Project-Tied Labor Migration from Turkey to the MENA Region: Past, Present, and Future

Ahmet İçduygu and Deniz Sert
Koç University, Istanbul

Abstract

The geographic region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) comprises one of the most fascinating immigration regions of the world, hosting millions of migrants and receiving thousands of new migrants each year. While the panorama of MENA's immigration arena is extremely diverse, this article aims to investigate project-tied, or contract-based, labor migration from Turkey, which occurs mostly through the long-established work of Turkish companies that engage in various construction and service-sector businesses. Taking the analytical context of migration system theory into consideration, the main aim of this essay is twofold: while it attempts to document the dynamics and mechanisms of contract-based labor migration from Turkey to the MENA countries, it also intends to elaborate on research about migratory systems between Turkey and the MENA region, mainly referring to macro-level factors affecting the relevant migration system.

Today the geographic region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)[1] comprises one of the most fascinating immigration regions of the world, hosting millions of migrants and receiving thousands of new migrants each year. This immigration scene is the result of the postwar period, in which most of the MENA countries have transformed into oil-producing countries that draw migrants from various parts of the world. The panorama of MENA's immigration arena is extremely diverse: It includes labor migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees as well as professionals and students, often for temporary stays, but sometimes for permanent settlement. While the region has experienced migration of people within its borders, it is also targeted by migrants coming from neighboring countries, such as Turkey, as well as from distant lands, such as India, Pakistan, and the Philippines.

This article aims to investigate the project-tied, or contract-based, labor migration from Turkey to the MENA region, which occurs mostly through the long-established work of Turkish companies that engage in various construction and service-sector businesses. Taking into consideration the analytical context of migration system theory, which has a tendency to analyze regional migration systems,[2] it is possible to argue that since the early 1960s, the migratory flows of Turkish citizens have consecutively become a part of various migratory systems: first, heavily involved in postwar European immigration; second,

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annexing Australian immigration and then linking to contract migration in the oil-rich countries of the MENA; and finally, connecting again to contract migration in the formerly communist countries of Eastern Europe and Central and Northern Asia, mostly to countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Within the context of migration system theory, any migratory movement can be analyzed through attention to interacting macro- and microstructures. While macrostructures mean large-scale institutional factors in the sending and receiving countries, microstructures refer to the individual characteristics of migrants and their near circles, such as the households to which they belong. Meanwhile, these two levels, micro and macro, are combined by mesostructures, which indicate a number of intermediate mechanisms, such as recruitment agencies and offshore working companies.[3]

Although there have been abundant studies conducted on the case of Turkish emigration to different receiving countries, no consistent research has been carried out on project-tied or contract labor-based migration from Turkey to the MENA region. Additionally, there has been no use of migration system theory in research on Turkish emigration to different destination regions. Therefore, the current study, with its attempt to fill in the gaps in related research, will complement previous studies in the field. The main aim of this essay is twofold. First, it attempts to document the dynamics and mechanisms of contract-based labor migration from Turkey to the MENA countries. Second, this effort intends to elaborate on research about migratory systems between Turkey and the MENA region, mainly referring to macro-level factors affecting the relevant migration system.

The history of Turkey's emigration during the last fifty years indicates that the migratory flows of Turkish citizens have been successively attached to a range of migratory systems around the world. In the last five decades, nearly one million workers from Turkey have left home to sell their labor power in the MENA countries, which sharply differs from the migratory flows of Turkish citizens to other migrant-receiving countries. This is a type of project-tied or contract migration where workers are admitted to the receiving countries only for a certain period on the basis of a work contract with a firm or an employer to carry out specific projects. Thus, this type of migration, by its nature, is limited in time, and the return or circulation rates of such contract workers are very high, as only a small proportion of them can be rehired. These migrant workers are mostly men who are generally employed in the construction sector, where they are often subjected to harsh and risky living and working conditions.

The following section provides a brief theoretical overview that frames the discussion throughout the essay. The third section refers to the macrostructures of the relevant migration system. This section, first, provides us with an overview of the history of Turkish emigration since the early 1960s, and relates the emergence of contract migration to the MENA countries to the wider context of emigration from Turkey. In the second part, the general picture of the nature, characteristics, and patterns of the international migratory regime in the MENA countries is explored. The analytical discussion in the fourth section

reflects a macroanalysis of migration from Turkey to the MENA countries, referring to the volume, patterns, and characteristics of the migratory flows. The final part of this essay draws conclusions about the main features of the migration system between Turkey and the MENA.

Theoretical and Analytical Considerations: Locating Turkish Contract Labor in the MENA Migration System

Since the 1960s, mass migratory movements from Turkey to Western European countries have been in process and, increasingly, an internal element of the migratory flows from the country for the last four decades. Given this, the contract-tied labor migration flows from Turkey to the MENA, which provide a unique case study, require a careful analysis of the migratory system. Therefore, an application of migratory system theory here is not arbitrary but rather merely functional. As far as migration system theory is concerned, economic and political structures and linkages among nation-states are not adequate to explain who is likely to become a migrant or why only a subset of persons ever actually migrates.[4] There are also questions of how to relate the macro-, micro-, and meso-level variables to the larger context of international migration. To answer these questions, migration system theory looks at the actual processes whereby macro-conditions and policies connect to the micro-level (i.e., potential migrants).[5] These processes include networks of both institutions and individuals that assist with the mobilization and recruitment of migrants and with the actual organization of migration. With meso-level structures operating at and between the macro and micro-levels, looking at these structures through the analysis of networks helps to link the various countries together into a coherent migration system.

Defining a migration system as a set of places linked by flows and counterflows of people, goods, services, and information that tend to facilitate further exchange (including migration) between the places, it is possible to suggest that a theoretical framework for the study of migration requires the use of a systematic approach. Portes and Böröcz[6] and Kritz, Lim, and Zlotnik[7] extend this definition of "system" to international migrations, which do not occur randomly but usually take place between countries that have close historical, cultural, or economic linkages. Moreover, migrants receive increasing assistance in their moves from networks of earlier migrants, labor recruiters, corporations, travel agents, or even development agencies.

