

COMMENT ON BOOTH AND COLE PAPER

Anthropologists, sociologists, demographers and economists study migration phenomena from different perspectives. Where economics is concerned, immigrants are now given more attention in terms of their relation to the ever-flourishing informal sector, a field that has already become an autonomous field of study. I know of at least four dissertations completed recently in which the integration of immigrants to the unregulated sectors of Istanbul's domestic economy has been studied. Istanbul similar to many major European cities has become a haven for immigrants from various countries over the past decade. Immigrants can be spotted in street corners awaiting to be picked up as day workers, working as street hawkers, and women working in night clubs as prostitutes. A more recent tendency among the female immigrants of Eastern European origin is to work in households cleaning homes and caring for the disabled or the elderly. To the best of my knowledge, there is no study of the conditions under which the foreign immigrants are preferred over the Turkish nationals for such jobs and certainly no study of the effects of such tendency upon the traditional Turkish family structure. The study on hand by Prof. Booth and Prof. Cole has much to inspire—in terms of research method and argumentation—the Turkish scholars for designing such a study. They juxtapose the demand and supply sides of immigration phenomenon in Sicily, more specifically in Palermo, with a view to discerning “southern European patterns of transnational labor movements and segmented labor markets”.

The paper is designed to cover the both sides of the story and the authors have especially done a superb job in surveying the local conditions that created the demand for immigrants. Their principal unit of analysis is the family which, in their view, has become “the only secure refuge for many Sicilians” owing to a number of historical circumstances. Authors provide a very comprehensive overview of these circumstances, paying due attention to their implications upon the family structure. We are persuaded that no matter what the circumstances are, the members, especially the youth, of a typical Palermon family are very conservative in terms of their perception of domestic work, which the two authors eloquently describe. Domestic work is considered an undesirable job in many respects and that creates a niche for the immigrants. And there is certainly enough immigrants, be they women or men, to fill in this niche. Here one of the original findings of the authors should be emphasized. That is, it is not only the female immigrants but also the male immigrants that go for domestic jobs. That may be unique to Sicily. Because neither in big Greek cities nor in Turkish cities, where foreigners are known to be hired for domestic work, males are not considered for domestic work at all.

The demand on the part of the locals for immigrant labor has been really very well-documented. But I think the best part of the article is found in the authors' perceptive approach to the supply side of the story. The life-worlds of immigrants have been neatly documented with due attention paid to not only to the advantages but also to the impediments experienced by them. The authors also recount “push” and “pull” factors that have caused these people to end up in Sicily.

I have a few technical comments to add. Firstly, each subsection has a historical background information, which gives the impression that each section addresses a totally different aspect of the issue under consideration. However, that is not the case. Therefore all the historical background information dispersed throughout the paper should be gathered in one section at the outset. Secondly, the first two subsections on the vicissitudes of the Sicilian family and the demand for foreign domestic workers are in fact inseparable so are the following two subsections on the foreign domestic workers in Palermo and the immigrant families. Subsections are intended to make the job of the reader easier but here they do not serve this purpose. Thirdly, the information gathered by the authors from interviews could be used to inside the preceding section to support the argumentation instead of being given under a separate section. That section looks more like an appendix than an integral part of the paper. Leaving all these aside, I think this is a solid paper that makes an excellent case study of the migration phenomena as experienced by the immigrants themselves and the host population.