

CHILD WORKERS FROM AN EMPIRE TO A REPUBLIC: THE HEREKE FACTORY AS TRANSITIONAL SPACE (1910s-1950s)

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Abstract

This study examines the changing patterns of child labour at the Hereke Factory during the late years of the Ottoman Empire and the early years of the Turkish Republic. In the Ottoman era, the factory's management initiated its first housing projects for workers' families and built dormitories for single employees and child labourers, many of whom were orphans. These housing initiatives for civil servants and workers continued after the Republic was founded, especially following the factory's transfer to Sümerbank, with orphaned children still working there. The issue of child labour and orphans played a significant role in the early days of the Turkish Republic, which saw a major shift in the workforce, particularly among the proletariat. The period from the 1910s to the 1950s marked a gradual transition from forced labour to voluntary employment, which notably influenced the dynamics of the labour force.

Keywords: orphans, child labor, sport areas, housing for workers, dormitory.

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İmparatorluktan Cumhuriyete Çocuk İşçiler: Geçiş Mekanı Olarak Hereke Fabrika Yerleşkesi (1910'lar-1950'ler)

Özet

Bu çalışma, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun son yılları ile Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin ilk yıllarında Hereke Fabrikası'ndaki çocuk işçiliğinin değişen dinamiklerini incelemektedir. Osmanlı döneminde, fabrikadaki yönetim, işçilerin aileleri için ilk konut projelerini başlatmış ve tek başına çalışanlar ve çoğu yetim olan çocuk işçilerin barınması için lojmanlar inşa etmiştir. Cumhuriyet'in kurulmasının ardından, özellikle fabrikasının Sümerbank'a devrinden sonra, memurlar ve işçiler için konut projeleri devam etmiş, yetim çocuklar da hâlâ fabrikada çalıştırılmaya devam edilmiştir. Çocuk işçiliği ve yetimlerin durumu, işçi sınıfının büyük değişim geçirdiği Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin ilk yıllarında önemli bir rol oynamıştır. 1910'lar ile 1950'ler arasındaki bu geçiş dönemi, zorla çalıştırmadan gönüllü istihdama doğru kademeli bir kayma yaşanmış ve bu durum iş gücü dinamiklerini önemli ölçüde etkilemiştir.

Keywords: yetimler, çocuk emeği, spor alanları, işçiler için konut, yatakhane.

Introduction

This study analyses the evolving dynamics of child labour at Hereke Factory during the late years of the Ottoman Empire and the early years of the Turkish Republic. Located in the east of Istanbul on the shores of the Marmara Sea, Hereke Factory initially operated as a private broadcloth factory in 1842 and was later transformed into an imperial factory (Hereke Fabrika-yı Hümayun) in 1845. From then on, it produced textiles and carpets for local and international markets and played an instrumental role in a series of modernization projects of the empire. Following the establishment of the Turkish Republic, the factory was first transferred to the Industry and Metal Bank (Sanayi ve Maadin Bankası) in 1925. Later, it was transformed into a state economic enterprise in 1933 and started operating under Sümerbank. As it evolved from an Ottoman imperial institution into an important component of the new national infrastructure, the factory underwent major changes in its architecture and built environment. Notably, there were substantial modifications in the types of building materials used and the size and orientation of the different components of the factory, as well as in production patterns and the training, support, and housing opportunities provided to workers.¹

¹ For more details, see: Didem Yavuz Velipaşaoğlu, *Crafting an Empire: the Hereke Factory Campus (1842-1914)* (Libra Kitap, 2023).

Examining this period from the perspective of child labourers, this study argues that the policies and developments during the final years of the Ottoman Empire significantly impacted the conditions of child labourers even long after the empire had ended. The practice of using child labour extended to the post-Imperial period; however, the governing elites of the new Republic, known as Kemalists, saw it as a social problem that demanded reforms. Similar to other countries, child labour in early Republican Türkiye was inextricably linked to poverty and the influence of the working class.² In the Hereke factory, the management undertook the first housing projects for families in the Ottoman period and built wards to accommodate single workers and child labourers, many of whom were orphans. The factory's housing projects for civil servants and workers continued after the establishment of the Republic, particularly after its transfer to Sümerbank, while orphaned children were still employed in the facility.

This research centres on a particular group of eighty to ninety orphan girls, who were brought to the factory in 1926 and lived in a house with two large wards, as well as in four rooms within the factory.³ Those girls also participated in daily exercise routines, which were carried out following a specific understanding of health and the body. Throughout the 1930s, youth camps were established in various parts of the country, including Hereke, with the aim of overseeing the development of children and young people. Meanwhile, regulative changes in the country led to a new understanding of childhood, distancing itself from the practice of employing children as labourers and wage workers. The emergence of the national worker ideology led to a visible transformation in how child labour was perceived and approached. Through the support of social, cultural, and healthcare activities, efforts were made to construct a new working class. In this context, sports emerged as a key motif, particularly in fostering robust and healthy bodies, and in regulating the physical development of children and youth.

This study aims to explore those changes related to child labour by exploring answers to a series of pertinent questions: What activities did workers engage in their daily lives? What impact did the transition from empire to republic have on the worker profile, as well as on housing, culture, and health programs? How did the concept of child labour evolve along with steps taken to create a national worker profile? And finally, how did the youth camps opened in Hereke in the 1930s reflect this changing understanding of children?

² Semih Gokatalay, 'Child Labor and Industrialization in Early Republican Turkey', in *Standard of Living: Essays on Economics, History and Religion in Honor of John E. Murray* (Springer, 2022), 279-297.

³ *Sümerbank Hereke Yünlü ve İpekli* (İstanbul: Sümerbank, 1934), 10-11.

A Photograph among Old Photographs



Figure 1. Housing for family workers and dormitory for orphans of Hereke Factory Campus. *Source: Mustafa Hergüner personal archive.*

A 1950s photograph from Hereke offers valuable insights into the workforce composition, residential arrangements, and social norms of a prototype factory (Figure 1). This photograph, which shows a residential complex featuring a central dormitory surrounded by modular, cubical concrete houses, serves as a crucial artefact that can help us understand the prevailing conditions of the period. The factory employed labourers under the age of 18, actually between 12-18, many of them were orphaned.⁴ As a result, the dormitory for orphaned children, which was inherited from the late Ottoman period, found itself surrounded by modern housing facilities.

In the historical functioning of capitalism, low-wage and so-called 'unskilled' monotonous jobs have been systematically shaped by gender and ethnicity, and disproportionately assigned to specific social groups.⁵ This pattern was also evident in the late Ottoman-era factories. At the Hereke Factory, for instance, it is known that just before the war, approximately 2,200 Orthodox Greek and a significant

⁴ See, *Hereke Fabrikası*, (Sümerbank; 1947).

⁵ Görkem Akgöz, Sürgün Almanlar Yazıyor: Bir Ulusötesi Karşılaşma Mekânı Olarak Fabrika, *Toplumsal Tarih*, Mayıs 2025, 54-60.

number of Armenian girls were employed, whereas only around 200 Muslim Turkish girls worked there.⁶ The transition from imperial rule to the republican era had a profound impact on various aspects of the society, including the Turkification of workforce, infrastructure, culture, and public health. The shift in political landscape prompted a substantial change in the demographic composition of the workforce, with the population exchange and deportations of Orthodox Greek and Armenian workers, in the last ten years of the empire. For instance, as the majority of the Orthodox Greek population left Hereke, Turkish refugees—predominantly young and impoverished individuals were settled and employed at the factory through the philanthropic efforts of the factory administration. On June 17, 1921, twelve male and five female immigrants and refugees were sent to the Hereke Imperial Factory after petitioning the directorate for protection and employment in suitable positions.⁷ These examples serve as precedents for how demographic structuring was carried out. On the other hand, the single-party government (1923-1945) placed family-oriented workers at the core of the workforce; the single-party system, unlike the single adult and child worker types of the Ottoman workers' market, introduced a new nuclear family model in which married couples contributed to the economy together. Likewise, housing arrangements transitioned from traditional constructs to more modern and modular abodes. Accordingly, detached and semi-detached houses with gardens were built for working families.

The rise of the structurally transformed in Turkified, and so nationalized worker archetype profoundly altered perceptions about child labour. The orphaned child labour force had a multicultural profile, including Armenians, Orthodox Greeks, and Muslim Turks. However, subsequent to the War of Independence, the young Republic's workforce underwent a significant transformation, with the majority of the workforce becoming composed of adult Muslim Turkish households. The paradigm shifts in socio-political ideology brought about a critical

⁶ Centre for Asia Minor Studies (CAM), Bithynia-Izmid-Hereke B110, 11.

⁷ Presidency's Archives of the Republic (BCA): 272 0 0 12.38. 16. 32 18.06.1921.

