

**SILK WORKERS IN THE LATE OTTOMAN EMPIRE:
GENDER, LABOR AND COLLECTIVE STRUGGLE IN BURSA'S FILATURES**

by

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ABSTRACT

This study provides an examination of the capitalist transformation of the silk industry in Bursa from the viewpoint of its workers. As the Ottoman economy integrated into the world market in the nineteenth century, silk fabric weaving on independent hand looms and artisan workshops declined. Instead, Ottoman and foreign entrepreneurs established many silk-reeling workshops (*filatures*) in major silk manufacturing centers to meet the demand for raw silk thread from the silk factories in Europe. In order to lower labor costs, these filatures employed young women and children of rural origin, instead of skilled male artisans available in the city. The present study sheds light on the experiences, working conditions and collective struggles of the filature workers in Bursa, a center of silk trade and manufacturing for centuries, based on primary sources including previously untapped archival material. It demonstrates that gender norms which undervalued women's work in the labor market underlay the boost in local silk production after the 1880s. It presents a challenge to the common argument in the literature that Ottoman women joined the filatures to purchase luxury items for their dowries and suggests that these accounts reflected the perspectives of the factory owners and legitimized the low wages and poor working conditions. Gender ideologies operated not only as instruments of suppression and exploitation, but also as instruments of resistance in Bursa's silk-reeling sector. During the strike in 1910, the workers mobilized gendered discourses to gather support from the local community and authorities. Lastly, this study presents an analysis of the controversy between the provincial and central government authorities on the labor unrest in 1910 and suggests that the Ottoman State was not a detached entity overarching the struggle between the workers and their employers. Rather, it was one of the grounds upon which this struggle took place.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire, Bursa, silk industry, labor activism, labor process, gender

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Bursa'daki ipek endüstrisinin geçirdiği kapitalist dönüşümü işçilerin perspektifinden ele almaktadır. Osmanlı ekonomisi on dokuzuncu yüzyılda dünya ekonomisine entegre olurken, esnaf dükkanlarında ve bağımsız el tezgahlarında gerçekleştirilen ipek kumaş üretimi geriledi. Avrupa'daki ipek fabrikalarından gelen ham ipek ipliği talebini karşılamak üzere, Osmanlı vatandaşlarından ve yabancılardan oluşan girişimciler büyük ipek imalat merkezlerinde pek çok ipek ipliği üretim tesisi (*filatür*) kurdular. Emek maliyetlerini düşürmek için, bu filatürlerde şehirlerdeki kalifiye erkek zanaatkarlar yerine kırsal bölgelerden genç kız ve kadınlar istihdam edildi. Bu çalışma, daha önce açığa çıkarılmamış arşiv malzemeleri de dahil olmak üzere birincil kaynaklardan yararlanarak, yüz yıllardır ipek imalatı ve ticaretinin merkezi olmuş Bursa'daki filatür işçilerinin deneyimlerine, çalışma koşullarına ve yürüttükleri kolektif mücadeleye ışık tutmaktadır. Yerel ipek sektöründe 1880'lerden sonra gerçekleşen üretim patlamasının altında kadın emeğinin piyasadaki değerini düşüren toplumsal cinsiyet normlarının yattığını öne sürmektedir. Osmanlı'da kadınların çeyizlerine lüks eşyalar almak için filatürlerde çalışmaya başladıkları savına karşı çıkmakta, sermaye sahiplerinin perspektifini yansıtan bu savın düşük ücretler ve kötü çalışma koşullarını meşrulaştırma işlevi gördüğünü göstermektedir. Toplumsal cinsiyet ideolojileri Bursa'nın ham ipek üretim sektöründe yalnız baskı ve sömürü aracı değil aynı zamanda direniş aracı olmuştur. İşçiler 1910'da ipek fabrikalarında düzenledikleri grev sırasında, kadınlıkla ilgili belli toplumsal kabulleri harekete geçirerek yerel halkın ve otoritelerin desteğini kazanmıştır. Son olarak, bu çalışma işçi hareketine dair yerel ve merkezi otoriteler arasında açığa çıkan görüş ayrılığını analiz etmekte ve Osmanlı Devleti'nin işçiler ile işverenler arasındaki mücadelenin dışında, tarafsız bir birim olmadığını, aksine bu mücadelenin zeminlerinden biri olduğunu öne sürmektedir.

Keywords: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Bursa, ipek sanayii, işçi hareketleri, toplumsal cinsiyet

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study is about silk workers in the late Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman textile manufacturing underwent a fundamental transformation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the empire integrated into the world economy. Beginning from the 1820s, textile producers in the empire, especially those organized in guilds, were overwhelmed by influx of cheap European goods from coastal areas and ports. In the process, several textile manufacturing forms died out and many others gradually transformed along capitalist lines in order to adjust to the conditions of global competition. After the 1870s, some completely new forms of textile manufacturing also appeared and flourished in the empire (Owen 1993).

The nature of capitalist transformation in the textile manufacturing was readily observable in silk weaving and sericulture, among the oldest occupations in the empire. In parallel to the increasing demand for raw silk from factories located in France, Italy, Switzerland and Britain, cocoon production in many locales experienced an unprecedented growth after the 1850s. At the same time, silk weaving on hand looms declined and artisan shops were gradually replaced with hundreds of mechanized silk spinning workshops (filatures) producing silk thread for the European weaving facilities. Successfully transformed to adapt to the demands of the global market, the silk industry in the Ottoman Empire experienced a significant boost after the 1880s (Quataert 1993a).

The transformation of the industry brought about fundamental changes in the lives of local people. In many parts of the Ottoman Empire such as Bursa, Lebanon, Salonica, Izmir and Edirne, thousands of young women and children who previously wove clothes and spun thread at home, in addition to performing agricultural activities, became factory workers. In Bursa, a center of silk trade and manufacturing for centuries, the establishment of many large and small silk filatures after the 1880 by foreign and Ottoman capital owners deeply altered

employment forms and patterns. The owners of these filatures employed exclusively young women, mostly from Armenian and Greek neighborhoods, instead of skilled male artisans, to lower labor costs. As the number of the factories grew, the number of young women and children from rural areas gained predominance in the industry's labor force.

The present study opens a window into the lives, working conditions and collective struggles of the young women in Bursa's silk manufacturing workshops in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries - an important historical juncture where the social relations of production in the empire transformed fundamentally. The main focus of the study is the mass labor movement that took place in the filatures in 1910. However, it is presented in a holistic approach in order to lay out the historical and structural dynamics which shaped the contours of the events in 1910.

1.1.Scholarship on Ottoman Labor

The academic interest in the lives and experiences of ordinary men and women in the Ottoman Empire does not have a long history. Traditionally focused on the lives and politics of elites, bureaucrats and state members, Ottoman history writing took an alternate path to historical narrative as a part of a larger historiographical shift in the United States and Europe towards social history and "history from below"¹. However, the tendency in the Western academic circles to focus on the daily experiences and politics of common men which became popular after the 1960s, did not immediately reverberate in Ottoman history writing. It rather expressed itself as an inclination towards studying economic history, which was "an indirect means of learning about non-elite groups who were so elusive in the historical record"

¹ There are a number of reasons for this elitist approach in the mainstream Ottoman history writing, one of which is the subscription to the modernisation paradigm. See: Quataert, Donald. 2001. "Labor History and the Ottoman Empire, C.1700-1922", *International Labor and Working Class History*, 60(93-109) and Abou-El-Haj, Rifa'at 'Ali. 2005. *Formation of the Modern State: The Ottoman Empire, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries (Second Edition)*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

(Quataert 2001:98). History from below, as practiced in the United States and Europe, remained highly exceptional until very recently.

The first academic works on the experiences of Ottoman workers were produced during the 1960s and 1970s, a period marked by an increasing popular demand for social justice and equality in Turkish politics. In parallel to the developments in the political arena and to the growing interest towards labor studies in the English speaking world, some researchers made first attempts to document strikes that took place in the empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Sencer 1969; Tuncay 1967; Sülker 1976; Şanda 1976). These first generation studies were highly significant in that they posed a challenge to the traditional Ottoman historiography which regarded the working masses as merely objects of state influence with little or no acting capacity of their own. By documenting labor movements and discussing their influence upon state politics, they demonstrated that the workers of the empire were agents of change rather than passive and submissive extensions of the state. On the other hand, the analyses presented in a majority of these works suffered from an uncritical use of sources and hasty conclusions regarding the revolutionary potential of the Ottoman workers' activism.

These first-generation works were followed by more meticulous studies produced in the 1980s and 1990s on labor movements in the last forty years of the empire. These studies included detailed tables on the number and regional distribution of the strikes in various sectors and regions (Güzel 1996). The authors also reviewed and critically assessed previous arguments regarding the quality and scope of wage labor (Karakışla 1998; Makal 1997). They made important contributions to the field by documenting the demands, organizations and leaders of the workers - particularly during the 1908 strike wave. On the other hand, several problems associated with the first-generation studies were also present in many of these works. The foremost problem was that the emphasis was placed on organized labor mainly

concentrated on big factories and a number of enterprises such as ship building yards, railroad companies and mines, therefore, excluding a considerable part of the Ottoman work force in small workshops and “putting-out” networks (Quataert 2001)². In addition, the authors had mostly concerned themselves with listing the strikes and discussing their outcome – whether or not the participating workers were successful in materializing their demands or influencing state policies in the end. Some authors such as Karakışla (1998) put a distinction between the workers’ “economic demands” such as wage increase and “political demands” which concerned broader socio-political issues outside the shop floor. They excluded the former, in which the Ottoman workers apparently showed greater interest, from the realm of politics. As discussed further in the following pages, this approach failed to recognize power relations on the shop floor as well as alternative forms and means of resistance.

The underestimation of the scope of wage labor which largely resulted from the focus placed upon big factories operating in a limited number of sectors, as well as the dependence on government statistics, had discouraging implications for the Ottoman labor studies. Based on official sources, such as the industrial census of 1915 which comprised only a limited number of large factories in Istanbul and six Western Anatolian cities, some authors such as Makal (1997) argued that wage employment was exceptional in the empire. Also, according to Makal (1997), “full-proletarianization” was confined to a very small number of sectors and regions since many factory workers depended on additional sources of income. In a context where wage labor was exceptional and the existence of a working class was highly disputable, the occasional strikes that took place in a number of sectors and regions did not seem worthy of much deep analysis.

² “Putting-out” system is a means of subcontracting work to home-based producers. It’s also known as the domestic system (or the workshop system).

In the meantime, a second line of research pioneered by some scholars such as Donald Quataert and Sherry Vatter put many of these assumptions into question. Through a significant body of work on a variety of contemporary occupations from carpet weaving to shoe manufacturing, Quataert (1991; 1993a; 2004a) demonstrated that the manufacturing industry in the late Ottoman Empire extended beyond big factories and much debated guild organizations³. By focusing only on a limited number of large scale factories and declining guild-organized production, many Ottoman economic historians had concluded that the Ottoman manufacturing industry was in a phase of decay throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, Quataert (1993a) argued that the blow to the Ottoman textile manufacturing in the 1820s, effecting both guild and non-guild production, was not the end of the story. Following the spread of wage labor, change of products and re-organization of production through rural putting-out networks and small workshops where women and children performed most of the work, many branches of the Ottoman manufacturing sector had thrived in the domestic market in the second half of the nineteenth century. In some sectors, such as silk reeling, carpet weaving and tobacco manufacturing, the profits made after the 1880s were a result of successful global competition (Quataert 1993a).

Although not organized in the same way as some state owned big factories, thousands of people working in these sectors had experienced the effects of entering wage labor and they had taken collective action to have a say in affairs concerning their lives (Quataert 1983). For instance, Sherry Vatter (1995) demonstrated that a network of journeyman weavers in Damascus organized regular strikes in the 1870s against the masters who employed them. In his study on tobacco labor politics in Thessaloniki, Tutku Vardağlı (2011) argued that the

³ Roger Owen's earlier studies on Middle Eastern industrial history made great contributions to this line of research. See: Owen, Roger. 1984. "The Study of Middle Eastern Industrial History: Notes on the Interrelationship Between Factories and Small Scale Manufacturing With Special References to Lebanese Silk and Egyptian Sugar, 1900-1930", *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 16(475-487). In addition, some scholars made important contributions by offering a comprehensive profile of the labor force in major cities such as Istanbul. See: Kırılı, C. 2001. "A Profile of Labor Force in Early Nineteenth Century İstanbul", *International Labor and Working Class History*, 60(125-140).

labor movement in the province was carried out mainly by workshop laborers rather than industrial factory workers. Therefore, an important episode in the story of the “Ottoman working class”, as long as this category also included non-unionized workers outside big factories, concerned small scale non-guild work sites where the majority of the work force was present. As a matter of fact, the so-called proper working class, as well as “full-proletarianization” of the majority of the workforce, has been an exception in global history. Quataert (2001) and many scholars of global economic history have now demonstrated that labor does not necessarily evolve toward a form of organized, big factory work encompassing the bulk of the working population. Also, as has been proven by the re-emerging of small scale workshops and networks of putting-out employment after the 1980s, large scale factory production is not a *sine qua non* for the organization of a capitalist economy.

The present study is also based on one of those networks of small scale workshops in Western Anatolia. The filatures in Bursa, located in different parts of the city but mostly near two rivers, *Gökdere* and *Cilimboz Deresi* in present *Osmangazi* district, employed about twenty to sixty workers each. Although some sources indicate that some factories in the city such as *Harir Fabrika-i Hümayunu* employed up to three hundred and fifty workers (Erder 1978), an official document listing the numbers and wages of the workers in that factory shows that the number of the workers employed by the year of 1875 was only fifty six.⁴ The reason these small establishments were called “factories” by the government authorities and the local sources might be that they utilized motive power to operate the machinery. However, in comparison to bigger factories in the Empire, such as the Imperial Fez Factory in Istanbul which employed about five hundred workers (Kabadayı 2008), categorizing these filatures as

⁴ The Prime Ministry Ottoman Archive (B.O.A). HH. D. 16461. “20 Kanun-i Evvel 1290” (1 January 1875).

workshops would be more appropriate. Although their individual scale was small, the filatures employed about five thousand people in total in the early twentieth century.⁵

Another major contribution that Quataert and others who followed the second line of research was to question the emphasis placed solely on workers-in-action. Contrary to some analyses which “measured” class consciousness by listing the instances of collective action and discussing the extent to which the workers were successful in achieving their demands or affecting state politics, this new line of research focused on examining labor processes and every day interactions of the working people to shed light on class experience. This shift in interest was also a -late- response to E. P. Thompson’s (2001) invitation to labor historians to explore the culture of laboring people instead of limiting the research to the institutions of labor and their approved leaders and ideology.

The present study also offers a portrayal of the daily life in the silk filatures of Bursa and reveals how women experienced work and how these experiences shaped their group identities. It provides examples of the interactions between the workers and upper-class men and women, as in the instance of Fatma Fahrunnisa Hanım’s visit to the filatures in 1896. An upper class Muslim woman from Istanbul, Fatma Fahrunnisa Hanım visited the filatures for touristic purposes. As she observed the workers extracting cocoons from the containers of water, one of them invited Fahrunnisa Hanım to put her hands into one of the containers to experience the temperature of the water instead of speculating about it. She kindly refused and noted that the water was extremely hot by the looks of the swollen and discolored appearance of the workers’ hands (Fatma Fahrunnisa 2010). These examples, as well as their own statements in the petitions and letters, reveal that the workers were aware of the differences between their lives and the lives of other women from the upper class strata of Ottoman society. In addition, this study demonstrates that the work in filatures was fundamentally

⁵ “Hayat ve Hakikat”, *İştirak*, 02 April 1909 (20 February 1325), 1(2):23-26.

different from housework not only because the quality of the jobs performed was different, but also because the former was performed under a completely new set of rules and relations. Therefore, it presents a challenge to some recent studies which claim that the textile workers in the empire were not aware of their working status since the textile work meant little more than to carry the housework physically outside (Vardağlı 2011:330).

As for the Ottoman labor history, the studies focusing on the daily experiences of the workers are still quite few in number and challenged by certain difficulties such as accessing the sources produced by non-elite individuals or groups. However, the growing interest in the Ottoman workers' life, ethnic origins, cultures and social interactions opens new horizons in the field. Akram Fouad Khater's (1996) study on silk-reeling workers in Lebanon, Gila Hadar's (2007) study on tobacco workers in Salonica, Quataert's (2009) work on mine workers in Zonguldak, Can Nacar's (2010) study on tobacco workers in Kavala, İskeçe and Istanbul demonstrate that class experience is not limited to instances of class action. Also, these studies demonstrate that the strikes were not the only channels through which the Ottoman workers organized resistance. For example, in the silk-reeling filatures of Lebanon, the workers employed alternate tactics such as slowing down the pace of work or producing lower quality silk to make the filature owners raise their wages (Khater 1996:332). The present study demonstrates that the workers in Bursa appealed to local government officials through petitions written in proper state jargon before taking to the streets. From a perspective which takes account of the continuity of class experience, mass labor uprisings in the form of strikes or street demonstrations are the moments of deepened crises that left their mark on the official documents. They are not sole indicators of resistance to the power relations on the shop floor.

This study examines a strike movement that took place in 1910 with the participation of at least 1,200 workers from sixty different filatures in Bursa. However, the characteristics

of the movement does not fit into the established framework of organized labor movements, mainly because there seems to be no labor union or leading group/individual involved in the process. For this reason, some scholars concluded that the striking workers in Bursa had probably been provoked or “instrumentalized” by some groups, such as *Hinçakyan* Organization, with different or broader political agendas (Van Os 1997). This study positions itself against those accounts which deny the agency and the experiences of the workers. Instead, it presents the argument that the workers organized the strike through unconventional forms and channels under circumstances which deprived them of the practical means and resources to follow the established route. It also distances itself from the approaches which equate the lack of institutions or leaders with the incapacity to organize a movement. Most probably, the workers’ coordination and self-organization arose out of local interactions enhanced by strong communication networks among them. Thanks to the movement’s organizational strength, the strike continued for fifteen days and seriously disrupted the local dynamics. However, the aim of this study is not to present the workers as a homogeneous mass united against their employers. Rather, it takes into account the conflicts and fragmentations among the workers which, among other things, led to the clashes between the protesters and strike-breakers a week after the strike started.

Another distinctive feature of the 1910 strike has been the ambiguity regarding the outcome of the events. Although it is possible to make certain assumptions based on a number of contemporary journal articles, the historical evidence reached so far does not provide precise information on whether the workers were actually successful in reaching their demands. However, unlike many other previous studies on labor movements in the empire, the overall success or failure of the workers is not a fundamental concern of this study. The assumption is that the process itself reveals important clues regarding the power dynamics inside and outside the workplace. This also means that the conflicts inside the shop floor or

“narrow shop floor issues” belong to the realm of politics, an argument also presented in some recent works (Nacar 2010).

This study sets out to present a holistic approach to class relations in the late Ottoman Empire by including other actors of the game (factory owners, government officials and local people) into the picture as well. It focuses on the interplay between the factory owners, local officials and central government authorities during the strike and reveals controversies and power relations that took effect beyond the shop floor. This way, it challenges the mainstream approach in the literature which depicts the CUP government as a homogeneous political entity. The state was not necessarily an outside adversary to the workers’ cause as also argued by Chalcraft (2001) in the context of Egypt.

1.2. Gender and Labor in the Ottoman Context

The increasing attention to the power relations which shaped labor processes brought about gender as an important tool of analysis in historical research. In the context of Ottoman labor, recent studies by Quataert (1993a), Balsoy (2009), Hadar (2007) and Khater (1996) have demonstrated that the profits in many thriving sectors such as carpet weaving, lace and umbrella manufacturing, tobacco production and silk reeling depended heavily on the extensive use of cheap female labor. However, women workers rarely found themselves a place in the narratives of the first-generation labor studies. One of the obvious reasons for this categorical exclusion was the traditional focus on heavy industries as well as on labor organizations in which women seldom -if ever- occupied administrative positions. Another reason was the subscription to the established “gender blind” method of analysis in history writing which failed (or deliberately rejected) to recognize power dynamics that shaped all areas of social interaction. This tradition owned its strength and endurance to the gender identity of the producers of historical texts: Not only had the majority of archival documents,

but also historical studies, been produced by male individuals of mostly elite background until the democratization of universities in the 1960s. In parallel to women's increasing participation in historical studies and the feminist debates on the relationship between power and the production of knowledge, gender emerged as one of the categories of historical analysis.

According to Joan Scott (1986), the attempts of social historians who set out to study past social reality by incorporating gender relations into the picture fall into two distinct categories: essentially descriptive studies which designate the denied or ignored existence of women in history, and interpretative or explanatory studies which set out to theorize the role of gender relations and ideologies in the formation and shaping of historical phenomena. In order to map out an entirely new terrain, that is, in order to unearth the role and place of women in history as a group which has been systematically omitted from accounts of the past, descriptive studies were rather useful. However, the proliferation of case studies in women's history calls for synthesizing perspectives to explain the connection between gender ideologies and the operation of several social institutions including family, labor market, education, religion and polity (Scott 1986).

In the field of Ottoman labor studies, the majority of the works produced so far fall into the first category defined by Scott (1986). This is mostly because the field is too young: the studies on Ottoman women workers (or those taking account of gender in the analysis of labor relations) still constitute an exception in the field. So far, the primary focus of academic interest has been describing the activities of elite women who participated in the national movements, established women's rights organizations, published journals, made property transactions and maintained business relations (Reilly 1995; Çakir 1996; Zarinebaf-Shahr 2001; Zihnioğlu 2003). These studies made important contributions in overcoming the problem of invisibility of women which pervaded Ottoman history writing for decades.

However, only a few of these studies used gender as a conceptual analytical tool and many fell into the trap of the modernization paradigm which wedged women's issues in the framework of national development and progress. Also, their focus on the lives of elite women replicated the historiographical tradition that placed the elites at the center of historical account.

Besides Quataert's (1993a; 2004) several important works on female labor in the Ottoman manufacturing sector, a limited number of studies on non-elite Ottoman women and their experiences has been produced so far (Karakışla 1999; Hadar 2007; Balsoy 2009; Özbek 2010). These studies were mostly focused on female labor and the operations of gender relations in the workplace. Some of them provided a description of the workplace hierarchies, division of labor and use of technologies which were determined in line with the established gender stereotypes (Balsoy 2009). Others went further to explore how gender ideologies became instruments of power and resistance in shop floor conflicts (Hadar 2007). For example, as female labor was cheaper than male labor and women workers were considered more obedient, the tobacco factory owners in Salonica replaced male workers with female workers to cut costs and optimize efficiency. When encountered with resistance from the workers, they claimed it was for the sake of safe guarding female workers' "honor" on the shop floor. In response, the tobacco workers demanded a gendered division of labor inside the workplace to guarantee work for both male and female workers (Hadar 2007:133).

