

Worker silence in a turbulent neoliberal context: The case of mass privatisation of sugar factories in Turkey

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Abstract

Silence in the context of work has different meanings across different settings. Turbulence induced by the privatisation of previously state-owned enterprises presents a curious setting to explore worker silence. Turning to worker silence in the process of mass privatisation of sugar factories in Turkey, we examine why workers remained silent while resenting privatisation. We reflect on the experiences and perceptions of workers in the privatisation of sugar factories in an unregulated neoliberal country, where macro-national and meso-institutional mechanisms enforce worker silence. Drawing on 48 interviews with workers from sugar factories, we demonstrate that worker silence deepened in the process of privatisation. The study provides evidence that an unregulated form of neoliberalism worsens worker silence through three distinct mechanisms: dismissal of democratic demands, marketisation of everything and decline of solidarity. We extend these mechanisms with 13 different corresponding forms.

KEYWORDS

HR profession, neo-liberalism, organisational change, qualitative research methods, Turkey, worker

Abbreviations: AKP, Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi); HRM, Human resource management; TEKEL, Tobacco, Tobacco Products, Salt and Alcohol Enterprises.

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Practitioner notes

What is currently known

- Worker silence can be explained through macro-, meso- and micro-level factors.
- Neoliberal ideology is predicated on several values, including the decline of workers' voices, marketisation of everything, and deterioration of solidarity.
- Each of these values has an impact on worker silence.
- A turbulent context of unregulated neoliberalism (like privatisation) could exacerbate conditions for workers and deepen worker silence.

What our paper adds

- Neoliberal ideology permeates workers' macro, meso and micro encounters, culminating in their silence.
- In the context of privatisation, socio-cultural factors have a significant impact on worker silence.
- We identified three silence mechanisms and 13 forms of worker silence, five of which are unique and three are emic to Turkey.
- Collusion of all actors and multilayered influences in the process of privatisation in a neoliberal market and state context deepens worker silence.

Implications for practitioners

- HR should serve to promote worker interests and enable workers to speak up.
 - HR could help workers cope with privatisation and post-privatisation adjustment.
 - HR could collaborate with leaders, unions, and other parties to improve worker experience.
- HR could help workers move from silence to speaking up about their concerns.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Worker silence is a process by which workers intentionally withhold their opinions, concerns, or information about jobs or the organisation, conditioned by individual or collective concerns and interests (Wang et al., 2012). Even though the concept of worker silence is generally studied at the individual level, worker silence is a multifaceted and multilevel phenomenon. Worker silence may result from uneven power relationships in organisational practices (Milliken & Morrison, 2003; Nechanska et al., 2020) and institutional structures or ideologies that undermine workers' demands and voices (Donaghey et al., 2011; Fernando & Prasad, 2019). As Prouska and Psychogios (2018) stated, conditions that create uncertainty in the macro context and drive structural change, such as social and economic crises, could exacerbate worker silence. Worker silencing mechanisms are the process-relational means through which worker silence is ensured. The Nobel Prize-winning economist Stiglitz (2012) pointed out the silencing impact of neoliberalism, the dominant market ideology of the last 30 years. Stiglitz (2016, p. 1) defined neoliberalism as "the idea that free trade, open markets, privatisation, deregulation, and reductions in government spending designed to increase the role of the private sector are the best ways to boost growth". He explained that neoliberalism permeates and affects all social and political life and deteriorates human rights, civil liberties and workplace democracy, effectively serving as a silencing mechanism in countries with weak social regulation (Stiglitz et al., 2010). Neoliberal ideology shapes workers' experiences and perceptions of human resource management (HRM) practices (Bal & Dóci, 2018). It is important to study how an unregulated neoliberal context could impact worker silence through macro and meso level prioritising of financial concerns over and above social concerns and common good arguments (Jonsen, Tatli, Özbilgin & Bell, 2013; Özbilgin & Slutskaya, 2017). Research shows that an unregulated neoliberal

ideology drifts countries away from democracy and egalitarian social agendas towards expanding capitalist interests (Kanbur et al., 2018; Stiglitz, 2000). We know little about worker silence mechanisms and forms unique to the turbulent context of unregulated neoliberalism.

In this paper, we examine the experiences and perceptions of workers of human resource management interventions to explore their silence during the privatisation of sugar factories in the turbulent context of a country with an unregulated neoliberal ideology. Our field study sought to answer the following research question: what is the interplay between worker silence mechanisms and forms and workers' perceptions of organisational and human resource management interventions in the process of privatisation of sugar factories in Turkey? We focus on the mechanisms and forms of worker silence in the privatisation of previously state-owned sugar factories, which faced excessive forces of neoliberal marketisation in Turkey. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 48 workers in sugar factories, we analyse the data through an abductive approach. We explore three mechanisms of worker silencing in the process of privatisation: (a) silencing through the dismissal of democratic demands, (b) silencing through the marketisation of everything, and (c) silencing through the decline of solidarity. Under these three mechanisms, we extend the theory of worker silence by identifying 13 worker silencing forms, five of which are unique to this study. Building on the work of Prouska and Psychogios (2018), which focussed on the interplay of macro-national economic crises on worker silence, this paper straddles the micro-individual experiences and meso-organisational HRM interventions and practices to worker silence. In particular, worker silence is theorised in privatisation in a country where an unregulated form of neoliberal ideology operates and profoundly shapes worker experience and human resource management approaches that culminate in and deepen worker silence. We first review the literature on worker silence, present the turbulent neoliberal context of privatisation of sugar factories in Turkey, outline our methods, and then offer our findings and discussion.

2 | WORKER SILENCE

Research reveals that worker silence manifests as workers showing restraint in expressing their views on matters related to their work or organisation (Brinsfield, 2014). Personality traits, such as introversion, and socio-demographic backgrounds, such as lack of education and embeddedness, are viewed as antecedents of worker silence at the individual level (Cullinane & Donaghey, 2020). At the meso level, organisational policies and procedures, culture, and leadership styles reportedly influence worker silence (Milliken & Morrison, 2003). There is a dearth of studies examining the impact of macro-level influences on worker silence, except for Prouska et al. (2018, 2019) pioneering works, which investigated the dynamics of the macro-economic context in worker silence. We contribute to this line of research by identifying specific worker silence mechanisms and forms that manifest in a turbulent neo-liberal context.