The names of the refugees from Tekirdağ listed in the Presidency's Archives of the Republic are: Nuri, son of Halim (aged 17), (unknown) Şükrü? Son of Hüseyin (20), (unknown) the son of Halil (16), (unknown) Zehra the daughter of Ibrahim (16), Ali Fuad (unknown) the Son of Said (14) and (unknown) the son of Ali (18); from Salonika: Müberra? the daughter of Şeyh Bedreddin (19) and her brother (nameless - 17), (unknown) Hayri the son of Sefer (25); from Yemen: Ahmed ... ? the son of Abdülgaftar (17), his brother Mercan son of Ahmed (20) and his cousin Mehmed the son of Raşid (17), (unknown) the son of Mahmud (20), (unknown) Mahmud the son of İbrahim (24) and Nedim (25). From Orhangazi came: Ahmed the son of Mustafa (17) and from Mecca: Abdülrahim, the son of Abdullah (51); BCA: 272 0 0 12.38. 16. 32 18.06.1921.

reassessment of child labour practices, ultimately culminating in a more regulatory and protective approach. The shift marked a pivotal moment in labour practices, where the exploitation of child labourers was replaced by a more protective approach. This new type of worker, emerging as a semi-proletarian figure, underwent a process of full proletarianization during the Republican period.⁸

Recent studies have shown that child labour was a significant source of workforce for factories and warehouses in late Ottoman and early Republican Türkiye. Undoubtedly, one of the most prominent studies on child labour belongs to Donald Quataert, who asserts that coal mining in numerous countries often relied on the availability of inexpensive, easily controlled minors.⁹ Quataert particularly focuses on the Zonguldak mines in northwest Türkiye and argues that the terms ‘children’ and ‘youth’ were ambiguously defined in laws meant to protect minors. Can Nacar argues that the children also served as a significant labour force particularly for the Ottoman unmechanised tobacco industry.¹⁰ According to Nazan Maksudyan, children, most of whom were orphans, had an importance on factory and workshop production in the Ottoman empire. Maksudyan notes that during World War I, the number of child labourers increased significantly, forcing the state to address the issue of orphaned children by different policies, including sending child workers to other countries like Germany.¹¹ In another study, Görkem Akgöz demonstrates the links between global trends and Türkiye’s economic policies at the time, emphasising that post-imperial Türkiye came up with a new plan for national industrial development. She explores the issue of child labour inherited from the empire and discusses the legal framework for safeguarding minor and female workers.¹² Semih Gökatalay explains the new state policies and labour laws and discusses their failure to reduce child labour.¹³ Finally, Yaşar Tolga Cora analyses changing modes of labour control in the 1950s and describes the emergence of a new family-centred workforce.¹⁴

⁸ Burak Gürel, Türkiye’de Kırdaki Sınıf Mücadelelerinin Tarihsel Gelişimi, Marksizm ve Sınıflar: Dünyada ve Türkiye’de Sınıflar ve Mücadeleleri, Hazırlayanlar: Sungur Savran, Kurtar Tanyılmaz, E. Ahmet Tonak, İstanbul: Yordam Kitap, 2014, 304.

⁹ Donald Quataert, *Miners and the State in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Berghah Books, 2006).

¹⁰ Can Nacar, *Labor and Power in the Late Ottoman Empire: Tobacco Workers, Managers, and the State, 1872-1912* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 40.

¹¹ Nazan Maksudyan, *Ottoman Children and Youth during World War I* (Syracuse University Press, 2019).

¹² Görkem Akgöz, *In the Shadow of War and Empire Industrialisation, Nation- Building, and Working- Class Politics in Turkey* (Leiden: Brill, 2024)

¹³ Gökatalay, *Child Labor and Industrialization in Early Republican Turkey*, 279-297.

¹⁴ Yaşar Tolga Cora, “The New Worker in ‘The New Era’: Entrepreneurship and Labor Control in Turkey in the 1950s”, *Reflektif* 2(3) (2021): 343-364.

Using an interdisciplinary methodology, this study aims to examine the dynamic interrelationship between the political agenda of the state and the lived experiences of child workers in their daily routines during this period of profound change. The majority of records and chronicles used in this research were obtained from state and factory archives, including Sümerbank publications. This work also explores the history of the Hereke Imperial Factory, incorporating the narratives of marginalized individuals, such as migrant families, orphans, and widows who played a part in this state-level project. In this regard, photographs and oral history studies have been invaluable in understanding the daily lives of these individuals, particularly minor workers.

From an Empire

The final decades of the Ottoman Empire witnessed a distinct phenomenon with nearly half of the workforce returning from industrial centres to their rural hometowns after a few months of temporary employment. Subsequently, these individuals would be substituted by a new cohort of temporary workers possessing similar skill sets. Scholars have occasionally referred to these workers as ‘peasant-workers’ (*köylü işçiler*) or ‘farmer-miners’ (*çiftçi-madenciler*), reflecting their distinct socioeconomic status characterised by non-proletarian attributes.¹⁵ Starting from the second half of the 19th century, rental housing was available for married couples in Hereke. It was common for multiple families to share a single house, and domestic production also took place within these households. In this context, it can be argued that small landholding was a viable option for married workers.¹⁶ However, the Hereke factory predominantly relied on a temporary workforce comprised mostly of children and unmarried adults. The relevant photograph depicts young female workers and children dressed in traditional attire engaged in weaving large carpets within spacious workshops that receive ample natural daylight and do not suffer from ventilation issues. (Figure 2) On the other hand, it is evident that not only the space but also the nature of labour and the work performed were gendered. Male workers were predominantly associated with machinery.

¹⁵ Janset Özen Aytemur, *Türkiye’de Yönetim Düşüncesinin Erken Dönemleri: Sümerbank (1930-1945)* (Libra Kitapçılık ve Yayıncılık, 2010), 62.

¹⁶ Didem Yavuz Velipaşaoğlu, *Crafting an Empire: the Hereke Factory Campus (1842-1914)* (Libra Kitap, 2023): 88-93.



Figure 2. Hereke workshops. Source: Zsigmond Fejes, July 1914, Gróf Károly Museum, 70.63.59.

One could argue that the children of workers were also propertyless and relied solely on dormitory-style housing for accommodation. These workers resided in two-storey individual dormitories known as ‘*keğüs*’, a term inspired by the architectural layout of military barracks. These dormitories represented a primary example of densely populated living quarters located within the factory premises.¹⁷ The building consisted of two wings, separated by a corridor and an entrance hall in the middle containing rooms for the warden. (Figure 1) This entrance hall was connected to the dining and living rooms. The sleeping quarters were situated along the two wings, with cabinets along the corridor for children and unmarried workers to store their belongings. Toilets were located at the end of the corridor. Historical records indicate that during the Ottoman period,

¹⁷ Yavuz Velipaşaoğlu, *Crafting an Empire: the Hereke Factory Campus (1842-1914)*, 144.

dormitories were typically constructed using a combination of masonry and timber. For example, in 1897, a timber dormitory designed by the Armenian architect Hovsep Kalfa was constructed, while the dormitory built in 1903 was made of stone with hackings and woodworks sourced from Bartın timber (Figure 3).¹⁸

The term '*koğuş*' is used in this context as a model to understand the living conditions of workers and the standardization of work.¹⁹ The dormitory's cellular structure offered an environment for regulating bodily functions such as sleep, nutrition, and childcare. This regulation, in turn, facilitated the standardization of labour and enabled the mechanisation of human body. The factory aimed to transform irregularly conscripted children from Anatolia into 'ideal citizens'²⁰ or subjects. Children were turned into disciplined labourers through repeated daily routines, including eleven hours of work, lunch breaks, dinner, and sleep.²¹

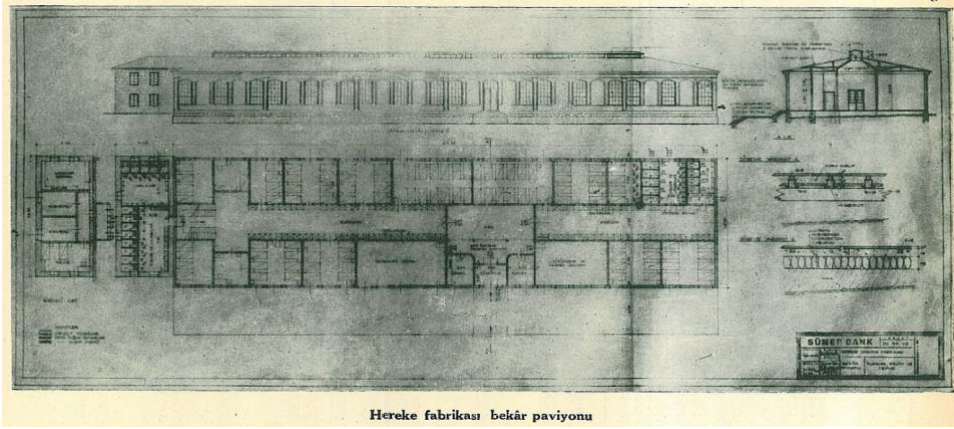


Figure 3. Dormitory (*koğuş*) accommodation, inherited from Ottoman period, on the Factory Campus. *Source: Sümerbank: 11.7.1933-11.7.1943 (İstanbul: Cumhuriyet Matbaası, 1943).*

From the very beginning, the factory hired impoverished children, mostly orphans. By the early 1910s, Muslim girls also joined the workforce, facilitated in

¹⁸ Ibid., 85.

¹⁹ Didem Yavuz Velipaşaoğlu, 'Pastimes for the Child Breadwinners: the Sanitisation and Recreation Facilities of the Hereke Factory Campus', in *Children and Childhood in the Ottoman Empire (Fourteenth and Twentieth Century)*, ed. Fruma Zachs and Gülay Yılmaz, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 264-289.

²⁰ Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1980), 684. Gültekin Yıldız, 'Ondokuzuncu Yüzyılın İki 'Standardizasyon Ütopyası: Kışla ve Hücre Tipi Hapishane', *Türkiye Günlüğü* 112 (2012): 118-135.

