

Black as Hell, Strong as Death, Sweet as Love
Social Deviance and Political Sediton in Istanbul Coffeehouses,
16th-18th C.

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Ottoman coffeehouses represent a unique tripartite structure within the already distinctive cultural landscape of early modern Istanbul. A crossroads of social, financial and political life, coffeehouses lend much to understanding urban Ottoman society in its myriad forms. The study of coffeehouses in the last thirty years has emerged as fundamental to understanding the Ottoman public sphere. Such study has, naturally, been influenced by Jurgen Habermas' work on defining the fundamentals of the public sphere. Habermas defines the public sphere as a nexus of private individuals forming foundational institutions which are separate from both state and economy; as such, this bourgeois collective is designed to spread ideas, news, and eventually political will.¹ To his mind, the first physical manifestations of a public sphere occurred in European coffeehouses, predominantly in Britain, where a growing educated middle class had accumulated the money and time to converse, debate, critique and incite political discourse; such leisure, previously unavailable under feudalism and similar systems, led to the creation of the "bourgeois public sphere".² The coffeehouse, accessible and popular, provided a staging ground for this cultural evolution.

Coffee and the Ottoman Public

Coffee's arrival in Europe, a topic which in itself could easily constitute its own separate study, represents a watershed moment for Habermasian notions of public institution. The exact moment of said arrival, however, is contested. Various accounts cite, among other options, Ottoman diplomatic gifts³, the Battle of Mohacs, or Venetian trade with Cairo. Ships logs,

¹ James Finlayson, *Habermas: A Very Short Introduction*, OUP (2005) 53.

² *Ibid.*

³ Suraiya Faroqhi, *Towns and Townsmen of Ottoman Anatolia: Trade, Craft and Food Production in an Urban Setting, 1520–1650*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1984).

corroborated by accounts of Egyptian trade after the fall of the Mamluk Sultanate in 1517, place coffee's arrival in Europe as early as 1590.⁴ The most colourful account suggests that soldiers came across coffee while raiding the abandoned Ottoman camp after the failed Siege of Vienna in 1683; they enjoyed this new beverage with a patisserie baked in the shape of the crescent of Islam, or what became known in French as the *croissant*.⁵ From apocryphal to anecdotal, the advent of coffee in Europe is nonetheless regarded definitively to be a result of contact with the Ottoman Empire, where coffee, far from an item of auspicious origins, was already a broadly accessible commodity.

The introduction of coffee into Ottoman society, though nominally facilitated through minor Mamluk and Safavid traders, begins in earnest with the Ottoman conquest of the Mamluk Sultanate in 1517 and subsequent the capture of Yemen by Sultan Selim I⁶. Transplanted from Ethiopia, grown in Yemen, and commercially traded in the port city of Mocha, coffee beans represented a growing agricultural phenomenon as a cheap and easily exportable commodity.⁷ When connected to the massive machine of Ottoman trade infrastructure and administration, coffee spread rapidly. Diplomats and elites were the first to access this emerging commodity. The first cups of coffee poured in Ottoman lands were served in private rooms in the homes of the wealthy; the Istanbul palace of the famed pirate-cum-admiral, Hayreddin Barbarossa, donated as *waqf* after his death, was described as containing a large "coffee room".⁸ This was

⁴ Mehmet Genç, "Contrôle et taxation du commerce du café dans l'Empire ottoman fin XVIIe–première moitié du XVIIIe siècle," in Michel Tuchscherer (ed.) *Le Commerce du café avant l'ère des plantations coloniales: espaces, réseaux, sociétés (XVe–XIXe siècle)*, Cairo : Institut français d'archéologie orientale (2001), 165.

⁵ Cemal Kafadar, "A History of Coffee," in *Rethinking Global Cities*, Durham: Duke University Press (2014), 57.

⁶ Alan Mikhail, *God's Shadow: The Ottoman Sultan Who Shaped the Modern World*, New York: Liveright (2020), 319.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

possibly the first recorded instance of the beverage being served in the city.⁹ There is reason to believe such rooms became a trend among the wealthy¹⁰. Common citizens, however, would not have long to wait for their cups to be filled. The first recorded coffeehouses were built in the 1530s in Syria, and between 1552 and 1554, two merchants - one from Aleppo and one from Damascus - founded the first pair of coffeehouses in Istanbul¹¹. The Ottoman historian Pecevi, writing later in the seventeenth century, recorded their arrival with a mixture of hesitation and reverence. He describes cafes, during booming popularity, becoming hubs for scholars and “idlers” alike¹².