Research shows that neoliberalism has served to deepen worker silence. Stiglitz identified that while some countries regulated their neoliberal system to offer protections for worker welfare and voice, others remained unregulated and experienced detrimental neoliberal impacts such as deepening worker silence (Stiglitz, 2012). The deepening of the neoliberal market ideology has undermined public service and common good rationales while valorising economic and financial calculations in organisational life (Vassilopoulou et al., 2019). Austerity, poverty, unemployment, weak wages, and restrictions in public services have burdened workers and violated their rights and working conditions with its policies (Stiglitz, 2012), especially in developing countries where policy space and the legal framework for worker protections are underdeveloped and largely unregulated (Chatrakul Na Ayudhya; Prouska & Beauregard, 2019; Vassilopoulou et al., 2019). The hegemonic belief in the self-responsibilisation of workers as custodians of their careers (Hall, 2004) has defaced and deformed solidarity and deepened workers' silence in unregulated neoliberal settings that have not fostered the responsabilisation of organisations to protect workers. As opposed to the collective response of individuals against injustices, oppressions, and tyranny (Scholtz, 2008), an instrumental form of solidarity has emerged, depleting workers' capacity to resist (Lynch & Kalaitzake, 2020). Such

solidarity is contingent upon self-interested gains and the fear of loss in societies governed by neoliberal ideologies (Wrenn, 2014). As anti-union and non-unionised policies (ILO, 2018; Mellor & Kath, 2011) and violation and criminalisation of labour movements (Della Porta, 2015) have become widespread in unregulated neoliberal contexts, the impact on solidarity was devastating. The untested promise of winning by competition as a deeply held belief in the neoliberal optimism kept self-responsibilised individuals from possibilities of social and political solidarity. To cope with the fear of loss, uncertainty and inadequacy, individuals who have lost their optimism sometimes move towards faith-based conservative values and religious fatalism (Cumming et al., 2020; Gammon, 2017; Wrenn, 2014), which were also detrimental to the spirit of collective struggle (Hofmann et al., 2019; Littlewood & Dein, 2013). Faith-based silence is also functional because religious motifs are prominent in right-wing populist discourses. It is interesting to note the uneven impact of neoliberalism on countries which have strong regulatory protections for workers versus countries with limited or ceremonial regulatory arrangements (Küskü et al., 2020).

Neoliberal programs, such as privatisation, that were set up to overcome economic contractions have caused considerable social dumping in terms and conditions of labour and led to fragmentation, stratification and precarity in worker experience (Lee, 2015). The worker conditions weaken in the market where actors make only cost-benefit-based decisions. The worker experience focuses on competitive rationales alone and moves away from working for service or on compassionate grounds (Greer & Doellgast, 2017). Under the spell of the hegemonic discourses of individualism, freedom, and choice of the neoliberal ideology, workers may remain silent about their unemployment, low wages, and precarious environment, accepting their low stakes in the neoliberal game of winners and losers (Bal & Dóci, 2018). As precarious and insecure working conditions turn into a personal risk that must be taken, managerialism and competitiveness were introduced as fundamental values in the neoliberal ideology (Özkiziltan, 2020). Careerism comes to the fore in precarious working conditions as the privilege of individuals to control their lives with their plans. In addition, loyalty promoted by the authority as adapting to existing conditions without objection to overcoming risks is another way of silencing workers. Hirschman (1970) defines this type of loyalty as hope-based silence. Out of loyalty, individuals may remain silent and not speak up. What induces hope-based silence is the expectation that “the situation will improve in the near future” (Prouska & Psychogios, 2019, p. 15).

Overall several worker silence mechanisms and forms manifest in the neoliberal context. In the next section, we explain why Turkey's unregulated neoliberal context provides a fertile setting to examine unique mechanisms and forms of worker silence that emerged in one of the flagship processes of neoliberalism, that is, the privatisation of sugar factories in Turkey.

3 | WORKER SILENCE IN THE TURBULENT CONTEXT OF PRIVATISATION IN A COUNTRY WITH AN UNREGULATED NEOLIBERAL MARKET IDEOLOGY

Turkey is a fascinating country to study worker silence for multiple reasons. Silence is enforced culturally (Ozbilgin & Yalkin, 2019) and entrenched further through the dominant neoliberal ideology (Ozeren et al., 2016). Turkey's privatisation journey started in the 1980s in tandem with policies that pushed for economic liberalisation, inspired by Ronald Regan in the USA and Margaret Thatcher in the UK. The 1980 *coup d'etat* brought prime minister Turgut Özal, who pursued market liberalism in Turkey. He established neoliberal bureaucracy in public administration and enforced marketisation and privatisation of previously state-owned enterprises, which were the driving force of the Turkish economy (Karataşlı, 2015).

Before the 1980s, the era preceding economic liberalism, laws and institutions in Turkey protected the organised movement of workers, and the central authority accepted workers' right to action and resistance as a democratic demand (Buğra, 2020). Trade unions were the main stakeholders of industrial relations, and union demands aimed to protect the workers' interests from the union managers' ambitions. In addition, the mass media was polyphonic and could voice the expectations of disadvantaged individuals (Adaklı, 2009). As a hegemonic neoliberal market ideology became dominant in Turkey, many social, political, and economic turmoils began manifesting. Significant violations of

workers' rights gathered momentum with the privatisation agenda after 2001, the year of the most profound financial crisis recorded in the country's history, as high unemployment, low wages, and precarious and informal working conditions exacerbated (Macovei, 2009, Önis, 2011). The IMF-led austerity policy created favourable conditions for neoliberal policies and enabled the ultra-conservative, right-wing Justice and Development Party (AKP) to come to power (Bozkurt-Güngen, 2018). AKP has adopted privatisation, financialisation and hyper-deregulation as pillars of its neoliberal ideology, coupled with corrosion of labour rights in Turkey (Tansel, 2018). Although neoliberalism has culminated in worker silence, it is important to understand the unique mechanisms and forms of worker silence that this particular macroeconomic context culminated in Turkey.

3.1 | Worker silence in the turbulent context of neoliberalism in Turkey

The unregulated neoliberal context in Turkey is imbued with three forms of turbulence. First, labour unions are highly politicised in line with the ruling party's interests, and worker opposition and social movements are constrained (Özkızıltan, 2019). Despite the neoliberal policies and the privatisation process in Turkey over the years, social movements which run strong in other countries, such as #blacklivesmatter, #metoo, and #yellowjackets remained limited in the Turkish context, where traumatic experiences and repressive regulations led to a culture which does not often revert to public protest. The "Bloody May 1" Labour Day in 1977, the massacre in Taksim/Istanbul, the largest public protest square in Turkey, marked the beginning of the decline of the workers' movement in Turkey. In 2013, the #gezi-park movement, which emerged as an environmental resistance against the government's unplanned and destructive urbanisation strategies that threatened green areas and parks in Istanbul, soon turned into a broader political stance, including opposition to the neoliberal capitalist expansion. After the #gezipark movement, political authoritarianism has accelerated against the oppositional voices in the country (Özbilgin & Erbil, 2021). While the hegemonic power expanded its control by declaring a 2-year state of emergency after the failed coup in 2016, it also restricted union activities and mass demonstrations. It pushed workers to deeper forms of silence (Arslanalp & Deniz Erkmen, 2020a).

