Many voices of a Turkish state factory: working at Bakirköy Cloth Factory, 1932-50
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Introduction

This dissertation investigates the Bakırköy Cloth Factory, a state-owned textile factory, in Istanbul between 1932 and 1950. It is a micro-historical actor-centred study of the working and living conditions, and the development of the political consciousness and language of Bakırköy Factory workers. This first systematic archive-driven study of a factory in early Republican Turkey, i.e. the period between 1923 and 1950, introduces a whole new perspective on the study of working-class formation in Turkey in two ways. First, it analyses the relations between the politics of production and the larger framework of state politics in the contexts of a national factory, a factory that was run by the state as part of its efforts to complement its recently acquired political independence with economic sovereignty. Second, through a close reading of workers’ experience of shop floor activity and politics, it examines the discursive structuring of class consciousness as the infusion of two different discourses: the discourse of nation-building and citizenship, and the discourse of labour politics. Thus, it tries to establish the interactions between the process of nation-building and the process of industrial proletarianisation by means of examining the fluid boundaries between class and citizenship.¹ Through documenting these interactions, I aim to open up class formation to a wider process of cultural and political definition and conceptualise it as much a discursive as a material process.

On another level, it introduces biographical instances of the process of working-class formation in order to evaluate the overly-generalised conclusions on state workers. Put differently, it brings the particular aspects to the foreground against the theoretical inclination of specialists in this field to go for the more general. As a state factory that was transferred from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic, Bakırköy Factory provides the micro universe for studying that formation in a context where the state and the citizen faced each other as the employer and the employee. Precisely because of these characteristics, the interactions of the two processes are easily detectable in this originally Ottoman factory that

¹ Though the literature on Turkish nationalism is expanding, its development has not been studied in a systematic manner in relation to the emergence of an industrial proletariat. Analyses of Turkish nationalism and the formation of the nation-state are characterised by paradigms of modernisation and Westernisation, whereby the development of Turkish nationalism is treated as an aspect of political modernisation. See, for example: Bernard Lewis, The Emergence of Modern Turkey, (London: Oxford University Press, 1968); Feroz Ahmad, The Making of Modern Turkey, (London: Routledge, 1993); Stanford Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, 1808-1975, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Niyazi Berkes, Development of Secularism in Turkey, (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1963); David Kushner, The Rise of Turkish Nationalism, 1876-1908, (London: Frank Cass, 1977).
was reclaimed materially and symbolically by the Republic. In other words, Bakırköy Factory will be treated as a lens that will enable the reader to zoom into the daily lives of state workers during this period, with an emphasis on the language they used to represent themselves as *Turkish workers* against their employer, the *Turkish state*.

Thus, the analysis fills a gap in Turkish labour history by means of introducing the human dimension to the mainly sociological conclusions of labour history studies during this period. The dominant narrative form of these studies has been characterised by the suppression and manipulation of a working-class collectivity by the state through means of domination, subjugation and force, and its ensuing failure to carry out its historical mission. In other words, a narrative of failure and an epistemology of absence underline these studies. Moreover, most of the time, working-class history is reduced to a chronology of state actions mainly in the form of labour legislation; workers are thus reduced to passive recipients of these regulations and legislations. The state is as such recognised as the only social actor and it is reified; it is given an independent existence, even when the authors are criticising the dominant “strong state tradition” approach within Turkish historiography. Though conclusions may vary, the uniformity of the narrative presupposes similar questions that would foreclose the analysis to the alternative socio-political visions within the labour movement that were suppressed.

In this study, I use a historical materialist methodology that pays special attention to the discursive aspects of this very dynamic and contradictory period of working-class history in Turkey. This methodology, first and foremost, entails starting from the conditions of the material existence of real men and women under conditions of exploitation and domination and their experience of that existence. Thus, instead of inferring working-class formation from class structure, I begin with the concrete activities of real people and document these activities in an anthropologically influenced narrative mode characterised by an interpretative approach to written and spoken word.

It is these methodological concerns that lie beneath the choice of a factory as the unit of analysis of this study. In order to bring an alternative narrative structure to the study of working-class formation, I chose to minimise the scope as much as possible and thus examine the details of that process. The factory site in this study is conceptualised as the cross point where space, mentality and ideology are materialised; as such, it is the space of manifold experiences related to work but that goes beyond work in its political and ideological effects. Being the site where the expropriation of surplus begins, the factory site is also the context
where workers display their first reaction to that appropriation. Through a study of the representations involved in that reaction and the later dealings of the factory management with that reaction, we could trace the changes in the mentality and language of workers’ self-perception. It is also at this level that we see the shaping and reshaping of the form and content of the managerial practices, which involve both means of discipline and incorporation. This allows us to make a fluid analysis: fluid in the sense that we can map out the changes in both workers’ and management’s languages and strategies. In such an analysis, discipline and control are not merely imposed on the workers; they are also constituted by their actions. Following a worker’s experience on the shop floor also allows us to see how that experience shapes their self-perception and the language she uses outside the factory. Thus, instead of seeing the larger framework of state politics as the determining factor of workers’ experience at the site of production, such an analysis enables us to conceptualise this relation as a contingent interaction. As such, it becomes possible to see the effects of the political developments on self-perceptions and representations.

This is not to imply a one-way simple causality; of course, the same developments would not yield similar results in different workers’ political language and activity. The relational question here has more of a contingent character. For example, we see a rather dramatic change in the language of the petitions after World War II. It would be easy to attribute these changes to the increasing politicisation of the everyday life with the end of the single party regime, but such an explanation could not establish the connections with workers’ past experiences. Or when we analyse the changes in the political affiliations of individual workers’ during the same period, it opens up a whole new dimension to analyse these in connection with their shop floor activity on the one hand and their immediate experience of labour politics at the factory trade union level on the other. The factory site is the spatial context in which the experience of labour is mediated by these developments at the same time when it mediates the political language of the workers as well. Thus, the political and economic developments of the early Republican period are given a human face through a study of micro-stories that took place in the factory.

Individual workers’ experiences on the shop floor are analysed in detail in order to explain the dynamics of the self-perception of state workers. Petitions they wrote, speeches they gave, and personal accounts they left are regarded as documentation of that self-perception. Through a close-reading of this documentation, I trace the inscriptions of nation-formation onto the process of working-class formation under state-led industrialisation. While
these micro studies give a human face to the sociological conclusions of a general order, the conclusions themselves are treated as the conditioning factors of workers’ self-perception, the constitution of a working-class political language.

A cautionary remark must be made here. When criticising the historians for siding with the victors of history, Alf Lüdtke reminds us of the importance of attending to the rich intensity of actual lives. One option to transcend the narrowly one-dimensional nature of the big questions in historical analysis “is to focus our attention on the historical subjects themselves, exploring them in the context of their immediate modes of action and expression”.\(^2\) But this should not be understood as a mere redressing of past historiographic neglect. The recognition of the multiplicity of synchrony also offers a new insight into the past by means of focusing “attention on the spectrum and range of what is historically possible in any given conjuncture”.\(^3\) The boundaries of that terrain of possibility, however, are not determined by constraints on action and temptations to act that are fixed givens. They should be viewed “as fluent moments in a spiral which moves from perceiving and interpreting reality to acting upon it and – in turn – to perceiving the changed state of things”.\(^4\) This is exactly what this study does by means of listening to the voices of the workers of a national factory where the discourse of the national community – often evoking the metaphor of family – displaced the labour-capital conflict. Workers’ perception and reaction to that displacement and their strategies for dealing with it are treated as open-ended processes characterised by contingency.

In a way, then, this study starts from where labour historians stopped; it deconstructs their conclusions in order to view the suppressed experiences, alternative voices and political visions of the state workers of the early Republican period. As such, it follows Ira Katznelson’s suggestion to move away from the question of whether class formation occurred to an inquiry into “the terms and content of class formation with respect to a quite specific, but deliberately open, object of analysis: the ways the newly emerging working classes expressed their claims to their employers and to the state.”\(^5\)

To recapitulate, there are two analytical axes to this dissertation: the intertwining of nationalisation and proletarianisation, and the relationship between the process of production


\(^3\) Ibid., p. 83.

\(^4\) Ibid., p. 60.

broadly defined and the emergence of a worker as a form of subjectivity and of a language of class in the context of a national factory. In these introductory pages, I will first explain the historiographical and methodological choices I have made in this study. I will follow with a brief theoretical discussion on the possible interrelations between these two processes. In the following sections, I will provide an outline of the chapters and a brief note on the method and sources.

