, Korea, Singapore, Malaysia and China in Turkey, and India, the most popular location for offshore call center outsourcing loses its attractiveness because of the workers harsh accents and companies are looking for new places. Turkey is a very strong candidate in this competition.²⁸¹ In an article in New York-based *Call Center Magazine*, Turkey is promoted for offshore activities as “Turkey, with 66 million inhabitants, is an excellent call center location. It has trade windows on Europe and the Middle East. The country is comparatively stable. It belongs to NATO and is one of ten countries vying to join the EU.”²⁸² Author cites an expert who “sees Turkey as a base to serve Arabic-speaking countries” and says “Turkey is a lot more stable and more economical than other countries in the Middle East” and “it costs 30% to 40% less to operate a call center there than in other nations like the United Arab Emirates and Egypt.”²⁸³ Another article by the same author offers companies that serve German- and Dutch-speaking customers to locate call centers in Turkey to and cites Robin Goad (Datamonitor) and Alp Koren²⁸⁴ (Sistema Managing and Information Solutions) who indicate the significant number of German- and Dutch-born people in Turkey.²⁸⁵

²⁸¹ Onur Selçuk. 19 May 2004. “Hintliler İngilizce’yi aksanlı konuşunca, Türkiye’nin şansı açıldı.” Available [online]: <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2004/05/17/business/bus14.html> [17 July 2009].

²⁸² Brendan B. Read, “A Murky New Dawn for EMEA Call Centers – Europe and, Increasingly the Middle East and Africa Offer Call Center Opportunities. Here’s How to Best Use them,” *Call Center Magazine*. (1 July 2002).

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Actually, it must be “Kohen”.

²⁸⁵ Brendan B. Read, “Taking the World Out for a Spin – Call Centers Worldwide Face Pressure to Cut Expenses. Here Are Some Strategies and Locations to Help You Cost-effectively Serve Your Customers Outside of the US,” *Call Center Magazine* (1 July 2003).

David Holman et al. state that linguistic and cultural familiarity shaped the geographical spread of offshored call centers: “Most centers providing international services follow historic patterns of linguistic ties: between France and Morocco; between Spain and Latin America; between the UK and US and other English-speaking countries (Ireland, India, Canada, and South Africa).”²⁸⁶ The legacy of colonization history is apparently a determinant factor here. However, in the Turkish case, the basis of the multilingual (particularly German and Dutch) labor is the 1960-70s migration to European countries. According to the only master thesis²⁸⁷ about German call centers in Istanbul, the above comments of experts and my own observations, the majority of workers in international call centers in Turkey are the children of immigrant families. Most of them were born in Germany or the Netherlands and grew up in there; they have fluent language skills and are familiar with the parent-company’s customers’ culture. This is the most striking feature of Turkish international call center workers: They have not an “accent problem,” in contradiction to their Indian peers, nor they are not unfamiliar to customers’ culture in contradiction to their Surinamese peers. This situation seems the most strong pull factor of Turkey in the case of offshored call centers.

The multilingual workforce in Turkish call centers however is not limited to immigrant family members. There are also workers who were born and raised in Turkey and learned their vocational-language (particularly English) at school. Being fluent in a foreign language should be considered a high and rare skill and it would not be an unrealistic assumption to say that university students or recent graduates

²⁸⁶ David Holman, Rosemary Batt and Ursula Holtgrewe, *The Global Call Center Report: International Perspectives on Management and Employment*. Available [online]: <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/globalcallcenter/upload/GCC-Intl-Rept-US-Version.pdf> [10 July 2009], p. 5.

²⁸⁷ Alina Belinda Nietzert, “German Call Centers in Istanbul: Beyond the Global and the Local,” (Master’s thesis, Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, Turkey 2008).

with fluency in a foreign language do not choose a careers in call center where the labor process is monotonous and low-value added. Additionally they can find employment with better wages when other factors are constant. The reasons that make these workers choose to work in offshored call centers constitute a major theme of the next chapter of this thesis.

State, Public Institutions and the Call Center Industry

Before looking at the governmental role in establishment and expansion of the call center industry, deregulation or light regulation of employment in the Labor Law should be discussed briefly. The new Labor Law of Turkey was introduced in June 2003 and its main aim was to increase labor market flexibility. Article 7 defines “temporary employment relationship” and Article 12 defines “part-time work” for the first time in the country’s labor law history. These regulations constitute the prerequisites for today’s call center employment.²⁸⁸ According to the related article, a part-time work contract is defined as one in which “the normal weekly working time of the employee is shorter than a comparable full-time employee.”²⁸⁹ Obviously, the article does not define what “shorter” means, so that employers can arrange the working hours of part-time workers with great flexibility. For instance, as will be seen in interviews in the next chapter, even call center agents that work more than 36 hours a week can be considered part-time workers. Additionally, there is room for flexibility in the arrangement of working time between the employer and employee;

²⁸⁸ For a broad description of working time under the new Labor Act, see Nurhal Süral, “Reorganization of Working Time and Modalities of Employment under the New Turkish Labour Act,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 4 (July 2006), pp. 407-420.

²⁸⁹ Republic of Turkey, Labor Law, no. 4857, Article 13.

and this provides employers to eliminate overtime.²⁹⁰ Although the related article declares that daily and weekly working hours are not to exceed 11 and 45 hours, respectively,²⁹¹ the evidence in the next chapter show that it is not valid for the case of call centers. Interviews suggest that in the call center environment, workers can work more than half of the day at “peak times,” as they put it. In addition, since the employment protection by the Law is only for those establishments 30 or more employees, small and medium sized enterprises gain a great flexibility and larger companies are encouraged to contract out their non-core activities to outsourcers to avoid regulations, even if they are very light. The increased rate of outsourced call centers in terms of both number and size is higher than the industry’s total growth should be considered a consequence of this.

The state in Turkey did not seem aware of the call center industry until 2008 and although governmental activities that address call centers have increased in the last two years, the Turkish state is still not comparable with Canada, Ireland, India and many others in terms of playing a central role in attracting companies to locate in the country, particularly in specific zones. In this sense, Turkey does not have a governmental organization to instigate the call center industry while the provincial government of New Brunswick, Canada, introduced its call center policy in the early 1990s,²⁹² Irish Industrial Development Agency has had its call center programme since 1992.²⁹³ In India, in 1999, the central government launched the National

²⁹⁰ Bekir Erdoğan, Ali C. Taşkıran and Erol Taymaz, *Quality of Work and Employment: Industrial Relations and Restructuring in Turkey*. Report for European Foundation for the Improvement of Working and Living Conditions. Available [online]: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2009/15/en/1/EF0915EN.pdf> [28 February 2010].

²⁹¹ Republic of Turkey, Labor Law, no. 4857, Article 63.

²⁹² Joan McFarland, “Call Centres in New Brunswick: Maquiladoras of the North?” *Canadian Woman Studies* 21-22, no. 4-1 (Spring-Summer 2002), p. 65.

²⁹³ Breatnach, “Globalisation, Information Technology,” p. 481.

Telecom Policy which supplied a modernized telecommunication structure for call centers, and other policies enduring India's commitment to globalization, liberalization and privatization, were implemented during the 1990s including extended tax breaks, financial incentives, the deregulation of telecommunications, export processing zones and labor market deregulation.²⁹⁴ Call centers in Turkey normally benefit from the general "state support" decisions of government, as discussed above.

The entrance of the Turkish state into the call center world was the launching of VİMER²⁹⁵ in early 2008. In this sense, the government's first role was not as facilitator or instigator, but participating in the call center industry as a center owner. VİMER was opened by the Minister of Finance of the date and minister symbolically answered the first call and stressed the importance of call centers in communicating with people.²⁹⁶ Also, the Prime Ministry, Ministry of Health, Social Security Institution, Ministry of Education and many municipalities have call centers in Turkey.²⁹⁷ The presence of ministers is common at the opening new branches; they all herald the call center industry as an employment opportunity for those who are young, skilled, willing to work in the service sector and looking for career prospects in the "information economy." For instance, in October 2008, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan attended the opening of the first call center in Diyarbakır and declared his acknowledgment of the largest call center company in Turkey, which

²⁹⁴ Taylor and Bain, *Call Centres in Scotland*; Taylor and Bain, "India Calling to;" Taylor and Bain, "Work Organization and Employee."

²⁹⁵ *Vergi İletişim Merkezi* [Tax Communication Center]

²⁹⁶ *Yeni Şafak*. 14 March 2008. "Buyrun, Ben Kemal Unakıtan". Available [online]: <http://www.yenisafak.com.tr/gundem/?t=14.03.2008&c=1&i=105555> [15 December 2009].

²⁹⁷ "Kamu'da Çağrı Merkezi Açılımı", *Call Center Magazine*, no. 14 (December-January 2009-2010).

controls 45% of the total market for creating employment in a “meaningful place” like Diyarbakır.²⁹⁸

The striking point here is the commitment of the government to the neoliberal transformation of the world of work. All public call centers are outsourced centers that are contracted out to a call center supplier company. Cooperation between huge companies in the call center industry and the state is evident. The government supports the companies which locate a call center in a provincial city not only with tax incentives, but also outsourcing its call center activities to them. For instance, the Ministry of Health contracted out its call center to a huge call center supplier company, AssisTT, which operates SABİM²⁹⁹ in Erzurum so enjoying incentives. Another example is cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Global Bilgi. They together form EĞİTEK,³⁰⁰ a call center to answer questions about the nationwide high school examinations. In this sense, the government encourages low-paid, insecure and part-time work, dominantly in a union-free environment which is evident in outsourced call centers. In every opening of new branches in provincial areas, government officials praise the industry’s capacity as a job generator, but do not mention conditions of workers. “Employment” seems a magical word in consideration of call centers; however it has nothing to say about actual well-being of employees. Lavin also points out this situation in the Canadian context by claiming “Unemployment as a social phenomenon is exchanged for low-wage work as a social phenomenon.”³⁰¹

²⁹⁸ “Global Bilgi’den Diyarbakır’a Çağrı Merkezi.” Available [online]: http://www.callcenter.com.tr/sektorden_gelismeler/187-global-bjelgje8217den-djeyarbakir8217a.html [15 December 2009].

²⁹⁹ Sağlık Bakanlığı İletişim Merkezi [Ministry of Health Communication Center].

³⁰⁰ Eğitim Teknolojileri [Education Technologies].

The story of AssisTT is interesting and demonstrates how trade unions became aware of call centers in Turkey. AssisTT, now the second largest call center in the country with more than 2200 workers and two locations,³⁰² was established as a Turk Telekom subsidiary in 2007 after telecom privatization and operating call centers since 2008. The first important “project” of AssisTT was the acquisition of the call center of Turkish Airlines (THY) at the beginning of 2009. This caused 550 Turkish Airlines call center workers to lose their jobs and the general manager of AssisTT declared that they has taken the project, not the workers.³⁰³ The Union of Civil Aviation Workers (Hava-İş) protested the decision of THY to contract out the call center to a supplier company, organized “call protests”³⁰⁴ and claimed that the call center which is subject to outsourcing now, had been one of the best departments of THY and that the hidden agenda of THY managers was to eliminate union and collective agreement rights of workers.³⁰⁵ However, the attempts of Hava-İş failed and AssisTT is managing two-thirds of THY call center and remaining one third is under the control of another outsourcer company. AssisTT increased its size in terms of both workers and “projects” in two years and as the general manager clearly put it, aiming to grow in public sector.³⁰⁶ In other words, taking the existing call centers,

³⁰¹ David Oliver Lavin, “Call Centres in the ‘New Economy’: A Canadian Case Study”, (Master’s thesis, Queen’s University, Ontario, Canada, 2008).

³⁰² *Catalogue*, p. 143.

³⁰³ “AssisTT Kamuyu Bekliyor,” *Call Center Magazine*, no. 9 (February-March 2009).

³⁰⁴ “Call protests” which are carried out by an organized group by making constant calls to a selected call center and jamming the system, is a common method of protesting a call center with bad working conditions.

³⁰⁵ Necla Dalan. 2 October 2008. “THY’de Çağrı Merkezi Krizi.” Available [online]: http://haber.gazetevatan.com/haber.vatan?detay=THYde_cagri_merkezi_krizi_201535_2&Newsid=201535&Categoryid=2 [15 December 2009].

³⁰⁶ “AssisTT Kamuyu Bekliyor.”

which operate as departments of public sector bodies, or establishing new call centers for public sector with public sources, but in private sector.

Some companies that operate in provincial cities make agreements with local public universities to supply skilled labor. For instance, Global Bilgi and Dicle University in Diyarbakır cooperated for a training programme called the “Customer Relations Development Programme,” which aimed to create a suitable workforce for the company’s operations in the city.³⁰⁷ The same programme also was introduced at Erzincan University where the company has another branch. This cooperation between public universities or other education institutions and call center companies is evident in other national contexts.³⁰⁸ The neoliberal logic behind it is not limited to supplying skilled, cheap, as long as they are students and flexible workers for companies, but also providing a committed workforce that internalizes the values of the call center environment such as “customer satisfaction,” “the perfect customer satisfaction,” “the impact of customer’s consideration to brand equity.” Call centers in provincial cities are instrumental for university students to encounter and internalize “corporate culture” and transform them into devoted workers of the neoliberal world of work.

Beyond the cooperation between public universities and call center companies, other public institutions also cooperate with industry. For instance, the Turkish GSM operator giant Turkcell made an agreement with the Turkish

³⁰⁷ *Birgün*, 20 May 2009, “Turkcell Krizi Doğu’daki Ucuz İşgücüyle Aşacak!” [Turkcell will overcome the crisis by cheap workforce in the East!] Available [online]: http://www.birgun.net/actuel_index.php?news_code=1242819182&year=2009&month=05&day=20 [17 December 2009].

³⁰⁸ See McFarland, “Telling the Story of Globalization.”

Employment Organization (İŞKUR) in December 2009.³⁰⁹ According to this agreement, 1000 young people between 21 and 35 would be selected from the İŞKUR database and be trained as call center operators by Turkcell Akademi educators. The agreement also contains other cities (Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir) where candidates would be trained for other positions in Turkcell; but call center agent training programme would be only in Erzurum and Diyarbakır. It is clear that Turkcell and its subsidiary Global Bilgi are enjoying cheap labor in eastern cities and also using public support to reach this workforce. Here again, “employment” as a magical word converges public institutions and large companies. Nevertheless, İŞKUR offers call center agent courses in other cities. In the first quarter of 2010, there were four two-month courses in Istanbul and one in Samsun. One of the courses in Istanbul is for people with disabilities. These courses are employment-guaranteed; however, there is no further information about the type of employment for either candidates or the researcher. Obviously, İŞKUR train young and skilled call center workers with at least two-year university degrees which is a prerequisite to apply to the courses and leave them to the companies’ employment strategies.

Governors in peripheral regions are also very supportive of call center companies. For instance, the director of Siemens Business Solutions said that the governor of Düzce is very welcoming to “white-collar investments” in the city.³¹⁰ Furthermore, Siemens cooperated with İŞKUR to recruit workers in this location and

³⁰⁹ *Akşam*, 29 December 2009, “İşkur ve Turkcell’İN İstihdam İşbirliği.” Available [online]: http://www.aksam.com.tr/2009/12/11/haber/ekonomi/4470/iskur_ve_turkcell_in_stihdam_isbirligi.html [15 December 2009].

³¹⁰ *Sabah*, 22 July 2009, “Yeni Teşvikler Siemens’i Düzce’ye Yatırımı Çekti.” Available [online]: http://www.sabah.com.tr/Ekonomi/2009/07/22/yeni_tesvikler_siemens_i_duzceye_yatirima_cekti [17 December 2009].

applied to the organization to find 700 potential call center agents.³¹¹ The governor of Erzurum pointed out the importance and meaning of call center employment in the city where 1000 are employed in the branches of Global Bilgi and Finansbank; also stressed the capacity of Erzurum to be turned into a “call center hub.”³¹² According to him, the city benefits not only economically, but also socially from call centers and all investments in Erzurum will be supported by them as the “administrators of the city.”³¹³ Additionally, the Diyarbakır Governorship opened a call center where citizens can make calls in Turkish and Kurdish. The governor of the city declared their aim as “being close to people like a phone.”³¹⁴ Apart from this example which is extraordinary in its use of the Kurdish language between citizens and local representative of the state, there are many call centers belonging to governorships and municipalities.

Beyond any doubt, the most authorized governmental body on call center industry is the Ministry of Transportation. Minister Binali Yıldırım has pointed out the importance of call centers to the press several times. By comparing the call center seat rates in European countries, he claimed that the Turkish call center industry can employ 1 million people.³¹⁵ This optimistic view of call centers as a job generator was exaggerated in the final decisions of the 10th Transportation Forum, which was held in Istanbul on 27 September-01 October 2009. The forum declared a hundred decisions targeting 2023 (the 100-Anniversary of Turkish Republic), including

³¹¹ İŞKUR Bülteni, no. 41 (January 2009), p. 15.

³¹² “Anadolu’nun Kapıları Çağrı Merkezlerine Açıldı.”

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ İsmail Avcı. 9 June 2009. “Valiliğin Çağrı Merkezi Kürtçe Talepleri de Alıyor.” Available [online]: <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=856804> [17 December 2009].

³¹⁵ Haber Aktüel. 17 June 2009. “Türkiye’nin 1 milyon Açığı var!” Available [online]: http://www.haberaktuel.com/news_detail.php?id=202858 [17 December 2009].

“making Turkey the call center hub of Europe.”³¹⁶ It would not be an exaggeration to consider this decision by the forum as an exaggeration if the size and capacity of Irish and Dutch call center sectors among others, are kept in mind. Following this line, now we can attempt to situate Turkey in the global call center industry.

Concluding Remarks: Turkey’s Place in the Global Call Center Industry

As is evident in the above findings, like many other countries Turkey witnessed the mushrooming of call centers in previous decade. Deriving from the data of Turkey Call Center Catalogue, the average age of Turkish call centers is 6.3 and the great majority of them have been established since 2003. Employment doubled between 2003-2008 and transcended 35,000. Further it is predicted that sector can recruit 30,000 new employees in the subsequent five years. Obviously, call centers constitute a rising source of employment since they are considered as a key element of customer relations in almost every component of private sector and even in public services.

The Turkish call center industry is not so very distinct from other national experiences. In respect to the operating years of companies, annual growth rates, workforce composition, leading sectors, in-house / outsource segmentation, domestic / international segmentation, concentration in urban areas but tending to go more peripheral regions, the Turkish call center experience displays international trends of this newly established industry. On the other hand, according to the Call Centers Association’s comparison, the employment rate in Turkish call center sector is still

³¹⁶ *Zaman*, 30 September 2009. “Ulaştırma Şurası, İstanbul’da 60 milyon, Türkiye’de ise 30 milyon kapasiteli 2, 15 milyon kapasiteli 3 havaalanı yapılması kararı aldı”. Available [online]: <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=898038> [15 December 2009].

low and growth rates are still far behind those of many countries. In their meetings, press conferences and publications, the Association frequently stresses Turkey's potential to be a call center hub for European and neighboring countries.³¹⁷

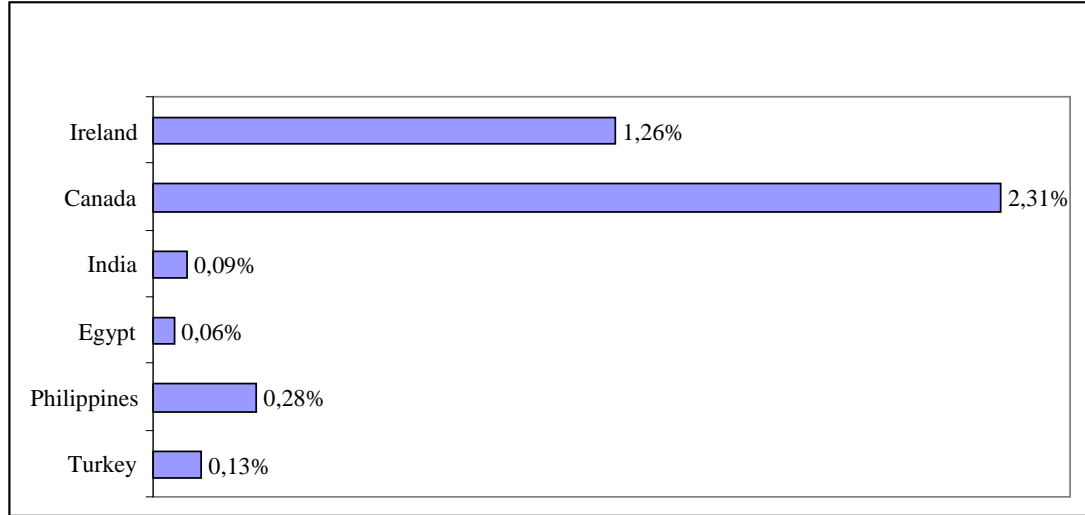


Fig. 2 Percentage of the Call Center Employees in Total Employment (2008)

Source: Çağrı Merkezleri Derneği, *Dünya ve Türkiye’de Çağrı Merkezi Sektörü* (www.cagrimerkezleridernegi.com)

Call centers are an employment area mainly dedicated to women and the young population in Turkey, as is evident in every national experience. However, the educational level of workers seems to be very high. 46.5% of Turkish call center workers hold bachelor's degrees and this ratio makes Turkey third in the countries surveyed in the Global Call Center Project, after India and France, in respect to university-educated workforce participation. As demonstrated in the second chapter of this thesis, there is a positive correlation between the internationalization of call centers and the educational level of workers. In the Turkish case, the participation of recent university graduates in the workforce is very common in call center sector, but this is not an indicator of high internationalization, rather it might be understood as a consequence of limited employment alternatives in other areas of the economy.