Second, the drive for mass marketisation presents a source of turbulence in Turkey. Marketisation has gained speed in this era to the extent that anything that falls out of the market has lost its political value in Turkey. The state apparatus mainly supports the market through links with corporations rather than partnering with labour unions. The market-based neoliberal transformation of social security that began in the 1980s also left workers unprotected. During the AKP rule, the accelerated privatisation and marketisation, inheritance of a flexible labour regime and expansion of subcontracting introduced different types of precarity alongside status-based and gender-related inequalities in the social policy system (Buğra, 2020; Dorlach, 2015). In addition, the transfer of responsibility for workers' welfare and demands for marketised relations with non-state actors pushed workers towards a precarious environment (Buğra & Adar, 2008). Lack of legal regulations and coercive measures in support of labour where hyper-deregulation left workers silent.

Third, at the macro-political level, the government termed most worker opposition terrorism or betrayal in Turkey (Araj & Savran, 2021), creating a turbulent context for worker solidarity. Solidarity among workers received resistance from the neoliberal market and the state forces. The pro-government media (Coşkun, 2020) and growing conservative populism (Firat, 2020; Kurtulus Korkman, 2015) secured consent and silenced worker dissent in Turkey. Thus, the Turkish context provides an interesting setting to explore the interplay between neoliberal ideology and worker silence.

3.2 | Privatisation of sugar factories in the turbulent neoliberal context of Turkey

As above, reflections of turbulence in the macro-national context led to turbulence in the mass privatisation of sugar factories. Initially, the industries established right after the proclamation of the Republic in 1923 aimed to stabilise

the economy and meet the country's basic needs. Sugar factories were part of this project to inculcate an industrial revolution in central Anatolia with the economic force of the state (Berberoglu, 1980). The fact that sugar factories have socio-economic and cultural prominence makes their privatisation case an exciting site to explore worker silence at the clash of the neoliberal drive of the country with its conservative motives on the one hand and the republican ideals of the Western facing Turkey on the other. Sugar factories were primarily located in rural and low-employment areas throughout the country, serving as economic hubs and employment lifelines for local populations. They had a mission to prevent irregular migration to cities, create employment, and benefit agriculture and animal husbandry with by-products (Erdoğan, 2017). Sugar factories served this purpose until they were reformed. The decision to set up public sugar factories historically dates to 1926. The so-called reformation of these factories through privatisation was initiated in 2000. The ruling party, AKP, included these factories in its privatisation programme in 2008 and 14 of the 25 factories were privatised in 2018. We examine mechanisms of worker silence in this turbulent context of privatisation of sugar factories in Turkey.

4 | METHODS

Drawing on a qualitative research methodology, we collected data through in-depth interviews with 48 workers from sugar factories in Turkey. We selected a qualitative design because workers in sugar factories are a vulnerable and hard-to-reach group (Hannekam, 2019). Qualitative research offers the opportunity to understand and explore unique beliefs, experiences, and interpretations of reality in its context (Abrams, 2010). The first author interviewed the participants. Sugar factories were selected as the study site as they are highly exposed to privatisation, precarity, and turbulent employment relations in the neoliberal context of Turkey.

4.1 | Participants

Sugar factory workers are a particularly hard-to-reach group of participants in the political climate of the last 5 years because of the risk of political exposure, social vulnerability and economic precarity. Thus, it was difficult to secure interviews with the 48 participants (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Initially, the first author contacted two workers from different factories through his contacts. The original two participants provided us with contacts in other sugar factories. Drawing on the snowball sampling technique, in the initial submission of this manuscript, 12 interviews were conducted from June to October 2020 (the first period). Following the advice from peer reviewers, we went back to the field in May 2021 to collect more data and reached 36 more participants over five months (the second period). In total, the study draws on 48 interviews which were conducted over nine months. We promised complete anonymity and confidentiality to participants and secured their trust and participation in the study with our cover letter, which had our institutional affiliations and full contact details.

Participants of this study had a similar socio-demographic composition to the workforce in the sugar factories. The age of the participants ranged between 30 and 56. Most of the participants are male, reflecting the gender composition in the workforce of sugar factories. Many participants had started their careers in sugar factories with limited experience in other sectors. Most of the participants are technical workers with specific expertise in the industry. We included further demographic details of the participants in Table 1.

4.2 | Interview schedule

To explore the relationality of the individual experiences and institutional mechanisms and forms that drove workers to silence in the face of mass privatisation in the neoliberal context, we opted to conduct in-depth interviews that

TABLE 1 Demographic information about participants, interview periods and duration.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Occupation	Tenure (year)	Interview periods	Interview duration (minutes)	
P1	Adnan	52	Male	Maintenance and repair master	30	First period	55
P2	Argun	44	Male	Overseer	26	Second period	64
P3	Ata	47	Male	Planting specialist	25	Second period	62
P4	Baha	46	Male	Technician	25	Second period	74
P5	Bedri	41	Male	Technician	20	Second period	49
P6	Bekir	49	Male	Machine master	25	First period	55
P7	Can	44	Male	Machine master	22	Second period	56
P8	Cem	42	Male	Electromechanical technician	22	Second period	48
P9	Cihan	49	Male	Agricultural tools foreman	25	Second period	69
P10	Demir	45	Male	Electrical technician	24	First period	61
P11	Emir	44	Male	Planting specialist	23	Second period	53
P12	Ender	52	Male	Agricultural tools foreman	30	First period	69
P13	Eser	48	Male	Warehouse chief	25	Second period	61
P14	Fahrettin	44	Male	Warehouse chief	23	Second period	54
P15	Faruk	47	Male	Filter technician	23	First period	59
P16	Fehmi	52	Male	Warehouse chief	33	Second period	60
P17	Feride	42	Female	Human resource specialist	21	Second period	54
P18	Gurur	49	Male	Foreman	27	Second period	57
P19	Hakan	48	Male	Foreman assistant	23	First period	72
P20	Halis	45	Male	Technician	25	Second period	56
P21	Hasan	43	Male	Warehouse chief	23	Second period	62
P22	Hicran	47	Female	Secretary	28	Second period	68
P23	Kaan	55	Male	Foreman	32	First period	65
P24	Levent	45	Male	Technician	23	Second period	54
P25	Leyla	42	Female	Human resource specialist	20	Second period	55
P26	Mahir	45	Male	Warehouse chief	24	Second period	55
P27	Metin	45	Male	Driver	23	Second period	49
P28	Nahit	51	Male	Planting specialist	38	Second period	59
P29	Necip	52	Male	Planting specialist	30	Second period	63
P30	Niyazi	49	Male	Machine master	27	Second period	64
P31	Okan	56	Male	Planting specialist	36	Second period	53
P32	Osman	44	Male	Technician	20	Second period	50
P33	Ozan	54	Male	Foreman	31	Second period	54
P34	Pars	48	Male	Foreman	25	Second period	58
P35	Polat	48	Male	Foreman	27	Second period	63
P36	Rafet	47	Male	Foreman	22	First period	60
P37	Recai	52	Male	Planting specialist	30	Second period	67
P38	Saadettin	48	Male	Maintenance and repair master	25	Second period	57

