

Fatal Workplace Injuries in the İstanbul Tuzla Shipyards
and the Obsession with Economic Development in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation focuses on workplace accidents, a chronic problem in Turkey. I conducted my fieldwork in İstanbul's Tuzla shipyards, where approximately 160 workers have died in work accidents since 1992. The Tuzla shipyards are both a symbol of negative working conditions and chronic work accidents in Turkey, and a site where the definitions, causes, and effects of work accidents are problematized, examined, and contested. In my research, I explore the ways in which various conflicting actors describe, identify, and explain accidents at work in relation to contested understandings, discourses, and practices of development.

To be sure, the definition of accidents at work as preventable or inevitable dramatically shape the evaluation of the problem and the ways in which work accidents were acted upon or not by contesting actors. While I examine the ways that work accidents are identified I also investigate how different actors legitimized their positions in relation to contested understandings of development.

The enduring nature of workplace injuries in rapidly developing Turkey has caused many activists and academics to question the contemporary obsession with development and the belief that economic growth will inevitably lead to social justice. Following these

critical insights, I investigate the relationship between the prioritization of national economic growth and the persistence of workplace injuries in Turkey.

Although I analyze the critiques of work accidents as critiques of the obsession with economic development, I also observed a more complicated narrative of class mobility and the aspiration for development amongst the working class themselves. The Tuzla shipyards zone is not only a uniquely dense industrial zone where workplace injuries are common, but also a unique site where a few workers have been able to quickly form their own subcontractor companies and benefit from rapid economic growth in the shipyards. Based on my ethnographic observations I argue that the dominant discourse about development also affects working classes' aspirations and their desires to have a better life.

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*This dissertation is dedicated to the workers of the world
who have died from preventable workplace injuries*

INTRODUCTION:

Preliminary Information on the Fatal Work accidents in Turkey

Fatal accidents at work are a common phenomenon in Turkey. Starting in 1946, the Turkish Social Security Institution (SGK) has collected statistical information about the fatal accidents at work. According to this data, by the end of 2013 about 62,800 workers died from accidents at work in Turkey.¹ More specifically, in the years while I conducted my fieldwork in Turkey there were 63,000 job accidents and 1454 workers died in 2010. In 2011, 1563 workers died because of the accidents at work.² This means that in Turkey in 2010 and in 2011 on average four workers died in work accidents each day.

According to the European Statistics Agency Eurostat, the proportion of the fatal accidents at work in 100,000 workers is 12.3 in Turkey, while the EU average is 2.1.³ This number places Turkey first in Europe in terms of both the death toll and the fatality rate for workplace accidents. The International Labor Organization (ILO) reports that in Turkey the number of the fatal accidents at work is far higher than the official statements.⁴

¹ Aziz Çelik, "İş Kazası Değil İş Cinayeti: 60 Bin ölü İşçi (Not Work Accidents but Work Murders: 60 Thousand Death Workers)," *t24.com.tr*, accessed March 8, 2016, <http://t24.com.tr/yazi/is-kazasi-degil-is-cinayeti-60-bin-olu-isci/4809>.

² "SGK İstatistikleri (Turkish Social Security Institution Statistics)," 2012, <http://www.sgk.gov.tr/wps/portal/tr/kurumsal/istatistikler>.

³ "Accidents at Work Statistics - Eurostat," 2012, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Accidents_at_work_statistics.

⁴ "XIX World Congress on Safety and Health at Work: Istanbul Turkey, 11-15 September 2011. ILO Introductory Report: Global Trends and Challenges on Occupational Safety and Health" (International Labor Organization, 2011), http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_protect/@protrav/@safework/documents/publication/wcms_162662.pdf.

Furthermore, this number reflects only the officially reported fatal injuries at work and does not cover the unreported cases or the fatalities of unregistered workers. The Turkish Social Security Institution collects statistical data on fatal accidents only if those accidents were reported officially. In most other cases, especially in workplaces where most of the labor force is composed of unregistered workers, such as the Tuzla shipyards, accidents at work are not reported to the authorities.

According to the estimates until the year 2005 unregistered workers made up more than 50% of the workers in Turkey. While the proportion of unregistered workers decreased over time, the Turkish Social Security Institution estimates as of 2014 show that 35% of all workers in Turkey were still unregistered. There is no official data on work accidents for informal, unregistered workers.⁵ Moreover, the number of the workers who are permanently injured or disabled because of work-related diseases, or who have cancer and will die eventually because of the deadly chemicals they were made to use during their work is unknown. The only known fact is that the number of the workers who suffer from work-related diseases is much higher than the known death toll for accidents at work.

The Particularity of the Tuzla Shipyards as an Ethnographic Site

My ethnographic research is an investigation of contesting approaches to the chronic work accidents in Turkey, particularly the ones that took place in the Tuzla shipyards where 160 workers have died in workplace accidents since 1992. Although fatal accidents at work are a common phenomenon in Turkey, before the work accidents in the

⁵ Estimates, retrieved from: “Türkiye’de Kayıt Dışı İstihdam Oranları (The Proportions of the Unregistered Employment in Turkey),” *Turkish Social Security Institution*, 2014, http://www.sgk.gov.tr/wps/portal/tr/sigortalilik/kayitdisi_istihdam/kayitdisi_istihdam_oranlari/.

Tuzla shipyards attracted the attention of the public, only work accidents that took place in mines with a high death toll became news. Yet such accidents are considered as singular cases due to the dispersed locations of the accident sites and the long time spans between such dramatic incidents.

What makes the Tuzla shipyards special however is its density as an industrial zone, where about 40 shipyards are located side by side in a relatively small area. Especially starting from 2006, following the rapid growth in the shipbuilding sector, work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards, in this dense area, took place frequently and regularly, and this allowed the work accidents to be considered and problematized no more singular cases but a structural and chronic issue. Starting from the year 2007 and during 2008 work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards zone became present in the headlines of the major newspapers in Turkey. The socialist labor union in Tuzla, Limter-İş organized two general strikes and numerous demonstrations in 2008, and students from İstanbul's prominent universities Boğaziçi, Koç and Sabancı marched to Tuzla to protest the ongoing workplace fatalities. The first comprehensive collaborative NGO report on the workplace fatalities in Turkey, namely the Tuzla Monitoring Commission Report that I discuss in detail in this dissertation, was also published and widely distributed in the same year. In a short while the Tuzla shipyards zone became both a symbol of negative working conditions in Turkey, and a site where the definitions, reasons, and effects of the work accidents are problematized, examined, and contested.

In order to examine the ways in which work accidents are explained by various actors, my research project is based on both ethnography composed of participant observation, conversations and interviews as well as content and discourse analysis of the

news, reports, and studies on the workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards zone in İstanbul. I conducted my fieldwork in İstanbul's Tuzla shipyards zone from June 2010 to August 2011. In the Tuzla shipyards zone I studied the organization of work, the everyday lives of the workers, the demands and expectations of the labor unions, as well as the reactions of the shipyard owners. In addition to my 15 months of field study, I examined the academic literature, news, official statements, critical declarations, reports and public debates on accidents at work in the Tuzla shipyards. Throughout my study I also followed the news, debates and reports about workplace fatalities in other sectors and places in Turkey.

In my research I analyze how accidents at work are defined, problematized, debated and contested. I especially explore how the discourses, actions and interventions of the workers, activists, academics, shipyard owners and government officials concerning work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards zone are related to particular imaginations, discourses and practices of development and economic growth. To be sure, the definition of accidents at work as preventable or inevitable dramatically shape the evaluation of the problem and the ways in which work accidents were acted upon or not by contesting actors. While I examine the ways that work accidents are identified I also investigate how different actors legitimized their positions in relation to contested understandings of development.

Arguments and Interventions:

a) The Critique of Work accidents as a Critique of Development:

In the first decade of the 21st century, especially after the coming to power of the liberal and Islamist, Justice and Development Party (in Turkish acronym, AKP) in 2002, Turkey was increasingly defined as a model country that “successfully” proved that Islam

and democracy can work in harmony, as well as a country where neoliberalism can “successfully” lead to rapid economic development, and enable it to catch up with Europe in terms of economic measures. Even anthropologist James Ferguson who critically studies developmentalism, has named Turkey together with East Asian countries as, “one of the handful and exceptional examples of success stories of neoliberal development,” in contrast to the overall failure and loss of plausibility of the neoliberal development projects and discourses in the rest of the world, notoriously in Africa, where Ferguson focuses his study.⁶

Similar views about Turkey’s democratic and economic miracle were popular during the first decade of the 21st century, at least until the Gezi Park uprising in June of 2013. The AKP government’s uncompromising attitude and the police brutality that came with the crackdown following demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of people, who claimed and occupied a public park in central İstanbul for fifteen days in order to protect the park from being converted to a shopping mall by the government, contributed to the popular disenchantment with the illusion of the “success” narrative of Turkey. The rest of the world witnessed the wide-range dissatisfaction of Turkey’s people who protested the way in which the environment, economy and politics were governed in Turkey.

However, the critique of development and the prioritization of economic growth over human life and environmental protection which until the Gezi Park uprising was not well-known outside of Turkey, has a history that goes much further back. In this dissertation I examine these critical approaches to the so-called successful development

⁶ James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press Books, 2006), 184.

narrative of Turkey that was popularly taken for granted in both academic and political circles around the world during the first decade of 21st century. My approach is to focus on accidents at work, a chronic problem in Turkey, as one of the negative side effects of rapid economic development.

As a topic of study, work accidents not only open up a critical debate on the costs and effects of rapid economic development, but also in the particular context of Turkey, work accidents are an endured issue whose disclosure challenges the “success story” associated with Turkey’s economic growth and the belief that such economic growth will automatically solve other social and political problems and secure social justice.

In his lectures on *the Birth of Biopolitics*, Michel Foucault discusses the understanding of social justice according to the neoliberal discourses and practices. As Foucault states, the neoliberal idea is based on the assumption that “the enrichment of one country, like the enrichment of one individual, can only really be established and maintained in the long term by mutual enrichment in the form of unlimited economic progress”.⁷ This approach towards neoliberalism can help us in understanding the motivations behind the obsession with the economic growth in Turkey, and government’s introduction of rapid economic growth as a major project for social justice. At this point it is important to note that even the name of the governing party, namely the Justice and Development Party, implies that economic development is a pillar for social justice.

One can observe in Turkey that the major political promise of the governing party before each election is to guarantee economic stability and rapid economic growth. Thus,

⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics : Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 54–55.

the AKP government places the developmentalist discourse and the priority of rapid economic growth at the center of its political campaigns to expand its electoral base. One of the AKP's major slogans used in their election campaigns of 2014 and 2015, which both ended with AKP electoral victories, was, "Let stability last, let Turkey grow"⁸. Election analysts and economists typically consider high economic growth rates and secured economic stability as one of the main reasons for the AKP's uninterrupted electoral success since the year 2002.⁹

As I will show through my analysis of the statements of government officials as well as shipyard owners and managers, there is a strong belief among those actors that economic growth will secure prosperity and social justice. This observation makes one think that the current neglect concerning work safety measures derives from the intention to secure the immediate and rapid economic growth, which in turn expected to create and secure a just society in the future.

Such neoliberal conception of social justice that is based on the belief that the increasing prosperity effects everybody positively ignores the fact concerning the extremely uneven distribution of the benefits of the economic progress at the present time. On the one hand rapid economic growth helps shipyard owners in Tuzla increase their profits and wealth. On the other hand, workers are expected to risk their health and lives while working under dangerous conditions. In my dissertation I show how this unequal

⁸ All translations are mine, if not indicated otherwise

⁹ Mahfi Egilmez, "İktidar Partisinin Oy Oranı İle Ekonominin Büyüme Oranı Arasındaki İlişki Üzerine Bir Deneme (An Essay on the Relation Between the Economic Growth Rate and the Vote Share of the Government Party)," May 1, 2015, <http://www.mahfiegilmez.com/2015/05/iktidar-partisinin-oy-oran-ile.html>.

distribution of the benefits and harms of rapid development is exposed, contested and resisted by various political actors.

In Turkey, development is introduced as a political question not only by the government and employers, but also by the critics, activists and left-wing labor organizations. In the case of the Tuzla shipyards, the endurance of work accidents is not only the endurance of suffering and misery amongst the workers, who risk their health and lives while working under unsafe and unhealthy working conditions, but also the endurance and persistence of a struggle that challenges the unquestioned prioritization of development in Turkey through naming those accidents at work (“iş kazası”) as murders at work (“iş cinayeti”).

On the one hand, the officials of the governing Justice and Development Party, shipyard owners and management have insisted on identifying fatal occupational injuries as “accidents at work” (“iş kazası”), as inevitable incidents and a dramatic but expected outcome of the work in the heavy industries. On the one hand, the politically active left-wing labor union Limter-İş and the labor organization TİB-DER in the Tuzla shipyards zone, as well as national and local NGOs that work on the problems concerning worker’s health and safety in Turkey, in their reports and analyses on occupational injuries persistently use the term “murders at work” (“iş cinayeti”), and emphasize the preventability of those injuries and the responsibility of the employers.

Thanks to this long, hard, and persistent work of activists, labor unionist, critical journalists, academics and the workers themselves, work accidents have been redefined as murders, and particularly as “political murders”, seen as the result of the willful misconduct of the employers and the consequence of a particular political choice that prioritizes rapid

economic development over human life. Describing fatal occupational injuries as political murders is not only a discursive tactic and a legal struggle, but also a political call questioning the priority of rapid economic growth. This critical voice was raised to oppose the Justice and Development Party governments' political choice to make economic competition with other developed and developing countries through rapid national growth a priority.

So, the first argument of this dissertation is that this critical approach to work accidents, and the persistence in naming those accidents as murders is also a robust political critique of development and the prioritization of the economic growth, in its own terms.

To be sure, there is no one single but multiple approaches to development and different explanations, definitions, and justifications of the ongoing workplace injuries. Thus, instead of finding out the "actual" reason of the workplace injuries, in the first chapter of my dissertation I rather explore the various ways that work accidents are defined, problematized, and justified by different actors according to their different and sometimes conflicting political and theoretical approaches to economic development. I discuss events and protests following the death of a worker, Necdet, in an accident at work in the Torlak shipyard in the Tuzla Shipyards zone, and introduce how the problems regarding work safety in the Tuzla shipyards are explained by the members of the leftist labor organization TİB-DER, and the socialist labor union Limter-İş as the result of the time-space compression and speeding up of the production cycles. Following this discussion, I introduce the ways in which the workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards zone were problematized by activist and academic Nevra Akdemir, who wrote the first academic

thesis on workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards, and argued that work accidents were a consequence of the violation of the labor law and inadequate legal sanctions.

While I was writing this dissertation in May 2014 the Soma mine disaster, one of the most dramatic work accidents in Turkey’s history resulted in the death of 301 miners, according to the official figures. This was the highest death toll in a work accident in Turkey’s history, and it placed once again questions concerning the relation between the obsession with economic growth and work accidents at the top of the public and political agenda. A recent study authored by critical Turkish scholars and published by Boğaziçi University Press following the Soma mine disaster describes “growth fetishism” or an “obsession with economic growth and development” as a major reason behind work accidents.¹⁰ In the first chapter I focus on whether the obsession with economic growth, which is defined by these critical Turkish scholars as a “hegemonic discourse” and the practice of the consecutive Turkish governments, can explain the underlying reasons for the normalization and naturalization of the high-rates of the workplace injuries in Turkey.

Drawing on these analytical approaches I consider the critique of work accidents as a critique of the prioritization of economic growth and development. And I take up development as a political question that is imposed, resisted, supported or criticized by competing political agents. In the Tuzla shipyards zone in particular, and in Turkey in general, debates regarding work accidents have helped to make visible opposing political views on the prioritization of economic development over workers’ health and safety. As

¹⁰ Fikret Adaman et al., “Ge-li-yo-rum diyen facia - Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Soma Araştırma Grubu Raporu (The Disaster that was Expected: Report of the Boğaziçi University Soma Investigation Group)” (Boğaziçi University, 2015), http://www.bogazicisomadayanismasi.boun.edu.tr/sites/default/files/Bogazici%20Soma%20Dayanismasi%20Soma%20Raporu_Kasim%202014.pdf.

I mentioned earlier, this difference in political views can be best observed in the contesting camps' approaches to the workplace injuries as accidents or murders, as the expected, and normal and natural cost of rapid economic growth, or unnatural and preventable incidents that must be stopped through substantial improvements to work safety and working conditions, thus fundamentally challenging the prioritization of rapid economic growth.

The insistence of leftist activists in naming fatal workplace injuries not as accidents but as murders is a powerful discursive tactic that has both political and legal implications. Politically, naming accidents as murders aim to explain workplace fatalities as a consequence of an intentional political choice that prioritizes immediate economic growth over the health and safety of the workers, and thus, politicize the question concerning development. Naming accidents as murders is also a legal attempt to criminalize occupational injuries which are otherwise considered as part of "the nature of the job", a claim put forward by government officials and shipyard owners numerous times. The left-wing labor organizations and activists claim that if necessary legal, financial and technological measures of work safety were provided by the employers work accidents could be prevented before they happen. Although zero-death might not be possible in workplaces, naming accidents as murders help to expose employers' intentional disregard of workers' rights and safety despite the availability of the technological, financial and legal means that can prevent workplace injuries. In legal terms such approach redefines workplace fatalities as the result of willful misconduct whose legal sanctions are much more severe than those of a simple mistake or neglect. Thus, the discursive tactic to name work accidents as murders also aims to impose more serious criminal charges against the employers and government officials who otherwise consider work accidents as an expected

cost in the drive for rapid economic growth, and as normal and expected mistakes that can be covered up through the payment of legally required monetary fines to compensate families for the loss of workers' lives.

What I observed during my ethnographic fieldwork in the Tuzla shipyards, where the tension regarding the naming of the fatal work incidents as accidents vs. murders is particularly potent, was the crystallization of the political and legal contestation between the prioritization of economic growth versus that of human life. I discuss this ongoing discursive, legal and political clash more in detail in two separate chapters:

In chapter three entitled, "How Employers Explain Work 'Accidents'" I examine shipyard managements' and government officials' interpretations of fatal occupational injuries. Drawing on my visit to the Turkish Shipbuilders' Business Association (GİSBİR) and my conversations with GİSBİR representatives and members I demonstrate that employers in Tuzla attempt to justify work accidents as a normal and inevitable phenomena in this particular stage of development and in the race for economic growth with other developed or developing nations. Employers consider work accidents a necessary sacrifice to secure rapid economic growth which in turn supposed to guarantee social justice, better working conditions and workers' rights in the future. This paradoxical approach that requires workers' sacrifices in terms of work safety today to make work safety a guarantee in the future, seems to result indeed in the indefinite deferral of workers' rights to live and work in healthy environments. Throughout the third chapter, I discuss the everyday effects of the normalization and naturalization of work accidents and explore how government officials' and employers' approach to workplace injuries as inevitable incidents actually shapes the way in which work accidents are acted upon. Here I particularly focus on the

working of the private hospital constructed by the GİSBİR in Tuzla. The GİSBİR hospital, which might be described as the embodiment of the employers' assumption about the inevitability of work accidents, intervenes in the injured workers after a work accident happens. Indeed, the GİSBİR introduced its hospital as a humanitarian intervention, a manifestation of how much employers care about the health of their workers. However, the target of this humanitarian project is reduced and limited to mere biological life that is understood in terms of "the suffering body" which has to be taken care of. Didier Fassin¹¹ and Miriam Ticktin¹², anthropologists critical of humanitarianism, argue that such projects do not touch on the political questions concerning inequality and justice and remains structural reasons behind the persistence of sufferings intact. And critical anthropologist, Peter Redfield emphasizes that humanitarianism grows particularly acute from the perspective of crisis and emergency that invites response¹³. As I show in the third chapter the GİSBİR hospital in Tuzla works as an emergency service for the injured workers. By neglecting the persistence of the structural problems about work safety and health and by considering work accidents as exceptional emergency situations, GİSBİR's humanitarian approach left the perpetually repeating nature of the work accidents and their political causes intact. Employers' reduction of work accidents to an emergency and their mere focus on the effects of the work accidents mask the political and structural formation of the

¹¹ Didier Fassin, "Compassion and Repression: The Moral Economy of Immigration Policies in France," *Cultural Anthropology* 20, no. 3 (2005): 362–87.

¹² Miriam Ticktin, "Where Ethics and Politics Meet: The Violence of Humanitarianism in France," *American Ethnologist* 33, no. 1 (2006): 33–49.

¹³ Peter Redfield, "Doctors, Borders, and Life in Crisis," *Cultural Anthropology* 20, no. 3 (2005): 328–61.

problem. As a result, workers are produced as targets of employers' humanitarian intervention while the structural political causes of work accidents persist.

Chapter four entitled, "Accidents vs. Murders - the Endurance of the Event" focuses on the personal stories and legal struggles of the families of fatal work accident victims, who are critical of employers' reduction of work accidents to an inevitable and exceptional emergency. I demonstrate that no matter the force of law, within the domains of the political and of labor, an enduring opposition continues that insists on scripting accidents as murders rather than accidents in order to draw attention to the workplace fatalities' structural political and repeating causes that are ignored by the employers and government officials. My extended conversations with the family members of workers killed on the job demonstrate how the forces of the memory, love and mourning can endure and challenge the seduction of "blood money", an informal compensation offered by the shipyard companies as a humanitarian and conscientious act, yet in practice work to silence workers' families. Throughout the end of the fourth chapter I analyze how the political and discursive persistence of naming workplace injuries not as accidents but as murders has had a nationwide impact in the application of laws and sanctions on the employers who have neglected work safety measures. As such, I show that the discursive campaign transformed into practical, concrete, and everyday legal support for the families who had lost members to workplace injuries.

b) Development as a Powerful Aspiration for the Working Classes

Although I approach the critiques of work accidents as political critiques of the obsession with economic development, I also observed a more complicated narrative of

class mobility and the aspiration for “development” amongst the working class themselves. The Tuzla shipyards zone is not only a uniquely dense industrial zone where workplace injuries are common, but also a unique site where a few workers have been able to quickly form their own subcontractor companies and benefit from rapid economic growth in the shipyards. Based on my ethnographic observations, I disagree with the critical scholars who categorically negate the idea of development.

For example, a well-known critique of development put forward by anthropologist Arturo Escobar proposes post-development, a pluralistic and non-market-oriented redefinition of progress that would not serve capitalist ends but instead would aim to satisfy the needs of local populations¹⁴. Similarly, in their recent study Turkish scholars Adaman and Akbulut, while identifying, “the obsession with economic growth” as a major reason for the ongoing work accidents in Turkey, propose “degrowth” as an alternative to obsessive development¹⁵.

However, as Marc Edelman and Angelique Haugerud argue in their edited volume on the anthropology of development, “contrary to proclamations about its desired demise, in many parts of the world the idea of development remains a powerful aspiration”¹⁶. My observations in the Tuzla shipyards zone have led me to agree with Edelman and Haugerud.

¹⁴ Arturo Escobar, “Imagining a Post-Development Era? Critical Thought, Development and Social Movements,” *Social Text*, no. 31/32 (1992): 20, doi:10.2307/466217.

¹⁵ Fikret Adaman and Bengi Akbulut, “The Unbearable Charm of Modernization: Growth Fetishism and the Making of State in Turkey,” *Perspectives: Political Analysis and Commentary from Turkey*, no. 5(13) (2013): 1–10.

¹⁶ Marc Edelman and Angelique Haugerud, eds., *The Anthropology of Development and Globalization: From Classical Political Economy to Contemporary Neoliberalism* (Malden, Mass: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 50.

Thus, my second argument in this dissertation is that the dominant discourse about development also affects working classes' aspirations and their desires to have a better life.

Academics and leftist labor organizations critical of neoliberal development correctly emphasize the inequalities of power between capitalist owners and workers that results in the dramatically unequal distribution of the benefits and harms of rapid economic development. However, a significant weakness of such critiques is their approach to this obsession with economic growth as a one-sided, top-down imposition of the capitalist owners onto the workers. In doing so, the activists and leftist workers' organizations approach the workers as the passive victims of policies that prioritize rapid economic growth and therefore disregard workers' agency and their desire to have a better life by actively taking part in and making use of the political, organizational and economic practices that facilitate rapid economic growth. In Tuzla this is carried out when workers form or aspire to form their own subcontracting companies.

In the second chapter of this dissertation entitled, "There won't be a Revolution" I discuss the tensions between the workers and leftist activists and labor organizations due to their differing representations of the problems in the Tuzla shipyards and their conflicting views and perceptions of development. While acting together with left-wing labor organizations, I had the chance to closely observe how some leftist activists took a patronizing stance towards workers while trying to persuade them to join the workers' struggle by using an educative and enlightening Marxist language, as though the workers were ignorant and needed to be taught and guided by those activists. Such tense encounters made me reconsider my former appreciation of the political campaigns organized in the Tuzla shipyards zone, and have led me question why the activists' campaign that

successfully attracted the attention of the public to the issue of work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards zone could not be organized amongst the workers themselves.

In addition to those questions, in the second chapter I examine how the workers in the Tuzla shipyards, despite the well-known negative working conditions maintain the desire to improve their lives and get rich fast through becoming owners of their own jobs. During my fieldwork, the left-wing labor organization TİB-DER in particular assisted me in contacting workers staying in the so-called “bachelor apartments”, working in the Tuzla shipyards in subcontractor firms for temporary jobs. Listening the stories of the bachelor apartment residents, their hopes and disappointments, and learning about their particular reasons for seeking work in the Tuzla shipyards despite knowing the negative and dangerous working conditions there, allowed me to understand how much the dominant discourse about development also affected workers’ aspirations and their desires to form a better life. The subcontracting mechanism, which is identified by activists and labor unionists as one of the major reasons behind the ongoing work accidents in Tuzla shipyards, is indeed also an opportunity for workers for upward mobility in terms of class and economic power. In addition to my conversations with the workers, together with the leftist labor union Limter-İş members, I participated in a demonstration held in the nearby suburban district Gebze to support workers who had occupied the Tepe Klima factory, a subcontractor firm providing ventilation systems to the shipyards, because they had not received their salaries for months. While acting together with the protesters, I had the chance to observe that even the workers who occupied the Tepe Klima factory because their salaries were not paid, demanded to take over the factory in return to their unpaid salaries and establish their own subcontractor company.

Even though most of the subcontracting firm owners, who are former workers, end up with bankruptcy, a few success stories in Tuzla are enough to nourish and keep alive the dream of becoming rich and improving once' class position. Thus, the desire for development survives thanks to the exceptional examples of those who could form their own subcontractor companies. Therefore, I examine the Tuzla shipyards as an ambiguous space, both the symbol of the inhuman working conditions in Turkey and the site of exceptional opportunities for upward mobility.

Throughout this dissertation I will take up the critique of work accidents as a political critique of development, and I will demonstrate how development is a contested yet powerful aspiration for the working classes. Before elaborating on these arguments in the following chapters, in this introduction I want to provide some historical information about how work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards zone became a major issue of contestation and struggle especially beginning in the year 2008. Following this overview, I will describe my first visit to a shipyard in Tuzla. In discussing this experience I demonstrate the ways in which work safety and workers' health are seemingly taken care of by the employers according to new legal regulations, while the shipyards continue business as usual with workplace injuries continuing at the same rates as before. My purpose here is to elaborate on my conceptualization of the prioritization of economic growth by demonstrating how the measures required to guarantee workers' health and safety, including work safety regulations and labor law, are subordinated to the politics of economic development.



Figure 1: The photo above is a good summary of Tuzla: On the left one can read the slogan of the Tuzla municipality, namely “İSTANBUL TUZLA’DAN BAŞLAR” (İstanbul starts from Tuzla). Below that there is an announcement of a free theater play by the Tuzla municipality theater group. The title of the play is “Gemilerde Talim Var” (“There is drill in the ships” –That title was borrowed from a lyric of a well-known old Istanbul song) .On the right, in the advertisement light box of the Tuzla Municipality one can read, “We have created 6 new health care facilities ready for your service.” And on the leg of the municipality’s advertisement board, one can read the graffiti of TİB-DER (The leftist Shipyard Workers Union Association). In the background one can see the cranes of the shipyards. The building below the crane on the right is the Turkish Shipbuilders’ Association’s private hospital, namely the GİSBİR hospital, which was constructed by the Business Association directly across the street from where the shipyard chain is located. GİSBİR claims that they constructed the hospital close to the shipyards zone because they care about the safety of their workers and wanted to have a facility that treats injured workers immediately “after” an accident happens. (Photo taken by myself - Tuzla İçmeler Bridge Bus Stop – February 2011)

The Subordination of the Law to the Politics of Economic Development

After 26 deaths in 2008 alone, Tuzla became the symbol for workplace accidents in Turkey and the word Tuzla started to resonate in Turkish public with worker’s death

instead of with “the glory of the rising ship construction industry in Turkey”. Years later this irreversible negative image of Tuzla continued to be a major concern of the Turkish Shipbuilders’ Association (GİSBİR).

In February 2008 a general strike was organized by the leftist Limter-İş labor union in the shipyards zone which was followed by large demonstrations supported not only by labor unions but also by students, activists, and politicians from all over İstanbul, who protested the unsafe working conditions and accidents at work in Tuzla. The largest demonstration in the Tuzla shipyards zone took place on the 16th of June, 2008, and was widely covered by the mainstream media.

The continuous media coverage of work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards, the workers’ demonstrations and strikes in Tuzla, and increasing public pressure forced the government to take action against the fatal work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards zone. On June 19, 2008, Prime Minister Erdoğan, together with the Minister of Labor, Minister of Transportation, Minister of Industry and Trade, and the Governor and the Mayor of İstanbul met with the representatives of the Turkish Shipbuilders’ Association and the head of the pro-government labor union of the shipyard workers, namely Dok-Gemi-İş¹⁷ in the İstanbul, Dolmabahçe office of the Prime Minister to discuss the ongoing problems in the shipyards. In the meeting, Erdoğan praised the success of the shipyards in terms of the increase in production and exports and argued that, “accidents at shipyards happened everywhere in the world. However, the high number of the fatal accidents in Tuzla now

¹⁷ Dok Gemi İş, The Labor Union of the Harbor, Dock and Shipbuilding Industry Workers of Turkey (Türkiye Liman, Dok ve Gemi Sanayii İşçileri Sendikası)

started to undermine the successful image of the ship building sector”¹⁸. To prevent this, Erdoğan emphasized the need for legal regulations. He said, “The shipyards that have a legal license to build ships are less than the number of the fingers on my hand. This makes us rethink the situation. We need to change this.”¹⁹

The Limter-İş labor union, which was not invited to the meeting unlike the pro-government Dok-Gemi-İş labor union, published a declaration stating that a search for a solution without inviting Limter-İş could not be a true solution. Limter-İş argued that, “PM Erdoğan cares more for the image of the shipbuilding sector than the lives of the workers. Even though there will be some improvements in the working conditions thanks to our strikes and protests, the legal regulations are only for show and will remain on paper”.²⁰

Shortly after the meeting between PM Erdoğan and the shipyard owners, on August 10, 2008, the Undersecretariat for Maritime Affairs, a government institution directly connected with the Office of the Prime Minister, prepared and published the by-laws regarding “Providing Licence to the Shipyards, Ship Building and Slip Sites.”²¹ The by-laws (*Tersane, Tekne İmal Yeri ve Çekek Yerlerine İşletme İzni Verilmesine İlişkin Yönetmelik*) oblige the shipyards to improve working conditions in the shipyards and to

¹⁸ “Başbakan Erdoğan’dan Tersane çıkışı (A Warning about the Shipyards by the Prime Minister Erdoğan),” *CNN Türk News*, September 19, 2008, <http://www.cnnturk.com/2008/turkiye/09/19/basbakan.erdogandan.tersane.cikisi/494113.0/index.html>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ “Sendikadan Tuzla Toplantısı Yorumu: Bizsiz Çözüm, Çözüm Değil (‘A Response of the Labor Union to the Tuzla Meeting: A Solution Which Does Not Include Us Is Not a Solution’),” *Bianet - Independent News Network*, June 19, 2008, <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/insan-haklari/107755-sendikadan-tuzla-toplantisi-yorumu-bizsiz-cozum-cozum-degil>.

²¹ *Tersane Tekne İmal Yeri ve Çekek Yerlerine İşletme İzni Verilmesine İlişkin Yönetmelik* (“Providing Licence to the Shipyards, Ship Building and Slip Sites.”), 10 August 2008, –published in the 26963 issue of the *Official Gazette of Turkey* <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2008/08/20080810-1.htm>.

provide documents regarding the quality, environment and work health and safety standards in order to obtain a legal permit and license to legally operate in the shipyards.²² According to these new measures to guarantee work safety, shipyards were forced by the government to hire full time labor safety and health experts who would observe the working conditions and improve the work safety measures in the shipyards. Moreover, the shipyards had to provide the required education for the workers before they started on the job. According to the by-laws, the shipyards had to take these measures within three years after the by-laws were published.²³

As of 2010, when I started my fieldwork, only 36% of the shipyards had obtained the required document OHSAS 18001 (Occupational Health and Safety Assessment Series) concerning work safety²⁴.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Fetiye Aydın, “İşçi Sağlığı ve Güvenliği Kavramının Toplam Kalite Yönetimi Açısından İrdelenmesi ve Gemi İnşaa Sanayinde -Tuzla Tersaneler Bölgesi- Bir Araştırma ("An Investigation on the Concept of the Worker's Health and Safety from the Perspective of Total Quality Management and a Research on the Shipbuilding Industry in the Tuzla Shipyards Zone)" (Unpublished MA Thesis, Marmara University, Social Sciences Institute, 2010).

How Employers Pretend to Take Work Safety Measures



Figure 2: Fences surrounding a shipyard - Tuzla Shipyards Zone (Photo taken by myself – June 2010)

In the summer of 2010, a college friend of mine who was working for a newly founded work safety and health company called me and asked whether I could do a translation job for him. My friend's work safety and health company wanted to enter into this newly created work safety market in the Tuzla shipyards zone. However, the first shipyard that they contacted and had plans to make a presentation to had European partners who could not speak Turkish. However, the presentation had been prepared in Turkish and

there was no one in the work safety company who could do an English translation of that presentation. Because of this why my friend asked me to do the translation work.

As a researcher who was working on work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards I thought that this could be a rare opportunity for me to see the inside of a shipyard. I had been interested and involved in the workers' problems in Tuzla since the 2008 demonstrations against the unsafe working conditions and fatal accidents at work. However, I knew that no one except workers, engineers and contractors were allowed to enter inside a shipyard. Taking photos was also strictly prohibited. In almost all shipyards, one could see signs stating "no entry" or "no photo", fixed prominently on the high walls of the shipyards following the 2008 demonstrations.

Under these conditions, I decided that being a translator was a good opportunity to learn more about what was hidden behind the walls of these shipyards, so I said "yes" to my friend and told him, "I can help with the translation."

On the day of the presentation my friend picked me up with his car at my apartment in downtown İstanbul (Fatih) and drove for about 50 km (30 miles) to the easternmost neighborhood of İstanbul, Tuzla, where the banners of municipality, "İstanbul starts from Tuzla" ("İstanbul Tuzla'dan başlar") welcomed us. The banners seemed ironic to me, because considering where one was coming from "İstanbul ends in Tuzla", too. From central İstanbul, Tuzla is located in the eastern end of İstanbul and not only geographically but also economically Tuzla marks a far away suburb of İstanbul where most of the "dirty" industrial facilities have relocated.



Figure 3: Tuzla is the easternmost neighborhood of Istanbul, as seen in the map above

Once a small fishing town on the outskirts of İstanbul, Tuzla became a major industrial zone in the metropolitan city in the aftermath of the massive migrations to İstanbul in the 1980s from various places in Anatolia (the Asian part of Turkey). The government's decision in 1969 to move all the shipyards away from their historical location, namely Haliç (the Golden Horn) in downtown İstanbul to Tuzla was applied in early 1980s only after the introduction of the government's promotion of "Ship Building, Ship Buying, Shipyard Construction and Development Funding" (GİSAT)²⁵. The first

²⁵ GISAT (Gemi İnşa, Gemi Satın Alma, Tersane Kurme ve Geliştirme Fonu) was introduced with the Turkish Cabinet decision #7/9245 in 1976 and started to be distributed during the post-coup governments of the PM Bülent Ulusu (1980-1983) and PM Turgut Özal (1983-1989). – Dünya Gazetesi, *Gemi İnşa Sanayi eki*, 31.10.2002, quoted Aslı Odman and Nevra Akdemir, "Tuzla Tersaneler Bölgesi'nde örülen ve üstü örtülen sınıfsallıklar ('The Class Relationships that are Built and Covered Up in the Tuzla Shipyards')," *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 113 (2008).

shipyards in Tuzla were constructed by Turkish capitalists who have a long family history in maritime trade and transportation. These families aimed first and foremost to build their own new ships by making use of the government's GİSAT funds in order to expand their maritime transportation fleets²⁶. The shipbuilding industry in Turkey initially emerged to satisfy domestic needs in the 1990s, but after the year 2003 shipbuilding in Tuzla became an increasingly export-oriented industry when exports surpassed domestic needs and imports.²⁷

In the meantime, Tuzla's deep relations to the sea remained even while fisheries were replaced by the naval academy, navy shipyard and tens of privately owned shipyards. As of 2010, 38 out of 59 private shipyards in Turkey were located in Tuzla. That is to say, the Turkish maritime and shipbuilding industry is concentrated within a spatially compressed, relatively small geographical area. Subcontracting firms, the workshops of supplier industries, and workers' housing are spread around the major shipyards in the Tuzla-Aydınlı bay. However, because of such rapid industrial growth in Tuzla, the color of the sea became greyish and the nearby Kamil Abduş Lagoon, once a natural habitat for a variety of birds, dried up. The leather and paint workshops together with a number of pharmaceutical factories and marble production sites were responsible for the surrounding

²⁶ As Odman mentions, the ship building industry was financed by eight major families that were already in maritime business. Namely *Kalkavan, Kaptanoğlu, Sadıkoğlu, Çiçek, Torlak, Yardımcı, Üner and, Bayrak* family corporations were among the first ones, who had a shipyard in Tuzla bay. The representatives of these family corporations are also members of the executive and advisory boards of the Turkish Shipbuilders' Association (GİSBİR) that advocates the interests of the shipbuilding industry in Turkey through lobbying activities and establishing strong ties with the government offices and other political parties. According to the OECD Report (2011) *The Shipbuilding Industry in Turkey*, as of 2011 all of those eight family corporations were ranked in the top-ten list based on the yearly production capacity of the shipyards in Turkey. Only the Sedef Shipyard that belongs to the Kalkavan family amounts about 1/3 of the production capacity of all shipyards in Turkey that corresponds to 650.000 tonnes (Dwt)

²⁷ "The Export and Import figures of the Turkish Shipbuilding Industry 2002-2010", data source "The Shipbuilding Industry in Turkey" (OECD, September 2011), <http://www.oecd.org/turkey/48641944.pdf>.

stinky air. Today, five out of eight industrial zones of İstanbul are located in Tuzla at the edge of İstanbul²⁸. Rapid economic and industrial development not only had negative impacts on the health and safety of the workers but it also caused severe environmental pollution.

These thoughts were all in my mind as we arrived at the shipyard in Tuzla where the presentation about labor safety and health would take place. We were welcomed by security personnel and guided directly to the meeting room without having a chance to look at the work spaces inside the shipyard. I felt disappointed as I followed my friend and the shipyard's personal to the meeting room where the presentation was going to take place. After a short introduction my friend began the presentation. He enthusiastically talked about how his work safety and health company was prepared to construct a safety infrastructure in the shipyard based on the most up to date security standards applied in Western Europe. He described in detail each and every piece equipment that they preferred to use in order to secure work safety while underscoring their commitment to choosing the most technologically advanced measures. He also gave details about the required 16 hours theoretical and practical education that they would provide for each worker before they started on the job. Finally he proposed a budget estimate regarding the cost of the equipment, the worker's education and the salaries of the permanent work safety experts who would regularly observe and check on the work safety measures in the shipyard. The presentation took about one hour and I tried my best to translate this enthusiastic presentation into English. There were no questions or interruptions from the shipyard

²⁸ The List of the Industrial Zones in Istanbul - retrieved from "Bilim, Sanayi ve Teknoloji Bakanlığı Bilgi Sitesi (Information Site of the Ministry of Science, Industry and Technology)," 2011, <https://osbbs.sanayi.gov.tr/citydetails.aspx?dataID=224>.

managers except for some murmurs and I started to realize that something was going wrong here. When my friend finished the presentation and thanked the audience, the European manager of the shipyard turned to me with a grimace and asked, “Is he finished?” I answered, “yes”. I could see that the manager was completely dissatisfied with the presentation. So, he continued:

What the hell are you talking about? I asked you to come here in order to provide me with solutions on how to fulfill the government obligations by completing the paperwork and formalities about work safety in the fastest and cheapest way possible. I didn't call you to make me spend hours of time for worker's education and thousands of liras for equipment so that we end up bankrupted. We have no time and no money to lose for all these unnecessary burdens. Just provide me your seal on formal letters, get your compensations for it, and that's all. We need to be quick and efficient. All other companies do it that way. I am sorry but I cannot work with you guys.

Both my friend and I were familiar with the infamous history of dramatic neglect concerning work safety in the shipyards zone. However, I was still shocked by the recklessness of the manager. The manager spoke with such disregard and without hesitation about how he did not care about worker's safety at all. It was pretty unbelievable I must say. We were talking about human life and the presentation was entirely about securing and protecting worker's lives against accidents at work, whereas for the manager saving time and money by ignoring worker's education and lowering the costs of work safety equipment and personnel as much as he could was obviously more important.