³¹⁷ For instance see Çağrı Merkezleri Derneği, *Kuruluş Duyurusu Basın Toplantısı*. [Available: online] <http://www.cagrimerkezleridernegi.net/uploads/dlfiles/CMD-Basin-Toplantisi-Sunumu.pdf> [24 July 2009].

The internationalization of call center activities in Turkey is quite low, 8%. Only Danish, Brazilian, Polish and South Korean call centers have a lower internationalization than that, according to the Global Call Center Project. The limited internationalization of Turkish call centers should be understood by the language barrier and target markets. Since the bi- or multilingual personnel in Turkey are more available for German and Dutch services and German and Dutch-speaking world is relatively smaller in scale than English-speaking one, international call centers in Turkey can never be big as their counterparts in India, Canada or Ireland.

The externalization of the workforce through contracting out call center activities is very common in Turkey. Outsourced call centers constitute 40% percent of total center activities. This ratio is higher than the world average (33%) and only three countries (India, Brazil and Spain) surveyed in the Global Call Center Project represent more outsourcing of call centers than Turkey. The high percentage of outsourced call centers contributes to union-free industrial relations in Turkey with many other factors that are behind the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, it should be noted that unionization and collective bargaining coverage are almost zero in Turkey, even in in-house call centers. In this sense, Turkey resembles any other developing country in the Global Call Center Project.

The Turkish state has not taken a proactive role in the case of call center industry; there are not governmental incentives dedicated to only call centers. In this sense, the state in Turkey resembles the New Zealand, South Korean and Polish experiences, where governments support the industry in an indirect way, unlike some liberal or coordinated market economies (Canada, Australia, Sweden...) and developing countries (such as India), where governments introduce specific policies and financial support for call centers as a means of employment creation. However,

this does not mean that the state is completely ignoring call centers. On the contrary, state officials, local representatives and related public institutions encourage call center activities, support them, offering varying degrees of incentives to invest in peripheral regions and organizing joint training programs for call center workers. But most importantly, deregulating industrial relations environment, encouraging and “normalizing temporary and contract work”³¹⁸ are the main “contributions” of the state to the call center industry. The Turkish state can be considered to be an “enabling” state in the call centers sector; however, in the final analysis, the establishment and expansion of the Turkish call center industry is an outcome of private sector actors by organizing their expos, networks and international connections.

To sum up, although it is difficult to detect every aspect of call center industry such as recruitment practices, wage levels, job discretion and monitoring in call center environment in the lack of data, the above observations, interviews with managers, data gathered from industrial publications, newspapers and business journals suggest that the Turkish experience with call centers can be situated at the edge of those of developing countries (or as Global Call Center Project refers them as “Recently Industrializing Economies”) with regard to relatively educated workforce, expanding market size, frequent stress on offshoring and Turkey’s potential to attract foreign investment, relatively low wages and long working hours and high externalization by outsourcing. There still remain many undetected facets of the Turkish call center industry and a large in scope and extent research is needed. In the next chapter, this thesis will focus on a sub-sector of Turkish call centers and examine multilingual call centers and employment therein by letting the workers talk

³¹⁸ Leah V. Vosko, *Temporary Work: The Gendered Rise of a Precarious Employment Relationships*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

about their jobs. The emphasis will switch from quantitative aspects to qualitative ones to draw a more meaningful picture of working in call centers.

CHAPTER FOUR

EXPERIENCE OF WORK IN MULTILINGUAL CALL CENTERS

This chapter is based on semi-structured interviews with multilingual call center workers. Its main aim is to demonstrate what kind of employment is being generated in call centers by letting the workers talk about their jobs. The interview questions seek to obtain information on who are working in multilingual call centers of Turkey, their characteristics, qualifications and expectations, how they consider their abilities and the skill demands of call center work and what skills call center work engenders. In addition the interviewees were asked if they think that these new skills would be recognized as valuable in other alternatives to work, to what extent they think that they could employ their existing skills and experience in the call centers, in what ways they were satisfied or dissatisfied with their jobs, where they situated their call center experience in a broader life-narrative, what their future plans were, whether they wanted to stay or leave the call center job behind, in the final analysis, why they chose this job or they did “really” choose. This chapter challenges the optimistic view about call center employment which is assumed to provide an opportunity to work in a “knowledge economy” and images like empowered, skilled, respected and responsible worker and claims that call center industry, even relatively higher waged multilingual call centers, is an employment area for those who have only limited job alternatives. The majority of the participants of this study agreed that the call center can not be considered a life-long job and external factors like their

family backgrounds, their limited or unvalued qualifications or being in need of money to continue higher education, determined their choices.

The following pages document seventeen workers' experiences from multilingual call centers located in Istanbul. As noted in the previous chapter, although there are a few branches of some companies in other cities, Istanbul is the hub for international call centers in the country. As the researcher sought to obtain representation from all types of multilingual call centers in Turkey, participants were selected from various fields of industry. Nine participants were from Turkish offshore-outsourcer companies, four were from foreign outsourcers, two were working for Turkish in-house call centers and two were employed by foreign in-house call centers, in another word, "captives." This diversity of participants in terms of their employers represents the diversity of multilingual call centers in Turkey. In addition, of seventeen participants, eleven were born and raised in foreign countries (Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Australia) as the members of immigrant families and had learnt their vocational language in these countries; on the other hand, six had no "migration story." Especially this distinction of family background will be referred to as a main source of different considerations of aspects of call center work in the following pages.

The participants also ranged in their educational level. Six of the participants were university students, four were university graduates and one was a college graduate, five held secondary education diplomas and one had a primary school education. This variety is representative of the high educational level of the Turkish call center workforce; on the other hand, it demonstrates that a university degree is not the main criterion of call center recruitment. Of the seventeen participants, nine were female and eight were male. Although, women constitutes the 70% of the total

workforce in call centers of Turkey, according to my own observations and my interviews with call center managers, the workforce in multilingual call centers is equally balanced in the case of gender; hence I did not pay special attention to the gender segmentation of participants.

In addition, not all participants were presently employed by call centers at the date of research. Five of them were not working in call centers and one was employed in a Turkish-served call center. However, as long as the research attempts to find the reasons behind the choice of a call center job and the personal experiences of a worker goes through while working, their contributions also supplied me significant implications. Apart from that, it was more factual to find the value of skills that the workers developed in the call center environment by the help of ex-workers' statements. Additionally, reasons to leave the call center also could be investigated according to their share. Furthermore, because of security issues and fear of losing job, my attempts to interview more current workers failed. Although I guaranteed anonymity, many of the workers that I reached via the Internet or friends did not want to talk. In order to provide anonymity, I refer to all participants by very common names in Turkish.

Participation was on a voluntary basis and the only criterion was using a foreign language in a call center that serves international clients. Five of the interviewees were working in German call centers and six in Dutch call centers; six spoke in English. By choosing multilingual call centers as a subject, this chapter aims to focus on a distinctive facet of Turkish call center industry. As noted in the previous chapter, Turkey as an offshore-outsourcing location presents different "advantages" to call center employers from other popular locations in the developing world, like India, Philippines or South Africa. First of all, most of the international

call centers in Turkey target the German- and Dutch-speaking world and the alternatives for offshoring call centers that serve in these languages are limited. Furthermore, Turkish multilingual workforce include those who were born and raised in European countries; hence, the cultural and linguistic problems that occur in the Indian, Filipino and South African context are rare in Turkish multilingual call centers.³¹⁹

In addition, workers who have no “migration story” constitute the most skilled call center workers in Turkey. As long as they have learned their vocational language at school, they are all university graduates or students, mostly attended high-ranking schools, even private colleges. Being fluent in a foreign language, beyond any doubt, is a rare skill and an important question rises in this context: Is there a tension between their qualifications and the labor process in call centers? An attempt to answer this question also contributes to the main aim of this thesis which is to find out what kind of employment is being engendered in call centers and for whom the call center is an employment “opportunity.”

Skills and Qualifications in Multilingual Call Center Work

Before I examine the skills and qualifications in call center environments, it should be noted that investigating skill is a challenging issue. First of all, the concept of skill has always been complicated. Formal qualifications, individual talents or experience on work can be labeled as skills; skill can be identified by the complexity of tasks that a worker perform during the working day and it also is closely related to his/her initiative or judgment over the labor process. By acknowledging the Noon

³¹⁹ See “Turkey as an Offshore Destination” in Chapter Two of this thesis.

and Blyton's metaphor, "skill is a definitional minefield,"³²⁰ in this section, rather than conceptualizing skill in the call centers, I will focus on what the skill demands of job are, what workers' considerations are about their abilities and qualifications that they need to employ in the labor process. I tried to find out what skills they brought to the job and what kind of skills -if any- they developed during the call center experience. My first questions about skills aimed to understand their educational qualifications, to see if there is a link between them and call center work; then I encouraged them to state the specific skill demands of their work which were usually hard to define. I used the generic term of "soft skills" for the latter.³²¹ The role of training programs that were provided by companies appeared as an important facet of skill development. Finally, their linguistic abilities which were commodified by the nature of multilingual call center work emerged as a major theme during the interviews.

According to the participants of this study, there is no relationship between one's educational level and the nature of the job. Interviewees had different educational degrees and in the same workplace, it is evident that a university graduate and a primary school graduate could work together, side by side. Workers that had no foreign country experience as an immigrant were more educated, because of the fact that they had learned their vocational language at school; they all had bachelor's degrees and some of them were working on their masters. On the other hand, those who were born and raised in foreign countries included workers with only basic education. Evidence gathered by interviews demonstrates that educational levels do not have any impact on wages; it also found in other national contexts,

³²⁰ Mike Noon and Paul Blyton, *Realities of Work* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p.116.

³²¹ See Korczynski, "Skills in Service" and for "skill debate" in the call center literature, Chapter One of this thesis.

having a bachelor's degree does not increase salary levels in the call center industry.³²²

All of the participants accepted that call center job is not based on skills that one gain in schools. An interviewee said, "Here you use your own gift, not anything you learned at school; it is up to you. Everyone can't do it. Selling is difficult. You develop yourself, you learn from your friends."³²³ However, some of them stress that having a university degree could provide the ability to understand how things are going on in the workplace and act accordingly. An university education, according to many participants is important for individual's own culture, rather than call center work:

Going to university means you're able to learn new things; it is easy to cope with extraordinary situations for you. But it is not about this work at all, if you go to university, it is useful everywhere, and in a call center too.³²⁴

"If you can understand what you read, education is not important nor is anything else; anyone can do that job,"³²⁵ said one of the interviewees, Ayşe. Ayşe was a graduate student and continuing her master's degree in finance and marketing. However, she did not think that her education field was relevant to the tasks she did at work. As long as the tasks are simplified and standardized by the help of scripts and related technologies, educational credentials loose their fundamentality in the workplace and generally in employment. Hence, regardless of the years an individual

³²² Charles Jobs, Deena Burris and David Butler, "The Social and Economic Impact of the Call Center Industry in Ireland," *International Journal of Social Economics* 34, no. 4 (2007), p. 281.

³²³ Emre, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. "Burada okulda öğrendiğin bir şeyi değil, kendi yeteneğini kullanırsın; sana bağlı olan bir şey. Herkes yapamaz, satış zordur. Kendin geliştiriyorsun, arkadaşlarından öğreniyorsun."

³²⁴ Deniz, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul Turkey, 8 January 2010. "Üniversiteye gittiysen, yeni şeyler öğrenebiliyorsun demek, olağaniüstü durumlarla uğraşmak senin için kolaydır. Ama bu işle bir alakası yok. Üniversiteye gittiysen her yerde işe yarar, çağrı merkezinde de yarar."

³²⁵ Ayşe, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 6 January 2010. "Okuduğunu anlayabiliyorsan ne eğitim önemli ne başka bir şey, kimi getirsen o işi yapabilir."

spent at school, his/her skills cannot be transferable to labor process. Another participant of this study, who had only primary school education, clearly stated that he is an example of the irrelevance of educational level and call center work: “We are marketing a product; you need to understand it. If you have the ability to understand that, there is no need to be a university graduate. An elementary school graduate may do it, I can do it.”³²⁶ All of the participants mentioned that they developed skills that the call center job requires in the training programs that the company supplied for them when they were first recruited and in the first months in call center on their own or with the help of colleagues. Except those from two Turkish banks’ inbound call centers, participants stated that training was short and project specific. Especially in the case of offshored-outsourced call centers, training tends to focus mainly on a specific product that they try to sell by phone and every time the product is changed, agents take another short training session. “I went through training, it lasted about one week. You receive training for every project that comes. Not only project training, but also selling training. In order to get fresh. How you do sell, which methods you use, but how to talk to clients, things like that.”³²⁷

One may think that call center work requires computer skills; however, my interviews suggest that call center workers are not recruited based on their technical-mechanical skills or could they employ their abilities on work. Although workers spent all their working day in front of computer screens and using software, mostly they considered call center work not relevant one’s computer abilities. They all stated that the software that they use at work is very simple and company-specific, the

³²⁶ Mehmet, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. “*Bir ürün pazarlıyoruz, onu anlamamız gerekiyor. Onu anlama becerisi olduktan sonra üniversite mezunu falan olmaya gerek yok. İlkokul mezunu da yapabilir, ben yapabiliyorum.*”

³²⁷ Hatice, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. “*Eğitim aldım, bir hafta kadar sürdü. Her proje geldiğinde bir eğitim alıyorsunuz. Tazelenmek için. Nasıl satış yapılır, hangi yöntemler kullanılır, müşterilerle nasıl konuşulur, öyle şeyler.*”

knowledge and experience about computer programs that they gained could not be adapted to other working environments. On the other hand, one participant mentioned that it was the first time he had used computers like that and call center work supplied knowledge about computers: “I had no computer experience before, now I understand some.”³²⁸ However, it should be considered as an extraordinary example. All other participants stated that the computer program that they used at the call center was easy to learn: “The job did not require much technical skill. We logged in with a password and then every day you do the same stuff once you learn the system.”³²⁹ Training also included computer and software education, but even so, they are not crucial. What constitutes the greater part of training is “how to talk” which will be analyzed later in this section; but before that, other aspects of call center training in different companies should be noted.

Some participants thought that training provided them with adequate skills which might be their advantage in the future. But this is limited to in-house call center example. In two Turkish banks’ inbound call centers, participants mentioned that they took the same training program with any other employer of the bank:

I have a basic banking certificate, but I obtained it from the company that I worked for. They put us through a 15-day course, they teach us basic law, basic banking. (...) Not only call center training but also banking. I received the same education as the tellers at the bank.³³⁰

³²⁸ Ahmet, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. “*Bilgisayar deneyimim yoktu benim hiç önceden, şimdi bir şeyler anlıyoruz yani.*”

³²⁹ Arda, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 17 February 2010. “*O kadar fazla teknik beceri gerektirmiyordu iş. Sadece bir şifreyle giriyorduk, onun dışında sistemi kir kere tanıdığın zaman her gün aynı şeyleri yapıyorsun.*”

³³⁰ Ayşe, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 6 January 2010. “*Temel bankacılık sertifikam var ama bu çalıştığım iş yerinden aldığım bir sertifika. Bir on beş günlük eğitim sürecinden geçiriyorlar bizi, temel hukuk, temel bankacılık eğitimi veriliyor. (...) Sadece çağrı merkezi eğitimi değil, bankacılık eğitimi. Gişede çalışan eleman hangi eğitimi alıyorsa ben de aynı eğitimi alıyorum.*”

She stated that this certificate will be in her CV for future job applications and it will “probably” be considered as a credential.

Participants from foreign in-house call centers talked about how their training program included lessons about globalization: “They gave us education about globalization, why they opened a call center here. They were explaining, this is globalization this is why we opened a call center here. They were explaining this to you because, umm, do not feel bad, okay, the workforce is cheaper here, but we present you these opportunities.”³³¹ Here, the managerial attempts to legitimize offshoring phenomenon is apparent.

Although there seems to be no correlation between educational level and call center work and workers come from different educational backgrounds and hold different degrees, this does not mean call center work is an unskilled job, nor do I suggest that call center work does not require distinctive skills. In spite of the educational credentials, all of workers that I interviewed stressed “soft skills,” which include communication skills, patience, staying calm and calming down angry clients, the ability to adapt to unpredictable situations, crisis management and conflict resolution. The training programs mostly aim to develop these kinds of skills.

Here, Hochschild’s conceptualization of emotional labor should be helpful. Emotional labor is defined as the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display. In the call center case, we may add “vocal display;” “Emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has *exchange value*.”³³²

³³¹ Burcu, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 7 January 2010. “*Bize küreselleşme nedir, çağrı merkezi burada nasıl açıldı eğitimi veriyorlardı. Anlatıyorlardı, küreselleşme bu ve biz de bu yüzden çağrı merkezi açtık. Bunu da sana şu yüzden anlatıyorlar, yani kendini kötü hissetme, tamam iş gücü burada ucuz ama biz de sana şu imkânları sunuyoruz.*”

³³² Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, p. 7

Since Hochschild's seminal *The Managed Heart*, emotional labor has been widely studied and developed as a general concept. Pugliesi claimed that emotional labor is not limited to the management of one's own feelings but also it should refer to the management of others' emotions.³³³ Further, Morris and Feldman stressed the managerial role in emotional labor and claimed that the workers are expected to perform organizationally desired emotions.³³⁴ Many studies in the call center literature have taken into consideration emotional labor, which can be identified as employing "soft skills" during interactions with customers, as a part of the Taylorized labor process.³³⁵ Below, while examining "soft skills" in the labor process, I will demonstrate to what extent multilingual call center work demands emotional labor by referring to the above conceptualizations.

Unlike the "hard skills" that can be demonstrated by an individual worker's degrees or certificates "soft skills," on which a call center job mostly relies are difficult to identify. Even those in this study who stated that being an agent is not suitable for everyone, it is a difficult job and based on the individual own skills, found it difficult to identify what kind of skills they employed during their interactions with customers. Soft skills usually were considered as someone's own talent and might only be improved by experience: "Doing this job should be inside of the person. Some people can't do this in any way, it does not come to them. But he may learn if he is [willing] to learn. It takes six months at least."³³⁶ All of the

³³³ Karen Pugliesi, "The Consequences of Emotional Labor: Effects on Work Stress, Job Satisfaction and Well-being," *Motivation and Emotion* 23, no. 2 (1999), pp. 125-154.

³³⁴ J. Andrew Morris and Daniel C. Feldman, "The Dimensions, Antecedents and Consequences of Emotional Labor," *Academy of Management Review* 21, no. 4 (1996) pp. 986-1010.

³³⁵ Bain et al, "Taylorism, Targets;" Mulholland, "Gender, Emotional;" Steve Taylor, "Emotional Labour and the New Workplace," in *Workplaces of the Future*, edited by Paul Thompson and Chris Warhurst (London: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 84-104.

participants of this study referred to “communication skills” as one of the prerequisites of call center work and when I asked them if they could identify the features of communication skills, patience and ability to listen emerged as key themes.

During their working days, call center workers might encounter difficult customers to handle with difficult problems to solve in the inbound environments or with no will to purchase a product in outbound call centers. They often were expected to interact with customers with great patience, always to smile on the phone. They had to find charm for every interaction and manage their emotions “professionally” to stay calm during a long and repetitive working day: “Being patient is very important, being tolerant, looking positively, being joyful, very very important.”³³⁷ Further, Ezgi explained that “An agent should be in the right mood all the time. It’s unacceptable to be depressed or, what else I can say, in a bad mood. If you are so, the team-leader suddenly shows up and warns you to come to yourself. Being energetic, it is important.”³³⁸ Morris and Feldman’s stress on organizationally desired emotions are apparent here.³³⁹ The management did not let workers prioritize their own feelings during working hours; the ideal worker feels only what his/her employee allows him/her to feel and interact with customers within determined borders, hence s/he should suppress other feelings.