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Occupation	Tenure (year)	Interview periods	Interview duration (minutes)
P39 Sabri	53	Male	Refined-syrup maker	34	First period	58
P40 Sargun	43	Male	Electrical technician	25	Second period	62
P41 Sencer	43	Male	Overseer	22	Second period	65
P42 Serhat	47	Male	Driver	23	Second period	53
P43 Tahsin	54	Male	Maintenance and repair master	32	First period	57
P44 Talip	45	Male	Weigher	24	Second period	55
P45 Ufuk	47	Male	Agricultural machinery master	23	First period	59
P46 Yakup	30	Male	Electromechanical technician	21	First period	61
P47 Yasemin	41	Female	Accountant	22	Second period	72
P48 Yavuz	53	Male	Weigher	29	Second period	54

provide rich multilevel insights on worker experience and human resource practices as experienced by workers. Interview questions aimed to understand their current experiences of silence and their perceptions of the human resource practices in the mass privatisation of sugar factories. We designed the questions to reveal the role of unions, political actors, and stakeholders of factories, such as farmers, transporters, and society, in shaping the worker experience.

We designed an interview schedule of 18 questions and prompts for semi-structured qualitative interviews. We identified these questions and prompts based on our research questions and the worker silence literature. The interview questions we designed had four central subheadings, alongside socio-demographic questions (such as age, gender, occupation, and seniority): (1) workers' experience across the career life cycle, (2) workers' experience in terms of collective organising, (3) workers' assessment of the human resource and organisational interventions, (4) workers' expectations in response to their real-life experiences. The interview schedule also included demographic questions, as outlined in the table above. The design made it easy for us to concentrate on the main themes and provided both flexibility and spontaneity for participants to reveal their concerns, priorities, and particular focus.

4.3 | Data analysis

When an interview was completed, the first author transcribed the interview verbatim, and the transcription was stored on a secure computer. We ensured privacy and anonymity by extracting information from the data set that would reveal the identity of the participants and assigned a pseudonym for each interviewee. We have also taken out information which can show the sugar factory as it could lead to the identification of the participants. As we promised to the participants, we have worked with our utmost care to secure data, information or other relevant material that will in any way reveal their identity.

We analysed data thematically. The thematic analysis allowed us to specify, classify and organise data to unveil meanings and experiences and appreciate patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We started the analysis by coding the data. For this stage, we created a coding list based on the questionnaire. The first list consisted of 35 codes. The abductive approach helped us organically modify our coding list throughout the analysis. We needed new codes, added them to the coding list, and redefined or removed some marginal aspects. We completed the coding process with a 50-coded list.

To find significant patterns from the coded data gathered from interviews, we used a relational perspective and adopted abductive research in the process of thematic analysis. The relational perspective enabled us to establish meaningful relationships between micro-individual, meso-organisational and macro-national levels in worker accounts

and to conduct context-oriented and comprehensive studies (Özbilgin, 2006; Syed & Özbilgin, 2009). Abductive research offers the opportunity to relate plausible theories to make sense of observations poorly explained by the extant construct (Meyer & Lunnay, 2013, 2013; Özbilgin & Erbil, 2019). Moving between the initial literature review of the worker silence, the neoliberal context, and the privatisations of sugar factories, we identified three salient themes outlined in the literature review. The themes emerged in the data and relevant studies of worker silence and precarity in the neoliberal context of Turkey (Durak, 2013). We present codes, subthemes and the three significant themes that account for worker silence in sugar factories in Turkey's turbulent context of neoliberal ideology in Table 2.

5 | FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As this study was conducted with an abductive approach, we identified three significant worker silencing mechanisms that corresponded with the turbulent employment conditions in the neoliberal national context we are studying. First, we determined how the neoliberal ideology engendered worker silence. Second, we noted that marketisation entrenched silence. The public sector, which had a stronger tradition of voice mechanisms, such as unions, abandoned these in preference for worker silence in privatisation. Third, we found that the privatisation process harmed solidarity between workers and lack of solidarity increased worker silence. Figure 1 below outlines the three mechanisms along with 13 respective forms of worker silence. The figure points out the new forms of worker silence we identified, and highlights locally meaningful, emic, forms to the Turkish context.

TABLE 2 Codes, subthemes, themes.

Codes	Subthemes	Themes	
"Protest", "state of emergency", "freedom of expression"	Lack of protest culture	Silencing through the dismissal of democratic demands	
"Empathy", "fear", "stigmatisation"	Fear of violence		
"Lack of the union's support", "society", "NGOs", "municipalities", "suppliers"	Lack of stakeholders' support		
"Fear of being dismissed", "bullying", "exclusion"	Concern for harassment and bullying	Silencing through the marketisation of everything	
"Devaluation of labour", "decision of participation", "consulting firms"	Adoption of market-oriented policies		
"Officers", "4C/4D", "subcontractor", "permanent workers", "temporal workers"	Instrumentalisation of status-based disparities		
"Careerism", "managerialism", "pragmatism", "performance", "promotion"	Encouragement of careerist attitudes		
"Fatherhood", "gender roles", "patriarchy", "being a female worker is..."	Acquiesce to traditional and conservative norms		
"Promotion of de-unionisation", "union solidarity", "unions' relations"	Loss of power of unions and de-unionisation		Silencing through the decline of solidarity
"Cynical attitudes", "desperation", "sceptic statement"	Cynicism		
"God belief", "gratefulness ('şükür')", "resignation ('tevekkül')", "patience ('sabr')", "spirituality"	Enforcement of religiosity and fatalism		
"Informal hierarchy", "being worker is...", "feeling excluded", "we and they", "status inequality"	Lack of status equalities		
"union's internal conflicts", "individual interests", "fragmentation"	Lack of prioritisation of problems		

