

BOOK REVIEW

Görkem Akgöz, *In the Shadow of War and Empire: Industrialisation, Nation-Building, and Working-Class Politics in Turkey*. Leiden: Brill, 2023, 300 pages.
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The narrative of *In the Shadow of War and Empire: Industrialisation, Nation-Building, and Working-Class Politics in Turkey* by Görkem Akgöz begins with the emergence of an Ottoman imperial industrial complex, which came to be known as the “Turkish Manchester,” in 1840s’ İstanbul. Akgöz considers this ambitious imperial project and its downfall, not only as a crucial episode in the complex history of the Ottoman Empire’s incorporation into the global capitalist system but also as a recurrent theme in the industrial discourse of the early Turkish Republican era. According to her, even though the Republican elite often dismissed or overlooked it as failure, the infrastructure, managerial experience, and labor practices inherited from this experiment significantly influenced the early Republic’s industrial landscape and its trajectory in the following decades. Thus, she focuses her narrative on the Bakırköy Factory, a state-run textile factory originally established as part of this imperial industrial complex, while illustrating the broader story of industrialization in Turkey particularly during the 1930s and 1940s.

Reflecting the author’s multi-scale approach, the book is structured into two parts. In Part 1, Akgöz provides a macro-historical context, examining the discourses and strategies of state elites from the mid-nineteenth-century Empire through the Republican period. Chapter 1 traces the origins of Turkish state-led industrialization in the 1930s to the Empire’s nineteenth-century economic peripheralization, exploring the Empire’s efforts to modernize its manufacturing sector. This includes the establishment of the industrial complex, known as the “Turkish Manchester.” The chapter also highlights the diverse ethnic composition of the Ottoman workforce, challenging the Republican-era reinterpretation of this history as of a monolithic entity composed solely of Turks.

Chapter 2 analyzes the transition from an open economy in the 1920s to a mixed economy characterized by protectionism and etatism in the 1930s. It explores the international and domestic factors that influenced this policy shift, including elite conflicts, debates over industrialization frameworks, and attempts to establish a Turkish labor code. Chapter 3 addresses the spatial logic behind state-led industrialization, focusing on efforts to rectify uneven geographical development inherited from the Ottoman period. This chapter emphasizes the Turkish state’s strategic expansion of the railway network and the selection of industrial sites, driven by post-imperial anxieties and a desire to create a unified nation-state. Akgöz challenges the notion of state industries as uniform, highlighting variations between old and new industrial centers, particularly in labor market dynamics, including gender aspects.

While this first part of the book serves as a foundational background for the narratives in the subsequent chapters, it also stands alone as a comprehensive history of industrialization in early Republican to post-war Turkey. Akgöz's focus on themes such as post-imperial state discourses, labor legislation, spatiality of development, and local labor markets provides fresh insights into the complexities of the industrialization dreams and process.

In Part 2, Akgöz narrows the the scope of historical analysis and zooms into the daily lives, social interactions, and political activism in and around the Bakırköy Factory. Despite this shift in scale, however, the author remains conscious of the interplay between macro-structures and micro-level agency and seeks to understand the everyday lives, social relations, and political actions of the factory workers in relation to the larger context.

Chapter 4 centers on shop-floor industrial relations, challenging common assumptions about state workers in the 1930s and 1940s. Traditionally, studies of this period, often relying heavily on secondary and state-produced materials, have portrayed these workers as a relatively well-off and obedient social cluster. The chapter examines various aspects such as the physical conditions of production, factory administrative structures, employment and wage policies, labor control strategies, social provisions, and housing issues. It highlights the gap between ideological prescriptions and everyday practices by exploring the "micro-physics" of power, focusing on failed attempts to rationalize production, repressive management practices, and isolated forms of worker resistance. Chapter 5 continues this exploration by detailing workers' daily experiences on the shop floor, informed by their petitions. The immediate post-war period marked a pivotal moment in Turkey's labor history, shaped by the intersection of the one-party regime's crisis and the emergence of international welfare discourse, which reframed labor issues as broader social concerns. From this dynamic interaction, a new labor regime took shape. In this chapter, Akgöz explores the evolution of this labor regime on two fronts: political and legal changes; and the lived experiences of workers through a micro-historical lens. The chapter is guided by the question of how external job regulation changes influenced shop-floor relationships and bargaining, using biographical accounts of Bakırköy workers to connect their industrial experiences with larger politico-economic developments. Drawing on the petitions and grievances of workers, she presents the factory as a politically charged space where norms and authority lines were continually contested and renegotiated. The chapter discusses the persistent struggle between labor and management over control and authority, despite the inherent power imbalances.