Returning to the idea of Habermas’ public sphere, coffeehouses in Istanbul thus proved to be a major social phenomenon. By 1630, the city boasted four hundred such cafes¹³, with each neighbourhood featuring multiple favourite spots; registries in the eighteenth century routinely cited twenty to forty cafes in a given district.¹⁴ While their legality was a subject of initial controversy, as we shall discuss further in this and the following chapter, coffeehouses skirted the overt Quranic bans that hampered the success of taverns and wine vendors. Prior to coffeehouses, informal public gatherings took place in markets, or, for more private affairs, in illegal taverns and wine-fuelled garden parties; the latter were relatively exclusive to the

⁹ Olivia Senciuc, “Exotic Brew? Coffee and Tea in 18th-Century Moldavia and Wallachia,” in Angela Jianu and Violeta Barbu (Eds.) *Earthly Delight: Economies and Cultures of Food in Ottoman and Danubian Europe, c. 1500-1900*. Leiden: Brill (2018), 168.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Kafadar, “A History of Coffee,” 51.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Emİnegül Karababa and Gülİz Ger, “Early Modern Ottoman Coffeehouse Culture and the Formation of the Consumer Subject,” in *The Journal of Consumer Research* 37, no. 5 (2011), 745.

¹⁴ Selma Akyazici Özkoçak, “Coffeehouses: Rethinking the Public and Private in Early Modern Istanbul.” *Journal of Urban History* 33, no. 6 (2007), 967-968.

wealthy.¹⁵ Coffee, by contrast, rarely cost more than two aspers, that is until 1574 when new taxes were introduced on coffee imports, and even then prices remained stable and reliably low.¹⁶ Affordability here was an essential factor not only for the popularity of coffee, but also regarding its societal impact; for the first time, members of an Ottoman urban population, regardless of class, could access a forum of conversation and debate which was distinct from both economic spaces like markets as well as outside the regulation of court, clergy and government procedures. As Pecevi notes, such a forum was quickly adopted by the literati and artists. Like Habermas' "bourgeois public sphere", coffeehouses formed a nascent realm uniting private intellectualism with the broader physical world. Istanbul's coffeehouses can be imagined as a veritable *heterotopia*, to turn to the work of Michel Foucault, who coined the term in reference to discursive spaces that mirror their culture of origin, but are nonetheless othered by development which breeds separation.¹⁷ Coffeehouse *heterotopias* thus provided a public theatre where Ottoman society could be reoriented through emerging trends of philosophy, art and gossip. Socially, they functioned similarly to later European coffeehouses, the very spaces Habermas calls "formative" to the original public spheres. That said, this paper by no means intends to refute Habermas' assertion on the origins of the public sphere. The argument that Istanbul may be the true birthplace of the public sphere has been considered, with varying degrees of efficacy, by a number of previous historians.¹⁸ Indeed, Istanbul's coffeehouses lacked a critical element of

¹⁵ Alan Mikhail, "The Heart's Desire: Gender, Urban Space, and the Ottoman Coffee House." in Dana Sajdi, *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee: Leisure and Lifestyle in the Eighteenth Century*, London: Tauris Academic Studies (2007), 203.

¹⁶ Genc, "Contrôle et taxation," 168.

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, New York: Vintage Books (1971), 8.

¹⁸ See Mikhail, "The Heart's Desire," Özkoçak, "Rethinking the Public and Private," and Ali Çaksu, "Janissary Coffee Houses in Late Eighteenth-Century Istanbul," in Dana Sajdi's *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee: Leisure and Lifestyle in the Eighteenth Century*, London: Tauris Academic Studies. (2007).

Habermas' public sphere, namely the premise of universal accessibility, as Ottoman cafes were only open to men. Let this paper instead view Istanbul's situation as a forerunner to European spaces and utilize Habermas as a baseline to understand what the coffeehouse represented for a male-dominated Ottoman public sphere. With this disclaimer in mind, the term "public sphere" shall remain one used to reference the social landscape coffeehouses helped to create.