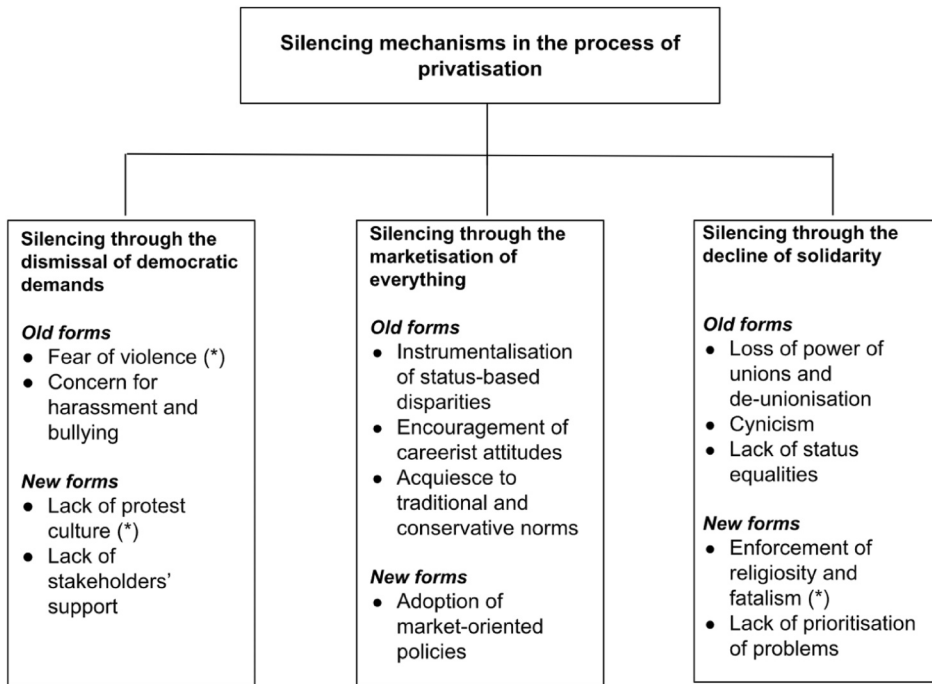


FIGURE 1 Conceptual framework of mechanisms and forms of worker silencing in the process of privatisation. (*) These are emicforms of worker silencing specific to Turkey.

5.1 | Silencing through the dismissal of democratic demands of workers

We identified four forms of worker silencing under this mechanism. Table 3 provides illustrative quotes from workers and identifies the HRM practices that caused worker silence.

Studying silence in a country with an unregulated setting for protecting workers is particularly interesting. Turkish experience provides a starker example in terms of worker silence in comparison to other countries with regulations for worker protections (Arslanalp & Deniz Erkmen, 2020b). One of the participants, Adnan (P1), explained how workers' protection was deregulated and the multifaceted practices introduced as part of the state of emergency measures to ensure worker silence. First, state-level actors, such as politicians, municipal leaders, police, and the armed forces, colluded to ensure worker silence. Second, the opposition forms such as rights of protest, visits by members of opposition politicians and even declarations of divergent opinions were rescinded in the name of state emergency. So, the macro-national and meso-institutional dismissal of democratic demands of workers culminated in worker silence. Adnan, one of the more vocal opponents of privatisation, revealed how such macro and meso-level draconian measures that undermined workers left him in a precarious position and ensured his silence in response to the privatisation.

In the context of an unregulated and overarching neoliberal ideology, social empathy is tarnished through violence and fear of violence. Psychogios & Prouska (2018) explained that in times of crises and turbulence, which is the case in our study context, social empathy declines and silences workers. The authors draw on Noelle-Neumann (1974) notion of the spiral of silence, which suggests a co-generative process between fear and silence. In our study, there was evidence of police brutality enforcing worker silence (Sözcü, 2014; Yalman & Topal, 2019). Bekir (P6), in our study, explained how the fear of police brutality and the will of the government to privatise the factory ensured his silence.

TABLE 3 Mechanism 1: Silencing through the dismissal of democratic demands, key indicative quotes, HRM practices.

Forms of worker experiences of silencing mechanism	Participants who reported this theme	Key indicative quotes	Worker reports of HRM practices to worker silence
1a. Lack of protest culture	P1, P4, P5, P9, P10, P11, P12, P16, P18, P19, P20, P22, P23, P28, P29, P34, P38, P40, P41, P42, P45	I said that I wanted to make a statement [against privatisation]. The factory manager interpreted this situation as 'I was trying to unseat him.' (Adnan, 52, male, maintenance and repair master, tenured for 30 years)	HRM does not provide information about privatisation process HRM does not develop alternative methods
1b. Fear of violence	P1, P2, P4, P6, P12, P15, P22, P27, P29, P30, P31, P34, P35, P36, P39, P42, P45, P48	We have also seen what happened to the workers of TEKEL. They were exposed to beating by the police and pepper spray. (Bekir, 49, male, machine master, tenured for 25 years)	HRM calms worker responses to privatisation HRM asserts the dominant promises and norms of the privatisation discourse
1c. Lack of stakeholder' support	P3, P4, P9, P15, P20, P21, P24, P29, P34, P35, P40, P44, P46, P47	But here [in privatisation] everyone is losing, but nobody reacts. They [stakeholders] cannot react. (Faruk, 47, male, filter technician, tenured for 23 years)	
1d. Concern for harassment and bullying	P3, P18, P21, P25, P33, P35, P40, P43, P44, P48	When the administrators had the opportunity, I don't know if we can say it was mobbing or not, they were putting pressure on those who participated in the protests [against privatisation]. (Sargun, 43, male, electrical technician, tenured for 25 years)	

There is extensive propaganda in the mainstream media supporting the state's neoliberal ideology. The dominance of the state in the news and media serves to suppress and neutralise reactions and even promotes hegemonic consent for privatisation. In Turkey, the discourse of failing republican systems and structures, such as state-owned industries, favours capitalist interests. Faruk (P15) explained how the privatisation process and neoliberal propaganda machinery silenced workers. Sargun (P40) explained that the neoliberal propaganda harassed workers to remain silent even though the neoliberal turn generated objectionable outcomes such as ending secure employment.