³³⁶ Mehmet, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey. 13 January 2010. “*Bu işi yapmak insanın içinde olması gerekiyor, öyle insan vardır, bu işi hiç yapamaz, içinden gelmez. Ama öğrenme şeyi varsa belki öğrenebilir. En az altı ay lazım.*”

³³⁷ Özge, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 14 January 2010. “*Sabırlı olmak çok önemli, toleranslı olmak çok önemli, pozitif bakmak, neşeli olmak çok çok önemli.*”

³³⁸ Ezgi, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 30 January 2010. “*Agent her zaman havasında olacak. Depresif olmak ya da ne bileyim, asıksuratlı olmak Kabul edilmez. Öyleysen, takım lideri hemen gelir ve kendine gel diye uyarır. Enerjik olmak çok önemli.*”

³³⁹ Morris and Feldman, “The Dimensions.”

Another interviewee stressed being “ready with an answer” as a prerequisite: “You have to be ready with an answer every moment. You don’t know what kind of a person you will face.”³⁴⁰ Answers in line with this statement were very frequent, for instance, one participant said that “You talk to each client in a different way, it might be a businessman or it might be a butcher. When you call a house, you can talk with a laugh.”³⁴¹ Especially, in a selling environment, workers need to perform like an artist. One interviewee stated that “You need to change yourself. It is like a theater actually.”³⁴² This interviewee thought that the call center job was the most skilled job she had ever had because of the nature of project work which requires ability to change character according to the project: “This is the most skilled job I have ever had. You become another person for every project. Sometimes, it is possible to pass to different projects in a day, too. I act out more than one character in the same day, actually.”³⁴³

Additionally, every product they were expected to sell requires a different voice tone and way of speaking, the same interviewee said: “It differs greatly according to the project. For example, while selling death insurance now, we talk more calmly, more respectfully, while selling vitamins, it is easier, you can banter.”³⁴⁴ However, it should not be considered as a way of multi-skilling in outsourced call

³⁴⁰ Fatma, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010, “*Her an hazır cevap olmalısın, ne tür bir insanın karşına çıkacağını bilemiyorsun.*”

³⁴¹ Nevin, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010, “*Her müşteriyle ayrı konuşuyorsun, iş adamı da olabiliyor kasap da, konuşmanı ona göre ayarlıyorsun. Evi aradığın zaman kikir kikir konuşuyorsun.*”

³⁴² Hatice, interview by the author, tape recording, 13 January 2010. “*Kendini değiştirmen lazım. Tiyatro gibi aslında.*”

³⁴³ Hatice, interview by the author, tape recording, 13 January 2010. “*Bu sahip olduğum en vasıflı iş. Her projede başka bir insan oluyorsunuz. Bazen bir günde değişik projelere geçebilme ihtimali de var. Aynı günde birkaç karakter oynuyorum aslında.*”

³⁴⁴ Hatice, interview by the author, tape recording, 13 January 2010. “*Projeye göre çok şey değişiyor. Mesela şimdi ölüm sigortası satarken daha sakın, daha saygılı konuşuyoruz, vitamin satarken daha rahat, şakalaşabiliyorsun.*”

centers where agents are expected to work different projects in a short period of time.³⁴⁵ As one interviewee suggested that “It is the same basically, after all, it is selling, it doesn’t differ. It is the same whether it is selling tomatoes or a machine.”³⁴⁶

In addition, different projects require additional information to get and explain the potential customers. This situation leads outbound workers to learn new things, but they were not sure if this new set of knowledge would be valuable in their social life or future career. Particularly, they sell products like cable television, natural gas subscription or insurance which were available only for those in Germany or the Netherlands. However, most of them considered the change in selling product as a way to take a breath, an escape from the existing script to a new one: “When the project changed, it is good for agents, because one’s head chills out. You’re still selling something, but this time you’re explaining something else. It recovers from monotony.”³⁴⁷ Hence, the switch from project to project supplies a break for the worker; however, it cannot be considered as a change in the nature of work.

In addition, again in selling environments, it is evident that individual workers usually had to find their own way to “hook” potential customers. In that sense, workers were expected to manage the others’ feeling; in Pugliesi’s conceptualization, this dimension of emotional labor is based on other-focused

³⁴⁵ Russell and Thite, “The Next Division of Labour.”

³⁴⁶ Onur, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010, “*Temelde aynı, nihayetinde satıştır yani, fark etmiyor, domates de satsan aynı, bir makine de satsan aynı.*”

³⁴⁷ Zeynep, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. “*Proje değiştiği zaman çok iyi oluyor, agentlar için, çünkü kafa dağılıyor. Yine satış yapıyorsun ama başka bir şey anlatıyorsun bu sefer*”.

priorities.³⁴⁸ Even so, the individual strategies to sell a product were actively limited by script:

The subject is apparent. It is necessary not to go beyond the subject. But of course, you are talking with a client, let's say, if there is a dog barking out there, you talk about the dog, in order to enter the subject. But there are specific things you have to say, you need to say all the things that will appear in the contract, so you are always circle around the determined things. You talk about the same stuff actually. In different ways to every client you talk about the same thing.³⁴⁹

You have to say the things in the script. You need to say the existing ones, you are not supposed to add anything else, but it is up to you how you say it.³⁵⁰

In order to sell, you can go beyond the script, but not much. It directs you. You need to follow the script in front of you.³⁵¹

Communication skills usually are considered as selling skills in outbound call centers. Workers that I conducted interviews with always mentioned that selling is a distinctive skill and pursuing someone to purchase a product that s/he can not see or touch is based on the worker's ability to create a "credible" atmosphere by using his/her communication skills. One of the interviewees stated that it is crucial to someone's communication skills to be a "professional salesperson": "One-to-one communication. You are dealing with a client directly. In my previous job, I was face to face [with the client], too, but here, the person doesn't see you. This is more

³⁴⁸Pugliesi, "The Consequences."

³⁴⁹ Zeynep, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010, "Konu belli, konu dışına çıkmamak gerekiyor. Ama tabii ki, müşteriyle konuşuyorsunuz, ne bileyim arkada kopek havlıyorsa köpek hakkında konuşuyorsunuz, konuya girebilmek için. Ama söylemeniz gereken belli şeyler var yani, bu sözleşmede olacak şeyleri telefonda da söylemeniz gerektiği için hep belirli şeylerin etrafında dönüp duruyorsunuz, hep aynı şeyi konuşuyorsunuz aslında. Ama her müşteriye farklı anlatıyorsunuz o şeyi."

³⁵⁰ Hatice, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. "Scriptte olanları söylemek zorundasın, olanları söyleyeceksin, daha fazla bir şey katmayacaksın ama nasıl söyleyeceğin sana bağlı."

³⁵¹ Nevin, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. "Satış için scriptin dışına çıkabiliyorsunuz, ama çok çıkamazsınız. Sana yön veriyor. Önünde bir script ona uymanız gerekiyor."

difficult. It is difficult to sell without seeing. Just hearing the voice.”³⁵² Here, the notion of emotional labor as managing the feelings of others appears. By referring to communication skills, workers usually identified strategies to pursue a potential customer. Call center workers as emotional laborers were expected to charm customers by developing acceptable strategies; thus they should manage the customer’s feelings. This is the case in outbound selling environments.

The option to utilize individual communication skills and moving beyond the script is not possible at all and strongly discouraged by management in inbound call centers. While in outbound call centers where selling is the most desired consequence of telephone interaction, managers could be tolerant of workers in styling the speech as long as they conclude the call by a sell; in inbound environments, workers are expected to present the public face (or voice) of the company so they mostly stated that they can not individualize the ways that they interact with clients and as one of the interviewees said, their communication skills are limited to staying calm, if that can be considered as a communication skill. She said, “If you have an angry client, you need to be quiet; if the guy swears at you, you need to be quiet. They recruit and train according to this. You are freaking out sometimes, but you can’t do anything else.”³⁵³ To use one’s own communication skills is not accepted; the only thing a worker can do is to follow computerized scripts which include every single possible interaction with a customer.

This situation also leads to different perceptions of the on-going development of individual skills. On the one hand, a worker from an outbound call center worker

³⁵² Mehmet, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. *“Birebir iletişim. Müşteriyle direkt muhatapsın. Daha önce yaptığım işte de yüzyüzeydim ama burada seni görmüyor insan. Bu daha zor, görmeden satış yapmak zor. Sadece sesi duyuyorsun.”*

³⁵³ Ayşe, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 6 January 2010. *“Sinirli müşterin mi var, susacaksın; adam sana küfür mü ediyor, susacaksın. Buna göre adam alıyorlar ve eğitiyorlar. Çıldırtıyorsun bazen ama yapacak bir şeyin yok.”*

thought that “Every day you learn a different method of marketing. Every day adds a new thing.”³⁵⁴ On the other hand, the general ideas on skill development of inbound workers mostly resembles this statement by an interviewee: “You don’t get anything after the first month in call centers. You are doing the same thing finally, there are determined scripts, you’re saying them, you’re doing exactly the same thing with a guy who has been in the same position for 12 years.”³⁵⁵ Another interviewee who was employed by a foreign outsourcer in order to answer calls from the clients with problems about the products of a giant computer producer company mentioned the training program that he had taken in the first ten days after he was recruited. He said that after an initial training about company’s products, training focused on “human relations”: “Human relations, which words you should use on the phone, what you should say... ‘Some of them will be mad at you, some will yell, some will want to be friends. Don’t be worried, he is not yelling at you...’ This type of training, after ten days, you start.”³⁵⁶ Hence, trainings stress on “disengagement psychologically as a defense against the rude and abusive customers,”³⁵⁷ which is almost survival in call center work, as will be seen in the following pages of this chapter.

The interviews suggested that inbound call centers require so-called communication skills which are limited to keeping calm, dealing with abusive customers and the ability to be a good listener. Being a good listener in the in-bound

³⁵⁴ Nevin, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. “*Her gün bir pazarlama tekniği öğreniyorsun. Her gün bir şey ekleniyor.*”

³⁵⁵ Arda, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 17 February 2010. “*Çağrı merkezinde birinci aydan sonra bir şey kazanmazsın. Aynı şeyi yapıyorsun sonuçta, belli scriptler var, onları konuşuyorsun, 12 yıldır çalışan adamla aynı şeyi yapıyorsun.*”

³⁵⁶ Can, interview by the author, tape recording, Yalova, Turkey, 6 February 2010, “*İnsan ilişkileri, telefonda hangi kelimeler kullanılır, neler söylenir. ‘Bazısı kızacak sana, bazısı bağırarak, bazısı arkadaş olmak isteyecek. İşte sen heyecanlanma, sana bağırıyor.’ Bu tarz eğitimler. On günün sonunda başlıyorsun.*”

³⁵⁷ Rose and Wright, “Satisfaction and Dimensions of Control,” p. 143.

environment means to understand what the problem of the client is clearly and empathize with the client's demands. However, because of the nature of call from an unknown person, being a good listener is not adequate on its own to interact effectively and meet the managerial demand for average call times and short conversations. Workers, particularly those in inbound call centers, stated that they were evaluated on the number of calls they handle in working hours, on the average length of their interactions and missed calls. After detecting the client's problem, an inbound worker should fix it in the shortest period of time, but the inevitable prolongations are unpredictable:

There is something that they teach you at the beginning: conversations should be as short as possible. Finish one conversation immediately and take another one. But the caller is stupid! I am explaining, he doesn't understand. 'Click that', I say, 'I don't know,' he says. He has no idea! My conversation time lengthens in this way.³⁵⁸

Being a good listener also allows the workers to get to know people better, as they stated. After a while in call center, all workers that I interviewed mentioned that they had begun to understand what kind of a people they were dealing with at the very beginning of a conversation: "I was a sociable person before, but now I understand people better. When the guy says A, you say 'Ok, I know what your problem is.'"³⁵⁹ Furthermore, in a multilingual call center where workers deal with client overseas could extend this ability towards a broader geography. One of my interviewees said that "I have never lived in America and England, but I know the people there, how they react, how they talk, I can understand."³⁶⁰

³⁵⁸ Can, interview by the author, tape recording, Yalova, Turkey, 6 February 2010. "*Baştan öğretilen bir şey, konuşmalar mümkün olduğunca kısa olacak, hemen bitsin ki sen diğer telefonu al. E işte arayan adam ya da kadın salak! Anlatıyorum, anlamıyor, şuraya tıkla diyorum, bilmiyorum diyor, hiçbir fikri yok. E benim konuşma sürem uzuyor o zaman.*"

³⁵⁹ Ayşe, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 6 January 2010. "*Ben zaten girişken bir insandım ama insanları daha iyi anlıyorum artık. Adam A dediğinde, ha ben senin derdini biliyorum diyorsun.*"

Beyond any doubt, all of the participants of this thesis were recruited thanks to their foreign language skills. In that sense, being bi- or multilingual was their essential access to employment. Fluency in a foreign language is a rare skill in Turkey. This situation can be an explanation for the relatively higher salary levels in most of the multilingual call centers. Eleven of the interviewees were born and raised in foreign countries where they had learnt their vocational language. Because of that, most of them considered the language that they used in the call center environment their mother tongue. The foreign language that supplied them an agent position in the call center is not “foreign” to them. On the other hand, other participants did not mention any migration story, only one out of six, Burcu has lived abroad for a while. This group of participants had learnt their vocational language in the Turkish educational system. Their statements demonstrated that they all had strong educational backgrounds; they had attended top universities. In this situation, it is possible for tension between their educational levels and repetitive and standardized nature of work to appear. My questions about foreign language skills aimed to understand how workers with migration stories consider the commodification of their “mother tongues” and to detect if there is a tension between qualifications of workers with no migration story and the nature of work.

In Alexandre Duchêne’s words, the call center is a workplace “where language practices serve as a central working tool.”³⁶¹ As long as the call center is internationalized and particularly serves clients in foreign countries, multilingualism has become a commodity. Two call center managers I interviewed stated that they preferred to recruit applicants who had been born and raised abroad because of their

³⁶⁰ Özge, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 14 January 2010. “Amerika’da, İngiltere’de hiç yaşamadım ama tanıdım oranın insanlarını, nasıl tepki verirler, nasıl konuşurlar, anlayabiliyorum artık.”

³⁶¹ Duchêne, “Marketing, Management,” p. 29.

linguistic qualifications; in that way, they could eliminate the “accent problem.”³⁶²

Further, their years of experience in foreign countries supplied workers a cultural awareness, so that they could be more successful at selling something to customers from a country which they knew very deeply. Monica Heller suggests that the commodification of language produces new forms of competition and social selection.³⁶³ It is evident in the multilingual call center recruitment process.

Furthermore, offshore-outsourcing companies pay special attention to recruit workers from similar backgrounds. In other words, they tend to compose the workforce with the migration story. This selection criterion, as will be discussed later in this chapter, contributes the “like-a-family” environment of call centers. On the other hand, Turkish in-house call centers which serve in foreign languages dominantly recruit applicants who have not got a migration story. This can be explained by their attempt to create a more-educated workforce.

My interviewees who were born and raised in foreign countries stated that they would not be able to do this job in Turkish. In that sense, they also mostly considered their Turkish as an obstacle to employment in any other sector. Hence, they generally seemed very glad to have an internalized skill that had a selling price:

I mean, I could not do any other job here. You see, my Turkish is worse than my German.³⁶⁴

Actually, I came here to improve my Turkish, but you need to work. It was very easy to get this job. I found it when I was in the Netherlands. If I looked for any other job, I would not have found any other for that wage.³⁶⁵

³⁶² Call Center Manager-1, interview by the author and Sinan Erensü, note taking, Istanbul, Turkey, 29 July 2009. Call Center Manager-2, interview by the author, not taking, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010.

³⁶³ Heller, “Globalization, the New Economy,” p. 474.

³⁶⁴ Ahmet, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. “*Yani burada başka iş yapamam. Görüyorsun, Türkçem daha kötü Almancamdan.*”

Fortunately, I know Dutch. I would not want to do this job in Turkish. I like it this way. I'm making my money with a language that I know.³⁶⁶

As the above narratives indicate, their language abilities became a money-maker, probably for the first time. Workers from immigrant families frequently mentioned they had limited chances for employment because of their unfamiliarity with “Turkish work habits” and their poor Turkish speaking abilities; however, with the rise of call center industry, particularly, the rise of call centers that serve international market, their multilingualism turns into a rare and desired skill. Although most of them stated that call center work is an exhausting, monotonous and very stressful job in the end, in the current situation where they have limited alternatives, call centers are being considered as presenting them a better choice from unemployment. Hence participant workers with migration stories did not complain about the commodification of their “mother tongues.”

At the same time, workers who did not mention any migration story and had learnt their vocational language in the Turkish educational system mostly stated that call center work provided them an opportunity to keep their foreign language skills. I asked them if their linguistic levels had been improved by their experience in the call center, none of them noted any improvement; however, they stated that the job helped them not to forget their foreign languages.

My foreign language did not improve, but it also did not regress. It stands where it was before. I mean, I'm making practice every day.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁵ Onur, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. *“Aslında buraya Türkçemi ilerletmeye gelmiştim, ama çalışmak da zorundasın. Bu işe girmek çok kolay. Yani ben Hollanda'dayken buldum. Başka iş arasaydım bulamazdım herhalde bu paraya.”*

³⁶⁶ Fatma, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. *“İyi ki bir Hollandacam varmış. Bu işi Türkçe yapmayı tercih etmem. Böyle memnunum. Bildiğim bir lisanla paramı kazanıyorum.”*

³⁶⁷ Ayşe, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 6 January 2010. *“Yabancı dilim gelişmedi ama gerilemedi de, olduğu yerde duruyor. Yani her gün pratik yapmış oluyorum.”*

I graduated from the Anatolian High School, I took courses in English at university. But I have never used English that much in my life. While living in Turkey, where you can speak English at that level? Maybe in the Grand Bazaar? [Laughs]³⁶⁸

Speaking English was really interesting and delightful. I could not know where the customer was calling from until I heard him say, “Hello.” But I can not say that I learnt anything new. The English that I spoke was very basic. “Could you please read your activation key? Yes, Sir.” That’s all.³⁶⁹

In addition, Deniz mentioned that all the things she was saying on the phone were written as computerized scripts. She said that she was following the screens according to the customer’s responses so “The only thing I did was read the scripts, actually. You don’t need to know English as your mother tongue, the only thing you need to do is to pronounce properly.”³⁷⁰ Ayşe also mentioned that there was a general exam to determine the English levels of employees in the company, but that not all the workers in the English section of call center had been able to pass this exam. This demonstrates that being fluent in English was not a crucial requirement for taking incoming calls in her example, an in-house call center of a Turkish bank.

According to interviews, there is no tension between foreign language levels of workers and the requirements of multilingual call center work. However, their educational qualifications always stand as a source of disappointment at work. In the following pages of this chapter, I will focus this theme more broadly.

³⁶⁸ Ezgi, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 30 January 2010. *“Ben Anadolu Lisesi mezunuyum, üniversitede İngilizce dersler aldım. Ama hayatımda hiç bu kadar yoğun İngilizce kullanmamıştım. Türkiye’de yaşarken bu derece İngilizce’yi nerede kullanacaksın ki? Belki Kapalıçarşı’da. [Gülüyor]”*

³⁶⁹ Arda, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 17 February 2010. *“İngilizce konuşmak gerçekten ilginç ve keyifliydi. “Hello” diyene kadar müşteri nereden arıyor bilemiyordum. Gerçi yeni bir şey öğrendim diyemem. “Could you please read your activation key? Yes Sir. Bu kadar.”*

³⁷⁰ Deniz, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 8 January 2010. *“Yaptığım tek şey scriptleri okumak aslında. Anadilin gibi İngilizce bilmene gerek yok, yapman gereken tek şey doğru telaffuz etmek.”*

Working Conditions and Work Satisfaction

For this section, the actual working conditions in multilingual call centers will be the main objective, underlining the prerequisites of interacting with clients from a broader geography which has both positive and negative impacts on the experience of work, at the same time, the relation between the different characteristics of workers and their considerations. This part is divided into three sections. At first, I will examine working hours, different working hour arrangements with their reasons in different organizations or call types and how workers consider their working hours, how they balance work and their lives outside the workplace. The second sub-section deals with stress-generators in multilingual call center work, demonstrating how pressurized working conditions and the nature of work lead to depersonalization, humiliation and consequently, poor work satisfaction is the main focus of this sub-section. In the third sub-section, positive views on call center work will be argued, while demonstrating the “cheerful” or “enjoyable” and reliable sides of call center work as workers stated in that way, I will attempt to dissociate genuine satisfaction (about pay and working environment) from self-deception or resignation. This sub-section will also focus on different considerations of workers from different backgrounds. The discussion about relation between work experience and one’s life-narrative will continue in the next section of this chapter.