These accounts opened a crack in the traditional narrative of the Ottoman labor and demonstrated that gender was pivotal in analyzing class relations and labor processes. However, the dearth of scholarship in the field largely obscures a healthy analysis of gender relations and their involvement in the formation of class identities in many sectors and branches. For example, the experiences of women in putting-out networks and small workshops in many branches of the manufacturing sector are still entirely in the dark.

Likewise, we still know so little about alternate means of resistance developed by women workers except a few studies on machine breaking carpet weavers in Uşak (Quataert 1986; Karakışla 2002).

The present study on Bursa's silk filatures aims to shed light on another dark chapter of the industrial relations in the late Ottoman period and reveal the experiences of thousands of young women workers. However, the primary aim is neither to fill an academic "gap" nor to add another descriptive study to the literature. The study seeks to explore the connections between gender ideologies and the process of class formation by analyzing the events surrounding the 1910 strike in Bursa's silk filatures. It presents answers to questions such as: How did certain qualities associated with womanhood come to play as factory owners sought to increase the profits? Which gendered discourses did women apply to when they resisted against the conditions of factory work? It shows that the profits in the silk industry depended on the qualities socially attributed to female labor which depicted the women as extra income producers or individuals incapable of giving rational economic decisions. It challenges previous scholarly arguments that women joined factory work to purchase jewelry items for their dowries and demonstrates that certain gender ideologies were in effect shaping these accounts. Lastly, it shows that the workers frequently appealed to the gendered discourses to convince the local authorities to support them in their demands of wage increase and the limitation of working hours.

The story of silk workers in Bursa offers more than just another volume of the history of laboring women in Western Anatolia. It offers a way to interpret power relations in contemporary settings where the exploitation of cheap female labor and insecure work arrangements such as sub-contracting in networks of neighborhood workshops has once again become widespread.

1.3. Structure and Sources

The Prime Ministry Ottoman Archive in Istanbul (*Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi*) provided half of the primary material used in the present study. One of the most important findings was a petition sent to the Sultan himself by the workers in Bursa dated 1909, filed under the Prime Ministry Records Office (*Başbakanlık Evrak Odası*). This document included the names of the thirty four representative workers and their workshops. The names revealed the ethnic origins of the workers as well as of their employers, since the filatures were named after their owners. The petition also included a detailed description of the working conditions in the workshops and the workers' demands from the government. By revealing the workers' own accounts of the circumstances under which the filatures operated, it posed a challenge to the established assumption in the literature that local young women joined factory work to purchase luxury items. Other documents found in the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archive included fifteen official correspondences between the Governorship of the *Hüdavendigâr* Province, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Commerce and Public Works about the labor unrest in Bursa between September 1909 and February 1911. These documents were filed under Ministry of Interior (*Dahiliye Nezareti*) and revealed the conflict between local and central government authorities regarding the government's position on the issue.

Other primary material used in this study included newspaper articles, memoirs, literary pieces and an anonymous photograph published in *Servet-i Fünun* magazine. The articles published in the socialist journal *İştirak* were particularly important in that the chief editor *Hüseyin Hilmi Bey* demonstrated a special effort in keeping record of the events that took place in the region and discussing their effects on government politics. In addition to the articles, he published a letter sent by the workers to the journal in 1909 which described the working conditions in the filatures and sought for public support to the workers' cause. The editors of the local journal *Ertuğrul* also published remarkable pieces which revealed the local

response to the events that broke out in 1910. The memoirs used belonged to Fatma Fahrunnisa Hanım, Hasan Taib Efendi, Şerafeddin Mağmumi and Mehmed Ali Ayni. These were people from mostly elite backgrounds who visited Bursa in the period between 1850 and 1910 and provided important information regarding the mills and the labor force in the city. For instance, Şerafettin Mağmumi was an Ottoman physician who performed a health inspection in the filatures in 1894 and provided valuable information on the working conditions in his journal (Mağmumi 2008). The photograph taken from the interior of a silk filature was published in the journal *Servet-i Fünun* in 1893 and clearly showed the machinery, the work order, the gender composition of the workers and their superintendents.

The sources of this study are either products of the elites or include statements dictated by the workers but put on paper by the official clerks or reporters. Considering that most of the lower class women of the period were presumably illiterate, it seems highly difficult to obtain a document composed by the workers themselves. However, this study showed that common people never evaporate from historical record for being illiterate. Even though they don't usually take pen in hand and write their thoughts, their ideas, actions and inspirations, they always leave a mark on historical documents and a critical reading of the available resources can help reveal this.

Another limitation of this study is the lack of sources on the workers' experiences in community, household and family. Most of the evidence reached so far provides information on the working life in the filatures and reveals little about the dynamics of social life beyond the shop floor. However, the lack of sources can be overcome by future studies in local and foreign archives and private collections. This study invites researchers to reveal more on the cultures, community and household interactions of the workers in Bursa's filatures. Such discoveries would make important contributions in our understanding of the way gender ideologies operated in the construction of power on the shop floor.

The study is composed of three chapters and a brief epilogue. The first chapter provides an examination of the process in which the Ottoman manufacturing sector adapted itself to the changing global economic environment after the 1820s with the transformation of previous forms and patterns of employment in various branches. The second chapter takes a closer look at the transformations in Bursa's silk industry which culminated in the spread of steam filatures and the employment of young women in these establishments. The third chapter analyzes the experiences and working conditions of the silk workers in Bursa based on primary sources produced in 1909 and 1910, a time of widespread labor unrest in the filatures. It presents an analysis of power relations among different actors and the role played by gender ideologies in the process.

2. THE OTTOMAN MANUFACTURING SECTOR IN THE LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES

The Ottoman manufacturing sector went through radical transformations in the period between the 1800s and 1914. The social and economic conditions of Bursa's silk workers can only be understood within the broad historical framework of transformations in the Ottoman manufacturing sector. This chapter provides a brief analysis of these transformations and its effects on the Ottoman producers in the nineteenth century. It presents the argument that the Ottoman Empire's integration into the world economy and the resulting spread of capitalist relations of production in almost all branches of the manufacturing sector radically altered forms and patterns of employment. As guild based production in cities declined in large measure, the bulk of production in the manufacturing sector shifted to putting-out networks and home industries in rural areas. Accordingly, urban male craftsmen's labor was gradually replaced with cheap female and child labor in many branches. Mechanized production in the form of large-scale factories was not widespread, however, several manufacturing activities in the empire flourished through factory production in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Putting-out networks along with factories and workshops that were established after the 1870s led to the spread of wage labor in the empire.

The analysis starts with a critical evaluation of the way in which the mainstream scholarship narrates the story of the Ottoman manufacturing sector in the nineteenth century. It continues with an examination of how certain economic structures and relations transformed in the Ottoman manufacturing sector as the empire integrated into the world economy.

2.1.The Ottoman Historiography on the Manufacturing Sector

There has been a growing and promising literature on the Ottoman economic activities in the nineteenth century. The proliferation of scholarly work on the Ottoman economic life stems from an increasing attention among a new generation of Ottoman historians to the activities of ordinary people and groups, contrary to the dominant approach in the field which did not regard them as worthy of attention so long as they did not affect the affairs of state (Quataert 2001:97). Despite this increasing attention to the daily economic life in the empire, our knowledge about the actual nature and transformation of many sectors within the Ottoman economy, including the Ottoman manufacturing sector in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, remains to be scant.

The academic disinterest in the history of manufacturing activities in the empire which lasted until the last couple of decades was primarily caused by two factors: First, the dominant approach in the Ottoman historiography narrowed down the definition of manufacturing industry to activities based on the use of factory-based technologies or to those performed in cities by guild-organized male craftsmen. Since factory-based technologies were not common and guild-organized activities were in the process of serious decline, many scholars assumed that the Ottoman manufacturing sector was in a phase of decay, or even total extinction in the nineteenth century (Sarç 1940; Yalçın 1979; Issawi 1980). Therefore, it did not deserve much attention.

However, recent studies show that a considerable part of the Ottoman manufacturing activities, especially those in the textile sector, was performed outside of factories and guilds in the nineteenth century (Quataert 1993a; 2004a). Despite the important role they played in

the economy of certain regions and cities, guilds had actually never monopolized the entire Ottoman manufacturing (Quataert 2001). Manufacturing textiles or other goods at home or at small workshops for extra income was a part of agricultural life for centuries. Considering that more than eighty percent of the Ottoman population lived in rural areas, an important part of the Ottoman manufactured goods was produced through this type of non-guild labor even before the nineteenth century. In the course of the empire's integration into the world economy, guild-organized production in cities declined and non-guild production based on cheap female and child labor in rural as well as urban areas increased drastically (Quataert 1993a; 2004a). In brief, manufacturing activities remained as an important part of the Ottoman economic life, albeit in a changing form. An examination of the nature and transformation of these activities provides important clues on the historical process in which capitalist relations of production spreads in a peripheral economy.

Although only a small portion of total manufacturing in the nineteenth century was carried out through factories, their significance in the transformation of the empire's manufacturing sector is also not adequately analyzed. The dominant approach in the Ottoman historiography dismisses factories as casual (even comical) attempts of state bureaucrats to catch up with the European industrial development (Ortaylı 1978) or as ill-planned state efforts to provide for the needs of a growing bureaucracy and military (Clark 1974). However, these accounts fail to recognize that several manufacturing activities in the empire flourished through factory production in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Many of these activities were associated with refining or processing raw materials required by the European (or sometimes local) industry including mechanized silk reeling, cotton processing, valonia and licorice production (the last two were substances used in leatherworking and in textile industry, respectively) (Kurmuş 1982). However, some of them also involved the production of finished goods such as oil, soap, woolen fabrics, tobacco and even industrial machinery

(Kurmuş 1982; Nacar 2010). The amount of production and the degree of the technology application in these factories may or may not be comparable to their counterparts in the Western and Central Europe. Nonetheless these establishments were indicators of the transformation of the relations of production in and around the regions that they were established.

The second factor which obscured an in depth analysis of the Ottoman manufacturing sector was that the state documents, which many Ottoman historians heavily relied upon, usually does not contain much information on non-guild manufacturing activities (especially on those outside of the capital city, Istanbul) and provide limited information on factories and workshops that were not owned by the state (Quataert 2004b). As a result, the essential part of the manufacturing activities in the empire became invisible to the mainstream scholarship which largely depended on official documents, stored in the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives. However, more recent studies have shown that it is possible to obtain information about non-guild manufacturing activities in rural areas and privately owned factories and workshops through alternate sources such as consular reports, notes of foreign businessmen, court registers, newspapers, journals and memoirs (Quataert 1993a). The scattered and disordered nature of these sources accounts for the slow pace of improvement in the field.

2.2.The Ottoman Manufacturing Sector in the Years between 1800 and 1914

The process of restructuring of the Ottoman manufacturing sector in the nineteenth century can be examined in two periods: from the 1820s to the 1870s and from the 1870s to the outbreak of the World War I (Quataert 1993a). In the first period, the impact of foreign competition was overwhelming and barely resistible for the majority of Ottoman producers. The years between the 1830s and 1850s were especially challenging in that respect. After the 1870s, however, the Ottoman manufacturing activities revived substantially thanks to a

combination of factors which increased the competitiveness of the Ottoman manufactured goods inside (and in some cases, outside) of the empire (Quataert 1993a). By the end of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman manufacturers lost foreign markets for many products, but they survived and successfully adapted to the conditions of foreign competition in the domestic market (Quataert 1993a). The following pages provide an analysis of the process in which former structures of the Ottoman manufacturing sector transformed as the empire integrated into the world economy.

Although the empire's integration into the world economy had started a century earlier (Kasaba 1988), the production of guild-organized crafts in the empire was plenty enough to meet the entire local demand in the beginning of the nineteenth century with some exceptions such as expensive woolen cloths, paper and glass products (Pamuk 2005). Additionally, the Ottoman manufacturers were exporting a good amount of cotton yarn and cotton and silk clothes to the Western European countries. However, the share of manufactured goods in Ottoman Empire's total imports had been continuously growing (Sarç 1940).

After the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, the Ottoman craftsmen in urban areas faced with the influx of cheap European (mainly British) manufactured goods. The peace and increased security in the Mediterranean combined with improvements in naval transportation had provided Britain with the opportunity to expand its trade with Eastern Mediterranean countries, including the Ottoman Empire (Issawi 1980). The Ottoman Empire was a convenient market for European goods: it was geographically close to Europe, it had favorable trade agreements with several European countries and its manufacturing sector was not prepared to compete with manufactured goods which were produced at low costs in big quantities by the Western European countries. After the 1820s, the empire's trade with the Western Europe, especially with the Britain, increased drastically (Pamuk 2005). This rapid increase in foreign trade was followed by political pressures from the European countries to

eliminate monopolies, to reduce import duties and to remove other obstacles to the free flow of goods. The Tanzimat Reforms of 1839 prepared the legislative ground for a transition to the liberal economy in the empire (Karakışla 1995:19). The famous Anglo-Turkish Convention of 1838 and several other treaties between the Ottoman Empire and Western European powers further opened the Ottoman market to the world economy (Owen 1993).

As imported goods increased in quantity, tastes of Ottoman consumers began to change, a factor further challenging to the competitiveness of local manufacturing (Quataert 2004b). At first, the impact was limited to coastal areas and ports. However, foreign investments in the transportation infrastructure which started in the later decades of the nineteenth century extended the network of trade further within the empire. Consequently, inner parts of the empire were also affected from the foreign competition (Issawi 1980). The impact was especially stronger in those sectors where transportation costs were relatively low, such as the textile sector (Pamuk 2005).

The effects of the first encounter with the influx of cheap European goods were overwhelming for the manufacturing sector in the empire. Thousands of craftsmen became unemployed and the number of looms in manufacturing centers such as Aleppo, Damascus, Istanbul and Bursa fell down significantly (Issawi 1980; Vatter 1995). As Quataert (2004b) states, many Ottoman historians focus their attention to this transitional phase and conclude that the Ottoman manufacturing sector decayed altogether in the face of foreign competition. However, what happened during the 1820s was not the end of the story. As the empire further integrated into the world economy, some forms of manufacturing activities died out, while some others survived and successfully adapted to the conditions of foreign competition by restructuring. Also in the process, some completely new forms of manufacturing activities appeared and flourished (Zürcher 2010).

The production of manufactured goods in the Ottoman Empire was organized in three separate forms: guild-based production, non-guild and non-factory production and non-guild production in factories (Pamuk 2005). The effect of the empire's capitalist integration on each of those activities is examined separately under the following sub-titles.

2.2.1. Guild Based Manufacturing Activities

For centuries, a good number of manufacturing activities in the empire were carried out in the framework of guilds which were organizations of urban craftsmen. Although guild organizations differed in structure and activities in different regions and periods, they usually functioned to secure craftsmen's reach to raw materials. They also provided that craftsmen benefit from monopolies and privileges in the production and selling of certain goods (Quataert 2004b:1005-7). In return for possessing certain monopolies and privileges, guilds guaranteed the provision of the State's and major cities' needs for manufactured goods. They also facilitated the taxation of manufacturing activities (Quataert 2004b).

The influx of foreign goods into the empire in the nineteenth century had a devastating impact on guild organizations. As factories of the Western European countries poured out cheap commodities to the Ottoman ports, and as advocates of the idea of liberal trade increased their economic and political power in the empire, the Ottoman bureaucrats, especially those who were in favor of liberal economy due to their class position, began to question the Ottoman State's traditional relations with guilds (Pamuk 2005). According to Quataert (1993), the first serious blow to the Ottoman guilds came in the year of 1826, when Sultan Mahmud II abolished the Janissary corps, infantry musketeer units that formed a part of the Ottoman military force. Quataert (1993:22) states that the Janissaries were protecting guilds against assaults from the State and from the Ottoman elites, since many of them were also members of different guilds. When the armed force behind guilds was eliminated, it

became possible to further open the Ottoman economy to the world market. Indeed, the Anglo-Turkish Convention of 1838 (*Baltalimanı Treaty*) and the imperial reform edict (*Hatt-ı Humayun of 1856*) abolished commercial monopolies and left thousands of Ottoman craftsmen in urban areas unprotected in the face of foreign competition (Pamuk 2005).

The abolishment of commercial monopolies was damaging to the guild-organized production not only for it allowed the inflow of vast quantities of cheap manufactured goods, but also for it allowed the outflow of raw materials that the Ottoman craftsmen needed to maintain their manufacturing activities (Quataert 2004b). Combined with the negative effects of heavy taxations that the Ottoman State imposed in order to finance reforms and wars, guild-organized manufacturing activities in urban centers experienced a serious decline. According to Osman Nuri's report from Istanbul as cited in Ökçün (1997), the number of looms in Istanbul, which was estimated at about 2,750 in 1838, had fallen down to twenty five within a period of only thirty years. In other manufacturing centers of Anatolia such as Bursa, Amasya and Diyarbakır, the number of looms had also fallen down significantly in the mid-nineteenth century⁶. In Aleppo and Mosul, guild-based manufacturing remained vibrant until the early twentieth century, but craftsmen lost their control over the manufacturing process to merchants and/or to powerful families (Quataert 2004a).

As a response to these increasingly bitter economic conditions, guilds in many locales turned into more highly-structured, more organized, more formal and more restrictive structures in the second half of the nineteenth century (Quataert 2004a:6). However, this reaction accelerated their decline at a moment when "their survival was highly dependent on flexibility and adaptability" (Quataert 2004b). It should also be noted that the Ottoman governments' stance against guild privileges was not consistent at all throughout the century. In some cases, the Ottoman government responded to guilds' demands for state protection and

⁶ Viquesnel 1868 as cited in Sarç 1940.

retained their monopolies, in many others; guilds were left on their own in the face of foreign or local competition (Quataert 1993a). In general, though, guild-organized urban production was in extreme disarray throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

2.2.2. Non-Guild Manufacturing Activities Outside Factories

In addition to guild-based forms of production, several manufacturing activities in the Ottoman Empire were performed outside guilds, largely by women at homes or at small workshops in rural areas. In the nineteenth century, more than eighty percent of the Ottoman population lived in rural areas (Quataert 1993a). Textile manufacturing was an integral part of agrarian life for centuries, partly because raw materials such as cotton, silk, wool and linen was in abundance. In many villages, spinning wheels and looms were found in virtually every home and family members (usually women) manufactured yarns and clothes for both personal and commercial use in their remaining time from agricultural activities (Quataert 2004a). However, due to their scattered and unorganized fashion, the state could not control and tax these manufacturing activities. Throughout the nineteenth century as before, they remained largely unrecorded (at least, as far as state records were taken into consideration) and hence economic historians gave very little attention to their transformation in the process of the empire's integration into the world economy.

The period from the late eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century was also challenging for manufacturers outside of guild organizations. The effect of foreign competition led to the wiping out of several non-guild manufacturing activities in the empire along with guild-based production (Sarç 1940). However, as Ottoman manufacturers lost foreign markets in many textile sectors after the 1820s, local manufacturing activities managed to survive in the domestic market and many of them flourished especially after the 1870s. Cloth weaving in Aleppo is an example, which accounted for “up to three quarters of

textile production in northern Syria” in 1875 with three to six thousand working looms (Quataert 2004a). By shifting away from luxury cloths to plain cotton cloths for the bottom of the market, the weaving industry in Aleppo managed to successfully adapt to the conditions of foreign competition. Cloth weaving and cotton yarn production maintained to be important economic activities in many other parts of the empire until the beginning of the World War I (Quataert 1993a). According to Roger Owen (1993), the number of textile producers in Syria continuously increased throughout the nineteenth century. In addition, some export-oriented sectors such as lace making, carpet manufacturing, silk-reeling and tobacco production expanded significantly in the second half of the nineteenth century (Kurmuş 1982; Quataert 1993a; Owen 1993; Nacar 2010).

A combination of several factors made this adaptation possible: The increasing control of merchants over the process of production, the concentration of Ottoman producers on labor-intensive manufacturing activities, the increasing use of cheap female and child labor, the early and widespread adaptation of machine-spun yarns and synthetic dyestuffs, the increasing domestic demand for textile goods and the use of competition techniques such as manufacturing textile products according to local tastes (Quataert 1993a; 2004a; Pamuk 2005; Kurmuş 1982). In addition, the conditions of foreign competition were less severe for the Ottoman textile producers in the second half of the nineteenth century: After the 1870s, industrialized countries of Europe shifted from producing consumer goods to capital goods, Britain lifted the ban on the export of textile machinery, the world economic depression between 1873 and 1896 raised the Ottoman producers’ capacity to compete, and lastly, the price of exported agricultural goods increased after 1896, which led to the accumulation of domestic capital and an increase in the domestic demand for textile goods (Quataert 1993a).

The increasing control of merchants over the process of production is the key to understand the transformation of the Ottoman manufacturing sector in the nineteenth century.

As former organizations of the manufacturing sector failed to deal with the European competition, foreign and local merchants in the empire gained more and more control over the organization of production in both rural and urban areas. Rural areas were especially convenient for merchants' capital accumulation because they were outside of guild control and manufacturing activities were mostly based on cheap female and child labor. In these areas, merchants assumed the leading role in the adaptation of new technologies and materials which was a necessary condition of successful competition with the European producers (Quataert 2004a). In the textile sector, for example, the use of machine-spun yarns and synthetic dyestuffs enabled local producers to compete with foreign goods by considerably reducing production costs and saving labor time (Quataert 1993a). In many locales within the empire, merchants established broad production networks by acting as mediators between suppliers of raw materials and home-based producers. In most cases, they provided raw materials to producers, paid a certain sum per finished piece and sold manufactured goods to distant markets. This was a system used widely in Europe before (and in some cases, after) its transition to mass-scale factory production, known as the "putting-out system" (Leydesdorff 1992).

One of those industries that flourished through the putting-out system in the Ottoman Empire was the "Irish lace" industry, which employed about seven thousand women in and around the capital city before the World War I (Quataert 2004a). Thousands of women and young girls were also employed in umbrella making, shoe making and readymade clothing industries in urban centers. The first industrial survey of the Ottoman Empire reports that about six thousand workers in Istanbul who were employed in the putting-out jobs went on strike right before the outbreak of the World War I (Ökçün 1997). The same survey also reports that about three thousand shoe workers in Istanbul alone were supplying goods to big stores (Ökçün 1997). In Damascus, the re-organization of the textile sector along capitalist

lines in the nineteenth century had increased the total production to a large extent by 1850s. The number of looms steadily rose from under two thousand in 1848 to three thousand and half in 1859 and close to seven thousand in 1879 (Vatter 1995).

