WHAT HAS BEEN HAPPENING TO SQUATTER SETTLEMENTS AND THEIR RURAL-URBAN MIGRANTS OVER THE YEARS?: THE CASE OF TURKEY

Introduction

Since its occurrence, rural-urban migration in the "Third World" and squatting housing as its outcome in the physical realm have attracted the attention of many fields in the social sciences, such as sociology, anthropology and political science. Yet environmental psychologists seem to have neglected this area. Over the years, the once-indigenous squatter settlements have been undergoing transformation as well as the migrant community itself. In Ankara, as in many other large cities of the "Third World," there is an increasing trend towards transforming squatter settlements into apartment districts as the city expands rapidly towards its peripheries. Today more and more rural migrants are moving from squatter houses to apartment buildings. This has been producing changes in the migrant community at large, and in the squatter community in particular, and it is a sign of the changes taking place in this group. Yet the focus in the literature has been on squatter settlements, with little research on rural migrants living in apartment areas (Erdogan-Erman, 1981) and on the outcomes of the move from squatter houses to apartments. As years pass, second-generation migrants who have different experiences and expectations from their parents start living in the city, many in squatter houses. And recent migrants who have different experiences and expectations from firstcomers start living in the city, again many in squatter houses. Research on (or with) these groups is both promising and essential.

Methodology

The findings of this paper are part of a larger project carried out in the Fall of 1988 and in May through November of 1989. In 1990 and 1991 several visits were again made to the research sites. The project is a qualitative study of rural-urban migrants living in a gecekondu(1) area (Cukurca) and in a newly developing apartment area (Bagcilar).

The research employed the rigorous method of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Strauss, 1987; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The grounded theory of analysis involves a grounding in data; it is based on field data supplemented by experiential data. This approach requires the analysis of data from the very beginning which guides further data collection; it suggests constant comparison of data as the way to understand the phenomenon under study; it requires the researcher to do "coding and memoing" throughout the research. The research in grounded theory is not a single path determined before the data collection begins; instead it is flexible, allowing the data collected so far determine the next steps. It is not linear; rather it is a back-and-forth procedure, allowing the collection of new data during the writing.

The project employed ethnographic techniques, namely, participant observation and formal and informal interviews. During the research I rented a gecekondu and lived in Cukurca for five months. I also paid frequent visits
to Bagcilar. I participated in people’s daily activities. I was invited
to special occasions, such as wedding and circumcision ceremonies, birthday
parties and picnics. I sometimes interviewed people formally, tape-recording
or writing down their answers, and sometimes asked the questions informally
in a conversation. I took photographs of people, their homes and their
neighborhood. My taking photographs soon became a major means for me to
approach people and a main reason for them to invite me to their homes as
well as to special occasions. From the very beginning I kept a journal
("memoing"), taking down daily notes of my feelings, thoughts and observations,
usually ending with questions to further investigate.

Participants

The participants are rural-urban migrants living in gecekondus or apartments.
Among them there are both tenants and owners, wealthy and poor migrants,
long-term migrants (who moved in the late 1950’s) and newcomers (who moved in
1988 and 1989) and people in their early 70’s and teenagers. Based on the
basic features of grounded theory, the number and characteristics of
participants were not predetermined other than defining prospective participants
as male and female rural-urban migrants living in gecekondus or apartments.
The decision about who the next participant would be was made as the research
progressed and significant issues emerged. The research ended with 142
participants: 103 are females and 39 are males, 98 lived in gecekondus and
44 in apartments. All but 9 apartment residents once lived in gecekondus.

Findings

Cukurca as the gecekondu site of the research and the changes it has
been facing over the years

Cukurca lies on the slopes of a hill facing the high-rise apartment
blocks of an upper-income district, creating a marked contrast. Cukurca’s
history dates back to early 1960’s. The firstcomers were from a village of
Ankara called "Cukurca," naming the area after their village. At that time
a few houses, all shanties with small outhouses used as toilets, were built
here and there. Residents obtained water from wells. They sat in the
gaslightr at nights. They had to walk for miles to reach a bus-stop. Cukurca
was full of trees and it was occasionally used as a picnic area. Cukurca
residents were scared of wolves who came down from the surrounding hills
in the winter time.