Working Hours

The arrangement of working hours in a given call center depend on various factors, including type of service, the customer base, operating hours, variation in

call volume and levels of demand and the time-zones served by the call center.³⁷¹

The participants of this study mentioned different working time arrangements. The type of service occurs as the main determining factor. Working hours in outbound selling call centers were generally regular because of the fact that it could not be expected to call a potential customer during “anti-social hours,” workers were present in the workplace 10am to 7pm with a 30-minute lunch break. However, participant workers stated that working hours could be extended during “peak times,” especially in days before Christmas or any other special day. On the other hand, in inbound environments, part-time work arrangements and working on shifts were common. Working in shifts was related to the parent-company’s demand to cover 24 hours in a day, particularly in technical service call centers where workers were answering calls for the United States and Canada, night shifts were mandatory. Determining working hours according to targeting countries, internalizing their working hour and day patterns is conceptualized as “colonization with and of time”³⁷² by Barbara Adam. This “colonization” process is evident in the multilingual call centers in Turkey as well, where a foreign (German, Dutch or American) clock time is considered standard.

Interviews with outbound call center workers suggest that they were relatively glad to work regular hours. Especially, since the working hours were arranged depending on the target country’s time-zone, they could come to work in a untraditional starting hour, at 10am. However, because of the same factor, they had to work until 7pm under normal conditions. One participant stated that “Working hours are as required. Actually, it is not too much, but the best part is that we don’t

³⁷¹ Paul and Huws, *How Can We Help?* p. 22.

³⁷² Barbara Adam, “The Gendered Time Politics of Globalization: Of Shadowlands and Elusive Justice,” *Feminist Review*, no. 70 (2002), pp. 3-29.

start early in the morning. 10:00 is good but on the contrary, it's getting harder after 6:00 in the evening, that one hour passes with difficulty.”³⁷³ Another participant was more complaintive about working hours, he mentioned that he was familiar with 9 to 5 work in the Netherlands, because of this working until 7 pm affected his social life negatively: “Here, because of the time-zone difference, we work until 19:00. You leave at 19:00, get home at 20:00. There is not so much left.”³⁷⁴ However, another participant, a female worker with family responsibilities said, that “Our working hours are very good, because we start at 10:00. I'm married and I can organize my house, I can cook dinner. The kids are at school during these hours. When I get home, they have come home, too.”³⁷⁵ Another participant with dependent children stated that sometimes they were expected to work during the night, particularly before special days: “We worked until 9 or 10 for a while. It was bad, really bad. You can't see your kids when you get home.”³⁷⁶ In these “peak times,” since the workers were expected to work half of the day, the employer violated the related article of Turkish Labor Law, which states a working day can not exceed 11 hours.³⁷⁷

They were not expected to work on weekends and on Christian holidays, but they had to deal with a giant peak before these days. However, they had to work on

³⁷³ Emre, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. *“Çalışma saatleri gerektiği gibi. Aslında aşırı fazla değil ama en güzel yanı sabah erken başlıyoruz, 10 güzel, ama buna karşılık akşam 6'dan sonra zorlanıyorsunuz, o bir saat zor geçiyor.”*

³⁷⁴ Onur, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. *“Burada saat farkından dolayı 7'ye kadar devam ediyoruz. 7'de çıkıyorsun, 8'de eve varıyorsun. Fazla bir şey kalmıyor geriye.”*

³⁷⁵ Nevin, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. *“Çalışma saatlerimiz çok iyi. 10'da başladığımız için. Ben evliyim, evimin düzenimi kurabiliyorum, yemeğimi yapabiliyorum. Çocuklar da okulda oluyor o saatlerde. Ben eve geldiğimde, onlar da gelmiş oluyor.”*

³⁷⁶ Fatma, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. *“Bir süre 9'a, 10'a kadar çalışmıştık. O kötü oluyor, çok kötü oluyor. Çocuklarını göremiyorsun eve dönünce.”*

³⁷⁷ Republic of Turkey, Labor Law, no. 4857, Article 63.

Muslim holidays and Turkish national days. Even so, working hours depending on Germany or the Netherlands' standards satisfied most of them; they seemed not to have any problem with the "colonization with time."

Part-time work and the shift system were evident in inbound environments. Inbound call centers were usually specialized in technical service, reservations, customer service and taking orders. To cover 24-hours in day, client-companies demand night shifts and especially serving countries in overseas requires more staff at "anti-social" hours.

We were working 70-80 people on one project, 50 of them at night, about 30 during day-time. Because we were working for America, according to their busy hours. Your shift was sliding constantly, once in a two-week period, step by step, finally you work every hour in a day.³⁷⁸

Everyone wants a project with regular hours but in inbound, it requires working 7/24. You have to work on shifts. My social life deteriorated, of course. We could work on the weekends. Ok, you work 5 days a week, there were no determined off-days.³⁷⁹

The above narratives confirm what Karl Marx claims about capital's constant drive to transform every minute of a day into "working day" regardless of the workers' social life, personal, and even biological needs: "Capital oversteps not only the moral but even merely physical limits of the working day. It usurps the time for growth, development and healthy maintenance of the body. It steals the time required for the consumption of fresh air and sunlight."³⁸⁰ The impact of working on changing

³⁷⁸ Can, interview by the author, tape recording, Yalova, Turkey, 6 February 2010. "*Yaklaşık 70-80 kişi çalışıyorduk projede, bunun 50 kadar gece çalışırdı, 30 kadar gündüz çalışırdı. Amerika'ya çalıştığımız için, onların yoğun olduğu saatlere göre. Vardiyarı sürekli kayıyordu, iki haftada bir, yani kademe kademe, sonuçta günün her saati çalışmış oluyorsun.*"

³⁷⁹ Özge, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 14 January 2010. "*Düzenli bir projeyi herkes ister tabii ama inboundlarda genelde 7/24 çalışmak gerekiyor. Mecbursunuz vardiyalı çalışmaya. Sosyal hayatım kötüleşti tabii. Haftasonu da çalışabiliyorduk. Tamam haftada 5 gün çalışıyorsun ama boş günlerin belli değil.*"

³⁸⁰ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol.1, translated by Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), pp. 375-376.

shifts on social life was referred to frequently as the worst side of call center work by the participants. Because of the fact that they could learn about their free days and working hours just before starting the arranged shift, interviewees complained about not to be able to organize their social life.

I was making good money. My girlfriend, for example, she was working in a trade company, an important company and earning 850 TL. I was earning approximately double that and I was doing a job that required less intelligence. My only problem was working hours, working days. (...) My social life was ruined; I could work weekends, completely random; your chance is 2 in 7 to get a weekend holiday. But all of my friends were working in normal jobs, I was sleeping during the day, working at night. My girlfriend was starting at 9, leaving at 6. You can only see each other at night during weekdays, but I was working this time. The weekend is her holiday, but I may work again. Monday is off, but now she is working. You can't something regular in shift system. It changes in two weeks.³⁸¹

Shifts are determined in two-week rotations. It effects you negatively of course, your health, your sleep is damaged, your eating habits changes. Also, you can't see people outside. You can't make appointments easily.³⁸²

Part-time work means mostly 30 or in some cases 36 hours of working in a week. As long as the employer can arrange working hours of part-time workers in great flexibility thanks to the Labor Law,³⁸³ for instance, Arda, who was working at least six hours in six days of a week was a part-timer on the payroll. According to the

³⁸¹ Can, interview by the author, tape recording, Yalova, Turkey, 6 February 2010, “Kazandığım para iyiydi. Kız arkadaşım vardı mesela, ticaret şirketinde çalışıyordu, önemli bir şirketti ve 850 lira maaş alıyordu, ben neredeyse onun iki katı kazanıyordum ve çok daha az akıl gerektiren bir iş yapıyordum. Tek problemim işte çalışma saatleri, çalışma günleri oluyordu. (...) Berbat olmuştu sosyal hayat, haftasonu çalışmam gerekebiliyordu, tamamen rastgele. Yedide iki şans var haftasonu gelmesi için. E arkadaşlarımın hepsi normal işlerde çalışıyorlar, ben gündüz uyuyorum gece çalışıyorum. Kız arkadaşım 9’da işe başlıyor, 6’da çıkıyor, haftaiçi sadece akşam görüşebilirsiniz, o zaman ben çalışıyorum. Haftasonu onun tatil, ben gene çalışabilirim. Pazartesi tatil oluyor mesela, o zaman o çalışıyor. Düzenli bir şey yapamazsın ki vardiyalı sistemde. İki haftada bir değişiyor.”

³⁸² Özgür, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 9 January 2010. “Shiftler iki haftalık rotasyonlarla belirleniyor. Olumsuz etkiliyor tabii shiftler, sağlık durumun, uyku durumun bozuluyor, beslenme alışkanlıkların değişiyor. Hem de dışarıda görüşeceğin insanlarla görüşemiyorsun. Kolay randevu veremiyorsun.”

³⁸³ For the brief discussion of Labor Law of Turkey and working hours, see the section “State, Public Institutions and Call Center Industry” of Chapter Two.

Law, there were no determined working hours for part-time workers, those who work “shorter” than full-time employees are a part-timers.

Even though, some participants reported that they chose part-time work for a reason, particularly to continue their education. In that sense, the opportunity to work on night shift was considered one of the most attractive features of the call center jobs by students. As long as they were offered negotiated working hours and could arrange their working schedules, workers who were continuing their education could choose call center job, so that they would be able to balance school and work. An interviewee stated that “I would arrange my shifts according to my course schedule. I was able to take advantage of flexibility.”³⁸⁴ However, they also mentioned that they worked because they had to and even if they had arranged their working schedule, their life outside the work went bad:

18 to 23 are suitable hours for me, because I’m studying at the same time. Now I can’t leave the work, even if I wanted it because, if I took another job, I could not find flexible working hours that suit my graduate studies. Flexible hours are more suitable for me because I’m still a student. (...) There is no such thing as social life of course. I’m working six nights, I’m going to school three days a week. There is no social life left.³⁸⁵

Working at night was my own choice, because I was studying while working. I was working at night in order not to overlap with my course schedule. (...) I arranged my flexible working hours, but this doesn’t mean that it was humane. If I did not go to school, I wouldn’t work.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁴ Burcu, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 7 January 2010. “*Vardiyaları ders programıma göre ayarlıyordum. Esnekliği kendi yararına göre kullanabiliyordum.*”

³⁸⁵ Ayşe, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 6 January 2010. “*18-23 benim için uygun bir saat. Şu an çıkmak istesem de çıkamam mesela. Çünkü başka bir işe girdiğimde, benim yüksek lisansımı kabul edecek esnek saatleri bulamam. Hâlâ öğrenci olduğum için esnek saatler benim için daha uygun. (...) Sosyal hayat diye bir şey yok tabii, 6 gece çalışıyorum, 3 gün okula gidiyorum. Sosyal hayat kalmadı.*”

³⁸⁶ Arda, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 17 February 2010. “*Gece çalışmak benim tercihimdi, okuyordum çünkü çalışırken. Ders saatlerimle çalışmaması için gece çalışıyordum. (...) Esnek çalışma saatlerini kendim ayarladım ama bu çok insaniydi demek değil. Okul olmasa çalışmazdım yani.*”

According to the interviews, another important issue about working time is breaks. First of all, most of the interviewees stated that they had no control over their break times and sometimes they were unable to take a break if the volume of calls was huge. Managers tend to exploit every moment of a worker during a working day, so attempts to shorten breaks were apparent in call centers. Below, statements of workers exemplify Marx's documentation of how employers have a constant aim of "nibbling and cribbing at meal-times"³⁸⁷ and other breaks in order to maximize the quantity of labor effort.

There is no such thing as a meal break, you eat your meal at your desk, while you're receiving calls. There is nothing like a kitchen or canteen or anything like that. You try to eat between calls. Sometimes it takes an hour to finish only a *dürüm*.³⁸⁸

We used to have 10-minute break every hour, but then they decreased it to 4 minutes. We were working in a place like a half football field and the only place where you could smoke was the kitchen. You had to walk across the whole office to smoke your cigarette. It was like a nightmare for smokers! I learnt to smoke in 4 minutes.³⁸⁹

You have 7-minute break each hour; totally you are on break 35 minutes. But if there is a huge volume [of calls], you can't go.³⁹⁰

We were taking a 10-minute break every four hours, after dinner you have another 10-minute break for the next four hours. We could take it whenever we wanted. We could also take emergency breaks, but you need to have a good excuse. They would ask if you were sick or what. Sometimes it was aggregating, calls were coming constantly, of course, these times you needed more breaks, but it was not allowed.³⁹¹

³⁸⁷ Marx, *Capital*, p. 352.

³⁸⁸ Arda, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 17 February 2010. "Yemek arası diye bir şey yok, masada yiyorsun, bir yandan çağrı alıyorsun. Mutfaktır, kantindir, öyle bir şey yok. Çağrı aralarında yiyorsun. Bazen bir dürümü bitirmek bir saat tutuyor."

³⁸⁹ Burcu, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 7 January 2010. "Eskiden saat başı 10 dakika aran vardır. Sonra bunu 4 dakikaya düşürdüler. Yarım futbol sahası kadar bir yerde çalışıyorduk ve sigara içebileceğin tek yer mutfaktı. Bütün ofisi yürüyüp sigaranı içebiliyordun. Sigara içenler için kâbus oldu yani. 4 dakikada sigara içmeyi öğrendim."

³⁹⁰ Ayşe, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 6 January 2010. "Saat başı 7 dakika molan var, toplamda 35 dakika moladasın. Ama yoğunluk varsa çıkamazsın."

³⁹¹ Can, interview by the author, tape recording, Yalova, Turkey, 6 February 2010. "Dört saatte 10 dakika mola alıyorduk, yemekten sonra bir 10 dakika molan daha var. Acil durum molası da

Furthermore, the workers stated that they had to get permission of their team-leader or supervisor to take a casual break. One interviewee mentioned this process: “You have to push a button when you go [on a break]. When your time is up, your screen turns into red and your manager is informed. Then he starts to look for you. You might have fainted or you might be stuck in the toilet. But if you abuse it, you probably will be fired.”³⁹² As Paul and Huws suggest, “failure to allow breaks for reasonable flexibility and freedom of movement can lead serious health and safety problems, discomfort and poor job satisfaction.”³⁹³ Many of my interviewees talked of problems with physical health and morale during long and constant working hours. The following pages will focus on stress and depersonalization generators in the working environment.

Stress on the Line: Depersonalization, Humiliation and Pressure in the Workplace

Above, the intensive usage of scripts, the lack of control over break-times and shift system appeared as sources of work-related stress in call center environments. Beyond any doubt, stress generators are not limited to these factors. In addition, the repetitive and monotonous nature of work, lengthened working hours, performance monitoring, management-determined targets, identity and “locational masking,”³⁹⁴ abusive calls, irate customers and lack of career opportunities should be considered

alabiliyorsun ama iyi bir mazeretin olmalı, soruyorlar hasta mısın, bir şey mi var diye. Bazen yığılma oluyordu, telefonlar art arda gelebiliyor, o zaman molaya ihtiyacın oluyor tabii. ama izin verilmiyor.”

³⁹² Burcu, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 7 January 2010.
“[Molaya] çıkarken bir tuşa basmak zorundasın. Dakikayı geçtiğin zaman ekranın kırmızıya dönüyor, ekranın kırmızıya dönünce yöneticinin haberi oluyor. Yönetici seni aramaya başlıyor, bayılmış olabilirsin, tuvalette kalmış olabilirsin ama eğer suiistimal ediyorsan, herhalde kovulursun.”

³⁹³ Paul and Huws, *How Can We Help?* p. 23.

³⁹⁴ Mirchandani, “Practices of Global Capital.”

as sources of stress in call centers. As previous research on call center recruitment practices has demonstrated, managers tend to recruit staff who can deal with the high pressured labor process.³⁹⁵

The intensive usage of scripts is one of the main sources of work-related stress. Many interviewees stated that they felt like tools that customers push by talking or robots under the control of scripts. Even some workers who stressed strongly the enjoyable parts of their work mentioned how depersonalizing call center work is. For instance Fatma said that,

It is really an exhausting job. Ok, I like my job, but it has an exhausting dimension. Always you are saying exactly the same things on the telephone and becoming a robot. Sometimes you say something that you should not say; I said you're becoming a robot. Your head becomes like concrete. You are working like that.³⁹⁶

Because of the fact that scripts were designed to standardize every single interaction between worker and customer, workers did not seem to have control over their own labor and individual initiative in the labor process is strongly discouraged by management. Since the workers were expected to follow management-determined scripts word by word, Braverman's model of the separation of mental and manual labor fits the call center labor process.³⁹⁷ Workers are considered as the intermediary tools between the customer and company's software which embodies the separation of the work conception from work execution in Braverman's theorization. As was noted above, particularly, in inbound environments like technical service, reservations or banking, the unexceptional rule of relying on scripts resulted in high

³⁹⁵ Belt et al, "Women, Social Skill;" Callaghan and Thompson, "We Recruit Attitude."

³⁹⁶ Fatma, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. "*Gerçekten yorucu bir iş, yani işimi seviyorum ama yorucu bir yanı var. Hep telefon başında sürekli aynı şeyi söylüyorsun ve robotlaşıyorsun. Bazen söylememen gereken şeyleri de söylüyorsun, robotlaşıyorsun dedim ya. Beton gibi oluyor başın, o şekilde çalışıyorsun.*"

³⁹⁷ Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, pp. 218-220.

stress for the worker and low job satisfaction. One interviewee stated that management had warned him for not following the script; he described his “unacceptable” attempts to personalize his labor:

They warned me several times about going beyond the script. Serious warnings. I said why I went beyond of script. After all, we are humans, not robots. If people connect to a human, we should not talk like robots. Because of that, I was going beyond of the script; without rescaling, I was interacting in a warmer way. That caused me to be warned by my supervisors. (...) This is what call center managers can’t understand, they want a constant focus, but it’s not possible. Maybe one hour, for example, the first hour, between 17 and 18, my focus might be good. But then, you feel hunger, you take calls constantly, you can’t focus. Maybe this was why I was going beyond the scripts, to make a difference, to control my own work. But they considered it as “fatal error.” Leaving the script behind was “fatal error” in work terminology.³⁹⁸

Knights and McCabe suggest that weakening employee autonomy and a loss of control should be considered as important indicators of work-related stress.³⁹⁹

Usually in inbound environments, workers are expected to take calls one after another; the Automated Call Distribution system was designed to route incoming call to the first available worker and workers do not have any control over the pace of work and are forced to take calls constantly and as many scholars agree, this situation demonstrates “assembly line” tendencies in call center management.⁴⁰⁰ By following this approach, Callaghan and Thompson state that

³⁹⁸ Arda, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 17 February 2010. *“Birkaç defa uyarılmışlardı beni scriptin dışına çıktığım için. Ciddi uyarılar. Ben scriptin neden dışına çıktığımı söylüyordum. Sonuçta biz insanız, robot değiliz. İnsanlar madem bir insana bağlanıyorlar, robot gibi konuşmamız lazım. Dolayısıyla ben, çok da cıvımadan, scriptin dışına çıkıyordum, daha samimi bir konuşma gerçekleştiriyordum. Bu da amirlerimin beni uyarmasına sebep oldu. (...) Çağrı merkezi yöneticilerinin anlayamadığı bu, kesintisiz odaklanma istiyorlar, ama mümkün değil ki bu. Belki bir saat, mesela ilk bir saat, 17-18 arası belki odaklanmam iyiydi. Ama sonra, açlık biniyor, devamlı çağrı alıyorsun, odaklanamıyorsun, scriptlerin dışına çıkmamın nedeni belki de buydu, biraz daha farklılık yaratmak için, işime hâkim olmak için. Ama “fatal error” olarak görüyorlardı bunu; scriptin dışına çıkmak “fatal error” müş iş terminolojisinde.”*

³⁹⁹ David Knights and Darren McCabe, “‘What Happens When the Phone Goes Wild’: Staff, Stress and Spaces to Escape in a BPR Telephone Banking, Work Regime,” *Journal of Management Studies* 35, vol.2 (March 1998), p. 168.

⁴⁰⁰ Taylor and Bain, “An Assembly Line.”