Another branch of manufacturing activity that flourished significantly in the second half of the nineteenth century through merchant supervision was carpet manufacturing in Western Anatolia. The industry was suitable for putting-out type of production and workshop system for three reasons: First, it was spread out over a wide geographical area, hence could not be taken under guild supervision. Second, carpets were usually woven by young women and children whose labor was considerably cheap in comparison to male weavers (Kurmuş 1982). Third, the European and American demand for oriental carpets had been steadily growing throughout the century, making carpet export a highly profitable business (Quataert 1993a). Taking advantage of all these factors, merchants transformed production in the Western Anatolia's carpet manufacturing sector by gradually increasing their control over it. Consequently, the industry showed a rapid growth especially in the second half of the nineteenth century. The following pages provide a detailed analysis of the Anatolian carpet manufacturing sector between the mid 1850s and the early 1900s as it constitutes a striking example of the process in which former structures and relations in non-guild manufacturing activities in the empire were transformed.

Oriental carpets manufactured in Western Anatolia were already being exported to Europe in big quantities by the seventeenth century (Quataert 1993a). It was common for both nomadic and sedentary families in rural areas to weave carpets in their remaining time from agricultural activities, mainly for personal use but also for the market. Family members, mostly women, were performing all tasks related to carpet weaving within the single household unit (Quataert 1993b). Starting from the early nineteenth century, carpet exports increased sharply thanks to the boom in Western demand. This led manufacturers to devote a

rising proportion of their time to carpet weaving and to become more dependent on the income that will come from carpet trade (Quataert 1993b). By the 1860s, a number of Muslim merchants had already begun to place orders to local weavers in traditional carpet manufacturing centers such as Uşak, Gördes, Kula, Demirci and Kütahya. One of these merchants, Hacı Ali Efendi, was supervising a carpet manufacturing network comprised about three thousand houses (Kurmuş 1982).

Starting from the late 1860s, British merchants gradually took control of these networks and expanded them to include many other Anatolian cities and towns. At first, six commercial houses they established in Izmir were coordinating the production process through agents and commissioners dispersed in rural areas. Agents were collecting the wool from villages, distributing it to other villages or factories for spinning and dyeing and then travelling from village to village to deliver dyed yarns to village headmen (*muhtars*) along with specific instructions for the amount, dimensions and patterns of carpets to be purchased by the British merchants (Kurmuş 1982:103). This system proved so profitable that in order to prevent a possible French competition, six British merchants joined and established a company named “Oriental Carpet Manufacturers, Ltd.” in 1908 with an initial capital of two million dollars (Issawi 1980; Kurmuş 1982). Later, the company’s capital was raised to five million dollars and large workshops were established in the Western Anatolia’s manufacturing centers to cut down production costs and to increase productivity (Issawi 1980; Quataert 1993a). By the end of the nineteenth century, the industry in its spinning, dyeing and weaving phases employed about sixty thousand workers (Kurmuş 1982; Quataert 2004a). The Oriental Carpet Manufacturers Company alone employed about twenty five thousand workers in eight thousand looms (Makal 1997: 153). According to two French observers of the time, Anatolia had become the second biggest exporter of oriental carpets after Iran (Kurmuş 1982).

Increasing commercial production and merchant control in the industry radically transformed the nature and organization of carpet manufacturing. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, merchants created tens of thousands of new jobs and altered the forms and patterns of employment of vast numbers of carpet manufacturers in the empire (Quataert 1993b). The increasing use of machine-spun yarns and synthetic dyestuffs, which were usually provided by the merchants, caused thousands of spinners to lose their sources of income but boosted total production amounts in the sector (Kurmuş 1982). In the course of the nineteenth century, carpet weaving as a manufacturing activity became increasingly less dependent on the specific skills and creativity of the producer. Typically, British merchants were providing ready-made geometric schemas of desired patterns to carpet-weavers, who had to weave these patterns with machine-spun and dyed yarns in a mechanical fashion without making any changes or giving any decisions (Quataert 1993a:282). For the merchants, the business was highly profitable: they sold synthetic dyestuffs and machine-spun yarns to carpet weavers at high prices, but paid quite low wages in return. In fact, the leading cause of the sector's remarkable success was extremely low costs of production (Kurmuş 1982).

By the end of the century, home-based production in the carpet manufacturing sector was largely replaced with the division of labor within workshops and factories established in many Western Anatolian towns by the Oriental Carpet Manufacturers, Ltd. These workshops enabled the British merchants to take the process of production under direct control and to generate big profits through more systematic exploitation of female and child labor. For the carpet weavers, being a wage worker in one of the company's workshops meant extremely low wages (for every five thousand knots workers received about four pennies in Uşak, two pennies in Isparta and one and a half pennies in Sivas), "unbearable" working conditions and

a complete loss of control over the process of production (Kurmuş 1982; Quataert 1993a; Eldem 1994).

As demonstrated in the case of carpet manufacturing industry in the Western Anatolia, a systematic exploitation of female and child labor accounted for the growth and competitiveness of non-guild manufacturing activities in the empire in the nineteenth century. Low wages in the empire became even more attractive for foreign entrepreneurs as labor costs in the Western European countries raised after the 1870s (Quataert 1993a). However, the process of transformation in the Ottoman manufacturing sector was not mere exploitation of passive natives by Europeans (Quataert 1993b:118). Ottoman workers, who effectively resisted to negative changes in their forms of employment throughout the century, also determined the course and nature of change. In the carpet manufacturing sector, for example, weavers and spinners in Uşak had managed to keep their income higher than other carpet workers in the empire by collectively resisting to mechanization for decades (Quataert 1993b). In fact, the effective resistance of carpet weavers and wool spinners in Uşak to mechanization led the British to establish factories in inner parts of Anatolia where carpet-weaving was not a traditional means of subsistence (Quataert 1993a).

When Oriental Carpet Manufacturers finally established mechanized wool spinning mills in Uşak in 1908, some 1.500 spinners largely composed of women and children mobilized and attacked the mills, carried off stored wool and destroyed the engine rooms. They also marched in the streets and demanded redress of their grievances, causing civilian and military authorities to advise the Istanbul regime to yield to the demonstrators' demands (Quataert 1993b). Strikes and labor militancy was also widespread in other sectors where putting-out type of production led to decline in real wages and loss of employment, such as weavers in Damascus (Ökçün 1997; Vatter 1995).

2.2.3. *The Factory Production*

The third group of activities in the Ottoman manufacturing sector was based on the use of technologies that was imported from Europe after the Industrial Revolution. This type of manufacturing activities was the least common in the empire. Starting from the reign of Selim III, the Ottoman rulers had made a series of attempts to introduce European industrial techniques to the empire in order to reduce the State's dependency on European manufactured goods (Pamuk 2005). During the reigns of Selim III and Mahmud II, several steam powered mills and factories were established in different parts of the empire (Sarç 1940). The majority of these industrial establishments were devoted to the manufacture of goods intended for governmental and military use (Clark 1974:66).

In the years between 1839 and 1876, known as the *Tanzimat Period* in the Ottoman historiography, the Ottoman government started an extensive project for industrial development. This project was greatly inspired by the vigorous industrialization attempt of Muhammed Ali Paşa in Egypt in the 1820s, which “materially strengthened his independent position” against the Ottoman State and the European powers (Clark 1974; Issawi 1980). Between the years of 1841 and 1842, Tanzimat reformers established an “industrial park” in the West of Istanbul, comprising a couple of manufacturing facilities, a technical school and a model farm. This was followed by other major state factories established in İzmit, Bursa, Silivri, Balıkesir, Hereke, Tokat, Samako (Bulgaria) and Baghdad. These factories were producing wool cloth, porcelain, paper, iron pipe, steel rails, cannon, swords and other forging and castings (Clark 1974:67). A crash program was also initiated for the provision of raw materials required by these factories, which culminated in the excavation of iron ore,

limestone and coal from the outskirts of Istanbul by the 1845. A sheep ranch and a mechanized silk reeling factory were also established in Bursa by the mid-nineteenth century (Quataert 2004b, Clark 1974). According to Önsoy (1994) as cited in Makal (1997), a total of 160 factories were established in the empire in this period and the majority of them belonged to the Ottoman State (p.155).

Nearly all the machinery for these facilities was imported from Europe and most of foremen, master craftsmen and skilled workers were brought from abroad. These men supervised some five thousand unskilled workers who were Ottoman subjects (Quataert 2004b). The majority of total workers were males but female workers were predominant in Bursa, Hereke and Feshane operations (Clark 1974). The majority of the Ottoman manufactures produced in these factories was consumed by the military and the state. However, some of them also reached to the civilian market through government stores in Istanbul and Bursa (Sarç 1940). In the formative stages of the project, the management of the entire Istanbul complex along with factories in Hereke and İzmit was handled by one family - the Dadians, or by Ohannes Dadian as the prominent figure. The Dadians were a member of the Gregorian Armenian *millet* and they were most experienced in industrial management among the Ottoman subjects (Clark 1974).

Although the Ottoman government had made a considerable investment to this ambitious state project of industrialization, several foreign observers reported by the mid-1850s that the project did not reach the desired success, or according to some, it turned into a complete disaster (Sarç 1940; Clark 1974). By the late 1840s several factories were idle, some foreign workers were laid off and the Dadians were removed from office. By the mid 1850s, the Ottoman Porte was forced to abandon the greater part of its industrialization program. The major cause of this partial failure was the financial crisis that followed the Crimean War in 1856.

Another very important cause of the failure was the labor scarcity, which reportedly plagued the Ottoman manufacturing sector throughout the century (Quataert 1993a). Rising European imports had displaced thousands of craftsmen and had created a considerable labor source for factories. However, disciplining workers who “strongly disliked” the demands of factory life had been a huge problem as in the US and Europe. According to Clark (1974), foreign supervisors found the Ottoman workers’ efficiency low, “their absenteeism high, their turnover rate appalling and the number of their holidays incredible” (p.74). Some observers reported use of *corvée* labor in factory construction, and others reported that some workers were hobbled in fetters (Clark 1974). Foreign supervisors, whose wages were well above average wages in Europe, were also reluctant to train recruits for their own positions.

Aside from the Ottoman workers’ resistance to factory labor, there were other factors which contributed to the program’s overall inefficiency. Among these, lack of experience in management, a fire in Küçük Çekmece and an earthquake in Bursa are often mentioned (Clark 1974). However, four of the factories remained active until the end of the Ottoman period. These were the cloth factory in Bakırköy (*Bakırköy Bez Fabrikası*), the Izmit wool mill, *Feshane* and the Hereke mill (Sarç 1940; Clark 1974:75).

The establishment of factories gained momentum after the 1870s again, this time with foreign and non-Muslim Ottoman entrepreneurs starting to invest in industry (Issawi 1980). A combination of several factors accounted for the increase in private investments to the manufacturing sector. As stated before, industrialized countries of Europe had shifted from producing consumer goods to capital goods by the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the ban on the export of textile machinery had been lifted. Second, labor costs were steadily increasing in Europe starting from the 1870s. Finally, the increase in the price of agricultural goods towards the end of the century, which constituted the major component of the empire’s exports, made possible accumulation of domestic capital and raised the domestic demand for

textile goods (Quataert 1993a). However, these factors altogether did not suffice to bring about large-scale private industrial investments in the empire, mainly due to the limits of domestic capital. Some scholars argue that the imposition of high taxes by the Ottoman Government on industrial production further obstructed investments in factories (Kırmıř 1982). It should also be noted that the putting-out type of production provided higher profits than factory production to entrepreneurs in many sectors and regions, as in the case of shoe and lace manufacturing in Istanbul. As for the foreign capital, the majority of explanations on the low foreign industrial investments in the empire center on the position that the empire acquired in the world system as a peripheral country (Pamuk 2005). As a matter of fact, the bulk of foreign capital in the empire kept flowing to infrastructural investments such as railroad construction and modernization of port facilities throughout the nineteenth century. These investments facilitated the commerce and enabled the transportation of raw materials to industrialized countries (Pamuk 2005; Eldem 1994).

Although large-scale industrial establishments were few in number in comparison to Western and Central Europe in the nineteenth century, a good number of factories and mills operating in sectors such as carpet weaving and silk reeling were established by private investors (Quataert 1993a). Starting from the 1860s, the Ottoman State renewed its interest in stimulating the local industry and founded a special committee for industrial reform known as the “*İslah-ı Sanayi Komisyonu*” (Eldem 1994). A law issued in 1873 brought tax exemptions for machinery and tools that will be used in factories (Eldem 1994:59). The committee issued its final report in 1889, which recommended the government to improve the local industry by establishing companies that will bring the Ottoman craftsmen together (Ortaylı 1978; Eldem 1994). The committee also reported that new technical schools and industrial exhibitions must be founded in order to encourage the empire’s industrial development. The mainstream scholarship is highly pessimistic as for the outcomes of these attempts, some even dismissing

them as completely useless and comical endeavors of the Ottoman bureaucrats (Ortaylı 1978). However, most of these comments are biased especially since the current academic knowledge about the number and capacity of private factories dispersed in the empire before the World War I is extremely limited. The current data indicates that the number of private factories increased rapidly after the 1870s, operating mainly in textile and food processing sectors (Eldem 1994; Quataert 2004b). In Istanbul and its provinces, numerous tobacco factories operated even before 1877 (Nacar 2010:28).

The transfer of the exercise of governmental power from the Monarch to the members of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) with the 1908 Revolution was a crucial step in the formation of the legal ground for the capitalist transformation of the Ottoman economy. As keen representatives of the interests of big landlords and capital owners, the CUP members in the Parliament changed legislation on property transactions and issued several business friendly laws which further lifted barriers before free enterprise and commerce (Zürcher 2010). The Committee's negative stance against labor protests of 1908 was another strong indicator of its class position (Sülker 1976; Zürcher 2010). In the face of mass labor mobilization in 1908, the members of the CUP in the Ottoman Parliament issued a provisional act known as the "*Tatil-i Eşgal Kanunu*" which obstructed strikes and prohibited trade unions in enterprises operating in public services. The CUP's attitude towards workers along with other sources of opposition got bitter in the years between 1908 and 1914 (Zürcher 2010).

Although some members and supporters had been advocating for protectionist policies in certain publications, a strong motivation for protecting the domestic capital against foreign competition did not exist among the CUP members in the early years of the Revolution (Toprak 1982). The formulations of Cavit Bey, who was appointed Minister of Finance in 1908, essentially aimed to prepare suitable conditions for the foreign investments in the empire while encouraging the development of the entrepreneurial skills of the Ottoman

subjects. The policy of unconditional support to the foreign capital was substantially maintained by the Ottoman Government during the first couple of years of the CUP rule (Makal 1997). Only after 1912, the CUP rule started to devise and implement protectionist policies in favor of the Muslim bourgeois in the empire (Toprak 1982).

The statistical and other data on the number, location and capacity of private factories in the empire before the World War I is fairly limited. The first industrial census in the Ottoman Empire was held in the year of 1915 by the Ministry of Commerce, which was published in 1917 under the title of “The Industrial Census of the Years of 1329 and 1331” (*1329, 1331 Seneleri Sanayi İstatistiki*) (Ökçün 1997). The census also provided data for the year of 1913. Its results were partial and highly misleading for two reasons: first, it was held after the empire had lost a big part of its lands in Europe, which meant that it had to exclude the leading manufacturing centers in the Balkans (Quataert 2004b). Second, it comprised only large factories in Istanbul and in the six manufacturing centers of Western Anatolia.

According to the partial results of the census, there were a total number of 28 large factories in the Western Anatolia in the year of 1915 with a total number of 14,060 workers (Ökçün 1997). The twenty seven percent of the reported establishments operated in the food processing sector, another twenty seven percent in the textile sector and a nineteen percent in the paper manufacturing sector. Only two percent of these establishments were owned by the State (Ökçün 1997). The ownership of private factories was dominated by local minorities, mostly Greeks and Armenians (Owen 1993). Many of the factories processed locally produced primary products for the domestic market. As stated by Owen (1993):

In the absence of any real protection from a low external tariff (eight percent until 1907, eleven percent thereafter), it was necessarily concentrated on those products where the raw materials needed were relatively cheap and where the foreign competition either was not very strong or where there was some indirect protection to be derived from the high cost of transporting imported foreign products (p. 211).

Although its results were partial and unreliable, it is possible to concur from the survey of 1915 that mechanized production in the form of large-scale factories was not widespread in the empire in the beginning of the twentieth century. However, in those sectors and regions where they were the main source of employment, factories transformed the relations of production and altered the lifestyles of thousands of working people and their families.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the general effects of the Ottoman Empire's integration into the world economy in the nineteenth century on the lives and patterns of employment of the Ottoman manufacturers. It demonstrated that the Ottoman economy's capitalist integration led to the collapse of several manufacturing activities but also created new sectors and new forms of employment, re-organized some manufacturing activities along capitalist lines and resulted in the entrance of thousands of Ottoman manufacturers into the wage labor.

The argument is not that a mass-scale or full proletarianization occurred as the empire integrated into the world economy. Instead, this chapter demonstrated that the capitalist development in the manufacturing sector was gradual, slow and not encompassing. However, in those sectors and regions where the transformation is readily observable, thousands of people had to abandon the way they previously sustained their lives and became wage laborers in factories, workshops, mills and home industries. Female and child labor was an essential part of this transformation, as many flourishing sectors in the empire in the late nineteenth century depended on the maximum exploitation of their labor power for successful competition in foreign and domestic markets.

3. THE CAPITALIST TRANSFORMATION OF BURSA'S SILK INDUSTRY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The interaction between the Ottoman economy and world capitalism in the nineteenth century brought about radical transformations in nearly all branches of the empire's manufacturing sector. The Ottoman silk industry was one of those branches in which the nature of the capitalist transformation was most distinctly observable. Starting from the early nineteenth century, the silk industry in the empire was subject to radical changes in terms of the organization of production, the use of technologies, the composition of labor and the social relations of production. This chapter examines the capitalist transformation of the silk industry in Bursa, one of the empire's biggest silk production centers since the sixteenth century.

The main argument is that the establishment of an increasing number of silk factories (steam filatures) after the 1840s transformed the industry in the city by replacing its focus on the weaving of luxury silk fabrics for the direct consumption of wealthy classes with the manufacturing of silk thread for the European silk weaving facilities. By the first decade of the twentieth century, the silk industry in the city had been transformed not only in terms of the quality and purpose of the products, but also in terms of the way the production was organized. The people who owned the means of production as well as the ethnic and gender composition of the workforce had also changed.

The filatures in the city, owned mostly by non-Muslim Ottoman subjects, introduced new silk spinning technologies imported from Europe and centralized the production of raw silk to a large extent. In a constant effort to decrease the costs, the owners hired young female workers from Greek and Armenian neighborhoods. These women's economic activities were regarded as supplemental to the family income; therefore their labor power was cheaper than

adult male workers in the industry. They were also assumed to be more submissive to the male authority in the shop floor because of their status in the gender hierarchy.

The first section of this chapter provides an analysis of structural transformations in Bursa's silk industry in the nineteenth century which culminated in the establishment and spread of steam filatures. The second section provides a description of the process in which an extended labor pool composed of young local women was formed for the filatures in the city. The arguments presented in both of these sections are mainly based on secondary sources. Due to the scarcity of the scholarly research in the field, the conclusions reached are tentative.

3.1.The Silk Industry of Bursa in the Nineteenth Century

The silk trade had been an important part of the Ottoman economy and a major source of tax revenues for the Ottoman State for centuries. Throughout the Ottoman period, Bursa and Aleppo had been the leading centers of silk trade and manufacturing (Quataert 1993a)⁷. The prosperity of Bursa, or Prussia as called by the Byzantines before it was captured by the Ottomans in 1326, rested upon its silk manufacture and trade for centuries. Bursa is situated close to Istanbul and within easy reach of sea transport, about forty two kilometers from the Marmara Sea. For centuries, it served as the shortest export channel of Iranian and other Eastern silk to Europe (İnalcık 1969; Akkuş 2008; van Os 1997). An important portion of the raw silk coming from Iran was woven in Bursa's looms, which amounted to one thousand in the fifteenth century, and the silk was sold in the Ottoman market or was traded with European countries by the agency of merchants (İnalcık 1969; Çizakça 1980:147)⁸. As a secure and accessible silk trade center, Bursa's population exceeded even that of Istanbul in the fifteenth century (Çizakça 1980:142).

⁷ Lebanon, Damascus, Salonika, İzmir, Edirne, Erzincan, Tokat and Diyarbakır were among other important silk production locales in empire (Quataert 1993a; Quataert 2004a:5).

⁸Dalsar (1960:156,190) states that among the customers of Bursa's *kadifes* in the sixteenth century were the kings of Poland and Iran.

The silk trade was a major source of capital accumulation for notables, important government officials and merchants in the empire. According to Çizakça (1980:143), slaves constituted a big proportion of the labor force in the industry which was organized as a system of guilds. Çizakça (1980:143) states that “a unique system of vertical mobility among the slaves existed,” meaning slaves were granted their freedom providing that they wove a certain quantity of cloth. In addition to guild organizations, the Ottoman State exerted control over the quality of silk manufacturing in Bursa and elsewhere in the empire. Aside from imposing strict regulations on silk weavers and dyers, the state directly participated in and supervised silk cloth production through workshops it established in Istanbul known as *Kârhane-i Hassa* or *Kârhane-i Amire* (Dalsar 1960:155). Furthermore, the Ottoman Government constituted a source of demand for the silk industry by purchasing large quantities of silk from local producers and storing it to be sold in times of need. Also, the government accepted silk cloth as a means of payment, like gold, from certain taxpayers (Çizakça 1980:145).

Until the mid-sixteenth century, manufacturers within the empire depended on foreign sources, mainly Iran, for the provision of raw silk. Çizakça (1980:143) states that the production of raw silk within the Ottoman Empire gained momentum following the Ottoman-Persian wars and the Ottoman blockade on Persian trade in the sixteenth century. Another factor which stimulated the growth of the domestic raw silk production was the world-wide inflation which occurred after the price revolution in Western Europe. According to Çizakça (1980:148), different rates of increase in the prices of raw silk and silk cloth had changed the character of the empire’s silk industry in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Primarily due to the growing demand for raw material coming from the expanding European textile industries, the rate of increase in raw silk prices had been a lot higher than the rate of increase in silk cloth prices. This decreased profits in silk cloth manufacturing and brought about an increasing specialization in the raw silk production for the Ottoman silk industry (Çizakça

1980:149). Taking advantage of the high prices and the suitable climate for sericulture, many peasant families in Bursa started to grow cocoons and spin silk thread at home as a means of supporting their agricultural income (Dalsar 1960). However, the prices did not follow a steady trend during the period and the raw silk production did not replace Bursa's famous silk cloth manufacturing until the nineteenth century.

