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## TARANDIĞIMIZ INDEXLER



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# KALKINMANIN ÇELİŞKİSİ: TÜRKİYE'DE HIZLI EKONOMİK BÜYÜME VE ÖLÜMLÜ İŞYERİ KAZALARI

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## ÖZET

**B**u makale, Türkiye'de kronik bir sorun olan işyeri kazalarının işverenler tarafından nasıl meşrulaştırıldığına odaklanmaktadır. Saha çalışmamı 1992 yılından bu yana yaklaşık 190 işçinin iş kazalarında hayatını kaybettiği İstanbul Tuzla tersaneler bölgesinde yaptım. Tuzla tersaneleri hem Türkiye'deki kronik iş kazalarının ve olumsuz çalışma koşullarının bir sembolü hem de iş kazalarının etkilerinin sorunsallaştırıldığı, incelendiği ve eleştirildiği bir bölgedir. Tuzla tersaneler bölgesindeki saha çalışmam sırasında ekonomik büyümenin mi yoksa insan hayatının mı öncelikli olması gerektiğine dair siyasi tartışmanın kristalize olduğunu gözlemledim. Bu makalede bu söylemsel ve siyasi çatışmayı tartışıyorum. Gemi İnşa Sanayicileri Birliği (GİSBİR) ziyaretim sırasında GİSBİR'in basın ve yayın sorumlusu ile yaptığım görüşme ve GİSBİR temsilcilerinin çeşitli medya organlarında yaptıkları açıklamalardan yola çıkarak Tuzla'daki işverenlerin iş kazalarını bu kalkınma aşamasında ve diğer gelişmiş ve gelişmekte olan ülkelerle ekonomik büyüme yarışı içinde normal ve kaçınılmaz bir olgu olarak meşrulaştırdıklarını ortaya koyuyorum. İşverenler iş kazalarını hızlı ekonomik büyümeyi güvence altına almak için zorunlu bir fedakarlık olarak görüyorlar ve bu hızlı ekonomik büyümenin gelecekte sosyal adalet, daha iyi çalışma koşulları ve işçi haklarını garanti altına alacağını varsayıyorlar. Ben ise bu makalede, işçilerin gelecekte iş güvenliğini güvence altına almak için bugün iş güvenliğinden feragat etmeleri gerektiğine dair bu çelişkili yaklaşımın işçilerin sağlıklı koşullarda yaşama ve çalışma haklarının süresiz olarak ertelenmesine yol açtığına iddia ediyorum.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İş kazaları, kalkınma, sosyal adalet, iş ve emek, Türkiye

## THE PARADOX OF DEVELOPMENT: RAPID ECONOMIC GROWTH AND FATAL WORKPLACE ACCIDENTS IN TURKEY

### ABSTRACT

This article focuses on how workplace accidents, a chronic problem in Turkey, are justified by the employers. I conducted my fieldwork in İstanbul's Tuzla shipyards, where approximately 190 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. What I observed during my fieldwork in the Tuzla shipyards was the crystallization of the political contestation between the prioritization of economic growth versus that of human life. In this article I discuss this ongoing discursive and political clash. Drawing on my visit to the Turkish Shipbuilders' Business Association (GİSBİR), my conversation with GİSBİR's responsible person for publications and press, and statements of GİSBİR representatives in the media I demonstrate that employers in Tuzla attempt to justify work accidents as a normal and inevitable phenomenon 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. I argue that this paradoxical approach that requires workers' sacrifices in terms of work safety today to make work safety a guarantee in the future, results indeed in the indefinite deferral of workers' rights to live and work in healthy environments.

**Key Words:** Work accidents, development, social justice, work and labor, Turkey

## INTRODUCTION

In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Turkey was increasingly defined as a model 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 (Ferguson 2006, 184).

In this article I criticize such arguments regarding the so-called successful development narrative of Turkey that was popularly taken for granted in both academic and political circles around the world during the first decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century. My approach is to focus on accidents at work, a chronic problem in Turkey, as a major negative side effects of such rapid economic development.

