

GÖRKEM AKGÖZ, “IN THE SHADOW OF WAR AND EMPIRE: INDUSTRIALISATION, NATION-BUILDING, AND WORKING-CLASS POLITICS IN TURKEY”

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Reviewer: Ivana Hadjievska

It seems that the field of labor history is gaining new influence in the academic and cultural debates, this time through the studies of *global labor history*. The last time the field was burgeoning was in the 1980s, when labor history was entangled in the ideological and mnemonic discourse of the countries in the Eastern bloc during the Cold War’s bipolar division. Today, discussions in this branch of historical discipline tackle phenomena from modernity (and post-modernity), but the epistemological

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difference from other fields of historical thought resides in the focus on the material base of societies and the conflictual character of class rule. I found inspiration for this assertion in Görkem Akgöz's book, *In the Shadow of War and Empire: Industrialisation, Nation-Building, and Working-Class Politics in Turkey*. The author is aligned to the generation of researchers who belong to the 'global academic diaspora'. This professional community is generally characterized by few shared features: turn towards the global world and critical challenging of national master-narratives; and precarious academic engagements, rather than stable working positions. These are important assumptions to understand the epistemic positioning of the title in front of us: it belongs to the academic turn towards cross-disciplinary, comparative perspective, as well as viewing local/national phenomena through the global reflector of economic processes and social movements. Although Akgöz's primary field of study is sociology and social sciences, her work in the past decade left a mark through research projects in global labor history, political economy, and women and gender history, particularly within the context of the history of the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey. What intrigued me in the book was precisely how research grounded in labor history, in contrast to the still dominant military-political historiography, can influence the understanding of the construction of modern (capitalist) states, taking into account both the ideological and the memory component of the process. This question is exactly my point of departure in the review.

The main topic in the book are the site-specific developments in the Bakırköy Cloth Factory - a textile company in Istanbul, in a broad economic and political context from the 1840s until the 1950s. This industrial complex, known as the "Turkish Manchester", was built on the northern shore of the Marmara Sea in the 1840s, and taken over by the republican state in 1923. The main social relationship under exploration is the relationship between nation-building and workplace conditions under Turkey's state-led industrialization. The key-spot where the relationship materializes is the factory shop floor. The author contextualizes

state factories as emerging key sites of entanglement, where questions of nation-building, class formation, and modernization were intimately tied together.

Audience wise, apart from the field specialists, the book should be of interest to readers curious about post-colonial processes, readers of entangled histories and to those searching for tangents of women's history. Due to its methodological exercises and the range of sources that the reader offers, it should be useful reading for students in the relevant fields.

The body of the book has two layers of observation, thus, the narrative structure is divided in two parts. The first part uptakes the macro-level. It leads the reader through the dense elaboration of the historical context and spatiality of industrialization, the changing urban landscape of Istanbul, the impact of the Labor Code (1936), and the key policies of the political elites that eventually shaped the ideology of the "worker-patriot". The second part uptakes the micro-level. It follows the labor habitus in the factories on the shop-floor scale and the ruptures in the building of class identity among the industrial workers, in the network of the statist labor politics.

The theoretical and methodological framework used by the author, reveal itself as a meta-historiographical text – a case in deeply considered writing process. Akgöz combines a long-term political economy approach with a shop-floor-level analysis of industrial relations. Interdisciplinarity is embedded in the working process, thereby, the tools of economic history are engaged with experience-based sources. Akgöz's theoretical positioning is the true strength of the book's originality. In the introductory part, she familiarizes the readers well with the state of the art of research in the western academic centers, as well as with the development of the same in the global south; she zooms in also in the framework of Turkish national historiography and tackles the main topical challenges. The originality resides in the fact that she's still not approaching this under-researched geographical space as a meadow

for source-harvesting to be used in trendy case studies in an academic center; on the contrary, through her own discursive analysis, field research and experiential approach, she develops theoretical thesis herself. One excellent example is the application of the concept for the factory as “contract zone”. This concept allows her to focus on workers’ everyday practices that are replete with agency in the specificities of the Turkish modern state, and then, to reconnect worker agency to the wider societal structures.

The book is polyphonic, in terms of the representation of a variety of perspectives and voices, both the official and celebratory narratives as well as the critical counternarratives on etatism: bureaucrats, intellectuals, foreign and local industrial experts, employers, managers and workers themselves. Behind this representation, lies the plethora of sources, including state documents, inspection reports, travel writing, memoirs, workers’ files, oral interviews, and periodicals.