The total transformation of Bursa's silk industry occurred in the nineteenth century, as its integration into the European centered world market gained momentum. Similar to many other silk centers of the empire, the rising European demand for raw silk resulted in an unprecedented growth in Bursa's raw silk production in this period. The growth was accompanied with fundamental changes in the organization of production in the industry and in the lives of thousands of silk workers.

The transformation of Bursa's silk industry in the nineteenth century demonstrates clear parallels with the transformation of the silk industry in Mount Lebanon between 1843 and 1914 as demonstrated by Akram Fouad Khater's study (Khater 1996). The main features of the Mount Lebanon case is briefly described in the following paragraphs to make certain patterns in the process visible.

Raising silkworms and growing cocoons to support the income gained from agricultural activities was a well-established peasant activity in Mount Lebanon (Khater 1996). During the course of the nineteenth century, the features of sericulture in the region changed dramatically due to the increasing weaving of silk textiles in France and to the inadequacy of European sericulture to satisfy the demand of French factories. Especially in the second half of the nineteenth century, a growing number of French merchants and industrialists took an interest in buying raw silk from the Lebanese peasants. The regular and inexpensive steamboat service between Beirut and Marseilles and the diminution of tariffs

and customs on exported silk thread were among other factors that made the Lebanese silk attractive to French industrialists (Khater 1996:327).

In the mid-nineteenth century, French mercantile houses spread out throughout the mountain and advanced money to the peasants for their purchase of silkworms to encourage the raw silk production in the region (Khater 1996:328). For the peasants, producing increased amounts of raw silk with the French capital made economic sense in the beginning because the prices increased continuously between 1840 and the 1870s. At the end of each season, though, the majority of peasants ended up being indebted to the French merchants mainly because the actual yield of silk worms was lower in value than the money they borrowed (Khater 1996:328). Furthermore, the silk production took away the time and land necessary for raising subsistence crops. Consequently, the peasants were forced to borrow money from the merchants even for their families' daily subsistence. As the increasing debt tied the Lebanese peasantry to the French capital, sericulture went from being a supplemental activity to an essential economic activity upon which peasant families in the region depended for their survival (Khater 1996:327).

The increasing French demand for raw silk not only promoted sericulture, but also encouraged the industrialization of silk spinning in Mount Lebanon. Before the 1840s, itinerant spinners carried out most of the silk spinning in the region through hand-powered spinning wheels (Khater 1996:327). However, French silk factories required stronger and more even silk threads than could be spun with these wheels. This led French industrialists to establish silk factories in Mount Lebanon's mountain villages, which provided a regular supply of cocoons and cheap, female seasonal labor. The first mechanized silk factory in Mount Lebanon was established in 1843 by a French industrialist named Antoine-Fortuné Portalis (Khater 1996:326). By 1862, aside from those owned by Europeans, there were thirty three Lebanese-owned mechanized silk factories in the region. By 1893, the number had

increased to one hundred and forty-nine (Khater 1996:327). According to Owen (1984), there were nearly two hundred silk spinning factories in Mount Lebanon in 1900, employing some fourteen thousand workers. The greater part of the silk was exported to France and price of the cocoons was controlled from Marseilles and Lyon (Khater 1996; Owen 1984).

The transformation of the silk industry in Bursa as one of the leading silk weaving and trade centers of the empire happened slightly earlier than in Mount Lebanon. A combination of several factors prepared the ground for the change of Bursa's silk industry in the nineteenth century. The foremost factor, as in case of Mount Lebanon, was the unprecedented growth in European demand for raw silk.

In the course of the nineteenth century, the weaving of silk textiles increased in Europe due to growing affluence and the rising consumption of textiles per head. As indicated above, the spread and rapid mechanization of silk weaving in France, Britain, Italy and Switzerland resulted in a growing demand for a regular supply of raw silk in the nineteenth century (Dalsar 1960). In order to satisfy the demand from silk weaving factories in Lyon and elsewhere in Europe, the merchants sought extra supplies of raw silk in the Near East. Thanks to its proximity to Europe and its long experience in raw silk production, Bursa was an ideal source of raw silk (Çizakça 1980). In order to increase the raw silk production in the region, the European merchants encouraged peasants to plant more mulberry trees and to increase the volume of eggs sent into incubation by providing considerable amounts of cash advances prior or after the yield (Quataert 1993b; Quataert 1993a:201)⁹. The sale of huge amounts of raw silk to these merchants endangered silk weaving in many locales of the empire which could only be maintained with a regular supply of raw silk from Bursa. Between the 1820s and 1839, the Ottoman Sultans issued several decrees to protect the Ottoman silk weaving

⁹ Mulberry trees are essential ingredients for sericulture because the silkworms feed exclusively on their leaves. There is little other use for mulberry in agriculture except from feeding silkworms (Khater 1996:326).

industry from the shortage of raw material. In some of these decrees, the Sultans prohibited foreigners from giving cash advances to silk raisers and purchasing raw silk from the Bursa area before the demands of silk weavers in Bursa and in Istanbul were met (Quataert 1993b:201). However, these decrees did not stop the flow of raw silk to the European sources. The abolishment of guild privileges in the early nineteenth century combined with the changing fashions in clothing¹⁰ further challenged Bursa's silk cloth manufacturers. Consequently, the silk weavers of the empire lost their place in the foreign markets (Quataert 1993a:200)¹¹.

The growth of sericulture in Bursa in the 1830s and 1840s was due to the increasing global demand for silkworm eggs and cocoons¹². However, as stated by Quataert (1993b), the significant growth in Bursa's sericulture in the 1850s was largely due to the misfortunes of French silk raisers. Three diseases (pebrine, flacherie and muscardine) which appeared in the 1850s almost destroyed the whole sericulture in the French silk raising districts. These diseases spread to Italy in 1853 and heavily damaged the European raw silk production. Even before the diseases, the European merchants bought raw silk from the Middle and Near East to satisfy the sudden hunger of mechanized looms in Lyon and elsewhere. When the diseases dried out most of the valuable egg and cocoon supplies in Europe, the prices of these raw materials rose to unprecedented heights (Quataert 1993b:99). From then on, the foreign and uninfected raw silk sources including Bursa gained greater importance.

¹⁰ With the flow of inexpensive machine-spun cotton thread to the European market in the nineteenth century, cotton fabric became fashionable in women's and men's clothes, decreasing the demand for the oriental silk fabric woven on hand looms (Quataert 1993a).

¹¹ However, silk cotton manufacturing survived in many locales of the empire. The weavers continued production for the domestic market to end of the Ottoman period through several adaptation strategies, such as using machine-spun cotton thread together with silk thread in the weaving of half-silk half-cotton fabrics (Quataert 1993a).

¹² According to a newspaper of the period (*Ceride-i Havadis*), silk raising had become such a profitable business in the 1840s that a number of countries including the United States had started to import silkworm seeds from the Ottoman Empire to start sericulture (*Ceride-i Havadis* 1841 as cited in Dalsar 1960:402-3).

The increasing number of steam-powered factories in the city, which is examined in more detail in the following pages, was also adding to the demand for local cocoons¹³. The prices were so high in the mid-nineteenth century that the peasants completely abandoned silk spinning at home. A report written by the British vice-consul at Bursa in 1872 indicates that silk spinning in hand-powered mills had been completely abandoned by the local population after the late 1850s (Türkcan 1985:39). Instead, the peasant families devoted all their resources and time to raising silkworm eggs and growing cocoons, which generated an equal amount of income to silk spinning with less labor time (Quataert 1993a:218).

The mechanization of silk weaving in Europe not only brought about a boost in the local cocoon production, but it also resulted in the mechanization of silk spinning. In order to meet the technological requirements of the mechanized looms in Europe, the silk thread produced in the region had to be of standard thickness and uniformity (Çizakça 1980:150). This required the use of reeling machines instead of traditional hand looms which had previously served to spin silk thread at home. Therefore, several European merchants and entrepreneurs, especially some experienced silk reeling mill operators from France who migrated to Bursa in the 1840s, encouraged the mechanization of silk spinning in Bursa (Quataert 1993a:210). They introduced new silk reeling technologies into the city and paid much higher prices for the silk thread spun in mechanized reels than those spun by traditional methods. As a result, in the years following the 1830s, the use of newer technology reels spread quickly in Bursa. Considering that the use of new technologies in silk weaving started only in 1908 (Quataert 1993a), which is more than half a century later than the use of new technologies in silk spinning, the fundamental transformation that the region's silk industry underwent clearly manifests itself. As the industry further integrated into the European market, the production of silk thread for the European silk weaving facilities largely replaced

¹³ In fact, a report written by the British vice-consul at Bursa in 1872 states that the ninety percent of local cocoons was processed in silk reeling factories before they were exported (Türkcan 1985:39).

the weaving of luxury silk cloth for the Imperial Palace and for the European and Eastern royal families.

The agency of European merchants who assumed the role of bringing together the supply of labor force in the city and the foreign demand for raw silk was an important element of the transformation of the silk industry in Bursa. Before examining the changing conditions of labor in Bursa's silk industry, a historical analysis of the development of silk-reeling workshops is necessary. In 1838, only ten years after the invention of steam filatures¹⁴ in Lyon, the first hydraulic silk reeling factory¹⁵ was established in Bursa by a French family known as Glaizals (Erder 1978:114). Glaizals and several other French silk manufacturing families had migrated to Bursa following the strike wave in Lyon between 1831 and 1834 (Quataert 1993a:212). The motive behind the establishment of this factory was to have direct control over the process of production and to make local spinners produce good quality and standard silk threads that could be woven in European factories (Dalsar 1960; Quataert 1993). However, the factory went bankrupt shortly after it was established. Later, a Swedish merchant and an entrepreneur working in the Austria Consulate named Falkeisen purchased the factory from Glaizals. These two entrepreneurs then partnered with a local Ottoman Armenian, Taşçıyan Ohannes, to operate the factory (Kaplanoğlu 2006:31)¹⁶.

The first steam-powered factory in Bursa was established by Falkeisen and his partners in June 1845 (Quataert 1993a:212). They reportedly brought an experienced silk man named Goudard from France to train unskilled factory workers. By the next year, the factory's production capacity had increased three fold and the partners had started to export raw silk to Lyon (Kaplanoğlu 2006:62). In 1846, an Italian entrepreneur named Gesailli established the

¹⁴ Mechanized silk reeling employing steam power.

¹⁵ Different sources give different dates and names regarding the first mechanized silk reeling factory established in Bursa (see Ökçün 1997:149). However, it is commonly accepted that the first factory was established around the 1830s by French entrepreneurs.

¹⁶ The period under which the factory operated under the management of Falkeisen and his partners is unknown.

second steam-powered silk factory in the city. Also, Italian merchants had been establishing small sized hydraulic mills in almost every village, thanks to the ample supply of inclined water channels and cheap seasonal female labor (Erder 1978: 177; Quataert 1993a:213). In the beginning of the 1850s, there were one thousand and seven hundred workers employed in steam-powered silk factories in Bursa (Erder 1978:115). In the mid 1850s, there were fifteen silk factories in the city with a total estimate number of three thousand and eight hundred silk workers (Erder 1978:115; Quataert 1993a:214). By that time the quality of Bursa's silk threads had gained international recognition and was sold at eight to ten percent cheaper prices than Italian silk threads of the upper most quality (Dalsar 1960; Quataert 1993a:212).

A big earthquake in 1855 destroyed many factories in Bursa, but it did not stop the growth of the industry. The British vice-consul in Bursa reports that the number of silk factories in the city had risen to ninety by 1862 and about ten percent of the city's population had been working at industrial establishments by the late 1860s (Türkcan 1985:36)¹⁷. Considering that the foremost and most widespread industrial establishments existing in the city were the silk-reeling factories in the 1860s, it is clear that a considerable portion of the population had become factory workers by that year.

By the mid-nineteenth century, mechanized silk thread manufacturing had been expanding not only in Bursa, but also in other silk production centers of the empire. In Salonika, for example, there were about thirty silk reeling factories employing two thousand workers in 1847 (Quataert 1993a:215). As stated in a contemporary newspaper article, there were twelve factories operating in Adapazarı in 1910, an important and densely populated city in the Marmara region¹⁸. The Ottoman government, taking notice of the growing potential of

¹⁷ The observations of this British vice-consul on the industry in Bursa were reflected in his special report dated November 24, 1869. The report was prepared as a response to the notice sent by the British Foreign Ministry on April 30, 1869. A translation of the report was published by Ergun Türkcan in *Tarih ve Toplum*, December 1985.

¹⁸ "İpek Amelesi Hakkında", *İştirak*, 09 April 1910 (27 Mart 1326), 7(1):110.

the industry, actively encouraged and participated in the efforts of mechanization (Dalsar 1960). In the year of 1854, for example, the State provided money to silk merchants in Bursa to send apprentices to Paris. These apprentices were supposed to learn and transfer new methods in silk reeling (Quataert 1993a:214). The government also encouraged experienced silk reeling mill operators to teach their methods in Bursa. In 1844, for instance, an experienced silk man came from France and set up a workshop in the Kuşbazlar neighborhood of Bursa, to train local silk spinners in the use of more advanced silk reeling devices (Dalsar 1960:411). In 1852, the Ottoman government established its own silk reeling factory (*Harir Fabrika-i Hümayunu*) in Muradiye, Bursa (Dalsar 1960). The factory was among the biggest silk reeling factories in the Bursa region and produced good quality silk thread for a weaving facility in Hereke, also owned by the State (Erder 1978). Lastly, government-led efforts to improve the transportation and communication networks of the city and its surroundings promoted the silk industry. According to Sandison¹⁹, who was the British Consulate in Bursa in 1864, the governor of Bursa (Ahmet Vefik Efendi) founded a private steamboat company with the partnership of merchants from Bursa and Istanbul (Türkcan 1985:36). The company's regular steamboat service, which was faster, cheaper and more secure than the previous state-owned steamboat line, lowered transportation costs and promoted the silk trade. Consequently, the demand for the region's raw silk increased.

By the time the pebrine disease finally spread to Bursa in the 1860s, the raw silk production had reached record amounts (Erder 1978). Similar to what happened in the French and Italian silk raising districts, the disease decreased the region's cocoon supply sharply. According to Eldem (1994:69), many producers in the Bursa area who suffered from the

¹⁹ The translation of Sandison's report about the governor of Bursa (Ahmet Vefik Efendi), dated June 28, 1864, was also published by Ergun Türkcan in *Tarih ve Toplum*, December 1985.

disease started to turn their mulberry orchards into fruit orchards.²⁰ The silk thread production also fell considerably from six hundred tons before the disease to some one hundred and ninety tons (Eldem 1994:69). In 1863, some silk reeling factories in the region were closed down (Quataert 1993a:222).

Factory owners and entrepreneurs took several measures to minimize the negative effects of low cocoon supply on their production. In 1864, for example, they started to import uninfected silkworm eggs from Japan to keep the factories operating. After the 1870s, some merchants and factory owners went to France to learn the French scientist Pasteur's technique to eliminate the disease (Dalsar 1960). However, Bursa's sericulture did not experience a quick recovery. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the entrance of big quantities of Japan and Chinese raw silk to the European market had considerably dropped the prices. Between 1869 and 1892, the global prices of raw silk went down continuously and prevented Bursa's producers from applying effective methods in improving the sericulture and silk thread manufacturing in the region (Quataert 1993a:225).

In the 1880s, however, a new period for the silk industry in the city started with the entrance of the Ottoman Public Debt Administration into the picture. The Ottoman Public Debt Administration (PDA) was formed in 1881 by European bondholders of the huge Ottoman debt, following the collapse of the Ottoman finance in 1875 (Zürcher 2010). In order to repay its debts, the Ottoman government ceded many of its important revenues to this European consortium including the silk tithes from Bursa province and other regions. In 1887, Hermann Scholer, a silk merchant and German Vice Consul in Bursa since 1881, proposed to increasing the revenue gained from silk tithes by reviving the industry through effective and widespread adaptation of Pasteur's technique (Quataert 1993b:103). The PDA took his

²⁰ More detailed information on the situation of Bursa's sericulture in this period can be obtained from the October 1863 issue of *Journal de Constantinople*.

proposal seriously and offered Kevork Torkomyan, an Ottoman Armenian who studied agronomy in France with governmental funds, the directorship of the program of reviving the industry (Dalsar 1960:426). In 1888, the Debt Administration established the Silkraising Institute (*Harir Dariüta'limi*) in Bursa upon the advice of Scholer and Torkomyan. In the following three decades, about two thousand people, most of whom were Greek and Armenian Ottomans were trained in this institution (Dalsar 1960:429; Quataert 1993b). The PDA began sponsoring silk raising competitions at Bursa and in the nearby silk towns of Bilecik and İzmit for the purpose of upgrading production standards in 1891. In the same year, it instigated the imposition of import duties for raw silk entering the Ottoman Empire to protect local silk raisers (Quataert 1993b:103).

The Ottoman government also took part in efforts to promote the raw silk production in this period. For example, it granted a three year tithe exemption for all newly established mulberry plantations in Bursa province and also granted exemption to Bursa silkworm raisers from the income tax (*temettü vergisi*) (Quataert 1993b). Also, the government and the PDA distributed some sixty million saplings to cultivators near Bursa and in other parts of the empire without charge (Quataert 1993b:104).

These measures, combined with the global demand for raw silk which doubled between 1880 and 1900, revitalized the raw silk production in the Bursa province. From the 1880s to the first decade of the twentieth century, fresh cocoon production nearly tripled in the region (Quataert 1993b:100). Also, the incubation of imported eggs fell considerably as the amount of locally-produced silkworm eggs sent into incubation increased. After 1900, silk raisers in Bursa annually exported over eleven tons of silkworm eggs, mainly to Persia and Russia (Quataert 1993b). The prices of local cocoon were so high that local factory owners

sent a petition to the Ottoman government and demanded the elimination of the eight percent import tax to be able to import cocoons at low prices²¹.

According to the records of the Debt Administration, Bursa was providing nearly half of the raw silk that was produced in the empire in the years before World War I (Eldem 1994:73). A government survey dated 1915 indicates that the bulk of the cocoon produced in the region was reeled into raw silk prior to shipment out of the country (Ökçün 1997:153). At least eighty percent of Bursa's total raw silk production was exported to France, which was the second largest consumer of raw silk after the United States (Quataert 1993b:101).

However, as Quataert (1993b) points out, the market demand alone does not account fully for the growth of the industry, considering that not all silk raising districts experienced growth and prosperity after the 1880s despite the favorable market conditions. For example, a long-time silk supplier, Persia, could not manage to fully recover after the onslaught of the pebrine disease in the 1850s. Even in the 1890s, its production levels were only half of the 1850 levels (Quataert 1993b:102). In the case of Bursa, the PDA's interference played a considerable part in the growth of the silk industry after the 1880s. Another major drive behind the growth could be the mass migrations from the Balkan States and the Caucasus to Western Anatolia which followed the Russian - Turkish War in 1877-78, also known as the '93 War' ('93 *Harbi*) (Kaplanoğlu 2006:97)²². As stated by Mehmet Ziya²³, the immigrants who settled in Bursa after the '93 War had a considerable impact on the growth of the industry (Mehmet Ziya 2010). This impact was most likely related to the rapid increase in the number of skilled and unemployed workers in the city after the late 1870s.

²¹ Hüdavendigar, April 20, 1905 as cited in Kaplanoğlu 2006:98.

²² According to Kaplanoğlu (2006), eighteen new villages and fifteen new neighborhood units were established in Bursa following the migration wave of the 1880s.

²³ Mehmet Ziya was the principal of a senior high school in Bursa (*Bursa Idadisi*) in 1892. He collected his observations on the city in a memoir named "*Bursa'dan Konya'ya Seyahat*" (The Travel from Bursa to Konya). The memoir was first published in 1912 by *Vatan Matbaası* in Istanbul.

It is also worthy to note that the effects of the low supply of local cocoons between 1860s and 1880 were not completely devastating for silk reeling factories in Bursa. Although the crisis of cocoon production had an overall negative impact on the silk reeling industry, the production did not fall sharply thanks to the continuing global demand for raw silk. Many local factory owners were able to continue production by importing eggs from Japan and other Eastern countries (Quataert 1993b:103). According to the yearbooks, there were still fifty factories of all sizes in the Bursa province in 1878, employing some four thousand and five hundred workers (Dalsar 1960:410).

The reeling industry in the city responded quickly to the boost in Bursa's local egg and cocoon production after the 1880s. Between 1890 and 1910, the average annual raw silk production in the Bursa area steadily rose from one hundred and fifty four tons to six hundred seventy seven tons (Quataert 1993a:225). The number of steam filatures also increased by fifty percent in the same period. Quataert (1993b) states that in the beginning of the twentieth century, there were one hundred and sixty five steam and non-steam mills in the Bursa province which utilized about nine thousand two hundred basins²⁴. These mills employed some nineteen thousand workers in the Bursa province and in the İzmit district. Hasan Taib Efendi²⁵ states that there were forty one steam filatures in the city alone in 1905, employing 3,150 workers (Hasan Taib 2007:42). The 1915 survey also records forty one silk reeling establishments in Bursa employing 3,648 workers (Eldem 1994:73). The survey states that another one hundred twenty seven mills which did not utilize motive power should be added to the total number of silk reeling establishments in the city (Ökçün 1997:149)²⁶. Quataert

²⁴ Basins are "containers of heated water into which the cocoons were submerged to facilitate reeling onto wheels" (Quataert 1993b:108).

²⁵ Hasan Taib Efendi was a former Islamic judge (*qadi*), who spent his retirement years in Bursa and collected his observations on the city in a memoir named "Hatıra ya da Bursa'nın Aynası". The memoir was first published in 1905 by the Bursa Province Prints (*Hüdavendigâr Vilayet Matbaası*).

²⁶ The survey included those establishments which employed at least ten workers and utilized motive power, or employed at least twenty workers without the motive power (Ökçün 1997:7). It should also be noted that the

(1993b:109) argues that in the years preceding World War I, steam-powered silk reeling factories in the city alone provided employment for about six percent of Bursa's population.

According to an article published under the initials "D.K" in the journal *Sabah* on August 1910, the foreign entrepreneurs had gradually taken possession of silk factories in town and that some of them gained considerable wealth from raw silk manufacturing²⁷. However, a petition sent from the silk workers to the Ministry of Commerce and Public Works in 1909 indicates that non-Muslim Ottoman subjects dominated the ownership of silk reeling factories in the city²⁸. According to the 1915 survey, only two of the silk reeling factories in the city were owned by the State and the rest were owned by individuals or families (Ökçün 1997:150). The majority of these individuals and families were either Greek or Armenian Ottomans. No more than ten owners had Turkish names. The French owned six factories²⁹.