²¹ Yavuz Velipaşaoğlu, *Pastimes for the Child Breadwinners: the Sanitisation and Recreation Facilities of the Hereke Factory Campus*, 264-289.

part by Women's Associations.²² Male and female Turkish labourers were brought in from Tavşancılı (Tavşancıl), located about six kilometres to the west of Hereke. On the other hand, Orthodox Greek girls were mostly recruited from regions beyond the Izmit Gulf, such as Kuru, Çınarcık, Kadıköy, as well as villages in Yalova, including Agios Haralambos (Hacı Mehmet) and Safran.²³ (Figure 4)

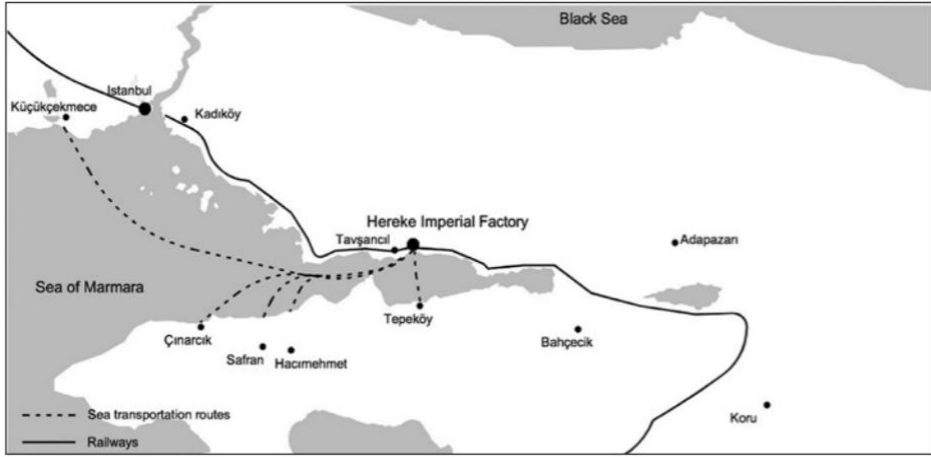


Figure 4. Map showing daily and weekly routes of dormitory-living workers; *Source: produced by author.*

Throughout the empire, there was no centrally coordinated labour market which impacted the expropriation of labour power and the shift towards wage-based employment. Along with the scarcity of skilled labour, the fragmented labour market configuration posed a significant challenge for the new Republic.²⁴ Factories, such as the ones in Hereke, historically provided a sanctuary for those in need. Even during the Armistice period²⁵ between 1818 and 1923, this support system continued to function, and when the Turkish-Greek population exchange took place, attempts were made to house orphaned children and young individuals in need within the factories. After the majority of the Orthodox Greek community left Hereke even before the population exchange²⁶, the factory administration

²² "İstanbul Postası," *Sıyanet* 15, 19 Haziran 1330 (2 July 1914), 2.

²³ Centre for Asia Minor Studies (CAM), *Bithynia-Izmit-Hereke B110*, 12.

²⁴ Janset Özen Aytemur, *Türkiye'de Yönetim Düşüncesinin Erken Dönemleri: Sümerbank (1930-1945), Libra Kitapçılık ve Yayıncılık*, 62.

²⁵ The Armistice, an interim period recognized in Turkish history as commencing with the Armistice of Mudros on October 30, 1918, and concluding with the Treaty of Mudanya, characterized by occupation and the Turkish War of Independence.

²⁶ Exchange of Muslim populations from former Ottoman territories with non-Muslim populations in Turkey in 1923.

began accommodating and hiring primarily young and impoverished Turkish refugees.²⁷ On June 17, 1921, upon requesting protection and suitable employment, twelve men and five women, who were immigrants and refugees, were directed to the Hereke Imperial Factory.²⁸

To a Republic

By 1925, two years after the declaration of the Republic, the workforce at the Hereke factory underwent a significant transformation in line with the new ruling elites' aforementioned perspectives on child labour. Children and young individuals started wearing aprons and uniforms instead of traditional attire, symbolising their alignment with the rejuvenated face of the young Turkish Republic. (Figure 5) In 1925, the production of special hats and uniforms for the Hereke Village School was approved and carried out by the Ministry of National Education.²⁹ Such changes also brought forward a profound transformation within the working force. Starting from the 1930s, a new type of worker began to emerge around the concept of 'Human Rationalization' (*Menschliche Rationalisierung*) borrowed from Germany, which aimed to cultivate new workers and working-class families who were technically, socially, and emotionally better equipped for this new type of rationalised work, as well as politically more compliant.³⁰ The factory focused on changing the mindset of the workers by instilling work discipline through familial metaphors, while a new form of family-based housing featuring contemporary social gathering areas were introduced. Kemalism, the official ideology of the new republic founded by Mustafa Kemal, made significant strides towards industrialisation by the mid-1930s. Industry and technology were heralded as critical elements of nation-building efforts, which resulted in the establishment of a factory system consisting of both pre-existing

²⁷ Presidential Archives of the Turkish Republic (BCA): 272 0 0 12.38. 16. 32 18.06.1921.

²⁸ The names of the refugees from Tekirdağ listed in the Presidency's Archives of the Republic are: Nuri, son of Halim (aged 17), (unknown) Şükrü? Son of Hüseyin (20), (unknown) the son of Halil (16), (unknown) Zehra the daughter of Ibrahim (16), Ali Fuad (unknown) the Son of Said (14) and (unknown) the son of Ali (18); from Salonika: Müberra? the daughter of Şeyh Bedreddin (19) and her brother (nameless - 17), (unknown) Hayri the son of Sefer (25); from Yemen: Ahmed the son of Abdülgaffar (17), his brother Mercan son of Ahmed (20) and his cousin Mehmed the son of Raşid (17), (unknown) the son of Mahmud (20), (unknown) Mahmud the son of İbrahim (24) and Nedim (25). From Orhangazi came: Ahmed the son of Mustafa (17) and from Mecca: Abdülrahim, the son of Abdullah (51); BCA: 272 0 0 12.38. 16. 32 18.06.1921.

²⁹ BCA MEB 180.9.0.0 1.6.7. 17.11.1925.

³⁰ Cora, *"The New Worker in The New Era": Entrepreneurship and Labor Control in Turkey in the 1950s*. See also: Görkem Akgöz, *In the Shadow of War and Empire Industrialisation, Nation-Building, and Working- Class Politics in Turkey*.

Ottoman factories and newly constructed ones. State-owned factories emerged as pivotal locations where the processes of nation-building, class formation, and modernisation were intricately intertwined.³¹



Figure 5. Students and instructors of the Hereke Sewing Course. *Source: Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Source: Women's Library and Information Centre Foundation, 0118 (1925).*

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The leather and weaving factories located by the Empire in Beykoz, Defterdar, Hereke, and Bakırköy continued to operate as state-owned industrial enterprises of the Republic.³² Even in the final days leading up to the establishment of the Republic, Sabit Bey, the deputy of Kayseri, submitted a parliamentary motion calling for the reform of the Hereke Factory.³³ Even before the 1930s—specifically during the crisis year of 1929—efforts were made to reform the Hereke Factory through the involvement of foreign experts. Specialists such as Zosef Varlimont and Frenst Rudolf Batzar from Germany, and Arnst Veise from Romania, were brought to the campus.³⁴ State Economic Enterprises, *Kamu İktisadi Teşekkülleri*, (KIT) constitute one of the key institutional structures that have shaped Türkiye's economic and social landscape. These enterprises not only played a central role in the state's economic development initiatives but also

³¹ Akgöz, *In the Shadow of War and Empire Industrialisation, Nation- Building, and Working-Class Politics in Turkey*.

³² Serkan Tuna, *Türkiye'de Devlet İşletmeciliği ve Sümerbank (1932-1939), Dünya Ekonomik Krizine bir Cevap mı?* (Derlem Yayınları, 2009), 18.

³³ BCA 30.10.0.0 6.31.25 6.10.1923

³⁴ BCA 30.18.1.2 62-14 25.12.1929

contributed significantly to broader processes of social transformation.³⁵ KIT complexes established during the Early Republican Period in Türkiye—particularly the Sümerbank factories—bear significant resemblance to factory settlements in the Soviet Union in various respects. This is largely due to the fact that Türkiye’s model of planned, state-led industrialization was inspired by that of the Soviet Union. Indeed, while Soviet worker settlements were implemented with the launch of the First Five-Year Plan in 1928, Turkish KIT followed suit under the First Five-Year Industrial Plan of 1934—only a few years later. In establishing the Sümerbank factories, Türkiye drew directly from Soviet experience. The early Sümerbank complexes in Kayseri and Nazilli were constructed by the Soviet Union, with extensive use of Soviet engineers, technical experts, credit, and technology.³⁶ In terms of the housing conditions, there were significant differences among the various state enterprises. The Nazilli Cotton Print Factory was reported to be in a comparatively worse position than other institutions. According to 1945 data, the proportion of married workers accommodated with their families in Sümerbank enterprises was 44% at the Gemlik Artificial Silk Factory, 40% in Karabük, 35% at the Konya Ereğli Cotton Factory and the Kayseri Textile Complex, while in Nazilli, this rate was only 16%. Although no specific statistics are available for the Hereke Factory, it is generally considered to have been in relatively better condition.³⁷ Drawing on Yiğit Akın’s insights, it could be argued that all these cultural, social, health-related, and even athletic facilities collectively formed a landscape *of culture consent* for the proletarianizing working class. These provisions offered temporary relief for individuals burdened by various social and economic pressures and functioned as a mechanism to obscure the harshness of an increasingly authoritarian regime.³⁸

According to a 1934 Sümerbank publication, the wooden factory residences that had been built for officials and workers were deteriorating, leading to poor living conditions.³⁹ These dwellings were leased to civil servants and workers at a low rental fee. In 1933, a decision was made to build new residences on the factory premises to house all officers, workers, and their families. These new dwellings were planned with a contemporary, hygienic, and sanitised approach. The goal was not only to improve the living conditions of the residents but also to increase

³⁵ İlayda Erturun, Sümerbank Nazilli Basma Fabrikası’nı Toplumsal Cinsiyet Bağlamında Okumak, Çalışma ve Toplum, 2024/4, 1543-1584.

³⁶ Sinan Meydan, Cumhuriyet’in Sosyo-kültürel Fabrika Örneği: Sümerbank Nazilli Basma Fabrikası, Yeditepe University, Master’s Thesis, İstanbul 2023. 15-16.

