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Where was 1821? Space and Territory in the Greek Revolution



Review of Leda Papastefanaki and M. Erdem Kabadayı, eds., *Working in Greece and Turkey: A Comparative Labour History from Empires to Nation-States, 1840–1940*

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Leda Papastefanaki and M. Erdem Kabadayı, eds.

Working in Greece and Turkey:

A Comparative Labour History from Empires to Nation-States, 1840–1940

New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2020. xviii+468 pp.

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Working in Greece and Turkey is an innovative and fascinating edited volume that explores different angles of the changing labour market in the late Ottoman Empire and two of its successor nation-states, Turkey and Greece, from the 1840s up to the 1950s. This period, marked by long-lasting wars and major political shifts and transformations, presented both urban and rural populations with economic and social hardships. The two editors, Leda Papastefanaki and M. Erdem Kabadayı, collected thirteen chapters, two of them authored by the editors, reflecting innovative approaches to labour history. While the different chapters examine major questions of labour history, they do so by focusing on specific case studies (town, village, factory). Here lies one of the significant achievements of the volume. It offers a captivating combination of diverse and new sources and methods with microhistorical analysis, enabling the authors to challenge some of the major assumptions in labour history and to offer new insights and conclusions.

As is the custom, the editors open the volume with an introduction that presents the volume's approach and main methodological frameworks. Their introduction achieves much more, as it also provides a detailed historiographical discussion about the changing place given, first, to the Ottoman legacies in Greece and Turkey and, second, regarding the ever-changing attitudes to labour histories in both countries. New concepts and approaches of the last decades, adopted from gender, class, race, legal and environmental studies, have totally altered how we think of labour history, both salaried and unpaid work, in both countries. The authors' historiographical surveys help the reader better understand their ambition to "bridge the Aegean" and to compile a volume aiming to present a connected labour history of two neighbouring countries that share much of their modern history. In their epilogue, the editors move from the individual chapters to draw some general conclusions and to suggest future research directions.

The different chapters are divided into three parts. These include the rural and urban

organisation and conditions of work; the evolvement of the labour markets following the political changes triggered by mass migration and the rise of different forms of nationalism during the second half of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; and the most original part, in my opinion, the impact of emotions on the shaping of the labour market. The development of paternalistic practices among employers to bond their employees to their workplace and thus ensure their loyalty is a remarkable example discussed in this part of the book. The volume's various parts take the readers to diverse workplaces on both sides of the Aegean and beyond and explore them as case studies that offer insights and clues regarding changing work conditions and regulations. Consequently, the big questions surrounding labour history are translated into the faces, names and deeds of individuals who left their imprints in different records. Such an approach, that constantly moves between macro- and micro-analyses, helps illustrate major changes, conflicts and developments and renders the volume readable for non-experts. A detailed bibliography and endnotes are attached at the end of each chapter, efficiently directing one to further reading.

Instead of presenting each chapter separately, I will highlight the main achievements of the volume and its contributions to the field. One of the major challenges of any editor is to shape a coherent volume out of multiple chapters authored by many scholars. *Working in Greece and Turkey* revolves around a clear periodisation (the late Ottoman Empire and the shift to nation-states) and a relatively straightforward geographical framework (mainly, but not exclusively, present-day Greece and Turkey and the corresponding Ottoman provinces). While using modern territorial definitions (Turkey and Greece), the different authors move away from the convictions of nationalist historiographies to revisit some of the main issues and paradigms related to labour history at that time. The latter are numerous and include modernisation, globalisation and European commercial expansion, legislation and citizenship rights, the shift from guilds to work associations and unions, industrialisation and protoindustrialisation, urbanisation and immigration, the rise of national and class politics and conflicts. Moreover, while previous studies focused on salaried urban male workers and unionisation, this volume sets aside the centre (both geographical and social) to discuss developments that took place in rural areas or by urban marginalised groups of “invisible” labourers, as one of the authors defined them, such as poor women, immigrants and minorities. This approach enables the volume to include understudied groups of labourers and labour markets and to analyse the significant changes that took place far from the centre or among often-silenced labourers that remained in the fringes or outside national historiographies. The emergence of textile protoindustries among Muslim and non-Muslim villagers in the Plovdiv uplands is an illustrative case study of a rapid economic expansion that took place in the Ottoman Balkan countryside during a period that is often characterised by the assumed decline of traditional artisanship due to the fierce competition

with European products evident in some Ottoman urban centres.