**Methodological Considerations on Labour Historiography**

At the meeting of the Labour Network of the European Social Science History Conference in 2008, the high number of young labour historians surprised the more experienced practitioners of the field. “And they say labour history is dead!” shouted one of them with a happy undertone of surprise; others approved enthusiastically. Indeed, it was surprising to see that many academics at the beginning of their careers are interested in a field that has allegedly been in a ‘disorienting epistemological crisis.’ Having lived out its glory days in the 1960s and 1970s with the emergence of the ‘new social history,’ the explanatory categories of the field have come under increasing scrutiny in the last two decades. The ‘history from below’ approach, which was once celebrated as a fresh insight brought to studies of working-class history, has been widely criticised because of its dependence on grand narratives. There are different aspects of this critique, ranging from the improper treatment of language and discourse to the neglect of imperial and racial dynamics of the study of working-class formation. The common denominator of these critiques has been their questioning of the fundamental concepts of social history such as experience, agency, and identity. In fact, the notion of ‘class’, which has been the building block of labour history, has been scrutinised by a growing number of social scientists since the late 1970s with the rise of

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7 The emblematic study of working-class formation from below is *The Making of the English Working-Class* by E.P. Thompson (New York: Vintage Books, 1966). Thompson’s conceptualisation of class has been shaped in opposition to the sociological understanding of it in stratification studies in which it was treated as a ‘thing’, a ‘category’. To Thompson, class is an historical relationship and class formation is an historical process shaped by the logic of material determinations.
post-structuralism and its questioning of the possibility of the unitary subject, and, by implication, the notion of agency.\(^8\)

Though the critiques vary, I will discuss two of them that have influenced me in designing the methodology of this research. Arguably, these have also been the most effective in challenging the ‘history from below’ approach. The current study is also located in the historiographical tradition of this approach. As such it uses the Thompsonian conceptualisations of class, class struggle and experience in a critical manner. Yet, it has also been influenced by these two sets of critiques and adopted some of their methodological insights. On the one hand, there is the turn to culture, language and gender; what came to be defined in general terms as the linguistic turn introduced the historical analysis of representations to the field. Beginning in the 1980s, labour historians have become increasingly critical of the use of concepts such as experience and consciousness without a thorough understanding of the constructivist role of language.\(^9\) An equally powerful critique of these explanatory categories came from scholars of race and empire who have exposed the Eurocentric nature of labour history. For a long time, histories of labour in the non-Western world could not go beyond mere applications of theories and historiographies of the Western world. In other words, the field did not learn from those settings in which labour-capital relations and state formation did not show similar characteristics with the Western world. The situation changed dramatically, however, from the 1980s onward, and today a number of studies exist that challenge the theoretical and methodological assumptions of social history. Most important among them has been the universalistic claims on culturalist assumptions and the effects of differences in state formation on working-class subjectivity and collectivity.

In the next two sections, I will analyse these two sets of critiques in terms of their relevance to the current study. These two sections could be read as an attempt to move beyond

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\(^8\) William Reddy gives an extreme example: “It is quite possible to account for the whole of English history down through 1850 without evoking class interest to explain events” (qtd. in Theodore Koditschek, “Marxism and the Historiography of Modern Britain: from Engels to Thompson to Deconstruction and Beyond”, in Terry Brotherstone and Geoff Pilling [eds.] History, Economic History and the Future of Marxism, [London: Porcupine Press, 1996], p. 120).

the epistemological crisis of labour history and to have a productive dialogue between a progressive materialist history and post-structuralism critiques of the new social history paradigm.

The Linguistic Turn

The post-1980 debates within labour history have differed from previous ones in two ways. First, they reflected the need to reconsider the faith in the revolutionary agency of the working-class in the context of the emergence of neo-liberal capitalism. At the centre of the polemical debates was the questioning of the new social history’s efforts to integrate social and political narratives, which, the critics claimed, produced a tendency to reduce political behaviour to a function of the changes in social structure. The call to give politics and its expressions their autonomy characterised these revisionist attempts. Secondly, critiques on labour historiography have borrowed extensively from other disciplines. Social historians have transferred theoretical insights from a spectrum of social sciences and called for social history to adopt these to the study of subordinate classes. This was a time when post-structuralism became increasingly popular in the social sciences and humanities; the questioning of the universal explanations and the unitary subject has undermined the possibility of accurate historical analysis. The most significant effect of this questioning concerns the treatment of language and discourse within labour history.

It has been increasingly argued that, within labour history, the “problematic character of language” had been concealed thus far because the founding concepts of the field have assumed a too-easy relation between social being and the ways it found its expression in social consciousness. At stake here are concepts such as ‘experience’ and ‘consciousness’, the definitions and implications of which had been elaborately given by E.P. Thompson, the prominent name of the ‘new social history’ tradition within labour history. The problem with these concepts, critics argued, has been their treatment of language as nothing but a simple medium through which consciousness is achieved. The authority of the concept of

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13 Jones, *Languages of Class*, p. 20.
experience, that is, “the appeal to experience as incontestable evidence and as an ordinary point of explanation” has been questioned and experience is defined as “a linguistic event that does not happen outside established meanings.”

Thus, scholars operating from a poststructuralist perspective have criticised labour historians’ tendency to interpret workers’ language too literally. In other words, it is argued that language should be treated as one of the constituents of social being, and not just as an expression of it. Thus, its mere decoding could not lead to an understanding of material conditions. Likewise, a notion of experience as being distinct from language could not be thought of as bridging the gap between social being and social consciousness. What leads to an understanding of common miseries among the masses is a linguistic ordering of experience. In between consciousness and experience, then, lies “a particular language which organises the understanding of experience” and this language is by no means a single one. The solution to the problem lies in the substitution of the prefigurative conception of language with a non-referential one.

It has been more than twenty years since these debates and the historical analysis of the construction of social meaning and representation has become completely endemic. The debate continues, however, with regard to the methodological ways in which that study is conducted and the ways in which it arrives at certain conclusions. To begin with, labour historians’ confinement of language to spoken word resulted in the reproduction of the methodology of intellectual history. The second problem concerns the application of theoretical and methodological insights borrowed from other disciplines to the study of labour. The feminist poststructuralist inquiry has uncritically imported methods to the field. While borrowing theoretical and methodological insights from other disciplines, however, the borrowing discipline should be aware of the methodological differences between the disciplines. In other words, the borrowing discipline needs to filter them through its own epistemological and ontological existence. Within labour history, the most problematic issue in this regard has been the importing of the method of deconstruction from literary studies where it has been identified with post-structuralist philosophy.

William Sewell defines two differences between literary and historical scholarship in terms of their object of analysis and their interpretive tasks. Different from literary

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scholarship, historical scholarship does not take language and meaning construction as its object of study. The concern of historical scholarship lies in the quest to “understand a world that is manifested, reflected, refracted or referred to in the texts but that is different from” them in its broader reach. The structure of human social worlds is not confined to linguistic conventions; thus, deconstruction would not suffice as the only tool for the reconstruction of the past. Moreover, considering that the discipline of history is mainly about the study of time and context, deconstruction’s scant regard for these two categories makes its use in historical studies problematic. Hence, it has to be modified as an analytical strategy in order to answer historical questions. It is for all these reasons that if historians are to borrow deconstruction from literary scholarship they need to modify its “vocabulary, practice, and epistemology” to suit their purposes. Only then could deconstruction shed light on hitherto shadowed aspects of history.