Although fatal accidents at work are a common phenomenon in Turkey, before the work accidents in the 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 (*Radikal Daily Newspaper* 2008). 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 *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”) was

prepared by the TMMOB, DİSK, Limter-İş, İstanbul Chamber of Physicians and İstanbul Worker's Health Institute and widely distributed at the same time period (TMMOB (Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects) et al. 2008). The first comprehensive academic dissertation on the Tuzla shipyards prepared by academic Nevra Akdemir in 2004 was released as a published book entitled *Kalkınma ve Sermaye Birikimi Sürecinde Enformelleşme: Tuzla Örneği* ("Informalization in the process of development and capital accumulation: The case of Tuzla") in the same year (Akdemir 2008). 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 (Odman and Akdemir 2008).

## Methodology

As part of my doctoral dissertation research project in anthropology, I conducted my fieldwork in that contested zone, İstanbul's Tuzla shipyards, where approximately 190 workers have died in work accidents since 1992. 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. During my ethnographic study I conducted semi-structured interviews with representatives of employers as well as labor unions, workers, activists and academics. 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 from late 2010 until the beginning of 2012, I examined the academic and activist literature, some of which I mentioned above, as well as news, official statements, critical declarations, reports and public debates on accidents at work in the Tuzla shipyards. Throughout my dissertation study I also followed the news, debates and reports about workplace fatalities in other sectors and places in Turkey. This article is based on that data collected during my doctoral dissertation research project.

## Research Questions and Interventions

In my research I critically 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.

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” (Foucault 2008, 54–55). This approach towards neoliberalism can help us in understanding the motivations behind the Turkish 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, the Justice and Development Party, implies that economic development is a pillar for social justice.

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 in Turkey 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 industrialists increase their profits and wealth. On the other hand, workers are expected to risk their health and lives while working under dangerous conditions. In this article I discuss how this unequal distribution of the benefits and harms of rapid development is contested by various political actors.

### How the Government and Employers Respond to Work Accidents

While I was working on my research on work accidents, on May 13<sup>th</sup>, 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. 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.

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 that negligence (Adaman et al. 2015). In contrast to the critics, the prime minister at the time claimed that accidents were part of the nature of mining and that they are normal. To support these claims several high casualty mine accidents were listed that took place in the late 19th and early 20th century in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Japan (Daloglu 2014).

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” (Kohen 2014).

However, official statements that followed the Soma mine disaster was not unique or exceptional opinions. Such approach is prevalent among 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" (Sağlam 2008).

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" (*Sabah Daily Newspaper* 2008).

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 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' 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 activist friends and members from the socialist labor unions in Tuzla 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. They also told me that their 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 us in terms of talking to these people."

What my activist friends 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 leftist labor organization members. However, I wanted to try my chances, and at the time 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 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.

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. Then he let me in and I 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<sup>1</sup>. 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.

1 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 my informants anonymous.

“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, “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.”

### “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. 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 a Yacht Building Company 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 the manager 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<sup>2</sup>.

The Minister for Transportation, Maritime and Communication at the time 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"<sup>3</sup>.

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 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. Because work accidents are assumed as "normal," any identification of the work accidents as an abnormal problem caused by employers' negligence and the failure of the government is considered as a threat to the progress of the ship building industry in particular and the national economy in general. 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.

### **"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.

As seen in the example above, statements about the "naturalness" of the Soma mine disaster and examples of the massive workplace fatalities that took place in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century or early 20<sup>th</sup> century

2 Statement of the partner and manager of a Yacht Shipyard, (video interview translated by me). October, 2010.

3 Minister Yıldırım, June 22, 2012, quoted in the book prepared and published by the (Workers' Families Seeking Justice 2013, 78)

England, France, the US and Japan were not then newly and randomly created justifications to cover up the situation. Such legitimation 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 built 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 one 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 stages (Rostow 1960). 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 as biased, West-centric, outdated and disproven by critical social sciences (Khan and Slavador, Marinaro 2017), 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 (Daloglu 2014).

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. To be sure, the technology to prevent workplace injuries is highly developed today, and furthermore, contemporary technologies to secure work safety cannot be compared to the technologies of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Therefore, for Kohen such a comparison was inaccurate (Kohen 2014). 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 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain, today worker and human rights are globally accepted, a politically and legally applied phenomena.

As the ILO statistics and estimates clearly state 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 safety<sup>4</sup>. 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.