I told my friend that the manager found the offer too time consuming and too costly, and that he only wanted someone who would quickly fill out the forms concerning work safety and sign them, that's all. After hearing that, my friend was disappointed for another reason: he realized that the work safety solutions offered by his company were completely

irrelevant to the expectations of the shipyard owners and managers in Tuzla. He told me that before coming here he had assumed that something had changed in Tuzla especially after the public awareness concerning work accidents rose following the 2008 campaign. “It is so sad to see that nothing has changed here,” he said. He was sad, too, because the reaction that we received after the presentation showed that there were no future jobs for him in the Tuzla shipyards unless he decided to work as a reckless form filler.

After all of this, we were dismissed politely and my hope to see the work spaces inside the shipyards after the presentation again turned to disappointment.

Soon after our visit to the Tuzla shipyards a new amendment was applied to the by-laws concerning work safety allowing the shipyards to form work safety units composed of engineers and technicians who were not work safety experts²⁹. Technicians and engineers who were already working in the shipyards could just fill out the required forms and sign the documents so that the shipyards could continue to bypass the government obligations concerning work safety through satisfying the minimum requirements.

This amendment also made the work safety units much more dependent on the shipyard managements. A major problem in terms of the inspection of the work safety conditions in the Tuzla shipyards is the financial dependency of the work safety experts and work safety companies on the shipyards. Because the work safety experts or companies are directly paid by the shipyard owners, they cannot conduct independent inspections and prepare their reports autonomously. Shipyard owners can easily fire and change the work

²⁹ The Council of the State decision #2010/696, to change the order of certain sections of the by-laws regarding *İşyeri Sağlık ve Güvenlik Birimleri ile Ortak Sağlık ve Güvenlik Birimleri Hakkında Yönetmelik* (“*The Work Safety and Security Units and Common Health and Security Units*”), which was introduced on 15 August 2009 and published in the Official Gazette issue #27320.

safety and health company that they work with if they are not satisfied with the reports that the work safety experts prepare.

That is to say, the legal reforms introduced after August 2008 remained on paper, and shipyard managers, including the European shipyard manager that I talked to in Tuzla, are granted all the power to choose, hire or fire the required work safety companies and experts, and thus, manipulate the work safety inspection reports in any way they want.

During my fieldwork, with the help of the Limter-İş labor union, I also had the chance to contact and talk with a work safety expert who was working in the shipyards zone since the introduction of the August 2008 legal amendment that forced the shipyards to hire full-time work safety experts in order to be licensed. He explicitly asked me to disguise his name, the name of his workplace and any details that might identify him. When I asked him about his experiences, the problems and concerns that he dealt with as work safety personnel he responded to me with the following:

The foremost worry of a work safety expert is losing his job if his reports are not approved by the shipyard's management. Unlike the shipyard workers, work safety experts do not even have a labor union or organization that defends their rights and supports them if they lose their jobs. As a result, work safety experts remain silent even if they observe a violation of work safety regulations. Work safety experts should be independent and prepare their reports without the intervention of those who are directly responsible for the violation of work safety regulations. The salary of the work safety expert should be paid by the state or by the Chamber of Engineers. However, that is not the case and therefore, in the Tuzla shipyards there has not been one single report prepared by a work safety expert that shows a violation of work safety regulations in a shipyard so far. If you look at the work safety inspection reports, you will read that in the Tuzla shipyards work safety measures are taken perfectly with no exception. So, then one can ask, why there are so many fatalities and injuries at work in the Tuzla shipyards if work safety measures are so perfectly followed?

The testimony of the work safety expert about how his dependency on the shipyard company for salary and job security dramatically shaped the content of the safety inspection reports he prepared confirms the fact that the AKP government's legal reforms regarding work safety have not helped to improve working conditions in the shipyards through sanctioning shipyards management that ignore work safety measures. However, the reforms in labor law that have urged shipyards to have a permanent work safety unit in the workplace have helped government officials as well as shipyard owners to claim that they, too, care about workers' lives and safety, and do whatever they can to protect these. The law has helped to make it look like work safety measures in the Tuzla shipyards have been improved, while in practice it has not created any burden on the shipyard companies except a minor extra cost to be paid to work safety experts team, which the later amendment specified could be chosen from the already hired engineers and technicians of the shipyards. Thus, the new regulations on work safety only helped to create a show of the governments' and companies' care about workers' safety, while business as usual continued in the Tuzla shipyards where the major focus was on increasing the production and profits of the companies.

My observations about how work safety laws and regulations are applied by the shipyards' management without changing their business habits, and the testimony of the work safety expert that I talked to can also be directed as a critique towards the formalist explanations that consider violations of the application of the law as the main reason behind work accidents. As I discuss in the first chapter, Nevra Akdemir's thesis is that workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards continue to take place because of the violation of Turkish labor law, especially article 4857 that regulates the subcontracting relation between the

main firm and the subcontractor and prohibits the main firms from subcontracting out the main task of the company³⁰. According to Turkish Labor Law, in heavy industries such as shipbuilding, “except for the tasks that require professional expertise that are not part of the main task of the main company, the main task of the main company cannot be divided or subcontracted”³¹. However, most of the main jobs are conducted by subcontractor firms in Tuzla.

As Akdemir claims, major shipyards that give subcontracting firms the responsibility of taking work safety measures and transfer the burden of the cost of work safety equipment reduce the cost of labor dramatically. Moreover, thanks to the subcontracting mechanism, shipyard owners can deny responsibility for deaths at work by putting the blame on the subcontractors that do not provide the required work safety equipment for their workers. Furthermore, similarly to firing and hiring new work safety experts, the shipyard owners can easily dismiss the accused subcontracting firm and find another subcontractor to continue to ship production. Thus, subcontracting, which is illegal in the heavy industries, helps major shipyard firms to be relieved from the responsibility for fatal accidents at work³².

While I do agree with Akdemir’s critique of how the subcontracting mechanism serves to increase the profits of the main shipyard companies and to conceal their

³⁰ Nevra Akdemir, *Taşeronlu Birikim: Tuzla Tersaneler Bölgesinde Üretim İlişkilerinde Enformelleşme* (“Accumulation through Subcontracting: Informalization in the Production Processes in Tuzla Shipyards Zone”) (Beyoğlu, İstanbul: SAV, 2008).

³¹ *Turkish Labor Law, Article 4857, 2003.*

³² Akdemir, *Taşeronlu Birikim: Tuzla Tersaneler Bölgesinde Üretim İlişkilerinde Enformelleşme* (“Accumulation through Subcontracting: Informalization in the Production Processes in Tuzla Shipyards Zone”).

responsibility for workplace injuries, I do not agree with her that the prevalence of subcontracting in the Tuzla shipyards zone can be reduced to a question concerning the violation of the law which would then be fixed with the correct application and imposition of the law. The first problem with Akdemir's formalist approach is its basic assumption that takes for granted the status of the law as objective, separate and independent from the political decision making body that made that very law. It is my contention that in practice, the enforcement or non-enforcement of the law is indeed a political decision taken by the same political authorities who made that very law. Therefore, calling for the correct application of the law from those who make the law is a paradoxical call that assumes the imperative of the law is separate and above the law-maker. The second issue that I have with Akdemir's approach is that the law may be changed and/or re-interpreted by the government according to its economic and political priorities, as I directly witnessed in the ways that the regulations regarding work safety measures in the Tuzla shipyards have changed, so that companies can continue to ignore work safety measures while at the same time hiring work safety teams in the shipyards. This way, companies look like they care about workers' safety and without any violation of the application of the law fulfil all the requirements regarding work safety regulations.

At this point, what deserves to be questioned in order to explain the reasons behind the ongoing workplace injuries is not the non-application or inadequate content of the law, as the formalists like Akdemir would argue, but the political and economic priorities of the governing body that arbitrarily imposes the laws and regulations on the subcontracting mechanism and work safety inspection to realize those political and economic priorities for rapid economic growth and development. At this point, development seems to be the

ultimate law, and all other laws are subordinated to this dominant narrative and made to serve rapid economic growth.

For instance, labor law article 4857 was introduced by the AKP government itself in 2003, a year after its coming to power. However, since the year 2003 the AKP government has neither enforced labor law article 4857 nor applied sanctions against the companies that violated the law. The government is fully aware of the fact that the majority of the jobs done in the Tuzla shipyards are completed by subcontractor firms, but the AKP government arbitrarily ignores the violation of its own law for the sake of not interrupting the rapid growth in the shipbuilding industry.

After I talked to the work safety expert about his concerns in the Tuzla shipyards in the Limter-İş office, Hakkı Usta, the general secretary of the labor union turned to me and told that even the government's official inspections in Tuzla were prearranged: "The shipyard bosses inform workers that ministry of labor inspectors will be coming to the shipyard soon and before the arrival of the inspector they usually distribute clean, new overalls, helmets, gloves and safety belts to all workers. Surely, the ministry of labor inspector informs the shipyards before coming to the workplace. Under such circumstances, do you expect that a serious inspection can be conducted in the shipyards? Government inspections are nothing but a theater play."

This story of the way that the government and the employers pretended to care about work safety while in practice securing the continuation of their business was a common story that I heard from workers in Tuzla. In another conversation in the socialist TİB-DER labor organization's office, a subcontracting firm worker told me about how he witnessed a workplace fatality get covered up by the shipyard management and the public

prosecutor: “I saw with my own eyes how they dressed my friend who died in the shipyard after he fell from a height of 20 meters before the public prosecutor came to the scene. They took the dead guy and put his shoes on and a helmet on his head. Then the public prosecutor came to the shipyard, took some notes and photos, asked a few question and left. You didn’t need to be an expert or a public prosecutor to understand that the entire scene was a fake. However, we later heard that the shipyard company was found not guilty in the accident. This is how things work here.”

I was not surprised to hear that story because I knew that so far, in the Tuzla shipyards zone no shipyard owner has been put to a criminal trial because of his responsibility in workplace fatalities. In addition to the examples mentioned above, the court’s interpretation of labor law to exculpate shipyards in the case of fatal work accidents, and the mobilization of labor law to obstruct labor organizations and punish activists for participating in workers’ demonstrations that I discuss in several chapters, are further examples about the different and arbitrary impositions of the law according to the priorities of the government.

The particular interpretation of the law by the courts, public prosecutors and ministry of labor inspectors to favor employers while suppressing workers and labor organizations is instrumental in achieving rapid economic development for the government and high rates of production and profits for the shipyard owners.

The Workers Health and Work Safety assembly, the workers’ rights advocacy group, also claims that legal amendments and regulations mostly remain on paper and cannot guarantee workers’ safety in the shipyards and other industries as long as the rush

of the industrialists for more production and more profit in the shortest time period possible does not change³³.

Consequently, labor law and legal regulations on work safety were subordinated to the political and economic priorities of rapid economic development, and the judiciary has turned a blind eye to the arbitrary violation of those laws by employers, inspectors and the law-makers themselves.

Here, the ultimate law seems to be the priority of economic growth that has its roots in the obsession and/or fetishism with development in Turkey, which Adaman and Akbulut identify as a common hegemonic narrative and the policy of consecutive Turkish governments.³⁴ In the following first chapter of this dissertation I will discuss their arguments in more detail.

³³ “İşçi Sağlığı ve Güvenliği Meclisi: İş Cinayetlerini Yasalar Değil Tabandan Bir Mücadele önler. (Workers’ Health and Work Safety Assembly: Murders at Work Can Be Stopped Not by the Law but by the Grassroots Labor Organizations),” *Diken Online Newspaper*, November 7, 2014, <http://www.diken.com.tr/isci-sagligi-ve-guvenligi-meclisi-onca-acinin-cinayetinin-karsisinda-ortak-bir-dil-kurmak-gerek/>.

³⁴ Adaman and Akbulut, “The Unbearable Charm of Modernization: Growth Fetishism and the Making of State in Turkey.”

CHAPTER 1: A Day of Protest: How Work Accidents Are Explained and Contested in the Tuzla Shipyards

Introduction:

A recent study authored by critical Turkish scholars published by the Boğaziçi University Press following the Soma mine disaster that took place on May 13, 2014 in the mining town of Soma in Western Turkey and caused the deaths of at least 301 mine workers according to the official numbers, describes “growth fetishism” or an “obsession with economic growth and development” as a major reason behind work accidents³⁵. Although the authors did not clearly explain whether they take the word fetish in Freudian, Marxian or any another sense, and although they used the word “obsession” interchangeably with “fetishism”, a related but not synonymous term, I think that these terms and critical approaches to the rapid economic development in Turkey can help in developing the debates on the tension between the prioritization of economic growth over workers’ safety. Therefore, it is worth developing the discussion concerning “growth fetishism” and “obsession with growth” further.

In a former version of this argument, social scientists, Fikret Adaman, Bengi Akbulut, Murat Arsel and Duygu Avcı in the paper “De-growth as Counter-Hegemony? Lessons from Turkey” (2014), under the subheading “Growth Fetishism and the Unbearable Charm of Modernization in Turkey”, presented the following arguments:

Achieving modernization and economic progress has indeed been a long standing objective of Turkish policymakers. Beginning especially with the decline of the Ottoman Empire during the 18th century, and formally instituted with the foundation of the modern Republic, the idea of “catching up” with the West has

³⁵ Adaman et al., “Boğaziçi University Soma Solidarity Group Report.”

been central to politics in Turkey. Although modernization/development came to mean a transformation process that surpassed a solely economic one, there was, and still is, a central role for growth within it: rapid economic growth, fueled by the application of modern science and technology to economic processes, has been seen to provide support to the newly-created political and social order. Thus, growth policies have been given priority, based on the assumption that their achievement would automatically resolve social and political issues as well albeit sometimes with a lag. In addition, a wide range of ideologies within Turkish politics shares the common faith in economic growth as the precondition of progress. While the very foundations of the modern republic have been challenged by various political forces, ranging from revolutionary socialism to Islamic fundamentalism, the idea that development through rapid economic growth is a *sine qua non* for progress has remained uncontested.³⁶

Adaman, Akbulut, Arsel and Avcı's critical approach to the rapid economic growth in Turkey and their identification of this fetish as a major reason for work accidents was also in line with the leftist labor organizations' explanations. As I will demonstrate in the following section of this chapter, the socialist labor organization TİB-DER in its critical declaration to protest against the death of a worker, Necdet, at the Torlak Shipyard, claimed that the AKP government only cares about the growth of the shipyard sector, and that the ultimate purpose of the shipyard owners and the government is maximum economic growth. For the TİB-DER, this was the reason why shipyard managements did not take the necessary measures to guarantee work safety. TİB-DER was not alone in describing work accidents as the result of the insistence on rapid economic growth. In this chapter then I discuss the ways in which workplace injuries are explained and contested by various agents in the Tuzla shipyards, and whether the obsession with economic growth can explain the

³⁶ Fikret Adaman et al., "De-Growth as Counter-Hegemony? Lessons from Turkey" (Degrowth Conference, Leipzig, 2014), <http://www.degrowth.de/en/catalogue-entry/de-growth-as-counter-hegemony-lessons-from-turkey/>. A similar version of this paper was also published in Heinrich Böll Foundation – Turkey's web site in June 2014 (<https://tr.boell.org/de/2014/06/16/unbearable-appeal-modernization-fetish-growth-publikationen>)

underlying reasons behind the normalization and naturalization for the high-rates for the workplace injuries in Turkey.

The Death of Necdet in the Torlak Shipyards:



Figure 4: Tuzla Shipyards Zone, across from the Aydınlı train station (Photo taken by myself – July 2010)

It was a sunny day in July 2010. Before meeting with Metin³⁷, I wanted to see the Torlak Shipyard, at least from outside. Except for those who worked in the shipyard no one

³⁷ In order to protect the confidentiality in terms of the identities of my informants and their families, and to prevent any potential risks to their careers or well-being, I have kept the identities of the shipyard workers and their family members anonymous. The only real names that I have used are those of the workers from the Limter-İş labor union and TİB-DER workers organization's administrative staff who explicitly demanded to have their real names written down together with their views. Any academics, activists, journalists, shipyard owners and government officials, whose opinions and statements are public, appear in the text with their real names.

else was allowed to go inside. This rule has been strictly imposed by all shipyards in the Tuzla Bay following a general strike and political campaign in 2008 that aimed to protest ongoing fatal work accidents in Tuzla and to disclose the negative working conditions in the shipyard zone.

Torlak shipyard is located directly across from the Aydınlı train station where I exited the train and the first stop in the Tuzla shipyards zone for trains coming from central İstanbul. The first thing to attract attention to the eye of a visitor were the names of the Torlak family members, Ali Torlak, Aziz Torlak, and Cihat Torlak written on the shipyard cranes surrounded with “maşallah”³⁸ tags and evil eyes³⁹. There were large Turkish flags all around the shipyard, and written on some of the cranes are slogans such as, “in this facility we will think big like Aziz Torlak, we will be well programmed like Cihat Torlak, we will work very hard like Sedat Torlak!”⁴⁰

Torlaks are one of the founding families of the Tuzla shipyards. They are known as a strong supporter of the National Movements Party (MHP-“Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi” in Turkish), the ultra-nationalist Turkish party. The National Movement Party’s origins date back to the CIA-trained and supported anti-communism teams of the 1960s that were infamous for their beating, torturing and murdering of left-wing students, union leaders and party members during the 60s and 70s. Until the 1980 military coup, the National

³⁸ A common Islamic saying from the Arabic language meaning, “May God protect him from evil”.

³⁹ It is believed that evil eyes (“nazar boncuğu” in Turkish) protect people from malevolent glare and jealousy. Particularly in Turkey, it is believed that evil eyes should be large and visible enough to be seen from far to be effective.

⁴⁰ “Bu tesiste Aziz Torlak gibi büyük düşünüp Cihat Torlak gibi iyi program yapıp Sedat Torlak gibi çok sıkı çalışacağız!”

Movement's Party worked as the Turkish Gladio and was used by the government of the time to eliminate so-called enemies of the state using methods such as threat, torture and assassination. Its members were accused of being responsible for several massacres and murders of left-wing activists, Alevite religious minorities, journalists, and intellectuals during that period. Following the 1980 military coup, the National Movement Party was transformed from a marginal party to a mass party by increasing its votes and softening its extremist discourse. Despite this softening, the MHP is still a supporter of pro-state ideologies instead of being a typical opposition party.

Many fatal work accidents took place in the shipyards owned by the Torlak family. In addition to the Torlak Shipyard owned by Durmuş Ali Torlak, a member of parliament from the ultra-nationalist National Movement Party (MHP), another nearby shipyard TORGEM is owned by his cousin Kenan Torlak. Since 2002, ten workers have died in those shipyards, namely in Torlak and Torgem shipyards.

The day before my visit, a worker named Necdet died in Torlak Shipyard after falling off from one of the cranes. Indeed, the reason why I was there that day was to join the protestors and workers who had organized a demonstration in front of the Torlak shipyard. Necdet was 37 years old, married and the father of three children. For the last four years Necdet had been working for a subcontracting firm responsible for the cleaning and painting of ships in the Torlak shipyard. Before he moved to İstanbul, he had worked in construction in İzmir and Denizli. However, construction jobs were not continuous or stable and he could not make enough money to pay his debts. Before the demonstration, in a nearby coffeehouse where the workers had gathered, I met with Necdet's brother-in-law Metin. He told me that Necdet came to İstanbul in order to find a better job with a better

salary. However, in the Tuzla shipyards his situation did not change much. The work was discontinuous. “They called him whenever there was a job,” said Metin. “Sometimes he worked for 24 hours uninterruptedly, and sometimes he was called at 12am and worked until the morning.” I then asked Metin about the accident, “How did the incident happen?” Metin told me the story: “On the day when the accident happened, Necdet was called again around midnight, about 11pm, for over-time work. He accepted immediately because he had not received his complete salary for five to six months. He only received occasional payments. Therefore, Necdet could not pay his rent. Moreover, he had 3,000 liras (about \$1,200) credit card debt. He would not work there at that night if he did not have to pay back this credit card debt.” Metin stated that, “Credit card debts help to make workers accept any kind of job without question.”

When the incident happened at 5am in the morning Necdet was painting a ship while in a basket that was tied to a crane with a manila rope. Because it was early morning the actual crane operator was off duty and the crane was being operated by another ordinary worker. Suddenly the rope broke and Necdet fell 20 meters and died immediately. He had not been provided with a safety belt, which cost about 10 liras [\$6 as of 2010], and would probably have saved his life. Metin blamed the managers and owners of the shipyard who considered a safety belt more costly than a human life. He told me that according to the workers who witnessed the incident, the person who was operating the crane was sleepy. “This is an absolute negligence of the shipyard management. They let a lay person use the crane and that guy was sleepy.”

Metin lived in Tuzla district, too. He said,

For years we have heard every month, every week, and every day that somebody has died in the shipyards. I even cannot count the injured people. However, things

continue as they are because the shipyard owners do not take any safety measures. In the shipyards there is death every day. The shipyard owners blame the press, saying that the press goes over the fatal accidents and publishes ‘exaggerated news’ which as a result causes the closing down of the shipyards. I ask them why they do not take safety measures. Because you want to make more money, right! People’s health and lives shouldn’t be that cheap!

Metin argued that the accidents in Tuzla will be repeated because the shipyard owners do not take any safety measures. “If there is no professional crane operator available, you should not let someone else operate the crane. I do not drive a car without a driver’s license, right? If I do that, the police will stop me and gives me a ticket. The same should be done in the shipyards. No one but the crane operator can use the crane. If the safety measures are not taken, no one will be allowed to work there. Only then the accidents can be stopped. But if you say that I want the job done whatever the consequences are, these accidents will take place again and again”⁴¹.

A Day of Protest:

The day after Necdet’s death, the Minister of Economy at the time, Zafer Çağlayan came to Tuzla for the launch ceremony of a newly constructed ship in the Gisan Shipyard, located just about 500 meters away from the Torlak shipyard where the worker’s demonstration took place. The ship launch ceremony at the Gisan shipyard with the participation of the Minister Çağlayan together with the head of the Turkish Exporters Assembly (TİM)⁴² Mehmet Büyükeksi, and the head of the Turkish Chamber of Shipping⁴³

⁴¹ My conversation with Metin, brother-in-law of Necdet, who died in an accident at Torlak Shipyard in July, 2010

⁴² TİM: Türkiye İhracatçılar Meclisi

⁴³ Deniz Ticaret Odası (IMEAK)

Metin Kalkavan was scheduled long before Necdet's death in the Torlak shipyard. In other words, this high profile visit to the Tuzla shipyards immediately following a fatal workplace incident was just a coincidence. However, both Çağlayan and the Gisan shipyard management had been informed about Necdet's death before coming to the Tuzla shipyards zone and neither the shipyard nor Çağlayan felt the need to postpone the ship launch ceremony or cancel the program.

After Minister Çağlayan arrived at the Gisan shipyard, the workers began their demonstrations in front of the Torlak shipyard to protest the unsafe working conditions and Necdet's death due to the neglect of the shipyard management. The mainstream Turkish media was in Tuzla because of the visit of Minister Çağlayan and this therefore was a good opportunity for the protestors to attract the attention of the press. The demonstration was organized by the TİB-DER (The Shipyard Workers' Union Association), one of the several socialist workers organizations active in the Tuzla bay. I had contacted TİB-DER in the preliminary stages of my research, and I was also informed about the demonstration thanks to the call of TİB-DER. The demonstration was made up of about 17-18 people, including workers, members of TİB-DER, lawyers from the ÇHD (Progressive Lawyers Association) as well as members of the BDSP (Independent Revolutionary Class Platform), the larger party of which TİB-DER was a local organization in Tuzla. I was surprised by the low number of demonstrators, and especially because of the low turnout of actual workers in Tuzla who were there in overalls. At least half of the demonstrators including myself were not workers but outsiders. Even though TİB-DER's call for demonstration was open to anyone, other leftist and socialist organizations that were active in the Tuzla shipyards zone did not come and join the demonstration. Their absence is an issue related to sectarianism

within the left that derives from the contrasting views of leftist activists about how to approach and organize the workers and particularly about who will lead that process. I will discuss this question further in detail in the next chapter entitled “There Won’t be a Revolution”.

While demonstrators gathered behind the TİB-DER banner, on which the statement, “We want to have humane living and working conditions”⁴⁴ was written, they chanted slogans such as, “We don’t want to die anymore”, “Torlak is a murderer”, “Stop the murders in Tuzla”, and “Shipyard workers are not slaves!”

During the demonstration, protestors’ use of the word murder while describing the fatal occupational injuries in the Tuzla shipyards was not coincidental, but part of an ongoing discursive, legal and political struggle, which aimed to emphasize the fact that the ongoing injuries of shipyard workers in Tuzla were the result of a “political choice” by the government and Turkish industrialists who prioritized rapid economic growth over the demands of the workers concerning health, work safety and job security⁴⁵.

Following the slogans that described Necdet’s death as a “murder,” a press statement was read by a member of TİB-DER in front of the Torlak shipyard. In the statement TİB-DER claimed that the shipyard owners and management had not taken the required work safety measures, and also criticized the AKP government whose laws and regulations served the rich and were responsible for the death of Necdet and other workers in the shipyards. The statement continued,

⁴⁴ “İnsanca Yaşam ve Çalışma Koşulları İstiyoruz!”

⁴⁵ TMMOB (Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects) et al., *Tuzla Tersaneler Bölgesi İzleme ve İnceleme Komisyonu: Tuzla Tersaneler Bölgesi’ndeki çalışma koşulları ve önlemeliler seri iş kazaları hakkında rapor (“Report On the Working Conditions and Preventable Serial Work Accidents in the Tuzla Shipyards Zone”)* (İstanbul: TMMOB, 2008).

... All laws and regulations introduced by the AKP government aim to increase the profit of the capital owners. For them, workers' deaths have no importance. They only care about the growth of the shipyard sector and nothing else. Therefore, they are not taking the necessary safety measures to stop the workers' deaths. Their mere purpose is maximum economic growth.... At the same time, the government officials want to rule out any critique raised against the unsafe working conditions. However, their efforts are futile. They can never escape responsibility for the murders of the workers. We will hold them responsible, we will bring them to account...

In Turkey's labor movement naming "accidents at work" ("iş kazası") as "murders at work" ("iş cinayeti") has a longer history that could be traced back to 1970s⁴⁶. However, the particular slogan, "These are not accidents but murders" ("kaza değil cinayet") became popular nationwide after activists and leftist groups, including TİB-DER and Limter-İş⁴⁷ labor union in Tuzla, popularized it in their demonstrations, strikes and campaigns, starting in 2008, when the death toll in Tuzla shipyards was at its peak with 26 fatal injuries in only one year, and attracted the public's attention to worker's deaths. In 2008 two major demonstrations were organized in the Tuzla shipyards zone, the first on February 27th and the second on June 16th. Both protests were identified as a general strike by the leftist activists and the left-wing labor union Limter-İş that made the call for both of the actions. Despite the heavy police presence and the arrests of activist leaders and labor union members before both of the protests, the actions were successful in attracting the attention of the national mainstream media and public opinion.

Following the 2008 campaign, not only the politically active left-wing labor unions and labor organizations in Tuzla, namely Limter-İş and TİB-DER, but also national and

⁴⁶ "İş Cinayetleri' ('Murders at Work')," *TÖB-DER Journal*, 1975. Issue 105.

⁴⁷ Limter-İş: Labor Union of the Harbor, Shipyard, Shipbuilding and Repair Workers

local NGOs such as TMMOB⁴⁸, İstanbul Tabipler Odası⁴⁹, and İstanbul İşçi Sağlığı Enstitüsü⁵⁰, which work on problems concerning workers' health and safety in Turkey, persistently used the term “murders at work” (“iş cinayeti”) in their reports and analyses on occupational injuries, and also emphasized the preventability of those injuries and the responsibility of the employers. In contrast to this view, the officials of the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP), shipyard owners, and management insisted on identifying the fatal occupational injuries as “accidents at work” (“iş kazası”), as inevitable incidents and a dramatic but expected outcome of work in the heavy industries. In the Prime Minister of the time President Erdoğan's well-known phrase, “work accidents are the fate of the workers and part of the nature and creation (“fitrat/fitr”⁵¹) of the job.”⁵²

In response to such approach, TİB-DER in its declaration, explained Necdet's death by drawing attention to the insistence on economic growth by claiming that, “the shipyard management are not taking the necessary safety measures to stop the workers' deaths, because their mere purpose is maximum economic growth in the shipbuilding sector.” That is to say, the naming of occupational fatalities as murders is a persistent struggle to frame rapid economic growth as the result of a particular political choice and as the cause of vital negative effects on laborers' working and living conditions.

⁴⁸ TMMOB: Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects

⁴⁹ TBB: İstanbul Chamber of Physicians

⁵⁰ İstanbul Workers' Health Institute

⁵¹ Fitr-Fitrat is originally an Arabic word, used in different forms in Turkish, meaning the genesis, nature and creation.

⁵² Erdoğan, 14 May, 2014, public declaration after the Soma Mine Disaster, where according to the official numbers 301 miners died in an “accident.”

TİB-DER's demonstration, statements, and campaigns must be interpreted within this contested discursive, legal, and political battle on the naming and interpretation of fatal occupational injuries as murders as opposed to work accidents.

After the reading of the public statement that explained Necdet's death at the Torlak Shipyard as the result of the prioritization of economic growth over human life, TİB-DER members declared that the demonstration was complete. The crowd dispersed without any encounter with the police, who despite their common aggressive attitude towards the left-wing demonstrations that took place in Tuzla before, this time merely watched the protest from a distance and did not attack the protestors or make any arrests probably due to the heavy presence of the mainstream media in Tuzla on that day.

The Government's Response to and Explanation of Necdet's Death:

As I learned later on through the news, following the ship launch ceremony, before leaving the shipyard, Minister Çağlayan was asked by the press about his comments on the recent workplace accident which caused Necdet's death. Çağlayan answered the journalists as follows: "First of all, I send my condolences to the family of our brother who lost his life in this unfortunate accident. We need to improve work safety measures, but we also have to educate our workers. I want the shipbuilding industry to be known by its success in exports, and not by work accidents. We already conducted the required inspections and improved working conditions here significantly, and therefore, for a long time we did not hear such sad news. May Allah rest his soul in peace"⁵³.

⁵³ "Bakan Çağlayan'a protesto şoku haberi (A Shocking Protest to the Minister Çağlayan)," *İhlas News Agency*, July 17, 2010, <http://www.ihf.com.tr/haber-bakan-caglayana-protesto-soku-129532/>.

Despite Minister Çağlayan's claims that for a long time such work accidents were not heard of, Necdet was the fifth worker in Tuzla who died because of a workplace injury in the first half of the year 2010⁵⁴. Minister Çağlayan not only ignored ongoing fatal work accidents, but also implied that Necdet was responsible for his own death by stating that workers were not educated enough.

Although Turkish labor law designates employers as accountable for the education of their workers, as well as for the safety of the workplace⁵⁵, labelling workers as uneducated, and considering the lack of education of the workers as one of the major reasons for workplace injuries is a common rhetoric of both employers in Tuzla and government officials in Ankara. For instance, Hasan Kemal Yardımcı, the owner of the Yardımcı shipyard also located in Tuzla and an AKP member in parliament at the time, argued in a TV interview that, "Uneducated workers should not let be in the shipyards because the primary reason of the fatal work accidents are the presence of the illiterate and uneducated workers in Tuzla shipyards"⁵⁶. Identification of "uneducated workers" as a cause of work accidents also appeared in the Parliament of Turkey's official report regarding the investigations of ongoing work accidents which was published in 2008 and reflected the observations of the parliamentary committee on the causes and consequences of work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards. In the report, Kasım Özer, the head

⁵⁴ "TİB-DER'den Bakana Yanıt (TİBDER's Reply to the Minister)," *Kızılbayrak the Voice of Class, Revolution and Socialism*, July 17, 2010, http://arsiv.kizilbayrak.net/index.php?id=52&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=58922&cHash=1e86f131c58a76816e3843000c2a8864.

⁵⁵ Turkish Labor Law, article 4857, section 2.

⁵⁶ "Kazaların Sebebi Eğitimsiz İşçiler' ("The Reason of the Accidents Is Uneducated Workers)," *Deniz Haber - News Center for Maritime Affairs*, February 13, 2008, <http://www.denizhaber.com.tr/kazalarin-sebebi-egitimsiz-isciler-haber-12216.htm>.

of the Workers Health and Safety department of the Ministry of Labor claimed that, “In Tuzla shipyards uneducated workers, who were former peasants from rural areas, and who were only used to walking on the farm, easily fall down from high because they are not used to walking on narrow and high platforms.”⁵⁷

However, the claims by Minister Çağlayan, the Yardımcı shipyard owner, and Ministry of Labor bureaucrat Özer about workers education and occupational background are not supported by any statistical or ethnographic research conducted in Tuzla. Whereas there was no material basis or evidence to such approach, their arguments mostly consisted of speculation.

Necdet, who lost his life in the Tuzla shipyards in July 2010 was neither an inexperienced worker nor was he a former peasant and illiterate. He was a 37 year old experienced worker who came to İstanbul after working in major cities in Western Turkey, such as Denizli and İzmir. Indeed, none of the workers whom I contacted, encountered, and talked with in Tuzla during my fieldwork were illiterate or former peasants. However, despite the lack of evidence, the rhetoric about the “uneducated workers” was popular amongst government officials and employers in Tuzla, who intended to hold workers accountable for their own deaths. According to the TİB-DER’s next declaration in response to Minister Çağlayan’s claims one day later, “This was part of an attempt to explain the cause of work accidents as anything but the negligence of the shipyards’ management.”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Turkish Parliament Investigation Commission, “Gemi İnşa Sanayisindeki İş Güvenliği ve Çalışma Şartları Sorunlarının Araştırılarak Alınması Gereken Önlemlerin Belirlenmesi Hakkında Rapor (Report About the Investigation of the Problems Related to Work Safety and Working Conditions in the Shipbuilding Industry and Identification of the Necessary Measures)” (The Grand National Assembly of Turkey, July 2008), <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/sirasayi/donem23/yil01/ss295.pdf>.

⁵⁸ “TİB-DER’den Bakana Yanıt (TİB-DER’s Reply to the Minister).”

In their response, TİB-DER emphasized and criticized another method widely used by government officials and shipyard bosses to mislead the public opinion, which was holding foreign forces accountable for the ongoing fatal work accidents.

In addition to his answer to the journalists' question about his thoughts on the recent death of Necdet, Minister Çağlayan in his speech in the ship launch ceremony in the Gisan shipyard also implicitly responded to the ongoing protest in front of the nearby Torlak shipyard. As quoted in TİB-DER's declaration, Minister Çağlayan made the following statement about the work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards:

So, many people have died in the shipyards. Any life lost there, broke our hearts. However, there are provocateurs who are jealous of the success of Turkey's shipbuilding industry, particularly in the countries from whom we took over the market share of the shipbuilding sector. To be sure, we need to overcome the shortcomings of the sector. But, we should not let the shipbuilding industry die. As the government, we are aware of our responsibility and our record is completely clean. Surely the industry has to solve certain problems, yet, please do not allow foreign rival forces to achieve their aims, which are to provoke us and undermine the success of the Turkish shipbuilding industry. Do not get provoked and do not kill the ship building industry⁵⁹.

Through this statement Minister Çağlayan implicitly accused TİB-DER and other protestors in front of the nearby Torlak shipyard as agents serving the interests of Turkey's rivals in the shipbuilding industry by putting forward the problems concerning work safety in the shipyards and disclosing the weaknesses of Turkish shipbuilding sector, which for Çağlayan seems to be hidden from rival countries.

Such conspiracies again lack any material evidence and are not unique to Minister Çağlayan. On the contrary he followed a similar approach expressed by Prime Minister of the time Tayyip Erdoğan who, in his meeting with shipyard owners to discuss the problems

⁵⁹ Ibid.

in the shipbuilding industry in 2008, the year when the death toll in Tuzla was at its peak and the public anger was on the rise, stated that: “The increasing debates regarding the accidents and deaths at work in Tuzla have unfortunately surpassed a certain level and have started to overshadow the rapid growth and highly appreciated achievements of our shipbuilding industry in recent years... There is no ship building industry in the world where there is no fatal accident. We will not let our shipbuilding industry get drowned because of the negative climate caused by the work accidents.”⁶⁰

This statement was a reaffirmation of the prioritization of rapid economic growth, while at the same time accusing critics of undermining the achievements of the shipbuilding industry through denaturalizing the supposedly “natural”, “expected” and “normal” work accidents, which took place everywhere in the world. The identification of “natural” and “normal” statistical information as an unnatural, unusual and abnormal incident by activists and labor unionist was a “provocation” for Minister Çağlayan. And for Erdoğan such “debates regarding the deaths and accidents in Tuzla” were a threat to the progress of the shipbuilding industry in particular and the successful image of the national economy in general.

On the one hand, the perception of the fatal accidents as expected and natural incidents by government officials and shipyard owners plays a significant role in their evaluation of any critiques as malicious approaches that intend to introduce a “natural” fact in a “distorted” way. On the other hand, the critiques are powerful, too, in terms of shaping the discursive space in which work accidents are discussed, so that shipyard owners

⁶⁰ “Ölümsüz Tersane Dünyada Yok, Tuzla’yı Boğdurmayız (There Is No Shipyards in the World Where There Is No Death. We Will Not Let Tuzla Get Drowned),” *Hürriyet Newspaper*, June 20, 2008, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/olumsuz-tersane-dunyada-yok-tuzlayi-bogdurmayiz-9227017>.

frequently encounter and have to respond to the accusation of being “murderers” in this contested space regarding the definition of the occupational fatalities. In a well-known speech, Murat Bayrak, the head of the Turkish Shipbuilders’ Association at the time, responded to the press, the activists, and labor unionists who argued that shipyard owners were responsible for fatal work accidents with the following statement: “We hired those workers in order to create employment for them, in order to feed them. We did not hire them to make them die. However, this was their fate, their life time was that long, and they were deceased. [The critics] however imply that we intentionally murder those workers.”⁶¹

Here, the use of the leftist activists’ term murder by shipyard owners, even though they used the term to claim their innocence, indicates the influence of labor organizations in shaping the discursive space in which occupational injuries are discussed and the persistence of the left critique in the Tuzla shipyards.

Thanks to the long and hard work of the activists, labor unionists, a few journalists, academics and workers, work accidents were introduced as a persistent critique of the prioritization of economic development over workers’ lives.

However, government officials such as Minister Çağlayan considered protests against work accidents as acts that harm the image of the shipbuilding industry and claimed that those who organize such protests and campaigns and who disclose work accidents as a major problem in Turkey are indeed agents of foreign rival forces that aim to ruin Turkey’s economic success. Indeed, such conspiracy theories are instrumental in delegitimizing the struggle for workers’ rights in public opinion by stigmatizing activists

⁶¹ ““Ölen İşçilerin ömürleri O Kadarmış’ (The Life Time of the Deceased Workers Was That Long),” *Kaptan Haber - News Center for Turkish Maritime Affairs*, April 8, 2011, <http://www.KaptanHaber.com/HABER/25566/1/-34olen-iscilerin-omurleri-o-kadarmis-34.html>.

as betrayers of the national interest who do not want Turkey be developed and thus serve the interest of economic rivals.

Thus, making fatal work accidents visible and maintaining the attention of the public opinion on the issue are indeed major fronts in the battle between activists and government officials and shipyards owners who either try to conceal the incidents or to mobilize tactics to label the workers' struggle for the right to live and have better working conditions as a movement that threatens the national interest for rapid growth.

The Struggle Between Erasing and Recording the Name of the Dead Worker

Following the incident of Necdet's death, the Ministry of Labor Inspection Head Office in İstanbul initiated an investigation into the Torlak Shipyard. However, the manager of the Torlak Shipyard refused to provide reports on security measures regarding the cranes in the shipyard to the inspectors who came to the incident site for investigation. Torlak shipyard provided the required reports only three weeks later. Even though the reports were prepared retrospectively and returned to the Ministry of Labor too late, the Inspection Head Office in İstanbul dismissed the case with the claim that the reports showed that the shipyard had no omission in the accident⁶².

While Necdet's name was added to a list of dead workers, the closure of the subsequent investigation without any sanction or penalty for the shipyard was considered by Necdet's brother-in-law Metin as a biased interpretation of labor law by the judges, public prosecutors and court experts who exculpated the company owners and managers.

⁶² İsmail Saymaz, "Selay Tersanesi Gitti, Torlak Kurtuldu (Selay Shipyard Was Closed, Torlak Shipyard Was Saved)," *Radikal Daily Newspaper*, August 7, 2010, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/ekonomi/selay-tersanesi-gitti-torlak-kurtuldu-1012208/>.

As indicated in several Limter-İş and TİB-DER pamphlets and declarations, for the leftist campaigners, the Tuzla fatalities at work were “organized crimes” committed with the collaboration of the law makers, judges, inspectors, public prosecutors, the police and shipyard owners”⁶³.

Necdet’s death, similar to the thousands of workers’ deaths in Turkey, was considered by the government and by the company owners as a tragic event that was yet the fate of those people, and part of the nature of the work. As the head of the Turkish Shipbuilders’ Association at the time, Murat Bayrak stated once, “Every year in the shipyard industry 4-5 deaths are natural. The accidents in the ship building industry will end when traffic accidents will come to an end”⁶⁴. Thus, fatal accidents in the ship building industry are naturalized and normalized as statistical information, as an expected risk calculated beforehand. For the employers these incidents are inevitable and are happening everywhere in the world.

After his death Necdet’s body was sent to his hometown for a funeral. “There were no funerals of the workers in Tuzla because none of the workers who died here were from İstanbul” Metin told me, “Their bodies were sent to their hometowns where their families live. The funeral takes places there.”

While Necdet’s body was taken out of sight, his death was recorded by the shipyard owners, inspectors and judges as just another addition to the number of workers who have died while the Turkish economy was growing.