It has been argued that a historical materialist methodology would be incompatible with the constructivist conceptualisation of discourse. I would like to argue with Theodore Koditschek that there is not much difference between how “the rise of Marxist class theory in the mid-nineteenth century made it possible to see that universal liberalism was, in actuality, an unconscious bourgeois self-projection, from which workers were excluded” and how “the rise of the feminist theory in the mid-twentieth century now enables us to see that Marx’s universal proletariat was, in actuality, an unconscious masculine self-projection, from which women were excluded”. Both expose the hidden mechanisms of suppression, exclusion and domination that were constructed materially as well as discursively. When its identification with the “arbitrary, nihilistic philosophy of poststructuralism” ceases, deconstruction is a useful ground-clearing activity. Yet, to be sure, a historical materialist labour historiography would also demand a critical distinction between deconstruction as a method and

20 Sewell, “Gender and the Politics of History”, p. 82.
21 Koditschek, “Marxism and the Historiography of Modern Britain”, p.124. Koditschek goes on to argue that “a good case can be made that it was Marx and Engels themselves who were the first deconstructionist” (p.123). That is to say that one could read Capital as the deconstruction of the bourgeois political economy by means of showing its subtle ideological and tyrannical character. Consider, for example, Scott’s definition of the history of the present as the task of the historians: “What are the reigning truths that need to be historicised in order to challenge their aura of naturalness or inevitability?” (Joan W. Scott, “The ‘Class’ We Have Lost”, International Labour and Working-Class History, Vol. 57, 2000, p. 73). I think especially the sections on money and fetishism in Capital V.I are outstanding examples of such an undertaking.
22 Koditschek, “Marxism and the Historiography of Modern Britain”, p.130. Linda Gordon has a similar point of view: “[D]econstructionist lines of inquiry can lead to rewarding any subversive challenges to lazy and status quo readings of experience” (“Gender and the Politics of History”, Signs, Vol. 15, No. 4, 1990, p. 858.)
poststructuralism as a philosophy, for the latter rejects materialist explanations of the past completely. Unless we deprive our analysis from the actual activities of real women and men, ignore their connections with the changes in the material conditions of life, this self-sufficient philosophy could not be the basis for our understanding of the subaltern classes’ past experiences. Even when we exclusively focus on the discursive aspects of that history, deconstruction on its own cannot be our sole method since it is a method of exposing hidden meanings, and not constructing new ones.23

History, however, never stops at that point; it also has a constructive power of its own. In other words, a historian’s task could not be confined to the act of clearing the ground. It also entails the construction of new grounds to make sense of the past. That is why we as social historians have no choice but to engage with a grabby social analysis in the end;24 because this is the only method to learn about “how subjects mediate, challenge, resist, or transform discourses in the process of defining their identities.”25 It is this two-fold nature of the historian’s task that negates the oppositions that had arisen during the course of the linguistic turn between material and discursive transformations. Linguistic turn’s call for the historical analysis of representation does not need to be defined in opposition to the analysis of discernible, retrievable historical reality.26 We do not have to give up the task of documenting the experience when we examine how difference was constituted in the first place within an either/or paradigm.27 Tilly’s distinction between two different but complementary histories, the analytical, problem-oriented social history on the one hand, and the descriptive/interpretive studies on the other, speaks exactly to this two-fold nature.28

In this study, I try to bring these two different kinds of historical analysis together by means of attending the experiences of Bakırköy workers both in terms of the objective conditions that shaped them and their subjective interpretations of these conditions. For the methodology of the current study, I have been inspired by a feminist historian who managed

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23 Tilly, “Comment and Debate”, p. 452.
26 Ibid., p. 369.
27 To give an example, Scott’s call for writing the history of homosexuality instead of homosexuals, or writing the history of blackness instead of blacks implies that there is a clear distinction between the discursive construction of difference and the ways in which people experienced it. Not only there is the distinction but also there is the implication that the analysis of the latter precludes the analysis of the former (Ibid., pp. 375-6).
to bring these two different perspectives on labour history together. In her analysis of the complex relationships between gender and class in German labour history, Kathleen Canning researches the emergence and rapid expansion of women’s work in textile factories in Germany in the nineteenth century. The expansion of female factory workforce occurred in the midst of a series of changes in the discourses surrounding sexuality, family and marriage. The focal points of Canning’s analysis is the dialectical relation between the constitutive and subjugate powers of discourses, on the one hand, and the force of the material reality, which pressures and destabilises the discursive domain requiring “representations to be reworked, shored up, reconstructed on the other”. I take this conceptualisation as my starting point in order to study the social structure and worker subjectivity as interconnected, or even mutually determining, categories.

There is another aspect of Canning’s work that I follow. She is interested in the question of agency regarding the discursive domain that was formed by the convergence of different but overlapping and often competing discourses. Within this dominant discursive domain, there existed multiple subject positions characterised by their discrepancies in access to social space and power. It is at this point that the problem-oriented social history starts and the grabby social analysis enters the picture. To make sense of these differences in power, we need to invoke the experiences of the agents of these different discourses. The significant aspect of Canning’s analysis rises at the point when the two methods – discursive and social analyses – are used in a complementary way. The dialectical relation between the discursive and the material domains requires a dynamic analysis that allows fluidity between the two methods. Such an approach could answer the questions of how and why discourses emerged, how the historical world was internalised or inscribed in texts and when the moments of

29 Geoff Eley and Keith Nield praised Canning’s work using the following words: “Kathleen Canning’s work has disengaged class from the sovereignty of “objective” economic and social interests. Grounded in imaginative and meticulous studies of labour markets, workplace organisation, job cultures, family and household dynamics, industrial relations, and so on, she nonetheless opens class formation to a wider process of cultural and political definition. Here at least, social history of the classical kind and readings of language and political history are the opposite of incompatible.” (“Farewell to the Working Class?”, International Labour and Working Class History, Vol. 57, 2000, p. 8.)

30 Canning, “Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn, p. 380. Canning borrows the formulation from Judith Walkowitz who analysed the production and circulation of cultural meanings and their material contexts in the pretext of a melodrama from late Victorian period on the sexual danger faced by the young working-class women. She explains the dialectical relation between material reality and discursive construction as follows: “Material reality always exists as a certain pressure, a destabilising force on cultural production, forcing representations to be reworked, shored up, reconstructed. And the power of representations derives in good part from the material context in which they appear, from the social spaces where they are enunciated, and from the social and political networks that are organised around them” (Judith Walkowitz, Myra Jehlen and Bell Chevigny, “Patrolling the Borders: Feminist Historiography and the New Historicism”, Radical History Review, No. 43, 1989, pp. 23-43.)
inscription of these discursive shifts happened through such an analysis. Hence, Canning’s analysis of the discourses on female labour in Germany challenges the alleged opposition between a discourse “being caused by industrial conditions” and its “helping to shape them.”

The inclusion of social space and power in the analysis of the discursive domain is another methodological point that connects discourse analysis to social history. The recognition of the discursive aspects of class formation and its ideological and material effects on later struggles has been the contribution of the linguistic turn in social sciences to labour history. The discursive domain itself also includes different power positions. The relative power of multiple discourses emanating from the level of their publicity or their hegemonic capacity changes the power dynamics between the carriers of various discourses in the material terrain. Moreover, this conceptualisation also allows us to analyse the ‘defeated’ discourses, the alternatives that once existed, and which were suppressed by others and thus were lost in the archives.

It is this dialectic understanding of the relations between the discursive and material domains that underlines the methodology of the current study. I have briefly mentioned the visual metaphor of a camera zooming in-and-out above the factory to explain the narrative structure of the analysis at hand. The narrative moves continuously between the miniscule details of a worker’s experience on the shop floor and the macro level socio-economic developments. These moves are extensions from the micro context to the totality that shapes it. In other words, the narrative is underlined by a process of induction from the particular situation. The analyses of workers’ language answers the two-fold question of the material context of discursive struggles around subjectivity and representations, on the one hand, and the constitutive power of these representations, on the other. The inscriptions of the material context in the discourses are revealed through a thorough examination of the written texts by workers themselves. The method of close reading allows us to reconstruct the inner worlds of workers through a study of their choice of words, their mode of thinking and presentation of their ideas, and the ways they make sense of their environment. When the written texts left by the management are added to the study, a more dynamic relation between these modes is revealed. The travel from the close reading of written texts abruptly carries us to a much larger scale of development in material reality. I move continuously between the task of documenting a worker’s language and the possible factors that made that language possible.

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31 Canning, “Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn”, p. 382.
Obviously, these both change. When we consider the question of when a certain representation needs to be reworked and restructured arises, or whether a peculiar restructuring works or not, the analysis necessarily returns to the materialist approach.

In this study, I particularly focus on two discourses and their interactions: nationalism and working-class politics. The emergence of a language of class, I will argue, was shaped through discursive contestations between these two. Both their individual constructions and their interactions are shaped and reshaped according to the time, context and the agendas of their agents. Individuals shift between different discourses depending on these three conditions; and this constitutes one of the kernels of this study. When studying workers’ self-perceptions and representations, I focus on these changes and shifts in the context of the interactions between the processes of nationalism and proletarianisation and their corresponding discourses.