We queried how workers perceived the role of HRM in privatisation. Participants noted that the HRM was not supportive of worker demands. Since the factory administrations did not provide information about the process, neither the HRM function nor the workers could develop alternative methods to enhance their chances and choices. As a result, the workers remained in the dark, and the HRM merely served in line with employer demands. Beyond its unwillingness to support workers, HRM has reportedly played another more subversive role in calming and quietening worker responses to privatisation with official statements, which turned out to be unverifiable. HRM falsely announced that nothing would change for workers and that everyone would continue their work in the same way in

a privatised system. Thus, HRM has contributed to the workers' silence by appeasing worker concerns and spreading the neoliberal propaganda that privatisation would serve the workers well. Workers often saw that what they experienced in privatisation was not continuity but a radical decline in their job security and work cultures. Yet, workers remained silent as other alternatives were untenable.

5.2 | Silencing through the marketisation of everything

Mass marketisation of sugar factories required not only a concerted effort by the state to convince all stakeholders of the supposed decline and financial nonviability of state-owned enterprises but also a drive to exclude workers from the processes of decision-making about this marketisation effort (see Table 4). So, the process worked in a top-down fashion, dictated without any indication of timelines, means or methods by which marketisation would happen and without the involvement of worker collectives and unions. The way marketisation was declared involved much uncertainty for workers, offering expansive flexibility to investors who would buy the sugar factories lined up for privatisation. The flexibility provided to the investors was not afforded to the workers, who remained in the dark regarding what privatisation would bring to them. As such, marketisation and how it is done each time in sugar factory privatisation has ensured worker silence. It was also widely reported that the consulting firms which were invited in to manage the marketisation of sugar factories dehumanised workers, treated them as mere numbers and prepared financially focussed reports without an appreciation of other impacts of marketisation on people, communities, and the operation of the sector in Turkey (Hürriyet, 2018). "Neoliberal alliances that implement privatisation" (Jupe & Funnell, 2015, p. 66) often refer to consultants to give the impression of accountability to the marketisation process. The state has introduced enterprise logic via consultants to social institutions, which has separated and fragmented workers. Hakan (P19) explained how the marketisation process of sugar factories operated in Turkey and how marketisation caused dehumanisation, denigrating the value of workers and their labour to nothing.

Status-based inequalities also created fragmentation among workers. The existence of workers of different statuses in the factory prevented their collective action and solidarity as they were clustered across status lines in marketisation. For example, the workers were segregated into four groups: regular officers, regular workers, temporary workers, and subcontractors. Previous research demonstrated that job insecurity became permanent with subcontracting and fragmentation of workforces in sugar factories (Nurol & Unal, 2018) in their marketisation process. Demir (P10) explained how the precarity that marketisation created forced workers to be obedient and silent. All workers felt precarity rendered invisible in the marketisation process, and it served to silence workers by fragmentation strategies of the employers in the marketisation process.

Careerist and individualist attitudes among workers have led to precarity, reducing their collective bargaining power. In a turbulent environment, workers become vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Managers could alleviate the effects of adverse working conditions by keeping workers informed (Hickland et al., 2020). Yet, using their political ties, sugar factory managers could move into other public institutions before privatisation. They also have the power to negotiate with the new owners of sugar factories, that is, the private investors, and continue to pursue careerist goals without exposure to precarity. Thus, the marketisation created fragmented experiences among workers. As Ufuk (P45) explained, the high-status workers, such as managers, could navigate the marketisation process; their silence was since the system served them well. The silence of ordinary workers, particularly the agency and subcontracted workers, was due to a lack of voice mechanisms in the marketisation process that acknowledged their existence or value.

The family ideology that the ruling party promotes in Turkey is based on uneven gender relations at work and home and affords men the responsibility to financially maintain the family (Boratav et al., 2014). Turkey's form of neoliberalism has diminished state responsibilities in providing gender equality at work and home and came with a patriarchal family discourse (Yazıcı, 2012). High unemployment and minimum wages became the norm. The marketisation of the sugar factories is predicated on this dominant masculine ideal that men are the main providers in their

TABLE 4 Mechanism 2: Silencing through the marketisation of everything, key indicative quotes, HRM practices.

Forms of worker experiences of silencing mechanism	Participants who reported this theme	Key indicative quotes	Worker reports of HRM practices to worker silence
2a. Adoption of market-oriented policies	P1, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P13, P14, P15, P18, P19, P20, P21, P24, P26, P30, P31, P33, P34, P35, P39, P40, P41, P43, P45, P48	The privatisation administration presidency is calling a consulting firm, asking 'how can we privatise the factory?' [...]. Both the administrators and other parties act as if the workers have never worked in the factory, as if our labour was worth nothing. (Hakan, 48, male, foreman assistant, tenured for 23 years)	HRM is kept outside the privatisation planning stage HRM allows managers to seek privileges using their positions
2b. Instrumentalisation of status-based disparities	P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P14, P17, P18, P19, P23, P24, P26, P27, P29, P33, P34, P37, P38, P39, P40, P44, P45, P46	The difference between the status of the workers revealed two different behaviours. Those who are with permanent contracts say: 'Nothing will happen to me'. Others [temporary workers and subcontractors] have 'anxiety about being fired by privatisation.' (Demir, 45, male, electrical technician, tenured for 24 years)	
2c. Encouragement of careerist attitudes	P6, P7, P8, P9, P12, P13, P14, P15, P18, P19, P22, P23, P24, P28, P29, P30, P31, P35, P37, P38, P44, P45, P47	Those managers who want to remain in the factory would have the ear of the new investors and buyers. They also attract our colleagues and establish their teams into the future. (Ufuk, 47, male, Agricultural machinery master, tenured for 23 years)	
2d. Acquiesce to traditional and conservative norms	P1, P2, P6, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P17, P18, P19, P24, P25, P26, P27, P33, P34, P38, P43, P45, P47, P48	My family was happy that I am retired. [...] now, I continue my job by getting a salary from the factory that has been privatised in addition to my pension. I [have to] maintain my family. (Tahsin, 54, male, maintenance and repair master, tenured for 32 years)	

families. Such forms of gender segregation eroded human values of gender equality in sugar factories, which pushed women out of employment and provided men with some unearned gender-based entitlements in privatisation. Tahsin (P43) retired due to privatisation. He continued to work in the privatised company and drew a salary and a pension. He commented on how his family was content with this decision. Marketisation caused the silent acceptance of traditional and conservative gender norms at work.

