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Burçe Çelik, **Communications in Turkey and the Ottoman Empire: A Critical History,** Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2023, 254 pp., $28.00 (paperback).

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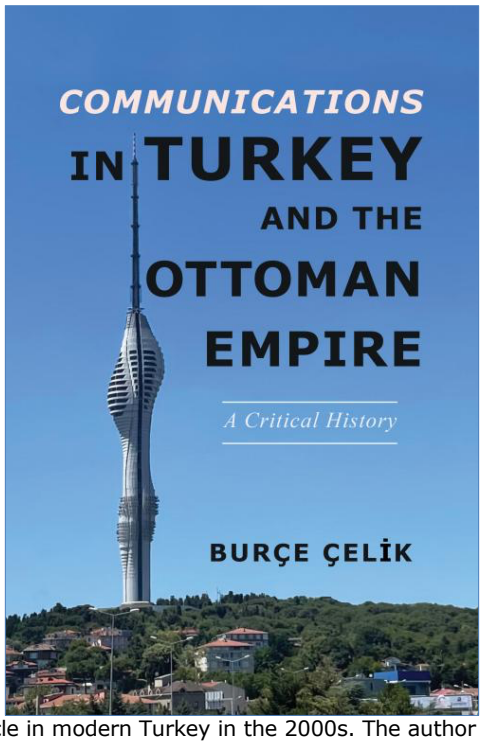

Communications in Turkey and the Ottoman Empire: A Critical History, by Burçe Çelik, is not yet another scholarly book on the modern communication history of a country from an Anglo-Eurocentric perspective. On the contrary, Burçe Çelik, with her book, does an extremely bold move in challenging "the historical pillars of West-centric media and communication studies" (p. 1). By recontextualizing the historical analysis, Çelik takes an intellectual stance on approaching a long span of communications in Ottoman and Turkish history from "non-Western historical temporalities rather than within a generically defined Anglo-European singular temporality" (p. 2). The book does not take the foundation of the republic in 1923 as a historical cue, but rather it takes us on an ambitious journey of more than two centuries, beginning with Mahmood II's reign in the 1830s. This choice of period is well-justified and explained by the author. The Ottoman Empire focused on the modernization of its communications during that time, which completed its full circle in modern Turkey in the 2000s. The author follows the path of the historian Braudel's long durée approach to the plurality of temporalities by recalling his advice to historians in general: "Do not think only in the short term, do not believe that only those actors who make noise are the most authentic", and finally, "there are others who matter but who are silent." Çelik focuses on the "silent ones," indeed. The historical roles of the Kurds and working-class women take their well-deserved yet underresearched place in this book. In all chapters, Çelik opens a refreshing sphere for these silenced communities to breathe among the "noisy actors, such as the state, the political elite, or the modernizers" (p.7).

The book is published by the University of Illinois Press as a part of the Geopolitics of Information book series, edited by prominent scholars Dan Schiller, Yuezhi Zhao, and Amanda Ciafone. The geopolitics of information deals with debates of the complexities of militarization and the commodification of communications, especially in the non-Western world. There is solid contemporary literature on the geopolitics of information as the intersection between communication and international relations, such as an edited volume by Daya Thussu (2025), *Changing Geopolitics of Global Communication,* Lee Artz's (2024) collection of leading scholars' "multiple perspectives about continuity and change in global media production and content" (p. 3), and *Global Media Dialogues: Industry, Politics, and Culture* and *Global Communication Governance at the Crossroads* (Padovani, Wavre, Hintz, Goggin, & Iosifidis, 2024), to name a few. All those latest sources gather a series of major changes in the geopolitics of global communication and its

relationship with non-Western countries. Similar to the approaches in the aforementioned collections, *Communications in Turkey and the Ottoman Empire* sheds light on the changing role of communications within industrialization and urbanization in parallel with "the historical periodization of capitalist transition" (p. 14).