The Problem of Eurocentrism

The second significant debate on labour historiography concerns an issue that has originated in other disciplines. Different from the linguistic turn where labour historians borrowed mainly from other disciplines, in this case, labour and social historians have made considerable contributions to the debate that went beyond their fields in effect. The issue at stake is a complex one that can possibly be best summarised as the Eurocentric character of the theory and historiography of working-class formation. As the empirical studies coming from Asia, Africa and Latin America increased in number, it became clear that the basic concepts of the field were not working for a vast majority of the world population and thus it was necessary to de-Occidentalise the field and develop a truly comparative approach.\(^32\) It is in such a context that suggestions for broadening the definition and conceptualisation of what constitutes labour, and considering the contours of the working class as fluid, gain utmost importance.\(^33\)

Within labour history, the predominant debates concerning the Eurocentric critic have mostly concerned the narrative of transition from pre-capitalist to capitalist social relations and the cultural assumptions that accompany that transition. The narrative of transition from


pre-capitalist to capitalist social relations is based on the acceptance on the universality of the Western trajectory. It presupposes that capitalism would cause the complete dissolution of pre-capitalist forms of labour control by inscribing the entire field of social relations. According to this logic, categories such as unfree labour or partial proletarianisation belong to the pre-history of capitalism. The problem with this narrative is that, when the analysis is ensconced in the terminology of free and unfree, the gray zones of the matter, the partially-proletarianised labourers are left aside.  

An important aspect of the problem concerns the origins of the industrial proletariat. The European literature on industrial working-class formation indicates two types of origins of the industrial proletariat: agricultural workers who were tied off from land and artisans who gradually lost access to the means of production and thus had to become proletarians. This narrative, however, does not always explain the situation in non-Western parts of the world where pre-capitalist and capitalist social relations have co-existed in a context of different modes of labour control. In Chapter 1, I will revisit this issue in the section on the origins of the industrial proletariat. Suffice to note here is the multiplicity of the process of transitions that implies a multiplicity of working-class formations and politics. The second debate on cultural assumptions speaks also to this aspect of historical studies of labour. It has revealed that certain cultural aspects of working-class formation and labour movements had been based on the experiences of European labourers and yet they had been presented as universal. What arose was an epistemology of absence which points to the lack of these specific cultural traits as the reason for the historical divergence of the non-West from the history of labour in

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35 Though it is a fact that the key works of the field had been about Western Europe and thus the key concepts were defined using historical examples from that part of the world, it would be wrong to think of histories of labour in Western and non-Western parts of the world as separate and completely incompatible examples. Historical inquiry is a type of quest that does not lend itself easily to ready-made theoretical generalisations. Such generalisations would make us blind to differences between working-class formations in nineteenth-century England and Germany when we talk of Western European histories of labour on one side and Indian labour history on the other. Concepts such as core and periphery do not have much explanatory value in a historical analysis because historicising makes both comparison and grouping quite different. However, it is also true that within the development of world-historical capitalism, there are certain general characteristics that are visible in some parts of the world but not in others. In the case of labour history, the most important characteristics of this kind would be the incompleteness of the process of proletarianisation due to capital’s different strategies of labour control, the differences in state formation under colonialism, and delays and contradictions in the process of internalising the logic of capitalist mode of production such as the perception of time and the work discipline. The important point, however, is to understand these not as opposing tendencies within capitalism but as different strategies of labour control deployed by capital. Histories of labour in different parts of the world cannot be treated as isolated, unrelated stories with their own logic of development.
the Western world, and regardless of the fact that the latter is far from being a singular history.

In this study, I follow one of the strongest aspects of the Eurocentric critique of the new social history paradigm. This has been the call for attention to the effects of differences in state formation on the development of working-class collectivity. Initiated by Subaltern Studies’ efforts to develop an alternative to both colonialist and nationalist historiography of India, the analysis of the colonial state and its shaping of the social relations has become a centrepiece in Indian historiography. Arguably, the labour historian whose work has been most widely discussed in this regard is Dipesh Chakrabarty. In his study on Bengalese labour history, *Rethinking Working-Class History*, Chakrabarty deals with the tension underlying the historical narratives of the periphery: the pendulum between universalism and exceptionalism. The source of this ‘soul torturing antitheses,’ he argues, lies in the fact that the categories and concepts of Marxian analysis, which are based on culture-specific assumptions, have been treated as being universal and applied to the Indian – or any other non-Western – setting without any critical engagement by the labour historians.\(^{36}\) Thus, the question that concerns us most would be how to use the conceptual tools of labour history in histories of peripheral working classes.

Naturally, the question comes down to the evaluation of the political role assigned to the working classes, which has not been realised in the case of India as well as others. Rather than coming up with explanations of why it did not happen, Chakrabarty directs our attention to a totally different level and questions why we expect it to happen in the first place. His reasoning is that this expectation is based on some culturally specific assumptions such as the liberal state tradition and the notion of citizenship. In other words, where these preconditions did not exist, it is meaningless to use the terminology of the historical mission of the working classes to begin with:

If the particular notions of “free-born Englishman,” of “equality before the law,” and so on were the most crucial heritages of the English working class in respect of its capacity for developing class consciousness, what about the working classes – for instance, the Indian one – whose heritages do not include such a liberal baggage? Are the latter

condemned then forever to a state of “low classness” unless they develop some kind of cultural resemblance to the English?  

Rethinking Working-Class History is an attempt to answer this question in the context of colonial India where the ‘working class’ was “born into a culture characterised by the persistence of precapitalist relationships” and tries to answer the question of how this condition affects its capacity for class and revolutionary action. To do so, Chakrabarty goes beyond the writings on labour history by locating the source of the problem in the culturally specific assumptions of hegemonic bourgeois culture in Marx’s writings. Once the problem is carried to this level, the incorporation of the ‘cultural’ to the writings of labour history becomes inevitable. Thus, Chakrabarty argues that “a theoretical understanding of the working class needs to go beyond the ‘political-economic’”. Besides the cultural aspects, labour history should also be thought of as a part of “the relevant history of citizenship and hence as a part of the biography of the state”. Underlying this argument is Chakrabarty’s claim that the assumption of hegemonic bourgeois culture is intertwined with state formation and the relations between state and capital, on the one hand, and between state and labour, on the other. Thus, Rethinking Working Class should be read as a dialogue with Marxism on consciousness, the nature of working-class politics, and the dialectic between citizenship and the process of proletarianisation.

In fact, the call to attend state as an independent variable and state action as a potentially important influence on socio-political outcomes was made within labour history in the 1980s. This call was part of the movement of bringing the state back into social analysis based on the argument that the social sciences have ignored the state’s centrality to the explanation of social change. Ira Katznelson’s article in Bringing the State Back In, argued that teleological assumptions were partly the result of the economy- and state-centred explanations. This is yet another critique of the assumption that organised class-conscious working classes naturally emerge from the process of capitalist industrialisation. To Katznelson, issues such as the timing of democratisation in relation to capitalist industrialisation, the growth of the national state, and the legal conditions under which working-class organisations had to operate were important factors that affected working-class

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37 Ibid., p. 222.
38 Ibid., p. xiii.
39 Ibid., p. 65.
action. Important here are the connections Katznelson makes between state actions and the creation of meaning pertaining to the language of class. These are conceptualised as factors that “shape and inform the creation of meaning about class expressed in language, dispositions, and organisations” and “established the vocabularies and institutional forms that workers would develop to shape and represent their demands directed both to employers and to the state”. This conceptualisation would allow us to include the state as an independent variable in our studies of working-class formation not only as the regulator of material conditions, but also of the discursive constructions.

The contribution of non-Western labour history to this idea of incorporating state actions is its interrogation of the universalistic claims on state formation. Once that formation is studied in terms of its peculiarities, it is seen that different mechanisms of displacement of labour-capital conflict has been at work in different contexts. For example, under colonialism, it becomes more difficult to distinguish the acts of workers against the state from the acts of workers against the bourgeois since the two are often close allies. In the absence of bourgeois revolutions in which the state at least appears to be the common aspiration of both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the state is likely to be an instrument of capital, both of a native and colonial kind. This close relationship could even give way to arguments such as the claim that the principal contradiction of the working poor was with the colonial state, not with the employers. Consequently, labour history should be concerned with the general position of the state towards the working classes. It is this general position that I conceptualise as one of the axes of the present study. The period of the study covers the etatist period of Turkish economy, that is, the years between 1932 and 1950. The detailed analysis of etatism as a moment of state-formation is provided in Chapter 1. Here, I will give a short historical background to the period studied, and then outline the theoretical considerations and the methodological disquisitions that determine the choice of period as a particular moment of working-class formation in Turkey.