Considering that the Silk Raising Institute beneficiaries were also mostly non-Muslims, the non-Muslim dominance in the ownership of silk reeling mills appears to be extended over the entire silk industry in the city (Quataert 1993b). As suggested by Quataert (1993b), the Muslim merchants who actively participated in the silk trade before the nineteenth century may have found it difficult or distasteful to participate in an increasingly European economic environment or they may have been discouraged from doing so by the European entrepreneurs themselves who favored the Christian elements of the population for

figures of 1915 survey did not include silk reeling establishments in Bursa's surrounding towns such as Mudanya, Gemlik, İnegöl, Pazarköy, Bilecik and Küplü.

²⁷ *Sabah*, August 25, 1910, 7518:1.

²⁸ B.O.A. B.E.O. 272209/3630, "17 Şaban 1327" (3 September 1909). A detailed table containing the names of the factory owners is provided in the next chapter.

²⁹ For a list of names of the owners of steam reeling factories in Bursa in 1913 and 1915, see Ökçün 1997:148-149.

a variety of reasons³⁰. Whatever the reason was, the dominance of non-Muslim entrepreneurs played a major role on the ethnic formation of the industry's labor force, which is discussed in more detail in the following pages.

For the owners of silk reeling factories, the industry was highly unreliable despite the boost in local cocoon production after the 1880s and the general increase in global prices of raw silk in 1892 (Kaplanoğlu 2006). The prices were steeply fluctuating throughout the entire period: an increase in prices was always followed by a sharp decrease, which then was followed by another sharp increase (Quataert 1993a:226). In order to lower production costs and minimize risk, factory owners took several measures such as using newer technologies. However, the majority of the strategies they applied involved the formation and sustainment of a skilled, cheap and disciplined labor force in the city (Quataert 1993a).

In sum, the nineteenth century witnessed the development and the spread of the capitalist mode of production in Bursa's silk industry through the establishment of an increasing number of steam filatures after the 1840s. In the process, the focus of the industry shifted from the weaving of luxury silk fabrics at homes or at small workshops to the manufacturing of silk thread in factories for the European silk weaving facilities. The filatures introduced new silk spinning technologies imported from Europe and centralized the production of raw silk in the region to a large extent.

The establishment of filatures transformed the composition of labor and the social relations of production in the industry. The owners of steam filatures took part in the formation of a class of factory workers in Bursa, composed mainly of women under eighteen years old. The following section provides an analysis of the slow and painful process of labor force formation in the city in the second half of the nineteenth century.

³⁰ However, the Non-Muslim in the industry dominance did not mean that the Muslim entrepreneurs completely relinquished silk raising and trade. The significant portion of the steam and non-steam mills in the nineteenth century were owned and operated by Turkish entrepreneurs (Quataert 1993b:110).

3.2.The Formation of a Class of Factory Workers in Bursa

“Dear Lady, remove your gloves and put your hands into the water. Then you’ll see if it is hot or not” (Fatma Fahrünnisa 2010:43).

This sentence belongs to a woman who worked at one of the silk reeling mills of Bursa in the late nineteenth century. The worker addressed an upper-class Muslim woman from Istanbul, Fatma Fahrünnisa Hanım, who visited the mill on 26 March 1896 during her stay in Bursa. In the course of her visit, Fatma Fahrünnisa Hanım carefully examined the work performed by the factory workers and noted her observations³¹. When one of the workers noticed the special attention Fahrünnisa Hanım paid to several containers of water which the workers frequently put their hands into, she invited her to experience the temperature inside the container, implying that the water was extremely hot. Fatma Fahrünnisa Hanım replied, “I know, I can tell how hot the water is just by looking at the poor women’s hands.” Then she noted that “the workers’ hands had wrinkled and acquired a blue color from the water’s temperature, under which you could see their red veins” (Fatma Fahrünnisa 2010:43).

The extraction of raw silk from the cocoons is the most delicate part of the silk manufacturing process (Erder 1978:113). After the larvae complete the process of spinning silk thread around them and turn into brown pupas inside the cocoons, the cocoons are collected and sorted according to size and quality. In order to prevent the pupas from ripping the silk fiber while coming out of the cocoons, the cocoons are “cooked” in boiling water or through steam, a process that kills the pupas inside the cocoons. Then silk fibers, about one to two thousand meters long in each cocoon, degummed from the cocoons. In the nineteenth

³¹ The travel journal of *Fatma Fahrünnisa Hanım* was first published by *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* (The Journal for Women) in the form of series starting from 24 June 1896. The series was titled as “*Hüdavendigâr Vilayetinde Kısmen Bir Cevelan*” (A Partial Journey in the Province of Hüdavendigâr). The Municipality of Bursa re-published the journal in 2010, under the title of “*1896 Baharında Bursa*” (Bursa in the Spring of 1896) with Nezaket Özdemir’s adaptation to the contemporary Turkish. See (Fatma Fahrünnisa. 2010. *1896 Baharında Bursa*. Bursa: Bursa Kültür A.Ş.)

century steam filatures, silk workers used their bare hands to extract the silk fibers from the cocoons while the cocoons were still in the containers of hot water. After they unraveled the fibers from the cocoons, the workers manually fed them into the spinning wheels above the containers (Fatma Fahrünnisa 2010:43). In order to endure the temperature of the water, the women had to put their hands into containers of cold water from time to time, placed next to the cocoon containers (Mağmumi 2008:46). According to an instruction manual written by Hoca Hagop in 1867 on silk manufacturing, the workers could waste great amounts of silk fiber and even destroy the whole product if they were not extremely careful and “fair” during this delicate process³². Apparently, feeding the fiber into the spinning wheel in a continuous manner without breaking the fiber off required a certain degree of experience, skill and caution (Dalsar 1960:409).



Figure 1. Inside of a silk-reeling factory in Bursa in the late nineteenth century.

Photograph: Unknown. 16 February 1893. Servet-i Fünun, 4(101):1.

As reported by Dr. Şerafettin Mağmumi, an Ottoman physician who visited Bursa in 1894, the number of silk-reeling factories located in the inner city was thirty five in that year

³² Hoca Hagop 1867:115 as cited in Dalsar 1960:409.

(Mağmumi 2008:46). The factories were concentrated near the coasts of two rivers, *Gökdere* and *Cilimboz Deresi* (Erder 1978:117). Erder (1978:116) states that the architecture of the factories resembled the weaving factories that were built by the Dupont Company in the coast of Brandywine, Pennsylvania in the nineteenth century. Each factory was composed of a large workshop, storage for the cocoons, dormitory-like quarters for workers and other extensions (Mağmumi 2008:46; Quataert 1993b:111). The smallest mills in the city contained about ten spinning wheels and employed at least twenty workers in the 1850s. Although some sources indicate that the bigger factories like the *Sarim Manas* and *Harir Fabrika-i Hümayunu* contained about eighty spinning wheels and employed up to three hundred and fifty workers (Erder 1978:115; Türkcan 1985:36), an official document listing the numbers and wages of the workers in *Harir Fabrika-i Hümayunu* shows that the number of the workers employed in that factory by 1875 was fifty six.³³ The big companies including *Sarim Manas* usually operated more than one factory in the city. According to the British vice consul Maling, the factories operated a total of two hundred days in 1872 (Türkcan 1985:39).

According to Mağmumi (2008:46), young women from the poor farmer families composed the majority of workers in the steam filatures. The workers who lived in the town also belonged to the poorest sectors of the urban population (Quataert 1993a:227). In a petition sent from the workers to the Ministry of Commerce and Public Works, the workers stated that the factory owners chose the poorest of all Muslim and non-Muslim women in the region for the factory work and offered them a cash payment of one lira (100 piasters) in advance³⁴. According to Quataert, the workers were mostly single women under eighteen years old and many of them were in their pre-teens (Quataert 1993a). They were transferred to the town from the surrounding villages at the beginning of each season in groups, and were

³³ The Prime Ministry Ottoman Archive (B.O.A). HH. D. 16461. “5 Kanun-i Evvel 1290” (1 January 1875).

³⁴ B.O.A. B.E.O. 272209/3630, “17 Şaban 1327” (3 September 1909). Further detail and discussion about this petition is provided in the next chapter.

lodged in barracks built near the factories until the cocoon processing season ended (Quataert 1993a). The petition mentioned above indicates that many women also traveled from their homes to the factories every day³⁵. As stated before, the majority of the workers were either Greek or Armenian, although some Muslim and very few Jewish women were also employed (Quataert 1993a). The British vice consul Maling (Türkcan 1985:39) claims that official authorities discouraged Muslim women's employment in factories but there is no other source indicating that this was the case. The signatures under the above-mentioned petition sent to the Ministry included Muslim as well as Greek and Armenian names³⁶.

As stated in the Maling's report, the work inside the factory was based on a rigid and hierarchical division of labor (Türkcan 1985:39). The factory owners and managers, who directly supervised the work of engineers, packers and watchmen, were on the top of the hierarchy. In several factories, the owner and the manager was the same person. Engineers, packers and watchmen were followed by the forewomen and the foreman in the hierarchy, who supervised workers reeling, spinning and combing the silk thread. These workers were called reeler (*çıkırıkçı*), spinner (*bükümcü*) and comber (*tarakçı*). Forewomen and the foreman also supervised workers who sorted out and whisked the cocoons inside the containers, called *tasnifçi* and *çırpıcı*. At the bottom of the hierarchy were the apprentices (*çırak*), who were as young as ten years old and received the lowest wage in the factory (Türkcan 1985:39).

The workforce in Bursa's silk-reeling factories emerged slowly and painfully over a span of five decades. Silk spinning and sericulture was evidently considered as "women's work" in Bursa, even before the mechanization of the industry. In his instruction manual for cocoon raisers and silk manufacturers, Hoca Hagop narrates a tale about a bachelor who used to produce cocoons. The man yielded fewer cocoons each time from the same amount of eggs,

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

so he increased the amount of eggs he used each year to produce the same amount of cocoons. After he got married, his wife assumed the role of raising cocoons and she secretly used one-fifth the eggs her husband used. When her husband found this out, he got into a big panic and questioned his wife. The wife promised to sell her trousseau to recoup her husband's losses if she did not yield the same amount of cocoons he had. At the end, the wife's yield exceeded that of her husband³⁷.

This old tale is supposed to justify women's predominance in silk-raising in terms of greater skills, like the similar tale about the Emperor of China whose wife assumed maintenance of all silk-related work due to her proven skills in the craft (Dalsar 1960:407). However, Quataert (1993b:105) states that these tales obscure the actual reason behind women's leading role in silk-raising in the Ottoman context. As stated before, the income from silk-raising and silk-spinning was supplemental to the agricultural income for many families in the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, Quataert (1993b:105) argues that not their higher skill levels but the fact that women were expected to produce extra-income for the family accounts for the female control of the industry.

After the first steam filatures were established in Bursa in the 1840s, the owners of the mills assumed the task of creating an industrial workforce out of local young women under eighteen years of age (Quataert 1993a; 2004a). Considering that a good number of skilled cloth weavers and artisans in the city had lost their source of employment due to the decreasing demand of Ottoman silk cloth after the 1820s, the recruitment of these young and mostly inexperienced women into the steam mills instead of skilled artisans in town may seem to make little economic sense. On the contrary, recruiting these women into the factories was part of the strategy to decrease labor costs in the silk industry (Quataert 1993a). Since they were traditionally regarded as extra-income producers, young women and children could

³⁷ Hoca Hagop 1867:31 as cited in Dalsar 1960:406.

work at lower wages than men for the same job. In addition, factory owners in Bursa as in Mount Lebanon (Khater 1996) likely assumed that women workers would have less resistance to factory labor than men due to their status within the patriarchal social system which demanded that they submit to male authority. In Salonica's tobacco industry, for example, companies preferred to employ single young girls instead of men because they were considered to be "more obedient" (Hadar 2007:129).

The task of recruiting young women for the factories, however, was challenging for two reasons: the factories demanded a work discipline that the women had never experienced before and the jobs required young women to work outside their homes in an unusual factory environment under the supervision of male factory owners. Since most of the potential workers lived in the surrounding villages, their accommodation was also another problem: young (mostly single) women coming from villages were supposed to stay in barracks near factories for the duration of the work season, away from the supervision of their families. Regis Delbeuf, a French traveler who was also the editor in chief of the journal *La Stamboul*, stated in the early twentieth century that the factory owners had to travel from village to village to find young women who could work in the mills³⁸. A French archaeologist and traveler, Georges Perrot, also noted that the owners of the mills had had serious difficulties recruiting women workers at the beginning³⁹.

The factory owners employed several strategies to create a stable workforce for the industry. First, they established the factories near or inside the Greek and Armenian neighborhoods, assuming that these communities would provide the best available pool of labor in the region (Quataert 1993a:228). As stated before, the owners of the mills themselves were also mostly Greek and Armenian Ottoman subjects; therefore, they were not complete "strangers" to the Greek and Armenian women. In order to extend the labor pool beyond the

³⁸ Delbeuf 1906 as cited in Kaplanoğlu 2006:56.

³⁹ Perrot 1864 as cited in Kaplanoğlu, Günaydın 2000:138.

town and attract workers from the surrounding villages, many factory owners also built dormitory like quarters near the factories. Another strategy employed by the factory owners to grow the labor pool was to bring a certain number of experienced and skilled forewomen from Europe. These forewomen were employed in factories to train and supervise the workers (Dalsar 1960:408). Their existence was also possibly meant to encourage the peasant women to work in factories, considering that many of them resisted factory work because of social taboos against the mixing of genders in the shop floor (Quataert 1993a:228). Some of those forewomen, like Madam Augustine Brotte from France, started their own filatures in Bursa in the following years (Kaplanoğlu 2006:33). Some others, like Marie Blache, also from France, married a factory owner and stayed in Bursa (Quataert 1993a:228). It should also be noted that male supervisors were still required in the mills, although their number was small in comparison to women. Quataert (1993a:228) states that out of six thousand two hundred workers in 1863, only four hundred directors, engineers and clerks were men. According to the British vice consul Maling (Türkcan 1985:39), men constituted only four percent of the labor force in the factories in 1872.

At first, the forewomen trained only Greek women living near the factories. Later, factory owners incorporated more and more Armenian women into the workforce. The concentration of factories in *Muradiye* and *Gökdere* neighborhoods had also to do with these neighborhoods being predominantly populated by the Armenians (Kaplanoğlu 2006:33). Quataert (1993a:230) states that to facilitate the recruitment of Christian women into the factories, the religious leaders declared that working in the ‘evil’ Ottoman factories was not immoral for the Christian women.

As the factories rapidly spread in the city after the 1850s, the signs of local unrest began to emerge. One of the earliest documents that reflect the grievances of local residents about the factories is a petition filed by the city residents to the government in 1856. This

petition included the complaints of local residents about the pollution caused by the mills and the bad smell of cocoons. The residents requested all the factories were to be driven out of the city by the government⁴⁰. It is highly likely that some other serious disruptions besides environmental problems were behind this radical request. As a matter of fact, Quataert (1993b:111) states that several mills in the area were burned or destroyed by the local residents during the 1840s and 1850s. According to Quataert (1993b:111), the workers who were involved in these incidents may have been “Ottoman-style Luddites,” rather than religious fanatics as claimed by the European observers.

Another documented incident of labor unrest in the early years of the factory production is the destruction of a newly established mill in 1862⁴¹. Quataert (1993a:232) reports that the mill was owned by an Armenian entrepreneur, who built it on a mulberry grove he had bought from a Turkish woman after receiving permission from the government. Shortly after the mill started to operate, “some Turks” claimed that it was built upon an old Turkish cemetery and demanded the government to demolish it (Quataert 1993a:232). They also declared that if their demands were ignored, they would start an uprising similar to the recent workers’ uprising in Damascus. When the government authorities refused to address their grievances, they marched to the mill on the 24th of July and burned it down. As stated by Quataert (1993a:232), the British consul at Bursa who narrated this incident argued that the religious fanatics had provoked the crowd. However, later in his report he admitted that all the factories in town had been under the threat of destruction by the workers who were upset because of the “low wages and inequality” in the industry (Quataert 1993a:233).

The growing local unrest was only one of the issues facing the factory owners in the 1850s and 1860s. Despite their continuous effort to expand the labor pool, the labor supply in the region fell short of the demand in this period (Kaplanoğlu 2006:56). In his travel journal,

⁴⁰ B.O.A. Y.E.E. 35-17, 19 August 1856 (17 Zilhicce 1272) as cited in Kaplanoğlu 2006:63.

⁴¹ Quataert (1993a:232) quotes this incident from the British Consul Sandison’s reports dated 24, 26 and 30 July 1862.

Perrot (Kaplanoğlu 2006) reports that an Italian factory owner who visited Bursa's mills in 1864 had stated that when all the filatures operated in town, the workers were paid up to two francs per day, meanwhile, in the Italian filatures, workers were paid eighty to ninety centimes for the same job⁴². It is highly likely that this comparison between the wages was an overstatement, considering that the wages in the Ottoman manufacturing sector was typically low according to the European standards during the entire period. As a matter of fact, the British vice consul Maling (Türkcan 1985:37) stated in his 1869 report that a British worker could barely survive with the wage paid to an Ottoman foreman in Bursa. However, the conversation between Perrot and the Italian factory owner indicates that lowering labor costs in Bursa's steam mills was a major concern for the investors in the mid 1860s. Similar to the vice consul, Perrot (Kaplanoğlu 2006) was convinced that the mill owners in Bursa would not be able to compete in the European market and would face bankruptcy within a short period of time unless they found a way to increase the labor supply. According to Perrot (Kaplanoğlu 2006), the factory owners could not reduce the wages for fear of losing their workers to other factories. If the number of Muslim women working in the factories could be increased, he suggested, the labor pool would grow and the wages would decrease accordingly⁴³.

As a method of controlling wage levels in the face of low labor supply, the factory owners resorted to a "tried and true European practice" (Quataert 1993b:111). They agreed upon a common certification system (*tezkere sistemi*) which required workers to obtain and carry work-cards containing information about their reliability, experience, and conditions of recent employment. This way, the workers could not quit their jobs and apply another position in a different factory without the acknowledgement and permission of their employers. Erder (1978:116) states that the system was in use in Bursa's mills as early as 1851.

⁴² One franc is typically divided into one hundred centimes.

⁴³ Perrot 1864 as cited in Kaplanoğlu, Günaydın 2000: 138.

Despite all the efforts to create a stable workforce for the industry, employment in Bursa's mills decreased in the 1860s (Quataert 1993a:233). The fierce regional competition between the factories, the decreasing supply of local cocoons due to the pebrine disease and the global decrease in the prices of raw silk had dragged the industry into a phase of stagnation. Quataert (1993a:233) states that the number of workers employed in the steam filatures had declined to perhaps two thousand in the period between the 1860s and 1880, which was a very small figure when compared to the previous years' employment rates.

However, from the 1880s to the first decade of the twentieth century onward, the industry experienced an unprecedented growth. The number of steam filatures in the region increased by fifty percent and the total number of workers employed in the filatures reached nineteen thousand in 1909 (Quataert 1993a:233). According to Quataert (1993a), neither the boost in the local supply of cocoons nor the increasing global prices of raw silk solely accounted for the remarkable growth that the industry experienced after the 1880s. As a matter of fact, the prices of local cocoon (that is, raw material) remained high until the beginning of World War I because of the foreign demand. The principal drive of the growth was, as argued by Quataert (1993a), the diversification of the labor force both in terms of ethnic origin and geographical location. According to Quataert (1993a), the participation of an increasing number of Armenian and Muslim women into the workforce increased labor supply and wages dropped accordingly. As the production costs decreased, the conditions for competition in the global market were reached and the industry developed considerably.

Although further research is required to understand the exact dynamics behind the growth after the 1880s, historical documents at hand confirm Quataert's (1993a) argument in that they demonstrate a sharp decrease in the wages in the early twentieth century. Maling (Türkcan 1985) stated in his report that the average pay of a silk-reeling worker (*çıkırıkçı*) per day was 10 piasters in 1857 and 6 piasters in 1872. In 1909, however, the daily pay of a

çıkırıkçı was reduced to three piasters⁴⁴. If this sharp decrease in wages was indeed due to growing labor pool, the factors that led to such a remarkable increase in the labor supply after the 1880s are open to inquiry.

Conclusion

The present chapter provided an analysis of the transformation of the silk industry in Bursa from the second half of the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. The scholarly knowledge on many important aspects of the process in which previous guild-based silk manufacturing practices in the city were replaced with capitalist forms of production is rather limited. Likewise, there are many questions and ambiguities pertaining to the process of transformation of the labor force, that is, the replacement of the silk weaving artisans with a class of factory workers composed of young women and children. Since the topic has rarely attracted scholarly attention so far, the use of available research inevitably leads to a one-sided narrative. Therefore, the conclusions reached in this chapter, which are mainly based on secondary sources, are tentative. Further study is required to uncover the dynamics of the formation and evolution of this highly productive capitalist industry in Bursa in the late nineteenth century.

The first section of this chapter examined the process in which silk-reeling plants emerged in the city of Bursa in parallel to the raising global demand for raw silk. It presented a brief history of the development of the industry which was marked by subsequent periods of crises and productivity boosts depending on the global prices of raw silk, the availability of local cocoons and the means of creating a steady labor supply. It also demonstrated that agricultural activities in the region were transformed as the silk-reeling filatures in the city as well as their European counterparts created demand for silkworm cocoons.

⁴⁴ B.O.A. B.E.O. 272209/3630, “17 Şaban 1327” (3 September 1909).

The second section focused on the early stages of the formation of the labor force for the filatures. The main argument was that in a constant effort to decrease the production costs, the owners of the silk filatures hired mostly women instead of men workers, whose economic activities were regarded as supplemental to the family income and who were assumed to be more submissive. They also developed several mechanisms to grow the labor pool and to diversify the ethnic composition of the workers to be able to decrease the wages. As the workforce for the mills grew, the wages decreased and the working conditions worsened. By the early twentieth century the silk mills in Bursa employed thousands of workers who had developed a collective identity to resist the working conditions in the industry.

The following chapter provides an analysis of class relations in Bursa's silk industry through a detailed examination of labor activism in the steam filatures. It also includes a comprehensive description of the working conditions in the early twentieth century based on primary sources such as petitions, official correspondences, newspaper articles and memoirs.

4. THE LABOR MOVEMENT IN BURSA'S STEAM FILATURES

As the Ottoman labor movement made its peak following the 1908 Revolution, Bursa, a city of commercial activities for centuries and a center of capitalist transformation in the textile industry, remained relatively silent.⁴⁵ The silk workers in Bursa's filatures made their first appearance in the newspapers in 1909, long after the strike wave swept the Empire. This chapter provides an analysis of the nature of class relations in the silk industry and the conflict between the workers and the factory owners that became evident as the workers decided to go on a general strike in the summer of 1910.