Within an Ottoman social context, coffeehouses offered a unique reorientation of public life. Through the commodification of the public sphere, coffeehouses created the first accessible secular space in the empire, a space for which there was truly no precedent.¹⁹ Coffeehouses served as a secular forum within a society and legal tradition where every aspect of life was viewed as a spiritual: "whether large or small, matters of ritual or dress or social ceremony, differences are inherently consequential for a faith that holds all human activity to be a sacred concern."²⁰ The political tendencies of coffeehouses were defined entirely by their patrons. The body politic manifested a unique collective political discourse, moderated by the general public, and this discourse differed from café to café. For men at least, the coffeehouse space offered the first forum constructed to express egalitarian conviviality and political discourse.

These institutions provided a gathering place for neighbourhood activity; Istanbul's neighbourhoods in the mid-sixteenth century were insular spaces, which accommodated strongly delineated communities that had been built through intimate connection.²¹ Barbershops and bath houses had served as places to gather, talk, nap and idle before the advent of coffeeshops, and these continued to serve such purposes afterwards, but to a lesser extent in the 17th and 18th

¹⁹ Kafadar, "The History of Coffee," 55.

²⁰ Madeline Zilfi, "The Kadizadelis: Discordant Revivalism in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul," in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 45, no. 4 (1986), 254.

²¹ Cemal Kafadar, "Self and Others: The Diary of a Dervish in Seventeenth Century Istanbul and First-Person Narratives in Ottoman Literature," *Studia Islamica*, No. 69 (1989), 7.

centuries. It is here that we detect the first interpretations of public gathering by Ottoman legal scholars. Access and privacy had clear guidelines and restrictions provided by the *ulema*, but clearly such notions were complicated in an urban setting such as Istanbul.²² Compact and ever-expanding homes were clumped quite close together, and thrived on communal space, and thus made use of shared street access, alleyways, dead ends and squares as makeshift community hubs.²³ As women did laundry outdoors, and men sat in barbershops and on corners, the constant flow of traffic between attached houses was a central feature of the social lifeblood of Istanbul that filled the arteries of urbanity, where deep thought and shallow chat alike were exchanged.²⁴ A common idiom, *al-jar qabl al-dar*, meaning “the neighbour comes before the house”, rings especially true for early modern Istanbul.²⁵ Coffeehouses, corresponding to locales and forming men’s local haunts, concentrated this neighbourhood sociability.

The private domestic sphere, parochially structured, divided the homes of Muslim Istanbulis into a *selamlık*, men’s quarters and reception hall, and *haremlık*, the women’s quarters.²⁶ Communal activity, divided along gender lines, was often facilitated through these sections within the home, especially in the case of the *selamlık*, where guests were welcomed in friendly gatherings.²⁷ However, gatherings were limited by the simple restrictions of space, as the average Istanbul home could not remotely accommodate the vast and diverse crowds of coffeehouses, nor were private domestic spaces with their gendered dynamics meant to be

²² Mikhail, “The Heart's Desire,” 211.

²³ Mikhail, “The Heart's Desire,” 209-211.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Mikhail, “The Heart's Desire,” 209-211.

violated by the secular public²⁸. While robust *selamiliks* were financially viable in the homes of elites, lower classes turned to the new coffeehouses to expand their living rooms. As such, coffeehouses served as more robust version of *selamlik*, a proverbial communal living room that expanded the domestic sphere of the entire neighbourhood, and welcomed a broader community into the regular social sphere of otherwise insulated patrons. While being careful of Marxist implications undue for our purposes, this accessible, secular space can be seen to represent an early form of Walter Benjamin's "artificial paradise", or a socialist melting pot that resists stratification and creates community through the encouragement and elevation of intellectualism, interaction and free expression among even the lowest classes.²⁹ Such sentiments are echoed in the moral philosophy of etiquette known as *adab*, which holds a view of the city as an urban extension of the self, where conduct, action and exchange between intellectuals created a metaphoric 'garden of paradise' on earth.³⁰

The urban paradise comes alive at night. The work of Ottomanist Cemal Kafadar on Istanbul's social history pays special attention to the emergence of nightlife. His study on the history of coffee, likewise, links the two phenomena of coffeehouses and nightlife. The expansion of the domestic sphere directly corresponded with a manipulation of the exact time of day when human activity was peaking. Energized coffee-drinkers stayed up later and later, and, in simple terms, began to engage in a new urban nightlife³¹; coffeehouses had already impacted

²⁸ Elyse Semerdjian, "'Because He is So Tender and Pretty': Sexual Deviance and Heresy in Eighteenth-Century Aleppo," *Social identities* 18, no. 2 (2012), 175–199.