According to the main argument stated in the introduction, the reality of shop-floor relations simply did not square with the contemporary representations of state factories and their workers, usually represented as passive. Therefore, the author indicates the need for re-embedding agencies at the workplace level. According to her, in workplaces where the state plays the role of both employer and regulator, worker agency is key to understanding the making of working-class citizenship, as well as its interpellation to state formation and nation-building.

The first part consists of three chapters: (1) *The “Turkish Manchester”. Factories in Nineteenth-Century Istanbul*; (2) *A “Home-Grown Plant”. State-Led Industrialisation between Ideology and Empiricism*; (3) *Smokestacks of “Atatürk’s Minarets” Industrialisation and the Politics of National Space*.

The first chapter opens with the painful modernization processes that the Ottoman Empire went through. Spatial associations are often used to capture change: the ornate imperial edifices were replaced with factory chimneys. Behind the new urban landscape, the perception of industrialization as an economic policy changed, and instead of being a method

for reducing import dependency for military requirements, local industrial production became a goal in itself, as well for the creation of local capitalist elites.

The second chapter deals with Turkish industrialization in the context of national, regional and world ideas of a planned economy. Readers learn that Turkey was the first country after Soviet Russia to introduce a planned economy. The conclusion of this chapter supports the thesis of postcolonial strategies of etatism. Etatism was used as a quick remedy for underdevelopment, but with great attention not to allow socialist ideological winds in the Republic. A solution to prevent class antagonisms from leading to the emancipation of workers was the adoption of the 1936 Labor Code. The chapter ends by detailing the ways in which the Code influenced economic and social policies.

The third chapter deals with the spatial development of industrialization. The author elaborates on the 'uneven development' and the consequences for communities, villages, in the coming decades: the gap between Istanbul, as the old industrial center, and Anatolia, its hinterland, as the new industrial center.

After reading the first part, one can formulate the conclusion about Turkey as an interesting example of suspending class conscience, while etatist industrialisation *de facto* became the *raison d'être* of the Kemalist Republic. The elites found ideological solutions in a nationalist narrative of industrial work, mobilizing a work ethic that concealed the unequal and coercive relations of production and, thus, subordinating class divisions in service to the nation.

The second part consists of three chapters: (4) *The View from the Factory. State-Led Industrialisation as Myth and Ceremony*; (5) *Voices from the Shop Floor. Politics, Law, and Workplace Industrial Relations*; (6) *Textures of Struggle. Worker Politicisation from the Shop Floor to the Trade Union*. The reader is gradually introduced to the everyday working life in the factory and the creation of a class identity among the workers. The focus is on the interactions between the two poles of the "politics in production" between labor and

capital: the relations of cooperation and conflict on the inside, and the interventions of the state, employers', and workers' organisations, from the outside.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to social experiences of the factory: recruitment and promotion, gendering of labor, discipline etc. It reads in the mechanisms that workers have found to resist or maneuver around strict factory rules, to negotiate their labor rights. The chapter is also interesting in terms of methodology: the author introduces experience-near level of analysis (the author designates them as biographical snapshots of Bakırköy workers), following sources such as workers' petitions, worker files and employment records among the most used. The image of the practicalities of workers' everyday life has also been reconstructed: the condition of hot meals, clothing, sports facilities, and medical treatment.

The fifth chapter is significant for the testing of the argument posed in the introduction. Through sources that reconstruct the lives and relationships on the factory shop-floor, the author successfully debunks the image of the helpless, complicit worker that prevails in the literature on this period. One of the examples is the worker housing crisis, which represented an opportunity for the (political) radicalization of industrial workers. The chapter also covers the main political processes of forming labor organizations and unions, the position of their leaders on the political spectrum and how they were intertwined with the lives and struggles of factory workers.

The sixth and final chapter is contextualized in state liberalization after the Second World War, which led to state recognition of industrial workers as a social and political group. However, there were examples when workers raised discussion on salary increase, employers resorted to abstracting the discussion into the categories of national identity, belonging, and citizenship. The chapter focuses on the interactions between shop-floor politics and the wider trade union politics. In this

constellation, workers' politics were not confined to the fragile structures of trade unions, but shaped by their experience on the shop floor.

Finishing the book, I came to the conclusion about the ease with which national master-narratives - subtly devoted to the romantic parts of the state-and nation-building, can obscure the understanding of the foundations of the material base of societies. This, in turn, leads to the marginalization of the political subjectivity and historical experiences of subjects who are active or passive 'stakeholders'. Perhaps this is precisely where the true potential of researchers of labor history lies: with their constant focus on the material base of society and social relations, they act as the 'inner judge' of national historiographies. They can also be useful theoretical designers for a substantive understanding of modernization processes in industrial societies on the fringes of Western-centric epistemic interest. Akgöz's forensic approach to archival sources and the discursive discussion she develops through original theses reinforce this claim.