Differential Temporalities

The Turkish Republic was founded in 1923, the last year of the Anatolian War with the victory of the Turkish nationalist forces under the command of Mustafa Kemal and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Though the Republic signified a clear political break from the Empire, the structure and the organisation of the economy remained intact. The economic heritage of the Empire was characterised by a vulnerable economic structure dependent mainly on exporting agricultural products. Industrial activity was very low. The dominance of foreign capital and merchants had already been problematised since the beginning of the century, and creating a national economy was commonly cited as the only way to economic sovereignty. But the Empire’s way of integration into the world capitalist system did not leave much space to this first peripheral area to become an independent nation-state to manoeuvre. Thus, the Turkish economy in the 1920s was characterised by an exceptional openness. The new government was bound by pre-republican agreements until 1929, and no restrictions were legislated on the movement of foreign capital. The state budget constituted 8-9 per cent of the gross national income. The Republic had neither a central economic institution nor a sound economic policy, and the institutions involved in the economy were a part of the Ottoman heritage. The new state, thus, was an ideal example of the laissez-faire ideology. Consequently, economic structure stayed intact until the effects of the Great Depression and the dynamics of changing class alliances made it impossible to sustain. But the following decade witnessed increasing state intervention in the economy, an intervention that bestowed the state with the role of the employer as well as regulator of the economy. Numerous state factories emerged during this period; some were newly constructed, others were taken over from administrative bodies by Sümerbank, the holding that was established to run state factories. The number of employees in state industrial enterprises reached 70,455 in 1938 and increased to 146,902 in 1948. Sümerbank employed 20,000 workers in 1940, 22,000 in 1945 and 30,050 in 1950.

46 “Sümerbank İştirai Teşkilat Raporu”, in Sümerbank 1940 senesi faaliyet ve hesap devresine ait Idare Meclisi raporu, bilanco, kar ve zarar hesabi, (Ankara: TBMM Matbaası, 1941), p.1; Sümerbank 1946 senesi faaliyet ve hesap devresine ait Idare Meclisi raporu, bilanco, kar ve zarar hesabi, (İstanbul: n.p., 1947), p.1; Başbakanlık
Besides the change in the economic policy, the 1930s were also characterised by the emergence of a new state form characterised by the identification of the Republican People’s Party, the party that Mustafa Kemal himself founded and that remained in power until 1950, with the state apparatus. After this full congruency between state administration and party organisation was declared, increasing suppression of civil rights and societal autonomy followed, which also included the heavy oppression of the working class and the denial of the existence of the social classes in the populist Kemalist regime. All these political and economic changes were achieved with the aid of an ideology of nationalism. The process of proletarianisation happened in the context of the emergence of a new politics of nation and citizenship.

The socio-historical problem that the simultaneity of these two processes poses could best be understood through a relational analysis of state politics and production politics. I chose to deploy a rather eclectic theoretical framework for the analysis presented here. This is mainly because the scope of the monographic study at hand could serve only as a starting point for a thorough understanding of the dynamics of a working-class formation process in Turkey. Thus, it would raise more questions than answers on that process. To begin with, it is necessary to conceptualise the relationship between the temporalities of economics and politics. These are the two differential temporalities of nation-building and proletarianisation; interdependent in a contingent way. In an article on the constituents and conditions of working-class collectivity, Göran Therborn defines the relationship of political and economic time, specifically the time of industrial take-off and the time of political development, as one of the key determinants of national working-class collectivity:

Historiographic evidence would appear to support the idea that a coincidence of economic and political time – of industrial take-off and of popular struggles for political rights of participation – is the most propitious for the creation of a national working-class collectivity. Prior industrialisation means a politically inexperienced proletariat, very vulnerable, in its loose organisational forms, to ruling-class repression.47

I argue that working-class formation in Turkey exemplifies this specific relationship of political and economic time. The period of industrial take-off in Turkey starts from the

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beginning of the 1930s when the state took industrialisation upon itself.\textsuperscript{48} Popular struggles for political rights of participation, on the other hand, came only after WWII. The end of the single-party regime and the increasing popularity of the main opposition party, the Democrat Party, which resulted in its electoral victory in 1950 general election, indicated an increasing politicisation of everyday life. As I will show in Chapter 4, the DP had considerable electoral base among the workers; after 1947, the labour movement was increasingly fragmented around political party affiliations. The DP government was celebrated as the people’s government, which came after twenty-seven years of authoritarian rule.

Though mind-opening as a venture point, the study of the effects of the relationship of economic and political time keeps the focus mainly on the level of societal developments, and thus does not allow us to amend the historiographic oversights in the study of the process of class formation.\textsuperscript{49} Since the unit of analysis here is the factory site, we need to take a step further in the direction of theorising the shop floor activity in relation to the general level of politics and analyse the shop floor determinants of working-class collectivity. One attempt to such theorisation is Michael Burawoy’s \textit{The Politics of Production}, which connects the working-class interventions in history to the effects of the process of production by way of expanding the study of that process beyond its purely economic moment. Burawoy’s methodological rationale to carry out this analysis corresponds to the historiographic motivations I outlined above: the examination of real workers in their productive circumstances even when passivity predominates. In Burawoy’s own words, the notion of politics of production “aims to undo the compartmentalisation of production and politics by linking the organisation of work to the state.”\textsuperscript{50}

The process of production, in this framework, is conceptualised beyond its objective shaping of the industrial working-class; it also entails the subjective dimensions by way of shaping the struggles engendered by a specific experience or interpretation of the type of labour it carries out. What emerges is a dynamic interrelationality between the shop floor and the societal level of politics. The methodological

\textsuperscript{48}“Aided by the recovery in the world economy after 1933, Turkish industry expanded. It is from this period that the take-off can be dated, based on import substitution in light industries and the less sophisticated heavy industries…[P]rogress was thwarted by conditions during the Second World War, but the first phase of Turkish industrialisation was completed in the 1950s.” (W.W. Rostow, \textit{The World Economy: History and Prospect}, [Texas: University of Austin Press, 1978], p. 76).

\textsuperscript{49}Lüdtke evaluates the effort to amend those oversights as follows: “[O]ur historical interest in the realities of everyday life, the hopes and anxieties of people at gross roots level, appears to be a kind of ‘compensatory modernisation’” (“Polymorphous Synchrony”, p. 44). This formulation indeed captures one of the underlying motivations of this study. As I have noted above, the literature on Turkish nationalism mostly reproduces a narrative of the Western-style modernisation process. To look for the everyday, subaltern manifestations of that process would produce an alternative set of questions, if not answers on that process.

basis of this analysis is a relational notion of the labour process defined in terms of its effects on the reproduction of social relations, both inside and outside the workplace. Burawoy argues for a conceptualisation of the labour process that goes beyond the apparent reproduction of the relations in production by state apparatuses and attracts our attention to its reproductive effects on relations of domination that originate outside production.

In Burawoy’s analysis, the political and ideological effects of the organisation of work, i.e. the labour process, and the distinctive political and ideological apparatuses of production constitute the two political moments of the process of production. The analytical category he arrives at by way of this conceptualisation is the concept of factory regimes. A factory regime is determined by a constellation of the following factors: labour process, enterprise relations to state and market, and the mode of reproduction of labour power. Based on the configuration of these four, Burawoy defines four types of factory regimes each of which has different effects on working-class collectivity. I will refrain from explaining these different types since my current purposes do not entail the determination of the particular factory regime Bakırköy Factory had during the period under study. Indeed, such an endeavour would necessitate a thorough and systematic analysis of the four factors mentioned. Neither the scope nor the main analytical axes of this study allows such an analysis. Rather, I selectively use one of the independent variables of Burawoy’s factory regimes model: the institutional relationship between apparatuses of factory and of state. Burawoy explains the significance of that relationship through the comparison of the South Chicago division of a multinational corporation, Allied, where he worked as a machine operator in 1974 and the Red Star Tractor Factory in Budapest where Miklós Haraszti worked as a mill operator in 1971:

At Allied, the factory apparatuses and state apparatuses were institutionally separated; at Red Star they were fused. To be sure, the state intervened to shape the form of factory apparatuses at Allied, but it was not physically present at the point of production. At Red Star, management, party and trade union were arms of the state at the point of production.\(^{51}\)

I argue that it was this fusing of the management, party and trade union that characterised the context of work at Bakırköy Factory. Furthermore, this fusion was circumscribed by the specific simultaneity of the two aforementioned processes. What emerged was a national

factory in the sense that its function was defined as serving the creation of the national economy. That was why it did not operate under stringent profit constraints; and its workers were expected to patriotically relate to their labour. Discourses around its existence manifested various expressions of nationalism ranging from the comparison of factory work with military service to describing a work stoppage attempt as an act of betrayal to the homeland. The emergence of the language of class at that national factory was shaped by these references that were partially internalised by Bakırköy workers as well.