⁶³ “TİB-DER’den Bakana Yanıt (TİBDER’s Reply to the Minister).”

⁶⁴ “Tersane İşçileri Neden ölüyor? - Taraflarla Ropörtajlar (Why Do Shipyard Workers Die? -Interviews with the Parties),” *NTVMSNBC*, February 7, 2008, <http://arsiv.ntv.com.tr/news/434678.asp>.

Remembering Necdet, adding his name together with the reason of his death to the list of the workers who have lost their lives in accidents at work in the Tuzla shipyards since 1992, and making Necdet part of the history of the struggle for making work accidents visible, was indeed only possible through the tremendous and persistent efforts of the Limter-İş labor union that (since its re-opening in 1992 following the military coup of 1980) worked as a pioneer of the campaign against work place injuries. Necdet was added to this list as the 136th worker who died in the Tuzla shipyards zone. Limter-İş published a press statement about the incident entitled, “The 136th murder at work in the Tuzla shipyards”, and condemned Torlak shipyard demanding the resignation of the Minister of Labor because of the governments’ failure to secure work safety measures in the shipyards⁶⁵.

Limter-İş labor union is the only organization in the Tuzla shipyards that collects and publishes data about the names of the workers who have lost their lives in the Tuzla shipyards together with the reason of their deaths. As I mentioned in the introduction chapter, in Turkey, there is no official information or statistics about work related injuries of unregistered workers. The Ministry of Labor only collects data about work accidents of registered workers. However, in Tuzla, similar to many textile workshops and construction sites in Turkey, the work is divided and subcontracted to several companies who are smaller in size, and these subcontractor companies do not register their workers in order to avoid making payments to the social security institution on behalf of the workers. According to the Tuzla Monitoring Commission Report, in the Tuzla shipyards only about

⁶⁵ “Tuzla’da 136. İş Cinayeti (The 136th Murder at Work in Tuzla),” *Atılım Socialist Newspaper*, July 15, 2008, <http://www.yenidenatilim.com/?Syf=18&Hbr=58308>.

10-20% of the workers, most of whom were experienced and qualified for work, were employed directly by the shipyards with long-term contracts and social security benefits. The remaining 80-90% were working for one of the hundreds of the subcontracting firms without any registration, formal contracts, or social security payments⁶⁶. In the case of the fatal workplace injuries, whose victims were mainly the unregistered workers of these subcontractor companies, statistics were not recorded by government offices. Therefore, for the Tuzla shipyards there is no official number or names-list of the victims of the fatal accidents at work.

The number of the fatal accidents in Tuzla, which was at 160 as of 2015, is based on the information collected by the Limter-İş labor union since 1992. This number is likely a low estimate considering the labor union's limited power and restricted access to the scenes of the accidents, and the unknown number of cases closed with the payment of "blood money", an informal payment of compensation by shipyard management to the families of workers who lost their lives at work accidents to dissuade the family from going to court and making the case public. Therefore, Limter-İş estimates that the actual number of fatalities in the Tuzla shipyards is far higher, similar to the International Labor Organization's (ILO) claims that the actual number of total fatal accidents in Turkey is much higher than the official statements.

⁶⁶ TMMOB (Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects) et al., *Tuzla Monitoring Commission Report (Tuzla Tersaneler Bölgesi İzleme ve İnceleme Komisyonu Raporu)*.

How are accidents at work explained?

By telling the story of Necdet and describing the opposing responses of labor organizations and government officials, I have introduced the contrasting discourses of major actors in the Tuzla shipyards towards workplace injuries.

When I chose work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards zone as a topic of study and prepared to go to Tuzla for fieldwork, the major question in my mind was: how do such fatal accidents continue, why haven't these work accidents stopped or even changed the number-proportion despite the rise of the visibility of the event, public awareness, and subsequent critiques?

Whereas Tuzla shipyards zone is a densely populated industrial site where accidents at work take place continuously, the endurance of chronic work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards resulted in the leftist critiques that problematize workplace injuries as a structural question related to the organization of the work, the compression of time and space, the violation of the labor law, the ineffectiveness of the official inspections, and the obsession with economic growth. I will discuss each of these explanations and problematizations of work accidents by activists and labor organizations in detail in the following sections of this chapter.

a) Time-space compression in the Tuzla shipyards

Necdet's death at the Torlak shipyard was explained both by his brother-in-law Metin and the workers' organizations TİB-DER and Limter-İş first and foremost as a result of the extended work hours and the pressure to finish the job in the shortest time period possible. As Metin told me, a sleepy and unqualified worker was using the crane when

Necdet was killed working overtime. Necdet was forced to work at a time when he supposed to have rest and he was recruited together with unqualified workers to complete a qualified job in a constrained time period.

While explaining this phenomena, in his analysis of neoliberalism David Harvey uses the term “time-space compression” in order to indicate the speeding up of production cycles and the reduction of turn-over time in the neoliberal age. Here, Harvey argues that “time-space compression” is a hegemonic strategy of the big bourgeoisie whose purpose is gaining increased profit in the shortest time interval possible.⁶⁷

The Limter-İş labor union, in arguing that the speeding up of work cycles is a major cause of work “accidents,” directly refers to Harvey’s concept of “time-space compression” in its public declarations that criticize the shipyard management’s and the government’s insistence on rapid production and growth. In a Limter-İş statement entitled, “The Lies and Truths about Time-space Compression”, the labor union argues that:

...In order to finish the job earlier, the subcontractor forces the worker to spend more labor in the same time frame.... Instead the time that workers’ need for their social life, for their families and for themselves should be extended. Work time should not exceed 7.5 hours each day and 37.5 hours every week. There should be at least two breaks every day so that workers can rest. ...without questioning the way of production which caused the work accidents, one cannot develop a solution. What have to be changed are the techniques of production, the flexible mode of work and the subcontracting system, about which the AKP government and the capitalists have stated, “we would never touch on this issues” ...As we, the Limter-İş labor union often emphasizes, Tuzla is the laboratory of neoliberalism in Turkey. Tuzla is the laboratory to develop techniques to use cheap labor in an insecure work environment, to disintegrate labor organization, to undermine people’s social rights, to exploit people’s future, to make people forget the value of life, and to

⁶⁷ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

make people get used to the murders at work. The intention of the capitalists is clear: To make everywhere Tuzla.”⁶⁸

Limter-İş labor union critically emphasizes that in Tuzla, while there are imposed time limits in the contracts between the customers and shipbuilders in terms of the completion of ships, shipyards force subcontractors to complete the job as soon as possible. If ships were not completed within the time limit indicated in the contract, shipyards were sanctioned to pay high amounts of compensations to those who ordered the ships. This tension of the shipyard companies is reflected in the pressure on the subcontractors that they are working with. When the subcontractor cannot finish the job on time, the shipyard owner cuts the payment or sometimes do not make any payment to the subcontractor. The possibility of bankruptcy on the side of the subcontractor creates a tension, which force the subcontractor to make his laborer work harder, longer and faster. While the completion of the job becomes a vital issue for the subcontracting firm, safety measures and worker’s health are neglected. Therefore, Limter-İş claims that the temporal pressure on workers is a major cause of workplace injuries.

According to another Limter-İş labor union statement, the global economic crisis in 2008 and 2009 has provided the justification for firms to cut costs and limit the measures taken to ensure work safety once again. Following the economic crisis, 80% of workers were fired, and the proportion of fatal accidents to total employment did not decrease, indeed it even increased⁶⁹. In the years following the global economic crisis, the previous

⁶⁸ “‘Tuzla’da Zaman-Alan Sıkışıklığında Yalanlar ve Gerçekler’ (The Lies and Truths about the Time-Space Compression in Tuzla),” *Limter-İş Labor Union*, November 12, 2014, http://www.limteris.net/haber/haber_detay.asp?haberID=392.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

amount of production was completed with fewer workers whose working times were extended dramatically. Many workers did not receive their paychecks for months, yet they continued to work without any objection because of the fear of losing their jobs.

The chart below, prepared by activist-academic Aslı Odman and later on updated by myself based on the most recent data, has been used by the Limter-İş labor union and Tuzla Monitoring Commission to show the positive correlation between the amount of production and fatal accidents at work. When there was an increase in the amount of production from 2001 to 2008, the number of fatal accidents increased, and when there was a decrease in total production in 2009 and 2010, there was a decrease in the total employment as well as in the number of the fatal accidents. This confirms the explanation put forward by the Limter-İş labor union about the reason for the decrease in the number of the fatal accidents following the 2008 economic crisis. As seen in the chart below, while the decrease in the number of the accidents at work in 2009 and 2010 is related to the decrease in total production, one can see that the proportion of the fatal accidents to the total employment did not decrease but rather increased in those years. That is to say, the decrease in ‘the number’ of the fatal accidents after 2009 is not an indicator of improvement of working conditions in Tuzla, as some shipyard owners claimed, but a direct result of the decrease in total production and total employment.

	Annual amount of ships built in Tuzla Shipyards in dwt. & cgt.	Fatal work accidents (data collected by Limter-İş)	Employment number according to GİSBİR-Turkish Shipbuilders Association	Employment number according to the Ministry Of Labor	Employment number according to the Undersecretariat for Maritime Affairs
2001	147.130 DWT / 124.185 cgt	1	5.750		
2002	84.700 DWT / 106.687 cgt	5	13.545		13.000
2003	106.450 DWT / 207.853 cgt	4	14.150		
2004	293.229 DWT / 255.487 cgt	6	14.750		25.000
2005	331.740 DWT / 344.328 cgt	10	24.200		28.500
2006	556.285 DWT / 446.674 cgt	10	28.580		33.480
2007	670.000 DWT / 662.720 cgt	13	33.000	17.572	33.480
2008	815.266 DWT / 817.982 cgt	26	33.480 (August) 25.923 (Nov.)	18.976	34.500
2009	750.793 DWT / 675.642 cgt	15	19.179	16.501	19.179
2010	465.462 cgt	11	21.449		21.449

Figure 5: Number of the fatal workplace injuries the Tuzla Shipyards according to Limter-İş Labor Union and employment numbers according to the three different organizations. The first version of this chart was prepared by Aslı Odman. I updated the chart according to the more recent data and information. The information in the chart is based on the following sources: Fatal workplace injuries list of the Limter-İş Labor Union, Report of the Ministry of Labour from 2007 http://www.calisma.gov.tr/is_teftis/tersane.pdf; webpage of the Association of Turkish Shipbuilders www.gisbir.com; OECD Report 2011 p.24, and the Tuzla Monitoring Commission Report 2008.

A second point that can be observed in this chart is that the information provided about numbers of the workers in Tuzla shipyards (registered-formal and unregistered-informal together) differs dramatically among three organizations, namely the Turkish Shipbuilders' Association (GİSBİR), Ministry of Labor, and the Undersecretariat for

Maritime Affairs that announce employment statistics about the shipbuilding industry in Tuzla. This critical difference between employment numbers is introduced by the Limter-İş as evidence of the high proportion of the unregistered workers in the Tuzla shipyards zone. Because there is no registry and no actual data but only estimates about the numbers of informal workers, the announced total employment numbers of various organizations differ radically. The high proportion of the unregistered workers in the Tuzla shipyards zone was also a major problem in following work accidents and collecting reliable information about fatal work accidents. Whereas an official investigation should be conducted after the death of a registered worker, in the case of the death of an unregistered worker, the company is able to cover up the case by paying the victim's family a direct monetary compensation called "blood money" in the Tuzla shipyards, to dissuade the family from appealing to the court. In such cases the death may not be reported or might be reported as something other than a work accident. The Limter-İş labor union claimed that the composition of workers in the Tuzla shipyards zone mostly from unregistered workers made the task of collecting information about workplace injuries much harder. Therefore, the labor union estimated that the actual number of the fatal workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards zone were much higher than the number that Limter-İş was able to collect and released publicly based on the information that they had access to.

b) Informalization through violations of labor law:

Necdet, who lost his life in a workplace injury at the Torlak shipyard was working for a subcontracting firm that was responsible for cleaning and painting the ships. However, as I explained in the introduction chapter before, subcontracting out the main job in heavy

industries, such as the jobs related to the production, repair and maintenance of the ships in Tuzla shipyards, is illegal according to Turkish Labor Law article 4857. That is to say, Torlak shipyards' hiring of a subcontracting company for the cleaning, painting and maintenance of the ships during the production process was a clear violation of Turkish labor law. Therefore, several scholars and activists argue that the violation of the law and formal requirements as well as the wide-spread use of subcontracting firms to complete the main portion of jobs related to the shipbuilding is a major cause of ongoing work "accidents." According to this formalist approach, Turkish labor law is understood to be well-designed but not properly applied.

Nevra Akdemir, who between 2001 and 2004 conducted the first scholarly research on the reasons for and consequences of work accidents in Tuzla shipyards emphasized the subcontracting mechanism as a violation of the labor law as a prime reason behind these work accidents. Akdemir's thesis *Kalkınma ve Sermaye Birikimi Sürecinde Enformalleşme: Tuzla Örneği* ("Informalization in the process of development and capital accumulation: The case of Tuzla") critically analyzes the subcontracting system that divides the main job and is instrumental in shifting the responsibility for taking work safety measures from the main shipyard companies to the small subcontracting firms⁷⁰. Akdemir's thesis was later on published as a book in 2008, at a time when the death toll in Tuzla shipyards was at its peak and work accidents in Tuzla attracted the attention of the mainstream media and national public opinion thanks to the political campaigns,

⁷⁰ Nevra Akdemir, "Kalkınma ve Sermaye Birikimi Sürecinde Enformalleşme: Tuzla Örneği ('Informalization in the process of development and capital accumulation: The case of Tuzla')" (MA Thesis, Marmara University Social Science Institute, 2004).

demonstrations and strikes of the leftist labor unions and activists in Tuzla. In her book, *Taşeronlu Birikim: Tuzla Tersaneler Bölgesinde Üretim İlişkilerinde Enformelleşme* (“Accumulation through Subcontracting: Informalization in the Production Processes in Tuzla Shipyards Zone”) Akdemir identified the violation of Turkish labor law article 4857 through the division and subcontracting out of the main job as a major cause of the chronic accidents⁷¹.

As Akdemir states, “In Tuzla Bay about 90% of the laborers who are actively working in ship, yacht and boat building in the 48 different shipyards are employed by subcontractors, and only 10% are directly employed by the main shipyard companies. The number of the subcontracting firms in Tuzla bay is between 1000 and 1500 at its peak in 2008. Each subcontractor firm employs between 3 to 100 workers. Most of the unregistered workers, who work as welders, assemblers, grinders, painters or electricians are hired informally and without a contract for daily compensations by one of those subcontracting firms. That is to say, in the Tuzla shipyards zone, the main job, which is shipbuilding and ship repair, is divided and subcontracted in violation to article 4857 - section 2 of Turkish labor law.”⁷²

Below is my translation of Turkish Labor Law article 4857, section 2, the last paragraph that regulates the subcontracting relation between the main firm and the subcontractor:

⁷¹ Akdemir, *Taşeronlu Birikim: Tuzla Tersaneler Bölgesinde Üretim İlişkilerinde Enformelleşme* (“Accumulation through Subcontracting: Informalization in the Production Processes in Tuzla Shipyards Zone”).

⁷² TMMOB (Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects) et al., *Tuzla Monitoring Commission Report (Tuzla Tersaneler Bölgesi İzleme ve İnceleme Komisyonu Raporu)*.

...In this relation [between the main employer and subcontractor], the main employer together with the subcontractor are equally responsible to the employees of the subcontractor in terms of the application of this law, and [both the main employer and subcontractor] have to abide by the job contract and all obligations imposed by any collective bargaining agreements in which the subcontractor is a part. The rights of the employees of the main company cannot be limited or reduced through being employed by the subcontractor, and forming a subcontracting relation with a worker who is already employed by the main company is not permitted. Once the contracted job begins, the employees of the subcontractor are regarded as the employees of the main company. Except for the tasks that require professional expertise that are not part of the main task of the main company, the main task of the main company cannot be divided or subcontracted.⁷³

That is to say, the shipbuilders can subcontract catering services or the cleaning of the offices to other companies but it is illegal for the shipyard companies to subcontract tasks that are part of their main task such as the repair or painting of a ship. As defined by the law, the subcontractor company that sent Necdet to the Torlak shipyard was not eligible to conduct the painting job of the ship that was part of the main tasks of the main company, and Torlak shipyard was not allowed to subcontract a task related to its main job, which was shipbuilding and maintenance. Even if the main job was subcontracted and conducted by a subcontractor company, as indicated in the law, Necdet, who was an employee of the subcontractor company should be regarded as an employee of the main company with the beginning of the job. That is to say, it was not the subcontractor company but the Torlak shipyard who were obliged to secure work safety and workers' health, and in that sense Torlak shipyard was directly responsible for Necdet's death. However, after its investigation the Ministry of Labor Inspection Head Office did not find Torlak shipyard

⁷³ Turkish Labor Law, Article 4857, Section 2, final paragraph.

guilty due to the fact that the shipyard had no omissions in the accident. Thus, the Labor Ministry disregarded labor law in its inspection.

Akdemir and others who are critical of the illegality and informality in the industry follow the formalist approach and consider violations of the application of the law as the main reason behind work accidents. According to Akdemir, the subcontracting mechanism divides the job and the workers and increases the risks derived from the difficulties of coordinating the job in a workplace where tens of different subcontracting companies work at the same time in a dense area. Moreover, for Akdemir, subcontracting allows the main shipyard companies to transfer responsibility and the costs of work safety measures to the subcontractor companies that are small in size, in most cases firms owned by a single owner whose profits derive from cheap labor and the reduced costs of work safety equipment that has not been provided or has only been partially provided⁷⁴.

Although the negative effects of unregulated subcontracting in the Tuzla shipyards are correctly identified by Akdemir, I think that her approach to the law, based on the assumption about the division between the executive and legislative powers, obscures the fact that these powers are indeed intertwined in practice, and that the political power that holds government office has all the means to write, rewrite, interpret, and arbitrarily suspend or apply the laws that they have introduced. Therefore, calling for the correct application of the law from those who make the law is a paradoxical call that assumes the imperative of the law is separate and above the law-maker.

⁷⁴ Akdemir, *Taşeronlu Birikim: Tuzla Tersaneler Bölgesinde Üretim İlişkilerinde Enformelleşme* ("Accumulation through Subcontracting: Informalization in the Production Processes in Tuzla Shipyards Zone").

c) Tuzla Monitoring Commission Report:

The most comprehensive study and consequent report on the reasons for the fatal workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards zone was prepared by Nevra Akdemir and another academic and prominent activist Aslı Odman starting from October 2007 and was published as a book freely accessible online in January 2008, when the death toll due to work accidents in the Tuzla shipyard was at its peak and the media and public attention on the issue was high. The Report is entitled *Tuzla Tersaneler Bölgesi'ndeki Çalışma Koşulları ve Önlenebilir Seri İş Kazaları Hakkında Rapor* (“Report On the Working Conditions and Preventable Serial Work Accidents in the Tuzla Shipyards Zone”) [From now on *Tuzla Monitoring Commission Report*]. The authors and signatories of the report identified themselves as the *Tuzla Tersaneler Bölgesi İzleme ve İnceleme Komisyonu* (Tuzla Shipyards Zone Monitoring and Inspection Commission). The report was written by academics and activists with help and information provided by the Limter-İş labor union. Various NGOs as well as the Ministry of Labor and the Turkish Shipbuilders Business Association (GİSBİR) were invited to contribute to the preparation of the report, however neither the Ministry of Labor nor the business association accepted. As a result, the report was introduced as the collective work of several NGOs: the DİSK (The Confederation of Revolutionary Workers' Unions in Turkey), Limter-İş (The Labor Union of the Harbor, Shipyard, Shipbuilding and Repair Workers), TMMOB-İstanbul (Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects, İstanbul Province Coordination Committee), İstanbul Tabip Odası, (İstanbul Chamber of Physicians) and İstanbul İşçi Sağlığı Enstitüsü (İstanbul Worker's Health Institute).

As indicated by the authors, “the report aimed to create public opinions that help to make the shipyards take the required work safety measures to stop the serial, fatal workplace injuries”⁷⁵. Following the tragic events in the Tuzla shipyards that resulted in the death of eight workers in the last half of the year 2007 alone, the Tuzla Monitoring Commission was formed to investigate the structural reasons behind these work accidents and to give a voice to the injured workers and the relatives of the workers who lost their lives in accidents. The commission particularly tried to make visible the work and production relations, the work environment, workers’ health and work safety procedures, and the legal processes that invite work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards zone⁷⁶.

Methodologically the report is based on statistical information about the shipbuilding industry, as well as interviews with engineers, health and work safety personnel, and workers in the Tuzla shipyards zone. The main explanations presented by the Tuzla Monitoring Commission Report for the prevalence of work accidents is a combination of the arguments discussed above, namely, time-space compression in a work environment where the major mode of organization is based on subcontracting. The “main thesis” of the report is described as the following: “The major cause of work accidents is the rapidly growing ship building sector that uses modern production techniques based on the speeding up of work without taking the required measures concerning work safety and workers’ health⁷⁷.”

⁷⁵ TMMOB (Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects) et al., *Tuzla Monitoring Commission Report (Tuzla Tersaneler Bölgesi İzleme ve İnceleme Komisyonu Raporu)*.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Moreover, the Tuzla Monitoring Commission report emphasized the fact that, “The subcontracting mechanism paves the way for fatal occupational injuries through making the organization of work as flexible and rapid possible and allowing the main shipyard companies to disavow their responsibility in workers’ deaths.” The report claims therefore that, “the subcontracting system helps to conceal the actual responsibility of the major shipyard companies. However, the subcontractor companies are not the cause of the problem but the symptom of it. We must direct our main critiques to the major shipyard companies that encourage and utilize subcontractor firms in speeding up work and discarding their own responsibilities in terms of securing workers’ health and safety⁷⁸.”

Furthermore, the report claims that, “almost all of those accidents could be prevented if the required measures of safety were taken by the shipyard owners.” The report defines work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards as, “serial events that have structural reasons” and that are “preventable” through reforming the failed structure. Thus, the report argues that because all accidents are indeed preventable, the fatal incidents at work are not accidents but murders. “The fatalities at work are the result of the capitalist employers’ intention to make more profit⁷⁹.”

In brief, the Tuzla Monitoring Commission Report listed the major reasons for the work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards as the following:

⁷⁸ Ibid., 26.

⁷⁹ TMMOB (Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects) et al., *Tuzla Monitoring Commission Report (Tuzla Tersaneler Bölgesi İzleme ve İnceleme Komisyonu Raporu)*.

1-The Subcontracting mechanism that creates an environment for the existence of unregistered work, divides up the job, and makes the regulation and inspection of work impossible.

2-The compressed work space despite the increasing speed of the work.

3-Extended work hours, which are in violation of the official regulations concerning heavy and dangerous industrial work that are imposed on the workers.

4-The organization of labor based on kinship or co-town (hemşehri) relations and trust instead of formal contracts and legal grounds.

5-The lack or insufficiency of the required health personnel and equipment at the work site.

6-The lack or insufficiency of the required work safety equipment.

7-The lack or insufficiency of personnel and/or engineers who are responsible for work safety.

8-Obstacles concerning the application of the law when the relatives of the workers who have died in accidents took legal action and applied to the courts.

9-A lack of severe enough sanctions against employers.

10-Partial or incomplete social security payments.

11-Legal obstacles and police pressure against labor unions and workers' organization activities.

12-The insufficiency of the inspections conducted by the Ministry of Labor.

d) The obsession with economic growth

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter in their recent study Turkish scholars Adaman and Akbulut identify “the obsession with economic growth” as a common hegemonic narrative and policy of consecutive Turkish governments and a major reason for the ongoing work accidents in Turkey. Aslı Odman, a prominent activist and academic, who played a key role in introducing the problems related to workers’ health and safety in the Tuzla shipyard to the general public by co-editing the comprehensive Tuzla Monitoring Commission Report that attracted the attention of the mainstream media as well as major political parties in the parliament of Turkey, also emphasized this obsession with economic growth in her recent articles on chronic work accidents in Turkey. According to Odman, “there is nothing unknown or unclear about the reasons for work accidents in Turkey. These incidences are rationally explainable and completely preventable. Every day workers are ordered to complete the job ‘quickly, more quickly’, and we hear from government officials and capitalists statements such as, ‘do not cool the engines, we need to grow rapidly.’ The reasons for work accidents are these ambitions for rapid economic growth and the speeding up of the work in the shipyards⁸⁰”.

The above-mentioned critiques that describe the government’s and employers’ approaches to rapid economic development as an obsession, ambition, time-space compression, profit maximization”, respectively, claim that such relation to rapid economic growth is a major reason behind ongoing work accidents. I would argue that these explanations are correct to a certain extent, however, they are still too general to grasp

⁸⁰ Aslı Odman, “Soma: Yaşam metaforları ölüme taşırken (Soma: While life carries metaphors to death),” *Birikim Socialist Culture Journal* July/August 2014, no. 303/304 (July 24, 2014): 224–31.

the complex, contradictory and ambiguous approaches towards development and growth by various actors in the Tuzla shipyards zone, namely the shipyard owners, labor unions and organizations, and the workers themselves. While I largely agree with these critical explanations, I think that there is a significant flaw in these argumentations.

I think that the significant weakness of the critical arguments of development presented above is the scholars' consideration of the obsession or ambition with economic growth as a one-sided, top-down imposition of capital owners onto the workers, as argued by Odman and Akdemir, or as a historical hegemonic strategy of the Turkish government as claimed by Akbulut and Adaman. Each of these critical approaches to work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards however, disregard workers' agency and their personal desires to have a better life through actively taking part in and making use of the political, organizational and economic practices that facilitate rapid economic growth.

In the following chapter titled "There won't be a revolution", I discuss then the workers' points of view about labor organizations, political campaigns and protests against the ongoing work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards on the one hand, and the opportunities that they see in the Tuzla shipyards on the other hand.

CHAPTER 2: “There Won’t Be a Revolution”



Figure 6: “Bosses are in the palace, workers are in the graveyards”: a slogan written by the socialist workers’ organization TİB-DER on a wall along one of the major roads that workers use to go to their jobs at the shipyards (photo taken by myself).

Introduction:

Leftist labor organizations, activists and scholars, correctly emphasize the very clear power inequality between the government and shipyard owners on the one hand and

the workers on the other hand in terms of determining political and economic priorities as well as controlling financial and legal means to impose development as a top priority. They underscore the oppression of the working classes by the government and employers and draw attention to the negative working conditions by calling Tuzla shipyards the graveyard of the workers⁸¹. Moreover, leftist labor organizations and academics critically ask, “for whom does the economy grow?” and claim that, “economic development merely benefits capitalist expansion and increased profits for the capitalists”⁸².

Such critiques of development urge one to rethink “alternatives to development”, a critical question introduced by anthropological studies on development⁸³. As well-known figures in the critical anthropological literature, Arturo Escobar⁸⁴ and James Ferguson⁸⁵ criticize the universalistic measures of development that are not defined according to the needs and expectations of the target populations and that do not benefit but rather harm disadvantaged segments of society. As an alternative to development Escobar proposes post-development, a pluralistic, ecological and non-market-oriented redefinition of progress and development that does not serve capitalist ends but instead satisfies the needs

⁸¹ Ufuk Uras (leader of the socialist Freedom and Democracy Party (ÖDP) member of the parliament at that time), “‘Tuzla Tersanesi İşçi Mezarlığı Haline Geldi’ (Tuzla Shipyards Became a Graveyard of the Workers),” *Hürriyet Newspaper*, February 13, 2008, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/tuzla-tersanesi-isci-mezarligi-haline-geldi-8224924>.

⁸² “TİB-DER’den Bakana Yanıt (TİBDER’s Reply to the Minister).” Similar arguments were expressed by Limter-İş labor union as well as academics Odman and Akdemir.

⁸³ A good review of the discussions on the question concerning alternatives to development can be found in Marc Edelman’s edited volume Edelman and Haugerud, *The Anthropology of Development and Globalization*.

⁸⁴ Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development : The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, c1995).

⁸⁵ James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

of the local populations⁸⁶. In a similar vein, Turkish scholars Adaman and Akbulut, while identifying “the obsession with economic growth” as a major reason for the ongoing work accidents in Turkey, propose “degrowth” as an alternative to obsessive development⁸⁷. Adaman, Akbulut, Arsel and Avcı define degrowth as, “a concept imagining and enacting alternative ways of organizing society-economy-environment relationships...whose scope ranges from issues of infrastructural adjustment to the architecture of new currency systems and social enterprises.” For these scholars, “degrowth calls for a radical reconfiguration and democratization of state-society relationships in Turkey”⁸⁸. In a journal interview on economic growth in Turkey, Akbulut describes degrowth in a similar way to Escobar’s definition of post-development, namely an imagination for a pluralistic and egalitarian society that instead of being designed by the central planning agencies in the capital Ankara respects local differences and ecological needs. That is to say, degrowth aims to satisfy people’s needs while minimizing social and ecological degradation [such as work accidents], and prioritizes good living and respect for nature rather than economic growth in industrial sectors⁸⁹. In the same interview, Adaman, a professor of economics at İstanbul’s Boğaziçi University states that degrowth is about “solidarity, sharing and sufficiency” as opposed to individualism and competition. He argues that we need to

⁸⁶ Escobar, “Imagining a Post-Development Era?”

⁸⁷ Adaman and Akbulut, “The Unbearable Charm of Modernization: Growth Fetishism and the Making of State in Turkey.”

⁸⁸ Adaman et al., “De-Growth as Counter-Hegemony?”

⁸⁹ “Adaman/Akbulut/Madra: Büyümeyle Değil Planlı Ekonomik Küçülmeyi Konuşalım (Interview with Adaman/Akbulut/Madra: Let’s Talk about Planned Degrowth instead of Growth),” *BusinessHT News*, August 18, 2015, http://www.businessht.com.tr/ekonomi/haber/1117160-turkiye-buyumesini-ariyor-3?utm_source=facebook&utm_campaign=tavsiye_et.

discuss how to share the social surplus in an egalitarian way and to redefine what is sufficient to live a qualified life together in an egalitarian society⁹⁰. Thus, production should aim to satisfy those needs set as sufficient, and not be for excessive consumption and profit maximization.

Whereas all of the above-mentioned critiques of development provide creative tools to imagine a more egalitarian society, the lack of a detailed discussion of concrete examples of such practices make those critical approaches remain mostly on paper. This is a major critique directed to post-development scholars: As Edelman and Haugerud quotes (Gow, 2002:300) in his book on the anthropology of development, “such academic criticisms of development often have little impact on its practice...it is counter-productive and offers no practical solutions”⁹¹. Edelman and Haugerud also raise their own critiques of post-development and degrowth schools by stating that, “but if not development, then what? To declare the development era over can only seem far-fetched to citizens of [global South]... Alternatives imagined by post-development enthusiasts often remain just that – imaginary”⁹².

Moreover, degrowth scholars’ descriptions of “good living” and “sufficiency” remain vague and their arguments suffer from the assumption that the local and/or disadvantaged populations are necessarily egalitarian people contented with “sufficient” goods and services. A major critique of the opponents of the post-development and degrowth school is about such representation and the romanticisation of disadvantaged

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Edelman and Haugerud, *The Anthropology of Development and Globalization*, 48.

⁹² Ibid., 52.

populations as people who pursue an ecological and egalitarian society by negating development⁹³. As Edelman and Haugerud argue, “contrary to proclamations about its desired demise, in many parts of the world the idea of development remains a powerful aspiration – a hope that lives in spite of a justified loss of faith in particular policy prescriptions”.⁹⁴

My observations in the Tuzla shipyards zone have led me to agree with Edelman and Haugerud. Economic growth stories are ambiguous, controversial, and contested. Surely, workers’ lives are more fragile and their choices more limited compared than those of the capital owners and employers. There is a clear unequal distribution of the results of economic growth and an unequal distribution of the life and death in the Tuzla shipyards. However, this does not mean that the workers are merely passive victims of governmental and capitalist practices that prioritize rapid economic growth over workers’ health and safety. Indeed, the Tuzla shipyards zone is a place that opens up new opportunities for the workers, too.

A unique quality of the Tuzla shipyards is its opportunities to get rich fast. The subcontracting mechanism, which is identified by activists and labor unionists as one of the major reasons behind the ongoing work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards, is indeed also an opportunity for the workers for upward mobility in terms of class and economic power. Even though most of the subcontracting firm owners who are former workers end up in bankruptcy, a few success stories in Tuzla are enough to nourish and keep alive the dream

⁹³ Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, *Anthropology and Development : Understanding Contemporary Social Change* (New York: Distributed in the USA by Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

⁹⁴ Edelman and Haugerud, *The Anthropology of Development and Globalization*, 50.

of becoming rich and improving one's class position. Thus, the desire for development survives with exceptions, with examples of those who could form their own subcontractor companies. Therefore, Tuzla shipyards is an ambiguous space, both the symbol of the inhuman working conditions in Turkey and the unique site of opportunities and dreams for upward mobility.

As I will discuss in the second half of this chapter, shipyard workers have better salaries in Tuzla compared to their counterparts in the construction or textile industries, and several workers also have the opportunity to establish their own business in the shipyard industry. In the Tuzla shipyards, despite the very negative working conditions some workers, whose stories I will tell in this chapter, maintain the desire to improve their own and their families' living conditions through becoming the owners of their own jobs.

Yet, before telling those stories I will first demonstrate the tensions experienced within the leftist labor organizations as well as between the workers and the labor organizations in the Tuzla shipyards zone. I ask why the leftist organizations that disclosed the oppression of the working classes by the government and employers and successfully attracted the attention of the public to the work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards zone could not be organized among the workers. What are the differences between the labor unions and workers in terms of their identifications of the problems in the Tuzla shipyards zone, their beliefs in social change and revolution, and their perceptions of development? How do these differences limit the labor unions, students, and activists in creating alternatives for the workers?

Strong Presence, Sectarian Divides: Leftist Organizations in the Tuzla

Shipyards

After the day of protest organized by the TİB-DER (The Shipyard Workers' Union Association) following shipyard worker Necdet's death in the Torlak shipyards, I began to regularly visit TİB-DER's office in the Tuzla shipyards zone in order to learn more about their activities, their approach to workers and also to inquire about the reasons why various socialist workers' organizations in Tuzla did not act together. TİB-DER is a workers' association and not an official labor union such as the Limter-İş (Labor Union of the Harbor, Shipyard, Shipbuilding and Repair Workers), a major socialist labor union in Tuzla that made the call for the major workers' demonstrations in Tuzla in February and June 2008. Although Limter-İş, also published a declaration in protest of the Torlak Shipyard because of their responsibility in Necdet's death as I mentioned in the first chapter, Limter-İş members were not present in the demonstration organized in front of the Torlak shipyard. Indeed, there were only 17-18 people at the demonstration, most of whom were members of either TİB-DER or the BDSP (Independent Revolutionary Class Platform), the larger socialist party of which TİB-DER was a local organization in Tuzla.

At this point I should note that similar to TİB-DER's relation to the BDSP, all other leftist workers' organizations in Tuzla have ties to larger leftist political parties. For instance, the leader group in the Limter-İş labor union was composed of members of the ESP (The Socialist Party of the Oppressed)⁹⁵ a radical leftist party in Turkey and an ally of the pro-Kurdish party HDP (People's Democratic Party) in the National Parliament. These self-declared links, as well as other alleged links of the Limter-İş to various parties and

⁹⁵ ESP: Ezilenlerin Sosyalist Partisi

organizations are utilized by the police, judiciary, and employers to claim that labor union activities such as calls for a general strike, boycott and demonstrations are illegal, or are “terrorist activities”.⁹⁶

Moreover, there were two other local workers’ organizations in Tuzla, the Baret (Helmet) group composed of members of the socialist EMEP (Labour Party) and “the Workers House” of the TKP (Communist Party of Turkey). However, the Workers House was closed during my fieldwork and the Baret group was inactive.

I was informed about the Baret group during one of my visits to TİB-DER’s office by Zeynel, a shipyard worker and the head of TİB-DER. Zeynel told me that the Baret group that had worked together with the Limter-İş labor union for a long-time, protested and left the labor union because of tensions regarding taking part in the leadership and decision-making mechanisms in Limter-İş.⁹⁷ As Zeynel told me, “Even though Limter-İş claims that it embraces all workers in Tuzla and defends their rights, they are sectarian and do not allow other groups take part in the decision-making process.”

I directly asked Zeynel about the TİB-DER’s own relation with Limter-İş and he told me that, “The current leadership of Limter-İş does not have a democratic structure and does not allow other opinions to be heard or discussed. They excluded us. At the beginning

⁹⁶ The ESP is an ally of the pro-Kurdish party HDP (People’s Democratic Party) which has close ties to the Kurdish guerilla the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) that since 1984 has regularly engaged in fighting against the Turkish army in the predominantly Kurdish populated southeast of Turkey with the goal of Kurdish autonomy.

⁹⁷ As I was told later on by Hakkı Usta, the general secretary of the Limter-İş labor union, the Baret group even intended to close down the union through the immediate resignation of Baret members from Limter-İş leadership positions, and then planned to intentionally prevent the election of a new leadership. Although I only heard one side of the story from Hakkı Usta and could not contact the Baret group, this incident showed me how strong the sectarianism was amongst leftist groups, so that a group that could not control the leadership of the labor union might intend to prevent others from forming leadership even at the risk of closing the labor union.

we were also organizing within the labor union. However, we left later on. I wish we could act together. For us the important thing is the organization of the working class and the organization of everybody in the Tuzla bay. This can be done by somebody else, it does not matter. Whoever can organize the workers here, we go and support them.”⁹⁸

Zeynel accused Limter-İş of being non-democratic. However, although he could not know my relation to the Limter-İş, he correctly guessed that I had also contacted them for my research and carefully concluded his words by stating that he wished that they could act together and maintained that for him it did not matter who organized the workers, what mattered was the organization of labor. I think that Zeynel’s careful shift from a critical to a mild tone can be considered as evidence of the tense relations amongst labor organizations which results in a lack of mutual trust. The actual practices of these competing leftist organizations do not fit with the politically correct and socialist statements of Zeynel about the paramount importance of class organization.

This state of intra-organizational tension explains why I did not see members from other leftist groups at the TİB-DER’s protest in front of the Torlak shipyard. Later on in my fieldwork, I never saw the members of Limter-İş present in an activity organized by TİB-DER, nor did I see any TİB-DER members when I participated in the activities of the Limter-İş labor union.

The Tuzla shipyards zone is not only a dense industrial region where workplace injuries take place excessively but also an industrial suburb where there is an excessive presence of leftist fractions compared to the almost complete absence of the left in other

⁹⁸ My conversation with Zeynel in the TİB-DER Office.

industrial suburbs in Turkey. Particularly after the 1980 military coup's harsh suppression of the left, and the shutting down of all leftist parties, labor unions and organizations until 1992, the former strongholds of Turkey's left in the suburbs and towns were gradually eroded and the remnants of the left were only able to survive as small fractions in metropolitan areas such as central İstanbul and Ankara, and were for the most part only influential in universities and academic circles. The 1980 military coup in Turkey that installed a state-centric and oppressive constitution also imposed serious legal constraints on organized labor. For instance the Limter-İş, the socialist labor union in Tuzla that re-opened in 1992 after the government ban on establishing labor unions was lifted, did not possess the right to collective bargaining or the right to sign collective contracts on behalf of the workers ("toplu sözleşme hakkı") according to the restrictions of Turkish labor law concerning unions.⁹⁹ Until November 2012, a labor union had the right to negotiate a collective agreement only if the number of its members exceeded the 10% threshold of all workers in the same "branch of industry" (iş kolu - in this case the shipbuilding industry). Although this threshold was reduced to 3% with an amendment in the law¹⁰⁰, the number of the legally recognized "branches of industry" was reduced from 28 to 20 which made it impossible for many labor unions in certain branches of industry to exceed the threshold. Moreover, the 2012 amendment to labor law defined a complete ban on strikes in many industries that were identified as "strategic" such as the production of military equipment and ships, air travel, banking services, natural gas production and petro chemical industries. According to the DİSK (The Confederation of the Revolutionary Workers' Unions) the

⁹⁹ Turkish Labor Law articles 2881 & 2882

¹⁰⁰ Turkish Labor Law article 6356

amendment weakened the power of organized labor in Turkey and striped the rights of about 6.5 million workers in Turkey to organize and to be represented by labor unions¹⁰¹. Due to legal constraints the proportion of the unionized workers in Turkey is only about 10% which makes Turkey last amongst the European and OECD countries¹⁰². Although there is such political and legal pressure on labor organizations in Turkey what strikes me about Tuzla is the exceptional and higher than usual presence of left-wing organizations, yet not in solidarity but in a sectarian competition with each other.

Zeynel also confirmed that the Tuzla shipyards zone was an exceptionally politicized area when he told me, “The Tuzla shipyards zone is a geographically small and dense area. Therefore, news about murders at work and other problems circulates rapidly. While workers do not necessarily join a labor organization, they know very well what is going on in Tuzla and almost all of the workers are aware of our activities. Nowhere else in Turkey can one find workers like those in Tuzla who have a conscious about their class positions.”

Yet, Zeynel did not think that workers’ awareness about the negative working conditions and the labor organizations’ activities to defend workers’ rights to safety and health was enough. “The problem in the Tuzla shipyards is that we cannot transform that consciousness into a revolutionary will.”

¹⁰¹ “İşçinin Örgütlenme İradesine Darbe Vuruldu (‘Workers’ Will to Organize Was Violated)’” (DISK Research, January 30, 2013), <http://disk.org.tr/2013/01/iscinin-orgutlenme-iradesine-darbe-vuruldu-sindikalara-yetki-gaspinin-ilk-adimi-atildi/>.