²⁹ Walter Benjamin, "Hashish in Marseilles" in *On Hashish*, Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press (2006), 137.

³⁰ Kathryn Babayan, "Introduction: The Adab as Urbanity," in *The City as Anthology: Eroticism and Urbanity in Early Modern Isfahan*, Stanford: Stanford University Press (2021), 10-25.

³¹ Cemal Kafadar, "The City Opens Your Eyes Because It Wants to Be Seen: The Conspicuity and Lure of Early Modern Istanbul," in Shirine Hamadeh & Çiğdem Kafescioğlu (eds.), *A Companion to Early Modern Istanbul*, Leiden: Brill (2021), 10.

the notion of “where”, but were also impacting the idea of “when.” They became a large piece of an emerging trend extending public activity beyond its typical hours. Kafadar goes so far as to suggest that, given its previously explored social uses, night hours were understood to be more “secular”, and thus corresponded with the notion of a secular public sphere. For Istanbul, as has been the case for modern cities worldwide in the ongoing development of nightlife, this phenomenon brought new opportunities for sociability and interconnectivity, but also broadened the spectrum of heterodox behaviour and social deviance.

Social Beverages, Social City

No direct precedent existed for the Ottoman *ulema* to police the consumption of coffee. Precedent, *sabiqa*, was and continues to be critical for Muslim jurists in settling legal matters. For legal scholars during the emergence of coffee in Istanbul, carbonation and alcohol served to fill the gap of *sabiqa* in regard to policing coffee consumption. From a religious viewpoint, the legality of coffee came down to a question of carbonation. Drinking coffee deemed to be carbonated was likened to eating charcoal, a *haram* act³². Likewise, the energizing nature of a caffeinated drink was debated to be an intoxicant. Early consumers certainly appeared intoxicated, and seemed to be wired on a potent substance and staying up late into the night for purposes that could often appear suspect³³. Relying on the precedent set by taverns, the Ottoman *ulema* issued immediate and sweeping bans on coffee in the 1540s and again under Sultan Murad III in the 1570s³⁴. However, the construction of the first coffeehouses, hindered but clearly not

³² Kafadar, “The History of Coffee,” 52. Karababa and Ger, “Formation of the Consumer Subject,” 737–740.

³³ Kafadar, “The City Opens Your Eyes,” 11.

³⁴ Fariba Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment in Istanbul, 1700-1800*, Berkeley: University of California Press (2010).

prevented by these bans, led to mass Prohibition-style underground consumption, which was abated by the growth of nightlife.

“Transformations in broader consumption patterns and a decline in obedience to religious and legal prescriptions”³⁵ kept cafes full, and some patrons developed legal arguments with religious backing to justify their coffee habits. Sufi mystics, major consumers of coffee with connections to the trade tracing through Egypt, Syria and Yemen³⁶, provided their own legal defences. Predominantly associated with the Bektashi order, such Sufis argued that consumption was legal on the grounds of *ijma*, or consensus, which was achieved over long-time use within the Islamic community³⁷. With no explicit pre-existing legal framework for dealing with coffee, these Sufis argued that coffee should not be grouped in with alcohol, but instead should be legalised by the collective will of the Muslim community accepting and consuming the product³⁸. The dominant Hanafi school of legal administration, with its use of *ra’y* (independent reasoning) and relative flexibility in relation to orthodox rhetoric, provided degrees of leeway, and bans were enforced loosely³⁹.

Founded by merchants, the first coffeehouses were built in the neighbourhood of Tahtakale, a commercial hub and centre of international imports.⁴⁰ Intended to expand coffee trade in new Turkish markets, early cafes were built within pre-existing commercial areas⁴¹. Tahtakale was a major point for the movement of foodstuffs. Connecting coffee to Istanbul’s

³⁵ Karababa and Ger, “Formation of the Consumer Subject,” 737–740.

³⁶ Derin Terizoglu, “Sufis in the Age of State Building and Confessionalization” in Christine Woodhead (ed.) *The Ottoman World*, London: Routledge (2011), 86-99.

³⁷ Zilfi, “The Kadizadelis,” 255.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Suraiya Faroqhi. *Coping with the State: Political Conflict and Crime in the Ottoman Empire, 1550–1720*, Istanbul: Isis Press (1995), 32.

⁴⁰ Özkoçak, “Rethinking the Public,” 967-968.