³⁷ İlayda Erturun, Sümerbank Nazilli Basma Fabrikası’nı Toplumsal Cinsiyet Bağlamında Okumak, Çalışma ve Toplum, 2024/4, 1543-1584

³⁸ Yiğit Akın, Gürbüz ve Yavuz Evlatlar: Erken Cumhuriyet’te Beden Terbiyesi ve Spor, İletişim Yayınları, 2004, 29-30.

³⁹ Sümerbank, *Sümerbank Hereke Yünlü ve İpekli*, 10-11.

productivity by enabling round-the-clock operations in day and night shifts.⁴⁰ Another Sümerbank periodical elaborates that in the year 1947, the factory undertook the construction of a comprehensive array of facilities including residences, a movie theatre, a canteen, and a guesthouse, as well as separate pavilions for single girls and boys. This initiative effectively modernized Hereke, imbuing it with a new sense of charm and modernity, while highlighting the paramount attention given to social welfare and community life.⁴¹ As a common belief, women's labour was regarded as an extension of their domestic responsibilities or even as a form of 'leisure.' This naturalized view rendered women's work largely invisible in historical records.⁴² However, with the establishment of the Republic, women's labour began to gain visibility through factories and emerging employment opportunities. In the post-war period, the shortage of male labour was compensated for by the increased reliance on female workers. However, it is also important to acknowledge, as Dr. Max von der Porten, consultant to Turkish government with learnings towards economic liberalism in 1930s, illustrates, how the gender-based hierarchy in the textile industry was portrayed as a 'natural' reality. His account offers a striking example: in reference to work considered much 'easier' and 'easier to learn,' he asserts that 'women, and especially young girls, generally perform better than men.'⁴³

The factory in 1947 possessed 130 contemporary and well-constructed concrete houses designated for civil servants and workers. A nominal rental fee, ranging from 2–10 liras per month, was levied on the residents to cover maintenance costs. The factory was responsible for supplying water, electricity, and handling any necessary repairs to the houses. Meanwhile another initiative to renovate sixty previously constructed houses was almost complete as of 1947.⁴⁴ In 1949, permission was granted for the establishment of the Sümer Housing Cooperative.⁴⁵ In the mid-50s, as was the case with other Sümerbank factories, the workers of the Hereke Factory also initiated the establishment of a housing cooperative with the aim of enabling its members to become homeowners. With a planned duration of 30 years and a minimum capital of 700 Turkish liras, the

⁴⁰ Sümerbank, *Sümerbank Hereke Yünlü ve İpekli*, 10-11.

⁴¹ *Hereke Fabrikası*, (Sümerbank; 1947), 4-5.

⁴² Yasar Tolga Cora, Female Labor, Merchant Capital, and Resilient Manufacturing, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 2018, Vol. 61, No. 3 (2018), pp. 361-395.

⁴³ Max von der Porten, "Kayseri Fabrikası İplik ve Dokuma Daireleri Hakkında," 1939, Amb./ Db.No: k.a./255.07.02.01.06.1114, Archives of the Supreme Audit Board, also in: Görkem Akgöz, Sürgün Almanlar Yazıyor: Bir Ulusötesi Karşılaşma Mekânı Olarak Fabrika, *Toplumsal Tarih*, Mayıs 2025, 54-60.

⁴⁴ Sümerbank, *Hereke Fabrikası*.

⁴⁵ BCA 30.18.1.2 119.42.17 03.06.1949.

formation of the 'Hereke Wool and Carpet Weaving Industry Workers' Housing Cooperative Partnership' was officially authorized by the Presidency.⁴⁶ In mid-century Türkiye, partially comparable examples can be found in the residential complexes (lojmans) of economic state enterprises such as Sümerbank, Etibank, and the Sugar Company, particularly in locations such as Zonguldak, Karabük, İzmit, Hereke, Eskişehir, Alpullu, and others.⁴⁷ In these residential complexes, only employees of the respective institution were permitted to reside, and only for the duration of their employment. While these housing units shared certain similarities with housing cooperatives—such as offering low-cost accommodation and the retention of property ownership by the institution that constructed them—a key distinction lies in the lack of long-term security. Termination of employment forced resignation, or death would necessitate the vacating of the residence. In contrast, no such condition applies in housing cooperatives: in the event of a member's death, their legal heirs retain the right to reside under the same conditions.⁴⁸

The fact that the wooden dormitory persisted among the new concrete workers' residences raises intriguing questions. It is plausible that this timber dormitory was a vestige of the imperial period, possibly reflecting remnants of a bygone era. The residents who lived in this dormitory during that specific period deserve further investigation and examination. Certainly, those residents remained preserved during tumultuous war years, in which the factory served as a haven for orphaned children.

Child: the Young Individual

During the tenures of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his follower İsmet İnönü, the single-party regime placed significant emphasis on educating and nurturing children and young individuals. The damage of the subsequent wars and the struggling treasury forced the governing elite in Ankara to put focus on human capital. Given that the Anatolian population had diminished from 18–20 million to 13 million, it became imperative to cultivate new generations through birth and upbringing in order to rejuvenate the society.⁴⁹

The Ottoman Empire, which encompassed nearly a quarter of Europe's population during the 16th century, saw a drastic decline in human capital

⁴⁶ BCA 30.18.1.2. 136.72.14 16.08.1954

⁴⁷ Ekmel Zadil, *Yapı Kooperatifçileri ve Mesken Problemleri*, Sosyal Siyaset Konferansları Dergisi, no: 12 (October 2011, first published in 1961): 31-69.

⁴⁸ Ekmel Zadil, *Yapı Kooperatifçileri ve Mesken Problemleri*, Sosyal Siyaset Konferansları Dergisi, no: 12 (October 2011, first published in 1961): 31-69.

⁴⁹ Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye'de Yeni Hayat: İnkılap ve Travma (1908-1928)* (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2017), 183.

accounting only to 7 percent of Europe's total population on the eve of World War I.⁵⁰ In an urgent appeal to all scientific disciplines, journalist Sabiha Zekeriya brought attention to the issue of children's health in building a modern nation in her article published in 'Resimli Ay' magazine. Sociologists, economists, and politicians needed to urgently address the problem of children's well-being, which had far-reaching impacts on the economy, society, religion, law, and sanitation. The child mortality rate was shockingly high, with 80-90 percent of infants dying in their first year and the surviving 10 percent facing dire living conditions. Sabiha Zekeriya's account sheds light on the urgency of the situation at the time:

Orphaned children numbered around 200,000, with only a small fraction receiving state care. The remaining 190,000 were left to fend for themselves on the streets. Some met their fate in institutions like Darülaceze (poorhouse), while a significant portion struggled and perished in the streets. Notably, there existed no comprehensive institution within the country to safeguard, care for, or provide treatment for these vulnerable children. Even children afflicted by diseases like tuberculosis and syphilis were abandoned to their fate.⁵¹

According to Sabiha Zekeriya, the main challenge faced by the Republic was that only 2 percent of children were receiving sufficient nutrition to develop into healthy and capable individuals who could contribute towards building a modern and democratic society in the future.⁵² She continued:

Turkish children were found without proper care, devoid of sustenance, lacking access to healthcare, shelter, and protection. However, there existed the potential for their rescue. Addressing this entailed grappling with three pivotal questions. Firstly, was the child issue primarily a matter of compassion or a subject demanding scientific inquiry? Secondly, was the child issue limited solely to concerns of healthcare, or did it extend to broader societal implications? Lastly, should the responsibility for organizing and caring for children rest with the government or be entrusted to the collective will of the nation?⁵³

The Turkish Association for Protection of Children (Himaye-i Etfal Cemiyeti), which was founded in Ankara on June 30, 1921 and opened its Istanbul branch in 1923, made it its primary mission to provide education and care to children under its protection.⁵⁴ The Kalender Agricultural Residency established by

⁵⁰ Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye'de Yeni Hayat: İnkılap ve Travma (1908-1928)*, 183.

⁵¹ Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye'de Yeni Hayat: İnkılap ve Travma (1908-1928)*, Doğan Kitap, 2017, 188-189; Sabiha Zekeriya, 'için için ölen bir millet', *Resimli Ay*, cilt 1, no 1, Şubat 1340, 4-9.

⁵² Ibid., 188-189. Sabiha Zekeriya, 'için için ölen bir millet', *Resimli Ay* 1(1), Şubat 1340, 4-9.

⁵³ Toprak, *Türkiye'de Yeni Hayat: İnkılap ve Travma (1908-1928)*, 196.

⁵⁴ Makbule Sankaya, 'Türkiye'de Zırai Eğitime Bir Örnek: Kalender Ziraat Yurdu', *ACTA TURCICA* 4(1) (2012), 87-101.

the association in İstanbul played a crucial role in rescuing many orphans, especially during the war years when their numbers rapidly increased. The institution not only provided care to these children, but also equipped them with vocational skills suitable for their age, health, and abilities, giving them the opportunity to join the workforce in agriculture and animal husbandry.⁵⁵ Rescuing orphans and street children and cultivating them into productive members of society required systematic and scientific approaches. Shifting from a mere emotional response to adopting rational methodologies had the potential to positively impact these children's lives. The transformation from compassion to scientific intervention was the only way possible to attain meaningful results.⁵⁶ Viewing the issue of children solely through the lens of health oversimplified its complexity. The challenge extended beyond mere health concerns and encompassed various aspects like the children's overall well-being, their spiritual nurturing, and the cultivation of a wholesome societal mindset. Establishing care facilities and health stations as well as providing crafts trainings were all integral to initiatives aiming to address this complex issue that required collective effort beyond the scope of medical professionals. Collaboration among diverse professionals, including educators, athletes, and trainers, was crucial to effectively tackle this issue.⁵⁷

Before we delve into the topic of Hereke factory as a historical example, it is essential to explain what was meant by the term 'child labour' at the time. In early republican Türkiye, a child labourer, as delineated by law, was a person between the ages of ten (increased to twelve after 1930) and eighteen years old. Once labourers reached the age of eighteen, they were considered adults according to the law. However, despite legal regulations, many children below the age of twelve were still employed.⁵⁸ The growing concern among policymakers advocating for child labour regulations in the late 1920s played a significant role in the passage of the Public Health Law in 1930, which included specific provisions on child labour. This legislation banned the employment of all children under the age of 12 in industrial settings, including factories, manufacturing facilities, and mining operations. Additionally, children aged 12 to 16 were restricted to a maximum of eight working hours per day, and were not permitted to work after 8:00 PM. However, the determination of hazardous occupations for children aged 12 to 16 and for women was deferred to subsequent labour legislation. The enactment of the Public Health Law reflected the political elite's acknowledgment of child labour as a serious issue. Nonetheless, as the following section will show, a gap remained

⁵⁵ Sarıkaya, *Türkiye'de Ziraî Eğitime Bir Örnek: Kalender Ziraat Yurdu*.

