

**Akgöz, Görkem.** 2024. *In the Shadow of War and Empire: Industrialisation, Nation-Building, and Working-Class Politics in Turkey*. Leiden: Brill. 374 pages. 4 maps. 32 figures. 1 table. ISBN: 9789004416741.

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Görkem Akgöz's *In the Shadow of War and Empire: Industrialisation, Nation-Building, and Working-Class Politics in Turkey* demonstrates the importance of critically re-examining a period of Turkish history often characterized by nostalgia and myth. The book meticulously explores how industrialisation and nation-building processes intertwined and intersected, spanning from the late Ottoman Empire's industrialisation efforts to the end of the Democratic Party era. Furthermore, it aims to fill a significant gap in historiography by offering a fresh perspective on the history of the working class, a central figure in these processes.

The book is divided into two main parts, each consisting of three chapters. The first part adopts a macro perspective, discussing the close relationship between industrialisation, political economy, and evolving economic ideas in the Early Republic with the process of modernization and nation-building. The second part narrows the focus to the lived experiences of industrial workers who carried the burden of this transformation, particularly their working conditions and relations on the factory floor. This dual-level analysis allows readers to better understand the discrepancies between planned economies and factory realities, successfully combining macro and micro analytical perspectives.

The first chapter provides a solid foundation for understanding the Ottoman Empire's industrialisation process. By drawing on a broad range of secondary sources, the chapter examines how the Ottoman Empire's first industrialisation drive began in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and why it did not achieve the desired level of success. This analysis clarifies the continuities and disruptions in Turkey's industrialisation history, highlighting how the trauma of this early failure deeply influenced the Republican elite's mindset.

The second chapter shifts focus to Turkey's political economy after the Republic's establishment. The author argues that statism was shaped by both internal and external dynamics, which expanded the state's manoeuvring capacity. Key factors included the declining influence of the 1929 economic crisis on peripheral countries and the Soviet Union's success with its planned economy model, which left a lasting impression on Turkish bureaucrats and intellectuals. Consequently, the state abandoned ineffective liberal policies in favour of statist economic strategies. The author convincingly argues that statist policies not only promoted economic growth but also strengthened the ruling CHP, enabling it to implement reforms more effectively and consolidate its power.

In the third chapter, the focus turns to the political dimension of state policies and the strategic establishment of state factories. While Ottoman factories were primarily

located in Istanbul, the Republic deliberately placed factories in remote parts of Anatolia. Despite foreign experts criticizing these locations as inefficient, the Republican government prioritized political objectives over economic ones. These factories and railways were seen as tools for penetrating Anatolia and spreading modernity. However, the author also highlights significant challenges, such as inadequate infrastructure and labour shortages, which hindered the success of these ambitious modernization efforts.

In the second part, the author examines the production process and the lives of workers, with a particular focus on the Bakırköy factory. The main question in this section revolves around how production relations operated within the factory. By utilizing primary sources, the author amplifies the voices of workers, a group often marginalized in traditional historiography.

The fourth chapter takes readers inside the factory, revealing the discrepancies between economic plans and reality. Contrary to the state's paternalistic rhetoric and technical planning, factory operations were often unstructured and chaotic. Workers faced numerous challenges, including uncertain wage policies, insufficient salaries amid rising living costs, housing shortages, and the authoritarian behaviour of foremen. Crucially, the author emphasizes that workers were far from passive; they resisted by quitting jobs or moving to other factories offering better conditions, prioritizing their own well-being over nationalist discourses.

The fifth chapter examines how World War II transformed workers' experiences. Although Turkey remained neutral during the war, its economy suffered severe disruptions. As living costs skyrocketed, workers' living conditions deteriorated. The author demonstrates how this period saw a rise in workers' self-awareness and organizational capacity, supported by petitions with increasingly assertive tones. Sections such as 'Questions of Distribution: Mümin versus Management' and 'Questions of Dignity: Mustafa versus Management' offer exemplary microhistorical analyses of workers' struggles.

In the final chapter, the author explores shifts in labour policies during the post-war period. External liberal influences and a more conscious working class at home forced a relaxation of authoritarian labour policies. Additionally, the emergence of a political party opposing the CHP significantly enhanced workers' bargaining power. The author highlights how workers became politicized in this environment, with unions emerging as key actors in their lives. Through the life stories of two workers, the chapter illustrates the diverse trajectories of this politicization process.

The book makes important contributions to the literature. The first is that labour fills a major gap in global historiography. The history of the working class in the Global South has been much less studied than in the Global North. Women's labour has been even more neglected. However, the book shows that women's labour was indispensable in the early Republican period and that women were more exploited because they were paid less. In this respect, although the work takes a broad view of labour and touches on important points both geographically and thematically, it does not exclude the factories, which were the main areas of production, from its analysis.

The book also filled a major gap in Turkish labour historiography, which is the history of workers in state factories. State factories have continued to be involved in daily

politics despite the passage of nearly 100 years. The privatization of these factories in the neoliberal period after 1980 created great discomfort in society, and these factories became a nostalgic, myth-filled taboo. However, it is shown in the book that the workers working in these factories do not have a life as described and that they suffer from various economic and social difficulties. Moreover, it demonstrates that the rhetoric of a patriotic and nationalist worker class, along with the image of a paternalistic and supra-class state, does not reflect the realities of their experiences.

Another significant strength of the book lies in its extensive use of resources. It draws on a diverse array of materials, including bureaucratic discourses, newspaper articles, reports by foreign experts, and government statistics, providing a robust foundation for its analysis. Most notably, the book highlights workers' petitions as a primary source, allowing their voices to emerge directly. These petitions provide a unique and invaluable insight into the experiences, struggles, and strategies of workers, offering a perspective rarely found in traditional historiography. Thanks to these sources, the book clearly shows that workers are not passive and are using the opportunities they have to develop different strategies to avoid the transformative effects of industry, oppression and misery. It has also shown once again how misleading the myths are that are created when we cannot reach out to workers' voices.

The only criticism of the book is that its emphasis on the failure of industrialisation efforts in the Ottoman and Republican periods feels somewhat exaggerated. While these initiatives did not achieve their full potential, Turkey has, since the 1930s, reached a position in terms of industrial output that is close to that of developed countries. Although political expectations may not have been entirely met, the statist policies succeeded in guiding the private sector and serving as a role model for economic development. These policies supported protectionist measures and human capital development, enabling the Turkish bourgeoisie to become self-sufficient by the 1950s. However, with this newfound strength, the bourgeoisie sought to dismantle the expanding statist policies at the first opportunity.

In conclusion, *In the Shadow of War and Empire* is a remarkable work that fills significant gaps in both global and Turkish labour history. By utilizing extensive resources and combining macro and micro analyses, it offers a fresh perspective on Turkey's industrialisation history. The book sheds light on the real living conditions of the working class, who bore the burden of this transformation, effectively uncovering the truths hidden behind nostalgic and mythologized narratives.