Even then Cukurca were in the hands of so-called real estate agents who
divided the land into plots to be sold. They sometimes provided people with
titles to the land and sometimes did not. Today some Cukurca residents,
although they paid for the land on which they built their gecekondus,
do not have titles.

Cukurca grew rapidly as more and more houses were built. Meanwhile more
and more trees were cut down to make room for houses as well as to obtain
wood. Today there are not many trees left in Cukurca. As the area became
more populated, the demands of residents from the city government for
services and infrastructure gained significance. In 1979 an asphalt road
was built, dividing the area into two. Although this road is the main means
bringing service to the area (buses and "dolmuş" (shared taxis) run on it),
it is a threat to children and animals (there were several incidents when a
chicken or turkey was run down by a car). In 1984 Cukurca received
electricity and in 1984 water. It still lacks a sewage system.

Today Çukurca is an established part of Ankara with its variety of stores, institutions and frequent bus services. It has grocery stores, a photo lab and a real estate office as well as an elementary school, two mosques and a health clinic. There are several two- or three-story houses that were built in the last decade, whereas the majority of the houses are one-story.

Another change facing Çukurca today is the increasing move of Çukurca residents to apartments, as apartments become more available to moderate income people when apartment districts develop out of gecekondu settlements, and as some migrants improve their financial situations. Today some of the owners in Çukurca have moved to the apartments they have bought, while renting out their gecekondu.

Changes in the gecekondu community

In Çukurca the number of tenants is increasing and this is changing the general atmosphere of the neighborhood. Before, those living in Çukurca were predominantly owners who built their houses usually close to their relatives; they lived in groups with people with whom they had close relations (usually kin-based), spending days together, supporting each other, sharing responsibilities as well as possessions. Also sharing the experience of building a gecekondu pulled these people together. Today as more tenants move to the area, this closely-knit network is disappearing. Tenants who come from various parts of the country may be ignorant of the traditions of people coming from other regions. They also tend to live shortly at a place, moving as soon as they find a better place to rent or build (buy) houses.

Changes in the migrant community

As we have seen above, the move to apartments from gecekondu affects those left behind in gecekondu who experience the destruction of their social networks. It also affects the migrant community at large. Moving to apartments is a sign of success; it is a chance of integrating into the wider urban society. Those who cannot afford apartments feel the burden of "not making it in the city," when they think of their previous neighbors living now in apartments like urbanites. Also the move of their relatives to apartments make many gecekondu residents want to move to apartments in order to be where their families are.

In brief, some migrants' moving to apartments, while others' continuing to live in gecekondu is a sign of differentiation in the migrant community. The once-rather-homogeneous migrant community now has people who have been better-off in the city and who have not, those who can afford apartments and who cannot.

Bagcilar as the newly developing apartment site of the research and its transformation from a gecekondu to an apartment area

The transformation of Bagcilar from a gecekondu to an apartment area is a rather recent phenomenon. Until late 1970's, it was a gecekondu area. Its proximity to "Eseed," an established middle-income district, has made real estate people and small contractors interested in the area. Meanwhile its master plan was completed, increasing its attractiveness. Contractors
began to buy gecekondus, replacing them by apartment blocks. Sometimes they had to take risks, when the gecekondu owner failed to have title to the land. Trusting to the difficulty of demolishing multi-story buildings as well as to their connections, and applying to bribery when possible, they were inclined to take advantage of the situation, obtaining ownership to the land by paying little money. Now and then those gecekondu residents who did not have titles to the land were thrown out of their gecekondus. When this happened, the once-gecekondu-owner moved in with other people, trying to find a place to rent, looking for any opportunity to build another gecekondu, this time farther away from the city.