Rather than focusing on a particular theory, the international migration systems approach tries to integrate the key aspects of different migration theories. The central idea of the systems approach is that the exchange of capital and people between certain countries takes place within a particular economic, social, political, and demographic context. Considering the surplus value of this approach, in contrast to other positions in migration studies, migration system theory takes feedback and adjustment effects into account and is applicable to all migration types.[8] In other words, with this theory, international migration

is analyzed as a dynamic process linking origin and destination countries. Therefore, this process changes over time as push-and-pull factors evolve in these countries, as feedback and adjustments stemming from the migration process itself alter the conditions in them, and as other ties and interactions between countries introduce new constraints or stimuli.[9]

Hence, in accordance with migration system theory, labor migration is determined not just by internal supply-and-demand factors in either sending or receiving countries, but also by market and nonmarket interactions between countries. Increasingly, these interactions are shaped by the intrusive role of the nation-state, political relations among countries, institutional arrangements (including the important role of multinational corporations), and cross-national social networks. The movement of persons across physical space has not only economic but also humanitarian, political, and cultural implications that often bring domestic and international interests into conflict.[10]

In short, migration system theory is a broad, comprehensive framework for studying international migration flows between a particular set of sending and receiving countries in the context of other economic, political, cultural, and social ties between the areas concerned. In line with this argument, this paper attempts to understand the Turkish MENA-region migration system by investigating the whole spectrum of migration dynamics. Within this framework, international migration is conceptualized as a part of a system that, once it has come into being, tends to become self-feeding and autonomous. Cumulative causation is the "master mechanism" in this self-feeding process: "rising emigration sets off structural changes that make additional migration more likely and that accelerate changes in the economic, political, social, and cultural spheres. Cumulative mobility is the result."[11] To clarify such mechanisms, their historical background, and their current status is the core objective of this paper.

Background: The Historical Context of the Turkey-MENA Migration System

The half-century after the end of the Second World War saw the disappearance of the direct involvement of European hegemonic powers in the MENA region and struggles over nation and state building.[12] This process, combined with rich oil production and state-led development projects, led to the emergence of labor immigration in the region, which was intrinsic to the newly transforming economic, social, and political settings of the region. In other words, immigration occurred as an important functional instrument related to the needs of the economies of the MENA countries, given that the exchange of capital and people between certain countries takes place within a particular social, political, and demographic context. When the economies of the MENA countries were in need of labor, they tended first to draw migrant labor from within the region, then from nearby countries, and finally even from distant countries able to export their nationals as work power. Project-tied, or contract-based, labor migration from Turkey to the MENA countries should be seen within this context for the period since the 1970s.

Emigration from Turkey

In the last five decades, Turkey has experienced considerably heavy outmigration of its citizens. The growth and dynamics of this movement are impressive. According to some estimates,[13] since the early 1960s around five million people have left the country, more than two million of them since 1980. More than four-fifths of the emigrants left for Europe; in particular, more than two-thirds for Germany. The number of returnees amounted to more than half of the total emigrants since the early 1960s. There were, by the late 2000s, over three million Turkish citizens in Europe, around one hundred thousand Turkish workers in the MENA countries, and some seventy thousand workers in the CIS. In addition to these expatriates, about two hundred fifty thousand Turkish citizens were reported to be present in other countries of the globe, with approximately two-thirds residing in the traditional immigration countries of Australia, Canada, and the United States. In addition to these emigrant Turkish citizens, there are also more than a million Turkey-originated naturalized immigrants living abroad who have gained the citizenship of the countries in which they live. Given that the total number of expatriate Turks is around five million, the whole emigration picture implies that today over six percent of the Turkish nation's total population is abroad.

The nature of emigration from Turkey has evolved over time. Four distinct periods can be identified in modern Turkish emigration history. Of course, these changing periods came into existence as a result of changes in the related international migratory systems: The first period, from 1961 to 1974, was characterized by massive labor migration to Western Europe; the second period, from 1974 to 1980, which started with the oil crisis, caused the decline of Turkish labor migration to Western Europe and precipitated the beginning of emigration to the MENA countries; the third period of emigration, in the 1980s, was dominated by labor flows toward the MENA countries and stood relatively low; and the last period, since the early 1990s, has been characterized by a turn of labor flows from the MENA countries to the countries being reconstructed after the collapse of communist regimes.

With the exception of the mass outflow of its non-Muslim population before the early 1920s, emigration from Turkey remained limited until the early 1960s. Although Turkey only began exporting labor after the negotiation of an official agreement with the Federal Republic of Germany in 1961, by 1970 it had become one of the largest suppliers of new workers in various labor-importing countries.[14] Even before the agreement with Germany, the Western European labor market had already started to draw a number of workers from the labor pool in Turkey. However, within the context of European migratory systems of the 1960s, a structurally organized emigration from Turkey was not possible without the negotiation of an official agreement between governments. After the new constitution of 1961, the First Five-Year Development Plan (1962–1967) in Turkey evaluated the "export of surplus labor power" as an aspect of development policy in terms of a return flow of

remittances and reduction in unemployment. Consequently, to promote this policy, Turkey first signed a bilateral labor recruitment agreement with the Federal Republic of Germany in 1961. Similar bilateral agreements between governments, specifying general conditions of recruitment, employment, and wages, were signed in 1964 with Austria, the Netherlands, and Belgium, in 1965 with France, and in 1967 with Sweden and Australia. Less comprehensive agreements were signed with the United Kingdom in 1959, with Switzerland in 1969, with Denmark in 1970, and with Norway in 1981.[15] These agreements shaped the initial stages of migratory flows significantly, even if they did not determine every element of the later stages of flows. In other words, migratory movements have gained their own dynamics and mechanisms quite independent of the previously structured measures of bilateral migration agreements.