The theoretical considerations outlined so far make the research question here more specific: how did the category of worker as a form of subjectivity emerge at a state-owned textile producing enterprise where factory apparatuses and state apparatuses were fused in early Republican Turkey? I analyse the effects of the labour process at Bakırköy on that process in detail in the following chapters. But, to study the self-perceptions, representations and the development of the political languages of the Bakırköy workers, we need to understand how workers related to this image of Bakırköy Factory as a national site of production. This is the point where Burawoy’s conceptualisation of production politics and state politics as interrelated realms is significant for the current study. However, to attend to the levels of subjectivity constructed under such conditions of industrial work, we need other concepts that would carry us to the realm of perceptions, representations and subjectivity. In his historical analysis of the image and concept of “German quality workmanship” as a symbolic representation of German workers, Alf Lüdtke invokes the concept of “national labour” that could bridge the two levels of politics in terms of their interconnected effects on workers’ subjectivity. Encompassing a variety of work-related virtues that cut across different labour processes ranging from craft trades to heavy industry, this symbolic representation gained a new meaning with the war mobilisation in 1914:

Quality workmanship was pointedly transformed into patriotic effort: “national labour.” After 1918, “national labour” and “quality workmanship” were fused in the modifier-plus-noun formula of deutsche Qualitätsarbeit…The images and formulae deutsche Qualitätsarbeit carried a double load of semantic freight: on the one hand, an appeal to work experiences and attitudes; on the other, a patriotic reference to their significance for the “whole nation.”52

This class-transcended image of labour was seen in other national contexts such as the Stakhanov campaigns in the Soviet Union and the New Deal USA with specific aspects of

52 Lüdtke, “Polymorphous Synchrony”, pp. 80-1.
national-state ideology. I argue that the category of state work in the early Republican Turkish context was also characterised by this image. The patriotic references to labour at state factories in particular and to labour in general in early Republican Turkey shaped the political language of the labour movement to a great extent. The language on labour, its collective organisation, strikes, and social benefits are full of these references. The common designation of workers as Turkish workers during this period, I argue, constrained labour politics to a great extent. But, at the same time, it politically enabled workers by means of allowing them to participate in politics through their inclusion in the national community.

On the Mode of Presentation

While it has been true that patterns of working-class formation, organisation and action have been seen mainly as a function of the characteristics of the process of capitalist industrialization, attention has been directed to differences and variations in working-class formation within new social history.\(^{53}\) One such attempt was the edited volume by Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zoldberg, which sought to explain the divergent patterns of class formation from a comparative and theoretical perspective. In the introductory article of this volume, Katznelson provides a model to study the variations and differences in working-class formation in four layers: the structure of capitalist economic development, the social organization of society lived by actual people in real social formations including workplace social relations and labour markets, the range of shared dispositions and common experience among groups of working people, and the modalities of collective action.\(^{54}\)

Katznelson’s approach to working-class formation has many interesting novelties, three of which bear the highest importance for my current purposes. I think of these three related points as openings to a more nuanced and accurate writing of working-class formation. First, the model of levels of working-class formation does not present these four levels in a teleological manner. In other words, there is not a causal relationship between the different levels that gives way to a pre-determined outcome. Among, other things, this allows the student of working-class formation the much-needed space to account for the “failures” as well as the “successes” of that class in attaining revolutionary consciousness.

\(^{53}\) Thompson made this explicit in terms of the study of the working-class consciousness: “Consciousness of class arises in the same way in different times and places, but never in just the same way” (The Making of the English Working-Class, p. 10).

\(^{54}\) Katznelson, Working-Class Formation, pp. 15-19.
Also related to the first point, Katznelson’s model, as Silver rightly points out, is an attempt to unpack the class-in-itself/class-for-itself master narrative.\(^{55}\) Although, at one point, it sounds as if the model is a prerequisite of the further improved usage of that dichotomous division, the strength of the model is clearly specified immediately after: “With the specification of different levels it becomes possible to construct the various cases of class formation in their own terms.”\(^{56}\) Thus, the student of labour history could leave the narratives of failure behind and focus on the particularities of specific historical processes in their own right.

Third, the model, mainly by endowing the term “class” with an analytical content, enables the historian of class formation to carry out a multidimensional analysis. Covering both the structural and cultural processes of working-class formation, the model, just as Katznelson suggests, allows the researcher to bring a wide variety of economic, social and political phenomena together in a holistic manner. The inclusion of the state-centred questions alongside the economy and society-centred ones in the set of determinants of working-class formation deserves further attention for the purposes of the current study.\(^{57}\) Some questions Katznelson lists in this regard concern the formation of the nation-state, the extent and character of state bureaucratization, the state capacity to tax, conscript, repress, and make public policy authoritatively, and the content of various public policies such as labour law. Both as an actor and “a shaper of the motives, interests, strategies, and activities of other actors”,\(^{58}\) the state acquires a central role in the shaping of the working-class formation.

It is due to these three openings that the organization of chapters follows the four layers of working-class formation. I start from the experience-distant level of macro-scale socio-economic developments, go through the workplace social relations and arrive at the experiences of workers recounted in their petitions, newspaper articles and interviews. The application of the levels approach to class formation, it should be noted, does not imply a linear progression but establishes the connections between different layers of working-class formation by way of studying the interrelations between material conditions and discursive constructions.

\(^{55}\) Beverly Silver, *Forces of Labour*, p.31.
\(^{56}\) “Without clear analytical distinctions between levels or layers of class, it is hard to improve on the “class in itself-for itself” model” (Katznelson, *Working-Class Formation*, p. 14).
\(^{57}\) Ibid., pp. 30-31.
\(^{58}\) Ibid., p. 31.
Outline of Chapters

The first chapter is on the structure of capitalist economic development of early Republican Turkey. By means of connecting the Republican regime to its Ottoman heritage in political and economic terms, it shows the historical roots of state-led industrialisation of the 1930s and 40s. The chapter also portrays the general characteristics of state structure during this period and argues that the implementation of etatism was a constituent of a new state form. By means of providing a bird’s-eye view of the constellation of nationalism and state-led industrialisation, this chapter illustrates how the former shaped the latter. The practical applications of etatism, such as the first five-year plan, the establishment of Sümerbank, its taking over of old factories and establishing new factories in Anatolia are also analysed in Chapter 1, within the framework of the reproductive effects of state power. The analysis here explains the process of the young Turkish state’s assuming the role of the employer in the field of industrial production. A section on the historical background of Bakırköy Factory describes the story of this original Ottoman enterprise that came to be an economic space defined through the Republican ideology. In a nutshell, the chapter argues that Bakırköy Factory was designed as a national factory; i.e. a factory that would be in the service of the nation, and thus its workers were expected to be conscious on their duty towards the homeland.

The second chapter is our entrance point to Bakırköy Factory. Here, I move away from the experience-distant level of class I analysed in the previous chapter to an analysis of the main features of the process of production and the relations in production, i.e. work-place social relations. These social relations are shaped simultaneously by the greater social and political environment that surrounds them. To a greater extent, this chapter deals with the former direction. I mainly use the concept of politics of production to understand the political and ideological, as well as the economic, moments of the labour process at Bakırköy Factory. Starting from the moment they apply for work, I portray the workers’ multi-faceted experiences on the shop floor. The chapter provides detailed information on the factory’s policy of recruitment, systems of remuneration, the managerial control of the labour process, the reproduction of labour power, the provision of social welfare and the strategies of the workers to cope with problems. Workers’ lives outside the factory are also partially analysed here, especially pertaining to their housing conditions and their rural ties.

This chapter brings together a variety of archival material in order to reconstruct the working and living conditions of Bakırköy workers. Thus, a dialogue with studies on Turkish
labour history underlies the chapter. Most important among these are the factory files, which include written material documenting the correspondence between workers and the management. As such, I insert the voice of the workers into the analysis and revisit some of the assumptions of Turkish labour historiography that attained the status of historiographic common sense with new archival material. One of the most significant among these assumptions concerns the very high turn-over rates at state factories. This is often attributed to the partial character of proletarianisation meaning the state workers were not completely cut off from means of subsistence thanks to their ensuing rural ties. I show in this chapter that this explanation does not hold for Bakırköy workers. A close reading of the excuses they gave for leaving the factory, the pattern of exiting and re-entering the factory and the management’s attitude towards these prove that Bakırköy workers did not continue to have strong rural ties. In some cases, it is even possible to establish that they chose to work for private factories in between their entries to Bakırköy Factory.

This takes us to another discussion: the allegedly higher wage levels of state workers compared to private sector workers in this period. The concept of labour aristocracy is invoked to state the differences in working and living conditions of state and private sector workers. Here also, evidence from workers’ files challenges the calculations on state workers’ remuneration levels. Obviously, the data does not have much representational value due to the limited size of the sample. However, there is another significant issue at stake here, namely, the dependence of labour historians on material produced by the state. Besides the biased character of these figures, the exclusive use of this type of material results in labour historians interpreting the data through the eyes of the state. In this regard, the presentation of new evidence on wage levels, which continues into Chapter 3, is important in the sense of changing our historiographic lens.

