

MIGRATION, MINORITIES & REGIONAL IDENTITIES

Turkey and the Black Sea region are located between different geographical regions such as the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East and Europe. Their location perforce constituted them as a physical bridge and traditionally pitted them at the crossroads between different historical forces and empires. This was as much a feature in prehistoric as in historical and even contemporary times, when trans-boundary migration remains an important domestic and international concern. The interplay between these diverse historical forces and migratory patterns has been a significant factor in shaping these countries' domestic and social make-up over time. It played an important role in forming cultural identities whether at individual, regional, national or supra-national level. Simultaneously, these processes in relation to migrant communities have also influenced the neighbouring areas around Turkey and the Black Sea region. This Strategic Research Initiative aims to promote research interests across different academic disciplines that pertain to the themes of migration across time in Turkey and the Black Sea coastal region.

Dark times in Istanbul

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My second year in Ankara has been a year of extremes. On two terrible evenings while working late in the office colleagues and I heard the instantly recognisable sound of explosions. Both were revealed to be car bombs; the first, on 17 February, targeted a convoy of military vehicles in the vicinity of numerous Turkish ministries and the second, less than a month later, exploded in the very heart of the city, at the transport hub of Kızılay, killing dozens of residents on their way home from work or out for the evening. Taking place at a spot which I, like everyone else in the city, had passed innumerable times, I felt lucky to find myself in the safety of the office and in the company of my colleagues. I was luckier still to have been in Germany during the largest of all the suicide attacks in the country in recent months, which killed over 100 gathering demonstrators outside Ankara railway station on 10 October 2015, and in Greece during the horrifying events of 15 July 2016, in which more than 200 people lost their lives. All the while, countless further attacks have afflicted Istanbul, Bursa and the south-east of Turkey, while events of unimaginable horror unfold across the country's borders in Syria and Iraq.

Somehow, amidst all these events, work continues. This academic year I have turned my attention back to my doctoral research, on the Allied occupations of Istanbul, Alexandria and Thessaloniki during and immediately after the First World War, which I am preparing for publication. I have been collecting and transliterating documents from the Ottoman archives to add to my existing British and French records, comprising Istanbul police reports on incidents

involving Allied soldiers, the requisitioning of civilian and government property by the armies of occupation, and strikes by tram drivers and electricity station workers.

I have been paying particular attention to the impact of occupation on the nightlife of occupied Istanbul; an article I wrote on which has now been accepted for publication in the journal *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*. The article traces how, after four years of wartime austerity, the influx of thousands of British, French and Italian soldiers with relatively high levels of disposable income into Istanbul stimulated a huge expansion in nocturnal entertainment in the city.

Alongside soldiers, new nocturnal entrepreneurs arrived, chasing profit and fleeing the instability that continued to perforate the post-war world. Bertha Proctor, the Lancashire-born owner of the eponymous Bertha's Bar at Şişli tram terminus, travelled with British troops to Istanbul on their departure from Allied-occupied Salonica. Other bars were the ventures of refugees who brought skills from past employment to their new home, as seen in Frederick Bruce Thomas' Anglo-American Garden Villa and the longer enduring Maxim Club, and in the wider role of Russian refugees in the supply of labour to the nocturnal economy. The rest were supplied by local landlords, keen to capitalise on the additional demand brought by Allied servicemen. Agah Sırrı Levent later wrote how Ottoman entrepreneurs 'know very well how to entertain new guests ... every day a shop changed its wears, writing the name of a new saloon on the window'. British journalists remarked how 'as by magic, "English", "Scotch", "London" and "Gibraltar" Bars sprang up everywhere'. By 1920 Istanbul had 471 beerhalls, 288 licensed cafes and restaurants, and 654 alcohol wholesalers serving both longstanding customers and these new arrivals.



Soldiers and sailors at a cafe in wartime Salonica

But this was not a simple story of merry money making, and the newly invigorated nocturnal economy of Istanbul had its dark side. Allied soldiers drunk on a heady cocktail of booze, military victory and imperialism were at the centre of numerous outbreaks of violence in the city streets. On a night in October 1919, a band of 15 or so American marines were embroiled in a fight with civilians at the Montecarlo Cafe, during which they fired their revolvers and wounded the responding Allied police with a broken bottle. On the night of 6–7 March 1920, ten French sailors who had absconded from the torpedo boat *l'Algerien* got drunk at the Brasserie de Pera, after which they seriously wounded an Ottoman civilian before being arrested by the Ottoman police and conveyed to the naval prison at Sirkeci. As a result of similar incidents, some entertainment institutions, such as the Olympia music hall, barred Allied troops from admittance.

Concerned by the potential threat to public order and the damage to European prestige in the city, the Allied military authorities made efforts to police and regulate nightlife. The Allies were quick to take control of the Ottoman police in the city, and tried to ensure sufficient night-time patrols were sent out from local *karakols*, particularly in the districts of Pera and Galata where the city's drinking establishments were concentrated. But with Allied officers few and far between, the police's nocturnal presence was limited. Ottoman police officers were more numerous, but as the Allies were determined to restore the capitulations that extended legal immunity to European soldiers and civilians, these policemen were unable to punish their transgressions.

So as to concentrate their limited resources, the Allies decided to limit the times and places that drinking establishments could open. During the first months of the occupation, a blanket closing time of 10pm was imposed. This was later relaxed for establishments in good favour with the authorities to 12pm and, at times, 2am. Bars that were a source of concern, by contrast, had their licensing hours restricted, were barred to Allied troops, losing profitable custom, or were closed entirely. As a result of such measures, a large number of intelligence reports can be found among



British officers at a Turkish cafe in Istanbul, ca 1920

Allied police documents, giving small insights into the bars, cafes and restaurants that dotted the city. We hear how the Brasserie Kedi on Postacı Sokak in Beyoğlu served a clientele of cosmopolitans and *femme de mauvaise vie*, and thus was denied its application for a later closing time, while the Cafe Moskva somewhat predictably hosted meetings of Bolshevik sympathisers and was put under police observation.

A large number of bars, restaurants and brothels defied the licensing hours, and were at times caught open after hours, resulting in punitive fines and closure. The Cafe de la Paix on Asmalı Mescid, for example, was closed for ten days in 1919 after it was discovered open late at night. Bar owners did all they could to implore the Allied authorities to grant them late licenses, with the owner of the London Bar, Hapat Assadourian, even enlisting the Armenian Patriarch to write a letter in support of his application to stay open until 2am.

Some of the nightspots established during the occupation period survived long into the Turkish Republic, like the Maksim Club in Taksim, founded by the aforementioned Frederick Bruce Thomas, which was a mainstay of Istanbul nightlife until the 1960s. Others disappeared with the emigration of their mostly non-Muslim proprietors, to be replaced with new entertainment venues and entrepreneurs. Despite challenges old and new, the lights of nocturnal Istanbul are still burning.



The long-enduring Maksim Club, 1959