The emergence of mass emigration from Turkey in the early 1960s was prompted in large measure by economic factors. The movement of migrant workers over the period 1961–1975 fluctuated as a consequence of changes in the European migration market. The number of workers going to Europe increased immediately after 1961 and peaked at 66,000 departures in 1964. The recession of 1966–1967 caused a rapid decline in these numbers. In 1967, only 8,947 workers were sent by the Turkish Employment Service (TES), while over 900,000 were on the waiting list.[16] After the recession, the number of emigrants increased sharply. This was a period of mass emigration. In 1974, however, the Western European governments stopped the entry of workers because of economic stagnation. This resulted in a dramatic decline in the number of labor emigrants, giving a total of only 17,000 departed. The year 1975 marks the end of large-scale Turkish labor migration to Europe. Between 1975 and 1980, which seems to be a transitional period, the direction of Turkish emigration shifted to another labor market, which had formed in the oil-exporting MENA countries. Considering the migratory flows to Western Europe, one should note that although the labor movement from Turkey ceased in the early 1970s, migration did not end but took other forms such as family reunion, refugee movement, and clandestine labor migration.[17] Even today, through these various types of migration, there is an annual movement of some 20,000 to 30,000 people from Turkey to Europe.

In the late 1960s, under the pressure of an unemployment problem, the Turkish government quickly went in a search of a new market that would allow the labor-exporting process to continue at a time when the doors of Europe were closing to immigrant workers. Indeed, Turkish emigration to Australia, as well as to the MENA countries, started under these circumstances. The timing of the bilateral labor recruitment agreement in 1967 with Australia reflected these efforts of Turkish emigration strategy, an example of "falling back on another country if one showed signs of saturation and diminished absorption ability."[18] There was, of course, a significant contrast between the migration policies of Turkey and Australia at that time. While Australian immigration policy was based upon the assumption of the permanent settlement of immigrants, Turkish emigration policy was guest-worker oriented. The signing

of a migration agreement with Australia was a new step taken to maintain the continuity of emigration. From 1968 to 1995, more than twelve thousand workers went to Australia. The level of emigration to Australia oscillated from 200 to 500 new settlers each year since 1975. Today, aside from a few hundred new emigrants, there are more than one thousand people from Turkey annually arriving in Australia due to family reunification and marriage migration flows. However, it should be noted that the number of Turkish migrants going to Australia represents only a very small fraction (approximately one percent) of all emigrants from Turkey.

In the 1980s, Turkey maintained a high male labor emigration rate to MENA countries, mainly Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Iraq. Turkey's search for new receiving countries corresponded with the need for an increased labor force in these countries. As stated by Reginald T. Appleyard,[19] after 1973, when oil prices rose dramatically, thus increasing the income of the oil-exporting MENA states with very small populations, the demand for labor led to large flows of contract workers from other developing countries. Migration from Turkey to the MENA countries occurred within this broader context. The last phase of Turkish emigration started with flows of relatively small groups of workers to the countries of the former USSR and Eastern Europe.[20] As emphasized by Ahmet Gökdere,[21] after the collapse of the communist regimes, some of the newly emerging states in the region launched reconstruction programs. The active involvement of various Turkish firms in these programs led to a significant level of project-tied and job-specific migration. In terms of its impact on the continuity of emigration from Turkey, the importance of migration to the countries of the former USSR and Eastern Europe was overwhelmingly clear: in a period when a downturn of migratory flows to the labor-receiving MENA countries began in the Gulf Crisis, the migratory movement to the CIS countries became a remedy for the emigration pressure in Turkey. The level of Turkish labor migration to these states started to increase steadily: from 8,000 workers in 1992 to more than twenty thousand in 1993, and later to more than forty thousand in 1994. It rose to some seventy thousand in the late 2000s.

As already noted, the suspension of organized immigration to labor in Western Europe in the mid-1970s did not curtail all emigration from Turkey. New destination areas were not the only ones to draw thousands of emigrants from the country; rather, Europe remained a long-standing receiving area for an increasing number of newcomers from Turkey. The number of people in Europe from Turkey increased continuously from 600,000 in 1972 to almost two million in the early 1980s, and to approximately three million in the mid-1990s.

Immigration to the MENA Region

As Arthur Goldschmidt has argued, "[h]istory is the study of humanity's recorded past, [and] that of the Middle East is the world's longest."[22] Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss this richness, there

are two important historical legacies in the region that are related to the migration debate at hand. The first one is the legacy of the Ottoman Empire in the region, which was the ruling power in the central Middle East from 1517 until the end of the First World War, a period of 400 years.[23] It can even be argued that the basis for the introduction and spread of nationalism in the region in the aftermath of the First World War was possible due to this legacy.[24] It was in the Ottoman Empire that the idea of nationalism began developing among the different populations of the region. The second important legacy is that of imperialism. It was with the Ottoman decline that new Arab states, which were separated by new borders defined largely by the imperial interests of the British and the French, were created in the region.[25] "Guided by their own interests and preconceptions, the great powers partitioned what had once been the Ottoman Empire and created states where states had never before existed. The wishes of the inhabitants of those territories counted for little when it came to deciding their political future."[26] Thus, the current political scene of the MENA region is the result of two important historical factors: the end of the Ottoman Empire and the imperial politics of the interwar period. Together with the legacy of the interwar period, as noted earlier, there were two interlinked and important developments in the postwar period, which had implications for recent immigration history: the disappearance of the direct involvement of European hegemonic powers and struggles over nation- and state-building. Based on these political dynamics, rich oil production and state-led development projects required the flows of foreign nationals to meet the labor demands of the economies of countries of the region.