Chapter 1 takes the reader back to the modernization attempts of Mahmood II and the Tanzimat Period, 19th-century capitalist imperialism, the Ottoman Empire's economic agreements with its political allies, and the implementation of the first postal network. This part on the social fabric of the Ottoman Empire, the structure and relations of the diverse communities (Muslims and non-Muslims, such as Jewish, Greek, Arab-Christian, and Armenian minorities), and the conception of justice is an interesting read, yet perhaps needs more historical references for more in-depth comprehension. Moving on with the first chapter, the changing communicative sphere and communication between the ruler (the Sultan) and the ruled are also told in parallel with the modernity attempts of that era. The Crimean War (1853–1856) is a turning point in terms of growing geopolitical tensions between Asia and Europe. This part narrates how the telegraphic and postal services are linked to the struggles between imperialism and the empire, and how the control of communications infrastructure has an impact on national sovereignty. Çelik highlights the importance of the growth of networks leading to the birth of "political society" in the Tanzimat era, meaning different social actors' involvement in protests against injustice by means of communication. Those networks are enriched by the reading, writing, and circulation of written texts, resulting in political deliberations. When the Ottoman Empire came to an end with World War I, with the Treaty of Sèvres, all foreign companies resumed having full control over postal, telegraph, and telephonic networks. Ottoman modernity, toward its demise, was constructed by the demand for Islamic justice rather than market democracy. This new evolution of "justice" brought its own communicative practices.

This brings us to the relation between a nation-building notion and communication in chapter 2. It is truly refreshing to read (as a native of Turkey and a communication scholar) a chapter on a historical analysis with communicative elements of Kemalism and its impacts on the subaltern population's lives at the core of its argument. This is rare since Kemalism as a modernization project is an extremely polarizing issue in contemporary Turkish society, while part of the society puts the persona of the founder of the republic exempt any criticism, and the other part blames Kemalist modernity for all the troubles the nation suffered later in history. In this chapter, Çelik explores the role of communications in the Anatolian liberation movement. She asks two fundamental questions: "What role did communications play in the complex and complicated project of Kemalist nation-building in the years of 1923–45?" and "In what way was the nation-building project a communicative process?" (p. 62). After a thorough analysis of the PTT (Post, Telegraph and Telephone Organization) and radio broadcasting attempts, Çelik points out that communication networks were never profit-oriented and capitalistic under Kemalist Turkey. On the contrary, the maximization of use-value was above the capital-driven ambitions in communications services. People's Houses (Halkevleri), founded in the early 1930s, were described as communications hubs with educational and cultural complexes and contested due to their Turkification, secularization, and assimilation policies, disregarding the Kurdish population and conservative Muslims.

The third chapter takes us through the labyrinths of developments between the mid-1940s and the late 1970s in terms of communications, militarization, and capitalism. Aligned with the vast and rich

literature on modernization in the non-Western world, Çelik adds the dimension of the militarization of communications and the implications of capitalist integration of peripheral countries. This chapter, which covers the "Americanization of Turkey," is quite extensive since the country's communications infrastructure radically changed after the rapprochement with the United States and the West, in contrast with the Kemalist nation-building ideology. The last two subsequent chapters explore the neoliberal transformation of the country during the 1980s and 1990s and the role of communication in strengthening the neoliberal militarism in an attempt to restructure communications through privatization, deregulation, and digitalization. While doing that, Çelik adds another dimension of Kurdish Media and Satellites in the Gulf War geopolitical context.

In the final chapter, Çelik dissects the concepts of Islamist populism, illiberal democracy, and how the AKP (Justice and Development Party) transformed the whole media landscape starting with the late 1990s. Turkey is perplexing to comprehend for readers who are not familiar with its culture, history, and politics. This book might be a good step for igniting an intellectual curiosity in those readers; however, given the density of the content, the target readers for this book are definitely communication scholars, historians, and researchers in Turkish studies. Burçe Çelik, with *Communications in Turkey and the Ottoman Empire,* should be acknowledged for her intellectual stance as a researcher to include women from all communication spheres, Kurds, progressive youth, and workers in this invaluable work. The only shortcoming of the book is not hearing their voices more in the text, as Çelik mentions the in-depth interviews conducted with those communities. With strong references and substantial archival work, Çelik presents diligent research in every chapter, presenting an impartial, balanced, and thorough book.

References

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