⁵⁶ Toprak, *Türkiye'de Yeni Hayat: İnkılap ve Travma (1908-1928)*, 197.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 197-8.

⁵⁸ Gokatalay, *Child Labor and Industrialization in Early Republican Turkey*, 279-297.

between legislative intent and its practical enforcement.⁵⁹ Despite legal efforts to protect children from arduous labour, the government struggled to prevent illegal child employment, particularly in private enterprises where regulations were routinely disregarded. Children often worked long hours in hazardous conditions, resulting in frequent accidents, physical harm, and lasting psychological trauma, while employers exercised unchecked authority over them.⁶⁰ Since its establishment in 1919, the International Labour Organization (ILO) actively opposed the use of child labour in industrial settings and, during the 1930s, extended its efforts by adopting four conventions addressing child labour in additional sectors. Türkiye became a member of the ILO in 1932, and this affiliation played a key role in expediting the development of new labour legislation.⁶¹ Even before the state-led industrialisation of the 1930s, the drive to promote capitalist development took precedence over the campaign to eliminate child labour. Certain public figures and newspapers advocated for the training of a new generation of workers by advocating for increased child employment and apprenticeships under skilled craftsmen. They believed that such practices would equip children with valuable life skills, preparing them to contribute to economic growth as adults.⁶²

Sümerbank's 1934 periodical reveals that in 1926, around eighty to ninety orphan girls who were studying at Darüleytam, the Ottoman state orphanage, were transferred to the factory.⁶³ The reason for this relocation was unclear, but it might be linked to the migration flow into Türkiye in the early 1920s as a result of population exchange. Growing concerns among policymakers, who were advocating for new laws to regulate child labour in the late 1920s, contributed to the enactment of the Public Health Law in 1930. The law included provisions related to child labour, prohibiting employment of all children under the age of twelve as labourers and apprentices in various industrial enterprises, including factories, manufacturing plants, and mining works.⁶⁴ The fact that all those relocated children were over the age of twelve suggests that the move was linked to legal changes made. (Figure 6) According to the periodical, the children were provided housing within the factory premises in a building with two spacious wards and four rooms. The factory provided all their needs, including food and clothing. These girls were also employed within the factory and received a daily

⁵⁹ (T.C. Resmî Gazete, 6 May 1930, Law No: 1593); (T.C. Resmî Gazete, Article 173, 8903); (T.C. Resmî Gazete, Article 174, 8903); (T.C. Resmî Gazete, 8904); Gokatalay, *Child Labor and Industrialization in Early Republican Turkey*, 279-297.

⁶⁰ Gokatalay, *Child Labor and Industrialization in Early Republican Turkey*, 279-297.

⁶¹ Gokatalay, *Child Labor and Industrialization in Early Republican Turkey*, 279-297.

⁶² Ibid., 279-297.

⁶³ Sümerbank, *Sümerbank Hereke Yünlü ve İpekli*, 10.

⁶⁴ Gokatalay, *Child Labor and Industrialization in Early Republican Turkey*.

wage for their labour. Over the years, the number of orphan girls dwindled. By 1934, only twenty-nine of the original eighty or ninety girls remained. Between fifty and sixty girls left the factory in time after getting married.⁶⁵ The inadequate implementation of the Labor Law in the late 1930s can also be assessed through the lens of children's education, particularly that of orphans. Although the ruling party declared a commitment to the protection of orphans at its Fourth General Congress in 1935, the governing elite faced a number of interconnected challenges related to the schooling of orphans and children from disadvantaged backgrounds. While some individuals took the initiative to establish orphanages for abandoned children, the primary responsibility for providing educational access to orphans rested with the state. Both local and national authorities proposed various reform measures to integrate orphans into the labour force, arguing that unemployed orphaned children hindered economic progress.⁶⁶



Figure 6. Orphans performing exercise. *Source: Vernacular photograph, by courtesy of Nurhan Ör.*

⁶⁵ Sümerbank, *Sümerbank Hereke Yünlü ve İpekli*, 10.

⁶⁶ Gokatalay, *Child Labor and Industrialization in Early Republican Turkey*.

Within the dichotomy of "old versus new," factory female workforce were symbolically positioned as markers of progress, with the Republican regime—particularly in the late 1940s—celebrated as a champion of women's rights. Yet, women's own voices were largely silenced or co-opted for ideological purposes. When heard, their testimonies revealed industrial labour experiences that starkly contradicted official narratives.⁶⁷ A 1933 film recording provides detailed insight into the daily routine of orphaned children residing in Hereke at the time. After descending the stairs of the orphanage/dormitory (koğuş), the children attend primary school, followed by meals at large communal tables under the supervision of a female foster mother. While the girls engage in carpet weaving, the boys are associated with mechanical tasks. The children are also seen playing basketball along the narrow-gauge railway line of the wool factory, which is oriented according to the northern light and topped with a shed roof. However, the activities depicted do not align with repetitive labour; instead, they reflect recreation and a sense of collectivity. All of these aspects reflect the development of children, around the age between 12 and 18, within a framework endowed not merely with philanthropy but with social rights. (Fig 7) The continuation of gendered labour practices from the Ottoman period can be partially observed in the association of young women with repetitive tasks and of men with machine-related work, reflecting a division of labour structured along gender lines and based on piecework.

⁶⁷ Görkem Akgöz, TRAFO – Blog for Transregional Research, PUBLISHED 5. MARCH 2021 · UPDATED 5. MARCH 2021

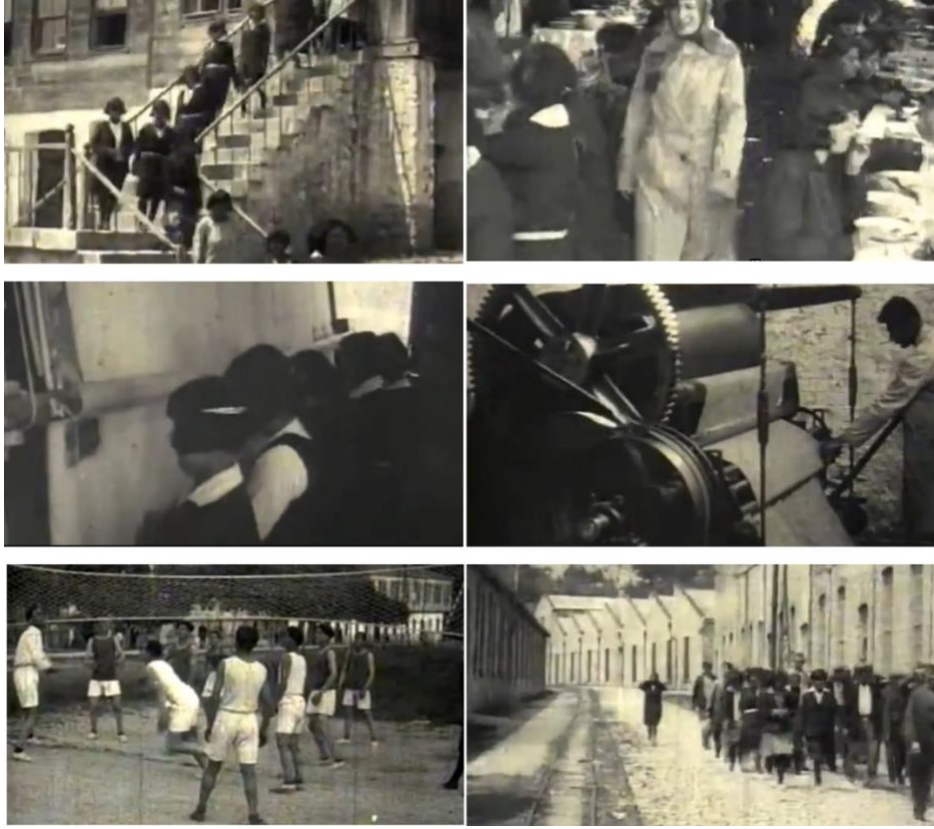


Figure 7. 1933 Hereke documentary 1933. *Source: Retrieved from Kocaeli Hereke İpek Halısı documentary on youtube.com: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-JbA9uLiO2U>*

According to Sümerbank periodicals, in 1947, free meals were provided to 300 orphaned boys and girls. The daily caloric intake for workers aged between 12 and 18 was calculated at 1,600 calories. Additionally, fruit was served daily, and milk was given to those employed in acidic or hazardous environments. Based on the calculations of that year, each child received a daily wage ranging from 3 to 5 liras.⁶⁸ Child labour became a quantifiable and regulated entity, with its value increasingly calculated and measured. As a result, it was incorporated into the broader labour market, while simultaneously being framed within the discourse of welfare and aid.