Management deliberately choose a technology that has been designed to limit worker autonomy and are conscious of the power of the call queue in maximizing production pace –the workers are seen as part of the machine– of a technology that continuously “fires” calls at them.⁴⁰¹

Scripts add another dimension to this process; standardization with the help of scripts is at the heart of the call center labor process and it causes work-related stress. The standardization of the labor process and managerial attempts to control and limit worker’s initiative on work indicate a continuity between the work organization of the Fordist era which is symbolized in blue-collared factory worker and today’s service economy in which so-called white-collared “knowledge worker” is assumed as dominant type.⁴⁰² The rationale behind the Taylorist approach is again to maximize productivity and thus to maximize profit by degrading labor. In this sense, Braverman’s analysis of the capitalist labor process in twentieth century does not seem to lose its cruciality in understanding the logic of the work organization in the new workplaces, call centers of the twenty-first century.⁴⁰³ As Simon Head rightly observes Frederick Taylor’s scientific management is still in practice in the contemporary service economy with its brand new synonym business process “reengineering.”⁴⁰⁴

Furthermore, Knights and McCabe underline “the contradictory position in which staff are placed, being tasked as they are, with providing high quality customer service while management limit their ability through work intensification to provide

⁴⁰¹ George Callaghan and Paul Thompson, “Edwards Revisited: Technical Control and Call Centres,” *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 22 (2001), pp. 20-21

⁴⁰² Baldry et al, *The Meaning of Work*, pp. 224-225. For a broad discussion of continuity see, Tony Smith, *Technology and Capital in the Age of Lean Production: A Marxian Critique of the ‘New Economy’* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000).

⁴⁰³ Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*.

⁴⁰⁴ Simon Head, *The New Ruthless Economy: Work and Power in the Digital Age*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 68.

such a service.”⁴⁰⁵ In this sense, script-generated stress in call centers demonstrates the tension between quantitative and qualitative targets in call centers. On the one hand, workers stated that they were expected to meet targets like “average call handling time,” “the number of calls in an hour” or “respond times;” on the other, workers had to interact with customers by acknowledging “soft targets,” such as politeness, opening and closing speech, caring attitude. They were expected to answer customer demands in a “acceptable way;” in other words, by following management-determined scripts, but to do so they were under strict time pressures:

There is big pressure on you, first of all. They expect a performance from you and you earn your money according to this. This is something that creates pressure. They call it the “Hamburger effect.” Customer pressure from below, management pressure from above. You squeeze between them. And they explain it to you. “But we recommend you these to handle them,” they say.⁴⁰⁶

Korczynski stresses the “dual logic” that is embedded in the call center labor process; he demonstrates the tension that emerges from the coexistence of providing customer satisfaction and maintaining cost-efficient operation.⁴⁰⁷ According to his conceptualization of “customer-oriented bureaucracy,” the customer rises as a figure of authority, but at the same time, rather than supplanting the bureaucratic logic in the sphere of production, it strengthens the logic of rationalization.⁴⁰⁸ As

⁴⁰⁵ Knights and McCabe, “What Happens When,” pp. 182-3.

⁴⁰⁶ Burcu, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 7 January 2010. “Üzerinde büyük bir baskı var bir kere. Senden bir performans bekliyorlar ve buna göre bir para alıyorsun. Bu baskı yaratan bir şey. “Hamburger etkisi” diyorlar buna. Alttan müşteri baskısı, üstten yönetici baskısı. Sen arada ezilirsin. Bir de bunu anlatırlar sana. Ama biz sana bunları rahat atlatman için şunları öneriyoruz, derler.”

⁴⁰⁷ Marek Korczynski, “The Contradictions of Service Work: Call Centre as Customer-Oriented Bureaucracy,” in *Customer Service: Empowerment and Entrapment*, edited by Andrew Sturdy, Irena Grugulis and Hugh Willmott (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 79-102; Marek Korczynski, “Communities of Coping: Collective Emotional Labor in Service Work,” *Organization* 10, no.1 (2003), pp. 55-79. Marek Korczynski, Karen Shire, Stephen Frenkel and May Tam, “Service Work in Consumer Capitalism: Customers, Control and Contradictions,” *Work, Employment and Society* 14, no. 4 (2000), pp. 669-697.

demonstrated earlier in this chapter, the training programs aim to teach workers how they “could effectively control conversations with customers.”⁴⁰⁹ Managerial offerings to “help” workers to handle this tension did not seem helpful in my interviewees’ statements. Even though the employees are frank about explaining the “dual logic” of call centers and acknowledging the pressure on workers, they are very strict about not allowing workers to develop their own strategies to cope with the “hamburger effect” by individualizing their own labor or taking the initiative while interacting with customers. The standardization of the labor process maintains as a main issue in particularly inbound call centers. In this case, the interviews conducted confirmed what Russell suggests; the standardization and routinization of the work process leads to the dissatisfaction of workers, especially when they are overqualified for call center work.⁴¹⁰

Additionally, in outbound environments where workers make calls to sell a specific product or service to potential customers, sales targets were evident according to my interviewees. The determined target was not only the number of sales, but also the number of attempts; in other words, the number of interactions that they made during a working day. “There is an expectation about the number of calls we make. We need to make as many calls as possible as during the day. Of course, sales are also important. There is a required number of sales, daily. You need to meet these targets.”⁴¹¹ In this situation, workers tended to try every possible way to make

⁴⁰⁸ Korczynski, “The Contradictions of,” p. 82 and 86.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 87.

⁴¹⁰ Bob Russell, “Skill and Info-Service Work in Australian Call Centres,” in *Developments in the Call Centre Industry: Analysis, Changes and Challenges*, edited by John Burgess and Julia Connell (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 92-117.

⁴¹¹ Zeynep, interview by the author, tape recording, İstanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. “Yaptığımız çağrıyla ilgili bir beklenti var. Gün içinde oldukça çok çağrı yapmamız gerekiyor. Tabii, satış da çok önemli. Beklenen bir satış sayısı var günlük. Bu hedefleri tutturmak gerekiyor.”

a sale; however, once again scripts appear as limits of the individualization of labor. Hence, they had to hope the management or “quality department” that evaluated their interactions by listening to randomly selected conversations, did not encounter or did not care about their “illegal attempts” to make a sell.

One of the major stress generators in the call center environment is interacting with abusive customers. Workers were expected to deal with abusive calls “professionally” and to stay calm. However, abusive calls are not uncommon, according to the interviewees. They all, regardless of their working type, inbound or outbound, mentioned that in an ordinary working day, they encountered angry clients with unrealistic demands or problems they were not able to solve. The anger of clients was directed at the workers, even if they were about company’s policies or a common problem of a product. Interacting with angry clients who were mostly reckless about yelling and humiliation was deepening the stress on workers. The management floor usually was not concerned about abusive calls and workers were expected to follow determined procedures by ignoring the insults. As was noted above, one interviewee, Ayşe, mentioned that in the recruitment process, the ability to cope with abusive interactions was a crucial criterion. Interacting with abusive clients every day results in emotional exhaustion and as many interviewees stated, workers might lose their control during the interactions:

Every thing is apparent once you get familiar with it. What will the caller say, is he calm or angry, is he happy or sad, is clear. While you are working during the day time, you know that only crazies call. It is 3 or 4 in the morning there, so you know who will call. They say stuff and nonsense things, perverts! For a while, you stay calm, because you know what will happen. But after a while, things change, you go crazy, too, in this process. Because of working at night, because of not seeing your family, people get stressed, and it fails there. The man is yelling, you should stay calm normally, how many people have yelled at you already, you used to it. But you are stressed now, what happens, you start to yell or there is a button, you push that and yell, the man cannot hear you, but in the room, you are freaking out. Other callers hear your voice. Customers ask, “Is something wrong there?”

Frequently, someone loses his senses. There were lots of friend who were fired or quit because of that. (...)

Let me tell you the sources of stress. Working at night, losing your social life, monotony, but most importantly, people are barking and shouting at you constantly. Because of something negative which is not your responsibility. The man on the phone is yelling at you, because he can only talk to you. Yelling, yelling, yelling. You say, “OK, well, let him yell.” But then another yells, then another... It creates stress, of course.⁴¹²

Managerial policy about interactions with abusive calls seemed clear. In every call center environment, regardless to organizational type or type of call, the workers stated that they were all expected to stay calm and they had no chance to close the conversation. Only in one example, an interviewee who was working for a Turkish in-house call center, mentioned that after she had recognized that the conversation was going nowhere because of the customer’s abusive attitude, she could route the call to her supervisor. However, she also said that her supervisor was not fluent in English; she was even responsible for workers in “foreign customers” team. As a result, although my interviewee had a chance to seek the supervisor’s help while dealing with angry customers in theory, in practice it did not happened.⁴¹³

Technologically, workers could not end the conversation; they had to wait for customer to hang up the phone. Managers tended to stress the “company’s image,” which they should protect on the phone:

⁴¹² Can, interview by the author, tape recording, Yalova, Turkey, 6 February 2010. *“Alıştıktan sonra her şey belli. Arayan adam ne diyecek, sinirli mi sakın mı, mutlu mu hüznü mü belli. Gündüz çalıştığın zaman, biliyorsun ki yalnız manyaklar arar. Gecenin 3’ü 4’ü orada, biliyorsun yani kimin arayabileceğini. Saçma sapan şeyler söylerler, sapıklar! Bir süre çok sakınsın, çünkü biliyorsun ne olabileceğini. Ama bir süre sonra işler değişiyor, sen de manyaklaşmaya başlıyorsun o süreçte. Gece çalışmaktan, insanlar ailesini görememekten stres oluyor, orada çıkıyor. Adam sana bağırtıyor, normalde sakın kalman lazım, kaç kişi bağırmış zaten, alışkınsın ama sen de stresli olunca, ne oluyor, sen de adama bağırmaya başlıyorsun ya da bir düğme vardır, ona basar öyle bağırtırsın, müşteri seni duymaz ama odada çıldırırsın. Diğer telefondakiler duyar. Müşteriler soruyordu, orada bir şey mi oldu diye. Kayışın koptuğu çok oluyordu. Çok arkadaş kovuldu ya da işten ayrıldı böyle. (...) Stresin kaynaklarını söyleyeyim sana. Gece çalışmak, sosyal hayatının çok kötü duruma gelmesi, monotonluk ama asıl önemlisi insanların da sana sürekli bağırp çağırıyor olması. Yani çünkü senin sorumluluğunda olmayan olumsuz bir durumdan dolayı adam sana bağırtıyor, çünkü sadece seninle konuşabiliyor. Bağırtıyor, bağırtıyor, bağırtıyor. Hadi tamam bağırsın diyorsun. Ama sonra, başkası bağırtıyor, sonra başkası. Bu da stres yaratıyor tabii.”*

⁴¹³ Ayşe, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 6 January 2010.

Even if the customer swore at us, we were not able to hang up the phone. The customer was swearing. What would you do? Don't we hang up it, no! You have to wait until he does. After all, it is an image issue! Pay attention to [Name of the company] image! It was always stressed. "You are representing the [name of the company], the customer hears only your voice." Managers tried to create pressure on us in this way.⁴¹⁴

Previous research demonstrates how emotional pressures associated with call center work leads to the dissatisfaction of workers and high labor turnover.⁴¹⁵ The narratives documented above also contribute to this literature. In addition, as long as my interviewees were using their foreign language abilities, emotional exhaustion in a multilingual call center environment takes another shape. Most of the interviewees stated that dealing with angry clients in a foreign language was better than hearing cursing in Turkish. Even those who were born and raised in European countries and considered Germany or Dutch as their mother tongues mentioned that emotional exhaustion could be more endurable in humiliating situations in these languages:

Swearing in German mostly targets your intelligence, but Turkish swearing is about your mom and sister. German or English indelicacies do not impact me very much, actually. Hearing them in Turkish would be more difficult. I don't care too much.⁴¹⁶

Although indelicacies in a foreign language might be tolerable and ignorable to an extent, multilingual call center work has another humiliating dimension. Since the workers serve customers by making calls to or taking calls from other countries, most of the multilingual call centers in Turkey, as it is evident in many other

⁴¹⁴ Arda, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 17 February 2010. *"Müşteri bize küfretse bile, telefonu biz kapatamıyorduk. Müşteri küfür ediyor, ne yaparsın? Kapatmayalım mı yani, hayır! O kapatana kadar bekleyeceksin. İmaj meselesi sonuçta. Aman, [Şirketin adı] imajı sarsılmasın! Bu hep vurgulanıyordu. "Siz [Şirketin adı]'u temsil ediyorsunuz, müşteri sadece sizi duyuyor." gibi. Amirler baskı yaratmaya çalışıyorlardı böyle."*

⁴¹⁵ Rose and Wright, "Satisfaction and Dimensions;" Deery et al., "Work Relationships in;" Taylor et al., "A Unique Working."

⁴¹⁶ Özgür, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 9 January 2010. *"Almanca küfürler daha çok senin zekânı hedef alırken, Türkçe küfürler ana bacı oluyor. Almanca ya da İngilizce küfürler beni o kadar etkilemiyor açıkçası, Türkçe duymak daha fena olurdu. Aldırmıyorum o kadar."*

examples, expected workers to mask their location and real name. This requirement of call center work in developing countries is well documented by previous research.⁴¹⁷ “Locational masking,”⁴¹⁸ to use Mirchandani’s term, might be a source of work-related stress because some customers could understand that they were lying about their identity. According to my interviewees, some workers thought that being obliged to hide his/her real name was humiliating; however, workers tended to develop some strategies to overcome this. For instance, Burcu said,

I felt bad of course, after all, it is something that degrades the individual. But you develop some defensive mechanisms. You say, “It is not wasting my time, it gives me more confidence.” You are kidding about it, but it feels bad to hide your name, your city.⁴¹⁹

Although the majority of interviewees, particularly those who had to hide their identities at work, were born and raised in foreign countries where they learned their vocational languages, did not have an “accent problem” unlike their Indian or South African colleagues, some customers were able to understand their lies about identity and location. Some interviewees stated that customers’ reaction could be racist. For instance, Mehmet said “I have a Dutch name. Yes, sometimes they can understand it. Maybe because of my accent, maybe some wrong use. There are many xenophobic people, they are reacting mostly. But I consider it as a part of my job, a job requirement.”⁴²⁰ Özge mentioned racist responses too; however, she also stated

⁴¹⁷ D’Cruz and Noronha, “Being Professional;” Mirchandani, “Making Americans;” Taylor and Bain, “India Calling to;” Sonntag, “Linguistic Globalization.”

⁴¹⁸ Mirchandani, “Practices of Global Capital.”

⁴¹⁹ Burcu, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 7 January 2010. *“Kendimi kötü hissediyordum tabii, sonuçta insanı değersizleştiren bir şey. Ama savunma mekanizması geliştiriyorsun. Diyorsun ki, “Zaman kaybettirmiyor bana, bana daha çok güven duyulmasını sağlıyor. Dalga geçiyorsun bununla ama kötü hissettiriyor tabii ismini, şehrini gizlemek.”*

⁴²⁰ Mehmet, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. *“Hollandaca ismim var. Evet bazen anlayan oluyor. Aksandan falan olabilir, yanlış kullanım belki.”*

that she was familiar with using English names because she grew up in Australia where all immigrants, as she claimed, have a fake name:

I had a nickname of course, because they [customers] were reactive regardless of your English level. For a short period of time, I used a Turkish name, my own name, but some people could be racist. They were acting too racist, “You immigrants...” they would say. (...) We could say Istanbul, but according to the customer’s attitude, we could say also Kentucky, the headquarters of the company in America. (...) I struggled for a time to use my own name but it was difficult for the customer, and also I was losing time. And I was familiar with using nicknames already. It was very in common those in foreign countries, my aunt, my cousins, they all have nicknames; a part of my family is still living in Australia. I also had when I was there. So I picked it up again.⁴²¹

Another interviewee also mentioned that it was not a managerial demand, but he chose to switch the names for “professional” reasons:

They said “It is not mandatory,” but when you use your own name, the dialog lengthens, you should keep it short. If you use your own name, the man asks “where are you from, what about the weather?” When he asks, you can not say “OK, forget about it, let’s fix your problem.” I mean, if you say Ahmet or Mehmet, you enter nonsense, unnecessary dialog. As I said, it was not mandatory, but if you use an English name for yourself, you skip all of these.⁴²²

Professional reasons such as shortening the conversation was frequently referred to during interviews; so it can be claimed that although locational and identity masking is considered humiliating, the discourse of professionalism is used

Yabancı düşmanı çok, onlar tepki gösteriyor genelde. Ama işimin bir parçası olarak görüyorum bunu, iş icabı.”

⁴²¹ Özge, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 14 January 2010. “Takma ismim vardı tabii, çünkü tepkili oluyorlardı, ne kadar İngilizce bilerseniz bilin, Bir dönem Türkçe isim kullandım ama insanlar ırkçı olabiliyordu. Çok fazla ırkçılık yapıyorlardı, “Siz göçmenler” falan diyorlardı. (...) İstanbul’da olduğumuzu söyleyebiliyorduk ama müşterinin tepkisine göre, Amerika’daki merkezi de söyleyebiliyorduk, Kentucky diyebiliyorduk. (...) Ben bir süre direndim kendi adımı kullanmaya ama hem müşteri için zor oluyordu hem vakit kaybediyordum. Zaten takma isim kullanmaya alıştım, yurtdışındakiler için öyledir, teyzem, kuzenlerim, hepsinin takma ismi vardır; ailemin bir kısmı hala Avustralya’da. Benim de vardı ordayken. Onu tekrar aldım yani.”

⁴²² Can, interview by the author, tape recording, Yalova, Turkey, 6 February 2010. “Dediler ki şart değil. Ama kendi adını söylediğin zaman konuşma uzuyor, kısa tutman lazım. Adam soruyor sen neresisin, havalar nasıl falan. Sorunca da yav sen boş ver onu, biz senin sorununu çözmeye bakalım diyemiyorsun. Yani Ahmet dersen, Mehmet dersen, saçma sapan, gereksiz bir konuşmaya girmiş oluyorsun. Dediğim gibi şart koşmuyorlardı ama İngilizce bir isim koyarsan kendine, geçiyorsun bunları.”

to balance this. Even so, the possibility of being exposed seems a stress generator in the call center environment, because customer reactions can be racist. For instance, Can also stated that although he used an English name, he could not lie about location because of the company policies, but

When we say that we are in Turkey, some of the clients may say humiliating things like “Oh, You’re a Turk. OK, now it is clear why you are not solving [the problem].” Even when we call the main office in Canada to pass on a problem that we can not fix, the staff in the same company that we work for reacts like that. “You Turks, you can’t do anything, can you?” they say.”⁴²³

Another narrative also demonstrates how workers needed to use a foreign name in selling call centers to avoid customer’s biases and make them feel comfortable with purchasing a product from someone whom they could not see:

To the clients in Germany, you don’t say that you are not in Germany. We were saying that we were in Nurnberg. Also I didn’t use my own name. First, it is a waste of time, the man wants to note [your name] down; second it keeps you from making a sale, ‘cause you are not German, if they learn that you’re Turkish, it is much more difficult, maybe impossible. Because of that, everybody had a German name.⁴²⁴

Considering locational and identity masking as prerequisite of multilingual call center work is very common. The workers frequently stated that, after a while they started to think of the fake name as real. They usually created a fake story for their virtual character at work, so that they could keep themselves from being exposed.

⁴²³ Can, interview by the author, tape recording, Yalova, Turkey, 6 February 2010. *“Türkiye’de olduğumuzu söyleyince, ‘Aaa, sen Türksün, neden [sorunu] çözemediğin şimdi belli oldu’ gibi aşağılayıcı söyleyen müşteriler oluyordu. Hatta çözemediğimiz durumu paslamak için Kanada’daki asıl ofisi aradığımız, aynı şirkette çalıştığımız elemanlar, ‘Siz Türkler bir işi beceremezsiniz, değil mi?’ derlerdi.”*

⁴²⁴ Burcu, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 7 January 2010. *“Almanya’daki müşterilere Almanya’da olmadığını söylemezsin. Nürnberg’te olduğumuzu söylüyorduk. Kendi adımı da kullanmıyordum. Bir, zaman kaydı, adam [adını] not almak istiyor; ikincisi satış yapmanı engelliyor. Alman değilsin. Türk olduğunu öğrenirlerse çok daha zor, belki imkânsız bile. O yüzden herkesin bir Alman ismi vardı.”*

I use a German name, but I don't feel very bad about it. You begin to identify with it after a while. The same name for four years. It turns into a character.⁴²⁵

I've been using this name for two years, it is like my own name.⁴²⁶

I made up a name which was similar to my real name, I even wrote a story for her. For example, s/he [customer] says "You have a German name, you're speaking German very well but you have a little accent, why is that? In this case, I would tell my story: "My mom is Turkish, my dad is German and I grew up in Turkey," something like that. (...) Also, I looked up the weather in Nurnberg, especially older people frequently asked.⁴²⁷

However, all these attempts to hide identity and internalization could fail in some situations; some callers were aware of call center offshoring phenomenon:

When the call center in Istanbul was opened, they had scaled down the one in Nurnberg, many people had lost their jobs, we heard, it was in the news in the region. People made demonstrations; it was a huge call center. Because of that, those who lived in this state knew that we were in Istanbul and they asked about it. Some of them asked about the weather, some of them said "Germans lost their jobs because of you. You stole our jobs!"⁴²⁸

As a conclusion, balanced with a strong sense of professionalism, workers tended to internalize the "prerequisites" of their job even those considered as humiliating and degrading. The stress generators of their job which were mostly originated from the nature of call center work, were tolerated with external factors. Most importantly, working in a foreign language, speaking it all day long, interacting

⁴²⁵ Zeynep, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. "Alman ismi kullanıyorum ama pek kötü hissetmiyorum. Artık özdeşleşiyorsunuz isminizle. Dört senedir aynı isim, öyle bir karakter. Özdeşleşiyorsunuz."