Furthermore, as it is evident from this volume, when allowed to do so, marginal labourers were probably one of the main social groups that were constantly on the move, searching for the scant opportunities to make a living. Following their footsteps, some of the chapters take the readers from rural areas to urban centres and vice versa. The lingering question of the so-called “new/second serfdom” and its relations to the evolvement of export trade in the Ottoman Balkans is an illustrative example of what can be achieved by moving the discussion from urban centres to rural areas.

The choice of the various authors to relate labour history to other approaches of studying history is another remarkable achievement that enriches the discussion and retrieves new factors (like famine) that influenced and altered labour relations and markets. While previous studies emphasised the continuity in Ottoman labour markets, where a son often followed his father’s steps in making (or rather, accepting) his labour choices, the relations between environmental disasters and the changing of work patterns demonstrate that labourers could and did influence their choices. The impact of gender studies is likewise evident in some of the volume’s chapters. Giving voice to essentially unpaid workers, many of whom were women and children, is one of the outcomes. The stories of young girls whose parents handed them over to serve as domestic servants in wealthy households indicate that they did exercise some agency in determining their fates and negotiating their rights later in their lives. New methods of assembling, organising and analysing archival data gleaned from tax registrations provide a better understanding of the ethnoreligious divisions in the Ottoman labour market. These examples demonstrate the volume’s success in suggesting new methodological tools and approaches for studying Ottoman labour markets.

One of the main proclaimed goals of this volume is to deconstruct the nationalistic historiographical approaches, evident for so long both in Turkey and in Greece (and in other nation-states that were established in previous Ottoman territories) and to reconnect the labour histories of Greece and Turkey, as two successor states of the Ottoman Empire. As such, it offers a much more complex and multilayered past than the one often imagined or claimed in nationalist historiography. One of the methodological tools allowing one to circumvent the nationalist approach is using historical sources that were produced by the “other” (for example, using Ottoman sources for the study of Greek history and Greek sources for exploring Turkish history), thus giving a voice to those deemed “the other” in nationalist historiography. Accordingly, various chapters search for such voices and actions among religious minorities and immigrants deemed unwanted due to their claimed otherness (like Russian refugees fleeing the Bolshevik revolution to Istanbul), thus assigning them some subjectivity. Another example is the discussion of the rivalry between refugees and local workers in the decade that proceeded the official exchange of populations between Turkey and Greece (1923). The rivalry between those Greek refugees who arrived from Eastern Thrace and Anatolia and local workers in Greece’s economic

centres in Athens and Piraeus reveals not merely the existing tension between different and opposing categories of “Greeks”, but also its direct impact on the forming of the Greek labour market for much of the first half of the twentieth century.

To use the comparative approach is one of the volume’s primary missions. While many of its chapters adopt a comparative approach to sustain their claims and suggest similarities and peculiarities, this is not always done with the idea of “bridging the Aegean” in mind. This is most obvious in the chapters that deal with postindependence Greek labour history. Chronologically, most of these chapters begin their discussion with the establishment of the Greek Kingdom, thus omitting the previous centuries of Ottoman rule. The exclusion of the Ottoman past and questions of legacies or continuities seems at odds with the volume’s comparative approach. Furthermore, as mentioned by the editors in their introduction, previous studies on labour markets in Thessaloniki’s docks or the tobacco industry did emphasise the relative continuity between the late Ottoman and the Greek periods in Macedonia and Western Thrace. However, this omission of the Ottoman past could be explained due to the different authors’ focus on localities in regions like Ermoupoli, Patras and the Peloponnese, that were on the margins of the Ottoman economy and owed much of their economic development – in some cases their creation – to the establishment of the Greek Kingdom. Drawing immigrants from different parts of Greece and beyond, their labour markets were created almost from scratch. It seems, therefore, that the editors’ wish to broaden the geographical and social scope of their volume actually limited the ability to adapt a thorough comparative approach between the two shores of the Aegean.

Notwithstanding this last observation, *Working in Greece and Turkey* represents a substantial contribution to the study of labour in the late Ottoman Empire, Greece and Turkey. By opening new horizons, advancing innovative research tools and methods, revisiting some persisting paradigms, and offering new approaches and original conclusions, this book enriches our knowledge and understanding of the labour market in the core provinces of the Ottoman Empire and two of its successor nation-states.