The first section of the chapter illustrates the conditions of factory work as described by the workers, the members of the local press and government officials. In doing so, it introduces a counter argument to the mainstream assumption in the literature that the local women chose to work in the filatures to spend on luxury items. Additionally, it provides descriptions of various methods that the workers employed to challenge their working conditions and wages before they decided to go on a general strike. The argument is that those established methods combined with their material conditions determined the workers' authentic course of action later in the process.

The second section provides a detailed examination of the events that took place as the silk workers went on a strike. The main argument is that the workers having their own social agendas, contrary to some scholarly accounts, were the main agents of the movement in 1910. The section includes an analysis of the controversy between the local and central government

⁴⁵ For a comprehensive list of the strikes that took place in the Empire in 1908, see: Cevdet Kırpık. 2004. *Osmanlı Devleti'nde İşçiler ve İşçi Hareketleri*. Isparta: Süleyman Demirel University, Unpublished PhD Thesis. According to this list, not a single labor movement took place in Bursa in 1908. However, an Ottoman official, Mehmed Ali Ayni, claims in his memoir that "the first workers' strike in the Empire" (he probably means the first strike in the 1908 wave) took place in Balya, a district of *Hüdavendigar* Province, on August 1908 (Ayni 2009:73). According to Ayni, who went to the district to negotiate with the conflicting parties, a couple of thousand workers in Balya's mines led by a Kurdish worker named *Mevlûd* had gone on a strike demanding wage increase. After several days, the owners had accepted the workers' demand and the strike ended with success (Ayni 2009:74).

organs about a legal regulation that would improve the working conditions in the filatures. Based on this controversy and the attempts of both the workers and the factory owners to influence government decisions, it introduces the argument that the Ottoman state was one of the grounds upon which the struggle between the workers and the silk industrialists took place.

4.1.The Steam Filatures between September 1909 and August 1910

As the archival research reveals so far, the first signs of labor unrest in Bursa's steam mills appeared in a letter dated April 1909. The letter titled "*Hayat ve Hakikat*" (Life and Truth) was from the silk-reeling women in Bursa and was published in a weekly magazine named *İştirak*, one of the pioneer socialist publications in the empire. Its chief editor, *Hüseyin Hilmi Bey*, was a member of the Ottoman socialist movement and an earnest tracker of the labor movements in the empire. In order to strengthen the working class consciousness, the magazine published news on the working life in different sectors and branches of industry under a column titled "*Amele Hayati*" (Workers' Life). The letter was published under this column on *İştirak*'s issue of 2 April 1909. It was reportedly translated from Armenian to Turkish by a person named "*Bedik*", probably the local reporter of the magazine and/or a member of the socialist movement in the region. It was signed as "five thousand young women working in Bursa's silk mills", without further disclosure of these workers' identities.⁴⁶

Although the letter was addressed to the government authorities, it was clearly meant to reach a wider audience, to create public awareness of the worker's problems in the district and possibly to put pressure on government officials to take the matters into their hands. The author(s) started with complaining about the situation in Bursa's mills and the lack of public

⁴⁶ "*Hayat ve Hakikat*", *İştirak*, 02 April 1909 (20 February 1325), 1(2):23-26.

awareness about it. They wrote that the working women, who were supposed to be equal subjects of the empire, had been voicing their grievances for a long time but neither the government authorities nor the journalists and intellectuals paid attention to their suffering. Afterwards they provided vivid descriptions of the working conditions in the mills. According to the information given, there were five thousand Turkish, Greek, Armenian and Jewish young women working in silk factories in the city of Bursa alone. The length of a workday was approximately seventeen hours, “from early morning to late at night”.⁴⁷ The length of the workday caused grievances not only because the wages and working conditions were extremely poor, but also because women workers, heading to the factories at dark, were harassed by men on their way. During their seventeen hours shift in the factories, the workers had one break at noon, lasting twenty minutes⁴⁸. The factory guard blew a whistle four times a day, indicating shift start and end times as in European factories. The breakfast and the lunch were provided by the factories; however, the meals were so small and poor in quality that the workers regarded them as poisonous. The author(s) also stated that the women worked in badly ventilated rooms, burnt their hands in hot water containers and had serious health problems.⁴⁹

Apparently, the workers in Bursa’s steam filatures were crowded into a small area with little light and without ventilation, exposed to the humidity and bad smell generated by the pots of boiling water. Dr. Şerafettin Mağmumi (2008:46) had thought that the problem of bad ventilation “poisoned the workers.” The problem could be solved if the factory owners would set up fans in the windows but they “did not even bother to think about such matters”. Mağmumi (2008:46) also stated that the dormitories of the workers were also very small, dark

⁴⁷ The author(s) state that the women worked from “9 oclock in the morning to late 1 oclock at night”. According to the system of timekeeping used then, the clock was set at 12:00 at sundown and at 00:00 at sunrise. When translated into the modern time keeping system, the workers’s shift was roughly from 5:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m.

⁴⁸ According to Şerafettin Mağmumi (2008:46), the workers were allowed to have two short breaks at that time, each half an hour long (or sometimes as brief as twenty minutes).

⁴⁹ “Hayat ve Hakikat”, *İştirak*, 02 April 1909 (20 February 1325), 1(2):23-26.

and badly ventilated. The poor ventilation in dormitories and in the shop floor combined with the length and pace of the work threatened the workers' bodily health (Mağmumi 2008:46). Fatma Fahrünnisa Hanım (2010:43), an Ottoman upper class woman who visited one of the mills in 1896, had reported that the temperature of the water caused serious deformations in the workers' hands and arms. Although the available historical sources do not speak of any death incident, a contemporary fictional story titled "*Sus Payı*" (Hush Money) was based on frequent deaths in the silk reeling mills due to poor working conditions⁵⁰.

The letter sent to *İştirak* also contained information on the wages. According to this, the daily wages of the silk workers ranged between two to six piasters. As stated in the first chapter, the industrial survey of 1915 documented that the lowest daily wage in the Ottoman manufacturing sector in the early twentieth century was six piasters (Ökçün 1997). Although the data is hardly reliable for previously stated reasons, the survey provides a rough picture of the wage levels for a wide range of industrial jobs of the period. Based on this picture, the silk-reeling sector, where wages could get as low as two piasters, comes forward as one of the lowest paying industrial jobs in the empire. The tobacco sector, which employed mostly women and children, constitutes another example of low-paying industrial jobs. In comparison, though, the working day in Bursa's mills was exceptionally long. For example, a petition written by tobacco workers in Istanbul shows that the women and children earned two and a half piasters for nine hours of work in the Cibali Tobacco Factory in 1911 (Nacar

⁵⁰ This story was composed by a prominent short-story writer in modern Turkish literature, Refik Halit Karay. Karay quit his career as an official in the Ministry of Finances and started journalism after the reinstatement of the Constitutional Monarchy in 1908. In the following years, he visited several Anatolian cities, and wrote Maupassant-style short stories about the lives of common people living in Anatolia. *Sus Payı* (Hush Money) which was written in 1909, just a year before the silk workers went on strike, was one of those stories (Sezer and Özyalçın 1997). The source of inspiration for this story may be a visit that Karay made to Bursa's steam filatures in 1909. Alternatively, Karay may have been inspired from the newspaper articles about Bursa's silk mills.

2010:172). As stated in the *İştirak* letter, the workers in Bursa's mills earned approximately the same wage for seventeen hours work in the high season.⁵¹

Another major cause of grievance stated in the letter was the ill-treatment of workers by the male factory owners, directors, foremen and guards. In addition to complaining about everyday verbal abuse, the author(s) recounted two incidents of physical violence to describe the severity of the situation. In one of these incidents, a factory owner assaulted a young worker, causing her to faint from fear. The worker stayed in a local hospital for two weeks; meanwhile she couldn't collect her unpaid wages. The other incident has an approximate date: two days before the letter was written, a twelve year old girl was severely beaten by a factory clerk.⁵² Although they lack important details, these accounts show that physical violence was an instrument of labor discipline in Bursa's silk-reeling mills. Analyzing official records of the Governorship of *Hüdavendigar* Province (*Vilayet Zabıtları*), Kaplanoğlu (2006:255) argues that the workers had appealed to local government office several times complaining about the beatings from the factory owners and the supervisors. Further research would reveal the specific role played by workers' gender identities in the process. How did women workers interpret and respond to the threat or use of violence by the factory supervisors? Was physical and verbal abuse by the supervisors equally common in the Ottoman factories where most employees were adult men? Most probably, transferring patriarchal authority from the household to the shop floor, male supervisors in Bursa found physical punishment a convenient and legitimate way to consolidate power relations and hierarchies inside a silk factory where almost all employees were young women.

The *İştirak* letter was written in a quite literary fashion, full of political statements and allusions. For example, when narrating their stories, the author(s) drew attention to the stark

⁵¹ "Hayat ve Hakikat", *İştirak*, 02 April 1909 (20 February 1325), 1(2):23-26.

⁵² The letter was published in April 2 but it is unclear the exact time it was composed.

contrast between the workers' lives and the affluent lives of the factory owners' daughters. In one paragraph, the author(s) stated that the factory girls' honor is the honor of the whole nation, since they would be mothers one day and raise the nation's children. The political statements and the literary tone of the letter signifies that it was a political figure or some political figures who composed it, not the women themselves (probably *Bedik* was the person behind it). On the other hand, the accounts of certain events and situations indicate that *Bedik* was aware of the situation in the factories; he had probably been in the region and discussed the issue with some of the factory workers. Indeed, the information provided by the author(s) on the working conditions, wages and disquiet in the factories is consistent with other consulted sources.

The editor of the journal added a small note to the end of the letter expressing his wish that the government authorities would take this problem into notice, and ensured them that the workers did not seek ways to avoid from work, but from the injustices they encountered in the factories. This note was especially significant in a political environment where the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) government had been criminalizing "unemployment and idleness" through a set of laws and policing practices.⁵³

The problems of the silk workers were also featured in the local press. In an article published by the local journal *Ertuğrul* on April 15, 1909, the disparity between the workers'

⁵³ On May 10, 1909, the Ottoman Parliament issued a law named "*Serseri ve Mazanne-i Su'i Eşhas Hakkında Nizamname*" (Law on Vagabonds and Suspected Persons). The negotiations in the Parliament pertaining to this Law demonstrated the conviction of the CUP administration that participating in the labor force was a moral and social obligation of all individuals in society. See: *Meclis-i Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi*, 1982, 3(1). Ankara: TBMM Basımevi; Ergut, Ferdan. 2004. *Modern Devlet ve Polis: Osmanlı Devletinde Toplumsal Denetimin Diyalektiği*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları; Yaman, Kadir. 2007. "Yoksulluk Hukuku: Modernleşme Sürecinde İngiltere-Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Karşılaştırması." M.A. Dissertation, Department of Law, İstanbul Bilgi University, İstanbul.

wages and working hours were harshly criticized and the factory owners were invited to increase the wages based on the argument that it would benefit the progress of the industry.⁵⁴

As the above mentioned letter did not lead to a change in their working conditions, the workers sent a petition directly to the Sultan on September 3, 1909.⁵⁵ The petition was examined by the Office of the Grand Vizierate (*Sadaret Mektubî Kalemî*) and forwarded to the Ministry of Commerce and Public Works (*Ticaret ve Nafia Nezareti*) on the same date with a small note attached.⁵⁶ The official who composed the note stated that the women workers of more than sixty silk factories in Bursa were complaining of being forced to work more than fourteen hours a day for three piasters. The length of the workday was more worthy of attention than the low wages, the official added, and recommended the Ministry to improve this situation after examining the workers' ages and physical capabilities. He also reminded the Ministry that the Kavala tobacco workers had stated complaints on the same issue two years ago and that their work hours and wages were regulated thereafter.⁵⁷

As opposed to the letter published by the journal *İştirak*, the petition sent to the Sultan was less literary in tone. Although it was probably put on the paper by an official clerk, it communicated the workers' perspective in a more straightforward and plane manner. The letter was signed as "in the name of one thousand and two hundred women working in Bursa's factories", followed by a list of thirty four names as representatives of the workers in a total of twelve factories. Each factory was named after its owner; therefore the list also provided the names of the factory owners. A table containing a list of the names is provided on the next page.

⁵⁴"Fabrikalar ve Amele Hayatı", *Ertuğrul*, 15 April 1910, n.4 as cited in Kaplanoğlu (2006:216).

⁵⁵B.O.A. B.E.O. 272209/3630, 17 Şaban 1327 (3 September 1909).

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid. For an examination of the strikes in Kavala tobacco industry in the early twentieth century, see (Nacar 2010).

The Factory Owner	The Workers
<i>Rapis</i>	<i>Âiçe, Âfâbî, Habilazot</i>
<i>Köleyan</i>	<i>Kâmile, Kohar</i>
<i>Kostinati</i>	<i>Zehrâ, Serpûk, Kadıno</i>
<i>Boduroğlu Simon</i>	<i>Emîne, Marigo, Lonisa</i>
<i>Boduroğlu Simon</i>	<i>Hâcî Mariya</i>
<i>Boduroğlu Agob</i>	<i>Fâtıma, Rapik, Vasiliki</i>
<i>Hâcî Manyâs</i>	<i>Fâtıma, Pruzâr, Elisabet, Kelem, Maryam</i>
<i>Kırmızıyan Karabit Ağa</i>	<i>Meryem, Hâcî Tamsabi</i>
<i>Mösyö Pol</i>	<i>Elmâs, Anik, Anastasya</i>
<i>Zâkârya</i>	<i>Vibrin, Serpûhî</i>
<i>Balaban</i>	<i>Âiçe, Eleni, Maryam</i>
<i>Osmân Fevzî</i>	<i>Fâtıma, Bayzâd</i>
<i>Agobhân</i>	<i>Tezile, Elesbisi</i>

Table 1. The names of the representative workers and the factories they worked.

B.O.A. B.E.O. 272209/3630, “17 Şaban 1327” (3 September 1909).

As revealed by this table, the factories were all private enterprises owned by mostly non-Muslim individuals. Among the factory workers, there were Jewish, Armenian, Greek and Muslim names. As a matter of fact, the Muslim names constituted approximately one-

third of all the names, but it is open to question whether this reflected the actual ratio in the labor force or the Muslim names were given weight to avoid discrimination from the government authorities. Under the names, there were no actual hand prints or signatures of the workers. Most probably the petition was composed in a local governmental office, upon the request of the representatives of the workers whose names were listed above.

Written in a proper jargon, the petition started with a short prayer for the Sultan (Mehmed V).⁵⁸ Afterwards, the workers stated their confidence in the Sultan's concern for his people and gratefulness for the passing away of the old days of despotism (*Istibdad*). On the basis of their confidence with the new administration, the workers stated their grievances about the working conditions and made clear that no other reason than the bare necessity to survive drove them to work in the factories. As stated by the workers, the factory owners offered cash payment of one lira (100 piasters) to the poorest of all non-Muslim and Muslim women in the region as an advance payment for factory work. For the lack of other sources to meet their survival needs, the women accepted this advance payment and started to work in the factories in return for a wage of three piasters per working day, which was sixteen hours long regardless of the season.⁵⁹ The statement that survival needs drove the workers to the factories was also repeated several times in journal articles on Bursa silk workers' problems. For example, an article published by the local journal *Ertuğrul* on August 1910 underlined that the workers' families had depended on their income for subsistence.⁶⁰ Likewise, in his small story on the workers' lives, *Mustafa Nuri* wrote that the women workers had to work to feed their children.⁶¹

⁵⁸ The reign of Mehmet V (*Mehmed Reşâd*) started on April 27, 1909. The previous Sultan Abdulhamid II had been deposed after the 31 Mart incident (on April 13, 1909).

⁵⁹ B.O.A. B.E.O. 272209/3630, "17 Şaban 1327" (3 September 1909).

⁶⁰ "Fabrika Amelelerinin Grevi", *Ertuğrul*, 19 August 1910 (6 August 1326), 22:1.

⁶¹ Mustafa Nuri, "Amele Kızları", *İştirak*, 02 April 1910 (20 Mart 1326), 1(6).

These statements are in direct contrast with the general assumption in the literature on the Ottoman silk workers which associated factory labor with the young women's fancy for luxury items. The scholarly assumption that the women agreed to work in the factories to buy ornaments and luxury items results from reading their history through the documents reflecting the views of the local elites and the capital owners. For example, in his report on the condition of the silk industry in Bursa dated 1872, the British vice consul Maling argued that even though the working conditions in the factories were extremely bad, young women preferred factory work to housework or agricultural work (Türkcan 1985:389). According to Maling, the workers squandered away the money they had been earning at the expense of their health because of their fondness to accessories and splurge (Türkcan 1985:389). In his study on the Lebanese silk workers, Khater (1996:333) puts forward a similar argument to Maling's, suggesting that the workers "were increasingly using their income to purchase gold and other precious items for their dowry" after the 1890s. To back up this argument, he mentions a contemporary proverb which lamented how "all that the brunette makes [in silk factories] she spends on lipstick and make up". He then draws on this argument to explain how factory work became a somewhat liberating experience for the young Lebanese women (Khater 1996).

Drawing on the evidence produced by the government officials who most likely had close contact with the factory owners such as Maling, it is inevitable to re-produce the contemporary dominant discourse which did not in fact take account of the workers' experiences. As a matter of fact, Maling's argument served to justify the wages and labor conditions in the factories on two fronts: first, it relied on and consolidated the social norms on the value of women's labor. That is, it suggested that the women's labor was not essential to the family income and had a supplemental value. Hence, it justified the low wages in the factories. Second, it built itself on the liberal notion of contract with each party making a

choice by their free will, suggesting that the women had other sources of income, but they preferred factory work instead. Therefore, it made the factory owners' disregard for claims to improve labor conditions justifiable.

On the other hand, the silk workers' petition indicates that the workers in Bursa had to sign up for factory work because they lacked other means of subsistence and the factory owners took advantage of the situation.⁶² The workers' statements and the newspaper articles are not the only sources that contradict with the mainstream assumption. The material conditions of the factory work alone shed doubt on the claim that the workers were lured by the opportunity to gain extra income to spend on "lipstick and makeup". Considering that they worked sixteen hours a day in miserable conditions for a wage hardly enough for survival and at the expense of sexual and other forms of abuse, it requires substantial evidence to back up the claim that the local women had other reasons to work than bare necessity to survive. Also, considering the low wage levels and the social stigma attached to women whose "honor" were constantly threatened by the perils of factory work, sending their daughters and wives away to the factories must have meant not only a waste of labor power but also social humiliation and disgrace for their families.⁶³ As a matter of fact, Mağmumi (2008:47) had reported that some young women who were abused by the watchmen or other male employees in the factories went back to their villages "under shame and disgrace." These workers had to break up with their fiancées and "lived with regret and misery for the rest of their lives" (Mağmumi 2008:47).

As in the case of Mount Lebanon (Khater 1996:331), it is possible that the families of the workers retained ownership of small lands and men continued agricultural activities by

⁶² It is worthy of note that the Grand Vizierate official uses the verb "*icbar edilmek*" (to be constrained) when describing the workers' relation to factory work. B.O.A. B.E.O. 272209/3630, "17 Şaban 1327" (3 September 1909).

⁶³ Considering that the silk reeling industry had a history of almost half a century in the region, the social humiliation was probably not associated with the factory work per se, but with the exposure to abuse and sexual harassment within and outside the factories.

means of cash payment received from the factory owners in exchange for their daughters and wives' labor power. It is also possible that the families had already lost agricultural means of production and were dependant on factory wages and other sources of income for subsistence. In both cases, the fact that the local women had to sell their labor power to make a living for themselves and their families remains.

The historical process through which the local families lost alternate means of generating income, however, is yet poorly examined. The previous chapters of this research provide various arguments pertaining to the decline of earlier forms of textile manufacturing and agricultural activities in the region. However, a more expanded and detailed study on the transformation of agricultural production and crafts in Bursa is necessary to clear up many important aspects of the process which "set free" local women as proletarians for the local silk manufacturing industry, in the sense as Marx used the term.⁶⁴

It should also be noted that there are studies like Hadar's (2007:129) which demonstrate that several young women entered into the industrial work force in the Ottoman Balkans to save money for a dowry. However, having to save up for a dowry was another survival issue for the poor families of the region, especially for those who had more than one daughter, considering that without the dowry their daughters could not get married. "The dowry" for these families was composed of basic items such as household utensils and bedding, not jewelry (Hadar 2007:130). As Hadar (2007:129) reports, "it was estimated in 1910 that a young girl of the working class would need to work 10 to 15 years to save enough money for a dowry".

The petition of the workers in Bursa continued with detailed descriptions of factory work and the particular hardships the workers encountered as women. The leading problem,

⁶⁴ In Capital Volume One, Chapter 27, Karl Marx provides a detailed description of the process in which the agricultural population in England was expropriated from land and set free for the manufacturing industry. However much the two processes are significantly different in many aspects, the historical evidence on silk workers in Bursa makes it clear that proletarianization was not a strange phenomenon to the Ottoman citizens in the early twentieth century.

as also stressed by the Grand Vizierate official on his note, was the street harassment. The workers, the oldest of them were said to be twenty five years old, stated that the factories were located at the outskirts of the city and that they had to travel long distances at dark to reach them, meanwhile being harassed by the drunks and “bandits” on the way. The petition did not mention maltreatment from the factory supervisors or owners.⁶⁵

After explaining their problems, the workers re-stated their aims to write a petition to the Sultan himself and listed their demands from him: a) a fair wage for their labor and b) the reduction of the working hours. They emphasized that calling for the Sultan’s help was their last resort, a path they had to choose after consuming every other way to reach out to the factory owners. According to the workers, the factory owners were completely indifferent to conferences, speeches and articles which declared the abolishment of all forms of suppression in the empire since the Constitutional Revolution.⁶⁶

As stated before, the Grand Vizierate forwarded the petition to the Ministry of Commerce and Public Works (*Ticaret ve Nafia Nezareti*) on September 3, 1909. As Kaplanoğlu (2006:216) reports, the Ministry took initiative and sent its Industry Manager, *Haydar Bey*, to inspect the situation in Bursa. *Haydar Bey* not only visited several factories in neighborhoods such as *Demirkapı*, *Setbaşı* and *Kayabaşı*, but he also organized meetings with the factory owners, the members of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Bursa (*Bursa Ticaret ve Sanayi Odası*), the Agricultural Office and the Governorship. As a result, the factory owners were reportedly convinced to improve the workers’ conditions. However, not long after this, the workers appealed to the local administration complaining that the owners did not comply with the agreement reached before. The Governorship was informed that the workers were still being forced to work at night, beaten up by their supervisors and a

⁶⁵ B.O.A. B.E.O. 272209/3630, “17 Şaban 1327” (3 September 1909).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

significant part of their current wages was being confiscated, a common practice in different regions and sectors. In response, the General Assembly of the *Hüdavendigâr* Province (*Meclis-i Umûmî-i Vilâyet*) decided to prepare a draft regulation to limit the working hours, to ensure the safety and to increase the wages of the silk workers in town. The regulation was then forwarded to the Ministry of Commerce and Public Works for examination (Kaplanoğlu 2006:216,255).