In the marketisation of everything in Turkey, the HRM function played varied roles. The consulting firms invited to manage the privatisation process often ignored HRM's social and value creation dimensions. As a result, the HRM was kept outside the planning stage except for retrieving HR data. HRM also silenced workers who were made redundant by offering them alternative recruitment opportunities. Some workers had to seriously consider these poor options due to the country's ongoing unemployment crisis. They also risk being replaced by younger workers on lower wages.

HRM promoted privatisation using its 'management status'. As HRM is a management function, HR officers have higher status than most workers. HRM function gave a false perception that the public sector provides job security. The stark reality hit the workers when the factory was privatised. Even then, they turned to themselves, looking for choices elsewhere rather than speaking up about the injustice of the process.

5.3 | Silencing through the deterioration of solidarity

Demarcating union interests to national interests silenced solidarity among workers around their shared concerns. The unions became instruments of state propaganda, disallowing workers to express their discontent with privatisation (See Table 5). Those unions which opposed the state line were criminalised, and the union members in those unions were targeted and harassed. Rafet (P36) explained how the lack of unionisation around shared concerns made breaking the silence a very undesirable option for individual workers. He also expressed how he felt he was silenced in the absence of trade union support.

The decline of trade union representation and power in Turkey engendered cynical silence, a form of silent discontent. Prouska and Psychogios (2019, pp. 15–16) explained that in the process of line managers' silence in non-unionised SMEs in Greece, *"An underlying element in cynical silence is a broader lack of trust towards how the government has dealt with the crisis, how the media has portrayed the crisis and the extent to which, consequently, senior managers/owners have used the pretext of the impact of the crisis on business operations during this time."* Similarly in Turkey, the collusion of all political and economic actors and absence of trade union representation, combined with Turkish political authoritarianism ensured worker silence "through securitisation of dissent, mounting repression, and systematic violation of civil liberties" (Esen & Gumuscu, 2020, p. 1). This form of cynical silence and silent consent was also constructed and disseminated with the support of the pro-government media. Kaan (P23) explained that the decline of solidarity affected the oppositional workers. Even the nationalists and supporters of the ruling party were affected adversely and reverted to cynical silence, which has become a common form of silence for workers of privatised sugar factories in Turkey.

Gone with the decline of the culture of solidarity among workers in Turkey is the hope for a better collective future. Instead, hope took more of an individualised form. Such forms of hope in the work context lead to acceptance of silence. Our findings add to the literature on hope-based silence as hope is entrenched in discourses and beliefs of religious faith in Turkey. Since the 1980s, Islamisation has been a deliberate strategy to silently get workers to comply with the state authority. Islamic reconfiguration of society and religious codes leads individuals to consent (Adaman et al., 2019; Can Gürcan & Peker, 2015; Korkut & Sarfati, 2020; Kurtulus Korkman, 2015). The common slogan among Islamically inspired trade unions, 'Prosperity, Nature, Fate, Gratefulness and Patience'/'Bereket, Fitrat, Kısmet, Şükür, Sabır' invites workers to grateful silence and subjugation. Silence is a consenting behaviour which is strongly endorsed in the context of adversity and authority in most Islamic doctrines. Ender's (P12) account reflected

TABLE 5 Mechanism 3: Silencing through the decline of solidarity, key indicative quotes, HRM practices.

Forms of worker experiences of silencing mechanism	Participants who reported this theme	Key indicative quotes	Worker reports of HRM practices to worker silence
3a. Loss of power of unions and de-unionisation	P5, P7, P11, P16, P17, P18, P19, P21, P22, P27, P28, P30, P31, P34, P36, P37, P39, P40, P47	For young people [in privatised factories], the situation is even worse. [...] they do not have a desire to unionise, they are afraid that they will not be recruited because they are union members. (Rafet, 47, male, foreman, tenured for 22 years)	HRM colluded with the state HRM facilitated de-unionisation before and after privatisation HRM created informal hierarchies between workers, which paves the way for privatisation with status inequalities
3b. Cynicism	P1, P8, P15, P16, P18, P19, P21, P22, P23, P24, P25, P30, P32, P33, P34, P36, P37, P40, P41, P42, P46	The power [authority] has turned everything it has today into an element of pressure. You cannot act, when you do, they block your way legally. All the fellow workers consented and accepted. (Kaan, 55, male, foreman, tenured for 32 years)	
3c. Enforcement of religiosity and fatalism	P1, P5, P6, P7, P11, P12, P15, P18, P23, P24, P25, P26, P30, P31, P33, P34, P38, P39, P40, P41, P42, P43, P48	That is fate. There is no more than fate. I believe in fate. I consented. I accepted my retirement. (Ender, 52, male, agricultural tools foreman, tenured for 30 years)	
3d. Lack of status equalities	P1, P2, P5, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P17, P20, P24, P25, P26, P27, P34, P38, P43, P45, P48	As permanent workers, we saw them [subcontractors] as 'people who earn lower wages, whose fate is in our hands, who will be fired immediately if we disparage them'. [...] they did not support us when it was necessary to raise a voice against privatisation. (Feride, 42, female, human resource specialist, tenured for 25 years)	
3e. Lack of prioritisation of problems	P2, P3, P10, P11, P12, P16, P17, P19, P20, P23, P24, P27, P28, P32, P33, P35, P36, P39, P40, P41, P42, P45, P46, P47	There was turmoil below [in local units of the union]. Local union leaders and their team are running an election race. The opposing side blamed the local union-management instead of being united against privatisation. (Serhat, 47, male, driver, tenured for 23 years)	

how this religious discourse prevents solidarity and critical evaluation of privatisation. His faith-based hope turns into a loyalty to the conservative regime, ensuring his silence.

Status-based inequalities create informal hierarchies among workers (Hopkins, 2011). The fact that the permanent workers considered themselves more powerful than subcontractors impacted the privatisation of the sugar factories. The informal hierarchy among workers disrupted the pace of work and legitimised privatisation with the rhetoric of taking productivity measures. Feride (P17) expressed how the status differences among workers undermined solidarity. Fragmentation was also evident among trade unions. Intra-union conflicts impacted the suppression of solidarity in the privatisation of sugar factories. Ahmet explained the intra-union disputes, which are based on the methods and discourses of overcoming the pressures of privatisation on workers. Serhat (P42) reported how intra-union clashes damaged solidarity.