⁴²⁶ Ahmet, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. "Ben bu ismi iki senedir kullanıyorum sanki benim isminmiş gibi."

⁴²⁷ Burcu, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 7 January 2010, "Ben gerçek adıma benzer bir isim uydurmuştum, hikaye bile yazmıştım ona. Mesela şey diyor, adınız Alman, çok güzel Almanca konuşuyorsunuz ama çok hafif bir aksanız var, neden? Hikâyemi böyle durumlarda anlatıyordum: Annem Türk, babam Alman ve ben Türkiye'de büyüdüm, gibi şeyler. (...) Hep internetten Nürnberg'teki hava durumuna bakardım, özellikle yaşlılar çok soruyordu."

⁴²⁸ Burcu, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 7 January 2010. "İstanbul'daki çağrı merkezi açılınca, Nürnberg'tekini küçültmüşler, bir sürü insan işsiz kalmış, bu o belgede haber olmuş. İnsanlar gösteriler yapmış; çok büyük bir çağrı merkeziymiş o. bu yüzden, o eyalette yaşayanlar biliyordu zaten ve soruyorlardı. Orada havalar nasıl diyen de oluyordu, sizin yüzünüzden Almanlar işsiz kaldı, işimizi çaldınız diyen de."

with foreigners, and the relatively high wages are still most satisfactory features of multilingual call center work. The last sub-section of this part below will focus on that and other enjoyable dimensions that the workers experience.

Positive Views on Call Center Work

This sub-section is devoted to the statements of participants about “cheerful”, “enjoyable” and after all, reliable sides of call center work and will focus on to what extent workers were satisfying with their jobs. During my interviews, I asked workers the facets of multilingual call centers that provide them satisfaction and encouraged them to state what they most liked about the job. Speaking a foreign language or their “mother tongue” for most of them, keeping in touch with their “hometown,” wages, helping the customers, a shared heritage with colleagues, team-members and the employer’s reputation emerged as key themes. Although, workers from different origins and backgrounds state work satisfaction that is derived in different ways, the most frequent and common one was “call center environment.” Regardless of their family origin or the type of call center that they were working for, all interviewees stressed the “family-like” or friendly working environment in call centers. Below I will argue this consideration as a strategy on the workers’ part to cope with the stressful and repetitive nature of work; further, rather than genuine satisfaction, I will attempt to demonstrate a tendency towards self-deception in some cases.

All of my interviewees stated that they enjoyed using a foreign language at work. Especially, workers who had spent years in foreign countries as members of immigrant families and had returned to Turkey for some reason, considered their

vocational language as their mother tongues. In other words, most of the interviewees with a migration history said that Turkish is like a foreign language for them and they could not do this job in Turkish. In this sense, they seemed very satisfied about being appreciated and earning money by employing their language skills which were not considered “skills” by themselves. Furthermore, as the narratives below demonstrate, many workers with migration histories felt at “home” again thanks to speaking their “mother tongue” all day long:

The most attractive part [of this job] is Dutch. We have nostalgia about the Netherlands of course, when we came here, I mean, it made us feel good. I felt like a Dutch again (...) Speaking Dutch is what keeps me in this job; this is the most important thing.⁴²⁹

When I entered here, I feel myself like I’m in Germany. We speak only German. It is easier for most of us.⁴³⁰

I couldn’t do it in Turkish, absolutely not. I’m sure about that. Dutch is like a mother tongue for me, more than Turkish. Also, this place is like the Netherlands. You talk to Dutch people, visit Dutch websites. You are always in touch with there.⁴³¹

Interviewees who did not have migration story also mentioned the joy of speaking a foreign language. As I referred to in the above sections of this study, they considered the multilingual call center environment as an opportunity to keep their linguistic skills. Ayşe said that “English communication is the most enjoyable side of this job. If it was not in English, I would not work so much.”⁴³² Burcu, who had lived

⁴²⁹ Nevin, interview by the author, tape recording, İstanbul Turkey, 13 January 2010. “[Bu işin] en cazip kısmı, Hollandaca olduğu için. Hollanda’ya karşı bir özlemimiz var tabii, buraya gelince hoşumuza gitti yani, yine kendimi Hollandalı gibi hissetmiş oldum. (...) Beni bu işte Hollandaca konuşmak tutuyor, en önemlisi o.”

⁴³⁰ Ahmet, interview by the author, tape recording, İstanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. “Buraya girdiğimde Almanya’da gibi hissediyorum. Sırf Almanca konuşuyoruz, çoğumuz için daha kolay.”

⁴³¹ Emre, interview by the author, tape recording, İstanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. “Türkçe beceremezdim bu işi, kesinlikle beceremezdim. Eminim buna. Benim için Hollandaca anadil gibi, Türkçeden daha çok. Hem burası da Hollanda gibi, Hollandalılarla konuşuyorsun, Hollandaca sitelere giriyorsun. Orayla hep bağlantıdasın.”

in Germany for five years as a high school student, clearly stated that speaking German was the main reason for her to taking the job:

For me, speaking German was like finding water in the desert. I always had going back to Germany in my mind. So it was very important for me not to forget German.⁴³³

Most of the interviewees stated that their wages and social security payments were satisfying; however the majority of them noted that they should be paid more as long as they were doing a difficult job. Furthermore, a sense of comparative perspective was apparent in their statements. The interviewees seemed to think about their earnings in terms of comparing available job opportunities and “overall job market.” Answers like “It is not bad under conditions of Istanbul,”⁴³⁴ “I can’t find any other job for this money”⁴³⁵ were frequent when I asked about how they consider their wages. However, especially middle-aged workers stated that they were in need of extra income to improve their life standards. For instance, Fatma, who was earning 650 Euros per month, said that “It may be good in these conditions, but it doesn’t mean that it is enough. It comes up short when you want to rely only on this for your living in Turkey.”⁴³⁶

Especially those who were still students while they were employed in call centers, strongly stressed they were making a good amount of “student money.” A

⁴³² Ayşe, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 6 January 2010. “İngilizce iletişim işin en keyifli yanı, İngilizce olmasaydı bu kadar çalışmazdım.”

⁴³³ Burcu, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 7 January 2010. “Benim için Almanca konuşmak çölde su bulmak gibiydi. Kafamın bir yerinde hep Almanya’ya gitmek vardı yine. Almanca’yı unutmamak çok önemliydi bu yüzden.”

⁴³⁴ Emre, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. “İstanbul şartlarına göre fena değil.”

⁴³⁵ Deniz, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 8 January 2010. “Bu paraya başka iş bulamam.”

⁴³⁶ Fatma, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. “Bu şartlarda iyi olabilir. Ama bu iyi yeterli demek değil. Türkiye’de hayatını sürdürmek için az.”

master student Ayşe, who was earning 1050 TL, 450 TL more than her colleagues in the same center, because she had passed a TOEFL-like English exam of the company, thought she could not find any other job “in these conditions of the country” in which she would earn more and it is impossible to find a similar job that she could balance with her graduate studies.⁴³⁷ Another interviewee, Burcu mentioned how she was proud of being employed and being paid Euro:

I did not sell much but the money that I got was sufficient for me, because I was earning student money. Approximately 300 Euro. Think about it! My first paid job and with Euros! It was very good money for me! It was a proud thing, working while I was a student.⁴³⁸

Can said the call center job was his first job after graduation from university.

He had limited opportunities and the call center was the best one:

My classmate from university had been working [in a call center]. He had mentioned it. It wasn't something that I wanted to do. You know what kind of a job it is. But it was an issue to find a job. Because there is something like that: Because you are a literature graduate, foreign trade companies are seeking experienced employees. I applied somewhere, but they offered 400 TL, but the [Call center company's name] was offering 1500 TL. I mean, if the difference was little, you would say, “Why should I deal with call centers?” But the money was very attractive. I had had constant troubles with money already while I was a student, so, I found it good.⁴³⁹

Some workers mentioned that they enjoyed talking to people on the phone and they derived satisfaction from helping customers or selling something to them. In inbound environments, workers tended to consider their jobs like “social work,”

⁴³⁷ Ayşe, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 6 January 2010.

⁴³⁸ Burcu, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 7 January 2010. *“Satışlarım düşüktü ama aldığım para bana yetiyordu, çünkü öğrenci parası kazanıyordum. Yaklaşık 300 Euro. Düşünsene! İlk maaşlı işim, hem de Euro’yla. Benim için çok iyi paraydı. Öğrenciyken çalışmak çok gurur vericiydi.”*

⁴³⁹ Can, interview by the author, tape recording, Yalova, Turkey, 6 February 2010. *“Üniversiteden sınıf arkadaşım çalışıyordu, o bahsetmişti, benim de yapmak istediğim bir iş değildi, biliyorsun nasıl bir iş olduğunu. Ama iş bulma sıkıntısı vardı. Çünkü şöyle bir şey var: Edebiyat mezunu olduğun için, dış ticaret şirketleri tecrübeli eleman istiyor. Bir yere başvurdum, 400 TL veriyorlardı, [Şirketin adı] ise 1500 veriyordu. Yani, fark az olsa, ne uğraşacağım, call center’la dersin. Parası çok cazip geldi. Zaten öğrenciyken, sürekli para sıkıntım olmuş, sonra iyi geldi tabii.”*

because they usually thought that as long as it was a problem-solving job, they were helping people with their issues that could not be handled in the lack of call center support. Warhurst and Thompson point to the “internalization of values” for this consideration.⁴⁴⁰ The internalization of customer service norms and corporate values frequently appear during interviews, particularly with in-house call center workers.

Deniz’s statement below exemplifies this attitude:

After all, we help people. We help them fix credit card issues, for example, they were in foreign countries as usual, and they don’t have any other chance except calling us. A woman is in Ireland, let’s say, can she find a branch in Ireland? She can’t, of course. I’m only her connection.⁴⁴¹

In outbound call centers where the selling function is dominant, workers seemed to derive satisfaction by pursuing a potential customer to purchase a product that s/he could not even see; gaining self-confidence was frequently referred to as an outcome of call center experience: “I have gotten used to marketing, I love the work, I really love marketing, selling something. It makes you feel good when the customer trusts in you; he buys something from you.”⁴⁴²

Workers could derive satisfaction from company’s name and its reputation in society. Particularly those who were working for the in-house call centers or outsourcer of big multinationals seemed very satisfied about reputation of their employers. This kind of a satisfaction did not emerge in the conducted interviews

⁴⁴⁰ Chris Warhurst and Paul Thompson, “Hands, Hearts and Minds: Changing Work and Workers at the End of the Century,” in *Workplaces of the Future*, edited by Paul Thompson and Chris Warhurst (London: Macmillan, 1998), p. 10

⁴⁴¹ Deniz, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 8 January 2010. “Sonuçta insanlara yardım ediyoruz. Kredi kartı sorunlarını çözüyoruz, mesela yurtdışındalar genellikle, bizi aramak dışında da çareleri yok. Kadın İrlanda’da diyelim, İrlanda’da bir şube bulabilir mi? Hayır tabii ki. Tek bağlantısı benim.”

⁴⁴² Nevin, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. “Pazarlamaya alıştım, işi seviyorum, bir şey satmak, pazarlamak. Müşterinin sana güvenmesi iyi hissettiriyor, senden bir şey alıyor ya.”

with workers of Turkish outsourcers. On the other hand, Ayşe and Deniz were working for two different Turkish in-house call centers where they were handling calls from companies' foreign clients; both of them strongly stressed "corporate culture" and "institutional identity." In some cases, these two concepts seemed to make them to internalize and justify the managerial demands, although they found some of them, as Deniz put it, a "bit ridiculous." Here, rather than work satisfaction, a tendency towards self-deception is more conceivable. For instance, Ayşe talked of the dress code in the workplace:

There is a formal clothes rule, tie is mandatory, it is forbidden to wear sport shoes. Even on New Year's Eve, after 10 pm when the directors had left, were the men able to take their ties off. But I like this dress code; I feel that I'm working in an institutional place.⁴⁴³

I mean, okay, nobody can see you in this room, but you're in the headquarters after all, you use the same door as everybody else, not only the clients but also the directors. Okay it seems a bit ridiculous at night, sitting with a skirt and high heels. But it is necessary, you can't put jeans on in a bank.⁴⁴⁴

Defensive self-deception appears even in more dramatic cases; "institutional identity" or "corporate culture" rise as the major source of commitment in the workplace for in-house call center workers. For instance, the limitation of socialization in the workplace can be considered as a requirement of working in a big company:

Actually, it is forbidden to be close friends. You can feel it, on breaks they [team-leaders] follow you if you are flirting with someone. They don't want us to get close outside of work, oh yes, if we don't count parties [Referring to parties organized by management in the workplace]. A result of institutional identity, they are trying to protect it.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴³ Ayşe, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 6 January 2010. "*Formel kıyafet zorunluluğu var, kravat zorunlu, spor ayakkabı giymek yasak. Yılbaşı gecesinde bile saat 10'da bütün müdürlerler gidince kravatlar çıkabildi. Ama kıyafet kuralı benim hoşuma gidiyor, kurumsal bir yerde çalıştığımı hissediyorum.*"

⁴⁴⁴ Deniz, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 8 January 2010. "*Yani, tamam odanın içinde seni kimse göremez ama, sonuçta genel merkezdesin, hem müşterilerle hem yöneticilerle aynı kapıyı kullanıyorsun. Tamam etekle, topuklularla oturmak biraz tuhaf görünebilir gece ama gerekli, bankada kot giyemezsin.*"

In addition, friendly working environment and friendship in the workplace are the facets of call center work which are frequently referred to as sources of satisfaction by the participants of this study. Usually in call centers where workers with migration stories constituted the majority, colleagues or team-members could appear of a source of enjoying the work. Apart from “keeping in touch” with hometown or mother tongue, friends with the same history made workers motivate themselves to work more easily. They strongly stressed the difference between “Turkish work habits” and the environment of the system they were familiar with from their experience in foreign countries. In this sense they all agreed that if the working environment had been designed according to German or Dutch system, they would be able to work better. The narratives below were taken from interviews with workers in a Dutch call center where all workers have lived in the Netherlands for some time in their lives; since the Dutch language is not taught in Turkish schools, all workers in these work stations have a migration story.

I feel comfortable. It would be different if there were only people from here [Turkey]. You share the same past, I mean, they came from the Netherlands; you, too. There is a common past.⁴⁴⁶

There is a beautiful environment here in the case of friendship. It wasn't clear how long would I stay here, but thanks to this beautiful environment, I have been here for three months. I could stay longer. Environment has a positive impact.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁵ Deniz, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 8 January 2010. “*Aslında yakın arkadaşlık yasak. Molalarda izliyorlar yani seni, hissediyorsun, bakıyorlar biriyle flörtleşiyor musun diye. İş dışında arkadaş olmamızı istemiyorlar, ha tabii, partileri saymazsak. Kurumsal kimlik sonuta, korumaya alışıyorlar.*”

⁴⁴⁶ Onur, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. “*Kendimi daha rahat hissediyorum. Sırf buralı insanlar olsaydı belki farklı olurdu. Aynı gemişı şey yapıyorsun yani, onlar da Hollanda’dan gelmiş, sen de. Belli bir gemiş var.*”

⁴⁴⁷ Emre, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. “*Arkadaşlık olarak ok güzel bir ortam var burada. Benim burada ne kadar kalacağım belli değildi ama ortam ok güzel olduėu iin 3 aydır buradayım. Daha da kalabilirim. Ortamın pozitif etkisi oldu.*”

It's like home. Also, the environment is very beautiful. We share the same past, we all have come from the same place, the feelings are same. I mean, the culture in here. OK, our country is Turkey, it is a different subject, but we have different habits, we internalized Dutch traditions to some extent, because we stayed how many years. When we came here [the call center], we caught this environment again. Because of the fact that we share these feelings. This is why it is more attractive to work here.⁴⁴⁸

We speak in Dutch between ourselves. Everybody had seen its culture, its traditions. This place is like the Netherlands Consultant. You are like a Dutchman, sort of.⁴⁴⁹

If I had started to work in a Turkish company where everything was Turkish, just after I had returned from there, I don't think I would have survived four years. This job is absolutely something that keeps me in Turkey.⁴⁵⁰

As Hauptfleisch and Uys found in their observation of a call center which serves foreign clients in South Africa, "team members are seen as a support system"⁴⁵¹ and this consideration is not limited to workers with shared heritage in my data. All interviewed workers regardless of their origin, educational background, the work type in which they were engaged or the organizational type for which they worked stressed the friendly working environment in call centers. For instance, one of my interviewees who had worked for a foreign outsourcer company for five years and left the job for some reason mentioned that she could not stop herself from joining "call center world" again:

⁴⁴⁸ Nevin, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. "*Ev gibi, bir de ortam çok güzel, aynı geçmişi paylaşıyoruz, hepimiz aynı yerden gelmişiz, duygular aynı. Ne bileyim burada kültür, tamam vatanımız Türkiye, o ayrı konu ama, ama bizim alıştığımız farklı adetler, ne kadar da olsa Hollanda adetlerini içimize sindirmişiz, orada kaç sene kaldığımız için. Buraya gelince, o ortamı tekrar yakalamış olduk. Bu yüzden burada çalışmak daha cazip geldi.*"

⁴⁴⁹ Mehmet, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. "*Kendi aramızda da Hollandaca konuşuyoruz, herkes oranın kültürünü görmüş, adetlerini görmüş. Burası Hollanda konsoloslğu gibi, biraz Hollandalı gibisin.*"

⁴⁵⁰ Hatice, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. "*Ben şimdi oradan gelip direkt Türk şirketine girseydim, her şey Türkçe olsaydı, sanmıyorum 4 yıl yaşayabileceğimi. Beni Türkiye'de tutan şeylerden biri kesinlikle bu iş.*"

⁴⁵¹ Sanet Hauptfleisch and J.S. Uys, "The Experience of Work in a Call Centre Environment," *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology* 36, no. 2 (2006), p.26.

At the moment when I left [company's name] after five years, I thought I would never work in a call center again. I planned to go back to Australia and study for a master's degree. I arranged everything, including school. And then, this [present call center company] occurred. There is an interesting environment, unique to call centers. It's a difficult job, it's not easy to do, but especially friendship, there is a different atmosphere. I guess this is why I joined call center world again.⁴⁵²

Most of the interviewees mentioned that team-members could be very helpful in order to meet the targets or learn some tricks about interacting with customers. Particularly, coping with abusive customers was frequently referred as a part of job which was learned by friends. Workers seemed very generous about sharing their experience with each other to improve their friends' performance. Although my evidence also confirmed that team-working as an autonomous group of workers who works collectively with high discretion over labor process is not suitable for call centers in which workers are performing the same tasks in a physically isolated environment;⁴⁵³ working as teams is not completely meaningless if workers need to cope with a stressful labor process in which they are expected to meet -in some cases unrealistic- targets and deal with abusive customers. Unlike previous research that focuses on how team-working turns into a competition amongst members as a managerial strategy,⁴⁵⁴ my evidence contributes to the approach which interprets team-work in the call center environment as a "source of motivation." Utku's

⁴⁵² Özge, interview by the author, tape recording, İstanbul, Turkey, 14 January 2010. *"Beş yılın sonunda ayrıldığımda, bir daha asla çağrı merkezinde çalışmam diyordum. Avustralya'ya dönüp yüksek lisans yapmak istiyordum. Okuluma kadar her şeyi ayarlamıştım. Sonra [şu an çalıştığı şirket] çıktı. Çağrı merkezlerinin kendine has, ilginç bir ortamı olur. Zor bir iş, yapması kolay bir iş değil, ama özellikle arkadaşlık, değişik bir havası vardır. Herhalde bundan gene çağrı merkezi dünyasına girdim."*

⁴⁵³ van den Broek et al., "Teams without Teamwork."