The issue of social provisions is another topic where this lens change is most needed. In Chapter 2, I argue that these provisions should be interpreted as part of the Turkish state’s efforts to create a new subjectivity, one that is in accordance with the political as well as the economic needs of the young Republic. Instead of interpreting state welfare policies, either as an act of benevolence or a tactical move and thus keep the focus on state’s motivations and concern, I move the focus on how these were received by the workers. Another significant point rises here concerning the treatment of state workers as a uniform group. I argue that not enough attention has been paid to the time and space differentials among state workers. In
Chapter 2, I distinguish between state factories’ working and living conditions based on the effects of spatial differences on conditions of employment.

In Chapter 3, I take an even closer step into the world of Bakırköy workers as I analyse the changes in the self-understanding and perceptions of Bakırköy workers against the labour control regime imposed upon them. This chapter deals with the key role played by petitioning in labour-management relations at Bakırköy Factory in the 1940s by means of analyzing five aspects of petitions: timing, frequency, addressee, content and vocabulary. This is, in a way, a Geertzian social analysis as described by Ira Katznelson, since the micro-historical case study of the petitions enables us to construct the world-view of the rank-and-file workers. Through a close reading of Bakırköy workers’ petitions and the commentaries of the management on these petitions, I portray the dynamics of the worker-management relations at the shop floor. By means of discerning the changes in these petitions over time, I aim to show that the workers’ self-perceptions and the representations of these self-perceptions underwent a dramatic change in the early Republican period.

As the analysis here is based on the written correspondence between labour and management, it exemplifies the relational aspect of class formation. The nature of the relationship is conceptualised as one of action and reaction; and thus it includes instances of both adaptation and resistance. The analysis is built upon the conditions of employment studied in the previous chapter, and as such, it depicts the ways in which the workers themselves interpreted these conditions. The diachronic analysis of petitions gives us clues about how workers construct meaning. That entails the formation and reformation of their understanding of the social system and their values of justice. They could be analysed as the plausible and meaningful responses to the circumstances workers found themselves in. As such, they present the possible visions of Bakırköy workers on what it is to be a worker at a time when the socio-political environment around them is fast changing. In this regard, Chapter 3 reveals a threshold point when a dramatic change in workers’ language happened. That point is the end of the war. To argue that, however, does not necessarily mean that this happened because of the changing international context. On the contrary, the confluence of a number of factors, including the official beginning of the labour movement, made it possible.

The importance of the analysis presented in Chapter 3 stems from its ability to reveal the undocumented, unregistered instances of resistance. Not collective in character, these instances cannot point to the formation of a working-class collectivity per se. But they clearly show that workers could make sense of the changing political environment around them and
formulate a language of complaint accordingly. In this regard, Chapter 3 introduces a very important archival document for the study of labour-management relations at state factories. This is presented in the form of a transcription of the interrogation of a worker by the factory management. A first example of its kind, this document is significant for it allows us to reconstruct that encounter, which presents a number of power relations and subsequent strategies of resistance. A close reading of the choice of arguments by both parties, and the words in which they were expressed, brings us closer to the dynamics of representation at a state factory.

By means of connecting these languages to the wider socio-political dynamics, I aim to explain what made certain language possible and effective in workers’ dealings with the management. Thus, to an extent, Chapter 3 also deals with the changing character of state-society relations throughout the 1940s. In a way, Bakırköy workers’ petitions could be read as written correspondence between the state and its subject. Working at a state factory meant encountering the state on a daily basis in an employee-employer relationship. To what extent the Bakırköy workers perceived these encounters in this way, we cannot know. But the factory management’s dealing with the petitions clearly reflected the workings of state bureaucracy. Moreover, the fact that some workers turned to the Sümerbank General Directorate and the Prime Ministry when their petitions to the factory management did not yield the desired result suggests that they perceived the factory as a part of the state bureaucracy. As such, my analysis of the petitions sheds light on the changes in the way an ordinary working citizen positioned himself vis-à-vis the early republican Turkish state.

Having covered the relations of and in production on the shop floor in Chapters 2 and 3, I take the reader outside the factory in the final chapter. This chapter examines the working-class collectivity at Bakırköy Factory in relation to the changing state-labour relations during the post-World War II period. This is where the first axis of the study, namely the interrelations between the processes of proletarianisation and nationalisation, is analysed most systematically. The chapter begins with a brief introduction on the background of the emergence of trade unions in 1947. In this section, I explore the connection between the understudied trade unionism of 1946 and the Turkish state’s efforts to contain the labour movement through the Trade Union Law of 1947, a law that crippled the development of the labour movement from the start. The literature on early trade unionism evaluates this phase of labour movement as an ineffective and subdued period of working-class politics. The Republican People’s Party’s (RPP) efforts to control and contain the trade union movement
are given extensive emphasis. It is true that the movement was to a large extent controlled by the state. But, by means of arriving at overgeneralised conclusions arrived through hindsight, such analyses conceal the alternative voices and visions within that movement. It is at this point that the level of analysis of the factory becomes functional in revealing these suppressed moments of alternative politics and resistance. In some ways, this means that I am further pursuing the question raised in the third chapter, namely the changes in the self-perception and presentations of workers in the post-WWII context, in the context of the labour movement. As such, I move from individual to more collective moments of resistance, but this does not mean that I lose track of the individual workers in that collectivity.

In this chapter, I mainly follow the politicisation processes of two weavers from Bakırköy. These two weavers represent two different alternatives to the RPP-steered trade unionism. The first one, Enver, was a member of a liberal party that criticised the government for its etatist policies. Throughout the period that I follow him, his political trajectory did not change dramatically. The second weaver, Ahmet, on the other hand, underwent a political transformation as he moved from the main opposition party, DP, to a more working-class based party, and finally found a communist party in 1954. In terms of reconstructing their experiences on the shop floor, trade union meetings and in the arena of formal politics to an extent, I aim to illustrate the changes in their mentality pertaining to their self-perceptions, political visions and ideas of the labour movement. I also analyse the horizontal relations among workers through their interaction on the shop floor as well as at trade union meetings. The difference in how their stories end shows us the limits of dissidence accepted by the dominant ideology.

This final chapter has much to offer in terms of our understanding of the interactions between the discursive construction of nationalism and working-class politics. Using material on the trade union movement in general, I portray a general picture of the language of trade unionism. That language is heavily affected by nationalism, references to the nation as community, Turkish people as a family and national enemies – mostly communists – trying to undermine sovereignty abound. I analyse these as the effects of the displacement of labour-capital conflict through nationalism. But the question remains of how that language was internalised and sometimes even used in a tactical manner. In this chapter, I add two new dimensions on the construction and the workings of the nationalist discourse during this period. The first concerns the uses of the nationalist discourse to control and contain the trade union movement, while the second examines the ways in which this discourse was used both
by different factions within the movement against more radical visions of state-society relations and by the movement as a tool to convince the state to recognise the legitimacy of its claims.

Sources and Method

In general, the section on the sources of a dissertation is often rather predictable: a list of different sources and the ways they are used is described, and the main methods deployed in the analysis are explained. My version will be slightly different. I would like to give an autobiographical account of the archival research for this project for that story itself speaks of the social history of the Turkish Republic. In other words, it is not just the content of the archival material but the very conditions of its existence, and non-existence for that matter, and of access to it that deserves the attention of a social historian studying Turkey.

The autobiographical account of this project’s trajectory is helpful in two ways. First, it helps the reader to better understand the choices of scope and the design of the study. Important in this regard is the silence of the manuscript on female labour. This has basically been the effect of the reproduction of the silence of the archival material on the issue. Second, such an account would reveal the difficulty awaiting Turkish labour historians in the archives. Many complaints have been made on the limitedness of the archival material on the early Republican period. Burke specifies three types of archival material – other than newspapers, magazines, journals, personal documents such as diaries and letters by workers – that labour historians could use: first are the documentation kept by workers’ organisations, trade unions and left-wing political parties, second are the documents private or state enterprises kept on their labour force and third are the documents kept by institutions such as the ministry of labour, employment bureaus and security forces on workers. In what follows, I will assess the availability of these three types of material in the Turkish context by narrating the story of this project’s trajectory.