¹⁰² Şebnem Turhan, “Türkiye en kötü sendikalaşma oranı ile OECD sonuncusu (Turkey is last among OECD countries in terms of the proportion of the unionized workers.),” *Hürriyet Newspaper*, October 23, 2014, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/turkiye-en-kotu-sendikalasma-orani-ile-oecd-sonuncusu-27468300>.

I asked Zeynel about what he thought the reasons were that workers' consciousness about the problems in the shipyards as well as about their class positions, could not be transformed to a revolutionary will. One reason Zeynel offered me was the fear of being fired and thus unemployed if the employers found out that the workers were affiliated with a labor organization:

Workers are even afraid of signing a simple petition. They are afraid of being blacklisted because of that. For instance, a friend of mine took a pamphlet that we distributed on the street and then he went to his job while reading our pamphlet. On that day he was fired from his job, just because he had a TIB-DER's pamphlet in his hand. He was asked by his boss why he took the pamphlet. When he answered, "Because I was curious", they told him that, "We cannot work with you anymore". Because this is a common and known practice in Tuzla, even during the election times workers will not take political parties' brochures. They are that intimidated. All of the political parties came to the Tuzla shipyards during the elections, however, they could not distribute one single brochure.

While Zeynel blamed the employers for blacklisting and then firing workers who were interested in the activities of workers' organizations, he also expected the workers to be courageous and not to have fear. So, for Zeynel, in addition to the pressure by the employers, the other reason why the awareness of the workers could not result in revolutionary change was a lack of a consciousness on the part of the workers themselves about class struggle. For Zeynel, although the workers in the Tuzla shipyards zone were conscious about the political campaigns in Tuzla thanks to the strong presence of leftist groups, workers were also not courageous enough to rise up against shipyard companies.

Zeynel continued:

During the economic crisis many people lost their jobs here. They first fired the most politically conscious workers. So, no politically active workers were left here. The workers who are left have a well-known perspective. They are aware of the problems in the shipyards but they do not participate in any actions. They are afraid of being fired by their employers or of being arrested by the police. They are hesitant and they do not care if another worker dies here. A lot of workers say that,

“I would rather die than be unemployed.” Because of the lack of a powerful organization, and because of the lack of workers’ clear consciousness about class struggle, employers can easily buy the blood of the workers here.

Zeynel’s critical comments about the workers’ hesitance and fear in the Tuzla shipyards also paints a picture of the ideal worker as imagined by a socialist labor organization. The labor organization glorifies the figure of the highly political, revolutionary and courageous worker, the one who fights the police, and who is not afraid of being arrested or fired from his job. To be sure, there is an explicit police pressure on the workers who are critical of the situation in Tuzla. The labor organization’s demonstrations and intended strikes in Tuzla were named as “acts of terrorism” by the shipyard owners and intervened in harshly by the police several times.¹⁰³ However, as I will discuss in the following sections in more detail, by expecting the workers to participate in street demonstrations, to confront the police violence, and to accept the risk of losing one’s job for the sake of class struggle and revolutionary change, the leftist labor organizations have set the bar very high for ordinary workers. Such an understanding of and approach to workers’ struggle makes taking action together and being part of leftist workers’ organizations too risky for ordinary workers, and thus, marginalizes the workers’ struggle.

However, for the workers’ organizations trusting someone was based on that persons’ capacity to take risk and to challenge the employers and the police. During my fieldwork, leaders of each political group that I contacted in Tuzla, including Zeynel from

¹⁰³ Zeynel also claimed that the renovation of the police station in Tuzla and the purchase of some required equipment including police vehicles is funded by the Industrial Business Associations in Tuzla including the Shipbuilders Business Association, GİSBİR.

the TİB-DER and Kanber from Limter-İş, persistently attempted to learn about my personal political affiliations and several times asked me directly about my political stance to identify whether I was ‘one of them’ or one of their rivals. While each time I insisted on identifying myself as a politically sensitive researcher, I could not satisfy them with such a vague identification. I felt that the trust between myself and the leftist labor organizations strengthened and intensified only after I joined in their demonstrations first with the TİB-DER in front of the Torlak shipyard and later on with Limter-İş in front of the Tepe Klima factory, and especially when I confronted the police together with members of those labor organizations in Tuzla.

Even in my case, my sincerity was judged and evaluated by the leadership of the leftist worker organizations based on my courage and my capacity to challenge the police and the employers. However, while I supported the protesting workers, the risks that I as an outside researcher and student took were dramatically different than those of an ordinary worker who unlike me faced with the risk of losing his job and the only income he had each time when he confronted the employer or the police. I thought more about this significant difference after I got to know and had several conversations with Recep, a laborer working in a subcontracting company in the Tuzla shipyards zone.

My Memory vs. Recep’s Story

I first met Recep in the TİB-DER’s office in 2011. When Recep entered the office, I was chatting with Zeynel, the head of the organization, and two other workers. Zeynel, turned to Recep and said “welcome” to him. Then he turned to me and explained, “Our Recep lives in a Bekar Evi [bachelor house], you heard about those, right?” “Sure” I said.

Bachelor houses in Tuzla were squatter housings converted into workers' dormitories, located between workshops and factories. The bachelor houses were occupied by the poorest of the laborers who work temporary jobs for subcontractor firms and are paid daily¹⁰⁴. These houses were notorious because of their terrible living conditions. As Zeynel told me earlier one of the purposes of the TİB-DER was to get organized among those workers. Zeynel then introduced me to Recep by naming the university that I graduated from in İstanbul. "Do you know where this friend is from? He is from Boğaziçi University, you know. You have been there, right?" "Yes, that is correct, I have been there," answered Recep, "yet I am surprised because I am not used to seeing Boğaziçi people around here except on the demonstration days."

At the moment I notice that Zeynel looked at Recep with a grimace as he wished that Recep would stop his sarcastic complaints. Although I also noticed the sarcasm in Recep's comments, for the sake of learning the reasons behind his critiques I avoided questioning him directly which might be perceived as hostility. So, I joined in the conversation as though I did not notice his sarcasm.

"Oh, you have been to Boğaziçi, what a nice coincidence. I graduated from that school in 2006," I told Recep while greeting him. "Yes," said Recep "I was invited by a leftist student group to talk about my experience in Tuzla as a worker. It was 2008, a time when Tuzla was popular in the news because many workers died at that year. I think the

¹⁰⁴ Daily payments called "yevmiye" in Turkish, yet pronounced as "yövmiye" among the workers. Those Daily payments were between 30 Liras to 80 Liras based on the qualifications of the workers. (The range of those daily payments were equal to about 18 to 45 US dollars when I did my fieldwork in 2010 and 2011).

highest number of the deaths took place on that year.” “How was your visit of Boğaziçi?”

I asked. “It was okay”, Recep said:

The event was on work accidents, I mean work murders. They wanted me to talk about the daily life in Tuzla, workers’ problems and also what the workers’ plans for action and protest were. However, at that time I was new in Tuzla, only working here for about 3-4 months in a subcontractor company so I could not answer all questions they asked me. I was new to İstanbul at that time, too. I am originally from Konya¹⁰⁵. I came directly from Konya to Tuzla and I had never lived in İstanbul before. Therefore, at that time I was not familiar with İstanbul. You know, I was even lost on my way to Boğaziçi.

He laughed then. “But it is not easy to find the way to Boğaziçi even if you were familiar with İstanbul”, I told him, “Before I started university I had never been to that area. Did you take the train first to go there?” I asked him. “Yes, I took the train to Haydarpaşa¹⁰⁶ and then took the ferry to go to the European side, but then I took the wrong bus.” Recep laughed again and continued: “You know this was my first time when I saw the Bosphorus and the European side of İstanbul. Even if I wasn’t lost it was a very long trip to Boğaziçi. It took almost half a day to go there from Tuzla.” “Were you supposed to work in the shipyards on that day?” I asked. “Yes, indeed” said Recep, “I am not sure now but I think it was a Wednesday or a weekday in any case. I was working on daily basis for “yemiye” (daily compensation). On that day I did not go to work however, but went to Boğaziçi. I did not tell anybody that I was going to Boğaziçi though. It was dangerous, you know. If the bosses learned that I was going to a leftist meeting they would not hire me again.” Then Recep told me about how the meeting at Boğaziçi went. He explained to me

¹⁰⁵ Konya: A major city in Central Anatolia.

¹⁰⁶ Haydarpaşa is the first train station on the Asian/Anatolian side of İstanbul, located on the Bosphorus and near the ferry station.

that he was asked about his experience in the Tuzla shipyards as a worker for a subcontracting company and how he was involved in the activities of TİB-DER. He also told me about how his answers were appreciated and how when he finished his talk he was applauded loudly by the Boğaziçi students. “After the talk we had a tea in the university cafeteria and then a student accompanied me until the Boğaziçi University bus stop so that I would not get lost again.” While he laughed again, I asked him “Weren’t there any students who lived on the Anatolian side and joined you on your way back?” “No”, said Recep, “they looked very busy with what they were doing. The event I was invited to was part of a week-long event they organized. At the end of that week, politically sensitive leftist students from Boğaziçi University, Koç University, Sabancı and some other universities marched from Kartal train station¹⁰⁷ to Tuzla to show their support for the workers’ struggle in the Tuzla shipyards. However, it was a Saturday. This time I am sure I remember correctly because there were not that many workers around except some members of Limter-İş and TİB-DER when the students came to Tuzla.”

Recep’s story clearly demonstrates the dramatic differences between the class-positions, understandings and approaches of the leftist students and actual workers in the Tuzla shipyards towards politics, organization and protest. The first point that struck me is the radical difference in terms of the risks taken by the university students and by an ordinary shipyard worker such as Recep in the political struggle for workers’ rights. On the one hand, by participating in the Boğaziçi University’s political event Recep took the risk of being blacklisted by the shipyard companies, which in turn could result in Recep’s

¹⁰⁷ Kartal train station is the stop before Tuzla-Aydınlı stop for those who came from central İstanbul (from West).

loss of his job and of his only income that he needed to cover his basic needs. Moreover, in order to come to Boğaziçi University Recep sacrificed his daily pay, which the students did not even think to compensate. The leftist students did not acknowledge how complicated coming from Tuzla to Boğaziçi was for Recep, who was seeing the European side of İstanbul for the first time in his life. Furthermore, none of the students felt the need to accompany Recep on his way back to the Anatolian side of İstanbul, a daily commute for some of the Boğaziçi students for years, yet a first-time event for Recep. On the other hand, a protest march to the Tuzla shipyards was scheduled on a weekend day by the students, who could not give up taking their classes and exams during the week. As both a practical and a symbolic result of these dramatic differences, the students and the ordinary workers in Tuzla could not meet and come together when the student groups marched from the district of Kartal and arrived at Tuzla on a Saturday evening.

Recep's story also struck me personally, because my memory of the same event was dramatically different than Recep's story and experience. After my conversation with Recep, in order to be sure, I checked the news archive and my emails and realized that the event that Recep talked about was "Labor Week" organized by the Boğaziçi University Student Cooperative, a left-wing student group, some of whose members I knew in person. The Labor Week took place between April 14 and 18, 2008 at the university.

While fatal work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards became one of the major news items in Turkey starting from the end of 2007, I was in New York City, pursuing my Masters in Anthropology at Columbia University. I followed the news about what was happening in the Tuzla shipyards through internet and social media. As a Boğaziçi University graduate, I received the announcement of the students' campaign in April 2008

by a group email that informed current Boğaziçi students and graduates about the events, organizations and the planned march to Tuzla. This was also the time when my personal interest in the political campaign surrounding the Tuzla shipyards had intensified. The students' campaign aimed to expose the responsibility of the shipyard companies for the ongoing fatal workplace injuries in the shipyards, and to protest the government that overlooked the negligence of the shipyard owners. Together with the announcement of the event, a call for action was attached to the e-mail prepared by the university students. The call for action was entitled "We wish that Turkey will not be Tuzla" and informed readers about the political campaign that aimed to attract the attention of the public to the issue of the "murders at work" in the Tuzla shipyards and declared solidarity between the shipyard workers in Tuzla and university students in İstanbul. Below is my translation of the declaration:

We are marching against the murders at work and miserable working conditions!
While we wrote this text another worker died in the Tuzla shipyards.
We are ashamed! Because we did not do anything until tens of workers died in Tuzla!
We are ashamed! Because the shipyard workers, who were ignored and destined to poverty could not be known for their labor but only for their death!
We are ashamed! Because we have forgotten that any creation of humanity is only possible thanks to the sweat on the brow of the workers.
We are ashamed! Because we understand how important our claims to rights and our ability to look after our lives are only after tens of workers died in Tuzla shipyards.
We are angry!
We are angry! Because the government and the Ministry of Labor officials claim that the reason for the work accidents was the inattention of the workers.
We are angry! Because with each ship the ship owners and shipyard bosses have become much richer, while tens of injured, sick, incapacitated or dead workers have been left behind.
We are angry! Because after each accident and each death, workers and families are forced to make a bargain with the employers for the blood money.

We are angry! Because work accidents, bad working conditions, poverty, insecure and unsafe work have been made a natural element of everyday life for the workers and an ordinary situation for us.

.....

To claim Tuzla means to claim our own lives. We are marching to Tuzla in order to support the honorable resistance of the shipyard workers who say that “we cannot bring down this order without coming together”. And we greet all the struggles of the workers with our march that gets its strength from our history of social resistance, which is based on numerous examples of worker-student solidarity¹⁰⁸.

Should I be ashamed, too? This was my feeling, at the time. “I should be there”, I told myself, “We should do something to prevent these accidents; we should raise public awareness”. When I received and read the declaration, I remembered that its first impact upon me was the feeling about the need to do something to stop workplace injuries. The leftist students’ agitating narrative that began with self-inflicted shame because of a belated reaction and then turned to anger directed towards shipyard owners and government officials affected me in the same order, and persuaded me about the immediate need to take action.

Later on I read in the news that several public intellectuals, well-known writers, and parliament members belonging to the oppositional political parties joined approximately 300 students from İstanbul’s most elite universities Boğaziçi, Koç, and Sabancı in their march to Tuzla. In the march students carried banners that featured statements such as “Stop the murders at work in Tuzla”, “We will not allow the whole Turkey to be like Tuzla” and they wore white t-shirts on which it was written “We are all shipyard workers” and the popular leftist slogan “Liberation cannot be achieved alone, either we fight together or none

¹⁰⁸ The Turkish original version of the declaration was retrieved from “Türkiye Tuzla Olmasın (‘We wish that Turkey will not be Tuzla’),” *savaskarsitlari.org*, April 18, 2008, <http://www.savaskarsitlari.org/arsiv.asp?ArsivTipID=9&ArsivAnaID=44922>.

of us can win!¹⁰⁹” The protest march attracted the attention of the mainstream press, and the news about the students’ march to Tuzla appeared in all major newspapers¹¹⁰. Later on I received another group email from Boğaziçi University Student Cooperative which stated that the protest march was very successful in attracting the attention of the public and included a long list of the newspapers and their internet links for anyone to check and see where the students’ Tuzla march appeared as news.

However, since I was far from the scene, I did not have the chance to observe the actual interaction between the students and the workers in the Tuzla shipyards following that march. Only after hearing Recep’s story, was I able to acknowledge how the worker-student solidarity glorified in the students’ declaration remained only on paper, while the students met with the representatives of leftist labor organizations on a Saturday evening in Tuzla. Whereas the students focused on and were successful in attracting the attention of the press and the public, such organization and language used in the students’ declaration could not attract ordinary workers who were absent from the scene. So, why did ordinary workers not participate in the students’ demonstration that were supported by the active leftist labor organizations in Tuzla?

I think there are several reasons. One of these reasons was the obvious dramatic differences between the students and workers in terms of their class positions, agendas and concerns. The students’ basic motivation for taking action seemed to be a shame as described in their call for action. For the students, the need to overcome this self-inflicted

¹⁰⁹ “Kurtuluş yok tek başına, ya hep beraber ya hiçbirimiz!”

¹¹⁰ “Üniversiteliler Tuzla’ya Yürüdü (‘University Students Marched to Tuzla’),” *Hürriyet Newspaper*, April 19, 2008, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/universiteliler-tuzlaya-yurudu-8741929>. News about the students’ march also appeared in NTV News, Milliyet, Radikal, Cumhuriyet and Evrensel Newspapers.

shame seemed to be prior and dominant to the need to contact the workers before coming to Tuzla and carefully examining the everyday needs and expectations of the workers. As a result the student action targeted the self-satisfaction of the students rather than developing a common struggle with the shipyard workers. The students, who supposedly could do something to attract public attention to the workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards, had not done anything up until that point, and therefore ashamed, marched to Tuzla to salve their conscience and to be relieved with the satisfaction of having done something. Here, even though the students' wore t-shirts stating empathetic claims such as, "We all are shipyard workers" and declared that, "To claim Tuzla means to claim our own lives", these claims could not mask the actual differences between the students of the elite universities of İstanbul and the shipyard workers in terms of their class, the risks they took and the way they interpreted the problem. Recep's emphasis on the temporal difference between the workers and the students was striking here. The students failed to even show up during the time when the laborers in the shipyards actually work, and those same students returned to their homes on the same Saturday evening without waiting for the start of work in the shipyards on Monday morning, because unlike the workers they did not have to. The students who visited the shipyards temporarily could return to their everyday student routine by simply taking off their t-shirts with the slogans. Consequently, the students' empathy worked here as the reproduction and reaffirmation of the fact that the students were indeed not shipyard workers.

Thus, another answer to the question of why ordinary workers were not present in students' demonstration might be found in the dramatic differences between the workers and students in terms of the risks they took by participating in a street demonstration. The

risks that workers face if they participated in a demonstration are significantly higher than the risks taken by outsiders such as the students and public intellectuals, who were present in the Tuzla shipyards only temporarily. The day after the demonstration, the elite university students were able to feel secure about continuing their jobs, namely going to school and taking classes without risking their ability to cover their basic everyday needs in terms of finances. At the same time, the workers were left alone in the shipyards to cope with the everyday work load and also had to face the pressure of the shipyard management that often blacklisted politically active workers. However, it seems as though the organizers of the larger political demonstrations missed that point.

Moreover, as I mentioned in the first section of this chapter, despite the significant difference in terms of the risks taken, the expectations of the students and leftist workers' organizations for the radicalization of ordinary workers marginalizes the workers' struggle. Whereas leftist students and activists ask for sacrifices from the workers in terms of their personal and job security by calling them to actively confront the police and challenge their employers in street demonstrations, these radical demands alienate ordinary workers who hesitate to act for the sake of the unlikely possibility for revolutionary change.

In our conversations, Aslı Odman, an activist and academic, who participated in and closely observed the 2008 political campaign in the Tuzla shipyards told me, "Such street demonstrations helped in attracting the attention of the public towards the murders at work in Tuzla, yet they did not help to strengthen the labor organizations and increase the numbers of unionized workers. The effect of the students' and the Limter-İş' campaign on workers was quite the reverse. Because Tuzla became too apparent in the news, the

shipyard owners became more reactionary against the critical and unionized workers, which in turn, made ordinary workers afraid to join the labor union.”

In addition to Aslı’s critical comments, what Recep told me about what actually happened following the June 16th general strike in the Tuzla shipyards was cautionary in demonstrating just how much the pressure imposed by leftist students and labor organizations to radicalize ordinary workers could be destructive and alienating.

When the Students and the Shipyard Workers did Actually Meet...

Following the students’ march on April 19th, 2008, in late May, 2008, the Limter-İş labor union called for a one day-long general strike in the Tuzla shipyards to protest the shipyard companies who were held responsible for the numerous fatal workplace injuries that took place in the Tuzla shipyards¹¹¹. Although the term general strike is usually used to describe a large-scale strike action, the June 2008 strike was only a call for shipyard workers and did not include workers from the other four industrial zones in the Tuzla district. The Limter-İş labor union insisted on calling the action a general strike to emphasize the revolutionary purpose of their action that aimed at radical social transformation¹¹². Kanber Saygılı, the head of Limter-İş claimed that, “If the general strike is successful, this will be a breaking point for the neoliberal policies imposed by the

¹¹¹ “Tuzla Tersanelerinde Genel Greve Gidiliyor (A General Strike in the Tuzla Shipyards Is Planned),” *Haberler.com*, June 9, 2008, http://www.haberler.com/tuzla-tersanelerinde-genel-greve-gidiliyor-haberi/?utm_source=facebook&utm_campaign=tavsiye_et.

¹¹² “Tuzla Tersanelerinde Grev Hazırlıkları (‘Preparations For the Strike in the Tuzla Shipyards’),” *Uluslararası İşçi Dayanışma Derneği (International Workers’ Solidarity Association)*, June 8, 2008, http://uidder.org/tuzla_tersanelerinde_grev_hazirliklari.htm.

bourgeoisie class on the working classes¹¹³.” On June 16th, 2008, once again student groups from the Boğaziçi, Koç and Sabancı Universities, as well as members of various NGOs and oppositional political parties, and representatives of various leftist labor unions from other districts of İstanbul, came together to join Limter-İş’ call for a general strike in the shipyards¹¹⁴. The demonstrators blocked the main road that connects all the shipyards and successfully stopped the work of the shipyards for one day. The demonstration was covered widely by the mainstream media and attracted the attention of the public. At the time I was informed about the general strike through the news that intensified my interest in the question concerning chronic workplace injuries experienced in the Tuzla shipyards. However, once again my memory about the June 2008 demonstrations was challenged when I heard Recep’s story. Recep, who had participated in the general strike, told me that the demonstration was indeed a disaster.

Unlike the students’ march to the Tuzla shipyards on a Saturday evening, the general strike was organized on a Monday morning. As a result, students and leftist activists were able to meet with the ordinary workers in Tuzla this time. However, as I was informed by Recep, there was a high degree of tension between the two groups instead of the supposed solidarity between the students, leftist worker organizations and the workers.

Recep described the tensions experienced in the general strike day as the following:

In the demonstration there were at most 200 workers. All other demonstrators were outsiders. While the demonstration continued some other workers wanted to go to their jobs. They did not want to join the strike. Yet, at that moment several students started to scold those workers who tried to pass through the protestors. A few

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ İsmail Saymaz, “Tuzla İşçisi ölümlere Son Verilmesi İçin Grevdeydi (‘Workers in Tuzla Were in Strike in Order to Stop Deaths’),” *Radikal*, June 17, 2008, http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/tuzla_iscisi_olumlere_son_verilmesi_icin_grevdeydi-883667/.

students yelled at them “How can you go to your job on the day of a strike, you are counter-revolutionaries, you are traitors to your class-brothers!” Some Limter-İş members joined the students and told the workers who were going to work: “What kind of people are you? Your friends die here and you don’t do anything!” Some people with tall plastic sticks even hit workers who were insisting on going to their jobs. Can you imagine? I saw that with my own eyes! The ones with plastic sticks were some students affiliated with other leftist political groups. I did not know who they were. I only knew that they appeared in Tuzla on the day of the demonstration. I didn’t see those same people later on. They came to Tuzla for one day only and blamed the workers for lacking a conscience, yelled at them, and even attacked them with plastic sticks. I am sure that later that day they went to the cafeterias of their universities and started heated debates about how to liberate the world and the workers while drinking their hot teas. It is easy to come here for a picnic and argue with the workers about class-struggle and give emotional speeches about rights and solidarity. Surely, those students won’t be the ones who are faced with the sanctions of the shipyards companies. You know, several worker friends who joined the general strike were fired by their companies later on...

...After we saw the fight between the workers who wanted to go to their jobs and the students, together with other TİB-DER members we tried to go there and stop those who were scolding the workers. At that moment Limter-İş members attacked us and tried to silence us. So, you see we also had to fight with Limter-İş. After all that mess we left the field. You see, even Limter-İş supported the outsiders instead of the workers! How do you think then they can recruit actual workers in Tuzla for the class struggle?

What I heard from Recep was pretty shocking for me. Yet, after hearing about Recep’s experience on the day of the general strike, I completely understood the reason behind his sarcasm and his critical approach towards the university students when he entered in the TİB-DER’s office, saw me and was informed by Zeynel that I was a Boğaziçi graduate. Later on I was also informed that the ones who scolded the nonparticipating workers and used plastic sticks to hit those workers were indeed some of the leftist students from Boğaziçi University.

What was particularly irritating about these leftist groups’ and students’ behavior was their claim to represent the true explanation of the problem concerning the workplace

injuries in the Tuzla shipyards and the only correct way to solve it on behalf of all shipyard workers. As indicated in the students' call for action, "the students are angry because each ship that has made the ship owners and shipyard bosses much richer, has left behind tens of injured, sick, incapacitated or dead workers."¹¹⁵ Whereas the cause of the problem was introduced within the framework of class-war, namely the exploitation of the working classes by the shipyard owners, the way to overcome such exploitation and "to bring down that order" was claimed to be radical class struggle and revolutionary actions such as general strikes. It seemed that such a representation of the problem and the imposition of class struggle as the only solution turned to active physical violence on the demonstration day when shipyard workers who wanted to go their jobs were first categorized and homogenized as part of the same worker class, and then blamed by some demonstrators for being counter-revolutionaries and traitors to their so-called class brothers.

At this point, one has to note that although members of the Limter-İş labor union were not university students but indeed workers, they adopted theoretical Marxist language similar to that used by students while approaching the workers. For the Limter-İş labor union, the main reason for the workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards was the capitalist shipyard owners' insistence on rapid production and growth. As I indicated in the first chapter, the Limter-İş labor union in its public declarations directly referred to the concept "time-space compression" described by David Harvey, to criticize the speeding up of production cycles and the reduction of turn-over time by the shipyard management to increase their profits in the shortest time interval possible¹¹⁶. Once time-space compression

¹¹⁵ "Türkiye Tuzla Olmasın ('We wish that Turkey will not be Tuzla')."

¹¹⁶ "'Tuzla'da Zaman-Alan Sıkışıklığında Yalanlar ve Gerçekler' (The Lies and Truths about the Time-Space Compression in Tuzla)."

was identified as a hegemonic strategy of the bourgeoisie, in order to undermine such hegemony, workers were expected to pursue radical social transformation through class struggle and to actively take part in general strikes.

In the Tuzla shipyards the leftist critique is important in disclosing the responsibility of the employers and the government in workplace injuries. Yet it is counter-productive when such critique turns to a persistent denial of the actual and everyday needs and demands of the workers who are not radical revolutionaries and may not even believe in the possibility of a revolutionary and structural change in the working conditions in the shipyards. In that sense, the abstract assumption of the students and activists about the “working class” does not completely fit with the self-identification and expectations of the workers in the field.

Whereas Recep’s stories about the 2008 political campaign in the Tuzla shipyards led me to entirely question my first impressions about the events that I had followed while I was away, in my fieldwork I also witnessed similar tense encounters between workers and labor union activists that demonstrated that the government and corporate pressure, as well as police violence and legal constraints were not the only reasons that hindered workers’ participation to the labor unions. The dramatic differences between the labor unions and workers in terms of their explanation of the problem, their beliefs in the possibility for a radical change in working conditions, and their calculations about the risks and benefits of working in the Tuzla shipyards were also significant obstacles before the organization of labor.



Figure 7: The welcome banner across from the Limter-İş labor union office door. From the top down: “Limter-İş is 35 years old”; “Long Live Pro-Class Labor Unionism”, “Welcome” (photo taken by myself).

“There won’t be a Revolution...”

One scene in particular stands out in my mind as symbolic of the ways that the leftist labor unions’ rhetoric about class struggle was challenged by workers who exposed the incapacity of the labor union to understand and satisfy their everyday needs. One night, on a weekday, I was in the Limter-İş office chatting with Kanber, the head of the labor union and Mehmet, the Tuzla representative of the ESP (the Socialist Party of the

Oppressed), the political party that controls the leadership of the Limter-İş labor union. Whereas Kanber was in his late fifties, Mehmet, a self-identified Marxist was in his thirties, about my own age. In our conversation, Mehmet was acting as though he was the boss by stopping the talkative Kanber and dominating the conversation with his Marxist theories about how to organize the workers and raise workers' consciousness in the Tuzla shipyards. It was late at night, at about 10pm, when two senior workers in their fifties entered the Limter-İş office. They looked very tired, yet it seemed that they had come to the office to chat a little bit with friends before going to bed. "Where were you coming from?" asked Kanber to the guests. "We were coming from work," answered the older one of the two. "What kind of work was this at this time? Were you coming from over-time work?" continued Kanber with his interrogation. "Yes, indeed" answered again the older guest, "there was an extra job in the Selay shipyard, we were coming from there." At that moment, Mehmet turned to me while pointing with his index finger at the two guests and told me, "You see, we failed to teach the workers that over-time work is another form of capitalist exploitation. If workers were conscious enough about their class-positions and mobilized the power that derives from their productive labor, then the shipyard bosses could not ask for over-time work. We repeated numerous times that over-time work is paid slavery and that extended work hours are the major reason behind murders at work. But as you see it is not heard. You ask why murders at work continue: Here you are!"

At the moment I was so embarrassed to be there as part of Mehmet's lecturing show, that I was frozen and could not say anything. In addition to Mehmet's scolding of the guests and his referring to them as "workers" in the abstract, distancing himself and the Limter-İş leaders from the guests, while not even looking in their faces but at my face, was

particularly irritating. The labor union leadership looked down on the workers when using an educative and enlightening language, as if workers were ignorant and needed to be taught and guided by the labor union leadership. This created and reproduced a dramatic distance between the workers and the labor union leadership. Those guests could have gone back home or to a coffeehouse after a tiresome day and night work, yet they chose to come to the Limter-İş office that was about a half an hour walk from the Selay shipyard. For me, this scene was a lesson that was more about why labor organizations could not organize amongst workers than one about why murders at work continue.

After a moment of silence and some murmurs, I saw the older guest turn to Mehmet and ask calmly “So, tell me then what would happen if I didn’t accept the over-time work? Do you believe that they could not find another guy to complete the job? If I rejected the job, Ali would do it. If Ali rejected the job, Veli would do it. The job would be completed in any case. Yet if I rejected the job, I would lose money. Tell me, if I rejected the job, could you, as the labor union, compensate my loss?”

Mehmet said, “No, but this is not the issue! You have to do this in order to show solidarity with your class-brothers, you don’t understand.” The older guest interrupted Mehmet, “What is the issue then if not the payment? Do you expect that there would be a revolution if I rejected the job? No, there won’t be revolution.”

While the argument between the guests and Limter-İş members about whether there would or would not be a revolution continued, one thing became clear: The labor union could neither compensate the financial losses of the workers nor present a practical alternative that could secure workers in covering their everyday needs. Under such circumstances the labor union’s promise for a revolution remained hollow rhetoric. The

guests who were visiting the Limter-İş' office were certainly conscious about their own class position and aware of their opportunities, their power and also limits of their power, maybe even more so than the labor union leadership. Whereas the labor union and leftist activist could not create practical solutions to improve working conditions and to satisfy the immediate needs of the workers, awareness about such a lack of practical alternatives led ordinary workers question what the benefit of sacrificing their over-time payments, jobs, and opportunities really was. Because there was no better option, working harder and longer appeared to be a viable way to benefit from the economic growth and survive in the Tuzla shipyards.

The Hope to One Day Have a Subcontracting Company

Whereas a revolutionary and structural change to the working conditions in the Tuzla shipyards promised by the Limter-İş labor union was seen as unlikely or impossible by the ordinary workers, the presence of a few opportunities for upward mobility, such as relatively higher salaries and the possibility to form one's own subcontracting company, help to maintain the image of rapid development. This image creates a powerful aspiration for the workers to improve their living conditions by benefiting from the rapid economic development in the shipyards zone.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, left-wing academics and labor organizations correctly emphasize the inequalities of power between the shipyard owners and the workers that results in the dramatically unequal distribution of the results of rapid economic development. However, as I discussed before a significant weakness of the leftist critique is the conceptualization of this obsession or ambition for economic growth as a

one-sided, top-down imposition of the capitalist owners onto the workers. By doing so, the activists and leftist workers' organizations approach the workers as the passive victims of the policies that endorse rapid economic growth and therefore disregard the workers' agency and desire to have a better life by actively taking part in and making use of the political, organizational and economic practices that facilitate rapid economic growth, especially through forming their own subcontracting companies.

While discussing the role of the subcontracting in the shipyards, leftist scholars and labor organizations focus merely on the negative effects of the subcontracting system on work safety and emphasize that one of the major reasons for fatal workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards is the suspension of work safety measures due to the division of the main job conducted in the shipyards amongst various subcontracting companies in violation of Turkish labor law article 4857 that bans the subcontracting out of the main job in heavy industries, such as jobs related to the production, repair and maintenance of the ships in the Tuzla shipyards¹¹⁷. The major shipyard companies evade their responsibilities concerning work safety measures, guaranteeing job security and paying worker's salaries by transferring those burdens to subcontracting companies that are barely inspected and that usually neglect the required work safety measures. Although subcontracting is truly a major reason for the negative working conditions in the Tuzla shipyards, subcontracting is also a major opportunity for the workers who aim to get rich fast and change their class positions rapidly. In that sense, the Tuzla shipyards zone is not only a uniquely dense industrial zone where workplace injuries are common, but also a unique site where a few workers have

¹¹⁷ Turkish Labor Law, article 4857, section 2.

been able to quickly form their own companies and benefit from the rapid economic growth in the shipyards zone.

In one of my visits to the leftist labor organization TİB-DER's office, I had the chance to talk to Ahmet Usta, a master worker who once operated his own subcontractor company. First he told me that he regretted having his own subcontractor company and said that, "I will not do this again. After I worked as a subcontractor for a while I gave up. I gave up because I had to tell lies to my workers. Normally, I never lie. Yet you are forced to lie because the way things work here makes you lie. Sometimes, you do not get your money from the shipyard and then you have to lie to your workers to handle the situation and to keep the work going."

Then he explained me in detail how easily ordinary workers could form their own subcontracting company:

In Tuzla, anyone can hope to be a subcontractor one day. The idea of having one's own company is widespread. According to my estimates there are about 2000 subcontractors in Tuzla. The subcontractors are pioneers. By pioneer I mean that these people are qualified workers, who know how to do the job very well. They also have the right connections and know people in the field. So, one day, they collect a large enough number of men and start work. Usually, there is no work contract and the work relations are personal. You do not even need to have too much capital. I know some workers who started their subcontracting firms with just 2000 liras [about \$1100 as of 2011]. Even though there are some older established subcontracting firms, the majority of subcontracting firms are single person companies. Most of the time, the main shipyard companies know you not by the company name but by your first name. For instance, when I had my own company they called me and asked "Ahmet Usta come and do this and do that". They did not even know the name of the company. You also do not need to be an official company and have an office. Even if you need an office to have a permanent address to receive mail, together with some friends you can rent a common office. If you see 3-4 different names on the same doorbell these are the common offices of the subcontractors....

Ahmet Usta then told me that the Tuzla shipyards zone is a site where an unqualified worker can become a master relatively fast compared to other sectors:

Whereas in textiles or metal work it takes 5-6 years to be a master, in the shipyards one can be considered a master in one or two years if he manages the right connections, has the required network with the big bosses, workers and other master workers, and saves enough money to form his own company. You know, workers are also encouraged by the main shipyard companies to form their own subcontractor firms because the main shipyards want to increase competition amongst subcontractor firms to lower labor costs and to avoid the burdens about recruiting workers and providing work safety equipment. Thus, the shipyard owners give the dirty jobs to someone else. The ordinary worker does not see the shipyard owner for the most part. In daily life he only sees and talks to the subcontractor. The ones who directly exert pressure on the workers are the subcontractors. The real big bosses sit on the fence and do not get involved in the everyday problems of the workers. They do not care whether the subcontractor has paid the salaries of his workers on time. They only care whether the job was done on time.

Although subcontracting was claimed to be a “dirty job”, Ahmet Usta added that the hope of having one’s own company in the future is what motivates ordinary workers in the Tuzla shipyards:

The presence of subcontracting works to exploit the hopes of the people. Workers think that one day we can have our own business and we can be rich. They continue to work hard under miserable working conditions while dreaming of being a rich subcontractor in the future. Yet the truth about being a subcontractor is different. Lots of the subcontractors I knew disappeared after the 2008-2009 economic crisis when things did not go well. Some of them just escaped and some declared bankruptcy. In each case the salaries of their workers were not paid. Workers were already in debt because they did not get their salaries for months. They could not survive in the Tuzla shipyard area and left soon afterwards to find another job in another district of İstanbul. I saw that after 5-6 months some of these bankrupted subcontractors appeared again in Tuzla. They formed new subcontractor companies with new names. As I told you, the name of the company does not matter at all because the shipyard owners know and ask about people by their first names. There is also no problem concerning a bad reputation because the major shipyard owners know very well how things are done in Tuzla. So, everybody continues their business as usual. Actually, there were several examples of workers who became rich like that, especially those who had good relations with the big bosses. Surely, I was not one of those.

Ahmet Usta's explanations demonstrated that the workers were not only the victims of the subcontracting mechanisms as reported by activists and claimed by leftist labor organizations¹¹⁸, but at least a few of them also benefited from subcontracting and made use of the flexible working conditions for rapid upward social mobility. Even though some of the subcontracting firm owners who were former workers ended up in a state of bankruptcy as stated by Ahmet Usta, the few examples of workers who made enough money and opened their own subcontractor firms in Tuzla were enough to nourish and keep alive the dream of becoming rich and improving one's class position.

Necati Tepe's story that I discuss below is a story about such a worker's dream of getting rich fast, forming one's own company, a rapid rise and yet a rapid fall. It is a story of hope, victory, collapse and disappointment.

Tepe Klima Resistance: The Rise and Fall of the Tuzla Dream

I was informed by the Limter-İş labor union head Kanber Saygılı about a week prior that the workers of a subcontractor firm Tepe Klima were going to occupy the factory to protest the owner Necati Tepe who had not paid the workers' salaries since the month of November. It was February 2011 when Kanber invited me to the occupation site and informed me that Necati Tepe did not keep his promise when he told the workers and the Limter-İş labor union that he would pay the salaries as soon as possible. I took down the address of the factory and went there on the day of the occupation, the 24th of February. The Tepe Klima factory was in Pendik, a neighboring town in the West of Tuzla. Both

¹¹⁸ TMMOB (Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects) et al., *Tuzla Monitoring Commission Report (Tuzla Tersaneler Bölgesi İzleme ve İnceleme Komisyonu Raporu)*.

Tuzla and Pendik are industrial suburbs. Several workshops and factories that supply the parts and services necessary for the construction or repair of ships in Tuzla were located in this nearby industrial suburb, Pendik. The Tepe Klima subcontractor company was selling heating and ventilation devices to the shipyards as well as chemical companies located in the Tuzla industrial zone. While the company worked as a distributor of several international brands, Tepe Klima also provided repair services for the air conditioning systems of general cargo ships, passenger ships and mega yachts constructed in the Tuzla bay¹¹⁹.

Before coming to the Tepe Klima factory, I decided to take a walk in Pendik. On an early weekday morning, I could not find a seat in a coffeehouse in Pendik to drink tea. Most of the coffee shops were full of young people, either unemployed or working daily jobs, waiting for the call of subcontractors in the coffeehouses. Yet, not only poverty that derives from unemployment but also poverty that derives from low or unpaid salaries was a major problem here. The Tepe Klima workers were of those working poor.

When I arrived at the site, I saw that the small-sized factory, which was located in the first floor of a residential building, was already occupied. What made the Tepe Klima occupation distinguished was the profession of the occupiers. The occupiers were welders and they shut and welded the doors of the factory and locked themselves inside. Thus, neither the employer nor the police could easily intervene in the occupation and enter the factory.

¹¹⁹ Self-description of the Tepe Klima on its company web page “Tepe Klima Marine CO. LTD.,” 2010, <http://www.tepeklima.com/>.

The Limter-İş labor union built a tent in front of the factory, which they called “the resistance tent”. The resistant tent was built on the wall of the Tepe Klima factory. There was a small fenced window that was used to communicate with the occupying workers and to bring food, medication and other needs of the workers inside the factory.



Figure 8: Inside the “Resistance Tent”. On the banner on the wall it is written, “This is Injustice. Stop the Atrocities”. The small, half-opened fenced window to the left of the banner was used to meet the various needs of and to communicate with the workers. (Photo taken by myself).

In the tent I was greeted by Kanber, the head of Limter-İş, who looked happy because the occupation had begun without any major problems. He quietly told me how hard it was for them to persuade the workers to occupy the factory: “These guys are

ignorant guys. It took months for me to persuade them to occupy the factory. When Necati first stopped paying their salaries they were about 16 people. In the meantime, some of them have found other jobs and have left. Some of them are still in Tuzla but did not answer our calls. They are cowards. So, there are now seven people inside the factory.”

I asked Kanber whether the occupiers were members of the Limter-İş before this action. “No”, he answered, “They contacted us when they could not get their salaries. Those friends inside have never supported us in any demonstration and they came to us when they could not get their salaries for three months and asked for help. We tell everybody about our labor-union. Indeed, everybody in Tuzla knows about us. Three months after they were unable to receive their salaries we suggested that they stop working and organize a resistance. Only after that we made them members of our labor union.”

Then Kanber told me how they contacted Necati and exerted pressure on him in order to make him pay his workers’ salaries:

We met with the employer as the representative of the workers. We urged him to pay the salaries immediately and accept that the workers continue to work there as unionized workers. We told him, “You know us, you know our demonstrations and actions in the shipyards zone. You know what will happen to you if you do not pay the salaries of the workers. So, you have to pay the salaries. You do a job, you get your own money, so you cannot stop paying workers’ salaries because there is an economic crisis. You are responsible for the unjust treatment of the workers and you have to recover any damage that you have caused.”