⁴⁵⁴ Bain et al, "Taylorism, Targets;" Baldry et al, "Bright Satanic Offices;" van den Broek et al, "Teams without Teamwork;" Belt et al, "Women, Social Skill;" David Knights and Darren McCabe, "Governing through Teamwork: Reconstituting Subjectivity in a Call Center," *Journal of Management Studies* 40, no. 7 (November 2003), pp. 1587-1619; Matthew J. Brannan, "Once More With Feeling: Ethnographic Reflections on the Mediation of Tension in a Small Team of Call Centre Workers," *Gender, Work and Organization* 12, no. 5 (September 2005), pp. 420-439.

statement below demonstrates to what extent team friends appear as the only reason to stay at a call center:

I quit the job after a year of working. I was really very happy to leave, my face was smiling. The only positive thing that I remember is friends. There were people from everywhere, students, older people, immigrants... They were all joyful people. Without them I lasted even that period of time. I used to see some of them, but then we separated, unfortunately.⁴⁵⁵

Korczynski suggests the term “communities of coping” for call center workers.⁴⁵⁶ As long as the workers share their experiences of abusive customers or their personal methods to cope with stress, workers perform, to use Hochschild’s term, “collective emotional labor,” which is usually tried to be limited by management.⁴⁵⁷ In this sense, dealing with same problems eventually builds solidarity among workers outside the sphere of managerial influence; it makes them a “community of coping.”

The examples of considering team-members a “source of motivation” or “support system” can be understood a form of worker solidarity. In a highly stressful environment where they were expected to meet targets and to handle repetitive tasks, further to deal with abusive customers who were not uncommon, workers sought to find something to create solidarity. In this process their shared past or shared problems that they encountered in the workplace gave them the opportunity to build friendships.

The friendships that workers build in the workplace, beyond any doubt, are distinctive from the commitment culture the management wants to be created through organized parties or special days. Two call center managers that I conducted

⁴⁵⁵ Utku, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 10 January 2010, “Bir yıllık çalışmadan sonra bıraktım işi, ayrıldığım için de çok mutluydum, yüzüm gülüyordu yani. Hatırladığım tek iyi şey arkadaşlar, öğrenciler, yaşlılar, göçmenler... Hepsi eğlenceli insanlardı. Yani, bu kadar bile dayanamazdım herhalde onlar olmasa. Bir süre görüştük ama koptuk ne yazık ki sonra.”

⁴⁵⁶ Korczynski, “Communities of.”

⁴⁵⁷ Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, pp. 114-116.

interviews with also stressed the friendly working environment in the workplace, one of them said that “We are all like a family here,”⁴⁵⁸ parallel to most of the worker participants of this study. The management-organized party is a well-established phenomenon in the call center industry. For instance *Call Center Magazine*, the pro-industrial, nation wide journal of call centers devotes a section in every issue to parties and other fun activities in call centers. However, as is well documented in previous research, the management-organized parties aim to maximize employee commitment and control employee behavior.⁴⁵⁹ One of my interviewees, Arda mentioned the fictitious nature of management-organized parties: “On New Year’s Eve, I was in the office. It was kind of mandatory, a made-up, fabricated party. Later they put the photos up on boards. To say ‘We are all entertaining here’”⁴⁶⁰ All participants who noted these parties happened in their call centers stated that they considered these attempts to create “team-spirit” or pseudo friendship boring and “fictitious;” the main reason to attend these parties was their semi-mandatory character. Trying to keep some distance between managerial attempts and oneself is suggested as a way of contemporary employee resistance by Fleming and Sewell.⁴⁶¹ Sturdy and Fineman also claim that “distancing as resistance, (...) creates a symbolic and/or physical separation from organizational-cultural emotion imperatives that are experienced as distressing.”⁴⁶² Here, the statements of participants of this study show

⁴⁵⁸ Call Center Manager-1, interview by the author and Sinan Erensü, note taking, Istanbul, 29 July 2009. “Burada hepimiz aile gibiyiz.”

⁴⁵⁹ Baldry et al, *The Meaning of Work*, p. 94.

⁴⁶⁰ Arda, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 17 February 2010. “Yılbaşında ben ofisteydim, zorunlu gibiydi zaten. Yapmacık, uydurma bir parti. Sonra resimleri panolara astılar. Sözde ‘Çok eğleniyoruz.’”

⁴⁶¹ Peter Fleming and Graham Sewell, “Looking for the Good Soldier Svejk: Alternative Modalities of Resistance in the Contemporary Workplace,” *Sociology* 36, no.4 (November 2002), pp. 857-873.

that workers tend to build their own solidarity by their own means and to be aware of managerial attempts to create a commitment workforce. Obviously, they derive satisfaction from their liberated friendship in the workplace; as seen in the narratives above, sometimes it could be the main reason for staying in the workplace.

As is demonstrated in this sub-section, workers did not see call centers as the “new sweatshops”⁴⁶³ of twenty-first century. They usually tended to focus on enjoyable sides of call center work. Particularly in a multilingual environment, speaking a foreign language all day long, interacting with foreigners, further, communicating with a culture with which they were familiar in the case of workers with migration stories, relatively high wages in a competitive job market help workers to endure the stressful and repetitive labor process. Friendship in the workplace, solidarity among workers which was built with the help of a common past and common occupational issues appeared as a source of motivation.

The Place of Call Center Work in Life-Narratives

During my interviews, I encouraged workers to share where they situated call center work in their broader life-narratives. I aimed to understand how they considered their jobs. What did they think about their futures, whether they want to work in the call center in following years or not; did they have any other plans or dreams to accomplish? Further, I asked former workers what the call center experience had supplied them for their lives in the world of work or outside the

⁴⁶² Andrew Sturdy and Stephen Fineman, “Struggles for the Control of Affect – Resistance as Politics and Emotion,” in *Customer Service: Empowerment and Entrapment*, edited by Andrew Sturdy, Irena Grugulis and Hugh Willmott (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 144.

⁴⁶³ Fernie and Metcalf, *(Not)Hanging on the Telephone*.

work; also their statements helped me understand the reasons behind to leave call center job.

First of all, it was rare to consider call center job as a life-long occupation; it was viewed usually as a temporary job for various reasons. The stressful and monotonous nature of the work, the limited opportunities to build a career, the unvalued view towards call center workers in society and considering one-self's overqualified for this job appeared as the main reasons to desire to call center world behind. In some cases, ideological reasons, in other words antagonisms to what call centers represent, could lead workers to give up relatively high level of wage and other material advantages of the job.

However, it does not mean that all workers stated that they wanted to escape the call center environment as soon as possible. Particularly, these workers who had a migration story and were middle-aged mentioned their willingness to stay in the current company. In addition workers who did not think they had any other opportunity to be employed in other segments of economy because of their limited or unvalued qualifications, tended to consider the call center industry as a career site; they usually had already considerable experience in call centers and they hoped to be respected as experts in this growing industry.

The different considerations of call center work directly were related to their own life stories. On the one hand, members of immigrant families were more enthusiastic about their work; they tended to view a future in this industry where their "natural" skills, such as being fluent in a foreign language which is not foreign to themselves, are appreciated. On the other, those workers who did not have a migration story and had developed their language skills by attending good universities were more likely to consider themselves overqualified for call center

jobs; all of the non-immigrant participants of this study frankly stated that the call center was not a part of their plans for the future. Particularly those who had already left the industry after a relatively short period of experience, like a year or less, accepted that only if it was temporary, call center work is endurable.

The stressful and monotonous nature of the work appeared as the most referred reason to leave industry by the participants of this study. Even those who tended to find cheerful sides of the job stated how they were exhausted at the end of the day and it became intolerable after a few years of experience in the call center:

I don't want to work in call center sector for a long time, because my brain is tired. Ok it's a pleasant job, but not a job you can do for a long time. I may work for five years, at most.⁴⁶⁴

I have been on the phone for three and half years. I have never left it. I get really bored sometimes.⁴⁶⁵

Call centers are hierarchically flat organizations and workers can only promote to team-leader or project manager positions. For in-house call centers, it might be thought that advancement to another department in the company is possible. However, regardless to organizational type that they work for, workers have limited opportunities to build a career in or through the call center. As was revealed in my interviews, most of the workers seemed aware of the limited advancement chances. This situation directly results as workers general attitude to see call center work as temporary. Even those who stated their will to stay in the industry did not seem sure about whether their current company would present career prospects for them. Ayşe said that,

⁴⁶⁴ Zeynep, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. *"Çağrı merkezi sektöründe uzun süre çalışmak istemiyorum, çünkü beyin olarak çok yoruluyorum. Tamam zevkli bir iş ama uzun süre götürülebilecek bir iş değil. Beş yıl çalışabilirim, ama en fazla."*

⁴⁶⁵ Hatice, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. *"Üç buçuk senedir telefonun başındayım ben, hiç bırakmadım. Bazen gerçekten sıkılıyorum."*

The first three months passes by trying to understand what is going on there, on-going training continues. After eight or ninth months, you understand how things work and you say “I can’t advance here.” Your productivity declines.⁴⁶⁶

Ayşe stated that she took the job in order to advance in the banking sector and her experience in call center might help her to be promoted to one of the core departments in the company. However, after a short period of working, she realized the lack of career planning in the company and although she had experience and knowledge about the company’s policies and products, her chance to be promoted was lower than that of any other people, as it is common to devalue call center workers in many in-house environments:

There are exams to be an MT [Manager trainee]. Let’s say, you take this exam and I also do, and we both pass. They recruit you because you’re an outsider. I fall into the pool. I need to wait in the pool for an open position. They don’t recruit from inside directly. If someone quits, I can be recruited.⁴⁶⁷

In outsourced call centers, building a career seems even harder. As long as the call center works for a variety of clients in foreign countries, usually in temporary basis, in other words, it is rare to continue a foreign project more than a year in offshored outsourced call centers, and workers can not apply to positions in the parent company. The only chance for them to be promoted to levels inside the call center which are limited to team-leader or project manager. However, these are very exceptional positions in a typical outsourced call center; only those who have spent more than 4-5 years in this relatively new industry can be promoted.

⁴⁶⁶ Ayşe, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 7 January 2010. “İlk üç ay orada neler oluyor onu anlamakla geçiyor, iş başında eğitim devam ediyor. Sekizinci dokuzuncu aydan sonra da içeride neler döndüğünü anlıyorsun, diyorsun ki ben burada yükselemeyeceğim. Verimin düşüyor.”

⁴⁶⁷ Ayşe, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 7 January 2010. “MT [Yönetici asistanı] sınavları var, diyelim sen de girdin sınava ben de, ikimiz de kazandık. Sen işe alınıyorsun, dışarıdan olduğun için; ben havuza düşüyorum. Havuzda bekliyorum, kontenjan açılmasını. İçeriden doğrudan işe almıyorlar. Ancak biri çıkacak ki sen işe giresin.”

Additionally, recruiting team-leader policies can vary in different organizations. For instance, Arda stated that any of team-leaders and other directors in the workplace had had experience with agent position; they all had been recruited from outside as “professionals.”⁴⁶⁸ On the other hand, in an outsourced call center that eight of my interviewees were working for employed only those who had worked for the company as a call center agent previously. These workers were more likely to stay in current company.

The separation of the head-office and the call center caused a lack of career opportunities in “captive” call centers as well. My interviewees from call centers which were directly owned and directed by foreign companies did not report any possibility to advance in the company. They seemed to realize, or as quoted from Burcu above in the first section of this chapter, they were taught during the training, that they were a part of peripheral workforce that carried out the non-core activities of the parent-company. Under the conditions of the Service Level Agreements, the only thing that they were expected to do has meet the parent-company’s targets. Employment in an outsourced-offshored call center does not provide a bridge to employment in the company which has contracted out the call center.⁴⁶⁹ Utku stated that,

[Name of the company] is not aware of us at any level. They know only statistics from Turkey. The managers were all sent by the head-office, they were all Germans. The only thing we could do was take calls, make reservations.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁸ Arda, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 17 February 2010.

⁴⁶⁹ Janet Walsh and Stephen Deery, “Refashioning Organization Boundaries: Outsourcing Customer Service Work,” *Journal of Management Studies* 43, no.3 (May 2006), p. 565.

⁴⁷⁰ Utku, interview by the author, tape recording, İstanbul, Turkey, 8 January 2010. “[Şirketin adı] bizim farkımızda bile değil ki. Sadece Türkiye’den gelen istatistiklerden haberdarlar. Yöneticilerin hepsi de merkezden gelmişti, hepsi Alman. Biz sadece telefon alabiliriz yani, rezervasyon yaparız.”

The student participants of this study stated that they considered themselves overqualified for this job and in the future they would like to be employed in a position where the abilities that they had gained in school was valued. In this sense, they all stated their will to do what they were educated for and call center job, at best, was a temporary pocket money supplier or a place to learn “business world” or workplace culture. Ayşe said that

I would quit [the job] because I think my qualifications aren’t really valued here. It is limited to studentship. Maybe less, 6 months... My classes will be harder next year, so I think I’m going to leave [the job]. (...) At least, I’m not a zero, fresh graduate now. It has provided me work experience. I have learned business culture; I think it will help me in the future.⁴⁷¹

Burcu, who left the call center environment after a year of working, was working in the media sector at the date of research. Apart from similar statements with Ayşe about “business culture,” she also mentioned the importance of call center experience if someone wanted to work with people:

If you want to work with people, every job is like that, a call center job is something to be tried for a month. You learn crisis management, time management, how to use your voice. In my current job also in my social life, the things that I got from the call center are very helpful to me. For example, people say that I am very convincing. [Laughs]⁴⁷²

However, as a Psychology and Public Relations student while working, she had never thought to work in call center more than a year. I asked her what did cause to decide to leave, she replied: “It is a very boring environment after sixth months,

⁴⁷¹ Ayşe, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 6 January 2010. *“Yetkinliklerimin tam olarak değerlendirildiğini düşünmediğim için ayrılıyorum. Öğrencilikle sınırlı, hatta gaz az, altı ay falan. Derslerim seneye daha ağır olacak, o zaman bırakırım herhalde. (...) En azından sıfır, üniversiteden yeni mezun değilim. İş tecrübesi kattı bana. İş kültürünü öğrendim; bunun ilerde işime yarayacağını düşünüyorum.”*

⁴⁷² Burcu, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 7 January 2010. *“Eğer insanlarla çalışmak istiyorsan, ki her iş öyledir, bir ay denenmesi gereken bir iş çağrı merkezi. Kriz yönetmeyi, zaman yönetmeyi öğrenirsin, sesini iyi kullanmayı öğrenirsin. Çağrı merkezinde öğrendiklerim işime yarıyor şimdi, hem işimde hem sosyal hayatımda. Mesela insanlar çok ikna edici olduğumu söylerler.” [Gülüyor.]”*

conditions get harder. You start to question if it is worth it.”⁴⁷³ She, in addition, talked of bad sides of call center experience, resembling a Pavlovian experiment:

My voice would get worse. I was answering the phones, my own cell phone, with my standard opening there [call center], for a while. My mother says that I still talk in my dreams at night; I am making sales sometimes in my dream. Sitting for long periods, always talking on the phone, the ring of that phone... Think about a phone constantly ringing, at busy times... These are very frustrating, I mean, chafing you. For example I don't like to talk on the phone at all, still. I can't chat on the phone. Call center effect, I guess. I don't even like its sound.⁴⁷⁴

Other interviewees who had quit the job at the date of research also stated their reasons to leave. For instance Utku, a German Literature student while working, mentioned his ideological concerns about call center work. He said that, “I didn't see myself as a productive person; I did not believe in this work. The only thing I was doing was taking reservations. So what? I felt I was doing donkeywork.”⁴⁷⁵ Here again, a tension between one's qualifications and the nature of work appears. As it is frequently said, most of the workers seemed aware of this tension, but external reasons, particularly limited job opportunities and being in need of money, had forced them to work in a dead-end working environment. Another participant, Arda, who was a Political Science and International Relations senior student while working, stated that call center work did not help him to develop his existing skills or add new ones: “Additionally, I can say, it has been degrading. It makes a person a

⁴⁷³ Burcu, interview by the author, tape recording, İstanbul, Turkey, 7 January 2010. “*Altıncı aydan sonra çok sıkıcı bir yer, koşullar ağırlaşıyor. Buna değer mi demeye başlıyorsun.*”

⁴⁷⁴ Burcu, interview by the author, tape recording, İstanbul, Turkey, 7 January 2010. “*Sesim çok kötü oluyordu. Telefonları oradaki [çağrı merkezi] standart açmamla açtım bir dönem, kendi cep telefonumu. Hâlâ gece rüyamda konuştuğumu annemler söylüyor, satış yapıyorum bazen rüyamda. Çok uzun süreler oturmak, hep telefonda konuşmak, o telefonun sesi... Sürekli çalan bir telefon düşün, yoğun zamanlarda hele. Onlar çok sinir bozucu, seni yıpratıyor yani. Mesela ben telefonda konuşmayı sevmiyorum hâlâ. Telefonda sohbet edemiyorum. Çağrı merkezi etkisi herhalde. Sesinden bile hoşlanmıyorum.*”

⁴⁷⁵ Utku, interview by the author, tape recording, İstanbul, Turkey, 10 January 2010. “*Kendimi üreten birisi olarak görmüyordum, bu işe inanmıyordum. Yaptığım tek şey rezervasyon yapmak. Ne ki bu? Ayakışleri yaptığımı hissediyordum.*”

weed after a while.”⁴⁷⁶ Can talked of how he had interacted with the same customer five times in a period of a year, and after the fifth conversation, he decided to leave: “I said, ‘The same guy again! [Name of the customer]! I think I will never forget this name! I said, OK, it’s enough! Everyday is the same and it provides you nothing. The same dialogs with the same guys, the same tasks!’”⁴⁷⁷ He added that the next job after the call center had offered him 800 TL, almost half of his wage at the call center, however, “Money was not an issue anymore. It had wearied me that much.”⁴⁷⁸

According to my interviews, those who stated their willingness to stay in the industry were all members of immigrant families, without any exception. They usually considered call center work as the only opportunity that they had in competitive job market of Turkey. Workers from immigrant families constitute the less-educated group of workers in multilingual call centers. Among them, it is very rare to hold a university diploma, which is usually a prerequisite of any job today. Particularly, positions where they could make a competitive living mostly require a bachelor’s degree. On the other hand, some workers were really skilled workers in other areas; however, they thought their skills other than fluency in a foreign language, were not acknowledged in Turkey. For instance, Ahmet had been educated as a lathe-man, although he had worked in this position in Germany for years and made a competitive living, he stated that being a lathe-man is not a desirable job in

⁴⁷⁶ Arda , interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 17 February 2010. “*Hatta, geriletti diyebilirim. Bir süre sonra insanı ota çeviriyor.*”

⁴⁷⁷ Can, interview by the author, tape recording, Yalova, Turkey, 6 February 2010. “*Gene mi aynı adam dedim! [Müşterinin adı]! Herhalde bu adı hiç unutmam. Her gün aynı şey, sana hiçbir şey katmıyor. Aynı muhabbetler, hem de aynı adamlarla, aynı işler!*”

⁴⁷⁸ Can, interview by the author, tape recording, Yalova, Turkey, 6 February 2010. “*Para artık önemli değildi. O kadar bıktırmıştı yani.*”

Turkey and he wanted to stay in the call center industry even though he did not think it was the most skilled job he had ever had:

They want you to work for 12 hours in a day, you have to work weekend shift, also they pay you very little money. At first I looked for [a lathe-man position], but from now on, I'm not interested.⁴⁷⁹

However, it does not mean that all participants of this study with migration stories stated that they saw themselves in the call center industry in the next years. Particularly younger workers who had returned to Turkey recently mentioned their aim to go back to the country where they had been born and raised. When I asked them if they could go back, would they work in a call center in the Netherlands or Germany, there was not any positive answer. These workers who wanted to go back to their "hometown," stated their desire to return to previous occupations as well. An example is Emre:

It would be hard for me to do any other job in Istanbul. As long as I stay here I can work in a call center. Of course, you can't know, you can be bored after a year but, our environment is beautiful here, I will work here as long as it remains like that. But if I can return to the Netherlands, I won't do this job. I will do my own job, I like being a taxi driver more than that.⁴⁸⁰

Participant workers who were middle-aged or tended to see themselves as not having a chance at a "fresh start" said that they wanted to stay in call center industry. As they are referred as "return to work moms" in the literature,⁴⁸¹ middle-aged female workers usually with children were considered this job an easy way to participate in the workforce again. They stated the joy of earning their own money