Given this brief background, recent immigration to the MENA region can be analyzed in three consecutive and overlapping periods. The first period is from the late 1960s to 1980s, when large-scale immigration of "guest" workers became a common phenomenon in the region. This movement was possible due to two global developments of the previous decades: the end of colonialism, particularly after the Second World War (i.e., the emergence of independent states in the region), and the beginning of the oil age and the emergence of oil as an important resource in the world, affecting not only economics but politics. The first period of immigration to the MENA region commenced as a response to the increase in the price of oil and the consequent plans of the oil-rich countries of the region for rapid development. As the local labor forces were usually small in number and/or did not have the variety of skills needed for the development of infrastructure and other projects, many MENA countries chose to import large numbers of foreign workers. The national labor-force participation rate was also low because of cultural, economic, and social reasons within the region, which meant that the rate of participation of women and upper- and middle-class men was minimal. The immigrant labor force usually took jobs in the construction and service sectors. During this period, which may be called "the major influx"[27] period, when the number of foreigners reached thirty-three percent of the total population,[28] most of the

international migration within MENA was among the MENA countries themselves, where the oil-rich Gulf states were receiving large-scale Arab immigration, mainly from Egypt, Yemen, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, and Sudan. Regional events were largely affecting the direction of these flows at this time. For example, the October 1973 war between Israel and Egypt indirectly generated a large flow of Egyptian migration to the Gulf states, not only as a result of the soaring oil prices that led to a high demand for imported labor, but also due to President Anwar Sadat's open-door policy that made the emigration of Egyptian workers possible.[29]

In the second period, from the 1970s to the mid-1990s, this demographic trend of inter-MENA migration changed again, largely due to regional events. Beginning with the 1970s, the migrant-receiving Gulf monarchies became increasingly worried about the possible political consequences of hosting Arab guest workers.[30] Two groups were especially attracting negative attention: Palestinians, who were involved in attempts to arrange strikes in Saudi oil fields and in civil strife in Jordan and Lebanon, and Yemenis, who were organizing various antiregime activities.[31] However, the peak moment at which these suspicions were realized was on November 20, 1979, when 200 armed Islamist dissidents, mainly foreign Arabs, attacked Mecca with the claims that the Saudi royal family no longer represented pure Islam and that the sacred mosque and the Kaaba must be held by those of true faith. The siege lasted two weeks, tens of thousands of pilgrims were taken as hostages, several hundred people died, and there was significant damage to the shrine. The siege was subdued only after the intervention of French troops. One result of this event was that the Gulf monarchies began increasingly to recruit guest workers from South and Southeast Asia, who were considered less likely to get involved in politics, easier to control, cheaper, and more productive.[32]

As oil prices began to decrease in the mid-1980s, some observers, like the CIA, reached the conclusion that it was the end of the era of mass migration to the Arabian Peninsula.[33] Many Arabs as well as South and East Asian workers did lose their jobs and return home, but the conclusion that mass labor migration to the oil-rich states had ended was premature, as migrant labor had become an irreplaceable part of labor force.[34] Thus, the assumption that the migrant presence in the MENA would be greatly reduced by the twenty-first century proved wrong.[35] In fact, based on the data provided by the United Nations Development Fund in 2004, the world's highest share of migrant population is to be found in the MENA.[36]

The preference for hiring non-Arab foreign nationals became more obvious after the outcome of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the following mass eviction of emigrants, particularly Egyptian, Palestinian, and Yemeni workers. There were also economic reasons for the preference for hiring non-Arabs. The falling oil prices created an era of austerity that forced public and private sectors to cut costs, which resulted in the substitution of less-skilled Asian workers for the existing Arab workers.[37] Between 1975 and 1995, the share of Egyptian workers in Gulf countries' foreign populations fell from

seventy-two percent to thirty-one percent.[38] It is estimated that by the 1990 Gulf Crisis, 800,000 Yemenis were expelled from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and 200,000 Jordanians and 150,000 Palestinians were repatriated, with a total of approximately two million Arab workers and their dependents losing their jobs in the GCC countries.[39] At the same time, three million legal immigrants were driven out of Iraq, primarily Arab citizens attempting to escape persecution on the basis of their citizenship, but also hundreds of thousands of Asian migrant workers running away from the war. All in all, after the 1990 Gulf War, there was an increased proportion of East and Southeast Asian workers in the migrant workforces of the Gulf oil states substituting for politically suspect populations like the Yemenis and Palestinians expelled during the crisis.

In the third and final period, from the mid-1990s to the present, all MENA countries, except for the GCC countries and Libya, have become both origin and destination countries for international migrants. This represents a marked shift from the initial two periods, when the MENA region was sharply divided between destination countries—namely, the capital-rich, oil-producing states in the Gulf and Libya, and migrant-origin countries, which make up the rest of the region.[40] This division derived from economics is not valid anymore.[41] Nearly all MENA countries produce oil, but this does not imply that they have created enough jobs to employ nationals. In fact, even large oil-producing countries, including Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, now face domestic unemployment. Countries like Morocco and Egypt, which are not large oil producers, have become unwilling recipients of migrants while remaining major origin countries. Thus, there is a general policy, especially in the Gulf countries, to curb the number of foreign workers due to rising levels of unemployment within the national labor force.[42] There are five reasons for this period of "open unemployment of nationals":[43] the external shocks of the two Gulf Wars, low oil prices, depleted foreign assets, an expanding labor supply through population growth, and the unwillingness of the private sector to hire nationals with their low skills and high wage expectations.[44] Like the Gulf Crisis in 1990, the US invasion of Iraq altered the composition of foreign labor, as Iraqis and Iraq supporters such as Palestinians, Jordanians, Yemenis, and Sudanese were forced to leave the GCC states. Almost a million Yemenis, 200,000 Jordanians, 150,000 Palestinians, and 158,000 Egyptians were displaced.[45] Thus, the Arab share of the expatriate population in GCC states decreased from seventy-two percent in 1975 to approximately twenty-seven percent in 2002.[46]

For many years, there have been media reports about increasing unemployment in the Gulf and discussions about the need for indigenization of the labor force and a reduction in the percentage of an expatriate population and workers, but only recently have Gulf countries begun to engage in actual policies.[47] The first type of policy aims to reduce the supply of foreign workers by increasing the cost of living through indirect taxes, nabbing and deporting irregulars, applying stricter visa regimes, and restricting visa trading among sponsors. The second

type of policy aims to enhance the growth and demand for indigenous workers by creating job opportunities through training, creating job opportunities through market-based measures (i.e., raising the cost of hiring foreign workers), and nationalization through administrative measures (i.e., pinpointing occupations where phasing out of expatriates can be done on a priority basis).

