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Abstract:

*State, Labor, and Landscape: The Making of the Zonguldak Coal Basin in Turkey*

The city of Zonguldak and its surrounding region, located in northwestern Turkey, has long served as the country's primary site of coal extraction. Following the industry's nationalization in the 1930s, the state heavily invested in Zonguldak and the coal sector. By the 1980s, however, the state not only reduced investments but also initiated privatization. Since then, alongside the now-shrinking state-owned company, several private mine operators have emerged. Another notable development has been the increasing prevalence of informal mining in the region. My dissertation examines ongoing transformations of Zonguldak's mining landscape to analyse the power struggles among informal miners, private operators, and state institutions in the post-1980 period. To do so, I draw on archival research, media analysis, and ethnographic and oral historical fieldwork conducted in Zonguldak during the summers of 2022, 2023, and 2024. Through my dissertation, I establish that while informal miners have consistently exercised their agency to pursue their socioeconomic interests in opposition to the hegemony of the state and private operators, the structures of oppression in Zonguldak have proven adaptive to bottom-up contestation. Specifically, informal coal has been integrated into the formal market through a "reflexive monitoring" system, which allows informal coal extraction under socio-spatial control mechanisms that ultimately reinforce existing power relations. Through this case study, my dissertation contributes to the scholarship of labor geography and geographies of resistance by examining both the possibilities and limitations of workers' agency against adaptive dominant powers.