As I was informed by Kanber, when workers decided to stop working because they could not get their salaries, Necati called the workers and said that he was willing to talk to the representatives of the workers and the Limter-İş to solve the problem. Following that call, Kanber, together with several workers of Tepe Klima met with Necati at a nearby coffeehouse to talk about the unpaid salaries. During the conversation Necati told the

workers that his son was out retrieving the money and that he would stay with them until his son came back. After a while Necati asked permission to go to the restroom and allegedly called the police claiming that he was kidnapped by the workers and labor union members. Soon after, the police raided the coffeehouse, arrested the workers and labor union members and “saved” Necati. As Kanber told me, “After that event we realized that Necati would not pay the salaries at any cost. So, we persuaded the workers to occupy the factory.”

While I was in the resistance tent, I talked to Hüseyin, one of the workers occupying the factory, through the little fenced window of the Tepe Klima factory. He began by informing me that their motivation was high thanks to the support of their families and the Limter-İş labor union: “We have electricity, heating and hot water inside. We can cook our own food, there is no problem.” Hüseyin then asked me whether I was a journalist. “No, I am not,” I answered, “I am working at the university and doing research on the reasons for the work accidents and the workers’ problems in the Tuzla shipyards”. “Oh, you are a well-educated man, then” he said to me, “I appreciate what you are doing. You know what, I always wanted to study, to go to a high school, and then to a university, however, I couldn’t. I was smart, willing and hard-working, but I couldn’t. I remained an ignorant man.” I tried to interrupt him and say, “Not at all.” Yet, Hüseyin did not stop and continued to tell his story:

Listen I came here from Giresun [a province in Anatolia in the Black Sea Region] to have a better future, not for myself, but for my child. I already lost that chance, but my son could have a chance here in İstanbul. You know, I was a very successful student in primary school, but my father was a poor guy, he was ignorant too. So, he couldn’t send me to middle school after I finished primary school, and because of that I became a worker. I do not want my child to have the same destiny. He is eight years old now and started primary school last year. I want to send him to the best schools and best universities of İstanbul. And for that, I need enough money.

Then I asked Hüseyin how and when he found the job in the Tepe Klima factory:

After I arrived in Istanbul, I worked in construction for a while, yet you cannot make enough money in that job. I tried working in textiles, yet the same problem persisted: the daily wages [yövmiye] were very low. Then a childhood friend of mine from my hometown who was working in the Tuzla shipyards told me about his job and suggested that I come and work here. He said to me that, “There are bosses from Giresun so you can easily find a job and daily wages are about double compared to construction jobs”. Of course, I had heard the stories about how workers died in Tuzla every day. Yet, I also needed money. As I told you, I want to prepare a better future for my child. So, I came to Tuzla about a year ago and started to work in this subcontractor company of Necati Tepe who was from the same town too. My friend was right. Payments were much better here than working in textiles or construction. Everything was good at the beginning, we were like a family.

Hüseyin informed me about his first impression of Necati, who had come to the Tuzla shipyards zone from Giresun as an unqualified worker similarly to Hüseyin only much earlier. As Hüseyin told me, Necati succeeded to become a master worker in the 1990s when the first shipyards were built in Tuzla. He formed good connections with the shipyard owners, saved enough money and started his own business, the Tepe Klima company: “When I first met with Necati, I thought that one day I could be like him and have my own company. Yet, things did not work like that.” Then he explained me what happened instead:

Eight months later the boss stopped paying our salaries. One day I went to him and told him that he stole our bread. I really got mad at him. He threatened to fire me. I said, “Do whatever you want, I do not get any money in any case”. Then he called me a traitor. He said me that he had provided me with a job because we were from the same town. He said that he gave me money to buy bread for my family and for my child, and that now I should make some sacrifices for him because he was experiencing financial difficulties. He yelled at me, “How can you forget all of these things that I did for you so easily?” Our friends however heard that Necati’s son lives in luxury and goes out to the clubs in Taksim every night. I told him that he could find the money to give to his son and that he was lying when he said that he had financial difficulties. Such fights began to occur almost every day. So, when

we could not get our salaries for three months we contacted the labor union and then stopped working.

Whereas Hüseyin had long-term plans for his family and particularly for his child, his hopes to benefit from the relatively higher salaries in the shipyard sector in order to save money and one day to form his own subcontracting company were exploited by his role-model Necati. That proves Ahmet Usta's claim that the presence of subcontracting works to exploit people's hopes to become rich fast in the Tuzla shipyards. Indeed, Necati Tepe got rich really fast. Yet, the collapse of his business occurred at the same pace. This time, with the encouragement of the Limter-İş labor union, the occupying workers asked to take over the Tepe Klima subcontractor firm in exchange for the debt Necati owed them. "We either want our unpaid salaries or we seek to take over and run the factory," Hüseyin told me, "We have friends inside who have worked as subcontractors before, we have enough experience in how to operate a business." So, even the workers who occupied the Tepe Klima factory because their salaries were not paid, demanded to take over the factory in return to their unpaid salaries and run their own subcontractor company. Such demand showed me once again how powerful workers' aspiration to benefit from development was.

With these demands, on the evening of that same day, Limter-İş called for a demonstration in front of Necati Tepe's house. Kanber informed me that Necati Tepe lived in the nearby suburban district Gebze, (a neighborhood in the East of Tuzla), and told that because they were late, they needed to travel there by car. However, the only car available belonged to a worker who had already occupied the factory. None of the labor union leaders had a driver's license. In fact, I was the only person who had one. So, they asked me to drive to the demonstration site. When I got the keys from the workers inside, I was

informed that the worker who bought the car had not yet even have a chance to use his car. He had bought the car second-hand, parked it in front of the Tepe Klima factory, and then occupied the factory and welded the doors. “So, don’t drive fast” they warned me while laughing. Together with Kanber, Hakkı Usta, a member of the Socialist Party of the Oppressed (ESP), and a journalist from the Atılım Newspaper (a socialist newspaper operated by the ESP) we drove to the town center of Gebze. The families of the workers who had occupied the factory were already present having traveled to Gebze via a separate bus. There were about one hundred demonstrators including parents, wives, children and even babies of the occupying workers, as well members of the ESP and Limter-İş. Compared to the relatively small size of the demonstrators there was a heavy police presence and armored police vehicles. At the time I was not used to seeing such heavy police presence even in larger demonstrations in central İstanbul. This was my first experience of participating in a political demonstration in a suburban residential district. Moreover, unlike the demonstrations in central İstanbul, there was also no media presence in Gebze except for the journalist from the ESP’s newspaper Atılım who came with us in the same car. While the absence of media was intimidating I decided to turn on my camera as well, just in case the journalist from the Atılım newspaper was arrested. Under such conditions the police tried to verbally harass and intimidate the demonstrators as much as they could. And the police did not allow us march through the main road. After some arguments and negotiations with the police the Limter-İş leaders accepted walking through the back street. I believe that the presence of the families, particularly the elderly and babies made the police hesitant to attack the demonstrators during the march. We walked behind the banner which read “Pay the salaries, stop this atrocity” and soon after we arrived at

Necati Tepe's home, yet, no one was inside. In front of the house Kanber Saygılı stated that Necati Tepe, who bought the entire whole five stories of the house in front of us by exploiting workers' labor seemed to have escaped, yet he maintained that they would not stop their struggle until they received their unpaid salaries. Without any physical confrontation with the police the demonstration was completed and we returned to Pendik with the same car, this time followed by an armored police vehicle for about five kilometers on our way back. When we returned from the demonstration in Gebze to the Tepe Klima factory in Pendik, the families of the workers gathered in the resistance tent to tell the occupying workers about what had happened at the demonstration. I thought that Limter-İş' mobilization of the families was a successful attempt in both raising the motivations of the occupying workers and in exposing some of the difficulties other than workplace injuries that workers together with their families encounter every day in the Tuzla shipyards zone.

Nine days after the demonstration, Necati Tepe called the Limter-İş labor union and asked to end the occupation. He agreed to compensate the unpaid salaries of the workers including the days that they spent during the occupation and signed a new contract in front of the Limter-İş leaders.

The Tepe Klima campaign demonstrated that the Limter-İş labor union could actually recruit workers and even their families when the union leadership could provide solutions for workers' everyday needs such as receiving workers' unpaid salaries instead of forcing workers to take part in an ambiguously and abstractly described revolutionary struggle. As Kanber, the head of the Limter-İş labor union told me about two months after the Tepe Klima campaign, "To be sure, many workers do not come to us due to the fear of

unemployment, the fear of hunger, the fear of not being able to bring bread to their families. So, to help more workers, we hired a lawyer, who comes every Saturday and answers the questions of workers regarding how to protect one's rights, when to sue the employers, and how to get compensations for unpaid salaries. On every Saturday now there are 50-60 workers who come to this session. We have been able to gain some new members after all of these sessions.”

All in all, what I witnessed, listened to, and saw while acting together with the leftist labor organizations in the Tuzla shipyards indicated that neither abstract revolutionary discourses nor ambiguous critiques of economic development helped the workers, but rather alienated workers from the labor movement. Whereas the idea of rapid development and the opportunities for upward mobility were powerful aspirations for the workers, the labor organizations were asked to provide practical solutions to the everyday needs of the workers in their struggle to improve their living conditions. And the labor organizations could indeed recruit workers if they provided political and legal support that actually help workers in improving their everyday working and living conditions.

On the one hand, the 2008 campaign in the Tuzla shipyards zone marginalized workers' struggle by the leftist students and labor union activists who expected the workers to participate in street demonstrations, to confront the police violence, and to risk losing their jobs for the sake of class struggle and revolutionary change. And, as I witnessed the discussion between Mehmet from the ESP and visiting workers who were coming from over-time work to the Limter-İş' office, the revolutionary rhetoric mobilized by the labor union leadership that aimed to raise the class-consciousness of the workers indeed alienated workers who were already aware of their opportunities and limits. On the other hand, the

Linter-İş labor union was successful in organizing workers and their families when the labor union could create actual everyday solutions and small yet concrete improvements that benefit workers such as helping workers in receiving their unpaid salaries from the employers as in the case of the Tepe Klima resistance. Where there won't be a revolution in the foreseeable future, the socialist labor union becomes popular among the workers when the union does not contradict workers' aspiration to benefit from rapid development but instead endorses workers in their struggle for improving their everyday living and working conditions.

CHAPTER 3: How Employers Explain Work Accidents

Introduction:

In the former chapter I discussed the limits of the labor unions, students, and activists in creating alternatives for the workers, and how the workers' awareness about the lack of practical alternatives as well as the presence of a few opportunities for upward mobility, shape the political relations and tensions in the Tuzla shipyards.

In this chapter I explore employers' and government officials' approaches to workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards, and discuss how workplace injuries are explained, legitimized and naturalized by these actors. I discuss how the employers' approach to workplace injuries as inevitable incidents shapes the means of intervention. I focus on the ways in which work safety and workers' health are seemingly taken care of by the employers, while the shipyards continue their business as usual with workplace injuries continuing at the same rates as before. I particularly pay attention to the ways that nationalist discourses that introduce economic growth as the major source of national pride are mobilized by the employers in Tuzla to legitimize fatal workplace injuries in the shipyards as a necessary sacrifice in such a stage of economic development. Moreover, I examine how the government's obsession with economic growth is mobilized by shipyard owners to ask for financial and other privileges from national banks and the AKP government.



Figure 9: Nationalism, Neo-Ottomanism, and Economic Growth: The Ship Launch Ceremony at Cemre shipyard with the participation and music of the historical Ottoman Army Band “Mehter” (retrieved from denizhaber.com, September 2011).

How the Government and Employers Respond to Work accidents

While I was writing my dissertation, on May 13th, 2014, in Soma, a town in Western Turkey known for its coal mines, Turkey’s worst-ever industrial disaster took place. According to the official statements 301 coal miners died when the toxic gas level in the Soma mine rose dramatically, triggered an explosion and underground fire. This was the highest death toll in a work accident ever witnessed in Turkish history. Once again, the actual number of the fatalities was contested. The labor unions and some of the locals in the town of Soma claimed that the death toll was far higher than reported, because it was known that there were 787 workers underground when the accident happened.

While leftist labor unions, critical journalists and activists identified the incident as “a mass murder”, the prime minister at the time, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan claimed that accidents were part of the nature of mining and that they are normal. While critics had identified the Soma mine disaster as an unnatural incident caused by the willful misconduct and negligence of the employers as well as the government’s failure to inspect those negligence of acting politically, Erdoğan described the incident as natural. In a press briefing after visiting the accident zone on May 14th Erdoğan stated that some of the anger displayed by the victims’ families, unions, and activists was political. He contended that: “There are some groups, extreme elements that want to abuse developments like this one. I would like to reiterate that, for the peace and unity of our nation, it is very important not to pay heed to them.” He continued as follows:

“Let’s please not pretend that such incidents do not occur in mines. These are ordinary developments. There is something called work accidents within literature. This is part of the nature (“fitrat”)¹²⁰ of this business.”¹²¹

To support his claims Erdogan also listed a number of high casualty mine accidents that took place in the late 19th and early 20th century in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Japan. Erdoğan said:

I want to share with you some numbers here. In England, 204 miners died after a landslide in 1862, 361 miners died in 1866 and 290 miners died after an explosion in 1894. Let me move to France. One of the most deadly mine accidents occurred in France in 1906 where 1,099 miners died. More recently, in 1914, 687 miners died in Japan. In China, 1,549 miners died after a mixture of gas and coal poisoned them in 1942. Again in China, 684 miners died in 1960. And a mine gas explosion

¹²⁰ –fitrat, an originally Arabic word, used in different forms in Turkish, meaning the genesis, nature and God’s creation.

¹²¹ “Erdogan Says Mining Accidents ‘Nature of the Business,’” *Al-Monitor*, May 14, 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/05/turkey-soma-mine-erdogan-accident-investigation.html>.

resulted in the death of 458 miners in Japan in 1963. In the United States, too, which has the most advanced technology, 361 miners died in 1907.¹²²

Many people responded angrily to the examples that Erdoğan presented. As a critic, Sami Kohen wrote in the *Milliyet* daily newspaper: “How can one compare the Soma mine disaster with incidents that took place almost 100 or 150 years ago in Britain or the US? Such comparisons are inaccurate. Today, thanks to modern technologies, ‘zero death’ is possible in these kinds of workplaces. If one wants to make a comparison such comparisons should be between Turkey and contemporary UK, Japan, Germany or the US.”¹²³

Erdoğan faced public fury after Turkey’s worst-ever industrial accident. Protests took place in İstanbul and Ankara, as well as in Soma. Yet, this was not the first time that Erdoğan had expressed this opinion on mine accidents. After the death of 28 mine workers from an explosion in the Zonguldak coal mines in May 2010, he stated that these deadly accidents were the fate of the workers. “The people of the region are quite used to events like these,” he claimed, “This profession has this as its fate. The workers get into the profession knowing that these kinds of incidents may occur.”¹²⁴

Some journalists and critics associated such statements with Erdoğan’s madness or his evil character. However, they forgot that Erdoğan was not the only one who expressed such opinions. Unlike these critics I was not surprised when I heard Erdoğan’s declarations

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Sami Kohen, “Soma İçin Yanlış Karşılaştırma (A Wrong Comparison for Soma),” *Milliyet Daily Newspaper*, May 16, 2014, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/soma-icin-yanlis-karsilastirma/dunya/ydetay/1883205/default.htm>.

¹²⁴ PM Erdoğan, May 2010. Erdoğan’s quote was translated into English in an article published by Thomas Gaist, trans., “Explosion at Turkish Coal Mine Kills at Least 238,” *World Socialist Web Site*, May 14, 2014, <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2014/05/14/turk-m14.html>.

on television. His words reminded me of the statements of the government officials, shipyard owners, managers and engineers whom I had talked to, heard from, or read about during my fieldwork in the Tuzla shipyards. Below are some statements of the shipyard owners in Tuzla regarding accidents at work:

The head of the Turkish Shipbuilders Business Association in 2011, Murat Bayrak argued that: “Four or five fatal accidents are normal in the shipbuilding industry. These accidents are the nature of this job. It is like this everywhere else in the world. Who can we blame for that? There is no way to completely prevent work accidents. Work accidents stop when traffic accidents stop, too”¹²⁵.

The owner of the biggest shipyard, Sedef, in Tuzla, Metin Kalkavan once made the following notorious statement: “Workers would not come here, if they didn’t make significantly more money than at other jobs. They come and think that nothing can happen to them. However, what we are giving shape to here is not cotton but steel. And we are not a textile workshop. This is a heavy industry. The worker has to know that he may die.”¹²⁶

While the above-mentioned statements about work accidents by shipyard owners can help us to understand the ways in which workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards are normalized and naturalized by the shipyard owners, in my fieldwork I was also able to talk to and to discuss face to face with the representatives of the Turkish Shipbuilders’

¹²⁵ “Tersane İşçileri Neden ölüyor? - Taraflarla Ropörtajlar (Why Do Shipyard Workers Die? -Interviews with the Parties).”

¹²⁶ “İşçi Ölebileceğini Bilmeli’ – (‘The Worker Has to Know That He May Die’),” *Sabah Daily Newspaper*, June 13, 2008, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2008/06/13/haber,C0D1983D4E6643D4AE5E79D583C7BA20.html>.

Association about how they justify the continuation of the fatal workplace injuries despite ongoing strong critiques by the media, labor unions, scholars and activists.

My Visit to the Shipbuilders' Business Association (GİSBİR):

Contacting Gemi İnşa Sanayicileri Birliği (GİSBİR - Turkish Shipbuilders' Business Association) was not easy. My friends in the Limter-İş labor union had already told me that shipyard managers did not accept any interviews with journalists or activists, especially after the student and labor union campaign against the rise in fatal workplace injuries in Tuzla in 2008, which was covered widely by the mainstream media. Aslı also told me in our conversations that her name and other activists' names were already included on the blacklist of the shipyard owners, "That means that the shipyard personnel do not let us approach the shipyards and talk to the workers or managers inside. They already know our names and who we are. In that sense, you have a better chance than me in terms of talking to these people."

What Aslı told me was correct. It would not be easy to talk to the shipyard managers and owners if they knew that you were an activist or researcher, and particularly if you were seen together with the Limter-İş or other leftist labor organization members. However, I wanted to try my chances, and as of March 2011 I was not a known figure by the shipbuilders' association. I wanted to discuss the issue from the employers' point of view while I had still a chance.

Following my preliminary research about the statements of shipyard owners on workplace injuries, the actions of the labor organizations and critiques in the press, and taking into account the warnings of Limter-İş members and my activist friends I went to

the Turkish Shipbuilders' Association office which was located at the very end of the northwestern corner of Tuzla Aydınli Bay among several shipyards. It was about a one hour walk from the Aydınli train station and I passed the shipyards one by one on my right side, and on my left, the tragic view of the Kamil Abduş Lagoon, once a natural habitat that had dried up and became a swamp. Finally, I arrived at the Shipbuilders' Association (GİSBİR) office.

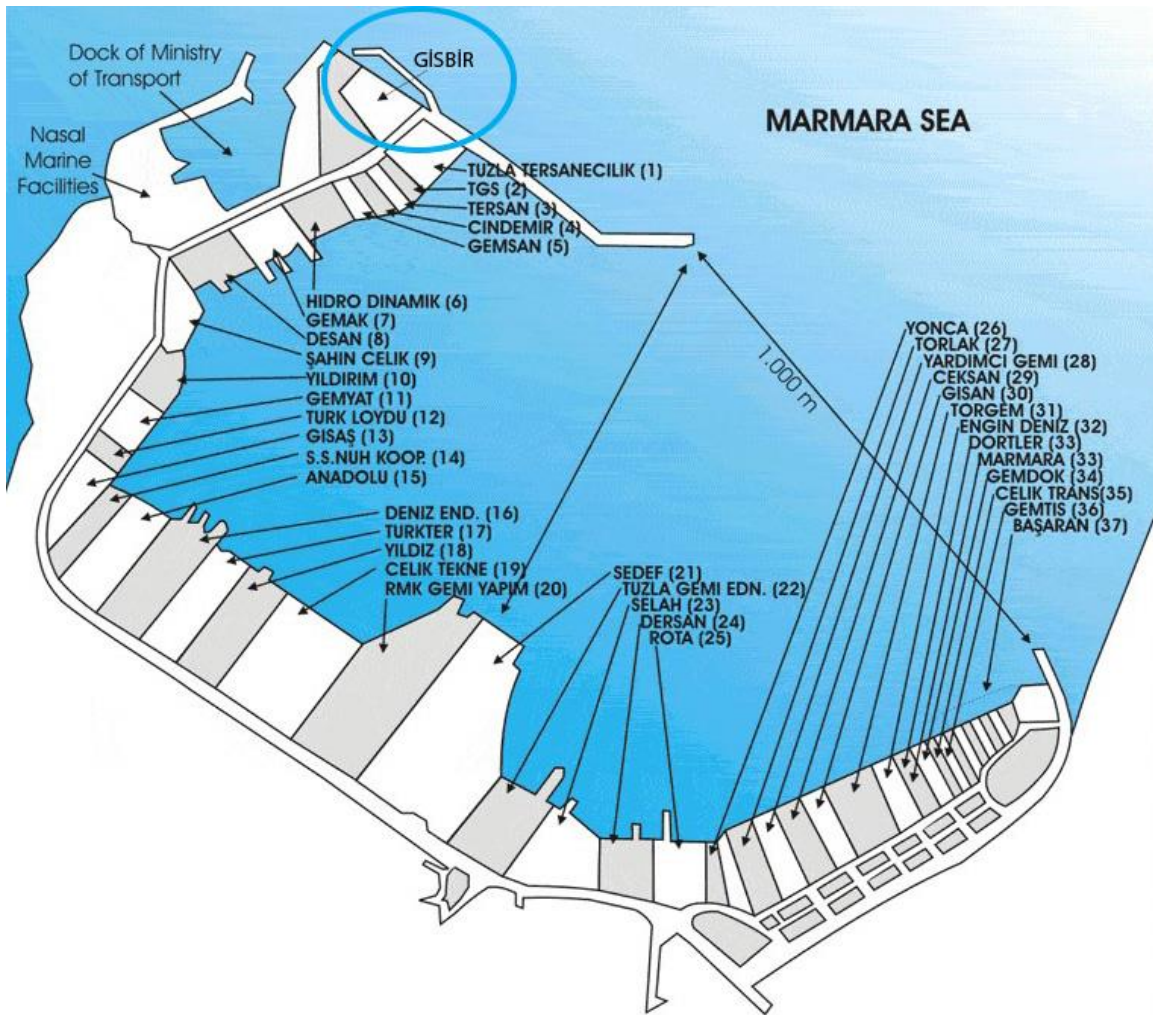


Figure 10: As seen on the map, the shipyards are located densely side by side in the Tuzla Aydınli Bay. The Turkish Shipbuilders' Association's (GİSBİR) office is located at the very end of the shipyards road (map retrieved from gisbir.org, June 2010.)

At the door of the GİSBİR building security personnel stopped me and asked what I wanted. I told him that I was interested in the journals and other publications of the Shipbuilders' Association and wanted to obtain copies of these if possible. He told to me, "wait a minute," and made a phone call. "An engineer is here at the door and wants to see you," the security personnel told the person on the phone. For the security personnel, anyone who was interested in the Shipbuilders' Association's publications had to be a shipbuilding engineer. Still, it was better for me that he did not think I was a journalist or an activist. Therefore, I did not feel the need to correct him and entered the building. In the room that I was directed into, I was greeted by Mesut, a shipbuilding engineer and a member of the advisory board of the Turkish Shipbuilders' Association. He was also the person responsible for the journals and publications of the Association, and was able to provide me the available copies of those journals and publications.

"Are you an engineer?" he asked me. "No," I replied, "I am doing PhD in America and studying the problems in the Tuzla shipyards." "Oh, then you came at the right moment" he laughed referring to the ongoing effects of the global economic crisis on the shipbuilding industry in Turkey. The fact that I was coming from America drew his attention and we talked for a while about life, studying and technological advancements in America. "We also try our best to go to international shipbuilding fairs and follow the most recent technological advancements, yet the vision of the shipyard owners in Tuzla are shortsighted. The very low levels of investment in research and development here are not comparable to the spending on technology in America," he told to me. He continued, "I do not know the exact number but in Turkey the proportion of the total research and development expenditure to the GDP is less than 1%. It is very low. The same ratio is more

than 2% in America and more than 3% in South Korea¹²⁷. The problem is that we do not have a visionary approach. By constructing the same ships again and again we cannot develop. We are falling behind.” He then told me how the success story of the Mengi Yacht building company did not help in changing that shortsightedness in the industry: “In the Tuzla shipyards here, we built a 100 million dollar single-piece yacht. The yacht received many awards in Europe. It was on the news. Yet, it remained as the one, single example of our pride. The same yacht building company did not attempt to build a second one that was better or even equal to the awarded one. They returned to their routine of building yacht pieces, small size yachts and ship repair, because of the lack of visionary approach.”

How Employers in the Tuzla Shipyards Approach Work accidents:

a) “‘Normal’ Incidents that are Exaggerated by the Press”

At one point in our conversation we came to the issue of work safety and health in the Tuzla shipyards. I asked Mesut, “Why are there still so many work accidents in Tuzla? Is this also related to the lack of visionary approach?” “We also spend a lot of money on work safety and we continue to work on that,” he replied to me.

There is a significant decrease in the number of the work accidents nowadays but you probably do not know that because the press does not write that. They only come to Tuzla when there is a work accident. They come here to attack and humiliate the shipbuilders and the businessman. They exaggerate the incidents to make us look like we intentionally murder people. You know, from the big bosses to the ordinary employees, all of us get very sad when there is a fatal work accident.

¹²⁷ As of 2012 Turkey’s Research and Development expenditure to the GDP is less than 1% (0.92% according to the Turkish Statistical Institution Data). As a comparison the same ratio is 2.77% in the USA, 1.97% in China, 3.67% in Japan, 2.82 in Germany and 3.74% in South Korea (according to the Royal Society and World Bank Data). In the OECD, where Turkey is a member state, the average research and development spending to the GDP is 2.4%, and in the European Union to which Turkey is a candidate, the average is 1.97% (OECD data).

When a worker dies we lose a part of ourselves. This is a small place and we all know each other. Do you know how much it costs the shipyard if it is closed one day because of an accident? Shipyards have to finish the job in a very limited time; otherwise they have to pay very high compensations to the companies that ordered the ship. No one wants an accident to happen here. Yet the press makes us look like as if we want work accidents, as if we want people to die here. The press is a traitor to the country. I do not think that the press in other countries is like that.

“So, you think that the press in Turkey intentionally attacks the shipyard business in Tuzla?” I asked him. “Yes, indeed,” he answered to me, “Did you hear that recently 14 workers died in the launch ceremony of a big cruise ship in Norway?” I shook my head. “You see, you did not hear it, right? You did not hear that incident because the Norwegian press was nationalist enough and they did not write about something that would harm their national industry and reputation. Do you know that there are as many fatal accidents in the shipbuilding industry in Japan as in Turkey? You do not know, why? Because Japanese media does not exaggerate those incidents like the Turkish media does.”

Mesut was not alone in describing the critical press as a traitor to the country. When I read and studied the statements of the shipyard owners and managers about workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards, I had already encountered similar approaches of employers who claimed that workplace injuries were normal and expected everywhere else in the world, and that the Turkish national press that focused on the fatalities in the Tuzla shipyards acted with malevolence and exaggerated the problem. The blaming tone of the partner and manager of the Mengi Yacht Building Company, Hüseyin Mengi talking about the representation of workplace injuries in the press was very close to the approach that I observed in my conversation with Mesut. In a video interview conducted in October 2010 Hüseyin Mengi stated that,

We exported a single-piece yacht that valued 100 million euros. No one wrote about that. The press was not there. However, this was the first time that Turkey had

exported a single-piece yacht that cost 100 million euros. Whereas they had the opportunity to write about how ‘this was a ground breaking success for Turkey,’ no one wrote about that. Today we do business in the amount of approximately 4 billion dollars, yet no one publishes anything about that. We employ 100.000 workers including those in the supplier industry. We feed 500.000 people including families, but no one writes that. They only write about the accidents at work. Okay, we are also very sad because of the work accidents. It is Okay if one writes about that, too, but they write about those accidents in a very exaggerated, affronting and humiliating manner. They are insulting the people who dedicate their lives to this business. I condemn the press, I condemn all of them.¹²⁸

Government officials do not think differently from the shipyard owners and justify the high numbers and rates of workplace injuries in Turkey on the assumption that work accidents take place everywhere in the world at a similar rate. As Binali Yıldırım, the Minister for Transportation, Maritime and Communication at the time, who himself owned a maritime transportation fleet, stated in an interview, “Even though we take the required safety measures, this is a hard job. Nevertheless, such accidents can be expected. This is the case everywhere in the world and it is normal¹²⁹”.

Similarly, as the Prime Minister at the time Tayyip Erdoğan expressed in his opinions about workplace injuries in a meeting with the shipyard owners at the Prime Minister’s Office in İstanbul in 2008, “Any country in the world that experiences such rapid development encounters similar problems. Unfortunately, injuries or deaths caused

¹²⁸ Statement of the partner and manager of the Mengi Yacht Shipyard, Hüseyin Mengi (video interview translated by me). October, 2010.

¹²⁹ Minister Binali Yıldırım, June 22, 2012, quoted in the book prepared and published by the Workers’ Families Seeking Justice, *İş Cinayetleri Almanığı 2012 (The Almanac of the Murders at Work - 2012)* (Bir Umut Yayıncılık, 2013), 78.

by work accidents can happen anywhere in the world. This is the case in the shipbuilding industry”¹³⁰.

Thus, both government officials and shipyard owners approach workplace injuries as statistically expected incidents, and therefore, consider work accidents as part of the job, as a natural and normal result of the work. The press in Turkey was accused of “exaggerating work accidents,” while in other countries the press and the governments of those countries supposedly did not publicize information about fatal work accidents in order to protect the national industry and economy.

As demonstrated in the statements of government officials’ and other shipyard owners, the GİSBİR representative Mesut was not alone in claiming that workplace injuries took place at the same rates everywhere in the world including industrially developed Western European countries and in Japan. However, after I heard this claim from Mesut in person and I realized how commonly government officials and employers normalize fatalities in the Tuzla shipyards by claiming that the rate of the work accidents was statistically similar everywhere else in the world, I became curious about the original sources and evidence for these doubtful and unconvincing claims. After conducting a review of the literature, I found that this information appeared first in the Turkish National Parliaments’ official report on the problems regarding work safety and workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards that was prepared and published by a parliamentary investigation commission in July 2008, following the workers’ protests and demonstrations in the

¹³⁰ “Başbakan: Tuzla’da 47 Tersaneden Birkaçının Ruhsatı Var (Prime Minister: In Tuzla Only a Few of the 47 Shipyards in Tuzla Have Work Permits),” *Bianet - Independent News Network*, June 19, 2008, <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/107737-basbakan-tuzla-da-47-tersaneden-birkacinin-ruhsati-var>.

shipyards zone that attracted the public's attention to fatal workplace injuries in Tuzla that reached 26 deaths in that year alone. On page 167 of the Turkish parliament's report, there is a chart that compares the rate of the fatal workplace injuries in the shipbuilding sector in various shipbuilding countries to those that took place in Turkey.¹³¹ In this chart, the Turkish Shipbuilder's Business Association GİSBİR is indicated as the source of information. According to the chart the proportion of fatal workplace injuries in the Turkish shipyards is indicated as three in every ten thousand workers employed, whereas the same rate was one in Sweden and the UK, two in the US, three in Japan, ten in Singapore, China and Taiwan, and twelve in Malaysia. That is to say, through this chart, GİSBİR claimed that the rate of the workplace injuries in the shipbuilding sector in Turkey was the same as that in Japan and more than three times less than the rates in Singapore, China and Taiwan. The Turkish Parliament's Investigation Commission published the chart provided by the GİSBİR directly without further inquiry about accuracy of the information.

¹³¹ Turkish Parliament Investigation Commission, "Turkish Parliament Tuzla Shipyards Investigation Report," 167.

Tablo-4.5 Dünya tersanelerinde ölümlü kaza oranları
(Çalışan sayısına göre)

Ülkeler	Kaza Oranı (Onbinde)
İsveç	1
İngiltere	1
Amerika	2
Japonya	3
Singapur	10
Tayvan	10
Çin	10
Malezya	12
Türkiye	3

Kaynak: GİSBİR

2000 yılı ile 2008 yılı ilk altı ay itibarı ile Tuzla Tersanelerinde meydana gelen ölümlü kaza oranı, çalışan sayısına göre ortalama (0,0003528) onbindeüçnokta beş olmuştur.

Tuzla Tersanelerinde, 2000 yılı ile 2008 yılı Haziran ayı sonuna kadar meydana gelen ölümlü kaza nedenleri aşağıdaki Tablo-3.4'de verilmektedir:

Tablo-4.6 Tuzla Tersanelerinde ölümlü kaza nedenleri (2000-2008)

KAZA NEDENİ	Oran (%)	Sayı
Yüksekten düşme	34	20
Elektrik çarpması	16,5	10
Malzeme çarpması/düşmesi	16,5	10
Patlama	11	7
Sıkışma	11	7
Diğer	11	7
TOPLAM	100	61

Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi

(S. Sayısı: 295)

Figure 11: Page 167 of the Turkish Parliament ("Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi") Commission Report regarding the investigation of the problems related to work safety and working conditions in the shipbuilding industry and identification of the necessary measures (2008). The Turkish Shipbuilders Business Association ("GİSBİR") is the source of information ("Kaynak") of the chart about the proportion of workplace injuries in every ten thousand shipyard workers in various countries.

According to the reports of the parliamentary proceedings the investigation commission prepared this chart based on information provided in a speech given by the National Movement Party parliament member Durmuş Ali Torlak, the owner of the Torlak shipyard, where together with several other workers, Necdet, whose story I told in the first chapter, died in a work accident. In his speech to the parliament, Torlak claimed that the information he presented proved that the rate of workplace injuries in shipbuilding industry in Turkey was similar to other developed and developing countries, and that this information was based on statistical data provided by the International Labor Organization (ILO). However, there was no ILO data specifically documenting the rate of workplace fatalities in the shipbuilding industry. Later on the ILO representative in Turkey also publicly declared that there was no ILO research focusing on the shipbuilding industry¹³². The ILO only publishes data about the total number and rate of reported workplace injuries and fatalities in each country, and also compares that information to the ILO's own estimates about workplace injuries¹³³. ILO estimates are usually higher than reported cases. For instance, the ILO estimates that actual numbers of fatal occupational injuries in Turkey are about two times more than those reported¹³⁴.

¹³² "Tuzla'da 'Hesaplar' Baştan Yanlış ('The Calculations' in Tuzla Are Wrong from the Very Beginning)," *Radikal Daily Newspaper*, March 6, 2008, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=249392>.

¹³³ Päivi Hämäläinen, Jukka Takala, and Kaija Leena Saarela, "Global Estimates of Occupational Accidents," *Safety Science* 44, no. 2 (February 2006): 137–56, doi:10.1016/j.ssci.2005.08.017.

¹³⁴ The ILO estimates intend to include the unreported fatalities at work, and therefore, are more than the official reports of each country. For instance the ILO claims that China reports only less than 1% of the estimated number of workplace injuries to the ILO. As another example for the year 2003 the US Bureau of Labor Statistics reported the rate of the fatal occupational injuries in the US as 4 in each 100,000 workers,

So, if this chart was not based on the ILO's data about workplace injuries in the shipbuilding industry in the world, what was its original source? Was that chart completely made up? While pondering these questions, the unconventional presentation of the fatality rates in the GİSBİR chart attracted my attention. Conventionally, the ILO and ministry of labor record fatality rates in work accidents for every 100,000 workers. However, the GİSBİR data shows the fatality rates per 10,000 workers. I checked the ILO estimates for the rates of total workplace fatalities in countries mentioned in the GİSBİR chart as of the year 2008, when the Turkish Parliament Investigation Report on the Tuzla shipyards was published. I observed that according to the ILO estimates for the year 2008, the rate of the total occupational fatalities was one in Sweden and the UK, three in Japan, ten in Taiwan and twelve in Malaysia¹³⁵. These were exactly the same numbers provided in the GİSBİR's chart but with a significant dramatic difference. The ILO estimates showed workplace fatality rates for every 100,000 workers, whereas GİSBİR distorted the proportions and showed those rates as in every 10,000 workers. Thus, by showing the fatality rate for work accidents in Japan, which was according to the ILO estimates was three in every 100,000 workers, as three in every 10,000 workers, the GİSBİR intended to claim that in Japan the rate of workplace injuries was the same as in Turkey. Indeed, in the Turkish Parliament's investigation report the rate of the workplace fatalities in the Tuzla shipyards (although

whereas the ILO estimates the same rate as 5 in 100,000 for the same year. To see the US Bureau of Labor statistics one can check Table C-1. Fatal Occupational injuries, employment, and rates of fatal occupational injuries by selected worker characteristics, occupations, and industries, 2003 in "Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI) - Current and Revised Data," accessed January 3, 2016, <http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshcfoi1.htm>.

¹³⁵ Päivi Hämäläinen, Kaija Leena Saarela, and Jukka Takala, "Global Trend according to Estimated Number of Occupational Accidents and Fatal Work-Related Diseases at Region and Country Level," *Journal of Safety Research* 40, no. 2 (January 2009): 125–39, doi:10.1016/j.jsr.2008.12.010.

incorrectly rounded down to three) was correctly reported by the GİSBİR as 3.5 in every 10,000 workers, which corresponds to 35 fatalities in every 100,000 workers. That was indeed eleven times more than the rate of the workplace fatalities in Japan. The occupational fatality rate specifically in the Tuzla shipyards was even three times higher than the rate for average workplace injuries in every 100,000 workers for all industries in Turkey combined, which was twelve as of 2008. That is to say, as of 2008, fatal workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards zone were significantly higher compared to other countries, and much higher than the rate of the fatalities in other industrial sectors in Turkey as well. The dramatic difference between the ILO estimates about the fatality rates in various countries and the rates provided by the GİSBİR about these same countries shows that the GİSBİR comparison of fatal work accidents worldwide was a clear manipulation of information.

Despite this clear disinformation by the GİSBİR, in my literature review I surprisingly encountered the exact same chart and the same comparison in other official reports such as the Turkish Ministry of Labor's report on the workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards¹³⁶, in business reports published in the GİSBİR's corporate journal *The Shipbuilding Industry*¹³⁷, and even in two different unpublished dissertations written on the problems related to work safety in the Tuzla shipyards.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ "Tersaneler ve Tuzla Gerçeği ('Shipyards and the Reality on Tuzla')" (Çalışma ve Sosyal Güvenlik Bakanlığı (Turkish Ministry of Labor), 2008).

¹³⁷ "Türk Gemi Sanayii Sektör Raporu (Sector Report on the Turkish Shipbuilding Industry)," *The Shipbuilding Industry*, November 2008, http://www.gisbir.com/userfiles/file/gisbir_sekt%C3%B6r_raporu.pdf.

¹³⁸ Aydın, "İşçi Sağlığı ve Güvenliği Kavramının Toplam Kalite Yönetimi Açısından İrdelenmesi ve Gemi İnşaa Sanayinde -Tuzla Tersaneler Bölgesi- Bir Araştırma ("An Investigation on the Concept of the Worker's Health and Safety from the Perspective of Total Quality Management and a Research on the Shipbuilding Industry in the Tuzla Shipyards Zone)," 89. The same chart was also used in Gürkan Duyar,

The misinformation of the GİSBİR travelled through official reports, business analysis and academic dissertations through copying and pasting without further inquiry, and, was persistently repeated many times to normalize workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards as incidents that took place everywhere in the world at a similar rate.

I even re-encountered the same claim while watching a Television interview on the CNBC-E economy channel in April 2011. In the interview, Başaran Bayrak, the head of the Ship and Yacht Producer's Association, claimed that even when the workplace injuries in Tuzla were at the peak, the proportion of fatalities to the total employment numbers in the shipyards was three in every 10,000 workers. He then claimed that in Taiwan and Singapore the fatality rates for work accidents in the shipyards were three times higher than those in Turkey¹³⁹.

The claim that Mesut presented to me in our conversation in the GİSBİR office about that fatal workplace injuries in the shipbuilding industry in Turkey being the same as those in Japan was part of this travel, repetition and appropriation of the above-mentioned distorted information provided by the GİSBİR itself. The discourse that, “the rates of the workplace injuries were approximately the same everywhere else in the world” was then mobilized by the shipyard owners and government officials to normalize the ongoing fatal occupational injuries in the Tuzla shipyards. Because work accidents are assumed as “natural” and “normal,” any identification of the work accidents as an unnatural problem caused by employers' negligence and the failure of the government is considered

“İş Sağlığı ve Güvenliği: Tuzla Örneği (‘Work Health and Safety: The Example of Tuzla’)” (Unpublished MA Thesis, Kocaeli University, Social Sciences Institute, 2010).

¹³⁹ “Türkiye Gemi Sanayiinin Durumu (The Current Situation in the Turkish Shipbuilding Industry)” (CNBC-E, April 28, 2011).

as a threat to the progress of the ship building industry in particular and the national economy in general. Using these manipulated statistics, the press, the activists, labor union leaders, and critics who have stated that workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards are not normal, were then accused of exaggerating “normal facts”, acting with malevolence, and even betraying the national interests of Turkey.

b) “Workers’ Rights are a Luxury for Turkey at this Stage of Development”

Mesut looked happy to surprise me by telling me that I had not heard about a major workplace disaster in Norway because the Norwegian press was “nationalist enough” not to write about it. He believed that while developed countries hid information about their economic problems and work accidents in their own countries, those same competing developed countries were creating pressure on developing countries by raising questions concerning human rights and workers’ rights at the same time. For Mesut, the Turkish press was collaborating with developed countries who do not want to see Turkey become a developed and strong competitor. As our conversation continued Mesut told me that, “The West has already passed these stages of development. When there was no notion of human rights, many workers died during the industrialization period of England. So, in order to catch up with the West we should do the same thing that they did two hundred years ago. Development has its costs, and only after we become as developed as the West then we can start to talk about workers’ rights and human rights. Today democracy and workers’ rights are luxury for Turkey.”