Chapter 6 examines the early trade union movement in the Bakırköy Factory, arguing that workplace relations and working-class politics cannot be fully understood merely as reflections of structural class positions. It emphasizes that worker subjectivity is complex, with shifting and contradictory aspects shaped by shop-floor labor relations. The narrative centers on the life trajectories of two trade unionists in the 1950s, who each offered different critiques of the mainstream political direction of the union movement. Their experiences and political choices highlight the diverse political positions within the working class: one of them stayed within the hegemonic boundaries of Kemalist nationalism and its authorized


discourses; the second one gradually became radicalized and became a communist. Akgöz follows their experiences on the shop floor, at trade union gatherings, and in political party meetings, using their lived experiences to explore the connections between collective organization and political identity. Focusing on the interplay between shop-floor dynamics and broader trade union politics, the chapter challenges the notion that labor organization history is a straightforward progression toward political consciousness.

Throughout the chapters, Akgöz navigates between the micro- and macro-levels of analysis, focusing on the Bakırköy Factory. This narrative strategy is the book's key strength, as it effectively connects the messy everyday experiences of workers on the shop floor with the major political and economic transformations in Turkey's history. I believe that this achievement is not a coincidence but relies on two factors. The first one is the author's sincere commitment to portraying the everyday lives, survival strategies, and political agency of the workers, despite the limited sources available. She diligently searches for and utilizes every archival fragment by placing them into a larger context. Second, the book's strength is also derived from the author's familiarity with recent theoretical and methodological advancements in workplace history and global labor history. Recent studies in the field of workplace research have broadened their focus to include issues related to social and identity dynamics. They have started to explore how work shapes and reshapes social identities and how labor practices contribute to social disparities. There is also an increasing focus on the anthropology of industrial labor, particularly in exploring the experiences of workers in unstable and fragmented job settings. This body of research has also underscored the links between local workplaces and global economic forces, questioning conventional theories of the evolution of capitalism. Making use of these new approaches, Akgöz provides a comprehensive understanding of the Bakırköy Factory industrial workplace and its interplay with the broader political economy and discourse.

The book builds on an understanding of the workplace as a "contact zone," where the larger forces of capitalism, state policy, and labor markets intersect with the everyday lives and agency of workers. This approach, inspired by Carlo Ginzburg's assertion that "the global perspective in any close-up is implicit," allows Akgöz to go beyond the divisions between micro and macro, agency and structure. Throughout the book, we see how macro-level forces such as "postimperial state discourses, labor legislation, spatiality of development, and local labor markets" directly shape the lived experiences of workers. At the same time, the author demonstrates how the agency of workers, expressed through their daily practices and struggles, can have an impact on these larger historical configurations.

In recent years, the field of Turkish labor history has expanded beyond previous studies focused on institutions to explore broader themes such as labor relations and workers' struggles. While much of this new research has focused on the Ottoman period and early Republic, Akgöz contributes to this evolving field by examining the trajectory of Turkish industrial relations from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century – a period that she describes as having a "largely neglected history," especially the 1930s and 1940s. However, her work not only fills a chronological gap. Through her close-ups of the messy everyday life at the Bakırköy

Factory, intermingled with wideshots of the broader historical context, she also provides a model for integrating micro- and macro-analyses into the study of industrial development and workers' everyday experiences on the shop floor.

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