Despite these recent policies, nonnationals in the GCC workforce outnumber nationals, comprising one-third of the population,[48] and there are still substantial numbers of immigrants in the MENA region. By 2002, Saudi Arabia was still hosting seven million immigrants, among which Indians, Pakistanis, Egyptians, Yemenis, Filipinos, Bangladeshis, and Sri Lankans were the major foreign nationalities.[49] These were the major nationalities not only in Saudi Arabia but in the entire GCC region, where Saudi Arabia was followed by the United Arab Emirates with 2,488,000, Kuwait with 1,475,000, and Oman with 630 immigrants.[50] Within this migratory system, Turks also comprise a noteworthy group, ranking as the fourteenth biggest nationality in the GCC.[51]

In summary, Gulf countries with the highest proportion of migrant workers in the world[52] are among the top immigration countries today, along with the nations of Western Europe and North America. And Africa, South Asia, Asia Pacific, and Latin America are the most labor-exporting geographies. However, labor migration from the East is directed not only toward advanced Western countries, but also toward particular members in the MENA region. There are certain characteristics of foreign labor migration in the MENA region that make it very different from the so-called guest-worker migration to Western Europe. First, it can be argued that labor migration to MENA is really a "temporary" movement with measures that accelerate the sending of remittances to the motherland rather than encourage becoming permanent in the host countries. Within this temporary pattern of migration, migrants in construction projects, with different legal rules that influence their living and working conditions, are very important.[53] To illustrate, according to the "guarantor system" (*kefale* system), which is very common in the MENA, migrant workers can receive visas and residence permits to work in one of the six Gulf states only if a citizen or an institution from these states has sponsored them.[54] The person or institution that employs migrant workers also becomes their guarantors with the entire economic and legal responsibility of the latter belonging to the employer/guarantor during the contract.[55] Thus, the duration of stay of the immigrant workers depends on these employers/guarantors. There are two exceptions to this system: Yemeni workers and foreign workers coming as part of a "package." Making a collective contract with foreign companies is called a "package deal" in the Gulf: Employers hire the migrants as their employees, determine the fees, and take on responsibility for these people. Sometimes, such employers/guarantors (though this is illegal) confiscate the passports of the workers and prevent them from leaving the country or the job until the end of the contract; thus, the worker is unprotected in the face of actions by the employer.[56] Consequently, the implementation of this system means that workers become entirely dependent on the employer, unlike a

formal employer-employee relationship, which is dependent on a freely signed contract built on mutual rights and responsibilities.

All in all, looking at the migration system within the MENA region from a meso level, we can conclude that it has three main characteristics. First, it is temporary. Second, and naturally linked to the first point, it is circular. Third, taking into account the guarantor system, it is largely dependent on and regulated by employing agencies or structures. Thus, Turkish labor migration to the MENA region should be evaluated within this system as a temporary and circular movement, which is largely regulated by private companies.

Project-Tied Labor Migration from Turkey to the MENA Region: Past and Present

Project-tied labor migration from Turkey to the MENA region can be analyzed in four periods. The first, in the 1970s, named here as the period of genesis, includes the period when Turkey began to search for new markets to which it could export its extensive labor force besides stagnating Western European economies. The second, in the 1980s, was a period of diversification of destinations in the MENA region for the Turkish labor force. The third, in the 1990s, at the end of the Cold War, can be named the decline period, with other destinations, such as the former communist regimes, becoming more preferable destinations for the Turkish labor force. The final period, in the 2000s, is called the revival period, where there are rising numbers of Turkish contract labor migrants to the MENA countries. The labor movement to the MENA was very different from the migratory movements to Western European countries. It was always exclusively a temporary movement of male workers. Their duration of stay was determined by the completion period of the work, where they were usually employed for a period of two years. The return rate of these workers was very high, because only a small proportion of them could be hired by the same firm for a new project or by a new firm.

The 1970s: Genesis

The first Turkish contract laborers arrived in the MENA region as a result of Europe's economic recession in 1966–1967. As Western Europe began to close its doors to immigrant labor, the Turkish government of the time, under the pressure of a high unemployment problem, rapidly began to search for new markets to continue to make the labor-exporting process possible. With these aims in mind, the Turkish government sent 342 male workers to Saudi Arabia and 92 to Libya in 1967; however, the level of the migratory flows remained very low until the early 1970s. Thus, it can be argued that the large-scale Turkish labor migration to the MENA really started in 1973, when Western European governments stopped the entry of workers because of economic stagnation that worsened due to the global oil crisis. The 1973 oil crisis was a turning point in the pattern of Turkish labor migration: While there were increasingly new demands for fresh labor power in the oil-exporting Arab

countries, Western Europe was closing its doors to foreign workers. Thus, 1973 marked the end of large-scale Turkish labor migration to Europe. In the following years, the course of Turkish emigration shifted to another labor market, which had formed in the oil-exporting countries of the MENA.[57]

During these years of genesis, Saudi Arabia and Libya remained the main destinations for Turkish workers. Their numbers progressively increased during the following decade but followed rather different trends. In January 1975, Turkey signed a labor force agreement with Libya that officially diverted Turkish labor migration from the West to the oil-exporting Arab world. It can be rightfully argued that flows to Libya dominated the whole migratory regime from Turkey to Arab countries and reached their peak point shortly afterward, in 1981, with the annual figure of 31,000, and then started to decline. Migration to Saudi Arabia, in contrast, was smaller in numbers compared to arrivals in Libya, but it continued to increase steadily. On the whole, while only 2,500 Turkish labor migrants went to the MENA between 1961 and 1974, from 1974 to 1980 this number was 75,000, largely directed toward Libya. During this period of genesis, Turkish migration to the MENA region still included an important portion of the overall Turkish emigration.[58]