Erdoğan's statements about the "naturalness" of the Soma mine disaster that I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter and his examples of the massive workplace fatalities that took place in the late 19th century or early 20th century England, France, the US and Japan were not then newly and randomly created lies to cover up the situation. Such legitimization of workplace injuries was indeed part of a discourse already prevalent amongst employers and business representatives.

The comparison of the industrial development in contemporary Turkey and the history of industrialization in America, Europe and Japan was also based on a particular understanding of temporality based on a linear understanding of development. That is to say, in order to legitimize current workplace injuries in Turkey, the past for the US, the UK, France and Japan was assumed to be the present for Turkey.

Such temporal understandings of development remind me of Whitman Rostow's well-known modernization theory. The basic assumption of Rostow's 1960 book *The Stages of Economic Growth, a Non-Communist Manifesto* is that all countries will pass through the same development stages¹⁴⁰. That is to say, non-Western developing countries will imitate the stages of development that Western Europe supposedly passed through already. Rostow's theory has been criticized for its mechanical and linear approach to development classified in stages, its limited empirical data based on the history of development in the West alone, and especially its unquestioned presupposition that the West is the only model and norm for development to be followed by the rest of the World. Even though in academic circles Rostow's modernization theory has long been considered

¹⁴⁰ W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth a Non-Communist Manifesto*, Reprint edition (Cambridge University Press, 1960).

as biased, West-centric, outdated and disproven by critical social sciences, it was interesting to observe how such theory was tacitly yet recently and repeatedly referred to by a representative of a business association as well as the highest-ranking government official of a developing non-Western country in order to justify the high rate of fatal workplace injuries.

However, here, the stages of development theory did not represent the government's approach to and everyday practices about development but was used to normalize work accidents. Indeed, the West or Europe is no longer seen as the model for developing Turkey. Whereas, the ideal of catching up with the West has a long history in Turkey that can be traced back to the 18th century, which marks the beginning of the decline of the Ottoman Empire, such narrative cannot explain adequately the current ambitious economic growth targets of Turkey. Especially following the military coup in the 1980s, which was followed by the opening of Turkish markets to the world (or the "neoliberalisation" of the country as Marxist scholars prefer to say) in late 1980s and 1990s, Turkey's major priority was defined as rapid economic development in order to get ahead in the global growth race, where now Turkey not only aims to catch up with the West, but also to grow faster than other countries in the developing global south. Thus, comparing itself to and competing with its neighbors in the East, mainly the "Asian Tigers", in the economic field is a relatively new phenomena in Turkish politics. Consequently, the discourse about catching up with West has been replaced with the AKP government's post-2011 European economic crisis discourse, namely, "we no longer need

the economically stagnant Europe, but they need us”¹⁴¹. While development became more about global positioning between and within the global North and South, both government officials in Ankara and employers in the Tuzla shipyards compared Turkey with China, Korea or Brazil instead of European countries in terms of economic success measured by growth rates.

To be sure, as Sami Kohen argued in his critique of Erdoğan’s speech after the Soma mine disaster, the technology to prevent workplace injuries is highly developed today, and furthermore, technologies to secure work safety today cannot be compared to the technologies of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Therefore, for Kohen such a comparison was inaccurate.¹⁴² In addition to this critique, one should also take into account the fact that thanks to a century long workers’ struggle, there is a historically developed legal framework, regulations and jurisprudence about how to secure workers’ health and sanction employers who neglect the required measures of work safety. So, while Mesut might be right that there was no notion of worker or human rights in early 19th century Britain, today worker and human rights are globally accepted, a politically and legally applied phenomena.

As the ILO statistics and estimates clearly state, some of which I mentioned in the previous section, the rate of fatal workplace injuries are significantly lower in countries where workers’ rights to health and safety were strictly regulated and better secured, and/or where there are more technological and financial investments in workers’ health and

¹⁴¹ “Erdoğan: Artık AB’nin Türkiye’ye İhtiyacı Var (Erdoğan: From Now on the EU Needs Turkey),” *Zaman Daily Newspaper*, February 4, 2013, http://www.zaman.com.tr/politika_erdogan-artik-abnin-turkiyeye-ihtiyaci-var_2049606.html.

¹⁴² Kohen, “Soma İçin Yanlış Karşılaştırma (A Wrong Comparison for Soma).”

safety.¹⁴³ Despite the presence of historical and contemporary models for workers' rights, stronger labor organizations, deterrent legal frameworks and tested technology to secure work safety, to consider workers' rights a luxury and workplace injuries as normal and inevitable "in this stage of development" in Turkey is more of a discursive strategy for government officials and employers to legitimize the ongoing workplace injuries.

c) "Necessary Sacrifices":

The legitimation of workplace injuries based on the claim that Turkey has not yet reached the stage of economic development necessary for the recognition of workers' rights brings to mind Chakrabarty's critical approach to historicism and his discussion of the question of political modernity in non-Western societies¹⁴⁴. Chakrabarty traces stagist theories of development back to John Stuart Mill's historicist arguments that describe Western modernism as the direction that all other nations are headed towards, thus, consigning non-Western nations to an imaginary "waiting room" of history. As Chakrabarty puts it, "Within this thought, it could always be said with reason that some people were less modern than others, and that the former needed a period of preparation and waiting before they could be recognized as full participants in political modernity".¹⁴⁵ Chakrabarty's critical approach to stagist theories that consign non-Western countries to

¹⁴³ For a comparison among various countries in terms of their rates of workplace injuries and a comprehensive study on the relation between the work safety investments, competitiveness and fatal workplace injuries, see: Jukka Takala et al., "Global Estimates of the Burden of Injury and Illness at Work in 2012," *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Hygiene* 11, no. 5 (May 4, 2014): 326–37, doi:10.1080/15459624.2013.863131.

¹⁴⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), 8.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

the waiting room of history can assist us in our analysis of the underlying logic behind the statements of government officials and GİSBİR representatives that consign the workers in the Tuzla shipyards in particular and in Turkey in general to a waiting room in which workers are expected to work patiently under unsafe and unhealthy working conditions until Turkey is economically developed enough to grant them their rights. The comparison of the stages of development in Turkey to those in the late 19th century in Western Europe by both GİSBİR representative Mesut in his legitimization of work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards and Prime Minister Erdoğan in his normalization of the Soma mine disaster can indeed be considered an appropriation and mobilization of the Western stagist approach to modernization that Chakrabarty discusses in the context of colonialism. The difference is that this time the same claim is being put forward by non-Western officials to support their arguments that the recognition of human and workers' rights in Turkey is a luxury and an excessive demand for contemporary Turkey. Workers are thus expected to wait in this waiting room where accidents are considered normal and expected. However, in practice, where development is defined as an open-ended process, the waiting of the workers never ends. Indeed, their demands for better working conditions, safety, and health are indefinitely deferred as a luxury, a pleasure that is not yet and may never be deserved.

The exploitation of the workers in this waiting room at the present moment is usually introduced by employers and government officials in nationalistic terms as a necessary sacrifice that guarantees the unstoppable and rapid economic development of the nation.

For instance, the miners who died in the Soma mines have been proclaimed as “martyrs” by the Prime Minister Erdoğan. Thus, the miners were presented as having

sacrificed their lives for the development of the Turkish economy. The dead miners in Soma were also officially granted “martyr” status by the AKP government and their families began to receive the same salary that was received by the families of soldiers who died while serving in the Turkish military. In a similar vein, workers in the Tuzla shipyards were told to be prepared for sacrifices. Workers are expected to sacrifice not only their bodies and health, but also their demands for their rights and for a fair salary.

In the aftermath of the global economic crisis that corresponded with the time when I was doing my fieldwork in the Tuzla shipyards zone, the shipyard owners, managers and engineers were not alone in asking for “necessary sacrifices” to support national economic growth. The head of the pro-government labor union in Tuzla, namely Dok Gemi İş (The Labor Union of the Harbor, Dock and Shipbuilding Industry Workers of Turkey),¹⁴⁶ Necip Nalbantoğlu also asked for sacrifices from the workers in terms of postponing their demands for salary increases and signing collective contracts. Necip Nalbantoğlu clearly described the economic crisis as “a state of war” amongst nations competing for economic domination. In his words:

We are losing experienced workers. Before, when someone lost his job in a shipyard he could find another job in another shipyard. Now, if someone loses his job, he is lost completely. In order to support the maritime sector, the government could suspend the social security spending of the workers and taxes for six months to one year. Otherwise, we are going to lose experienced workers. We do not want anyone to lose his job. This economic crisis is like a state of war. Therefore, all labor unions and political groups that think differently should come together and act together.

As a labor unionist I am telling you this with sorrow. At this critical moment of transition we should offer sacrifices in terms of the collective contracts and salary increases to a certain extent. Not all labor union leaders can say this, they do not

¹⁴⁶ Dok-Gemi-İş: (Türkiye Liman, Dok ve Gemi Sanayii İşçileri Sendikası). I spoke about the function of the pro-government Dok-Gemi-İş Labor Union in chapter 4, as well.

accept this. However, if you are a labor union leader, you have to know when to take certain measures on such bad days. Maybe the workers will not applaud us, maybe they will not agree with us, but, in order to protect the bread and the long-term interest of the workers, in the short-term we have to make certain decisions under such conditions.¹⁴⁷

In Nalbantoğlu's words, the economic crisis should be dealt with by taking the measures that would be taken in a state of war. For Nalbantoğlu, to win in the long-term, workers would have to give up with their demands for better working and living conditions in the short-term. Once again, workers were told to be patient in the waiting room of history. Current sacrifices were considered the main requirement to get out of the waiting room of history in the long-term so that through rapid economic growth conditions where work safety and workers' rights are no longer luxuries could be created. This paradoxical approach that requires workers' sacrifices in terms of work safety today to make work safety a guarantee in the future, seems to result indeed in the indefinite deferral of workers' rights to live and work in healthy environments. Whereas in employers' discourse the future is associated with prosperity, a time when workers' rights will not be a luxury, in everyday life the future turns to a site where all the burdens and risks of present short-term growth are postponed indefinitely. The mere focus on the immediate need for victories in this economic competition results in a permanent state of emergency according to which worker's rights, measures for work safety and all other long-term side effects that derive from the fast economic growth have to be suspended indefinitely.

¹⁴⁷ TV Interview with the head of the DOK GEMİ İŞ (Union of the Dock and Shipbuilding Workers) Necip Nalbantoğlu, February 2011

As seen in the above-mentioned statements, employers' and government officials' have introduced rapid economic development as an unquestionable national project. Whereas the prime imperative is to grow rapidly, laws, regulations and the organization of the work are designed to realize that imperative and to achieve the goal of development. Such a prioritization of economic growth also helps shipyard owners and industrialists legitimize workplace injuries as normal and inevitable "in this stage of development" in Turkey. As I quoted, the GİSBİR representative that I spoke with, as well as Prime Minister Erdoğan argued that in this particular stage of economic development work accidents are expected and cannot be prevented completely.

Where work accidents are considered inevitable and expected, laws and regulations regarding work safety are imposed only for show as I have demonstrated in my discussion on the application of work safety regulations in the Tuzla shipyards. A similar approach can be observed in the governments' and the Shipbuilders' Business Associations approach to workers' health.

Tuzla Shipbuilders' Association's Private Hospital

While the employers and government officials approach workplace injuries as inevitable and unpreventable cases, they normalize those injuries by naming them accidents, unfortunate incidents caused by occasional mistakes. The normalization of the occupational injuries as inevitable accidents also helps to justify negligence towards taking the required work safety measures beforehand by claiming that these accidents will take place in any case.

Employers' approach to workplace injuries as inevitable accidents is surely the very opposite of the approach of labor organizations and activists, such as the Limter-İş labor union and the Workers' Health and Work Safety Assembly, which claim that all workplace injuries are indeed "preventable" if intervened in beforehand by taking all the necessary measures for work safety. Therefore, for Limter-İş and WHSA fatal workplace injuries should be described as murders, because employers intentionally neglect to prevent these potentially preventable injuries¹⁴⁸.

To be sure, considering workplace injuries as preventable or inevitable differentially shapes and determines how and when workplace injuries are intervened in. The approach that assumes that work accidents are inevitable make employers and the government intervene in the situation only after a serious workplace injury has taken place and not prior to these accidents.

This is similar to the way that the government intervened in the aftermath of the Soma mine disaster, the most deadly work accident in Turkish history that resulted in the death of 301 miners because of an explosion and fire in the Soma mines on May 13, 2014. The AKP government did not impose any sanctions on the Soma mining company before the incident took place despite the previous warnings of experts. Moreover, a motion proposed by the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) discussed in the National Assembly on October 2013 (seven months before the incident) specifically drew attention to the safety conditions of the Soma mine, and asked for a parliamentary

¹⁴⁸ For a more detailed discussion of this approach please see the "Accidents or Murders?" subsection of the First Chapter as well as the Fourth Chapter that examines the labor organizations', activists' and families' struggle to name workplace injuries as "murders".

inspection commission to be established, yet was rejected by the AKP government¹⁴⁹. However, immediately following the incident the government was present in the town of Soma in the form of police and gendarmerie to suppress any possible upheaval and social unrest. The second measure that the AKP government took was to pay compensation to the families of the workers who died in the Soma mine. In his subsequent speeches Prime Minister Erdoğan called the 301 dead miners “martyrs” and proudly repeated how generously the government compensated workers’ families in the town of Soma who received 154,450 liras [about USD 65,000] each¹⁵⁰. This was a dramatic example of how a government that considered workplace injuries as a natural occurrence intervened in an enormous disaster only afterwards and intended to solve the problem through the payment of financial compensation to the relatives of the workers whose deaths were assumed to be inevitable.

A similar logic can be observed in the way that the Shipbuilders Business Association, GİSBİR, intervened in workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards. In the unique case of the Tuzla shipyards, the Turkish Shipbuilders’ Association GİSBİR along with the encouragement of the AKP government, constructed the first private hospital in Turkey owned and led by a business association to intervene in the cases of injured workers “after” an accident happens. In that sense, The GİSBİR hospital might be described as the embodiment of the employers’ assumption about the inevitability of work accidents.

¹⁴⁹ “Erdoğan Says Mining Accidents ‘Nature of the Business’ - Al-Monitor.”

¹⁵⁰ “Soma’da ölenlerin Ailelerine 154 Bin 450’şer Lira ödenecek - (The Families of the Workers Who Died in Soma Will Receive 154.450 Liras Each),” *Radikal Daily Newspaper*, July 15, 2014, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/somada-olenlerin-ailelerine-154-bin-450ser-lira-odenecek-1201985/>.

The Turkish Shipbuilders Association Hospital was constructed directly across the street from the chain of shipyards and was officially opened in April 2010 by the Prime Minister Erdoğan in person. In the opening ceremony, Erdoğan stated that, “While the shipbuilding industry gradually grew, inevitably the number of the work accidents increased, too. Even though one takes all measures of safety, one cannot stop all work accidents. This is the case in the most developed countries in the world as well. Together with the representatives of the shipbuilding sector we spent a lot of effort to find solutions for this problem. As a result of those efforts, today we are opening the GİSBİR Hospital. This hospital will be an important institution in serving the Tuzla shipyards zones’ needs in terms of work safety and health¹⁵¹.”

Erdoğan’s arguments were familiar for those who had heard previously the comments of the shipyard owners on the work accidents in Tuzla. According to this rhetoric work accidents are considered inevitable and supported with the speculative claim that such accidents take place even in the economically developed countries at the same rates. Whereas preventing “the inevitable accidents” was considered impossible, the GİSBİR Hospital that would intervene in those same “inevitable accidents” only after the accident took place was introduced as the best solution to the problem.

The GİSBİR was proud to establish such a well-equipped hospital in Tuzla. In a newspaper interview, Murat Bayrak, the head of the GİSBİR at the time, explained the story of the foundation of the GİSBİR hospital in Tuzla as the following:

We first founded a small size healthcare facility that acted as an emergency service in 2005. Since then we saved a lot of injured workers’ lives thanks to the close

¹⁵¹ “Gisbir Hastanesi Törenle Hizmete Açıldı (‘The Gisbir Hospital was Opened with a Ceremony’),” *Deniz Haber*, April 10, 2010, <http://www.denizhaber.com.tr/gisbir-hastanesi-torenl-hizmete-acildi-haber-25859.htm>.

proximity of our healthcare facility to the shipyards. Today I believe that we made a good decision at that time by entering the healthcare business. We gained experience thanks to our emergency facility. Moreover, we were able to collect a lot of information and data about workplace injuries throughout the shipyards zone. The statistical information we collected convinced us of the need to build a fully equipped hospital in the area to intervene in workplace injuries immediately after they occur. Thus, we prepared a proposal to establish a hospital and presented our proposal in a GİSBİR meeting. The proposal was accepted with the unanimous vote of the GİSBİR members. While preparing this project regarding the type and focus of the hospital we carefully examined the information that we had collected through our emergency facility about minor and major injuries that took place in 35 different shipyards in Tuzla. Based on that information and experience we equipped our hospital with the highest quality and high-tech medical devices. We hired 42 selected and experienced doctors and health personnel to work with. Today we have 35 rooms and 70 beds in our hospital, but want to increase the number of beds to 100. In addition to those the emergency and three operation rooms were perfectly designed so that they can work as an example for other healthcare facilities. We also added a burn unit that will particularly serve to workers who are injured in the shipyards. Now, six patients can be hosted at the same time in this burn unit in our hospital¹⁵².

The statements of the head of GİSBİR as well as the personal participation of the Prime Minister in the opening ceremony of the hospital in Tuzla exposes the degree that the foundation of this private hospital led by a business association was presented as a highly appreciated act. The GİSBİR Hospital was proudly introduced by the shipyard owners as a as a sign of care and good will. Similar to Erdoğan's pride in compensating the families of the Soma miners generously, GİSBİR seemed proud to introduce an emergency service to intervene in workplace injuries only after they happen, and "save lives" if the worker has not immediately died in the worksite.

The GİSBİR introduced its hospital as a humanitarian act, a manifestation of how much employers care about the health of their workers. However, as Miriam Ticktin argues

¹⁵² "Murat Bayrak ile Söyleşi ('Interview with Murat Bayrak')," *Deniz Haber*, April 2010, <http://www.denizhaber.com/index.php/21318/1/gisbir-hastanesi-tuzla-39ninsansi.html?sayfa=habgst&id=21318&links=1>.

in her critical approach to humanitarianism, the target of the humanitarian projects is reduced and limited to mere biological life that is understood in terms of the suffering body which has to be taken care of.¹⁵³ Humanitarian projects do not touch on the political questions concerning inequality and justice and remains structural reasons behind the persistence of sufferings intact. In the case of the Tuzla shipyards, while masking the structural social and political causes of work accidents and the fact that the very harm and suffering of the injured workers is a direct result of the employers' misconduct and the government's political choices, through the introduction of their hospital the members of the GİSBİR transformed a preventable and employer-inflicted suffering into a show of care-giving. Critical anthropologist, Peter Redfield emphasizes that humanitarianism grows particularly acute from the perspective of crisis and emergency that invites response.¹⁵⁴ The GİSBİR hospital in Tuzla, too, works as an emergency service for the injured workers. By neglecting the persistence of the structural problems about work safety and health and by considering work accidents as exceptional emergency situations, GİSBİR's humanitarian approach left the perpetually repeating nature of the work accidents and their political causes intact. Employers' reduction of work accidents to an emergency and their mere focus on the effects of the work accidents mask the political and structural formation of the problem. As a result, workers are produced as targets of employers' humanitarian intervention while the structural political causes of work accidents persist.

¹⁵³ Ticktin, "Where Ethics and Politics Meet."

¹⁵⁴ Redfield, "Doctors, Borders, and Life in Crisis."

While answering a journalists' question Murat Bayrak, the head of the GİSBİR, argued that the GİSBİR hospital was opened as a private hospital but was indeed a non-profit institution. "We do not seek profit. We will not charge our workers. And we will treat residents of Tuzla for fees as low as those in public hospitals. We will invest all the money we earn to better serve our patients. The happiness of our patients is the most important thing for us.¹⁵⁵"

However, for the Linter-İş labor union, Murat Bayrak's claim was inaccurate. Linter-İş stated that, "this project [GİSBİR Hospital] functions as a tool to lower labor costs, so that the shipbuilding industry can be more competitive. The worker health and work safety units that are required in each shipyard are in most cases useless and only exist on paper because they are considered too costly by shipyard companies. A major reason for the foundation of the GİSBİR hospital is to lower costs by introducing a single hospital responsible for all workers' health and work safety needs for each and every shipyard in Tuzla¹⁵⁶."

Not only does the GİSBİR Hospital lower the costs of workers' healthcare through the centralization of the healthcare facilities that are supposed be present in each and every shipyard, the hospital has also created a profitable business for the shipyard owners who charge workers for the medical reports that cost about 100 liras (about 65 USD in 2010) required to start a job in the shipyards. And as of 2010, 100 liras corresponded to the payment an ordinary worker received after two days work in the Tuzla shipyards.

¹⁵⁵ "Murat Bayrak ile Söyleşi ('Interview with Murat Bayrak')."

¹⁵⁶ TMMOB (Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects) et al., *Tuzla Monitoring Commission Report (Tuzla Tersaneler Bölgesi İzleme ve İnceleme Komisyonu Raporu)*, 74.

According to the 2008 work safety regulations, each worker is required to have a medical check-up before starting on the job. After the foundation of the GİSBİR Hospital, all of the shipyards in Tuzla asked workers to bring check-up reports from their own hospital and no longer accepted medical reports provided by other institutions¹⁵⁷. Thus, the GİSBİR utilized the new work safety amendments to make even more profit by creating a monopoly for their hospital in preparing these medical reports. Considering the fact that about 20 thousand workers were officially employed in the Tuzla shipyards in 2010 when the GİSBİR hospital was founded, and that the jobs were temporary, short-term and that workers on average changed three jobs a year¹⁵⁸ needing a new medical report each time, one could make a quick calculation, and find that GİSBİR earned at least 6 million liras (about 4 million USD in 2010) in a year just through providing the required medical reports.

Moreover, the reports of the Limter-İş labor union and workers' testimonies show that the GİSBİR Hospital is free only for registered workers who have health insurance coverage, while unregistered and uninsured workers who compose the great majority of the workers in the shipyards zone¹⁵⁹ are asked to pay the regular fees for their treatments¹⁶⁰. Furthermore while the quality of the health services in the hospital are not significantly

¹⁵⁷ TMMOB (Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects) et al., *Tuzla Monitoring Commission Report (Tuzla Tersaneler Bölgesi İzleme ve İnceleme Komisyonu Raporu)*.

¹⁵⁸ The information that workers in the Tuzla shipyards change three jobs a year on average was based on a statistical study conducted and published by Odman and Akdemir, "Tuzla Tersaneler Bölgesi'nde örülen ve üstü örtülen sınıfsallıklar ('The Class Relationships that are Built and Covered Up in the Tuzla Shipyards')."

¹⁵⁹ Unregistered workers compose TMMOB (Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects) et al., *Tuzla Monitoring Commission Report (Tuzla Tersaneler Bölgesi İzleme ve İnceleme Komisyonu Raporu)*.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

better than those in public hospitals, for the uninsured workers the fees charged by the private hospital are significantly higher than the fees in public hospitals.

In Turkey there is a dual system of healthcare. Whereas the majority of hospitals are public with doctors appointed by the Ministry of Health and funded by the government, a significant amount of private hospitals can be found in major cities such as İstanbul, Ankara, and İzmir. Again the state is the major health insurance provider while at the same time a few private health insurance companies exist. In Turkey public hospitals provide quality service and affordable healthcare for uninsured patients. In addition to those who can afford the fees, the private hospitals are mostly chosen by patients whose private health insurance company has a contract with that particular private hospital. The case of Tuzla is an unusual phenomena where a private hospital, whose fees are significantly higher than the fees in public hospitals, is designated as the primary healthcare facility even for the uninsured workers.

That is to say, in contrast to Murat Bayrak's presentation of the GİSBİR Hospital as a non-profit institution, the GİSBİR hospital is indeed a profitable business for the shipbuilders who pretend to care about the health and "happiness" of their workers.



Figure 12: Tuzla Shipbuilders Association (GİSBİR) Private Hospital. The hospital is located across the street of the chain of the shipyards in Tuzla. The entrance of the emergency service (ACİL) is directly connected to that main street, so that injured workers can be brought to hospital quickly (photo taken by myself).

The Dependency of the Doctors on the GİSBİR:

The hospital is also a highly visible show of GİSBİR's organizational capacity and power as an employer association that can track the records and information of workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards. All of the doctors and personnel of the GİSBİR hospital receive their salaries from the shipyard owners. That is to say, the doctors in GİSBİR hospital are financially dependent on the shipyard bosses unlike the doctors in the nearby Kartal Public Hospital, where the injured workers in the Tuzla shipyards were brought before the foundation of the GİSBİR private hospital.

Here, a problem similar to those problems experienced in the work safety inspections can be observed in the ways in which workers' health is taken care of in the Tuzla shipyards zone. The doctors of the GİSBİR hospital, similar to the work safety experts hired by the shipyard companies are completely dependent on the shipyard owners' business association in terms of their salary and job security.

In my fieldwork I had a chance to have a conversation with Nevin, a nurse from the Kartal Public Hospital, to get an insider's point of view about what exactly had changed after the opening of the GİSBİR private hospital in Tuzla. I met Nevin in the "resistance tent" in front of the Tepe Klima factory occupied by workers who were denied their salaries for months. As I mentioned in more detail in the second chapter, together with the families of the workers who were occupying the factory I was in the nearby suburban district Gebze, (a neighborhood in the East of Tuzla), in front of the house of the owner of the workshop, Necati Tepe, in order to protest against his unfair treatment of the workers. When we returned from the demonstration in Gebze to the Tepe Klima factory in Pendik, a neighborhood in the West of Tuzla, the families of the workers gathered in this resistance tent to tell the occupying workers about what happened in the demonstration¹⁶¹. Nevin, a self-identified socialist, had volunteered to come and check the health conditions of the workers who occupied the factory. She also asked whether any demonstrators had been harmed by the police and needed medical attention. I told her that although there was heavy police presence during the demonstration and they tried to intimidate us by all other means, there had been no physical attacks by the police. After that I explained her that I was doing

¹⁶¹ Both Gebze in the East of Tuzla, and Pendik in the West of Tuzla are industrial suburbs, where supplier industries for the shipyards in Tuzla are located. Some workers in the shipyards and their families also reside in these nearby neighborhoods.

a research on workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards and we started a conversation about how workers were treated differently in the Kartal Public Hospital before, compared to the GİSBİR hospital now.

She told me that from her perspective things were much better before, at least more transparent, because workers who got injured were brought to the public hospital where she worked and the doctors there could prepare their reports about the workplace injuries independently. These reports would later be used as evidence against the employers in Tuzla. She continued: “However, following the foundation of the GİSBİR Shipbuilders Association Hospital things have changed dramatically. Because injured workers are now brought to the GİSBİR hospital, where the doctors and other employees receive their salaries from the shipyard owners, the doctors and nurses of the Kartal Public Hospital are no longer in charge of preparing reports and following up with work fatality cases.” Nevin claimed that the GİSBİR hospital was actually founded in order to shake off the politically aware and active doctors who took the side of the injured workers and prepared reports that might be used as evidence that showed the responsibility of the employers in the accidents.

She told me:

Starting from the opening of the GİSBİR hospital, one cannot even track the number of injuries and fatalities that have taken place in the Tuzla bay. I suspect that in the GİSBİR hospital they lower the number of work accidents. I heard from several workers that after some minor injuries, such as splinters in the eye or small cuts, were treated in the GİSBİR hospital, workers were sent directly back to work that same day without getting a medical report. After such an injury workers should be sent to home for at least two days to rest. This is what we do in the Kartal Public Hospital. We send them home for two days and prepare official medical reports for their medical leave.

I told Nevin that I had heard some rumors about how deaths of some workers were also hidden by the GİSBİR Hospital and asked her whether she knew anything about that. She answered me that she heard the same stories, as well, but could not be sure whether those were true. “What I do know however is that shipyard bosses and managers are allowed to go into the hospital and check the medical records freely to follow-up the case if a serious injury takes place in their shipyards whereas members of the labor organizations, NGOs or independent inspectors are not allowed to go and check records in the GİSBİR hospital. This surely throws suspicion on shipyard bosses, and makes us question whether the doctors there manipulate their medical reports about injuries and fatalities because of the pressure exercised by shipyard owners who are indeed the bosses of the doctors as well.”

The rumors that I mentioned to Nevin were told to me by Zeynel, an activist shipyard worker and the head of the socialist TİB-DER labor organization. In one of our conversations in TİB-DER’s office in Tuzla, Zeynel told me about how difficult it was for them to follow all of the workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards zone. Zeynel stated:

We cannot follow all of the murders at work. There are a lot of covered up cases about which he have no information. However, we try our best to expose concealed cases. For instance the case of Mehmet Tanrikulu, a worker from Seray Shipyard who died in the GİSBİR hospital, was really suspicious. After the accident he was brought to the GİSBİR hospital. The hospital didn’t accept the patient claiming that their intensive care unit was full, so, they sent the worker to the nearby Kartal Public Hospital. There, the worker underwent surgery. However, after the surgery the employer once again transferred the worker to the GİSBİR hospital claiming that there Mehmet would be better taken care of. Mehmet then died while he was in the GİSBİR hospital. We, together with other friends from TİB-DER, went to the GİSBİR Hospital when we learned about Mehmet’s death from his friends in the shipyard. First, the personnel in the GİSBİR hospital did not want to let us in. However, because we persisted and raised our voices they had to let us in and allow us to see a doctor. The employer of the doctors there was the GİSBİR. When the doctor talked to us he was also looking in the eyes of the owner of the hospital. Could a doctor give us true information under such circumstances? The doctor told

us that they had no responsibility for Mehmet's death. He claimed that Mehmet was already dead when he was brought to the GİSBİR hospital. "So, if he was already dead, why was he transferred to the GİSBİR Hospital?" I asked the doctor. "Would you plan to conceal his death if we did not learn what happened to him and come the hospital?" The doctor remained completely silent. We also asked about the name of the manager who had insisted on transferring Mehmet from the Kartal Public Hospital to the GİSBİR hospital. However, neither the doctor nor the hospital personnel provided us his name. They also refused to give us the medical records about Mehmet, claiming that we were not his relatives. One personnel at the information desk told us that we might get the name of the manager from the police, and that they, as the hospital, were not involved in this case.

Following this story, Zeynel said to me, "You see, this is the particular reason why they built the GİSBİR Hospital, to conceal accidents and workers' deaths. Because if you go to the Public Hospital, whether you like it or not, they keep a record of the incident and write a report which is publicly accessible. However, at GİSBİR Hospital, one cannot access the records of the patients. Still they introduce the GİSBİR Hospital as if they did a very good thing, as if they solved all of the problems related workers' health by establishing that hospital."

So, despite the concerns raised by Zeynel and Nevin about the financial dependency of the healthcare personnel on the GİSBİR and the non-transparency of the medical records in the GİSBİR hospital as Zeynel stated, the replacement of the Kartal Public Hospital with the GİSBİR hospital as the main health facility for injured shipyard workers was represented as a show by the Turkish Shipbuilders' Business Association about how much they care about their workers' health.

The New Logic and Organization of Workplace Healthcare

Similar to the Turkish government that disregarded the previous warnings about the Soma mines and intervened in the Soma mine disaster case only after a massive workplace

injury took place, the GİSBİR hospital, too, operates its emergency services only if there has been an accident, while all other times without accidents are considered normal times with no problems. Here, the hospital can be seen as the symbolic expression of the unfortunate destiny of the shipyard workers. An accident will happen in any case, “it is destiny” according to the PM, ministers, government officials, and shipyard owners whom I quoted before and repeated numerous times. And only after an accident happens, GİSBİR and its hospital will intervene in the case of the injured worker.

As expressed in the Tuzla Monitoring Commission Report, the authors of the report including İstanbul Chambers of Physicians and İstanbul Workers’ Health Institute, fundamentally opposed GİSBİR hospital’s approach to healthcare. For them, “the basic philosophy of workplace medical care is to protect workers from accidents, injuries and illnesses, and thus, to stop losses of life, workforce and money beforehand. However, it seems that in the private GİSBİR hospital, the basic aim of health service is not protection and prevention from injuries but is reduced merely to the treatment of injuries. Such an approach to healthcare cannot prevent injuries, illnesses and deaths in the shipyards. On the contrary, this approach reproduces conditions that cause workplace injuries and fatalities.”¹⁶²

Hakkı Usta, the general secretary of the socialist Limter-İş labor union was also critical of the function of GİSBİR hospital and described the hospital as useless. When I asked his opinions about the GİSBİR hospital he told me: “When there is a work accident,

¹⁶² TMMOB (Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects) et al., *Tuzla Tersaneler Bölgesi İzleme İnceleme Komisyonu: Tuzla Tersaneler Bölgesi’ndeki çalışma koşulları ve önlemebilir seri iş kazaları hakkında rapor (“Report On the Working Conditions and Preventable Serial Work Accidents in the Tuzla Shipyards Zone”)* (İstanbul: TMMOB, 2008), 73.

GİSBİR hospital serves as a morgue. As long as they do not take the necessary safety measures in the shipyards, founding such a hospital is useless.”

According to the critical activists, the work safety regulations imposed by the government following the protests against the negative working conditions and fatalities at work in the Tuzla shipyards were utilized by the shipyard companies to lower labor costs and create a new source of income thanks to the foundation of the GİSBİR Hospital. At the same time, shipyard owners could present a spectacle of care and pretend that they valued the health and safety of their workers.

As İstanbul Chambers of Physicians and İstanbul Workers’ Health Institute emphasized establishing the GİSBİR Hospital as the emergency health facility for the shipyards workers also marks a change in the logic and organization of healthcare that is based not on prevention of workplace injuries beforehand but on treating those injuries only after an accident has taken place. Following this understanding the business association postponed indefinitely both the financial cost of work safety and any other costs involved with the risk of not providing proper safety equipment. Work safety equipment that can prevent possible accidents “beforehand” is instead exchanged with a fully equipped hospital that is able to intervene in accidents only “after” the moment that the incident has happened. Such an approach to the healthcare of the shipyard workers reproduces the assumption that work accidents are inevitable and not preventable beforehand.

How was Economic Growth Introduced as a Source of National Pride?

As I have demonstrated thus far, fatal workplace injuries are described and legitimized by the GİSBİR members and government officials either as normal incidences that occur at the same rates everywhere else in the world, or as the inevitable consequences of the development process in this particular stage of development, or as a necessary sacrifice to compete with rival countries in an economic battle. Most of the time employers and government officials expressed a combination of these legitimations rather than giving a single explanation when they were asked about the reasons for the high rate of the workplace injuries in Turkey in general and in the Tuzla shipyards in particular. Despite the inaccuracy and lack of grounds for those arguments, government officials and business representatives still mobilize these three claims to naturalize fatal workplace injuries and to blame those who are critical of negative working conditions for dynamiting Turkey's path towards economic development. A hegemonic nationalist discourse according to which economic development is described as the contemporary source of national pride plays a significant role in supporting the approach of the employers and government officials toward workplace injuries.

While economic power is considered a source of national pride, this imagined economic race becomes a new sphere of war-like international competition. In the particular context of the shipbuilding industry, Turkey is in competition with China, South Korea, and Japan, the three major shipbuilding countries in the world. Under conditions of heavy competition workers who die in accidents at work are considered sacrifices in the economic battle for growth, a national cause that is unquestionable.

In the first chapter of this dissertation I discussed Turkish critical scholars Adaman, Akbulut, Arsel and Avci's argument that the major reason for workplace injuries in Turkey is the fetishism or obsession with economic development. The same scholars also consider economic development a dominant narrative and a hegemonic practice introduced by the consecutive Turkish governments to gain the consent of different and at times contesting groups within the population:

We argue that the roots of this undisputed appeal and dominance of growth oriented modernization should be searched in the configuration of state-society relationships; in particular, the way that the state presented itself and legitimized its claim to rule by drawing up a broad consensus for its existence in Turkey. The Turkish state has historically achieved its power and legitimacy, first and foremost, from the promise of fulfilling the ideal of modernization. The urgency to modernize and realize economic development constituted a collective interest, an outlook for the whole nation envisaged as an organic unity without internal divisions, where even questioning its validity was considered unpatriotic. Through this, the Turkish state was able to represent itself as a neutral institution that embodied the collective will of the people, and thus acquire the consent of the society to its claim to rule. That is to say, the idea of modernization/development was integral to the state's ability to govern not by naked coercion, but by being backed with the consent of its constituency. On the other hand, the aspiration to modernize became what united an internally-fragmented society along with different dimensions of socio-economic inequality and prevented the formulation of demands arising out of intra-society divisions¹⁶³.

This critical approach, one that I agree with, draws attention to the ways that the consecutive Turkish governments historically produced economic development as a hegemonic discourse and practice, as well as a project desired by the population. Accordingly, high economic growth rates became a source of national pride and an indicator of Turkey's success in international competition amongst other developing countries. I would argue that it is important to understand the hegemonic power of this

¹⁶³ Adaman et al., "De-Growth as Counter-Hegemony?"

developmentalist discourse in Turkey in order to better analyze how workplace injuries are explained and contested by conflicting sides of the debate. Indeed, the hegemonic power of these developmentalist discourses and practices help the shipyard business in the Tuzla industrial zone to identify themselves with the hegemonic national development project, to associate growth in the shipbuilding sector with national pride, and to consider their success in the shipbuilding business as part of the national success in the international race for economic growth.

A statement from Muhsin Divan, the manager of the Desan Shipyard¹⁶⁴ expressed in a journal interview on July 2010 was exemplary of such a view. While describing the problems in the shipbuilding industry, Muhsin Divan framed the needs of the shipyards as the needs of the national economy. As Muhsin Divan stated:

The ship construction industry is a serious industrial field. Look, before the last economic crisis started there were 40,000 laborers working here. And this was a completely national sector, controlled completely by national capital. Together with 40,000 workers this area was the biggest industrial zone in Turkey. Look, I repeat that number emphatically once again: 40,000 workers corresponds to the total employment in ten steel factories! However, today, the employment number in Tuzla has dropped to 10,000. Thus, hearing the noise of the hammer and seeing the light of the weld in Tuzla means that the production and employment here powerfully contributes to the nation and national development. Therefore, the problem in Tuzla is not only a problem of the owners of the unfinished ships and of the shipyards, but also a problem of the national economy. Look, up until recently things have been fine in the world and in Turkey. However, the world crisis that started as a financial crisis has affected the finance sector so badly that it has made the construction of new ships in Turkey pointless. First of all, the prices of already constructed ships have dropped dramatically. We have started to experience problems in bridge loans and credits provided by Turkish banks that were taken until the launching of the ships; we have experienced problems in paying back these loans, problems that drove from the international financial system. Therefore, trying to complete the construction of ships under such conditions became akin to committing suicide. The government should strongly support the maritime sector,

¹⁶⁴ Desan is a major shipyard in Tuzla, and owned by Kaptanoğlu family that is in the maritime business for a about century.

just like other maritime countries in the world have done. To be sure, the public administration, the central administration, and the government cannot be indifferent to such problems. Of course, they have to organize the national economy in a tidy manner, they have to evaluate national sources efficiently. Thus, with mutual negotiations we took some steps. With the help provided by the government guarantee funds we can take some more steps forward¹⁶⁵.

In this statement, Muhsin Divan carefully describes the employment created, as well as the problems encountered, following the economic crisis in the Tuzla shipyards not as cases that were particular to the Desan shipyard or the shipbuilding industry as a single sector, but as inseparable components of the national economy and the national project for development. That is to say, for Divan, the success or failure of the shipbuilding industry in Tuzla could not be thought of as separate from the success or failure of the national development project. GİSBİR members repeatedly claim that the shipbuilding industry in Tuzla helps raise national pride by contributing to rapid economic development in Turkey.

However, as seen in the statement of Divan, and as I will discuss more in detail in the last section of this chapter, such mobilization of nationalistic discourse that equates national pride with the success of the shipbuilding industry was expressed by the shipyard management to leverage privileges from the national banks and the government. Moreover, the hegemonic discourse of national development was also mobilized by employers to suppress critiques about negative working conditions.

As I already discussed in the statements of GİSBİR representatives, shipyard owners and government officials, anyone who criticizes working conditions and high rates of the workplace injuries in the shipbuilding industry might easily be identified as being

¹⁶⁵ “Muhsin Divan İle Söyleşi (‘Interview with Muhsin Divan’),” *Perşembe Rotası*, July 22, 2010, <http://www.persemerotasi.com/page/159/>.

unpatriotic at best and traitors at worst. Critics are accused of undermining Turkey's nationalist project for development while serving the interests of competing countries in the race for economic growth.

As a result, not only the press but also activists and leftist labor organizations critical of the government and the employers' policies were targeted as traitors to the country. Activists and labor union members were accused of acting with malevolence and collaborating with rival countries. Kanber Saygılı, the head of the Limter-İş labor union told me that labor organizations that are critical of the negative working conditions in the shipyards were blamed by GİSBİR members for serving the interest of competing rival countries. For example, Limter-İş labor union members were labeled by the shipyard owners as being "German spies". Germany is the major supplier of the electronic and technical equipment, engines and navigation systems required for the construction of the ships in the Tuzla shipyards zone. Turkish shipbuilders could not produce this electronic equipment and they were therefore dependent on high-tech imports from Germany to complete the building of their ships.¹⁶⁶ For Saygılı, Turkish shipbuilding companies had no bargaining power to reduce the cost of this imported equipment, and this power inequality between German firms and Turkish shipbuilding companies made Turkish shipyard owners resort to such reactionary statements against Germany, and to blame critics, labor organizations and activists in Tuzla for serving the interest of Germany and other competing countries.