The study reveals that the girls' dormitory, inherited from the Ottoman period, was located in the Kemhahane district to the west of Hereke. This two-

⁶⁸ *Hereke Fabrikası*, (Sümerbank; 1947), 12.

story building featured regularly spaced rectangular windows that ensured appropriate health and ventilation conditions. It had a raised foundation with stairs leading from the exterior up to the ground floor. In contrast, the boys' dormitory clearly reflected the modernist architectural language of the Republican era. Situated along the Ulupınar waterfront, on the east side of Hereke, the building emphasized horizontality, included a recessed skylight on the upper floor, and maintained a strong visual and spatial relationship with the surrounding landscape. (Figure 8)



Figure 8. Female and male dormitories, *Hereke Fabrikası*, (Sümerbank; 1947)

In the early Republican period, physical education and sports were promoted as means to improve the general level of public health, with the aim of cultivating healthy and agile children.⁶⁹ One could argue that, as evidenced in both photographs and recordings, sport was integrated into the daily routine not only as a means of cultivating robust and disciplined bodies, but also as a tool for fostering a sense of belonging to the settlement. For the proletarianizing working class—including children—sport functioned as a temporary escape from the monotony and strain of repetitive labour, offering moments of physical and psychological relief. Dormitories, in this context, could be interpreted as instruments of bodily regulation—spaces that prepared and disciplined children for the routines of the new day.

It is plausible that most of those children came from institutions like Kalender and were later placed at the Hereke Textile Factory by the Child Protection Association after the war. As of the end of 1927, Kalender was taking care of a total of 109 children, consisting of sixteen girls and ninety-three boys.

⁶⁹ Yiğit Akın, *Gürbüz ve Yavuz Evlatları: Erken Cumhuriyet'te Beden Terbiyesi ve Spor* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004, 101.

Out of these children, five were sent to work at the Hereke Textile Factory, one was sent to the Istanbul Branch of Ziraat Bank, one was admitted to İstiklal High School, and two were enrolled in the Boys' Teachers' School. Furthermore, seventeen children were distributed across various institutions, including Çamlı store, Anatolian Railways Workshop, the general office of the Marine Directorate, Poor Houses, and Electrical house. Among these children, some were placed in boarding schools within Istanbul, while others were sent to schools in locations such as Kayseri and Adana. This indicates a coordinated effort to provide these children with educational and vocational opportunities across multiple regions.⁷⁰

Within the Hereke Factory Campus, the boys' and girls' pavilions, which were entirely reconstructed in 1945, accommodated 300 workers who received a modest wage. These pavilions offered a family-like living environment, complete with extensive sanitary amenities. A booklet published by Sümerbank in 1947 emphasised that these pavilions aimed to replicate the essence of a home, offering workers a nurturing space along with essential facilities.⁷¹ Indeed, the dormitories and the entire Hereke campus were equipped with robust healthcare services, encompassing not only a hospital and pharmacy but also various sports areas. These provisions may be interpreted as mechanisms implemented in the Early Republican era to stabilize and formalize labour mobility, especially among peasant-origin workers.

During the late imperial period, philanthropic practices served not only to legitimize the authority of local elites in the public eye, but were also closely intertwined with emerging notions of community formation. A significant transformation occurred as conventional forms of charity gave way to a more politicized mode of philanthropy, which prioritized the construction and reinforcement of a modern communal or national identity through support for institutions linked to social progress and reform.⁷²

Health, Factory and Child's Body

In 1924-25, a sports club named 'Hereke İdman Yurdu' was established by civil servants and workers to enhance the physical training opportunities of factory

⁷⁰ Türkiye Himaye-i Etfal Cemiyeti 1927 Senesi İptidasından Nihayetine Kadar Bir Senelik Umumi Rapor Ve 1928 Bütçesi Ve Esbab-ı Mucibe (İstanbul: 1928,) 29. Makbule Sankaya, Türkiye'de Zırai Eğitime Bir Örnek: Kalender Ziraat Yurdu, ACTA TURCICA, Yıl IV, Sayı 1, Ocak 2012, 87-101.

⁷¹ Sümerbank, *Hereke Fabrikası*.

⁷² Yaşar Tolga Cora, Female Labor, Merchant Capital, and Resilient Manufacturing, Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient, 2018, Vol. 61, No. 3 (2018), pp. 361-395.

employees. Operating under the factory's oversight and adhering to rules regulating sports organisations, the club featured a sixteen-member marching band. (Figure 9) Club members orchestrated sports events during holidays and organised evening gatherings in the club hall. The club's activities spanned multiple disciplines, including football, volleyball, swimming, wrestling, and running.⁷³



Figure 9. The band of Hereke Sport Club (Hereke İdman Yurdu) *Source: Nazım Demirtaş personal archives.*

Healthcare was one of the most pressing issues for the young Republic, which faced many difficult challenges. The society had endured substantial casualties during the prolonged wartime and was now struggling with illnesses such as malaria, syphilis, and cholera. Cultivating a healthy generation by promoting physical health and encouraging sports as a morale-boosting, community-building activity was crucial for the burgeoning Turkish society. Eventually, the factory grounds were transformed into an athletic park with sports facilities occupying the entire area along the İzmit Bay. The annual reports of Sümerbank between 1938 and 1941 indicate that the bank continued the construction of apartment buildings for 96 families at the Hereke Factory as part of its investments. There were a total of twenty lodgings, comprising six single-storey, six two-storey, and eight three-

⁷³ Sümerbank, *Sümerbank Hereke Yünlü ve İpekli*, 10.

storey buildings.⁷⁴ The masterplan represents a radial plan. The structures with subbasements, built of masonry, feature stone load-bearing walls. These walls are plastered on the interior but remain unplastered on the exterior. Although there is no record, it is estimated that the buildings were designed by Russian architects.⁷⁵ (Figure 10, 11, 12)

The factory embraced modernity by investing in health, education, and social infrastructure. During the Republican era, a new concept of workforce based on family units emerged and each family was given their own residence. The photographs provide insight into how workers engaged with the modernisation efforts of the new Republic, particularly through healthcare infrastructure. A comparable set of socio-cultural and healthcare facilities was also established within the Nazilli Sümerbank factory campus. More than merely a production enterprise focused on economic success, the Nazilli Printed Cotton Fabric Factory embraced a comprehensive vision of social development, prioritizing societal welfare and the formation and advancement of the working class. The factory's social infrastructure included a 350-bed dormitory for single workers, a 40-bed hospital, a daycare centre, and Sümer Primary School, which served the children of factory workers. In addition, to support workers' social and recreational activities, the factory provided facilities such as basketball and football fields, tennis courts, and a cinema and theater hall with a seating capacity of 600.⁷⁶ The social facilities of the Hereke and Nazilli Sümerbank factories show significant similarities;

⁷⁴ Yusuf Utkaner and Özlem Aydın Oral, 'Hereke Fabrika-i Hümayunu'nun Mimari Analizi ve Koruma Önerileri', *Mimarlık* 350, 46-51.

⁷⁵ It is worth noting that Ekmel Zâdî refers to the housing cooperatives established through the Russian initiative as follows: *Housing cooperatives represent a specific type of cooperative organization. Cooperatives, first and foremost, are joint labor organizations. They can be defined as the voluntary and economic association of individuals who unite to collectively operate an enterprise aimed at meeting their mutual needs in production, consumption, housing, or credit. In brief, a cooperative may be described as "a community of individuals who come together voluntarily with an economic purpose." The first essential factor here is the voluntary association of individuals. Unlike commercial corporations where capital is the foundational element, in cooperatives it is the individuals themselves who constitute the basis of the organization. The second factor is the pursuit of an economic purpose. Lastly, and most crucially, is the principle of voluntariness. This refers to individuals joining such organizations of their own free will, and likewise, being free to leave whenever they wish. It is for this reason that institutions established under the name of cooperatives in Soviet Russia, where participation was compulsory, cannot be regarded as true cooperatives. In such regimes, the core principle of voluntary entry and exit—arguably the most important aspect of cooperative identity—was not upheld;* Ekmel Zâdî, *Yapı Kooperatifçileri ve Mesken Problemleri*, Sosyal Siyaset Konferansları Dergisi, no: 12 (October 2011, first published in 1961): 31-69.

⁷⁶ İlayda Erturun, Sümerbank Nazilli Basma Fabrikası'nı Toplumsal Cinsiyet Bağlamında Okumak, *Çalışma ve Toplum*, 2024/4, 1543-1584

however, it is worth noting that the Hereke Factory served as a model for later Sümerbank factory campuses by carrying over social, cultural and healthcare infrastructures—such as schools, hospitals, pharmacies, communal gathering spaces, and sports activity areas—from the late Ottoman period into the Republican era.⁷⁷ Turkish State Economic Enterprise (KİT) settlements resembled Soviet settlements in terms of their socio-cultural components—such as housing, cinemas, theatres, hospitals, nurseries, schools, and sports fields—as well as their self-sufficiency, collectivist structures, and statist characteristics. However, there were also significant differences between Turkish KİT settlements and Soviet industrial settlements. Turkish KİT settlements were smaller in scale, less complex, less communal, and more family-centered compared to their Soviet counterparts. In Turkish KİT settlements, collectivism and classless spatiality were emphasized in a more passive manner.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ For more details, see: Didem Yavuz Velipaşaoğlu, *Crafting an Empire: the Hereke Factory Campus (1842-1914)* (Libra Kitap, 2023). However, in terms of housing provisions during the Republican period, there were considerable differences among the institutions. According to Makal, it has been noted that the Nazilli Printed Textile Factory was in a relatively disadvantaged position compared to other institutions. See: Ahmet Makal. *Ameleden İşçiye: Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Emek Tarihi Çalışmaları*. 2021. İstanbul: İletişim Yayıncılık, 48-9. In contrast, it can be argued that the proportion of housing facilities was significantly higher within the Hereke factory campus.