The typical contract between the contractor and the gecekondu owner has been, as this is the prevalent practice among small-scale contractors, to give to the gecekondu owner several apartments in the building that will replace the gecekondu. In this way, some of the gecekondu owners have become highly well-off— owners of several apartments, while others (those who lacked titles) have lost their homes.

Today in Bagcilar there are apartment blocks together with some gecekondus. Construction of more apartment blocks is under way. The apartment blocks usually have three stories from the entrance level, and this means 6 or 7 stories without an elevator when built on a steep slope. Buildings without a central heating system predominate the area. Construction quality is rather poor when compared to the buildings in the established parts of the city. Small-scale contractors who are the major agents of construction in Bagcilar may leave the building unfinished, if they go into bankruptcy (or claim so). Then it is the residents themselves who convert the building into a livable place.

Roads and sewage system are under construction. The area received electricity and water when it was still a gecekondu area. Some of the roads have been asphalted. There is a frequent bus service to Bagcilar. Many commercial places exist, especially supermarkets and grocery stores of various sizes.

More changes in the migrant community: The case of second-generation and recent migrants (2)

Today one can see young women in stretch jeans and with perm- ed hair, wearing make-up, walking around in a gecekondu area. These women tend to have conflicts with the gecekondu community and to take the gecekondu community against themselves. They occasionally fight with their neighbors or isolate themselves. They hold strong feelings against gecekondus and prefer to live in apartments. They emphasize the superiority of apartment environments in terms of the quality of their residents and praise them as cultured, educated and well-off urbanites, while they criticize their gecekondu neighbors as uncultured and backward people from the village. In contrast to the majority of migrants who consider themselves rural, this group of women regard themselves as urban. They stress that it is the desire and determination of the person to become urban that counts and not the place where the person is born. They do not like the village and do not want to visit it. Among them there are second-generation migrants as well as newcomers to the city. Today many migrants move to the city with the expectation of living in an apartment, of becoming an "urbanite." This is highly different from the case of firstcomers who migrated without any concrete expectations other than to live a better life.

On the other hand, there are second-generation migrants who consider themselves rural, despite the fact that they look urban. They do not mind
visiting the village, if they stay there briefly. They socialize with the
migrant community and tend to have urbanites as their friends. Those living
in the gecekondu area are in a difficult situation. They complain about the
discrimination against gecekondu residents. They occasionally have conflicts
with the gecekondu community, yet they try to get along well with their neighbors.

Among second-generation migrants, there are those who have a critical
approach to the society. They criticize the society in general, and the
attitudes towards rural migrants and gecekondu residents in particular. They
do not want to "integrate" into the urban society, but to change it. They
believe that villagers as well as migrants have been exploited by the urban
bourgeois, and they resent it. This kind of critical approach lacks in the
case of first-generation migrants who are not against the status quo and are
satisfied with the progress they have made in the city (Karpot, 1976).

The structure of the society, namely, the imbalance between rural and urban
areas as well as between gecekondu areas and the established parts of the
city, and the image of an urbanite as an upper-class urban dweller act as a
force for those migrants who do not want to be identified in the city as a
rural migrant reject anything related to the village, including their relatives
and migrant neighbors. These migrants are highly frustrated, if they live
in a gecekondu area. On the other hand, many migrants try to "integrate"
into the urban society without rejecting their rural background and rural
connections. And some migrants reject the urban society, or rather its
prevailing values and economic system, and try to make a place for themselves
where they will not have to play the game with the rules of the urbanites.

Notes
1. Gecekondu is the name given to squatter houses in Turkey.
2. Because of space limitations, this section limits itself to findings
on women. Women, and not men, are chosen here for three main reasons:
(i) I feel more secure with these data, since as a woman I was closer to women
than to men; (ii) women are more affected by the housing environment than men;
(iii) I find the data on women highly interesting.

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