¹⁶⁶ The import/export ratio, namely the share of the imported materials and components (especially the more sophisticated and high technology items such as the main engines and navigation equipment) to the exports of the completed ships is relatively high in the Turkish shipbuilding industry. That is to say, the value-added in the Turkish shipyards is relatively low and derives from the low(ered) costs of labor used to build the hoods of the ships.

For the GİSBİR members' and government officials in particular, making the problems in the Tuzla shipyards visible through the press and through labor union activism is considered as a disclosure of a weakness that can aid the “enemy” or rival economies to undermine the reputation and success of Turkey’s economic growth.

According to the prime minister at the time Tayyip Erdoğan even if Turkish industry had some problems, these problems should be solved internally and not in a way that would allow anyone else to overshadow the success of the Turkish economy. In a meeting with the Turkish Shipbuilders Association in September 2008, (three months after the major worker demonstrations in the Tuzla shipyards to protest fatal workplace injuries), Erdoğan stated that, “I am talking here on behalf of you, but also as someone among you. We cannot say that we did not make any mistakes. Yes, we may have made some mistakes. However, no one has the right to undermine the shipbuilding sector by exploiting those mistakes through organizing various demonstrations every day or through utilizing the problems in Tuzla for other purposes. If we have problems we also have the tools to do whatever has to be done and to solve those problems amongst ourselves without letting these problems overshadow the success and stability of the shipbuilding industry. We should not let anyone dynamite this industry.”¹⁶⁷

In another speech given at the meeting of the Turkish Chamber of Shipping in June 2008, the minister of trade and industry at the time Zafer Çağlayan implicitly claimed that the critical actions of the workers, labor unions and activists in Tuzla were organized through the direction of rival countries. “I wonder whether the high capacity of the Turkish

¹⁶⁷ “Başbakan Erdoğan’dan Tersane çıkışı (A Warning about the Shipyards by the Prime Minister Erdoğan).”

labor force, Turkish entrepreneurs and the Turkish people as well as the fact that Turkey is becoming one of the major production bases in the world scares our rivals outside of Turkey and makes them strike back”¹⁶⁸.

Erdoğan’s and Minister of Economy Çağlayan’s statements about the need to deal with the problems in the shipbuilding industry as internal matters that should not be made known to outsiders and their view of workers’ protests as acts serving the interests of rivals were also in line with GİSBİR’s accusation of Limter-İş of treason and being German spies as well as Mesut’s accusations that the critical press as traitors to the country. That is to say, government officials and shipyard managers consider workplace injuries more as a threat to national reputation and a weakness that can be exploited by rival economies if learned about than as a threat against workers’ health.

¹⁶⁸ “Tuzla Tersaneleri Masaya Yatırıldı (Tuzla Shipyards Were Examined),” *Zaman Daily Newspaper*, June 12, 2008, http://www.zaman.com.tr/gundem_tuzla-tersaneleri-masaya-yatirildi_701460.html.

Nationalist Obsession with Economic Growth



Figure 13: A Ship Launch Ceremony in the Cemre Shipyard. The ship, ordered by a Norwegian company was decorated with three Turkish flags, including a huge one in front of the ship, posters of Ataturk, the founder of Turkish Republic, and of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Prime Minister at the time, and finally an evil eye in front of the ship. One can hardly see a relatively small Norwegian flag beside the Turkish flag that covers the bridge of the ship (photo retrieved from istenhaber.com, September 2011).

As I mentioned before, in practice, nationalistic discourses that equate national pride with economic power are mobilized by the employers to suppress the demands of labor organizations for more investments into work safety and workers' health. The hegemonic discourses of economic development according to which Turkey, as a developing country, is described as engaging in an intense economic race with other countries where the overall economic growth rate is a major indicator of national success, has also been mobilized by the shipyard owners in Tuzla to ask for financial privileges from the banks and from the AKP government, particularly in the aftermath of the global economic crisis. While mobilizing a nationalist discourse to express their dedication to the

economic development the shipyard owners in Tuzla whose statements I will quote below, attempt to support and legitimize their cause by associating national pride with their success in industrial production in the Tuzla shipyards.

The 2008 global economic crisis hit the shipbuilding sector in Tuzla severely. From 2002 until the global economic crisis of 2008 Turkey's export of ships grew exponentially from approximately \$490 million to more than \$2.65 billion¹⁶⁹. Immediately preceding the global economic crisis, Turkey had become the 4th biggest ship producer in the world in terms of the number of the global orders¹⁷⁰. However, in the aftermath of the global economic crisis, orders for new ships were cancelled and the Turkish ship construction industry dramatically contracted, falling to the 10th place in the global ranking in 2011¹⁷¹. In the meantime, while several shipyards declared bankruptcy, many others saved their business by transforming their shipbuilding facilities into ship repair facilities, the least skilled and most labor intensive job in the shipyard industry.

During my conversation with Mesut in the GİSBİR's office in Tuzla, I asked him how the economic crisis affected the Turkish shipbuilding industry in particular, and what the current situation was like. "I heard that some shipyards recently declared bankruptcy, is that correct?" I asked him. Mesut told me that this was unfortunately correct. "The shipyards are experiencing financial difficulties since the economic crisis," he told me. "Major customers cancelled their orders immediately after the global crisis while at the

¹⁶⁹ "Türkiye Sanayisine Sektörel Bakış: Gemi İnşa Sanayisi ('A Sectoral Investigation of the Turkish Industry: The Shipbuilding Industry')" (TÜSİAD - Turkish Industrialist' and Businessmen' Association, October 2010).

¹⁷⁰ Turkish Parliament Investigation Commission, "Turkish Parliament Tuzla Shipyards Investigation Report."

¹⁷¹ "The Shipbuilding Industry in Turkey," 33–34.

same time the price of ships has decreased dramatically. Thousands of workers lost their jobs. No one helped us during the economic crisis. We were left alone.” Mesut then claimed that the Turkish national banks were responsible for the failure of the shipyards during the global economic crisis. He even went so far as to claim, in addition to the press, another traitor to the country were the Turkish banks. With his arms stretched wide open he told me:

Do you see this room? Do you know that this room was full of bank representatives before the economic crisis? They all were competing with each other to provide us credits and loans. Today, they have all disappeared. They disappeared when we needed them the most. Now, they do not answer our phone calls. They betrayed us. The shipbuilding industry was the rising star of our economy. By betraying us, the banks betrayed the nation. They should provide us with low interest-rate loans during the economic crisis with the intention of protecting the survival of the national economy. However, they work for nothing else but to increase their own profits! I am sure American banks are not like that. They support their own national industry at all costs!

I tried to explain him that his assumption was wrong, and that American banks, too, worked for nothing else but to increase their own profits. I told him how during the economic crisis major American banks that experienced major financial difficulties were bailed out by the government using the tax money of ordinary citizens despite public anger about such a decision.

However, he interrupted me and said: “So, you see then why America is so powerful. The American government, American companies and banks don’t sell each other out during hard times. Our banks are not like that. They left us alone during the crisis and began to provide loans exclusively to international corporations outside of Turkey.”

“In America, during the economic crisis millions of people lost their jobs and were left alone, too, while banks were bailed out,” I told Mesut, but he did not seem to listen to

me. Instead he continued to repeat his argument that everyone else but the shipyard companies themselves were responsible for the difficulties and bankruptcies that they experienced in the Tuzla shipyards in the aftermath of the economic crisis. To support his argument he continued to claim that this was not the case in other countries, including America, and that the problem in Turkey derives from the fact that the Turkish banks, press, and labor organizations are not nationalist enough and did not commit the necessary sacrifices to make the shipbuilding industry continue to grow.

I asked Mesut why shipyards did not save money for hard times when the shipbuilding industry was growing rapidly and had high margins of profit right before the 2008 economic crisis: “Are the banks the only ones responsible for your lack of money or for your high credit debts?” “Yes, indeed,” he replied, “Before the economic crisis they were very willing to sell us credit loans. They wanted to earn more and more profit from those loans while we became gradually more and more indebted. The Turkish banks were even more resilient to the crisis than the American banks. None of the Turkish banks were bankrupted or collapsed during the crisis. They just lost some share from their profits. That’s all! So, if the banks were nationalist enough they could have bailed us out just like the American government bailed out its banks. However, the Turkish banks turned their back on us.”

Again, it is not only Mesut who thinks that the banks that did not provide credits and loans with low or non-interest for the shipyards during and after the economic crisis are “deprived of national values and are not nationalist enough.” From Kenan Torlak, the owner of the Torlak Shipyard to Muhsin Divan, the manager of the Desan Shipyard, the

big bosses of the shipyards also expected “a sacrifice” from the Turkish banks during the economic crisis.

In a journal interview Kenan Torlak, the owner of the Torlak shipyard, who experienced severe financial difficulties during the economic crisis because of the lack of adequate capital savings in his company, claimed that the Turkish banks that made securing loans more difficult during the economic crisis were responsible for the failure of the shipyards:

The mortgage crisis that started in America spread all around the world very rapidly. First it hit world trade, and thus, the marine trade. 90% of trade in the world is conducted through the maritime line. The daily rent of a ship which was about 50 thousand dollars in the summer of 2008 became 5 thousand dollars in the month of November. To be sure, this affected the ship construction industry negatively. We had so many orders that all of our shipyards were full for 2010 and 2011. However, following the crisis people started to cancel their orders. At the end of 2008 we became unemployed. We became unable to see the future. The banks stopped. They asked for an increase in equities and assurances in order to provide loans. Because of the attitude of the banks, ship owners and investors had to suspend their payments to the shipyards for three to five months and even then they could not make complete payments¹⁷².

Muhsin Divan, the manager of the Desan Shipyard, didn't think differently from Kenan Torlak. Once again, the Desan Shipyard lacked the necessary savings and investments that might have been obtained during the years of growth. Instead of questioning why the Desan Shipyard did not have enough capital savings and long-term investments, and had take no precaution concerning the possibility of an economic crisis, Muhsin Divan, too, argued that the Turkish banks should take more responsibility during the crisis. He asked the banks to make “sacrifices” from their profits for the sake of national economic growth.

¹⁷² “Kenan Torlak ile Söyleşi: Krizden Sonra Türk Gemi Sanayii (Interview with Kenan Torlak: Turkish Shipbuilding Industry after the Economic Crisis),” *Perşembe Rotası*, May 2010.

Right now there are 150 unfinished ships in Tuzla. At this point, the companies that have economic problems, the ones that have credit and debt problems, should be allowed to benefit from low-interest loans. There are still some restrictions in applying to those funds. One has to approach the problems in a way that is more flexible nowadays. Banks should take more responsibility. As you know, Turkish banks are now experiencing the most profitable period in their history. Maybe they should make a little bit more of a sacrifice from their profits for the sake of our national maritime sector. They should do so, because as a result, we create high value-added products. In terms of assurance, each of these products is a work of art¹⁷³.

Because the growth in Tuzla shipyards has been identified as a national cause by the shipyards owners and managers, in addition to the national banks, the government was assumed to be an unconditional partner and supporter of the growth in the shipbuilding industry. Thus, lacking adequate savings and investments, the Plan-B for the shipyard bosses during the economic crisis was to ask for sacrifices not only from the banks but also privileges from the government. They wanted the Turkish banks with the help of the Turkish government to bail out the shipbuilding industry that owed significant amounts of debt. The organic ties of the major shipyard owners to the government and membership in other political parties in parliament were mobilized to gain the required government support as much as possible.

In the same journal interview that I cited above, Kenan Torlak, the owner of the Torlak Shipyard, described how they had to desperately ask for the help of the government during the economic crisis:

Despite all of our problems we still had hope to get new orders by the second half of 2010. However, as the days passed I realized that this hope could not be actualized. If things were to continue to go that badly we would even miss 2009. Before that major crisis we had experienced similar smaller crises. Yet, at those times we always got support from the government. They created new opportunities

¹⁷³ “Muhsin Divan Ile Söyleşi (‘Interview with Muhsin Divan’).”

for us and made things easier for us. This time we went to the Capital, Ankara, so many times to ask them to create the same opportunities. We even sent committees to the Prime Minister. We told our problems to the ministers who came to Tuzla. They agreed that we were an important sector, however, so far we have not seen any help or support. On the contrary, by cancelling the stimulus payment they impeded us. 200 thousand people became unemployed.

It is also typical that the shipyard owners, while talking about their victimization, emphasize that they create employment for thousands of people –here again the employment numbers they provide are highly exaggerated compared to the official statistics as I mentioned in the first chapter of this dissertation.

Kenan Torlak continued:

The situation of the maritime sector today makes me feel very sad. Both of my children are ship construction engineers. Both of them grow up in the shipyards. To see their faces drawn because of unemployment makes me very depressed. To see the sons of my friends dispirited makes me feel very sorry. While we aim to leave a good sector to the young generation, we have fallen to this tragic situation. We urgently wish to see the support of the government behind us. Germany provided help to its own shipyards in the amount of 260 million Euros. China gave 25 billion dollars support to its shipyard owners. Other Asian countries provided similar supports. In the first days of the crisis they provided support in billions of dollars. However, we did not get anything! On the contrary, based on the excuse that we are entering the European Union they even cancelled the stimulus documents and investment promotions. When the crisis is eventually overcome the shipyards in Asia, such as China, South Korea or Vietnam, will be full with new orders. We will get new orders only after the shipyards in Asia become full. To compete with the Asian countries, especially in terms of the prices is impossible, because their governments provided them help and support. Especially during this crisis, Asian governments supported their shipyard industry, and they will continue to support their maritime sector afterwards. The EU countries already supported ship construction and their shipyards with secret funds and stimulus even before the economic crisis. During the crisis they started to support their shipyards openly. Now they will increasingly continue to support their maritime sector. Moreover, during the crisis the EU countries took the required measures and applied them thanks to the various funds allocated beforehand. Now, in Turkey too, the ships under construction should be urgently supported by the government. The bridge loans and credits should be refinanced. The credits and loans taken from the banks

for investment into and the modernization of the shipyards should be refinanced, too¹⁷⁴.

Similar to the assumptions of the shipbuilding engineer Mesut who described the nationalist attitude of the American media and American banks that privileged their own industry and businesses, Kenan Torlak, who asked for the help of the Turkish government, supported his arguments with speculative, unconfirmed and inconsistent information about the alleged help of other governments such as Germany, China, South Korea or Vietnam to their own maritime and shipbuilding industries.

Kenan Torlak's approach was in line with Mesut who claimed that other governments including the American government were more nationalist compared to the Turkish government in the war-like crisis situation and in the economic race for growth. Here, similar to Mesut, Torlak, criticizes the Turkish government of not being nationalist enough in order to legitimize his demands for privileges from the government to endorse the shipbuilding industry for the sake of national growth.

Later on, in the winter of 2013, I had the chance to personally listen to an employer in the Tuzla shipyards as he mobilized a patriotic discourse on economic development to ask for the support of the government. In a restaurant in İstanbul, I coincidentally met with Turhan Yardımcı, the younger son of the owner of the Yardımcı shipyard in Tuzla, Kemal Yardımcı, a former member of the parliament and vice-minister of transportation with the AKP government. The gathering at this particular restaurant was a reunion of the London School of Economics graduates, and I was invited by a friend of mine who was an alumni

¹⁷⁴ “Kenan Torlak ile Söyleşi: Krizden Sonra Türk Gemi Sanayii (Interview with Kenan Torlak: Turkish Shipbuilding Industry after the Economic Crisis).”

of the LSE. At the gathering I was introduced to Turhan Yardımcı by a professor of economics at both LSE and İstanbul University who knew that my research was about work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards. Turhan was about my age, worked in the shipbuilding business, and now had his own company. After the introduction he asked me what my particular interests were in the Tuzla shipyards. I told him, work accidents. “Oh I see,” he replied and repeated the statement which I was now very familiar with: “Work accidents happen everywhere else in the world. We also feel very sad about it. But these incidents were exaggerated and used against us to undermine our reputation.” As I mentioned before, most shipyard companies do not accept interviews with journalists or researchers regarding workplace injuries. I was suspicious as to whether he would agree to do an interview with me if I emailed or called him before by introducing myself as a researcher working on work safety problems and fatal workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards. However, after we coincidentally met at this table, as a graduate from the LSE business masters’ program he looked like he was willing to argue with me about the issue. So, I asked him why there was not enough investments in technology and work safety in the shipbuilding sector that would prevent workplace injuries. “How is it that in a technologically advanced age, fatalities due to preventable causes still continue in the Tuzla shipyards?” He answered that they did not have enough capital accumulation and enough time to make such enormous investments and that they needed government support to do this. “This is a national issue,” he told me, “Several shipyard companies still experience financial difficulties. So, in order to improve the working conditions and effectively compete with other shipbuilding countries the sector needs low-interest loans guaranteed by the government.” He also asked me to write about the demands of the shipbuilding industry for government subsidies in my dissertation and

publications because he believed that a scientific approach might help persuade government officials about the importance of supporting shipyard companies. He also asked me not to mention stories that could degrade the reputation of the shipbuilding sector in Turkey. “We have been attacked enough,” he told me, “Please do not do the same thing. We all want our national economy to grow. That’s what it is all about.”

I asked Turhan if he probably had more chance to reach high-rank government officials because his father was a former member of the parliament from the AKP government party. However, he told me, “That is not the case. They know that when my father speaks about the shipyards, he favors his own interests. Yet, if a scientist mentions the demands of the shipyard industry and scientifically shows that supporting the shipbuilding industry serves the national interest, such an account will be considered objective statement and be taken more seriously.” In my response, I promised him that I would definitely discuss his arguments in my dissertation, so did I.

My encounter with Turhan, as well as my conversation with Mesut, and the quotations from Muhsin Divan and Kenan Torlak are exemplary of the employers’ mobilization of the discourse on national growth in order to ask for privileges from the government to endorse production in the shipbuilding industry in Tuzla.

The statements of the shipyard owners show that the Turkish shipbuilding industry lacks adequate financial savings and investments, and in a crisis situation the industry cannot sustain depending on its own resources. While introducing the particular problems of the shipyards as part of Turkey’s national economic growth, and as a question related to national pride, shipyard management ask for privileges from national financial institutions and the government. We can see that, the obsession with economic development, which

critical scholars Adaman and Akbulutis defined as a historical hegemonic discourse that makes modernization a national project and critiques of it unpatriotic acts, is not only mobilized by the government to legitimize policies that prioritize economic growth over workers' health and safety, but is also utilized by industrialists as a discursive tactic to suppress labor organizations' demands to enhance workers' rights and to secure their health and safety, and to ask for the help and privileged support of the banks and the government.

Nevertheless, the power and hegemony of the obsession with economic development is not unchallengeable. In the next and last chapter I introduce the concept of endurance in regards to the endurance of the political and legal struggle of the families and relatives of the workers who lost their lives in workplace injuries. I demonstrate how persistent legal and political help provided by labor organizations, NGOs and activists that aim to name workplace injuries not as accidents but murders play a significant role in changing the legal approaches so that those responsible for workplace injuries are sanctioned more seriously.

CHAPTER 4: Accidents vs. Murders-The Endurance of the Event

Introduction:

In the preceding chapters I demonstrated how the hegemonic political discourses that prioritize economic growth, the law which has been subordinated to such politics of growth, and the practices of the government officials and employers that mobilize a nationalist discourse on economic growth to justify workplace injuries have resulted in the widespread neglect of workers' safety in the shipyards and the endurance of suffering of workers' and their families. I also discussed the limits of the didactic and theoretical revolutionary language and vision of the labor unions, students, and activists in creating alternatives for the workers.

In this fourth and last chapter, I will demonstrate that no matter the force of law, within the domains of the political and of labor, an enduring opposition continues that insists on scripting accidents as murders rather than accidents. I will discuss the ways that the force of the memory, love and mourning of the relatives of workers killed on the job, has the potential to challenge the seduction of blood money, an informal compensation offered by shipyard companies to silence workers' families.

I will examine how the political and discursive persistence in naming workplace injuries not as accidents but as murders has had nationwide impact in the application of the law and the imposition of sanctions upon the employers who have neglected work safety measures. Thus, I will demonstrate how the discursive campaign transformed into practical, concrete, and everyday legal support for the families who had lost members to workplace injuries.



Figure 14: “Conscience and Justice Gathering”: The monthly meeting of the Workers’ Health and Work Safety Assembly and Workers’ Families Seeking Justice in Istanbul-Taksim, Galatasaray Square to commemorate workers who lost their lives and to attract public attention to the issue of fatal work accidents. On the banner in the background it says: “In Turkey every day 5 to 8 workers lose their lives. These are not accidents but murders. Don’t you have a conscience?” On the ground one can see the photos of dead workers with flowers placed on them (photo retrieved from ekmekveadalet.org, April 5, 2015).

The Endurance of the Event

“I go to bed, you tell me Tuzla; I wake up, you tell me Tuzla. We already started to take the necessary measures for work safety. Why do you continue to demonstrate?”¹⁷⁵

–Minister of Labor, Faruk Çelik

On February 27, 2008, in the Ankara Chamber of Trade Office, the Minister of Labor Faruk Çelik answered questions from journalists regarding the ongoing major

¹⁷⁵ Minister of Labor Faruk Celik’s response to the first general strike organized in Tuzla shipyards on 27 February, 2008 (“Yatıyoruz Tuzla, kalkıyoruz Tuzla...”)

workers' demonstration in the Tuzla shipyards. This was the same day that the demonstrations stopped all work in the shipyards for that day. He directly responded to the Limter-İş labor union who organized the general strike in Tuzla shipyards and claimed that "Limter-İş is not the real [authorized] labor union that represents the workers there, and there is another labor union that is the true [authorized] representative of the workers", referring to the pro-government trade union Dok-Gemi-İş.¹⁷⁶

Minister Çelik continued:

I am not sure whether they [Limter-İş] want to solve the problem or whether they make other calculations to recruit more members to their labor union... We opened all the doors open for a solution and we are doing whatever we can do to solve the problem. Despite all of our efforts, why do they continue to demonstrate? We don't get it. Did they want to be heard, yes they were heard. We established an investigation commission in parliament, we formed a human rights commission, the Ministry of Labor as well as the Ministry of Family and Social Affairs formed commissions too. Inspectors of our ministry are already there. I do not know if they want Turkey to completely give up the shipbuilding industry... I go to bed they tell me Tuzla, I wake up, they tell me Tuzla. If they can contribute to what has to be done, they are welcome. We are open to listen to their suggestions right away. However, such demonstrations do not help anybody¹⁷⁷.

¹⁷⁶ In order to delegitimize the actions of Limter-İş minister Çelik referred to a post-1980 military-coup Turkish labor law regulating the organization of labor which introduced the requirement of at least 10% of the workers in the sector members of the labor union to be officially recognized by the government as the representative of the workers for collective bargaining. In the Tuzla shipyards zone, only the pro-government trade union Dok-Gemi-İş, which was formed by the employers who require their registered workers to be a member of this organization, can surpass this 10% threshold, and thus, is recognized as the only authorized labor organization that represents shipyard workers. As Limter-İş members argue, the Dok-Gemi-İş trade union is actively supported by the employers in the Tuzla shipyards to make it appear as if there is a bargaining process between workers and employers in Tuzla, and to disqualify any other labor organizations in the Tuzla shipyards from taking part in legitimate protests, strikes and bargaining processes.)

¹⁷⁷ "Tersane Eylemi Gergin Başladı, Bakan Eleştirdi: 'Yatıyoruz Tuzla, Kalkıyoruz Tuzla' (The Demonstration in the Shipyards Started with Tensions, the Minister Criticized: 'I Go to Bed, You Tell Me Tuzla; I Wake Up, You Tell Me Tuzla,'" *Milliyet Daily Newspaper*, February 27, 2008, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/Yasam/HaberDetay.aspx?aType=HaberDetayArsiv&ArticleID=242778&Kategori=yasam&b=Tersane%20eylemi%20gergin%20basladi,%20Bakan%20elestirdi>.

What strikes me about the question concerning work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards is the “endurance” of the event, which obviously annoyed the minister of labor quoted above. Here, by endurance I mean both the endurance of the suffering of the workers and the workers’ families because of the never-ending workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards, and the endurance and persistence of the struggle of leftist labor unions and organizations, political groups, workers, activists and academics to make visible the responsibility of the employers and the government in these workplace injuries by emphasizing over and over again that accidents are indeed murders and not the fate of the workers, but predictable, and preventable incidents. As I indicated before, on the one hand, the officials of the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP), shipyard owners and management have insisted on identifying the fatal occupational injuries as “accidents at work” (“iş kazası”), as inevitable incidents and a dramatic but expected outcome of work in the heavy industries. In doing so, they reduce tremendous violence to an everyday routine, which in turn results in the endurance of suffering of the injured workers and their families. On the other hand, leftist labor unions and labor organizations in Tuzla, namely Limter-İş and TİB-DER, several national and local NGOs such as Chamber of the Turkish Physicians (TBB), Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (TMMOB) and Workers’ Health and Work Safety Assembly (WHSA) have persistently used the term “murders at work” (“iş cinayeti”) in their reports and analyses on occupational injuries in order to emphasize the fact that the ongoing injuries of shipyard workers in Tuzla are the result of a “political choice” by the government and Turkish industrialists who prioritize rapid economic growth over the demands of the workers concerning health, work safety and job security.

Naming workplace injuries as murders is not only a discursive gesture. Such naming also entails hope for an alternative social vision and political project according to which workers' health and safety is prioritized over rapid economic growth. In her book *Economies of Abandonment*, while addressing the question of endurance, Elizabeth Povinelli asks: "...Why does a certain strand of critical theory put such hope in potentiality? Does it matter whether people can endure this precipice? And which form of endurance will they find themselves inhabiting, the kind that makes them hardened, calloused, and indifferent to life or strengthens their attachment to life?"¹⁷⁸

As emphasized by Povinelli, endurance is not homogenous but can take multiple forms. While investigating the endurance of both work accidents and the struggle for an alternative social possibility in the Tuzla shipyards, I will demonstrate how these multiple forms of endurance exist simultaneously and how people may inhabit different forms of endurance at different times due to their state of abandonment or belonging to an empowering solidarity network. Moreover, I will discuss how the endurance of the suffering of the workers and their families can also be used to create opportunities for employers' and governments' intervention in the name of care-giving.

The Endurance of Accidents

Accidents at work are a common phenomenon in Turkey, a country where according to official records approximately 1.500 workers die from accidents every year. There has been no significant change in this number for many years. Indeed, even

¹⁷⁸ Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2011), 116.

according to the allegedly reduced official figures of the Turkish Social Security Institution the annual death toll from workplace injuries has increased slightly each year¹⁷⁹. The endurance of work accidents as a chronic and unchanging phenomenon has resulted in the particular form of endurance that makes some people “hardened, calloused, and indifferent” to work accidents. This view considers work accidents as the fate or nature of working in shipbuilding, mining, or construction in Turkey and is frequently expressed by government officials and employers.¹⁸⁰ Whereas that dominant approach to workplace injuries is also shared by certain segments of public opinion, the interest of the public and the mainstream media in work accidents in Turkey has been proportional to the death toll of these accidents, and has been limited to a short time period immediately following the event. This was the case at least until the Tuzla shipyards appeared in the news as a site where accidents at work were persistently described as murders thanks to the frequent and persistent protests, demonstrations and political campaigns organized by the Limter-İş labor union and other labor organizations such as TİB-DER that have attracted the attention of the public and the press.

Workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards began to be taken seriously only after the number of fatalities at work increased dramatically and the issue was put onto the public agenda by the mainstream media.

¹⁷⁹ Bedri Tekin, “SGK İstatistiklerine Göre İş Kazası Sayısı Yüzde 291 Arttı (‘According to the Social Security Administration’s Statistics the Number of the Work Accidents Increased 291%’),” *Evrensel Newspaper*, January 26, 2015, <http://www.evrensel.net/haber/102998/sgk-istatistiklerine-gore-is-kazasi-sayisi-yuzde-291-artti>.

¹⁸⁰ I discuss the views of the employers and government officials on the fatal workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards in detail in chapter 3 of this dissertation

The Tuzla shipyards zone became present in the headlines of the major newspapers in Turkey in September 2007 after five workers died in twelve consecutive days following August 21st, 2007¹⁸¹. Umur Talu, one of the first journalists who drew attention to accidents at work in the Tuzla shipyards, condemned the five deaths in the shipyards in his column in the Sabah daily newspaper. His article entitled “There is death in the ships” referred to and reversed the lyrics of a popular Turkish song, “There is a drill in the ships, my love is a sailor...”¹⁸²

During the later months of 2007, seven other workers died in accidents at work, which brought the total death toll up to twelve. 2008 was the worst year in the Tuzla shipyards in terms of the number of the workers who lost their lives to work accidents. In 2008, when both production as well as accidents increased dramatically, 26 workers died. This was the highest yearly death toll ever seen in the Tuzla shipyards zone.

During the year 2008, most of the major newspapers carried the Tuzla shipyards to their headlines. While the mainstream Milliyet Newspaper named the Tuzla shipyards as the “Shipyards of death”¹⁸³, Yeni Şafak, a conservative newspaper compared the shipyards to concentration camps and wrote, “The Tuzla shipyards are even worse than the concentration camps.”¹⁸⁴ Daily Sabah newspaper, which at the time was oppositional to

¹⁸¹ İsmail Saymaz, “13 Günde Beş İşçi öldü (‘Five Workers Died in 13 Days’),” *Radikal Newspaper*, September 5, 2007, http://www.radikal.com.tr/ekonomi/13_gunde_bes_isci_oldu-824894/.

¹⁸² Umur Talu, “Gemilerde Ölüm Var (‘There is Death in the Ships’),” *Sabah Daily Newspaper*, September 5, 2007, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2007/09/05/haber,F56012A000A042ABA9BF9C82257A0048.html>.

¹⁸³ “Ölüm Tersanesi! (‘Shipyards of Death’),” *Milliyet Daily Newspaper*, December 18, 2007, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/olum-tersanesi-/guncel/haberdetayarsiv/18.12.2007/261813/default.htm>.

¹⁸⁴ “Tuzla Tersanesi toplama kampı bile değil! (‘The Tuzla shipyard is even worse than the concentration camps’),” *Yeni Şafak Newspaper*, August 19, 2008, <http://www.yenisafak.com/yerel/tuzla-tersanesi-toplama-kampi-bile-degil-135409?p=1>.

the AKP government, described the conditions of work in Tuzla shipyards as “slavery”¹⁸⁵. Cumhuriyet, a left-wing secularist newspaper claimed that, “the shipbuilding industry grows with blood”¹⁸⁶, whereas Aydınlık, an ultra-Kemalist and nationalist journal stated that, “The Tuzla shipyards are like a death machine”¹⁸⁷. Other titles appeared declaring the following: “This shame cannot be concealed.” (Daily Sabah). “Million Dollars’ worth of yachts are built under these miserable conditions!”¹⁸⁸ “What falls down from high is humanity”¹⁸⁹. “They have eyes, but they do not see; they have ears, but they do not hear” (referring to surah A’raf:179 in the Quran)¹⁹⁰.

When major mainstream newspapers started to bring the work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards to their headlines the issue attracted the attention of the public ranging from university students to political parties, labor unions, activists and academics. Public debates started, with work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards as a turning point in identifying ongoing accidents at work all over Turkey as a major problem. After a short while the

¹⁸⁵ Umur Talu, “Köle Düzeni Bu (‘This is Slavery’),” *Sabah Daily Newspaper*, February 1, 2008, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2008/02/01/haber,05205BEB19E742829E86FB43F717A58A.html>.

¹⁸⁶ “Gemi Sanayii Kanla Büyüyor (‘The Shipbuilding Industry Grows with Blood’),” *Cumhuriyet Newspaper*, February 21, 2008.

¹⁸⁷ “Tuzla Tersaneleri Ölüm Makinesi Gibi (‘The Tuzla Shipyards are Like a Death Machine’),” *Aydınlık Newspaper*, February 11, 2008.

¹⁸⁸ “Milyon Dolarlık Yatlar Bu şartlarda Yapılıyor (‘Million Dollars’ Worth of Yachts Are Built under These Miserable Conditions!’),” *Vatan Newspaper*, February 20, 2008, <http://www.gazetevatan.com/milyon-dolarlik-yatlar-bu-sartlarda-yapiliyor-163157-ekonomi/>.

¹⁸⁹ İsmail Saymaz, “Tersanelerde ‘İnsanlık’ Yüksekten Düşüyor, ölümlerin Ardı Arkası Gelmiyor (‘In the Shipyards What Falls down from High Is Humanity, Deaths Continue in Tremendous Amounts’),” *Radikal Newspaper*, January 20, 2008, http://www.radikal.com.tr/ekonomi/tersanelerde_insanlik_yuksekten_dusuyor_olumlerin_ardi_arkasi_gelmiyor-837798/.

¹⁹⁰ İsmail Saymaz, “Kulakları Vardır Duymazlar, Gözleri Vardır Görmezler (‘They Have Eyes, However, They Do Not See; They Have Ears, However, They Do Not Hear’),” *Radikal Newspaper*, April 10, 2008, http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/kulaklari_vardir_duymazlar_gozleri_vardir_gormezyler-845374/.

Tuzla shipyards became notorious as the symbol of chronic work accidents in Turkey. Thanks to numerous studies, published reports and articles on the causes and effects concerning work accidents, the Tuzla shipyards zone endured as a major reference point in the problematization of chronic work accidents in Turkey.

It was not a coincidence that the comprehensive study and report on the reasons for the fatal workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards zone, namely *Tuzla Tersaneler Bölgesi'ndeki Çalışma Koşulları ve Önlenabilir Seri İş Kazaları Hakkında Raporu* (the “Report On the Working Conditions and Preventable Serial Work Accidents in the Tuzla Shipyards Zone”) was prepared and published in January, 2008. This was the time when the media and public attention to the Tuzla shipyards was at its peak. Moreover, the major political demonstrations and strikes in the Tuzla shipyards zone were organized by the Limter-İş labor union in the same period, in February and June, 2008, respectively. Thus, the focus of the media on the problems in the Tuzla shipyards was embodied in other material forms such as academic studies, reports and critical political campaigns, all of which in turn endured the persistence of the problematization of the work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards in particular and in Turkey in general.

As a result, the Tuzla shipyards became a site where the definition, the reasons for and the effects of accidents at work were studied, examined, discussed and contested in detail. While in time the word “Tuzla” began to resonate in public opinion with work accidents, the Tuzla shipyards became the original site where workplace injuries in Turkey were problematized.

In the Tuzla shipyards, the contested space regarding the reactions to workplace injuries, multiple forms of endurance can be observed. On the one hand, the kind of

endurance that strengthens the attachment to life most popularly appear in the form of the critical naming of accidents as murders. On the other hand, the form of endurance that makes people indifferent to life, or rather leaves people with no option but to be indifferent to suffering, exists simultaneously.

Hakkı Usta: “One Life Lost, One Life Dedicated to Resistance”

Hakkı Demiral’s story is a story about the life-affirming form of endurance in the Tuzla shipyards. Hakkı Demiral is called by most of his friends and by anyone whom I came into contact with in Tuzla as Hakkı Usta, as if Usta was his real family name. Usta in Turkish means “master” and is also an adjective that denotes respect to the experience of the worker. Hakkı Usta is the general secretary of Limter-İş (the Labor Union of the Harbor, Shipyard, Shipbuilding and Repair Workers), the major socialist labor organization in the Tuzla shipyards zone, and the organizer of the February and June 2008 political campaigns and general strikes in Tuzla. As a member of the leftist DİSK (The Confederation of Revolutionary Workers’ Unions in Turkey)¹⁹¹, one of the three major umbrella institutions of labor unions in Turkey¹⁹², Limter-İş identifies itself as a revolutionary and anti-capitalist organization. Limter-İş contributed to the preparation and distribution of the Tuzla Monitoring Commission Report in 2008 and is the only group that spent tremendous effort to prepare a list of names of the workers who have died and their

¹⁹¹ DİSK: Türkiye Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu, founded in 1967

¹⁹² In addition to the leftist and revolutionary DİSK, the other two trade union confederations in Turkey are TÜRK-İŞ (Confederation of Turkish Labor Unions), a nationalist mainstream umbrella organization of labor unions, and HAK-İŞ (Confederation of the Real Labor Unions in Turkey), an Islamist and pro-government umbrella organization of labor unions.

causes of death in the Tuzla shipyards since 1992. Thus, Limter-İş played a very active role in making the problem and the increasing number of the work accidents in Tuzla known to the media and to public opinion. Furthermore, Hakkı Usta was a major figure in the organization of political campaigns and demonstrations, and in recruiting new members to the Limter-İş labor union.

I was first informed about Hakkı Usta by my activist and academic friend Aslı who already had good connections in the labor union. To get in touch with Limter-İş, she suggested that I first contact Hakkı Usta, “who is very well informed about the issue”. I was also told by Aslı beforehand that Hakkı Usta lost his son in the Tuzla shipyards in an accident, and that this was how he first became involved in labor union activism. Mentioning Aslı’s name as a common friend helped me to get an appointment with Hakkı Usta when I called him.

When I went to the office of Limter-İş on a Sunday afternoon there was nobody inside. I waited for about half an hour at front of the door of the Limter-İş office, an apartment on the top floor of a four-story-squatter building surrounded by industrial workshops. After waiting some time, I telephoned Hakkı Usta. He told me that he was in a coffeehouse talking to the workers and would come shortly. In the meantime, I took the stairs to the roof whose door was open and looked out in order to see how far away the Limter-İş’ office was from both the shipyards and the train station. From the roof of the building one can see the cranes of the shipyards and the Tuzla-Aydınlı bay. However, as seen from the roof, the office of the Limter-İş is located very far away both from the major shipyards zone and also the train station. This made me realize that the shipyard workers who want to visit the office of Limter-İş needed to make the extra effort to walk at least

half an hour to get there. Moreover, another extra effort was needed to find the place, which was inconveniently located at the end of a narrow street. There was no sign around the building or on the street that showed the direction of the Limter-İş office.



Figure 15: Cranes in the Tuzla shipyards and its surroundings as seen from the roof of the Limter-İş labor unions' office (photo taken by myself).

After I spent some time on the roof, about an hour later Hakkı Usta came, greeted me, and invited me into the office. When we entered thlie apartment he told me that the location of the Limter-İş office had recently been changed. Hakkı Usta said that their office has been located in a more convenient place closer to the shipyards, but the landlord, who acted under pressure from the shipyard owners, did not renew the lease and they were

forced to move out. They then experienced hardship in finding a new place because nobody wanted to rent them an apartment. “Finally, we found this place. It is pretty large, but it is hard to find and far away from where the actual shipyards are,” Hakkı Usta confirmed.

After we sat down, Hakkı Usta began to tell me a story, one I could tell that he had told numerous times to journalists and other researchers like me. He mentioned that he came to Tuzla from Elazığ (an Eastern province in Turkey) during 1980s and started working in the construction of the shipyards. Afterwards he worked as a welder in the shipyards. “I was here from the very beginning,” continued Hakkı Usta, “I know almost everyone here. They know me, as well.” He told me:

If there are ten thousand workers here I know eight thousand of them. I lived here for 25 years. I met with them in demonstrations, in the street, or during lunch. I am Alevite and socialist, yet despite all of our differences there is only one identity that brings us together: being Workers. This is the common denominator that brings us together everywhere in the world. It doesn't matter if one is a supporter of the BDP [pro-Kurdish party], CHP [Republican People's Party – the main opposition] or the AKP [government]. If one is a worker, the bosses approach him in the same way.

He then summarized the story and achievements of the Limter-İş labor union, and described how the general-strikes in February and June 2008 and the other activities and protests that they organized successfully attracted the attention of the public and brought together workers from different political views. He also claimed that the activities of the Limter-İş were appreciated and that the labor union was embraced by all workers from different political backgrounds:

There are 46 shipyards here. We organized demonstrations in front of almost all of them. The profile of the workers here are mostly right-wing and nationalist. Yet, when they meet us they can see that the police's claim that Limter-İş is a terrorist organization is not correct. So, even though workers here are conservative they do not allow Limter-İş members be identified as terrorists. They tell their bosses that, “We went and saw Limter-İş, and it was not as you described to us. Yes, they are socialists, but they protect our rights, they are not terrorists” This is what the

workers here think about us. We try to show them that the important thing is class struggle. So, we consider the office of the Limter-İş not as a right or left-wing house, but as the house of the workers.

Hakkı Usta's descriptions of Limter-İş and the workers' approach to the labor union were too perfect to believe, especially knowing the low rate of labor union participation, the ongoing tensions between labor organizations and workers, and among different worker organizations in the Tuzla shipyards. Hakkı Usta's narrative did not include any self-criticism. What he gave me was a very formal speech, mostly in the form of a monologue that repeated many of the points that I had already read in the Limter-İş press statements and booklets. He did not mention his personal story or the story of his son.

Instead he asked me about who I was, what I was doing and what my political affiliations were. Because Tuzla shipyards is a politically tense region, a tension felt both between the labor organizations and shipyard management and also within different leftist fractions, there was always extra suspicion about those who approach any of those organizations without an invitation. As I have noted, while doing my fieldwork in Tuzla I continued to experience indirect interrogations about my personal political opinion, about my occupation and about whether I was a member of a certain political group or not.

After I gave him information about my studies and my research, I waited for him to talk about his son and how he lost him. Yet, he did not mention the story at all. Then I asked him directly, just as he began to tell another story of a workplace injury that had recently taken place in the Tuzla shipyards.