⁷⁸ Arıtan, Özlem, “Sümerbank Yerleşkeleri: Cumhuriyet Modernleşmesi’nin İdeolojik Varyasyonlarına İlişkin Mekânsal Bir Okuma”, *Fabrika’da Barınmak*, Ed., Ali Cengizkan, Arkadaş Yayınları, Ankara, 2009, s.177-213; Arıtan, Özlem, *Kapitalist/Sosyalist Modernleşme Modellerinin Erken Cumhuriyet Mimarlığının Biçimlenişine Etkileri-Sümerbank Kıt Yerleşkeleri Üzerinden Yeni Bir Anlamlandırma Denemesi*, Dokuz Eylül University PhD Thesis, İzmir, 2004. 64-66.

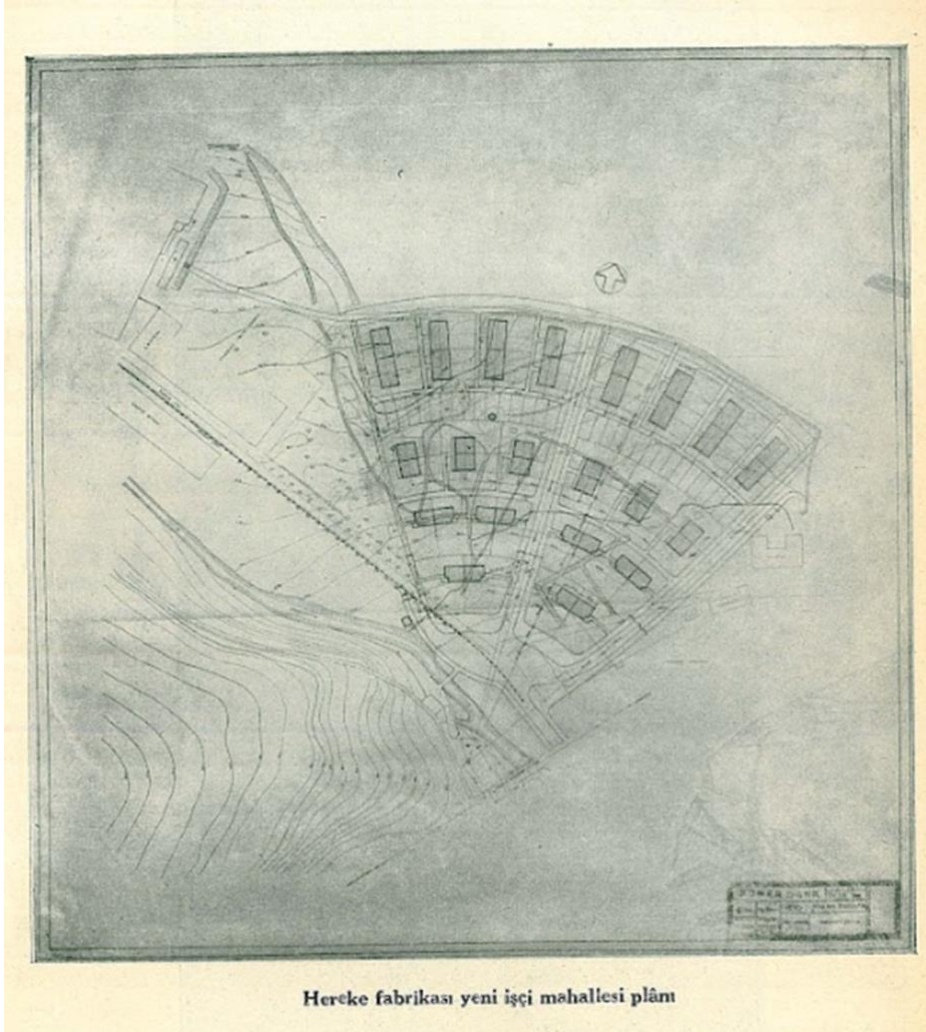


Figure 10. Courts (tennis and basketball), inbetween multistorey lodging for family-workers. Source: *Sümerbank 11.7.1933-11.7.1943* (Istanbul: Cumburiyet Matbaası 1943)



Figure 11. Multistorey buildings. *Source Sümerbank 11.7.1933-11.7.1943 (İstanbul: Cumburiyet Matbaası 1943)*

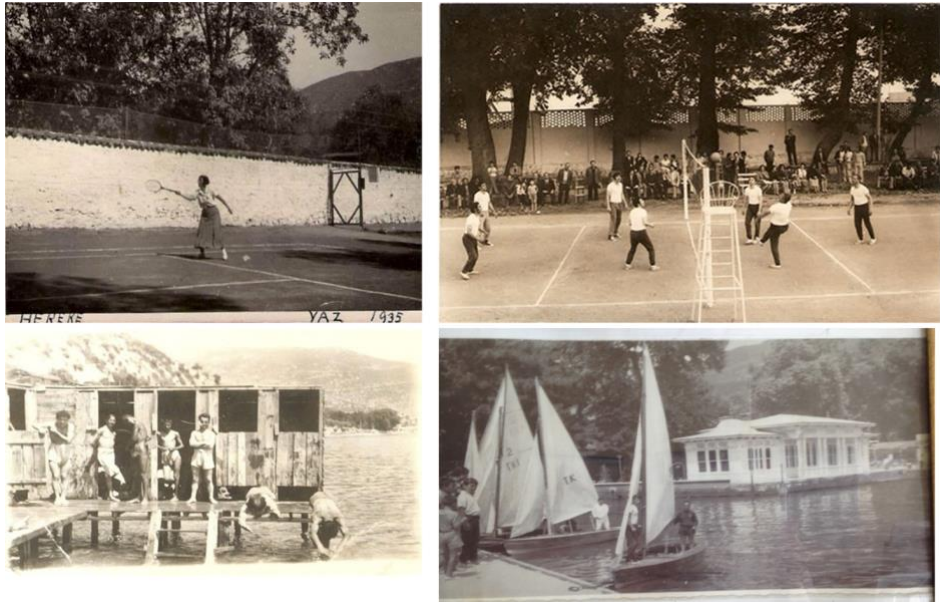


Figure 12. Sports activities on the factory campus. *Source: Nazım Demirtaş Personal Archives.*

Youth camps emerged in the early 1930s as a part of the recently established Republic's health policy. Based on an idealized concept of youth, these camps envisioned robust and healthy young people exercising in nature. The youth camps established in Hereke during that period emphasised this changing concept of childhood, marking a shift in perspective from solely providing for basic necessities towards a more holistic approach to the development of children. The camps were designed to promote physical well-being, intellectual growth, and a sense of citizenship among the youth. In doing so, the camps mirrored a broader social transition that viewed children as active participants in shaping a future generation that espoused the Republic and its modern ideals (Figure 14).

The Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1924, which was ratified by Türkiye, stands as the main international convention safeguarding the welfare of children. This foundational document underscored the importance of allowing children to develop naturally, addressing the needs of the hungry and ailing children, protecting those who were abandoned, prioritising children in times of disaster, shielding them from all forms of mistreatment, and offering education rooted in the spirit of brotherhood. Türkiye also participated in the First Balkan Congress in 1936 which aimed to advance collaboration among organisations working on child protection. Subsequently, the Second Balkan Congress convened in 1938 to deliberate on the protection of normal and healthy children as well as the age limit at which children could be employed.

In the current version of the Declaration, various nations acknowledge their obligation to provide the best possible care for children and commit to end

discrimination based on race, nationality, or creed. This collective acknowledgment reinforces the commitment to prioritise the well-being, protection, and development of children, referring to shared humanity over differences.⁷⁹

It is clear that the evolution of the Red Crescent's perspective on children during the 1930s and 1940s mirrored the approach in this declaration and the ensuing Balkan congresses. The shift marked a departure from a perspective that considered children as nothing more than labour assets without any agency and a move towards seeing them as individuals who require protection and healthcare. It reflected a growing awareness about the unique needs of children and the importance of safeguarding their well-being and development.

A 'Red Crescent Youth Institution' was established by the Red Crescent as per Article 125 of its modified regulations, replacing the 'Hilâl-i Ahmer Youth Society'. The primary objective was to establish Red Crescent Youth Committees across primary, secondary, and high schools. The institution outlined the objectives of the Red Crescent Youth Institution as follows:⁸⁰

1. Nurturing children with a profound sense of humanity, compassion, and mutual assistance, while acquainting them with the dynamics of social life to achieve this purpose.
2. Instilling a sense of virtue and citizenship within Turkish youth.
3. Advancing public health principles to elevate the overall health standards within the country.
4. Engaging students in Red Crescent matters, imparting an understanding of the Red Crescent's goals and aspirations, and subsequently augmenting its membership.
5. Cultivating connections with analogous youth associations on an international scale.
6. By increasing the Red Crescent's resources, facilitating the implementation of Red Crescent Headquarters' directives to aid survivors, the sick, disabled individuals, and those in need.

The General Regulation of the Red Crescent Youth Institution, which was issued in 1949, included a provision that outlined the goal of establishing health camps in various parts of the country. The primary objective was to cater to underprivileged, weak, and malnourished children, especially during school

⁷⁹ Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1924), <http://www.un-documents.net/gdrc1924.htm>. Accessed 13 March 2024.