⁴⁷⁹ Ahmet, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. "*Seni 12 saat çalıştırıyorlar günde, haftasonu da vardiyaya giriyorsun, bir de üç kuruş para veriyorlar. Başta bakındım ama, artık hiç ilgilenmiyorum.*"

⁴⁸⁰ Emre, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. "*İstanbul'da başka iş yapmam yani zor. Burada kaldığım sürece çalışırım çağrı merkezinde. Tabii bilemezsin, bir sene sonra sıkılabilirsin ama ortamımız burada, böyle olduğu sürece çalışırım. Ama Hollanda'ya dönebilirim yapmam bu işi. Kendi işimi yaparım, taksi şoförlüğünü daha çok seviyorum.*"

⁴⁸¹ Durbin, "Gender, Skills and Careers."

and socialization through work. Fatma's narrative demonstrates their attitude towards the call center job:

I was a housewife for 10-15 years. Everything can happen in one's life. I mean, I lost my husband one and half years ago. This job was superb for me, I mean. People should have a skill, as they say, a "golden bracelet" [a Turkish expression meaning a remunerable skill or otherwise guaranteed income source]. The Dutch language saved me, I can make a living now. (...) I always wanted to work, I mean, sitting at home, it makes the person blind. All these things, days [referring special days when housewives come together and have a kind of party] others never attracted me. You make yourself blind, that's all. Now, you're earning your own money, you have new friends in a new environment. But at home, surrounded by four walls, you go blind.⁴⁸²

Özge and Özgür can not be considered as middle-aged workers, however they both mentioned that they needed to "hold on" what they are doing right know, as long as they were "aging."⁴⁸³ Özge thought that after five years in two different call centers, this job was shaping his life and since the industry was growing rapidly in the country, she had lots of opportunities. On the other hand, Özgür, who had a similar experience in call centers and the same consideration of "time to think about having a career,"⁴⁸⁴ did not think that he could stand call centers five more years. He said "I want to knock all the doors I see; I try to improve my position. I would quit today for a better job."⁴⁸⁵ However, until that day, as he stated, he would try to do

⁴⁸² Fatma, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 January 2010. "*10 15 sene ev hanımlığı yaptım. İnsanın başına her şey gelebiliyor, yani bir buçuk sene önce eşimi kaybettim. Bu iş benim için süper oldu yani. İnsanın bir beceri olmalı, altın bilezik derler ya. Hollandaca beni kurtardı. Şimdi geçimimi sağlayabiliyorum. (...) Ben hep çalışmak istiyordum, yani evde oturmak insanı körleştiriyor. Günler şeyler, bunlar beni hiç çekmedi, körleştiriyorsun kendini, o kadar. Şimdi kendi paramı kazanıyorsun, başka bir ortamda yeni arkadaşların oluyor. Evde dört duvar arasında körleşiyorsun.*"

⁴⁸³ Özge, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 14 January 2010. "*Yaşım ilerledi artık, işinize tutunmak zorunda kalıyorsunuz.*"

⁴⁸⁴ Özgür, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 9 January 2010. "*E artık kariyer düşünmek lazım.*"

⁴⁸⁵ Özgür, interview by the author, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, 9 January 2010. "*Bütün gördüğüm kapılarımı çalmak istiyorum. Daha iyi yerlere gelmeye bakarım. Daha iyi bir iş için bugün ayrılırım.*"

what he is doing currently, giving technical service in a foreign outsourced call center.

To sum up, call center work was frequently considered as a temporary job by the participants of this study. Workers with a university degree, without any exception, stated their aspiration to leave call center environment for good after a short period of working and to find work in their own field, for one which they had been educated. Even those who had started to this job as a career ladder mentioned that they changed their mind after realizing the lack of advancement opportunities. Only these participants who were less-educated and also had attended schools in foreign countries talked of the call center industry in their future plans. However, most of them also stated that this job was exhausting and boring in nature, but because of the lack of any other employment opportunities for them, because of the fact that they were not native to “Turkish work habits,” they were forced to stay in call center world. In addition, younger returnees stated their final aim to go back to “hometown” (Germany or Netherlands); they were not planning to stay in Istanbul for a long time and until the day that they would return, the call center job was instrumental to provide them a living in Turkey. On the other hand, middle-aged, mostly female workers considered being a call center agent as a life-long job. After a long period of not participating in the workforce, the call center provided them a quick and easy way of earning money, socialization and in these ways, helped them gain self-confidence. In the final analysis, the engendering employment in call centers is an “opportunity” for only those who have limited alternatives for various reasons, including their family background in foreign countries or being in need of money to pursue higher education.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This thesis examined the Turkish call center industry pertaining to the locational distribution of these brand new workplaces, the role of the state and public institutions in expansion of call centers, the integration of the industry with global connections by offshore-outsourcing activities of multinational companies and finally, the rising employment in multilingual call centers in Turkey. The main aim while doing this was to analyze what kind of employment is being engendered and for whom a call center job is a desired occupation. In this sense, by claiming call centers create employment for those who have limited alternatives in other segments of the economy, this thesis questioned the positive image of the industry which the government representatives and business people frequently promote in the press and any other means of public relations.

Buying a service or product or complaining about them, making reservations and many other business-to-customer or customer-to-business interactions by telephone is not a recent phenomenon but the call center as a dedicated unit is something new. Call centers constitute one of the most rapidly growing employment generators in countries all over the world. As the rise of call centers can be situated at the crossroads of advances in information and telecommunication technologies, business process reengineering, the changed structure of customer needs and demands and the changing structure of employment towards more unstable, flexible and low-paid jobs and expanding participation of young and women population in

the workforce, the call center can be considered as the best exemplary of twenty-first century capitalism. Hence, examining call centers provides powerful insights for not only about capitalist labor process but also about the new international division of labor which is an outcome of the exploitation of technology by multinational companies to reach cheap and skilled workforce.

In this sense, this thesis firstly demonstrated the establishment and expansion of call centers in other national contexts by using the findings of existing research. According to this, call centers are dominantly in-house organizations where workers handle incoming calls, serving mostly national market rather than international one. A typical call center worker is young and female. Call centers are dominantly located in urban areas but since the labor costs constitute the major costs for call centers, companies tend to go more peripheral areas where unemployment rates are traditionally high in order to exploit cheap workforce.

This migration of call center activities began with going provincial cities in national borders; however, during 2000s most of the multinational companies relocated their call centers in developing world where they enjoyed not only low-cost and relatively educated workforce with frequently stressed “professional attitude” but also generous financial support from governments which consider the call center as an opportunity to overcome unemployment in their countries. In this context, India, South Africa, Philippines emerged as popular offshore destinations thanks to their linguistic and cultural ties that derived from colonial heritage.

The discussion on governmental role in the rise of the call center industry showed that not only governments in developing world, but also those in liberal market or coordinated economies offer tax breaks, forgivable loans and other means of support in order to create job positions for available workforce. Nevertheless, the

word “employment” does not indicate anything meaningful about the actual working conditions or well-being of workers and since the labor process in call centers is routinized, standardized and tightly controlled, the turnover rates in the industry are high and workers satisfaction levels are low in almost every country. The universal Taylorist tendencies in call center management results that the workers tend to see call centers as a “just passing through” industry in liberal market and coordinated economies; however in developing world workers usually consider call centers as “life-long job” as long as the their alternatives in other segments of economy are limited.

Call centers bring not only employment to developing world, but also socio-cultural problems. Since, accent neutralization, hiding location and identity are considered as prerequisites of working in international call centers and labor process in call centers of the developing world tend to be most routine, standardized and closely monitored one, the alienation of workers reach higher levels in offshore-destination countries. The new international division of labor offers low-skilled, low-waged and degraded elements of the service sector to developing world.

After these observations on the global call center industry, this thesis looked at Turkish call centers by comparing them with other national experiences. The Turkish call center industry is not so much distinct from other examples and in respect of the average operating years of companies, annual growth rates, workforce composition, leading sectors, in-house/outsource segmentation, concentration in urban areas but tending to move more peripheral regions, Turkish call centers display the international trends of this newly established industry. On the other hand, unlike coordinated market economies of continental Europe where trade union representation and collective bargaining coverage are relatively high, Turkish call

centers lack worker representation and resemble their counterparts in the developing world and liberal market economies. Additionally, the externalization of the workforce by contracting out the call centers to outsourcer companies is higher than the world average and in this way, Turkish companies seek to reach more flexibility in industrial relations and regulations, even if they are very flexible, particularly after the New Labor Law of 2003.

The governmental role in the establishment and expansion of call centers in Turkey demonstrates an indirect character. Call center employers normally benefit from general “state support” decisions and implementations to deregulate industrial relations and employment regime but the state in Turkey does not have an organization or introduced policy that is dedicated particularly to the call center industry. In this sense, although the government presents generous tax breaks and support for companies that locate their call center in less-developed regions and declares gratitude in the press usually when a new call center is opened with the presence of a high-rank state representative, the Turkish state is still not comparable with many countries in which the state plays a central role in attracting companies, generally multinationals to invest in the country. Hence, the state should be considered as an “enabling” state in the Turkish example and the growing market size of call centers in Turkey is an outcome of private sector actors.

Although the Turkish call center workforce is typically young and female as elsewhere, the education level of workers seems relatively higher than that of their counterparts in many other countries. A university-educated workforce participation generally indicates high internalization in the global call center industry; however, the high participation of workers with at least a bachelor’s degree is not an indicator of the concentration of offshore activities in Turkey. Furthermore, the workers in the

international call centers of Turkey include those less-educated ones. This extraordinary situation implies the distinctive facet of the Turkish call center industry.

The multilingual workforce in Turkey is more available for German and Dutch services. Offshore-outsourced call centers from Germany and the Netherlands generally derive their workforce from returnees who had migrate to Europe as “guest workers” and for some reason, returned to Turkey in recent years. As long as the call center work is based on the worker’s communication skills, and in the case of international service, foreign language skills, these workers from immigrant families constitute the most desired workers thanks to their linguistic and cultural awareness of the target country. In this sense, the majority of workers of multilingual call centers in Turkey have a migration story and their long years of experience in Germany or the Netherlands provide them an occupation in a competitive job market in which they usually have limited alternatives. However, the Turkish multilingual workforce in call centers consists of not only of returnees, but also has workers who learned their vocational language in the Turkish education system. This group of workers constitutes the most educated and skilled workers of Turkish call center industry. The main chapter of this thesis was devoted to the work experience of these two distinct groups of workers and investigated for whom the multilingual call centers represented a job opportunity.

This study, while it aimed to analyze the employment in multilingual call centers, considered the skills and qualifications of workers, their satisfaction and dissatisfaction with their jobs, the place of the call center in their live, the strategies that they created to cope with a stressful working environment and how they constructed meaning for their experience in the call center. Most importantly, I

investigated working conditions in order to understand the promises of engendering employment which was aimed to be increased to make Turkey a call center hub for international services. The evidence gathered from interviews with workers demonstrated that multilingual call center work represents universal Taylorist tendencies in the industry and further its distinctive facets result in a more stressful and pressured working environment. Furthermore, workers create different strategies to construct meaning for their work with the help of their backgrounds and they consider call center work in different ways. In this sense, this thesis theoretically claimed that the labor process in a given workplace should be examined by paying particular attention to the characteristics of workers who are employed there; otherwise, the analysis fails to account how the life outside the work affects on the workplace relations and experiencing the labor process.

While examining the Turkish call center industry, I detected four different organization types of multilingual call centers: Turkish offshore-outsourcer companies, foreign outsourcers, Turkish in-house call centers that serve foreign clients and foreign in-house call centers which are directly owned and managed by international companies. In order to obtain different facets of this sub-sector, I interviewed workers from different companies, work types, contractual agreements and particularly different backgrounds. According to my qualitative evidence, working in a multilingual call center is based on one's fluency in a foreign language, but Taylorist tendencies in work organization degrade other forms of skills such as educational credentials and technical skills. At the same time, call center work demands soft skills which are ability to listen, empathize with customers' demands and management emotions of oneself and others professionally.

Working hour arrangements differ according to various factors, but generally in outbound environments, workers have regular hours, while in inbound call centers, switching shifts and part-time work were evident. Furthermore, regardless to inbound/outbound distinction, employees have the constant aim of extending working hours and shortening breaks. In call centers in which the workers handle calls from other continents, night shifts appear as mandatory and working at night causes serious problems in the workers' social life and well-being. Additionally, failure to allow breaks according to human needs leads to dissatisfaction among the workers.

The repetitive and monotonous nature of the work, lengthened working hours, performance monitoring, management-determined targets, hiding identity and location, abusive customers, lack of career opportunities, intensive usage of scripts, lack of control over break-times and shift system appear as main stress generators in call centers. Particularly, since the workers interact with customers in foreign countries and lied about their names and locations, they encounter humiliating situations and even racist reactions. While they try to meet targets that they are paid for, such as average call times or daily sales, workers are also expected to provide "customer satisfaction," which is sometimes impossible under strict time pressures. The interviewees frequently stated that they felt squeezed between managerial demands and customers' needs.

Although interviewees stated how working in a call center is a exhausting, stressful and pressured experience, most of them find positive sides about the call center work. Speaking a foreign language or their "mother tongue" for most of them, keeping in touch with "hometown", relatively high wages in a competitive job market, helping customers, shared heritage with colleagues for workers from

immigrant families and team-members appeared as main motivations to choose or stay in the industry. Family-like or friendly working environment were frequently mentioned and team members in a call center environment can be considered as a “support system.” However, in some cases, rather than genuine satisfaction, a tendency towards self-deception occurred. Particularly, deriving satisfaction from working for a big company was evident for some workers, even if they thought they were considered as a peripheral workforce.

While constructing a meaning for their occupation or create strategies to deal with negative facets of work, their family origin or life-narratives played important roles. Their future plans, in or out the call centers, mostly were related to their background. Although it is very rare to consider call center job as a life-long job, middle-aged workers from immigrant families and particularly “return-to-work-moms” tended to stay in the industry. Younger returnees usually stated their will to return to European countries where they had been born and raised; however, until that time, the call center meant for younger returnees a comfortable place with people of the same background where they could make a living, particularly in a job market which label them “foreigners to Turkish work habits.” Workers who did not have a “migration story” considered call center job as a pocket money supplier and without any exception, wanted to leave the call center for a position for which they were educated; meanwhile, the call center offered them flexible working hours, so that they could balance their work and school.

To conclude, engendering employment in call centers is an “opportunity” for only those who have limited alternatives for various reasons, including their family backgrounds in foreign countries and being in need of money to pursue higher education. Most importantly the repetitive, standardized and stressful nature of work

that deepened with location and identity masking, interacting with racist and insulting customers and night shifts in the case of serving international customers resulted in the dissatisfaction of workers. Most of them tend to leave the industry for a short period of working. In this sense, the frequently stressed potential of Turkey as a hub for international call centers for European and neighbor countries by state and corporate representatives or significantly rising employment in the industry do not indicate anything about actual working conditions and well-being of employees.

Working conditions and workplace relations at call centers that I examined in this thesis unfortunately limit to themselves. This study can give some insights, but as long as the call center is not a “one size fits all” type of workplace, the themes of this study and other issues in the industry need to be investigated in other cases, considering all sub-sectors, for a genuine analysis of working conditions and workplace relations in call centers. Particularly, research should be undertaken in a comparative perspective to determine wage and contractual agreement differences in different organizations, regions and workflows. While aiming to understand workplace relations, the individual selves of workers should not be ignored and this thesis which aimed recognizing the importance of workers’ life-narratives in the workplace context will hopefully spark additional research that pay particular attention to workers’ voices.

APPENDIX

Interviewee Profiles

Ahmet; 29, born in Germany, male, married; graduated from high school in Germany. He is currently employed by an outsourcer call center where he makes outgoing calls to potential customers in Germany to sell the products or services of a variety of companies. He had been working for the same company for two years at the date of the research. He lived in Germany for 26 years and came to Turkey in 2008.

Arda; 25, born in Istanbul, male, single; graduated from a Political Science and International Relations department, continuing his master's degree in Political Studies. He was a senior student while working for a Turkish outsourcer call center where he answered incoming calls in English from clients of a multinational software company. He worked for eight months between June 2008 and February 2009.

Ayşe; 23, born in Istanbul, female, single; graduated from Political Science and International Relations department, continuing her master's degree in banking and finance. She is currently employed in an in-house call center of a Turkish bank, handling English incoming calls. She had been working for sixteen months at the date of research.

Burcu; 24, born in Balıkesir, female, single; graduated from Psychology and Public Relations. She was in her second year in the university while working for an in-house call center of a foreign retail company where she was answering calls in German. She worked for a year in 2005. She had lived in Germany for five years as a high school student.

Can; 28, born in England, male, married; graduated from the English Literature department. He worked for a foreign outsourcer call center where he answered incoming calls from the customers in North America and England of a multinational computer company. He worked for a year in 2004. He had lived in England for 13 years in England and came back to Turkey in 1995.

Deniz; 24, born in Izmir, female, single; was her senior year in university, in an Economics department at the date of research.

She is currently employed in an in-house call center of a Turkish bank, handling incoming calls from foreigner clients in English. She had been working for six months at the date of research.

Emre; 26, born in Amsterdam-the Netherlands, male, single; graduated from high school in the Netherlands.

He is currently employed by an outsourcer call center where he makes outgoing calls to potential customers in the Netherlands to sell the products or services of a variety of companies. He had been working for the same company for three months at the date of research.

He had lived in Germany for 26 years and came to Turkey just three months earlier.

Ezgi; 23, born in Istanbul, female, single; was a senior student in an International Relations department.

She was employed in a foreign outsourcer call center where she handled incoming calls from foreign clients in North America. She worked as a technical service agent for nine months in 2007 while she was in her second year in the university.

Fatma; 50, born in Ankara, female, single, mother of two; graduated from high school in the Netherlands.

She is currently employed by an outsourcer call center where she makes outgoing calls to potential customers in the Netherlands to sell the products or services of a variety of companies. She had been working for the same company for five years at the date of research.

She had lived in the Netherlands for 14 years, between age 12 and 26 as a member of an immigrant family.

Hatice; 27, was born in Amsterdam-the Netherlands, female, single; graduated from university in the Netherlands.

She is currently employed by an outsourcer call center where she makes outgoing calls to potential customers in the Netherlands to the sell products or services of a variety of companies. She had been working for the same company for three and half years at the date of research.

She had lived in the Netherlands for 21 years and came to Turkey in 2004.

Mehmet; 38, born in Istanbul, male single; graduated from primary school in the Netherlands.

He is currently employed by an outsourcer call center where he makes outgoing calls to potential customers in the Netherlands to sell the products or services of a variety of companies. He had been working for the same company for three years at the date of research.

He had lived in the Netherlands for 10 years between the ages of 6 and 16 as a member of an immigrant family and came to Turkey in 1988.

Nevin; 43, was born in Istanbul, female, married, mother of two; graduated from high school in the Netherlands.

She is currently employed by an outsourcer call center where she makes outgoing calls to potential customers in the Netherlands to sell the products or

services of a variety of companies. She had been working for the same company for four years at the date of research.
She had lived in the Netherlands for 18 years, between age 1 and 18 as a member of an immigrant family.

Onur; 31, born in Rotterdam-the Netherlands, male, single; graduated from college in the Netherlands.

He is currently employed by an outsourcer call center where he makes outgoing calls to potential customers in the Netherlands to sell the products or services of a variety of companies. He had been working for the same company for two months at the date of research.

He had lived in Germany for 31 years and came to Turkey just two months earlier.

Özge; 29, born in Australia, female, single; graduated from English Language Education department.

She worked for a foreign outsourcer call center in where she dealt with incoming calls from North America and United Kingdom for a multinational computer company between 2005 and 2008. She was employed by a Turkish-served call center at the date of the research.

She had lived in Australia for 15 years as a member of an immigrant family and came to Turkey in 1996.

Özgür; 29, born in Stuttgart-Germany, male, single; graduated from an Interpretership department.

He is currently employed in a foreign outsourcer call center where he answers incoming calls in German and English and provides technical service. He had been working for five months in the same company at the date of the research and had two years of experience in different call centers.

He has lived in Germany for 11 years as a member of an immigrant family and he has come back to Turkey in 1992.

Utku; 24, born in Istanbul, male, single; graduated from an Interpretership department.

He was a senior in the university while working in an in-house call center of a foreign transportation company where he was answering incoming calls in German to make reservations and sell tickets. He worked about a year in 2009.

Zeynep; 31, born in Austria, female, married; graduated from high school in Austria.

She is currently employed by an outsourcer call center where she makes outgoing calls to potential customers in Germany to sell the products or services of a variety of companies. She had been working for the same company for a year at the date of research; also she had three years of experience in different call centers

She had lived in Austria for 19 years and came to Turkey in 1998.

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