"You also lost your son in the shipyards, right?" I asked. "Yes, indeed" he answered shortly and silently. The strong and loud tone he had used during his propaganda speech was replaced by a murmur. I asked him to explain how the incident took place. He gave

me only a brief explanation: “I lost Sezai in 2005. He was only 20 years old when he died. My son fell down from high while working. If there was a safety fence there, he would not have died. All shipyards should have safety fences, yet in Tuzla most of them don’t have any. My son could have survived if there was a simple fence there.”

Then Hakkı Usta stopped for a couple of seconds, sighed, and started to tell another story about the recent injury of another worker:

Many other workers have died in Tuzla because of similar simple reasons. I will give you another example. Do you know that for one and half months, a worker friend of mine from Sivas [a town from Eastern Turkey] has been in a coma? He was working on a platform which was 25 meters high. They had installed a temporary banister where he was working, yet they did not weld the banister well enough, thinking that the banister was temporary and that they had to deinstall it later on. When our worker friend got tired, in order to have some rest, he leaned on the banister and the banister broke. He fell down from 25 meters high. This would not have happened if the banister had been welded correctly. And it would have been even better if the company did not use any banister at all, so that our friend would not find anything to lean on. You see, they installed a trap! Therefore, it is difficult for me to name these incidents as accidents. They are rather murders at work. And we, as the Limter-Is labor union, want the bosses of the shipyard companies to be sued for planned, first-degree murder.

In reflecting on this conversation, I think that Hakkı Usta did wish to introduce his son’s death as an example in order to emphasize the fact that there are many similar deaths and injuries, and that this is part of a structural and political problem, and not a personal or single issue. Maybe this is how he coped with such loss. It seems to me that the endurance of his suffering strengthens his attachment to life through involvement in the workers’ struggle in the first front, while consistently believing in the transformative power of such struggle to overcome structural causes of the work accidents.

Throughout our conversation Hakkı Usta was very careful and persistent in naming of fatal workplace injuries as murders and not accidents. As he told me, “In Tuzla most

employers consider work safety equipment more costly than the workers' lives. Many workers died or were injured because they were not protected by something as basic as a helmet when a heavy object fell on their head. Because the shipyard owners know very well that all of the workplace injuries are indeed preventable, yet do not put in the required effort, investment and money for workers' safety, they are responsible for first-degree murder and should be sued accordingly." The Limter-İş labor union publishes press statements after each fatal occupational injury in the Tuzla shipyards. Each of the statements that I read since I started my fieldwork in 2010, consistently and persistently closes with the same demand: "We want the shipyards owners to be held directly responsible for workers' deaths in their shipyards, and we demand that they be charged with first-degree murder."

After that first meeting, I encountered Hakkı Usta in various workers' demonstrations. These demonstrations were not only in Tuzla. I also saw him at the Mayday demonstrations of 2011 in Istanbul's Taksim square and in several other workers' protests in Taksim and Kadıköy, İstanbul, under the banner of Limter-İş, most of the time at the very front line, chanting the slogans loudly and encouraging others to chant, too.

Hakkı Usta helped me to develop my research with all the means he had access to. He invited me to his own apartment, provided me all kinds of resources that I asked of him including documentaries, journals, and publications of Limter-İş, assisted me in contacting workers and other activists, and informed me about any of the labor union's actions and demonstrations long before the dates they were planned for. He knew that I was studying abroad and had access to international circles. As he told me, "Any contribution, even a small one may help and can make a difference."

Hakkı Usta is among many of those who have lost relatives in work accidents in Tuzla. Yet he is among only a few who have stayed in Tuzla and have continued to struggle for his rights and for the improvement of work safety measures in the Tuzla shipyards. The endurance of his sufferings strengthened his attachment to life as “a vanguard worker” as his co-members in the Limter-İş labor union described him.

The endurance of suffering, however, made some other relatives of workers who lost their lives in the Tuzla shipyards consider this loss as either the fate of the worker or as an undesirable but natural part of the risky jobs in heavy industries, and subsequently made them indifferent and hardened to life as then normalize the incident. It may be better to say that some relatives of the victims of work accidents were left with no choice but to normalize the loss and to be hardened to life when they were left alone and felt abandoned, pitted against powerful government offices, the law, and shipyard management, all of which prioritize economic growth over human life.

Blood Money

A major mechanism to normalize and cover up work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards was “blood money”: The unofficial compensation offered by the companies to the families of the victims of work accidents in order to prevent them from applying to court and suing the shipyard is an old phenomenon in the Tuzla shipyards zone.

Leftist labor organizations and employers ascribe different meanings to blood money. As I will explain in the section below in more detail through the story of Sibel, who lost her husband in a work accident, the companies describe the blood money they offer as “compensation” or “help”. In opposition to that approach the leftist labor

organizations and activists claim that blood money discloses the fact that human life, body and blood are converted to a commodity which can be measured by financial value and exchanged for a certain amount of money. Thus, they use blood money as a critical term and emphasize that the possibility and the presence of blood money reproduces workers' bodies who are already working in the Tuzla shipyards as things that can be bought and sold.

In contrast to the leftist labor organizations' approach to blood money, shipyard owners such as Kemal Yardımcı, a former parliament member from the governing AKP and the owner of the Yardımcı Shipyard in Tuzla, supports the presence of blood money as a useful mechanism to compensate workers' families who have lost a family member in an accident. As Yardımcı stated:

I do not need to defend myself by claiming that “there is no blood money paid”. Do you think that blood money is paid only in Tuzla? You know the realities of Turkey, blood money is paid. This is a widespread practice in Anatolia. For instance, in fatal traffic accidents people pay blood money to the victims' families. Blood money is not meant to cover up the death. It is not correct to describe blood money as such a cheap practice. Blood money is the same as what was decided by courts after a very long process. It is not money paid by force to silence the family of the injured one. It is a deal based on mutual understanding¹⁹³.

Government officials are also aware of the presence and use of blood money to compensate worker deaths in the Tuzla shipyards zone. However, they consider this a “good thing”, as Minister of Labor Faruk Çelik stated in response to journalists' questions about the case. In a newspaper interview published in 2014, when asked by the journalists

¹⁹³ “‘Sektör Kendi Pisliklerini Kendi Temizlesin’ (‘Let the Sector Clean Its Own Mess’),” *Milliyet Daily Newspaper*, February 28, 2008, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2008/02/28/ekonomi/aeko.html>.

about the fact that the victim's families gave up their complaint to the courts in exchange for a payment of blood money, Çelik answered the following:

If an accident takes place, the relatives, orphans and widows of those who lost their life already have certain legal rights. They already get compensation through legal means based on the court decisions regarding the case. Besides that, if there were an accident somewhere, and if in addition to these legal rights, those who are conscientious make the effort to take care of the orphans, widows and families, this is a good thing. We believe that this is something that has to be done. Indeed, it is the opposite of this attitude, namely telling families that, "these are your only legal rights and we cannot do anything else", which is indeed an unconscientious approach¹⁹⁴.

Here, Minister Faruk Çelik interprets blood money as an additional and complimentary compensation to the compensations that were already granted by law. However, leftist labor organizations and activists claim that blood money was offered by the companies not in addition to but in exchange for legal compensation, and only after the victim's family promised not to apply to court and sue the company.

What is more striking is that Minister Çelik's framing of the payment of blood money as a conscientious act and as a sign of care and good will masks the fact that the very harm and suffering of the workers and their families was a direct result of employers' misconduct and the government's political choices. Minister Çelik transformed a government- and capitalist-inflicted suffering into a show about how much employers care about the families of the dead workers by paying them blood money. Thus, similar to the appreciation of the foundation of the Turkish Shipbuilders' Association's private GİSBİR hospital in Tuzla that I talked about in the third chapter, with the appreciation of blood

¹⁹⁴ "Bakan Çelik'ten Kan Parası Yorumu: Bu İyi Bir Durum ('An Interpretation of Blood Money by Minister Çelik: That Is a Good Thing')," *Radikal Newspaper*, October 23, 2014, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/bakan-celikten-kan-parasi-yorumu-bu-iyi-bir-durum-1220745/>.

money, the endurance of the suffering of the workers and their families is used to create a new space for employers' and governments' intervention in the name of care-giving.

Sibel: The Endurance of Suffering and Regret

Sibel was one of those workers' relatives who accepted money offered by the shipyard company in exchange for renouncing her right to apply to the court and sue the company in the death of her husband. Sibel is a mother of three children. She lost her husband in a work accident in the Tuzla shipyards in 2006. Unlike Hakkı Usta's unquestioned dedication to the workers' struggle after his son's death, Sibel's story was more about the ambiguities of the experience of workers' relatives that prolong the suffering from the loss of a family member from work accidents. Sibel's experience was about how the form of endurance shifts from being hardened to life to strengthening the attachment to life because of the regret of being calloused before, and then losing that strength once again, a cycle between struggle and cynicism due to the presence and absence of outside legal and political help of the labor union and the pressure of the shipyard management, and the changing levels of that help and pressure. Thus, Sibel's story might show how different forms of endurance change and are even experienced simultaneously.

I was first informed about Sibel by the activist and academic Aslı Odman. Aslı told me that it was not easy to persuade Sibel to collaborate with the labor union and activists in this legal struggle. "Sibel is a mother of three," she said, "so, she is desperate for money, and the shipyard management knew her weak point, so they threatened her with harming her children." Aslı informed me that after being part of the political campaign to stop work accidents in Tuzla for a year, Sibel disappeared and stopped answering the phone calls of

activists and union members. “We lost communication with her for a long time,” Aslı told me. Sibel contacted activists once again when she was invited to the Workers’ Health and Work Safety Assembly (WHSA), an organization that brought together the relatives of workers who lost their lives in accidents at work not only in the shipyards but also in the construction, mining and other sectors nationwide. WHSA aims to attract the attention of public to the issue of unsafe work and provides legal help to family members.

In order to reach Sibel, I asked the Limter-İş labor union for help as they had Sibel’s contact information. Then Limter-İş arranged a meeting with Sibel at the Limter-İş office while Hakkı Usta was also present. During our conversation Sibel told me how she lost her husband in an explosion in Tuzla Dearsan shipyard in August 2006. “I was married to Hasan for 25 years. We came to Tuzla 16 years ago in 1990. Since then he worked as a welder in the Tuzla shipyards. On the day of the incident, the gas measures, which have to be taken regularly, were not taken by the company. Hasan died because of an explosion caused by the compression of gas.” Sibel told me that the company representatives lied to her from the very beginning, claiming that the accident took place because of a spark in the welding machine. They also failed to inform Sibel about the seriousness of her husband’s injury. She learned the truth when she went to the hospital and saw her husband. 95% of his body was burnt.

“I asked the doctor ‘tell me the truth’”, she said, “and the doctor told me that my husband had bleeding in his brain and that his liver was burnt, therefore, it was unlikely that he could recover. Even if he did recover he would have experienced infection, so, there was not much hope. ‘Prepare yourself,’ the doctor told me. Then I waited for four days and

nights on the stairs near the emergency service. On the morning of the fifth day I was informed that my husband had passed away.”

I asked Sibel, whether her husband had been injured before or had witnessed other work accidents in the shipyards. She answered the following:

On some days, when my husband left home to go to work, he would tell me, “Let’s see whether one day my turn will come, too.” In those times I felt anxious and told him, “If you say so, don’t go to your job, and leave it.” “How can I leave the job?” he asked me, “how can I find another job if I leave this one?” Sometimes he had minor injuries such as poisoning, but they were minor issues, not dangerous problems. However, I never expected that one day this will happen to us and his turn really would come.”

Then Sibel told me that after her husband passed away the representatives from the Dearsan Shipyard contacted her and put pressure on her in order to prevent her from applying to the court. “I myself was also unable to apply to the court because I had no support and no money. No money was left from my husband since it was impossible for him to save money considering his low salary and our cost of living in Tuzla.”

Sibel mentioned that she learned the correct details about how the incident took place only after listening to the co-workers of her husband. As the co-workers told her, on the day of the incident there was a gas and paint leakage in the workplace and workers did not want to work there. However, the laborers were forced to work by the shipyard management. After a long debate, five out of six workers left the cabin, only Sibel’s husband Hasan stayed. Sibel said that her husband was a silent person and accepted any job because they had big debts, and therefore, they were urgently in need of money. In the aftermath of the incident, the accident report of the company claimed that Sibel’s husband insisted on working in the cabin even though the company warned him several times, installed a safety tape in front of the cabin, and prohibited anyone from working there. “I

was shocked when I read that report”, Sibel said, “Can you believe that the company claimed that my husband disregarded the warnings of his bosses, and entered a dangerous cabin by cutting off the safety tape by force, because he insisted on working! What a lie.”

The company told her that if she objected to the report and applied to the court the lawsuit would take at least three years, and after that they, as the company, would apply to the higher court to appeal the court decision which would take another five years. As Sibel stated, they told her that she could not survive for eight years without any money. To be sure, they already knew that she was a widow, had no work and no money. “How can you survive without money as a single woman, without a man who is working to feed you and your three children?” This was what they told me”, repeated Sibel and continued:

I got very mad at them. I thought about my options. They asked me not to apply to the court if I wanted to get the money they offered. People call this blood money. So, they started a bargain for the blood of my husband. I wanted to apply to the court and start a legal struggle. However, I had three children, two boys and a girl. My oldest son was 22 years old but he was going to university and did not work. My other son was 13 and my daughter was 9 years old at that time. I realized that I could not survive without any money for eight years. So we sat down and talked with the company representatives. These were the most disgusting talks I have ever had in my life. Yet, at the end I lost, surrendered and accepted the money. They gave me 60 thousand liras [about 40 thousand US Dollars at the time] and I signed a letter confirming that I would not sue the company.

The clear power inequality between the shipyard companies and the families of the victims of work accidents plays an important role in making families of the dead workers accept the company’s money. The government offices that are supposed to guarantee workers’ health and safety and the judiciary officials who are supposed to advocate for the right to live and to balance that power inequality favor the companies as I explained in the first chapter in the case of Necdet’s death in Torlak shipyard.

In the Tuzla shipyards zone, when companies offer a certain sum of money to the families of the victims of work accidents, they persuade these families by claiming that court cases take too long. In Turkey a basic compensation case about an accident at work takes seven to eight years on average to reach a court decision¹⁹⁵. Whereas the deceased shipyard worker was the only source of income for the family, after his death his wife and children necessarily suffer from poverty. The shipyard owners know this well. The companies basically exploit the slow workings of the courts in Turkey and the poverty of the victims' families to their benefit. The amount of money they offer, which varies from 50,000 to 200,000 liras¹⁹⁶ [28,000 to 110,000 USD at the time] is a pretty large amount of money for the workers' families. Thus, it is very hard for a family living in poverty to refuse this offer. In certain cases while bargaining with the families, shipyard companies have told the families that they may receive more money at the end of seven to eight years when the court comes up with a decision, but they remind them that they cannot survive for so many years without any money. The shipyard management tell families, "We offer a good amount of compensation in advance without making you wait for years for a slightly higher amount." Making the victims' families sign letters as the evidence of their approval that they will not apply to the court or inform the media is very beneficial for the companies since this process protects the reputation of the company from any degradation, which might be more costly for the company. Most of the families have to accept the offer because they have no other option to survive.

¹⁹⁵ TMMOB (Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects) et al., *Tuzla Monitoring Commission Report (Tuzla Tersaneler Bölgesi İzleme ve İnceleme Komisyonu Raporu)*.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

The presence of blood money makes many fatalities invisible. “The number of murders at work that we announced as the labor union was only the number of the fatalities we could collect information about,” Hakkı Usta told me, “These were the cases that could not be hidden from public opinion and the media. Maybe there were more cases that we could not hear about because of this silent deal between the companies and the victims’ families, that we call ‘blood money.’” That is to say, the number of the fatal workplace injuries is very probably much more than the counted and announced number, because many cases were hidden from the public with the help of blood money.

During our conversation, Hakkı Usta recalled that on the day of the explosion members of the labor union immediately came to the Dearsan Shipyard, occupied the shipyard and tried to see their injured friend, Hasan. As Hakkı Usta stated:

We made a declaration to the press that day. Yet, the company managers did not allow us see our friend, Hasan, Sibel’s husband. They also tried to prevent Sibel from contacting the labor union by telling her that any involvement of the labor union would make the case more complicated. They knew that she was in need of money so they threatened her by saying that she might not get the compensation they offered. We were only able to contact Sibel after she received the money. Before families receive blood money it is impossible for us as the labor union to contact the families of the victims of murders at work. Later on we contacted Sibel and now we are in solidarity with her.

Then Sibel told me how her suffering brought her to dedicate herself to the struggle for the other workers’ rights, how she got involved in labor union activities, joined demonstrations, and also took part in the commission that went to Ankara to discuss the problems regarding working conditions in Tuzla with the government officials:

Whenever I remember that I accepted the money offered by the company and did not apply to the court, I regret what I did. I still feel ashamed when I think that I took the blood money and gave up on defending the rights of my husband. I wish I never had to take that money. However, I was one of many who were compelled to

do that. I wish I had some other income and sued the company and struggled until the very end. I was easily cheated by the company, but I was so sad at that moment and I could not think well. The company people told me that they were also saddened because of what happened to Hasan, but that I had to accept what happened as my fate like everybody else who had experienced the same suffering. For a while I also believed that this was my fate and tried to continue my life. However, when I heard of another new death of a worker in Tuzla I woke up from that dream. I told myself that, “Yes, I regret that I gave up fighting for my husband but I could not continue to be indifferent to the continuing fatalities. I had to do something”. And so I decided to answer to the calls of the Limter-İş, whose calls I did not answer in the beginning.

“It is very rare that someone goes public after she has received the blood money,” said Hakkı Usta, “As far as I know Sibel was the first one.”

“The only thing that I want is to save a life,” Sibel continued while she tried to hold back tears. “Whenever I hear the sirens of an ambulance, I experience the same suffering over again. I know now that what happened to my husband could happen to any worker in the Tuzla shipyards. Therefore, today I am supporting the labor union. Participating in the labor union activities, joining the demonstrations in front of the shipyards, and going to Ankara made me feel a little bit relieved. I feel as if it is not me but my husband there fighting for his rights. This is the first reason and the second one is, as I said before, I do not want to hear the sirens of that ambulance ever again.”

Sibel also told me that she visited workers’ in coffeehouses or in their apartments to encourage them to join the struggle:

I told them to join the labor union, or get organized somehow, to form an association. However, the workers answer to me by saying, “We do not make a lot of money. Do you want us to give up even with the little amount we get?” When they said so I told them “so you do not organize not to lose your little salary, yet, when you die, who will enjoy that money? Money is not the issue. Can anyone bring back my husband, can they?”

What about their families, I asked her, “Did you talk to other people who lost their relatives in work accidents?”

“Yes, I tried” she answered, “However, I think that most of the families remained very silent. They accepted a small amount of blood money for their loss and didn’t speak. I wish that everybody could speak loudly about the issue. Yet, I cannot blame families for not joining the demonstrations if even the workers themselves don’t join the struggle. Nevertheless, the families who lost their husbands or sons could at least raise their voices.”

But Sibel has not completely lost hope and does not think of giving up the struggle: “I believe that our efforts are not in vein,” she said; “there are still deaths in Tuzla. But, if we were silent, there would be more.”

“But you did give up, once, right?” I asked her. Then she explained to me how the representatives of the Dearsan Shipyard continued to threaten her after she took the money and contacted the Limter-İş labor union and made her case public. The shipyard was particularly annoyed because Sibel disclosed the fact that she was offered money by the shipyard, although she had signed a waiver and promised not to apply to the court and inform the media. As Sibel explained, “I was told that I had already received the money. They asked me why I still insisted on undermining the reputation of the Dearsan Shipyard. They added that there would be consequences for my wrong behavior.”

After a while, she received threatening calls from unidentified people ordering her to stop visiting the labor union. After receiving those threats Sibel told me that she became fearful and ended her relation with the labor union. After about three years, when she was informed about the foundation of the Workers’ Health and Work Safety Assembly, a nationwide organization that supports the relatives and families of the workers who lost

their lives in accidents, she started to join public demonstrations together with the other family members of the victims of work accidents again.

I asked her what she was planning to do next. “I will continue” she told to me.

Some people tell me that “something may happen to you.” I was once afraid, too. I was not afraid for myself. What happened to my husband may happen to me as well. And I would be happy if I could save some lives. I could die with relief. But I was afraid for my children. Especially after I started to receive the threatening calls from unknown people. Now, my children are old enough. My older son got married and my younger son started college in another city. My little daughter is still with me but I am not afraid for her anymore. My friends assured me that my case was already public and no one could harm us again. So I will continue my struggle. I will go until the very end whatever the consequences are.

The Endurance of the Legal Struggle

As Hakkı Usta mentioned in our conversation, Sibel was one of the very first examples of the relatives of the deceased workers who insisted on continuing her struggle even after receiving (informal) compensation. Her struggle to go further, to make her case public, and draw the attention of the public to workplace injuries in order to create pressure on the shipyard companies and force them take the required work safety measures is also a challenge against the definition of the fatal work place injuries as accidents, as incidents that can be covered up by monetary compensations.

Surely, financial compensations that are obliged to be paid to the injured victims of work accidents or to the families of workers who have lost their lives at work accidents is a deterrent sanction against the shipyard companies that ignore work safety measures. However, until the introduction of the volunteer legal help by the Limter-İş labor union and the formation of the Workers’ Health and Work Safety Assembly (WHSA) in 2011 and the organized struggle of the relatives of the deceased workers, disputes following fatal

occupational injuries were settled between the shipyard companies and the victim's family after the payment of a formal or informal monetary compensation.¹⁹⁷

In a panel titled “Murders at Work and the Subcontracting System” in İstanbul, Erbay Yucak, the volunteer lawyer for the relatives of the workers who had lost their lives in work accidents explained the legal procedure following fatal occupational injuries as follows:

First of all, I have to note that if the worker who dies in an accident is an unregistered worker, most likely the case will be covered up with the payment of blood money to the workers' relatives without a follow-up legal procedure. Legal proceedings go forward only when a registered worker has lost his life in a work accident, or if the death of an unregistered worker is reported to the authorities or somehow becomes public. In these cases, two court actions start simultaneously. The first is the action for compensation because of a “mistake” in the workplace that caused the accident, and the second is the public action taken by the office of the public prosecutor who investigates whether or not there was “willful misconduct” that resulted in the death of a worker. In most cases the action for compensation is finalized with the payment of the compensation amount decided by the court to the family of the victim. These families are usually poor and have neither the required financial resources nor the legal help to follow the public action. I also know that most of my lawyer friends are not willing to defend workers' families, considering that these poor families cannot afford the regular attorney fees. Because the public actions do not have a direct benefit for the workers' families, who are dealing with financial difficulties after the loss of the working person in the family, they do not hire a lawyer for the public action. So, because there was no plaintiff who followed the case, until the foundation of the WHSA all public actions against employers ended with the dismissal of the case¹⁹⁸.

Aslı, one of the founders of the WHSA agrees with Erbay Bucak in identifying the financial, political and legal obstacles that have until recently prevented the families of the deceased workers from following the public criminal case. She told:

¹⁹⁷ Information retrieved and translated from “Workers' Health and Work Safety Assembly,” 2011, <http://guvenliscalisma.org>.

¹⁹⁸ Panel organized in İstanbul on 4 December 2014, the video recording of the panel can be reached online at Seyyar Forum, *İş Cinayetleri ve Taşeronluk Sistemi* (“Murders at Work and the Subcontracting System”), 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aV_mwkLviik&app=desktop.

There is a clear power inequality between the companies and the families of the victims of murders at work. Families for the most part do not go to the court to the criminal action against the owners and managers of the company who are responsible for the deaths of the workers. They do not do this because they are left with no other option. They are left alone and abandoned against a big company. They are poor and they are suffering from a big loss in the family. They have no legal support and no money to hire a lawyer. As a result, human bodies and parts of bodies transform into objects of accounting, objects that can be sold and bought. To be sure, there has to be compensation. However, the logic that equates human life to money is problematic. The failure in understanding the murders at work as a public problem and the lack of any serious sanctions against the employers is a common cause of the continuation of serial murders at work. Until the formation of the WHSA there was not one single case that concluded with the punishment of a high-profile employer in the shipyards or in any other work site in Turkey. No manager or owner of a shipyard was arrested, convicted or imprisoned because of a fatal workplace injury in their shipyard. At this point, we can consider these workplace injuries as a threat against the security of the public and all of these cases should be considered not as singular but as a general problem related to the security of society.

The reduction of fatal work place injuries into cases for compensation reproduces occupational injuries as accidents, statistically expected side-effects, interruptions of the normal working of the industry, and losses whose cost is calculable and compensable merely through financial means. Legally, compensations are sanctions for “mistakes” and therefore, the reduction of the sanction of workplace injuries to monetary compensations means that workplace injuries are legally categorized as “mistakes” and not as the results of “willful misconduct” whose sanctions are as severe as imprisonment. Subsequently, compensations that are paid either as a formal compensation whose amount has been determined by a court decision or in an informal way as “blood money”, reduce workers’ bodies to entities whose values can be measured in monetary terms.

In this sense, blood money and legally imposed compensations do not differ in their converting of deceased workers’ bodies into “collateral damage” in the race for rapid economic development. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, from the

perspective of the shipyard owners and government officials, the distinction between formal compensation and blood money is also ambiguous. As expressed by the shipyard owner Kemal Yardımcı and Minister of Labor Faruk Çelik, blood money is a good, required, conscientious obligation of the employers, and should be considered complementary to legal compensation. Blood money, the informal version of the legal compensations only differs from the latter in its use by the shipyard management to cover up the cases without making the incident public, and thus, preventing any possible harm to a company's reputation. However, both formal and informal versions of compensation are indeed a settlement based on bargaining between unequal sides in terms of economic power, for the price of the loss of a family member.

Limter-İş labor union was the first organization that started to provide legal and political help to relatives of the deceased workers such as Sibel in order to balance the power and economic inequality between workers' families and shipyard management. For this task, Limter-İş attempted to bring together volunteer lawyers, work safety experts and the families of deceased workers. The struggle to empower workers' families legally and politically that started in the Tuzla shipyards later on transformed into a nationwide organization İşçi Sağlığı ve İş Güvenliği Meclisi (Workers' Health and Work Safety Assembly -WHSA) in 2011. WHSA is an NGO that advocates for the rights of the workers and provides legal and political support to the families of victims of work accidents in their struggle against the employers, government officials and other responsible persons. WHSA was formed by a group of activists, scholars and unionists to collect information and data about workplace injuries especially in informal and unregistered workplaces where fatalities were not being reported to government offices. They started to prepare periodic

reports on “the murders at work” and a name-list of the workers who had lost their lives in fatal work place injuries that took place nationwide. These reports claim that there are more workplace injuries and more fatalities especially in the informal, unregistered sectors, than the Ministry of Labor claims in its own official statistics. Starting from 2012, WHSA published the annual almanac of “the murders at work”. Moreover, on the first Sunday of each month, they organize a sit-in in Taksim-İstanbul, in front of the historic Galatasaray High School, to share the stories of the families who have lost their relatives in murders at work and to discuss the reasons for the workplace injuries with the participation of the members from the press. All of these ongoing campaigns are the expansion of the persistent struggle of the Limter-İş labor union in the Tuzla shipyards to other worksites in Turkey with the aim of remembering deceased workers, recording the history of the problem, and creating public pressure on the employers and government officials to improve work safety measures and increase economic and legal sanctions on those who neglect workers’ health and safety in their workplaces.

The political campaign led by the Limter-İş labor union in the Tuzla shipyards and its extension to a nationwide struggle to improve workers’ rights through the WHSA that insist on naming work accidents as murders is not only a discursive battle aiming to question the necessity and methods of rapid economic growth, but the persistence naming of fatal workplace injuries as murders also has an impact on the way the law is interpreted and applied. As the volunteer lawyer for workers’ families, Erbay Yucak argued, “Defining a work accident as a murder, indeed as a first-degree murder which is the result of willful

misconduct, may completely change the legal interpretations and possible sanctions and punishments applied to the shipyard management and owners.¹⁹⁹”

Activists from the Limter-İş and WHSA agree with Erbay Yucak. They identify the lack of any serious sanctions as a major problem that make the shipyard owners and management feel comfortable about the way they manage the job. Limter-İş and the Workers’ Health and Safety Assembly have called for the trial of shipyards’ management and prominent shipyard owners with first-degree murder, instead of the covering up of the cases with a mere pecuniary penalty which in most cases is obliged to be paid by the subcontractors and low-rank work safety inspection personnel.

As in one of our conversations Hakkı Usta stated: “If there is a murder at work, we go to the court to sue the main shipyard company that hired subcontractors. We claim that the main company is responsible for workers’ safety, therefore, the main company should be punished. Because the ones whom we call subcontractors are people who just have a jacket and a bag. If he escapes from Tuzla, there is no way to find him. However, the main shipyard companies have nowhere to escape.”

If fatal occupational injuries were defined as murders, then shipyard owners’ punishments would be as severe as imprisonment for life and that could not be converted to a pecuniary penalty. This might deter them from ignoring work safety measures. Therefore, the political campaign regarding the naming of fatal occupational injuries as murders rather than accidents intends to have legal effects by emphasizing that, “human life is priceless and cannot be measured or compensated through monetary means”. Furthermore, this same strategy argues that the sanction for any failure in terms of

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

providing work safety measures on the part of the employers should be as serious as possible.

Hakkı Usta claimed that, if the employers were informed that they were going to be sanctioned with much harsher punishments compared to mere monetary compensations, than the presence of those sanctions might deter them from ignoring work safety measures and concerns regarding worker's health. As he told me: "If we succeed in imposing imprisonment as a sanction for shipyard employers who have not taken the required work safety measures, then we will see how they take all the health and safety measures they did not take before."

The Endurance of Solidarity

The expansion of the discursive struggle to introduce work accidents as murders at work into the legal sphere is a turning point in the proceedings of the fatal occupational injury cases. The Workers' Health and Work Safety Assembly not only plays a critical role in making chronic fatal workplace injuries in Turkey visible case by case and attracting the attention of public opinion in Turkey to the issue, they also help families to take part in public action and to sue the top-rank company officials who are responsible for workplace injuries with criminal offences.

Since 2011 both Limter-İş in the Tuzla shipyards region and the WHSA nationwide have worked to create a solidarity network amongst the activists, volunteer lawyers and relatives of the deceased workers. The WHSA intended to persuade families to go further in their legal struggle and to take part in public actions in order to hold the high-rank managers and company owners responsible for fatal workplace injuries and to support the

families in this exhausting and long process. Relatives of murdered workers who have come and acted together in public actions have called themselves “Adalet Arayan İşçi Aileleri” (Workers’ Families Seeking Justice). Since 2012, the Workers’ Health and Work Safety Assembly together with the Workers’ Families Seeking Justice come together once a month in Taksim Galatasaray Square in İstanbul for the “Conscience and Justice Gathering” to commemorate workers who have lost their lives and to attract public attention to the issue.

The legal help of the volunteer lawyers and the WHSA is critical for the Workers’ Families Seeking Justice because when there is no powerful support from the labor unions and NGOs, relatives who are already in poverty are left alone and defenseless before the threats of major corporations.

The testimony of Damla Kıyak, a 20 years old college student who lost her 30 years old brother Barış Kıyak in a workplace fire, shows how the support as well as the legal and political assistance of these solidarity networks played an important role in creating one of the very first examples of legal battles in Turkey that ended with the severe punishment of the company owners with long-term imprisonment.

On March 11th, 2012, Barış Kıyak, who was working on the construction of a shopping mall “Marmara AVM” in İstanbul’s Esenyurt province, burned to death together with ten other workers in a poorly made and overpopulated workers’ tent. The shopping mall was a major construction project financed by the German ECE Corporation and Deutsche Bank and carried out by the prominent Turkish construction companies Kayı and Kaldem. In the construction site, the companies provided electric stoves to the workers to heat their nylon tents and despite the reports from inspectors that emphasized the danger

of the electric heating in the overcrowded tents, no safety measures were taken and none of those reports were taken into consideration by the financiers and contractors²⁰⁰.

According to the statements of the workers, each tent had a capacity for 12-13 workers; however, about 50 workers were sleeping in each tent when the accident took place. There were no security measures in the tents. Workers were provided only with electric heaters but the required electrical insulation was not secured. The incident took place because of electric leakage. When tents started to burn there were not even fire extinguishers in any of the tents²⁰¹.

In a television interview conducted about two years after the incident, Damla Kıyak mentioned that she and her family were only four out of the eleven families of the victims who had gone to court and sued the construction company. She explained how they were left alone right after the incident took place and how they got reorganized with the relatives of the other workers and the WHSA in order to continue their legal struggle:

In the first few days following the incident, the media came and made news, politicians made declarations, and ministers appeared on TV and gave messages of condolences. Then, all of those people disappeared. The families of the victims were left alone against big corporations. We were abandoned. To be sure, the workers' families were in need of money and the companies provided money for the families by telling that they were also very sad because of the incident and wanted to "help" us. In our case, even before the legal process started representatives of the company came to us and offered us 200,000 Lira [about 110,000 USD at the time]. They didn't even name the money as "compensation". They told us that "they wanted to help us". Then they gave us the money. We gathered the money together with all the other families of the victims. In return for that money they made us sign a waiver which said that 'we will not go the criminal court, sue the company and inform the media about that waiver letter.' However,

²⁰⁰ "11 İşçi Şantiyede Yanarak Öldü (11 Workers Burnt to Death in the Workplace)," *Bianet - Independent News Network*, March 12, 2012, <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/insan-haklari/136861-11-isci-santiyede-yanarak-oldu>.

²⁰¹ Webpage prepared by the Workers Families Seeking Justice to share their testimonies, stories, and the updates on the legal struggle for justice: "Esenyurt'u Unutma" (Do not Forget Esenyurt)," 2012, <http://www.esenyurtuunutma.org/>.

we went to the court anyway. After we met with our volunteer lawyers we learned that this waiver letter had no legal validity and was not legally binding. However, most of the families did not know this. Families were not informed about and supported in gaining access to their legal rights. We did not know about any of this before we met our lawyers. So, the families did not know the truth and believed in the goodwill of the company. Therefore, only four families took legal action against the company, seven families stopped the litigation. We were one of those four families out of the eleven families that lost a relative in the incident...Before contacting the WHSA and the formation of our group Workers' Families Seeking Justice, there was no one who was with us in the legal process. No government organization or labor union helped us. This is not a problem particular to our case, but a common issue experienced after all murders at work. Today, thanks to our volunteer lawyers and our Workers' Families Seeking Justice group we are able to continue our legal action against the employers.²⁰²

Later on, Damla became a prominent spokesperson for Workers' Families Seeking Justice, repeatedly sharing her brother's story and demanding owners of the Kayı and Kaldem construction companies together with the managers of the financier German ECE Corporation be held responsible for her brother's death. The volunteer lawyer of the WHSA, Erbay Yucak, also acted as one of the attorneys for Damla K1yak and the other relatives of the burnt workers in the Esenyurt case, and he succeed in including the top-rank managers of the construction companies, as well as the bosses of the major financier German ECE corporation in the case as major suspects for willful misconduct in the workplace resulting in the death of multiple persons. Although the financier ECE Corporation was acquitted, on July 7, 2015, the court found the three owners of the Kaldem construction company guilty for willful misconduct and decided on ten years punishment for each partner in prison²⁰³. This was the first example in Turkey where company owners

²⁰² Interview broadcasted by the socialist TV station Hayat Televizyonu Video, *Emek Forum - (Labor Forum)*, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUwdakW8ur8&list=UU7_sAuwCJBN5Omet1bUQUdA&index=4.

²⁰³ "Esenyurt'taki AVM Faciası Davasında Karar Açıklandı (The Court Decision on the Esenyurt Shopping Mall Disaster Was Announced)," *NTV News*, July 9, 2015, <http://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/esenyurttaki-avm-faciasi-davasinda-karar,Kwq0C3Q6nEallrTzABTY6g>.

were found directly responsible for willful misconduct in a workplace injury and severely punished.

This is also an example of how the endurance of suffering that might make people hardened to life transformed to an enduring struggle for justice and strengthened attachment to life for those involved. The suffering of the workers' families in the Tuzla shipyards that began as a discursive battle in naming fatal workplace injuries as murders by the Limter-İş labor union, had concrete effects in the interpretation and application of the law after years of effort to expand the campaign nationwide and create solidarity networks to counter the inequalities of power between workers' families and corporations. To be sure, this same suffering also ended with exhaustion in some other cases as we saw the temporary withdrawals of Sibel, or the other families of the Esenyurt fire victims who did not continue the legal proceedings after they received blood money. However, it seems that the enduring campaign that insists on naming workplace injuries as murders has the potential to mitigate such exhaustion by proliferating the examples of legal and political gains thanks to the persistent struggle to strengthen workers' families' attachment to life.

CONCLUSION:

In this dissertation I described the complex, contradictory and ambiguous approaches towards workplace injuries, development and economic growth taken up by various actors in the Tuzla shipyards zone including the employers, workers and labor union activists. These discussions demonstrate the ways that the persistent critique of work accidents is also a critique of the obsession with economic development in Turkey. Leftist labor union members, activists and academics insist on naming work accidents as murders in order to emphasize that fatal workplace injuries are indeed preventable, and that the endurance of the workplace injuries is then the result of a particular political choice that prioritizes economic growth over workers' lives and safety.

However, as I have strived to show throughout this dissertation, such critical approaches towards economic growth and development should not lead one to declare the demise of developmentalism. On the contrary, development continues to be a powerful aspiration for the working classes. The workers in the Tuzla shipyards maintain the desire to benefit from rapid economic growth in the shipbuilding industry and to pursue the possibility to form their own subcontracting companies.

There is already an extensive body of international academic literature on the negative effects of development on vulnerable populations living in the Global South. The anthropology and sociology literature in Turkey, too, focus mainly on the negative effects of rapid economic development on the poor and deprived classes, as well as on work safety and workers' health. These studies assist in building a comprehensive understanding of the dramatic humanitarian and environmental costs of rapid economic development. However, while there are robust economic and ethnographic studies on the side effects of rapid

economic development, the views of the working classes who seek to benefit from this rapid development have not been studied in similar detail in Turkey. The support of certain segments of society for rapid development is mostly disregarded in Turkish oppositional activist reports and academic studies. Therefore, in my research, I have analyzed this pressing and as yet underdeveloped area and have tried to demonstrate how development is a strong aspiration for the working classes in the Tuzla shipyards zone.

Drawing on this important finding, my dissertation study opens up new research questions, particularly about the varying and contested perceptions of development. The Gezi Park uprising, that began in June of 2013 and continued throughout the summer of 2013 was a turning point in this sense. The educated middle classes of the society supported the Gezi revolt that aimed to protect a public park in central İstanbul from being converted to a shopping mall. The supporters of the uprising were successful in bringing questions concerning the humanitarian and environmental harm inflicted by the government-led development projects, particularly construction projects including shopping malls, mass-housing projects, bridges, tunnels and the so-called mega-projects such as the third airport project in İstanbul which was planned to be the biggest airport in the World and the “Canal İstanbul”, a water way parallel to the Bosphorus, to the forefront of public opinion. Yet at the same time, the more economically deprived poor segments of society that compose the majority of Turkey’s population took sides with the AKP government and continued to support those government-led development and construction projects despite the human and environmental damage that these projects inflicted. Development continued to be an important source of aspiration for the impoverished segments of the society and was largely seen as an opportunity for upward mobility. Such a significant rupture in the society in

terms of the diverging groups' conflicting perceptions of development, a rupture unearthed by the Gezi Park uprising, demands further investigation.

My personal encounters and conversations with shipyards employers have provided me with another unique contribution that other theses and research on the problems in the Tuzla shipyards were not able to provide. During my fieldwork, I was able to visit the Turkish Shipbuilders' Association GİSBİR's office and talk to an engineer and representative of the Association about his views on workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards. Moreover, I also had the chance to join a presentation on work safety in a shipyard and to observe the response of the shipyard management in person. In addition, I coincidentally encountered a major shipyard owner's, and member of the parliament's son who is also the owner of a shipbuilding company, and had a unique chance to discuss with him his views and justifications for workplace injuries in Tuzla. While keeping leftist and activist critiques of the shipyard managers in mind, I tried at the same time to be as unbiased as possible in order to understand how the same problem was seen from the point of view of the employers, and to gain insight into how shipyard managers legitimized the high rates of workplace injuries and fatalities in the Tuzla shipyards. I had the chance to closely observe how nationalist discourses that introduce economic growth as the major source of national pride are mobilized by the employers in Tuzla to legitimize fatal workplace injuries in the shipyards. The statements of the shipyard owners and government officials demonstrated to me how development was introduced as an unquestionable policy and how powerful the obsession with economic growth was. I also demonstrated how powerful is the belief that such economic growth will automatically solve other social and political

problems and secure social justice. That is a dominant political claim, whose justifications and effects I think are needed further critical investigation.

I also demonstrated that, no matter the force of law, within the domains of the political and of labor, an enduring opposition that insists on scripting accidents as murders rather than accidents continues. My extended conversations with the family members of workers killed on the job, namely Hakkı Usta who lost his son, Sibel who lost her husband, and Damla who lost her brother in work accidents, demonstrate how the forces of the memory, love and mourning can endure and challenge the force of law and the obsession with development.

I was able to understand with increased appreciation how only a few labor unionists, activists, workers, and family members of the deceased workers in the Tuzla shipyards had repeated over and over again that workplace injuries are not accidents but murders, while they endured in their suffering. And their struggle persists today. My experiences in Tuzla have led me to believe that maybe we cannot overcome all the pressures and oppressions. The disappointment may endure. Yet, we will persist, no matter what, and raise and repeat our critiques. So will I.

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