The HRM function's emergence coincides with Turkey's trade union power decline. Although we do not pursue a line of argumentation that suggests a causal relationship, our study shows that the HR function followed anti-union policies and played on workers' fears of job losses. The growing importance of HRM as a stakeholder in shaping employment relations weakened the unions and morally led solidarity in Turkey. Sitting on the side of employers rather than workers, HRM in sugar factories did not prepare the workers for the privatisation and post-privatisation adjustment. The decline of solidarity has led to worker silence as the culturally and politically endorsed course of action. The corrosion of solidarity through de-unionisation and other state coercive measures has led to worker silence. Solidarity was a means by which workers could speak up in collectives. As the HR colluded with the state in silencing workers, their use of religious and nationalist rhetoric has kept workers loyal to the state authority and ensured their faith and ideology-based silence.

6 | CONCLUSION

Worker silence took three forms in sugar factories in Turkey. First, workers were silenced through the dismissal of their democratic demands. This silencing was enforced with multilevel tactics employed by the state apparatus, the market, the media, and the corporate world. Second, workers were silenced through the marketisation of everything. This form of silencing involved distortion and deterioration of the value of the common good, public service and state sector enterprises. Marketisation rendered workers silent by symbolically deteriorating their value through fragmentation and status-based inequalities imposed by market logic. Third, workers were silenced through the decline of solidarity. This form of silence was ensured by upholding religious and nationalist traditions of submission to authority and power and the concomitant loss of collective power. Our study shows that the HRM served as a handmaiden to neoliberal ideology, deepening worker silence.

Silencing democratic demands in the Turkish context curbed collective worker representations as limitations were introduced to workers' welfare and human rights. As Stigitz (2012) argued, neoliberal ideology in a developing country with weak social welfare and human rights regulations serves to deteriorate the democratic demands of workers. Our study shows worker silence is fostered as unregulated neoliberalism has drowned workers' voices. In line with the recent work of Küskü et al. (2020), our study shows that an unregulated form of neoliberalism deepens worker silence by valorising financial concerns over and above worker protections. Our paper makes two distinct theoretical contributions: First, it explicates how worker silence became entrenched, despite general worker cynicism, resentment, and disdain about privatisation. Second, the paper adds to our understanding of worker silence in privatisation by extending the typology of three mechanisms and 13 forms of worker silence and corresponding HRM practices reported by workers in the mass marketisation of sugar factories in the unregulated neoliberal context of Turkey. The 13 forms of worker silence we identified are: lack of protest culture, fear of violence (cf. Yalman & Topal, 2019), lack of stakeholders' support, concern for harassment and bullying (cf. Arslan, 2015; Van Dyne et al., 2003), adoption of market-oriented policies, the instrumentalisation of status-based disparities (cf. Nurok & Unal, 2018), encouragement of careerist attitudes (cf. Hickland et al., 2020), acquiescence to traditional and conservative norms (cf. Pinder &

Harlos, 2001; Van Dyne et al., 2003), loss of power of unions and de-unionisation (cf. Özkızıltan, 2019), cynicism (cf. Ozeren et al., 2016; Prouska & Psychogios, 2019), enforcement of religiosity and fatalism, lack of status equalities (cf. Hopkins, 2011), and lack of prioritisation of problems (see above Figure 1).

Turkey has been undergoing a period of mass marketisation of its state enterprises since 2018. Marketisation at the macro level had consequences of exposure to private sector competition logics at the meso-organisation level and careerism at the micro-individual level (Prouska & Psychogios, 2018; Bozkurt-Güngen, 2018). Thus, the process of marketisation does not only happen at the macro level but cuts across all levels of values and processes where it happens. Because of unemployment and over-specialisation in this sector, workers were fragmented by HRM strategies. The valorised workers retained an instrumental and careerist silence knowing how they would benefit from the system. The expandable workers, that is, on temporary or on subcontracts, remained silent out of fear of job loss or police brutality. Managers served to silence workers, as Cullinane and Donaghey (2020) pointed out in their study. Managers were able to pursue privileged career paths for themselves, using their political ties, and were not interested in representing employee concerns. They colluded with HRM and coerced workers into submission to privatisation with the promise that they could retain their lucrative and mobile careers.

Solidarity has declined as a cultural value among workers in the last 40 years as a direct consequence of the neoliberal turn, which promoted values of individualism (Bal & Dóci, 2018). Worker silence was ensured through dual processes. The collective silence was guaranteed through the decline and perversion of trade union representation on nationalist and religious lines. The individual silence of workers was ensured through the endorsement of faith-based silence by the state apparatus and the coercive measures adopted by the state, the police, the legal system and organisational agents such as HRM. Durak (2013) and Gammon (2017) argued that conservatism and populism distracted workers' solidarity. This was the case also among workers in the Turkish sugar factories. In addition, the state endorsed the tradition of faith-based silence, which secured workers' consent to poor working conditions in Turkey. Dean and Greene (2017) identify similar forms of loyalty and silence among workers with limited terms and conditions.

Furthermore, the adoption of patriarchal norms corroded solidarity through gendered fragmentation in Turkey. The workers' silent agreement around the state endorsed conservative belief systems and entrenched worker silence. HRM function remained on the side of employers and served to silence workers, using these discursive and policy tools that ensured consent.

Our study shows that worker silence is evident in workers' experiences and reports of HRM practices in Turkey's privatisation of sugar factories. Worker silence presents a national, sectoral, and organisational malaise which needs redress. Industrial democracies thrive on worker voices and dissent to ensure equity and welfare for all. There is a need for further research to explore whether and how HRM could play a more progressive role in building and safeguarding worker voice (Palalar Alkan, Özbilgin & Kamasak, 2022) in the context of privatisation in neoliberal regimes, particularly in countries and regions with limited social welfare systems and protective regulation for workers. We suggest that HRM should develop strategies to end worker silence. To ensure this, HRM could play a more balanced role in representing workers' voices, dissent, and opposition to management and a more transparent and supportive role in preparing workers to cope with the process of privatisation and post-privatisation adjustment.

There are some limitations of this study. Due to travel restrictions imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic, we could not conduct the interviews face to face and had to communicate with the participants by phone. Yet, the participants allowed the phone calls to be recorded and transcribed in full. Besides, all sugar factories are now part of the national wealth fund. Implications of this transfer of ownership are not part of this study as this process remains a mystery. Therefore, the study does not provide insights into the silencing effects of this new route to privatisation. Future research should focus on, first, the impact of the wealth fund and other cloaked privatisation methods on worker silence. Second, future research can explore how silence mechanisms could be combated by worker collectives and progressive HRM practices that lend voice to workers.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Due to the sensitive nature of the data, data set will be held by the authors.

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