⁸⁰ Taner Bulut, 'Cumhuriyet'in Bir Gençlik Projesi olarak Kızılay Kampları (1936-1950)', *Çağdaş Türkiye Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 6 (14) (2007), 103-135. Türkiye Kızılay Gençlik Kurumu, *Türkiye Kızılay Gençlik Kurumu Talimatnamesi* (Ankara: Sümer Matbaası, 1943), 1.

holidays.⁸¹ This initiative aimed to encourage other provincial authorities to initiate similar health camps and offer comprehensive support to them. A key concern was training competent leaders who would oversee these camps and ensure their effectiveness in fostering the health and the well-being of the children. This concern underlined the institution's dedication to provide valuable services to children through those camps.⁸²

Even before 1949, when the The General Regulation of the Red Crescent Youth Institution was issued, some youth camps were held in Türkiye. The inaugural camp hosting 160 children took place on a seaside hill in Kocaeli-Hereke during July and August of 1936. This initiative was made possible through the collaborative efforts of the Kocaeli Cultural Directorate and the Child Protection Agency. Notably, Kemal Ermat, the Cultural Director of Kocaeli, became the camp's first director. The next year, the number of children attending the summer camp reached 300. The positive outcomes attained led to the establishment of a seaside campsite in Hereke under the auspices of the Turkish Red Crescent, laying the groundwork for the establishment of additional camps. This initial success set a precedent for the expansion of similar initiatives aimed at promoting the well-being and development of children.⁸³ The children stayed in the gardens of the factory campus, surrounded by nature. The imagery suggests that the children camped outdoors, in tents (Figure 13). An archival document reveals that in 1938, the third Hereke Youth Camp brought together children aged 10 to 14 from various regions, including Izmit, Thrace, and Ankara. Before being accepted into the camp, children and their families had to fill out a detailed application form. This form asked important questions, such as whether the child's parents were still alive and whether the child had ever contracted malaria. The camp itself was a well-organized initiative. It functioned under the patronage of the Provincial Government and the Youth Association, with the Directorate of Culture overseeing its management. In a letter addressed to the esteemed office of the Thrace General Inspectorate, the Governor of Kocaeli expressed the desire to send 10 children from the region to the youth camp. The purpose of this request was to introduce the children to their homeland, foster relationships among them, ensure unity, and teach them essential lessons in life and health.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Bulut, *Cumhuriyet'in Bir Gençlik Projesi olarak Kızılây Kampları (1936-1950)*.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ BCA 180-9-0-0 4 22 8, June 25, 1938



Figure 13: Hereke Youth Camp (1936). Source: Necdet Sor personal archive.

During the period of the Single Party rule established after the War of Independence and extended beyond World War II, a central tenet of the health policy was to rehabilitate the entire population, with a particular emphasis on children and the youth, in an effort to eliminate the effects of problems like epidemics, poverty, and malnutrition, among other challenges.⁸⁵

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Conclusion

This microhistorical study aims to contribute to debates on labour, childhood, youth, and the regulation of the body. It explores the spatial manifestations and contextual dimensions of these developments. During the late Ottoman period, the profile of workers who commuted to factory campuses via mobile means such as carts, daily trains, and boats shifted to a more settled family-based workforce. In the Republican era, the state enhanced the social, cultural, and health facilities that had existed in the final years of the Ottoman Empire by offering workers a classless and collective way of life. These improvements served as models for all State-Owned Enterprise settlements (KİT). However, the issue of child labour inherited from the Ottoman period was mitigated through educational and recreational activities during the Republic, marking Hereke as the first site where the concept of childhood—distinct from that of young adults—was articulated and visually represented through the lens of children's rights.

⁸⁵ Yiğit Akın, *Gürbüz ve Yavuz Evlatlar: Erken Cumhuriyet'te Beden Terbiyesi ve Spor* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004, 59.

The issue of child labour and orphans undoubtedly had a significant impact during the early days of the new Turkish Republic, which witnessed a huge change in the proletarianized workforce. This transition period spanning from 1910s to 1950s involved a gradual shift from coerced labour to voluntary employment and significantly impacted the labour force dynamics.

This 'New Era' aimed to create a new type of worker with a unique mindset and way of life, nurtured in the factory environment and within a distinct community.⁸⁶ With the creation of the national worker paradigm, there was a noticeable change in how child labour was viewed and used. The new national workforce paradigm also altered the perspective on child labour, by encouraging a more regulated and protected approach against the employment of minors as well as a reevaluation of current practices. This also marked an important turning point in terms of labour dynamics, as the exploitation of young workers was gradually replaced with diligent protection of their rights and well-being. From 1910s to 1950s, the focus shifted towards providing the necessary infrastructure to ensure workers could attain a healthy physique. Consequently, throughout the early Republican era, a new working class, composed of adults rather than children, was created. This workforce composed of people coming from different cultural backgrounds was characterised by their physical fitness, which was nurtured within the framework of health services provided.

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⁸⁶ Cora, *"The New Worker in The New Era": Entrepreneurship and Labor Control in Turkey in the 1950s*.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Bu çalışma, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nun son yılları ile Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nin ilk yıllarında Hereke Fabrikası’ndaki çocuk işçiliğinin değişen dinamiklerini incelemektedir. Osmanlı döneminde, fabrikadaki yönetim, işçilerin aileleri için ilk konut projelerini başlatmış ve tek başına çalışanlar ve çoğu yetim olan çocuk işçilerin barınması için lojmanlar inşa etmiştir. Cumhuriyet’in kurulmasının ardından, özellikle fabrikanın Sümerbank’a devrinden sonra, memurlar ve işçiler için konut projeleri devam etmiş, yetim çocuklar da hâlâ fabrikada çalıştırılmaya devam edilmiştir. Çocuk işçiliği ve yetimlerin durumu, işçi sınıfının büyük değişim geçirdiği Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nin ilk yıllarında önemli bir rol oynamıştır. 1910’lar ile 1950’ler arasındaki bu geçiş dönemi, zorla çalıştırmadan gönüllü istihdama doğru kademeli bir kayma yaşanmış ve bu durum iş gücü dinamiklerini önemli ölçüde etkilemiştir.

İstanbul’un doğusunda, Marmara Denizi kıyısında yer alan Hereke Fabrikası, 1842’de özel bir yünlü kumaş fabrikası olarak faaliyete geçmiş ve 1845’te bir imparatorluk fabrikasına (Hereke Fabrika-yı Hümayun) dönüştürülmüştür. O tarihten itibaren, yerel ve uluslararası pazarlar için tekstil ve halı üretmeye başlamış ve imparatorluğun bir dizi modernleşme projesinde önemli bir rol oynamıştır. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nin kuruluşunun ardından, fabrika 1925’te Sanayi ve Maadin Bankası’na devredilmiş, ardından 1933’te bir devlet ekonomik kuruluşuna dönüştürülerek Sümerbank bünyesinde faaliyet göstermeye başlamıştır. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’ndan yeni ulusal altyapının önemli bir parçasına dönüşen fabrika, mimarisi ve inşa edilmiş çevresinde büyük değişiklikler yaşamıştır. Özellikle kullanılan yapı malzemelerinin türü, fabrika bileşenlerinin boyutları ve yönleri ile üretim

desenlerinde, işçilere sağlanan eğitim, destek ve barınma imkanlarında önemli değişiklikler olmuştur.

Bu dönemi çocuk işçilerin perspektifinden inceleyen bu çalışma, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun son yıllarında uygulanan politikaların, çocuk işçilerin koşullarını imparatorluk sona erdikten çok sonra dahi önemli ölçüde etkilediğini savunmaktadır. Çocuk işçiliği uygulaması, İmparatorluk sonrası dönemde de devam etmiştir; ancak yeni Cumhuriyet'in yönetici elitleri, Kemalistler, bunu toplumsal bir sorun olarak görmüş ve reformlar yapılması gerektiğini savunmuşlardır. Diğer ülkelerde olduğu gibi, erken Cumhuriyet Türkiye'sinde çocuk işçiliği, yoksulluk ve işçi sınıfının etkisiyle iç içe geçmiştir. Hereke Fabrikası'nda, yönetim, Osmanlı döneminde işçi aileleri için ilk konut projelerini gerçekleştirmiş ve çoğu yetim olan tek başına çalışanlar ile çocuk işçilerin barınması için lojmanlar inşa etmiştir. Cumhuriyet'in kuruluşunun ardından, özellikle fabrikanın Sümerbank'a devrinden sonra, memurlar ve işçiler için konut projeleri devam etmiş, yetim çocuklar ise hâlâ fabrikada çalıştırılmaya devam edilmiştir.

Bu araştırma, 1926 yılında fabrikaya getirilen ve iki büyük yatakhane ile fabrikanın dört odasında kalan, aralarında seksen ile doksan yetim kızın oluşturduğu özel bir gruba odaklanmaktadır. Bu kızlar ayrıca, sağlık ve beden anlayışına dayalı olarak uygulanan günlük egzersiz rutinlerine katılmışlardır. 1930'lar boyunca, Türkiye'nin çeşitli yerlerinde, Hereke de dahil olmak üzere, çocukların ve gençlerin gelişimini denetlemeyi amaçlayan gençlik kampları kurulmuştur. Bu dönemde, ülkedeki düzenleyici değişiklikler, çocukluk anlayışını, çocukların işçi olarak çalıştırılmasından ve ücretli iş gücü olarak kullanılmalarından uzaklaştıracak şekilde dönüştürmüştür. Ulusal işçi ideolojisinin ortaya çıkışı, çocuk işçiliği kavramının nasıl algılandığı ve ele alındığı konusunda belirgin bir dönüşüm yaratmıştır. Sosyal, kültürel ve sağlık etkinliklerinin desteğiyle, yeni bir işçi sınıfı inşa etme çabaları görülmüştür. Bu bağlamda, özellikle güçlü ve sağlıklı bedenlerin oluşturulması ve çocukların fiziksel gelişiminin düzenlenmesi açısından spor önemli bir motif olarak öne çıkmıştır.