The 1980s: Diversification

The zenith of Turkish labor migration to the Arab countries was 1981, with more than 55,000 migrants leaving Turkey for the oil-exporting countries, compared with only 21,000 in the preceding year. While Saudi Arabia and Libya continued to be destination points for Turkish laborers, there were also other flows taking place to newer destinations within the MENA region, mainly to Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan, and Yemen. The 1980s was a period of relatively stable migration to the MENA, with 40,000 to 50,000 Turkish laborers arriving in the Arab countries annually. During this period of diversification, until 1990, 425,000 Turkish laborers went to the MENA region, making up ninety-eight percent of overall international Turkish labor emigration.[59]

Thus, this second period was characterized by growing numbers of emigrants to MENA and an expanding spectrum of destination countries. For example, migration to Iraq started with an annual rate of more than 10,000 workers in 1981. This actually signified the peak year of the whole migratory process between Turkey and Iraq. A declining trend followed until the Gulf Crisis in 1991, when the whole process came to a halt. At the same time, Jordan and Yemen were two new destination countries that emerged in the early 1980s; however, the figures of Turkish workers arriving to these countries were not sizeable, with only 2,800 people migrating to these countries in the entire following decade. Nevertheless, Kuwait was another new destination country for Turkish workers; it received more than 2,500 migrants.

While the spectrum of destination countries within MENA for Turkish export labor was diversifying in the 1980s, albeit with small numbers, some destination countries began to lose their importance. After reaching a peak in

1981, migratory flows to Libya began to decline in 1984–1985, when Libyan labor-recruiting companies became insolvent for Turkish workers.[60] Emigration to Libya lost its momentum after decreasing to the lowest annual figure of 8,000 in 1986, increasing to 11,000 in 1987, and to 13,000 in 1989, but declining steadily from 8,000 in 1990 to 4,700 in 1991. Saudi Arabia remained the dominant receiving country in this period with slightly variable trends. While the level of annual migration to Saudi Arabia was around 15,000 to 20,000 migrants in the first half of the 1980s, it was around 25,000 to 30,000 in the second half of the decade.

The 1990s: Decline

Although Turkish contract workers continued to enter the labor market of the MENA region, it is possible to talk about an interlude of decline in the 1990s, due to both global and regional events that shaped the world. The foremost event was the Gulf Crisis in 1991, which affected the related migratory regimes considerably. The post-Gulf Crisis years saw a sharp decline in the level of migration from Turkey to the Arab countries, to an annual level of only 8,000. In this period, only Saudi Arabia and Kuwait remained the two main receiving countries for Turkish workers: From 1993 to 1995 the Turkish Employment Service directed around 63,000 Turkish workers to Saudi Arabia and 600 to Kuwait. By and large, from 1993 to 1995, labor migration to the MENA countries decreased to an annual level, which is seventy percent less than that in the previous period from 1981 to 1992. From 1991 to 1995, 210,000 Turkish laborers (i.e., sixty percent of international labor migration from Turkey) arrived in the MENA countries. In the next half of the 1990s, 32,000 Turkish workers (i.e., twenty-eight percent of overall international labor migration from Turkey) found jobs in the MENA region.[61]

While the Gulf Crisis was an important reason for this decline, the end of the Cold War and the emergence of other labor markets with a demand for foreign labor (such as the CIS countries) were just as important. Turkey adapted to the new global migratory environment of the post-Cold War years quite quickly with a rising trend of emigration to CIS countries. The MENA region in this period still comprised some of the major receiving countries for Turkish migrants, but less so than the CIS. Looking at the figures for the year 1995, while three of every ten Turkish emigrants were received by the Arab countries, six of ten were admitted to CIS countries.

Thus, Turkey has been the source of relatively small numbers of emigrants to the Arab world in the 1990s. Even with an annual number of almost 36,000 workers arriving in Saudi Arabia in 1993, Turkey produced only 70,000 migrants to the MENA countries in the period 1993–1995, a figure well below those for previous periods. The Gulf Crisis and the emergence of new labor markets with the end of the Cold War were probably the main causes for the declining migration movements, but there were additional reasons on the bilateral level. Yemen, for example, stopped receiving emigrant labor from Turkey,

and Libya minimized its intake of Turkish labor; annual migration to Libya decreased from 2,600 persons in 1993 to 1,800 in 1995.

In the second half of the 1990s, parallel to the unstable political climate in many MENA countries caused by the First Gulf War and the ongoing Israel-Palestinian conflict, emigration flows from Turkey to the region remained at stable but low levels. There was almost no new migration to countries such as Libya and Iraq, but some continued to Saudi Arabia. An interesting case was newly emerging labor migration to Israel, which was partly organized by Turkish companies and partly a result of the arrivals of irregular migrants who were individually selling their labor in the informal sectors in Israel.[62]

The 2000s: Revival

The 2000s have been the revival period for Turkish contract labor migration to the MENA region both in its scale (i.e., there are increasing numbers of Turkish emigrants entering into the labor market of the MENA) and scope (i.e., the destination countries are again diversified, including Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Qatar, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and the United Arab Emirates). Two factors can be cited for this trend. First, it can be argued that national politics, the fact that Turkey has been continuously under Islamic-oriented governments since 2002, created an inclination toward closer relations with the MENA countries. Secondly, regional events like the United States' 2003 invasion of Iraq and consequent developments in this country have had a definite effect on migratory flows in the region. Between 2001 and 2005, 58,000 Turkish labor migrants went to the MENA region, comprising thirty-two percent of the overall international labor migration from Turkey.[63]