In its initial formulations, this project was designed as a comparative study of two textile factories, one state-owned and the other private, during the early Republican period. The idea was to compare the production processes and politics in these two factories along the

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lines of labour process, relations in production and reproduction of labour power. This would have been a study based mainly on the factory files of the two enterprises, i.e. the second type of documents mentioned above. Soon after I began the research, I came to realise that this was not possible for it seemed that archival material for the private factory was so scarce that a systematic comparative study would not be achievable. Thus, I decided to turn it into a monograph, as I knew for a fact that Bakırköy Factory files were available to consult. Indeed, researchers had consulted these documents at the actual building site of the factory, which had ceased working in 2004.

Unfortunately, that turned out to also be a disappointment as I learnt that the documents were no longer at the factory when I commenced my archival research. It took nearly six months to locate them and another six to get permission to view them. The files of all Sümerbank factories are stored at The Turkish Republic Prime Ministry General Directorate of the State Archives, Directorate of the Republic Archives in Ankara. Partly because they have not been classified, and partly for other reasons (for example, I was once told that it is illegal for researchers to view the personnel files of people still living), they are not open to researchers. After days of negotiation, the archive officers agreed to show the files to me in the following manner: I was given the inventory of Bakırköy and Defterdar Factory – another Sümerbank textile factory in Istanbul – files and asked to prepare a list of twenty-five files. These were brought from the storage the following day. The inventory was prepared by Sümerbank clerks, I was told, during the period of the purging of the state enterprises. I learnt from a storage worker that the clerks were under the utmost pressure during the time as the process of privatisation was increasingly threatening their employment status. Some were forced to resign at an early age; many were relocated to other state institutions. In fact, that particular storage worker once worked for Sümerbank and was still very bitter about his relocation.

The design of my project was based on the study of the intersections between political and economic developments within the everyday lives of rank-and-file workers. I realised at that moment that my adventures in the state archives had become a perfect example of that intersection. There I was, after months of detective work locating the files of a state factory, in the very building of the archives of the Republic. It was a partial success in the sense that I managed to find out where the files were. But, just when I thought I was about to see the files, a story that connected these files to the neo-liberal recent history of Turkey was unfolding before my very eyes! I was planning to write about workers whom, I thought, had suffered
from the painful process of proletarianisation; yet I found myself in the midst of a history that was destroying the lives of a large number of employees in state enterprises, a process of precarisation.

The inventories were Excel tables containing the following columns: sequence number, employee number, retirement number, social insurance number, name, year of birth, number of documents in the file, sequence number (repeated) and box number. The list did not follow any criteria such as ascending birth year or employee number. In fact, it appeared to be completely unsystematic, making random sampling impossible. For example, a worker born after 1950 followed another one born in 1908. Thus, after a few days of trying to do random sampling, I realised that I had to give up and choose those workers who were born before 1920. This, however, also did not solve the problem entirely since the inventory did not specify whether the worker worked at Bakırköy or Defterdar Factory. My first attempts returned mostly files of Defterdar Factory.

Moreover, in some cases, though the worker was born before 1920, he entered Bakırköy later than 1950. After a trial and error period of several days, I managed to pinpoint a part of the inventory that predominantly listed the names of Bakırköy workers. After that point, the process became a bit faster but the problems with sampling persisted. The biggest problem was the complete overlooking of underage workers. The files I studied did not include any underage employment though I knew for a fact that many children were employed at state factories. Since the names of workers were selected according to their year of birth, however, and because the files of workers from the 1920 period were very hard to find, I could not document the experiences of the underage workers. Furthermore, female workers are underrepresented in the sample compared to their actual numbers on the shop floor due to two reasons: first was because the problems related to the inventory, while the second reason concerns a more sociological problem. In many cases, the files of women gave almost no other information other than basic demographical data.

Another significant problem with the files surfaced after I wrote Chapters 2 and 3, combining the data from the files with other sources of archival material. Chapter 4, the final chapter was intended as a study of working-class political activity at Bakırköy based on a close reading of workers’ experience of trade unionism. However, the files provided virtually no information on trade union affiliations of workers during the 1940s and 1950s. My efforts to acquire such information from the archives of the trade unions were not fruitful either since they are almost non-existent. I spent much time on the phone with professional trade unionists
asking where I could find member names of trade unions in the late 1940s. In most cases, my question triggered sarcastic laughter. In every case, the conversation was very brief. Since the archives of security forces or Ministry of Internal Affairs, i.e. the third type of archival material available to labour historians, are not open to researchers, it was not possible to collect the names of even the ‘dissidents’. At the point when I was about to give up on the fourth chapter, I came across a publication – a weekly newspaper – which reported on trade union activity at Bakırköy Factory and mentioned some names from the administration board of the union. This meant another lengthy study within the inventory, which was well worth the effort since it provided me with the files of thirteen trade unionists. However, this was also problematic because they were all at the administrative level within the union. Thus, my sample was silent on the rank-and-file membership. Furthermore, as could be expected, there was not a single woman among these administrative board members. Women once again fell through the cracks of history; their presence was wiped out during this selective process of archiving. Yet mentioning all these difficulties does not necessarily imply a transfer of responsibility for the omissions and mistakes in the manuscript. I believe there is much work to do in terms of documenting the experiences of the unvoiced labourers of the Turkish labour history. This study has been a small step in that direction, a step that will hopefully be a part of a long and tiring, but rewarding, journey.

The files themselves are a rich source of data. Still, they record only a small part of an individual’s total activity. They do not cover, for example, the interactions among workers on the shop floor. Plus, there are considerable discrepancies between the files in terms of the completeness of the data they provide. Each file includes a job application form requiring personal information, past employment experience and the type of work requested by the worker. But mostly these forms are only partially filled in, and as we could speculate from the similarity of the handwriting, that they were filled out by a clerk. Thus, it was not possible to gather systematic information on workers’ past work experience or the type of work they preferred at the factory.

The second source of archival material used in this study comes from the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam (IISH). This institute has an invaluable collection on Republican Turkey. The collection I have predominantly used is the Kemal Sülker Collection. Sülker was a journalist and trade-union activist. This is a vast collection including a range of documents from newspaper clippings to personal letters, from Sülker’s trade union notes to meeting minutes. I have also used other material from the IISH Turkey Collection such as
newspapers (Hürbilek) and video recordings of in-depth interviews with trade union leaders conducted by Yıldırım Koç in 1988. In this manuscript, I have used two of these interviews, with Bahir Ersoy and Ahmet Cansızoğlu. Ersoy worked as a weaver at Sümerbank Defterdar Factory. He was an active trade unionist from 1947 onwards. Later, he became an MP from the RPP and then the Minister of Labour in the late 1970s. The second interviewee, Cansızoğlu, worked as a weaver at Bakırköy Factory. This interview became most useful because I managed to combine Cansızoğlu’s personal testimony with information in his personnel file and information on his trade union activity from newspapers. His story is the most complete in this study and is thus narrated in great detail in Chapter 4. I also conducted oral history interviews with five Bakırköy workers in Istanbul and Kastamonu in August 2009.

A fourth source of archival material I used is the collection of reports at the Prime Ministry Higher Board of Inspection. There are two types of reports in this archive: factory inspection reports and expert reports. The former begins in 1938 and covers all Sümerbank factories. In addition to annual reports on all Sümerbank factories, these include reports on certain factories and sometimes even thematic reports such as the ones on the labour organisation at state enterprises. These reports have been most useful in a number of ways. They include the presentation of statistical figures, working and living conditions and the decision-making mechanisms. For example, the administrative council reports present precious information on government views on state enterprises; it is also possible to delineate certain parliament members on the ways these affect private business. Though their language is usually very dry, and the information they provide tends to get repetitive at times, they are interesting as they hint at the differences in management and organisational outlooks among the bureaucrats.

The second type of reports begins in 1934. They have been written by a number of experts from various countries. Beginning in the early 1930s, these experts were consulted on policy implementations at first at a time when the Turkish state was trying to formulate its new industrial planning. Among these were Soviet experts who were consulted on the preparation of the first five-year plan, experts from American research firms, and German citizens who escaped from the Nazi regime. These reports also vary in terms of scope: some are on individual factories, some on state enterprises in general and others are on thematic

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issues such as technical facilities or wage regimes. They usually contain comparisons between Turkish and foreign enterprises, containing critical remarks about the former.

This dissertation draws on the review of news and articles in the following papers: Akşam, Cumhuriyet, Haber Akşam Postası, Son Posta, Telgraf, Tan, Yeni Asır. These collections were studied at Beyazıt Kütüphanesi and the National Library of Turkey. I have also consulted the Prime Ministry’s State Archives in Ankara for state documents on labour issues and Sümer Holding papers in Ankara.