Seven months after the Governorship sent the draft regulation to the Ministry, the *İştirak* journal brought forward the issue again in its issue of April 2, 1910. Under the title of “*Amele Kızları*” (Worker Girls), *Mustafa Nuri* composed a fictional story describing the lives and working conditions of the Bursa’s silk workers. The fact that the story was dedicated to the Minister of Commerce and Public Works suggests that the regulation was being examined by the Ministry at that time. In an ornate and literary style of writing, *Mustafa Nuri* described the poverty and destitution of the silk workers, who worked in miserable conditions to provide for their families.⁶⁷

A week later, the journal published another article on the issue. The article reported that the Council of State (*Şûra-yı Devlet*) had discussed the regulation prepared by the Governorship of the *Hüdavendigâr* Province.⁶⁸ The Council had decided to disapprove it on the grounds that it would be inappropriate to enact regulations exclusively for the silk workers. As for a general regulation involving all the workers in the empire, the Council had decided it would be detrimental to the economic development of the country, considering that the empire was just on the beginning of the road to progress. Moreover, the number of factory workers in the empire was not big enough to justify such an arrangement. Instead, the Council recommended that a special regulation to protect the rights of child workers could be

⁶⁷ Mustafa Nuri, “*Amele Kızları*”, *İştirak*, 02 April 1910 (20 Mart 1326), 1(6).

⁶⁸ “*İpek Amelesi Hakkında*”, *İştirak*, 09 April 1910 (27 Mart 1326), 7(1):110.

prepared.⁶⁹ In response, the author claimed that there were sufficient number of silk, flour, brick and lumber factories all over the empire and the number of workers kept increasing. He also added that he wondered if the Minister of Commerce and Public Works would yield to this unjust decision of the Council of State.⁷⁰

Apparently though, the Council's decision was in line with the CUP administration's labor policy.⁷¹ One month later, on May 14, 1910, the journal *İştirak* published another article on the issue. The article was about the Grand Vizier *Hakkı Paşa*'s comments about the condition of industrial workers in the empire.⁷² According to the author, *Hakkı Paşa* had stated that: "The country neither has excellent factories nor millions of workers as they have in Europe. We might have some rich people employing a number of workers here and there, but they are compassionate individuals and I doubt they would violate the workers' rights." To the author, the wages in the silk industry were obvious indicators of how these matters had nothing to do with compassion. Within one hundred and fifty [silk?] factories, he claimed, only one hundred workers earned five piasters for sixteen hours work, and the rest had to do with three piasters. Moreover, the factory owners deducted extra twenty *paras* from the wages of those who earned three piasters. Even worse, many workers could not collect their unpaid wages because the owners appealed to violence when the workers voiced their demands.⁷³

The turn of events revealed that people in favor of a legal regulation to protect the silk workers' rights were in minority both within the government and among those actors who had the power to shape the public opinion. One year after the silk workers sent their petition to the Sultan, nothing had changed in terms of their working conditions and wages.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ An examination of the CUP's labor policy in the years between 1908 and 1914 is provided in the first chapter of this study.

⁷² "Amele Davası", *İştirak*, 14 May 1910 (1 Mayıs 1326), 12(1).

⁷³ Ibid.

4.2.The Strike in 1910

On August 1910, thousands of silk workers in Bursa and its surroundings declared a general strike. A telegram sent to the *Stamboul* newspaper reported that the strike had started on August 15.⁷⁴ Three days later, another journal published in Ottoman Turkish, *Sabah*, confirmed the news about the strike and recounted the content of the telegram sent to the *Stamboul*. According to this, the silk workers in Bursa had been organizing protests in the city for a few days; however, the situation was under control.⁷⁵

The Governorship of the *Hüdâvendigâr* Province (*Hüdâvendigâr Vilayeti*) provided the most detailed account of the situation in a telegram sent to the Ministry of Commerce and Public Works on August 18, 1910. The Governorship reported that the silk workers in the city of Bursa were on strike since Monday morning with demands of wage increase and limitation of the working hours.⁷⁶ The local government had immediately taken necessary precautions to prevent “potential inappropriate incidents”. A few days ago, the report continued, a group of women workers who attempted to stage a protest with flags had been stopped on the basis of the relevant clauses of the Strike Act (*Tatil-i Eşgal Kanunu*). The situation in the city was under control and an investigation had been started to obtain information on the leaders and/or the instigators of the movement. In consequence of this investigation, a person named *Setrak* was prosecuted as the chief instigator.⁷⁷

According to the *Osmanischer Lloyd*, the workers in Bursa had demanded a twenty - twenty five percent increase in their wages.⁷⁸ Yet their demands were not limited to the wage

⁷⁴ “La grève générale dans les filatures de Brousse”, *Stamboul*, 196, 18 August 1910, p.3 as cited in A. N. M. Van Os, Nicole. 1997. “Bursa’da Kadın İşçilerin 1910 Grevi” *Toplumsal Tarih* 7(39):7-10. Van Os states that another Ottoman newspaper published in French and German, *Osmanischer Lloyd*, also reported the strike.

⁷⁵ “Bursa’da Tatil-i Eşgal”, *Sabah*, 18 August 1910 (13 Şaban 1328), 7511:3.

⁷⁶ B.O.A. DH. ID. 107/17, “5 Ağustos 1326” (18 August 1910).

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ “Der Streik der...” as cited in A. N. M. Van Os, Nicole. 1997. “Bursa’da Kadın İşçilerin...”

increase. They also demanded a minimum of one hour lunch break, a change in the organization of work, and the cancellation of the certification system in their recruitment.⁷⁹ As discussed in the previous chapter, the factory owners had been practicing a common certification system (*tezkere sistemi*) as a method of controlling wage levels in the face of low labor supply. This system required workers to obtain and carry work-cards containing information about their reliability, experience, and conditions of recent employment. This way, the workers could not quit their jobs and apply to other positions in a different factory without the acknowledgement and permission of their employers (Quataert 1993b:111).

The strike in the filatures was not surprising for the local press. On August 19, an article titled “The Factory Workers’ Strike” was published by the local newspaper *Ertuğrul*.⁸⁰ According to this article, the disparity between the wages and the working conditions in the mills was well known for some time and it was anticipated that the workers one day would “realize that they had rights as human beings and rebel against being forced to work like animals”. As the anticipated day had arrived, the article continued, all three parties (the workers, the factory owners and the government) would suffer great damage from it. For the owners, the strike meant that business commitments would not be fulfilled. For the workers and their families, the loss of wages would have disastrous consequences. For the local government, it would be serious a financial burden to aid the families who were affected by the current situation. For all these reasons, the author invited the government to closely supervise the working conditions in the factories before such events took place.⁸¹

The telegram the local administration sent to the Ministry on the first day of the strike did not provide precise information on how many workers participated in the protests or

⁷⁹ “La grève générale...” and “Der Streik der...” as cited in A. N. M. Van Os, Nicole. 1997. “Bursa’da Kadın İşçilerin 1910 Grevi” *Toplumsal Tarih* 7(39):7-10.

⁸⁰ “Fabrika Amelelerinin Grevi: Nihayet Dediğimiz Oldu”, *Ertuğrul*, 19 August 1910 (6 Ağustos 1326), 22, p.1.

⁸¹ Ibid.

which factories did they work in. It also did not mention any organizations that the strikers were found to be affiliated with. According to the *Stamboul* newspaper, 2,500 women from forty-eight factories participated in the strike; according to the *Osmanischer Lloyd*, the number was 3,000 and more participation from other filatures were expected.⁸² As a reporter from the *Sabah* argued, the strike had mainly taken place in factories owned by the “Ottomans”.⁸³ It is unclear whether the reporter included non-Muslim factory owners into this category.⁸⁴ According to the local administration’s telegram, the majority of the factories in town were shut down because of the strike.⁸⁵ This suggests that the factories owned by non-Muslim Ottoman citizens were also involved, since those owned by the Muslim entrepreneurs comprised only a small number of all the filatures in town.

Evidently, the local government had been leading negotiations between the strikers and the owners of the silk filatures for some time. The silk workers’ strike had started in Bilecik and Köylü towns and later spread to Bursa⁸⁶. At first, the government officials had been informed that the reason of the labor unrest in Bilecik and Köylü towns was the workers’ unwillingness to pay the income tax (*temettü vergisi*).⁸⁷ The government officials had discussed this issue with the factory owners and asked them to help the workers to pay the tax. A more in depth investigation later revealed that the actual reason behind the strike was not the income tax: the workers demanded a wage increase. Regarding the wage issue, the

⁸² “La grève générale dans les filatures de Brousse”, *Stamboul*, 196, 18 August 1910, p.3 and “Der Streik der Spinnerinnen”, *Osmanischer Lloyd*, 20 August 1910, p.1 as cited in A. N. M. Van Os, Nicole. 1997. “Bursa’da Kadın İşçilerin 1910 Grevi” *Toplumsal Tarih* 7(39):7-10.

⁸³ D. K. “Bursa Seyahatinden”, *Sabah*, 25 August 1910, (20 Şaban 1328), 7518:1.

⁸⁴ The author used the word “*ecnebi*” to define those who were not “Ottomans”. This word might mean foreigners or local non-Muslims depending on the context and the author’s intent.

⁸⁵ B.O.A. DH. ID. 107/17, “5 Ağustos 1326” (18 August 1910).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ “La grève générale dans les filatures de Brousse”, *Stamboul*, 196, 18 August 1910, p.3 as cited in A. N. M. Van Os, Nicole. 1997. “Bursa’da Kadın İşçilerin 1910 Grevi” *Toplumsal Tarih* 7(39):7-10.

negotiations with the factory owners both in Bilecik and Bursa was going on at the time the telegram was sent.⁸⁸

As reported by the *Osmanischer Lloyd*, the factory owners declared they would not recognize any labor organization or strike committee to discuss the workers' demands.⁸⁹ It is not clear whether the workers actually had any. As the factory owners remained inexorable in their refusal to negotiate with the workers, the workers appealed to the Municipality and later went to the Government Office of the *Hüdavendigar* Province. They gave petitions to the provincial administration and requested mediation from the government officials.⁹⁰ The silk workers' attempt to seek mediation and intervention from the local government was a strategy derived from the common experiences of the Ottoman working class. The government officials and the CUP leaders had previously taken active roles in the settlement of many conflicts between the workers and their employers.⁹¹ However, especially after the enactment of the Provisional Strike Act in September 1908, the Ottoman Government had largely abandoned its mediator role between the workers and the factory owners and started to take strict measures against labor activism. The local administration's reaction to the silk workers who attempted to stage a protest exemplifies this general attitude. It is also remarkable that the local government invoked the 1909 Act (*Tatil-i Eşgâl Kanunu*) to justify its decision to stop the protesters. As stated before, the 1909 Act prohibited strikes in enterprises operating only in public services (such as railroads, mines and dockyards). Apparently though, it was used as an excuse for anti-labor policing practices when the necessity arose.

Although the local government's response to the protesters was in line with the Ottoman Government's general policy, there was also a significant difference between the

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ "Der Streik der Spinnerinnen", *Osmanischer Lloyd*, 20 August 1910, p.1 as cited in A. N. M. Van Os, Nicole. 1997. "Bursa'da Kadın İşçilerin 1910 Grevi" *Toplumsal Tarih* 7(39):7-10.

⁹⁰ B.O.A. DH. ID. 107/17, "5 Ağustos 1326" (18 August 1910).

⁹¹ For an examination of how government officials took an active role in the settlement of the conflict between the Cibali Factory workers and the Regié, see (Nacar 2010:138-146).

positions of the local administration and the central government organs about the conflict. In its telegram to the Ministry of Commerce and Public Works, the Governorship stated that although the local government officials had been aware of the Council of State's decision not to interfere (in favor of the workers), they had decided to invite the factory owners to the Government Office and sought ways to persuade them to accept some of the workers' demands.⁹² In response, the factory owners had stated that they could agree neither to reduce the working hours nor to increase the wages of the workers. The raw material had been particularly scarce that year and if they gave in to the workers' demands, they wouldn't be able to compete with other factories in the region. The factory owners would agree to the workers' demands only if the Ottoman Government issued a regulation that would be enforcing for all the silk producers in the empire, or at least for those in the *Hüdavendigâr* Province.⁹³

The local administration's stance on the issue was more clearly revealed in a separate document attached to the telegram. According to this, the local government officials were convinced that the workers had a legitimate case after all and that their conditions had to be improved. The working hours were too long and the wages were too low. The majority of the workers had serious health problems including anemia because they worked indoors for long periods with no rest. Considering that they were mostly young women and children, the situation was also detrimental to the public health. In addition, the local government was equally concerned about the harassment that these women were exposed to as they walked to the factories at dark.⁹⁴

⁹² B.O.A. DH. ID. 107/17, "5 Ağustos 1326" (18 August 1910).

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ B.O.A. DH. ID. 107/17, 6662-498, "5 Ağustos 1326" (18 August 1910).

The local administration reminded the Ministry that for all these reasons, the General Assembly of the *Hüdavendigâr* Province (*Meclis-i Umûmî-i Vilâyet*) had prepared a draft regulation last year to limit the working hours and to increase the wages of the workers. However, the Council of State had rejected the regulation for being against “freedom of work” (*serbest-i say-ü amel*). The local administration warned the Ministry that the continuation of this state of affairs carried grave dangers for the future. The local government officials’ efforts to resolve the problem had been proving useless because there was no legal enforcement to make the factory owners to comply with the decisions of the local authorities. Hence, the Governorship had revised the previous year’s regulation and asked its re-examination by the Ministry.⁹⁵

This telegram makes clear that the silk workers had succeeded in convincing the local administration that their demands were legitimate and a legal regulation for the silk mills was necessary. It is highly possible that the workers’ gender had played an important role in this process. Actually, the workers themselves had emphasized their vulnerability as women in the petition they wrote to the Sultan, referring to the hardships they had to endure “with their womanhood”.⁹⁶ Those who wrote in favor of the workers in the local and national press had also frequently used this argument as a trump card to influence the public opinion. As revealed by the telegraph from the local government to the Ministry, the local authorities were highly concerned that street assaults towards local women, who were also perceived as future or current mothers, endangered the “public order” by putting them at the risk of losing their honor (i.e., being violated by strange men).⁹⁷ Since the women’s honor was associated with their family’s honor, the entire society would be restless. Thus, the workers had managed to

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ “...bazı eşirra ve sarhoşların tecavüzât-ı namus-şikenanesine ve saadet-i istikbalimize matuf tehlikelere maruz kaldığımız ve kadınlığımızla kış günlerinde karlar içinde uyuşturucu soğuklar karşısında cüz’î bir ücret mukabilinde maişet arkasında koştuğumuz...” B.O.A. B.E.O. 272209-3630, 17 Şaban 1327 (3 September 1909).

⁹⁷ B.O.A. DH. ID. 107/17, 6662-498, “5 Ağustos 1326” (18 August 1910).

transform society's gender norms, which undervalued their labor and created the conditions for capitalist exploitation in the first place, into something they could also use to their advantage. By stressing their "vulnerability" as women and their status as future mothers whose honor were at risk, they had convinced the Governorship and the General Assembly of the *Hüdavendigar* Province that their rights must be protected.

For all these reasons, the Provincial administration had negotiated with the factory owners several times and sought to convince them to accept the workers' demands. Moreover, it had devised a regulation to limit the working hours and increase the wages of the workers. The telegram sent to the Ministry was meant to pressure the Central Government organs to endorse this regulation. If that would happen, the local administration would acquire the legal authorization to enforce the workers' demands upon the factory owners or it would have the means to compel the owners to cooperate with the government in establishing a solution agreeable by both parties.

Towards the end of the strike's first week, several clashes occurred between the workers who went on strike and those who attempted to break it. According to the *Stamboul* newspaper, a fracas had erupted when the workers attempted to stop a group of strike breakers. During the fight some window glasses had been broken and some workers had ended up getting arrested.⁹⁸ The factory owners who spoke to the government officials argued that the majority of the workers had regretted joining the strike and wanted to start working again but they were afraid of being harassed by the others.⁹⁹ Upon this, the officials of the local administration assured the factory owners that nobody would be allowed to disrupt the public order given that all the factories started operating. The local government officials in Bilecik and Köylü also declared that those harassing the workers who continued to work

⁹⁸ La grève générale... as cited in A. N. M. Van Os, Nicole. 1997. "Bursa'da Kadın İşçilerin 1910 Grevi" *Toplumsal Tarih* 7(39):7-10.

⁹⁹ B.O.A. DH. ID. 107/17, 6662-498, "5 Ağustos 1326" (18 August 1910).

would not be tolerated.¹⁰⁰ As reported by the newspapers, the local administration had placed two policemen at the front doors of still-operating factories. The police had also been escorting the workers of these factories on their way to work.¹⁰¹

The accounts with regard to the clashes demonstrate that the workers did not act as a homogenous mass during the strike. While some workers never participated in the strike and some others did for a short period of time, some of the workers continued resisting for a much longer period. The fact that police presence was required to keep a number of factories operating, though, sheds doubt on the factory owners' claim that those who wanted to end the strike comprised the majority. Considering that the silk mills were dispersed in the city and employed thousands of workers from different ethnic origins and localities, it obviously required strong organizational ties and a solid communication network to continue the strike for more than a couple of days. The governmental documents in the Prime Minister Ottoman Archives do not indicate the existence of a union or a similar organization through which the workers organized and continued the strike. Based on the information from *Osmanischer Lloyd*, Van Os (1997:8) argues that an Armenian political party, *Hinçakyan*, had been supporting the strikers. This newspaper also argued that towards the end of the strike, a group of workers had turned against *Hinçakyan* for it had failed to provide them with the promised financial aid.¹⁰² As the situation got worse, *Hinçakyan* reportedly ended its involvement with the strike.¹⁰³ Meanwhile, *Osmanischer Lloyd* announced that six hundred workers decided to resume work on August 22.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ "Notes de Brousse: La Grève des Fileuses" *Stamboul*, no. 199, 22 August 1910, p.3 and "Der Streik der..." as cited in A. N. M. Van Os, Nicole. 1997. "Bursa'da Kadın İşçilerin..."

¹⁰² "Zum Spinnerinnenstreik in Brussa", *Osmanischer Lloyd*, 27 August 1910, p.1. as cited in A. N. M. Van Os, Nicole. 1997. "Bursa'da Kadın İşçilerin..." According to the *Stamboul* newspaper, the workers had protested a leader of the strike by throwing melon crusts at him during his speech at *Koza Han*, the center of commercial activities in Bursa. See: Notes de Brousse..." as cited in A. N. M. Van Os, Nicole. 1997. "Bursa'da Kadın İşçilerin..."

¹⁰³ "Zum Spinnerinnenstreik..." as cited in A. N. M. Van Os, Nicole. 1997. "Bursa'da Kadın İşçilerin..."

Meanwhile, on August 26, an article published in the local newspaper *Ertuğrul* announced that the factory owners had formed an alliance and stopped buying cocoons from the local producers, to make them complain to the local authorities.¹⁰⁴ In this way, they thought that the local authorities would appeal to themselves and be forced to act in accordance with their wishes. The author of the article in *Ertuğrul*, though, was furious. According to him, the factory owners had been acting against the public good and their behavior would provoke hatred and disgust among every public-spirited person in society. He even suggested that those who were outraged by the factory owners' last action could organize another strike. To him, the factory owners had been damaging their own businesses by aggravating the matters. Thanks to a handful of honorable merchants, though, the local cocoon business was continuing. More importantly, the article continued, the foreign factory owners in town had promised to their workers to comply with the government's final decision on the issue and their factories had started operating. Those who resisted government involvement were the Ottoman (local) factory owners, who, according to the author, must be shamed for putting their interests before everything else.¹⁰⁵

The remaining workers, as reported by *Sabah* and *Tanin*, also ended the strike on August 29, 1910 with the intervention of the local bureau of the CUP.¹⁰⁶ The newspaper articles did not provide any details on the CUP's role in the conflict. According to Kaplanoğlu (2006:218), the Governorship's involvement had also been very influential in ending the strike. None of these sources provide much detailed information about the events that took place in the last days of the strike and the factors that caused the remaining strikers to return to work. Quite possibly, the Ottoman factory owners adopted the strategy of their foreign counterparts and decided to wait until a decision was reached by the central government.

¹⁰⁴ "Fabrikatörlerin Hatası", *Ertuğrul*, 26 August 1910 (13 Ağustos 1326), 23, p.2.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ "Bursa'da Tatil-i Eşgal", *Sabah*, 7522, 29 August 1910, p.3 and "İpek Amelesinin Grevi", *Tanin*, 716, 29 August 1910, p. 3.

Based on a news article published in *Stamboul*, Nicole Van Os (1997) argues that the strike ended on August 27 but the the factories had to close down anyway on August 28 as the season had ended. This might be true, but there is also evidence indicating that the factory production continued throughout the year.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, the factory owners' decision not to buy local cocoons would have been unreasonable had there been only two days to the closure of all the silk mills.

As the archival evidence reveals so far, the strike in 1910 was the first instance that the silk workers in Bursa took to the streets to voice their demands in an organized manner. During the strike wave that swept the Empire in 1908, the silk filatures in Bursa were silent. However, this does not mean that the workers were contempt with their situation. The way the workers experienced class relations and the methods they developed within years to bring solutions to their problems determined their authentic course of action. Considering that the strike is only one form of negotiation, it is clear that the silk workers engaged in other forms of struggle before 1910 such as appealing to the local government officials or writing letters to the newspapers to improve their working conditions. When these methods proved insufficient, they decided to organize a general strike to strengthen their hands at the negotiation table.

In addition, the fact that the strike took place long after the CUP came to power and adopted legal measures against labor activism suggests that the workers in the Ottoman Empire had their own social agenda beyond the political program of the CUP or any other nationalist organization. There is a scholarly literature which emphasizes the role played by the Ottoman workers, regarded as potential allies by the middle class members of nationalist organizations, contributed to the rise of nationalism in various parts of the Empire such as Egypt (Chalcraft 2004; Beinir 2001). However, as demonstrated by this research and several

¹⁰⁷ B. O. A. B.E.O. 272209-3630, 17 Şaban 1327 (3 September 1909).

other studies (Haupt and Dumont 1977; Nacar 2010), the Ottoman workers had the capacity to formulate and advocate for their own demands, which reflected their immediate needs and collective perspective about a better life for themselves and their families. Therefore, the labor movements of the period cannot simply be reduced to the rise of nationalist movements in the Empire.