Saudi Arabia continues to be a major destination country for Turkish labor with an approximate average of 7,000 workers entering the labor market every year between 2001 and 2008. Saudi Arabia is followed by Iraq as another important destination country. A sharp increase can be observed in Turkish emigration to Iraq from 601 in 2003 to 4,900 in 2004. An average of approximately 4,000 persons entered Iraq annually up to 2008. The establishment of the Kurdish Autonomous Region in Northern Iraq was a catalyst for the deepening of the relations between the two countries, cultural affiliation playing a major role among Turkey's Kurds to choose to work in the region. With slight oscillations, Libya also continues to be an important destination for Turkish contract labor with an annual average rate of 1,833 migrants between 2001 and 2008. Qatar is the fourth major receiving country for Turkish migrant workers. A steady increase can be observed in the number of Turkish laborers received by Qatar, from 34 in 2002 to 4,879 persons in 2007. All in all, from 2001 to 2006, an annual average of approximately 1,800 Turkish contract workers entered into the MENA labor market.

Looking at the past and present of project-tied labor migration from Turkey to the MENA region, one explicit observation can be made from the information presented above: The MENA and Turkey have developed into a

migration system whose dynamics and mechanisms change due to altering economic, social, political, and demographic contexts, but continue nevertheless. Thus, despite oscillations, we can expect a continuation of Turkish migration into the MENA region in the future.

Concluding Remarks: Prospects for the Future

Although literature on international migration and Turkey is very Eurocentric, largely focusing on Western Europe as a destination point for Turkish emigrants, overall, almost one million Turkish labor migrants went to the MENA region, which is an important indicator of a migration system between the MENA and Turkey. With more than 4.5 million Turkey-born persons living abroad, largely in Europe, Turkey is definitely a major emigration country in the world. If native-born children of immigrants and naturalized Turkish immigrants are included, this estimate rises to over six million, corresponding to almost eight percent of the country's population. This picture is a product of the migratory flows from Turkey that mainly began in the early 1960s with the arrivals of Turkish migrants in various Western European countries and continued through flows reaching to Australia, the oil-rich countries of the MENA, and then to the former communist countries, such as the CIS. Although there have been a considerable number of studies conducted on different cases of Turkish emigration, no comprehensive research has been carried out on project-tied or contract migration from Turkey to the countries of the MENA region. Accordingly, this essay had three intentions. First, it attempted to document the dynamics and mechanisms of project-tied migration from Turkey to the MENA countries, focusing particularly on the history of the movement. Second, it elaborated the migratory system between Turkey and the MENA countries, mainly referring to the macro-level factors that affect it. The central idea of the migration systems approach is that the exchange of people between certain countries takes place within a particular economic, social, political, and demographic context. In other words, international migration is analyzed as a dynamic process linking origin and destination countries. It is argued that the migratory process changes over time as (1) push-and-pull factors evolve in those countries, (2) feedback and adjustments stemming from the migration process itself alter the conditions in them, and (3) other ties and interactions between countries introduce new constraints or stimuli. Third, this essay drew conclusions about the main features of the migration system between Turkey and the MENA countries via a comparison with other migratory systems that involve other destinations for migrant workers from Turkey, like Western Europe and the CIS.

NOTES

1. MENA countries in this article include Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestinian territories (the West Bank and Gaza Strip), Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

2. Mary M. Kritz, Lin Lean Lim, and Hania Zlotnik, eds., *International Migration Systems: A Global Approach* (Oxford, 1992).

3. Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration* (New York and London, 2003).

4. Kritz, Lim, and Zlotnik, *International Migration Systems: A Global Approach*, 6.

5. Ibid., 5–10.

6. Alejandro Portes and Jozef Böröcz, "Contemporary Immigration: Theoretical Perspectives on its Determinants and Modes of Incorporation," *International Migration Review* 23 (1989): 606–30.

7. Kritz, Lim, and Zlotnik, *International Migration Systems: A Global Approach*, 6.

8. James T. Fawcett and Fred Arnold, "Explaining Diversity: Asian and Pacific Immigration Systems," in *Pacific Bridges: The New Immigration from Asia and the Pacific Islands*, eds. James T. Fawcett and Benjamin V. Cariño (New York, 1987), 453–73; James T. Fawcett, "Networks, Linkages and Migration Systems," *International Migration Review* 23 (1989), 671–80.

9. Kritz, Lim, and Zlotnik, *International Migration Systems: A Global Approach*, 2.

10. Ibid., 139.

11. Thomas Faist, *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces* (Oxford, 2000), 300.

12. Albert Hourani, Philip Khoury, and Mary C. Wilson, *The Modern Middle East* (London and New York, 2004).

13. See, for instance, Ahmet İçduygu, "Migrant as a Transitional Category: Turkish Migrants in Melbourne, Australia" (Ph.D. diss., Australian National University, 1991); Ahmet İçduygu, "Refugee Pressure versus Immigration Pressure in Europe: The Perspective from a Sending Country—the Turkish Case," paper presented at the European Population Conference, Milano, September 4–8, 1995a; Ahmet İçduygu, "Population, Poverty, and Culture: Identifying the Economic and Social Mechanisms for Migration in Turkey," paper presented at the Euroconference on Social Policy in an Environment of Insecurity, Lisbon, November 8–11, 1995b; Ahmet İçduygu, "Migration from Turkey to Western Europe: Recent Trends and Prospects," paper presented to the Mediterranean Conference on Population, Migration and Development, Palma de Mallorca, October 15–17, 1996; Ahmet İçduygu and İbrahim Sirkeci, "Changing Dynamics of the Migratory Regime between Turkey and Arab Countries," *Turkish Journal of Population Studies* 20 (1998): 3–15; Ahmet İçduygu and Kemal Kirişci, eds., *Land of Diverse Migrations* (Istanbul, 2009).