4 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: (Takala et al. 2014)

### “Necessary Sacrifices”

The justification 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 also brings to mind Chakrabarty's critical approach to historicism and his discussion of the question of political modernity in non-Western societies (Chakrabarty 2007, 8). 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" (Chakrabarty 2007, 9). Chakrabarty's critical approach to stagist theories that consign non-Western countries to 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 19<sup>th</sup> century in Western Europe by both GİSBİR representative Mesut in his legitimization of work accidents in the Tuzla shipyards 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". 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 and their families began to receive compensation and salary similar to those that were received by the families of soldiers who died while serving in the Turkish military (*Radikal Daily Newspaper* 2014). 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), 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:

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 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<sup>5</sup>.

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.

### Tuzla Shipbuilders’ Association’s Private Hospital

While the employers and government officials approach workplace injuries as inevitable and unpreventable cases “in that particular stage of development”, 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 socialist labor organizations and activists that defend the rights, safety and health of the workers, and claim that all workplace injuries are indeed “preventable” if intervened in beforehand by taking all the necessary measures for work safety. 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 only after the Soma mine disaster and not before despite the previous warnings of experts. This was a dramatic example of how a government

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

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 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.

The Turkish Shipbuilders Association Hospital was constructed directly across the street from the chain of shipyards and was officially opened in April 2010

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 proximity of our healthcare facility to the shipyards. 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. 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 hospital (*Deniz Haber* 2010).

The statements of the head of GİSBİR 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 sign of care and good will. Similar to the government'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 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 (Ticktin 2006). Such 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 (Redfield 2005). 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.

### 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.

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 a factory occupied by workers who were denied their salaries for months. Nevin, a self-identified socialist, had volunteered to come and check the health conditions of the workers who occupied the factory. After I explained her that I was doing a research on workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards, 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 Mehmet, an activist shipyard worker and the head of a socialist labor organization in Tuzla. In one of our conversations he told me about how difficult it was for them to follow all of the workplace injuries in the Tuzla shipyards zone. Mehmet stated:

We cannot follow all of the murders at work. There are a lot of covered up cases about which we have no information. However, we try our best to expose concealed cases. For instance the case of Hamdi, 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 Hamdi would be better taken care of. Hamdi then died while he was in the GİSBİR hospital. We, together with other friends from the labor union, went to the GİSBİR Hospital when we learned about Hamdi'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 Hamdi's death. He claimed that Hamdi 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 Hamdi 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 Hamdi, claiming that we were not his relatives.

Following this story, Mehmet 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 Mehmet and Nevin about the financial dependency of the health-care personnel on the GİSBİR and the non-transparency of the medical records in the GİSBİR hospital as Mehmet 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 way in which the Soma mine disaster was intervened in 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 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 critical 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” (TMMOB (Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects) et al. 2008, 73).

The activist workers in Tuzla were also critical of the function of GİSBİR hospital and described the hospital as useless. They claim that, “When there is a work accident, 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.”

Based on assumption that work accidents are inevitable and not preventable beforehand, 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. At the same time, shipyard owners could present a spectacle of care and pretend that they valued the health and safety of their workers.

## Conclusion

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.

Employers in Tuzla attempt to justify work accidents as a normal and inevitable phenomenon in this particular stage of development and in the race for economic growth with other developed or developing nations. While high economic growth rates became a source of national pride and an indicator of Turkey's success in international competition amongst other developing countries, the economic race becomes a new sphere of war-like international competition. 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.

This article demonstrated how powerful is the belief that such economic growth will automatically solve other social and political problems and secure social justice. As quoted before in this article, Michel Foucault shows that the dominant understanding of social justice according to neoliberalism is "unlimited economic progress". 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. Such approach of employers is a reflection of and in line with the neoliberal discourses and practices of our time.

I argue that this paradoxical approach that requires workers' sacrifices in terms of work safety today to make work safety a guarantee in the future, results indeed in the indefinite deferral of workers' rights to live and work in healthy environments. Workers in the Tuzla shipyards are consigned in a waiting room in which they are expected to work patiently under unsafe and unhealthy working conditions until Turkey is economically developed enough to grant them their rights. Workers are expected to wait in this waiting rooms such as the emergency facilities of the GİSBİR hospital, where accidents are considered normal and expected. However, where development is defined as an open-ended process, the waiting of the workers never ends. Indeed, worker's demands for better working conditions, and prevention of workplace injuries beforehand are indefinitely deferred as a luxury, a pleasure that is not yet and may never be deserved.

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