As stated before, the level of involvement of certain local organizations in the 1910 strike is ambiguous. Neither the local branch of the CUP nor *Hinçakyan* was mentioned in the official documents in the Prime Minister Ottoman Archives. Although *Hinçakyan* members might have encouraged and supported the strikers as argued by Van Os (1997:9), it seems highly unlikely that the *Hinçakyan* members themselves organized and sustained such widespread labor movement in the region. As a matter of fact, *Hinçakyan*'s disengagement with the strike after a certain period suggests that the workers' movement had its own dynamic. The degree to which the CUP members were involved in the turn of events and the role they played is also mostly unknown.

Nicole Van Os (1997:9) expresses her doubts about the way the workers were "instrumentalized by some socialist groups" and implies that the women were provoked by certain male figures with a different political agenda. However, the historical evidence manifests that the strike in Bursa's mills, which lasted for almost two weeks with the participation of about 2500 women working in different neighborhoods and needing every penny of the money earned from factory work, was not a spontaneous incident. Under the given circumstances, to continue the strike for two weeks required solidarity and a well-established communication network among the workers. Regardless of *Hinçakyan*'s political agenda, which in fact might have overlapped with the worker's, the workers in Bursa's mills had their own agendas for at least two years: they demanded better working conditions and an increase to their wages. To this end, they had been pressuring the local government officials

for quite some time. Eventually, they succeeded in getting the Provincial administration on their side and provided that a regulation was prepared to change their current conditions.¹⁰⁸ When the Council of State rejected the regulation, they organized a general strike to make their voices heard by the public and by the political elites to whom they couldn't reach through petitions.

Van Os (1997:9) also claims that the historical evidence at hand does not indicate whether the women themselves assumed a leading role in the strike. She states that the person who was prosecuted as the instigator (*Setrak*), the CUP members, the local government officials and the person who was protested by the crowd at *Koza Han* were all male figures (Van Os 1997:9). However, the petition sent to the Sultan as well as letters and articles published in newspapers in 1909 demonstrates that the women workers had taken matters into their hands long before the outbreak of the strike.¹⁰⁹ As a matter of fact, none of those male figures who appeared in the historical documents had the power to organize such a widespread labor movement. *Setrak*, who was accused of instigating the movement, was prosecuted on the third day of the strike. Neither *Hınçakyan* nor CUP organizations were involved in the process from the beginning to the end. The local government officials, on the other hand, were obviously not the agents of the movement. They were the figures of authority the workers appealed to in order to gain support. How did the silk workers organize, then? How did they maintain the strike for a considerable period of time under unfavorable conditions if they were not organizationally and financially well prepared?

First, the fact that the press reports did not mention the existence of a labor organization or the names of particular women who led the movement does not automatically

¹⁰⁸ See "İpek Amelesi Hakkında", *İştirak*, 09 April 1910 (27 Mart 1326), 7(1):110 and B.O.A DH. ID. 107 - 17, 6662-498. 20 Şaban 1329 (18 August 1910).

¹⁰⁹ B. O. A. B.E.O. 272209-3630. 17 Şaban 1327 (3 September 1909).

mean their absence. Further research in the local and private archives might reveal the existence of an institution through which the workers organized the strike or which gave them active support throughout the process. Considering that the names of common women rarely appear in the historical documents, the possibility that there were women who played leading roles in the movement is also fairly high.

Second, even if an institutional framework did not exist, it would not follow that the workers were organizationally and financially unprepared. The exclusionary practices of the Ottoman unions towards women or several other practical difficulties (such as the distance between the factories) might have prevented the workers from coming together under one organizational roof¹¹⁰. Instead, the workers might have chosen to organize and communicate on a looser basis, perhaps through networks consisting of representatives from different factories, neighborhoods and cities. As a matter of fact, the signatures under the petition sent to the Sultan in 1909 manifest that the women had a number of representatives in each filature.¹¹¹ In addition, considering that some villages such as *Gündoğdu (Philador)* served as labor storages for the mills, it would be fair to assume that the workers residing in the same village had close contacts with each other outside work. Utilizing their already existing communication channels and support mechanisms, the women might have provided for those who had the least financial means. In every case, even though there were thousands of them dispersed in several large and small factories located in different neighborhoods, the workers had the organizational ability to continue the strike for two weeks which is a considerably

¹¹⁰ Several studies show that although they participated in union activities, women were usually excluded from the decision making organs of the Ottoman labor unions. See (Nacar 2010:142); (Hadar 2007:129).

¹¹¹ B. O. A. B.E.O. 272209-3630. 17 Şaban 1327 (3 September 1909)

long period in the general context of Ottoman labor movements.¹¹² This alone clearly manifests the workers' agency in the process.

The strike reportedly ended on August 29, but the correspondence between the government organs on the issue lasted for almost six more months. The local administration sent a second telegram to the Ministry of Commerce and Public Works on November 19, 1910 demanding the acceleration of the official proceedings regarding its earlier request. This short telegram was especially significant because the local administration stated that the proposed regulation would prevent the strikes "always taking place in the silk and carpet factories" in the Province.¹¹³ On November 27, 1910, another telegram was sent from the local administration to the Ministry repeating the same request.¹¹⁴ In these telegrams, the local authorities referred to the strikes occurring both in the silk and carpet factories. It is possible that the August 1910 strike in the silk factories spread to the carpet factories or that the silk workers started another strike in November together with the carpet workers. It is also possible that the strike in August 1910 was not the first labor movement in the silk reeling mills of Bursa.

Following the telegrams of the local administration, a long correspondence started between the Ministry of Commerce and Public Works and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.¹¹⁵ Finally, the Ministry of Internal Affairs sent a telegram to the local administration on February 20, 1911. It informed the local administration that the regulation proposed was not found appropriate based on the earlier decision of the Council of State.¹¹⁶ Instead, the

¹¹² When announcing the news about the strike, the local newspaper *Hüdâvendigar* had predicted that it would end within a couple of days or sooner. "Tatîl-i Eşgal", *Hüdâvendigar*, 2420, 16 August 1910 as cited in (Kaplanoğlu 2006:255).

¹¹³ B.O. A. B.E.O. DH. ID. 107 17, 6 Teşrîn-i Sanî 1326 (19 November 1910).

¹¹⁴ B. O. A. B.E.O. DH. ID. 107 17, 13 Teşrîn-i Sanî 1326 (27 November 1910).

¹¹⁵ B.O.A. DH. ID. 107/17, "23 Kanun-i Sanî 1326" (5 February 1911) and B.O.A. DH. ID. 107/17, "20 Safer 1329" (20 February 1911).

¹¹⁶ B. O. A. B.E.O. DH. ID. 107 17, "7 Şubat 1326" (20 February 1911).

Government had decided to prepare a regulation concerning all workers employed in the enterprises operating outside the public services. This regulation would also include the rights of the child workers in the empire. However, since such a comprehensive regulation would require extensive investigation and preparation, the Ministry advised the local administration to mediate between the workers and the factory owners until it was issued.¹¹⁷

The Ottoman Government did not promulgate any regulation of the sort mentioned in this telegram. The archival evidence available has been uninformative about the outcome of the 1910 strike. It is also not clear whether any actual improvement took place in the workers' conditions later on. Further research might reveal the practical consequences of the 1910 strike for the workers' and their families' lives. Although it is not known if the workers won the struggle against the factory owners and made them accept some of their demands, the process itself provides valuable information on the dynamics of class relations in Bursa's silk factories and involvement of the state in the struggle between the workers and the factory owners.

Although the Ottoman Government eventually denied the workers the legal means to enforce their demands upon the factory owners, the controversy between the local administration and the Council of State about the workers' demands demonstrated that the State was not a homogenous and detached entity overarching the class struggle in the Ottoman society. As demonstrated in this case, the State had functioned as one of the grounds upon which the silk workers of Bursa struggled with the factory owners once they took the Provincial administration on their side. The factory owners, on the other hand, had employed strategies such as boycotting the local cocoon business to influence the government decisions. Apparently, they were supported by the members of the Council of State who denied the workers' demands in the name of "freedom of work" (*serbest-i say-ü amel*).

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the capitalist transformation of the silk industry in Bursa in the context of changing class relations. It included a detailed analysis of the strike that took place in the silk filatures as a moment which revealed the new class dynamics in the industry.

The first section illustrated the working conditions in the filatures as described by the workers and the members of the local press. It included a description of various methods that the workers employed to make their voices heard by the wider public and the government organs before they decided to go on a general strike in 1910. The historical evidence presented in this chapter challenged the common argument in the literature that young women chose to work in the filatures because they wanted to buy luxury items. The material conditions of the workers show that they went through a process of proletarianization and thus had to accept working in the filatures to meet their survival needs.

The second section provided a detailed examination of the events that took place during the strike of 1910. The main argument was that the workers having their own social agendas, contrary to some scholarly accounts, were the agents of the movement in 1910. It entailed a discussion of how society's gender norms, which undervalued women's labor and created the conditions for capitalist exploitation in the first place, were used by the workers to their advantage as they made an effort to influence the local government's actions. The section also included a description of the methods employed by those on the other side of the equation, the factory owners, to influence the local authorities and suppress the workers' activism.

The events taking place in 1910 demonstrated that the workers did not act as a homogenous entity but the support for the strike was big enough to alert the factory owners and the government officials. The local population, most of whom raised cocoons for the

factories, was also a party to the conflict. Regarding the organizational structure of the collective action, the section documented that the workers' strike was neither a spontaneous nor manipulated incident. As an act of collective resistance which lasted for two weeks and brought together thousands of women dispersed in several factories, the organizational and financial preparedness of the workers was clear.

Lastly, the section included an analysis of the controversy between the local and central government organs about the regulation that would improve the working conditions in the filatures. As evident in their correspondences, the members of different government bodies took opposing sides in the conflict between the silk workers and the capitalists of the silk industry in Bursa. That is, the Ottoman State was not a homogenous and detached entity overarching the class struggle in the Ottoman society. On the contrary, it was one of the grounds upon which this struggle took place.

5. CONCLUSION

This study presented an analysis of the capitalist transformation of the silk industry in Bursa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It examined the role played by gender ideologies in the thriving of the silk-reeling sector and the formation of the worker class identity. The main focus of the research was based on a strike movement organized by women silk workers in the summer of 1910. Drawing on primary evidence from this period, including petitions, letters, official correspondences and journal articles, the study explored power struggles between the workers and their employers that took effect both inside and outside the shop floor.

The first chapter provided a brief analysis of the historical and structural context in which the transformation of the Ottoman silk industry took place. It demonstrated that the Ottoman economy's integration into the world market, which gained momentum in the nineteenth century, radically altered forms and patterns of employment in many branches of the manufacturing sector and led to the spread of wage labor in the empire. As the guild-based production in the cities declined in large measure, the bulk of manufacturing activities shifted to putting-out networks, home industries and workshops in rural areas which depended on the maximum exploitation of cheap female and child labor power for successful competition in foreign and domestic markets. The silk industry, which concentrated on a number of trade centers in the empire such as Bursa, Lebanon and Aleppo, also flourished in the second half of the nineteenth century through the extensive use of female and child labor.

The second chapter examined the structural changes in Bursa's silk industry more closely. Drawing mostly on the previous research in the field, this chapter illustrated the process in which the traditional focus of the local industry shifted from the manufacturing of silk cloth for the consumption of the wealthy classes at independent hand looms to the raising

of silkworm cocoons and the production of raw silk for the European (chiefly French) silk weaving facilities. Starting from the 1840s, the increasing number of silk-reeling plants (filatures) owned mostly by non-Muslim Ottoman subjects centralized the production of raw silk in the city and altered ethnic and gender composition of the industry's work force. In an attempt to lower production costs and to gain advantage in global competition, the owners of the filatures hired exclusively young female workers of rural origin, mostly from Greek and Armenian neighborhoods, instead of male artisans at downtown artisan shops. They also developed several mechanisms to create a steady female labor supply for the filatures such as offering cash advances to the poor families in return for their daughter's work and implementing a common certification system (*tezkere sistemi*) which prevented the workers from quitting their jobs and applying to positions at other factories without the acknowledgement and permission of their employers. By the early twentieth century, there were at least sixty silk filatures in the city of Bursa alone, employing about five thousand local women of Armenian, Greek, Jewish and Turkish origin¹¹⁸.

A petition sent to the Sultan himself by a representative group of workers in 1909, as well as several journal articles on the working life in Bursa's filatures, demonstrated that the wages and working conditions in the filatures were extremely poor. The workers were threatened by serious illnesses due to lack of nutrition and overwork in badly ventilated dark rooms. Moreover, they were exposed to sexual and other forms of harassment by the factory superintendents and some local men. These accounts challenged the common argument in the literature that young women chose to work in the filatures because they wanted to purchase luxury items. The material conditions of the workers, as well as their own statements, indicated that the local women went through a process of proletarianization and thus had to accept working in the filatures to meet their survival needs.

¹¹⁸ There were also a good number of filatures in the surrounding villages and towns such as Bilecik. Since the available sources contained information on Bursa's filatures, this study focused on Bursa alone.

The last chapter presented a detailed analysis of the events that took place before and during the strike of 1910. The chief argument was that the workers, having their own social agendas, were the main agents of the movement in 1910 - contrary to some accounts which assumed that they were provoked or “instrumentalized” by external local groups such as *Hinçakyan* Organization (Van Os 1997). These accounts partly rested on the current knowledge that no labor union or approved leader was involved in the 1910 strike movement. Although it did not fit into the established framework of labor activism, this study maintains that the strike was neither a spontaneous nor manipulated incident. Contrary to some claims about the textile workers in the empire (Vardağlı 2011), the filature workers were very much aware of their working status and their rights. They had been pushing for their demands through petitions and letters for almost a year before the strike. When their demands for better wages and working conditions were not met by factory owners and government authorities, they organized a collective resistance movement with the participation of at least 1,500 workers from sixty different filatures located in different parts of the city. Although they seemingly did not have a leader, the strikers had a group of representatives from several filatures and the ability to coordinate and self-organize which arose out of local interactions and strong communication networks among them. Thanks to the movement’s organizational strength, the strike continued for fifteen days and seriously disrupted the silk trade in the city. On the other hand, the workers did not act as a homogeneous mass united against their employers. Rather, there were conflicts and fragmentations among them which led to the clashes between the protesters and strike-breakers a week after the strike started. In addition, some workers reportedly ended the strike one week earlier than others.

This study entailed a discussion of how society’s gender norms, which undervalued women’s work in the labor market and created the conditions for capitalist exploitation in the first place, were used by the workers to their advantage as they made an effort to influence

local government actions. The workers had emphasized their vulnerability as women in the petition they wrote to the Sultan, referring to the hardships they had to endure with their “womanhood”. Those who wrote in favor of the workers in the local and national press had also frequently used this argument as a trump card to influence public opinion. By stressing their “vulnerability” as women and their status as future mothers whose honor was at risk, the workers had convinced the Governorship and the General Assembly of the *Hüdavendigâr* Province that their working hours must be regulated. Thus, gender ideologies operated on two different levels in the power struggle between the women workers and the filature owners in Bursa. First, they operated as instruments of suppression and exploitation, since they undervalued women’s work and formed a basis for women workers’ physical intimidation and sexual abuse by the factory superintendents. Second, they operated as instruments of resistance, since the women were able to mobilize gendered social values and stereotypes for their cause against the factory owners.

In order to explain class dynamics that transcended shop floor, this study also examined the controversies among other actors of the game. These were the factory owners, local cocoon raisers and officials of the provincial and central administrative bodies. The factory owners employed several tactics to influence government decisions and suppress worker activism during the 1910 strike. For example, they boycotted the local producers of silkworm cocoons, to evoke them to complain to the government authorities and demand immediate oppression of the movement. However, a number of articles from the local press revealed that the local population largely supported the workers’ cause. A week after the protests started, foreign factory owners agreed to comply with the government’s solution to the problem and persuaded a group of workers to end the strike, while the Ottoman factory owners insisted on boycotting the cocoon raisers and refusing the workers’ demands of wage increase.

The conflict between the workers and their employers was transferred to the governmental level as demonstrated by the correspondences between the Governorship and the Ministry of Commerce and Public Works. In the period between 1909 and 1911, the officials of the provincial administration organized several meetings with the filature owners to induce them to accept some of the workers' demands and sent subsequent telegrams to the Ministry requesting the endorsement of a legal regulation that they had prepared in favor of the workers. The CUP government in Istanbul denied these requests each time on grounds of "freedom of work" (*serbest-i say-ü amel*). The controversy between different organs of the Ottoman State surrounding the 1910 incident shows that the state was not a homogenous and detached entity overarching the class struggle in the Ottoman society. On the contrary, it was one of the grounds upon which this struggle took place.

From the evidence so far, the outcome of the 1910 strike is still vague. This has been the case for a considerable number of strike movements that took place in the empire in the early twentieth century (Karakışla 1998). There are journal articles indicating that a group of factory owners promised the workers to comply with the government's final decision on the issue, which, according to the official sources, was never reached. However, it does not follow that the workers' struggle for improving living conditions came to an end. Although detailed information on the outcome of the protests is not currently available, the events surrounding the 1910 strike provided a glimpse of how class and gender interacted in the capitalist transformation of the Ottoman silk industry. It demonstrated that gender stereotypes were essential instruments of power construction as new class identities were formed and the conditions for capitalist exploitation were prepared. Accordingly, it provided clues about the operations of gender ideologies in contemporary settings where the exploitation of cheap female labor in networks of neighborhood workshops has once again become widespread.

This study invites researchers to reveal more on the cultures, community and household interactions of the workers in Bursa's filatures and elsewhere in the Ottoman lands. Such discoveries would make important contributions to our understanding of the way gender ideologies operated in the construction of power on the shop floor. Until now, the excessive focus on official sources written in Ottoman Turkish has brought about the invisibility of the workers' everyday experiences in historical accounts. However, detailed research in the local archives using documents written in the workers' native languages (Armenian, Greek) might reveal a lot more than the official documents have offered so far. Moreover, such studies would produce concrete facts about the alternative organization strategies that the women workers developed in the process of the capitalist transformation of the industry.

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APPENDICES

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۸۲

برکات اینک نابینا را در علمه کس خفته انعامه

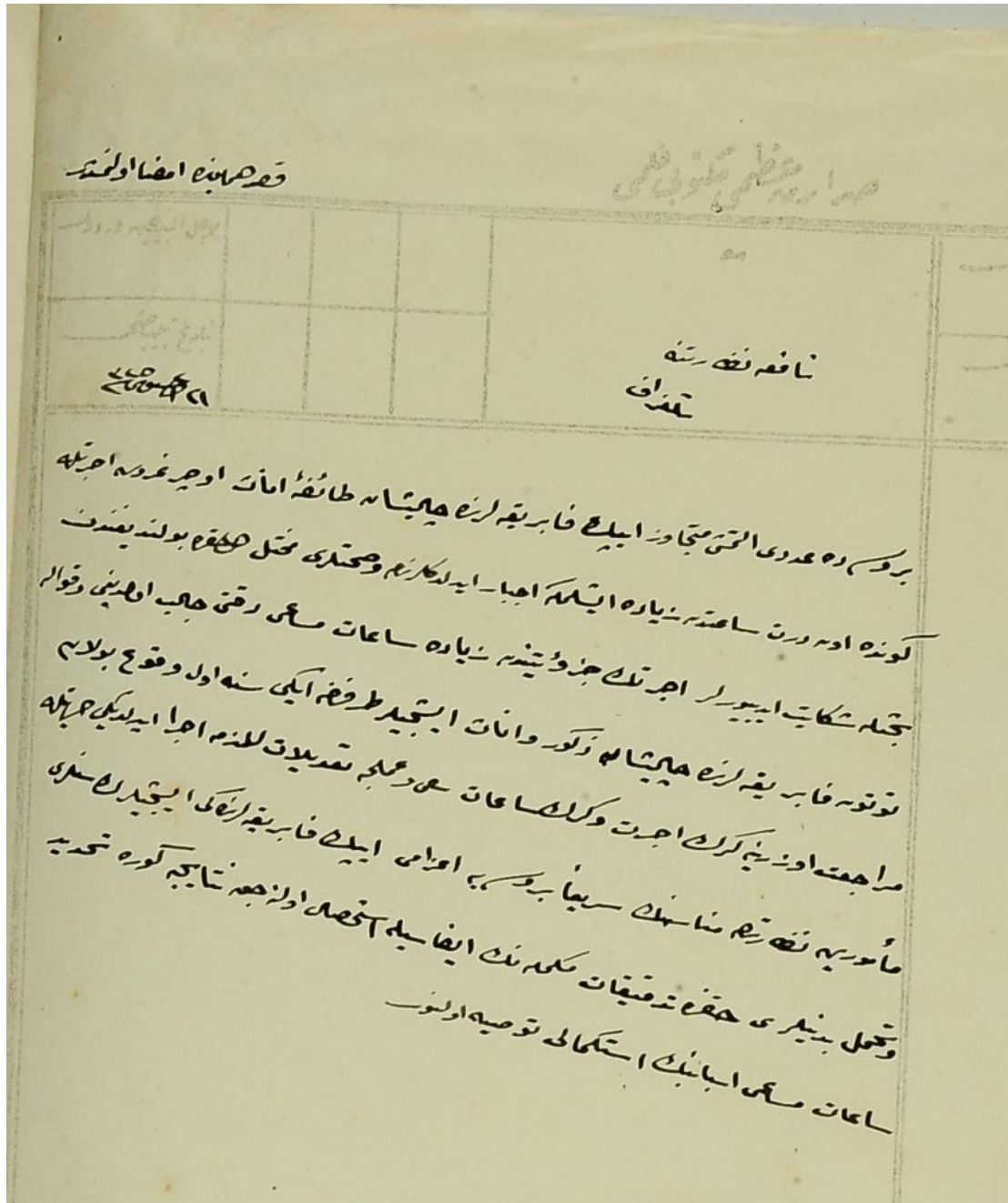
تحت و فقه طریقه
ضیاء مدبره

المرحوم

وہی ہے

۱۴ سرایه ای نایب ایلی بیگم بوز و لا زکرة عفری بیکه - رز موصفا و لا نیده ای بیت خایه نایب بزرگه
 طینه ده نه نانک می غنیه تحبید اجزینک تربید صدای قصده ای نایب نانک ندر قی قصده که
 ساهنک نریغ دار فد و لا نیده بوز ناکیه انامه تحریات فی لغا صواب الیه بی نینه المصدا نه حیاته و سحابه
 نظر نریغ ایضی نقصای موطا هم عبر نه نهید به انصابه

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