14. Nermin Abadan-Unat, "Turkish Migration to Europe, 1960–1977" in *Turkish Workers in Europe, 1960–1975*, ed. Nermin Abadan-Unat (Leiden, 1976), 1–44; Suzanne Paine, *Exporting Workers: The Turkish Case* (London, 1974), 59; İçduygu, "Migrant as a Transitional Category," 39.

15. Erhard Franz, *Population Policy in Turkey* (Hamburg, 1994), 307; Ahmet Akgündüz, *Labour Migration from Turkey to Western Europe, 1960–1974: A Multidisciplinary Analysis* (Aldershot, 2008), 61.

16. İçduygu, "Migrant as a Transitional Category," 554.

17. Anita Böcker, "Migration Networks: Turkish Migration to Western Europe," in *Causes of International Migration*, eds. R. van der Erf and L. Heering (Luxembourg, 1995), 151–171; İçduygu, "Migration from Turkey to Western Europe," 5.

18. Sefik A. Bahadır, "Turkey and the Turks in Germany," *Aussenpolitik* First Quarter (1979), 104–15.

19. Reginald T. Appleyard, "New Trends in Migration: Numbers, Directions, and Dynamics," paper presented at the Euroconference on Migration and Multiculturalism. London, August 30-September 2, 1995.

20. The labor movement to the CIS countries was very different from the movement to Western Europe but was quite similar to that to the MENA region: It was the movement of male workers with a work contract for a specific period and did not involve family migration or permanent stay.

21. Ahmet Gökdere, "An Evaluation of Turkey's Recent Migration Flows and Stocks," *Turkish Journal of Population Studies* 16 (1994): 29–56.

22. Arthur Goldschmidt, "The Historical Context," in *Understanding the Contemporary Middle East*, ed. Deborah J. Gerner (Boulder and London, 2000), 33–80.

23. William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (Oxford, 2004).

24. James L. Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History* (New York and Oxford, 2008), 196.

25. This is especially true for Syria, Lebanon, Palestine/Israel, Jordan, and Iraq. Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt's formations were rather different, either as a result of anti-imperialist struggle (Turkey), *coup d'etat* (Iran), revolution (Egypt), or conquest (Saudi Arabia); Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 537; James L. Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History*, 175.

26. Ibid.

27. M. Girgis, "Would Nationals and Asians Replace Arab Workers in the GCC?" Draft paper submitted to the *Fourth Mediterranean Development Forum* (Amman, 2002). Also quoted in Martin Baldwin-Edwards, "Migration in the Middle East and Mediterranean," A Regional Study prepared for the Global Commission on International Migration (Athens, 2005).

28. Baldwin-Edwards, "Migration in the Middle East and Mediterranean," 5.

29. Philip Fargues, *Emerging Demographic Patterns across the Mediterranean and their Implications for Migration through 2030* (Cairo and Florence, 2008).

30. Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration* (New York and London, 2003), 131.

31. F. Halliday, "Migrations de main d'oeuvre dans le monde arabe: l'envers du nouvel," *Revue Tiers Monde* 26 (1985), 103.

32. Castles and Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 131.

33. J. Miller, "Wave of Arab Migration Ending with Oil Boom," *New York Times* (October 6, 1985). Also cited in Castles and Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 131.

34. J. S. Birks et al., "Migrant Workers in the Arab Gulf: The Impact of Declining Oil Revenues," *International Migration Review* 20 (1986), 799–814. Also cited in Castles and Miller, *The Age of Migration*.

35. N. Fergany, *Aspects of Labor Migration and Unemployment in the Arab Region* (Egypt, 2001), 1. Also cited in Baldwin-Edwards, "Migration in the Middle East and Mediterranean," 5.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. World Bank Report, *Shaping the Future: A Long-Term Perspective of People and Job Mobility for the Middle East and North Africa* (Washington, DC, 2009).

39. Fergany, *Aspects of Labor Migration and Unemployment in the Arab Region*.

40. Fargues, *Emerging Demographic Patterns across the Mediterranean and their Implications for Migration through 2030*.

41. Ibid.

42. Nasra M. Shah, "Recent Labor Immigration Policies in the Oil-Rich Gulf: How Effective Are They Likely To Be?" (ILO Working Paper No. 3, 2008); Nasra M. Shah, "Restrictive Labor Immigration Policies in the Oil-Rich Gulf: Effectiveness and Implications for Sending Asian Countries." Report presented at the United Nations Expert Group Meeting on International Migration and Development in the Arab Region. UN/POP/EGM/2006/03.

43. Girgis, "Would Nationals and Asians Replace Arab Workers in the GCC?"

44. Baldwin-Edwards, "Migration in the Middle East and Mediterranean," 5.

45. A. Kapiszewski, "Arab Labor Migration to the GCC States," *IOM* (2004), 121.

46. Kapiszewski, "Arab Labor Migration to the GCC States," 123.

47. Shah, "Recent Labor Immigration Policies in the Oil-Rich Gulf."

48. World Bank Report, *Shaping the Future: A Long-Term Perspective of People and Job Mobility for the Middle East and North Africa*.

49. Kapiszewski, "Arab Labor Migration to the GCC States," 125.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. Philipp Fargues and Nasra Shah, "The Impact of Migration on Gulf Development and Stability," Gulf Research Meeting, (2010).

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54. Anh Nga Longva, "Keeping Migrant Workers in Check: The Kefale System in the Gulf," *Middle East Report* 211 (1999), 20.

55. Ibid.
56. Ibid, 21.
57. Horst Unbehaun, "Migration Professionnelle Des Turcs Vers Le Proche-Orient, La Russie Et L'asie Centrale" [Occupational Migration of Turks to Middle East, Russia, and Central Asia] in *Les Annales de L'autre Islam (Special issue on Turc D'Europe et D'ailleurs)* 3 (1995).
58. Ahmet İçduygu, *Gaining from Migration*, OECD (2006).
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
62. For a detailed elaboration of this issue, see the OECD-SOPEMI Reports of Turkey by İçduygu.
63. Ahmet İçduygu, *Gaining from Migration*, OECD (2006).