⁴¹ Genc, “Contrôle et taxation,” 170.

import hubs served to assimilate the economic infrastructure of former Mamluk territories into the Ottoman machine of trade⁴². Integration into the city followed similar processes to that of *bozahane*, alehouses, which were typically restricted from being built in residential areas⁴³. Likewise, early legal frameworks surrounding coffeehouses mirrored various precedents which were designed to police such taverns. Along with overt religious bans on consumption of alcohol, taverns were scrutinized as gathering places of rabble-rousers and political dissenters. Often, *bozahane* served as bases of operation for gang activity, prostitution, and petty crime⁴⁴; barbershops, bathhouses, and other common gathering places were viewed with similar suspicion, and not without cause. In 1579, barbershops across the city were shut down to prevent prostitution in back rooms⁴⁵, while restaurants were commonly subject to closure or condemnation for allowing sex workers to meet patrons on their premises⁴⁶. Bathhouses were constantly the subject of state investigation as facilitators for sexual activity given the common practice of hiring attractive young boys, often prostitutes already, as attendants and shampooers in the baths.⁴⁷ The newly emergent coffeehouses, as they grew in popularity in the late 1500s, fell under the same legal category as these “hotbeds of sedition”. *Boza*, coffee, tobacco and similar illicit products represented a democratization of consumerism. As moderate luxury goods saw increased popularity, their consumer base framed their economic and political identities in terms of what products they consumed⁴⁸ - a trend the Ottoman state found concerning.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Özkoçak, “Rethinking the Public,” 968.

⁴⁴ Faroqhi. *Coping with the State*, 27.

⁴⁵ Özkoçak, “Rethinking the Public,” 967.

⁴⁶ Dror Ze’evi, *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500-1900*, Los Angeles: University of California Press (2006), 45

⁴⁷ Walter Andrews and Mehmet Kalpakli, *The Age of Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society*, Durham: Duke University Press (2005), 67-125.

⁴⁸ Karababa and Ger, “Formation of the Consumer Subject,” 737–740.

Communal venues used for common conversation could easily be spaces used to disseminate seditious rumours and criticism of the state. These concerns over socialization kept coffee illegal.

Illegal coffee, however, was untaxed coffee.⁴⁹ Demand quickly overpowered law, making coffee-smuggling a massively profitable black market trade. Low costs produced a blooming market. The liberal nature of bans, and corrupt local officials allowing coffeehouse owners to operate, helped the coffee trade to grow rapidly in Istanbul. The Ottoman government was too late to curb coffee consumption within the capital. Bans on coffee appear to have been largely ignored, and because the illegal goods could not be taxed, prohibition strengthened consumption by keeping prices down. After bans were lifted, strong market trends had already emerged, maintaining coffee's consumer base through increased taxation. Bans became less and less prevalent, being used on a case-by-case basis in unique legal circumstances. Simply put, coffee was too popular to prevent. Pecevi summarizes the story nicely, writing how "certain persons made approaches to the chief of police and the captain of the watch about selling coffee from back-doors in side-alleys, in small and unobtrusive shops and were allowed to do this. After this time, it became so prevalent that the ban was abandoned. The preachers and muftis now said that it does not become completely carbonized, and to drink it is therefore lawful."⁵⁰

With legality came broader appeal. Generally accepted as a morally benign substance, coffee provided a significant advantage over alcohol for Muslim patrons. Whereas taverns were always clandestine, coffeehouses could be out in the open. To operate at all, taverns relied on the privileges given to Christians citizens who were allowed to make wine for church services.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Suraiya Faroqhi, "Coffee and spices: official Ottoman reactions to Egyptian trade in the later sixteenth century," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, 76 (1986), 90.

⁵⁰ Kafadar, "A History of Coffee," 51-52.

⁵¹ Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment*, 85.

Slightly freer moral restrictions in the European-minded city of Galata, where taverns were slightly more successful across the Golden Horn than in Istanbul proper, but cafes began to take over in Galata too.⁵² Taverns never received full popular support from the average Ottoman Muslim, and even as strict adherence to religious edicts on social life waned, alcohol remained taboo with limited appeal.⁵³ Bathhouses, the other major competitor for dominance over the evolution of the secular public sphere, lacked the energizing feature of coffee that kept patrons staying late. To stay competitive, bathhouse owners soon began serving coffee as well.⁵⁴ Baths' roles as centres of sexual activity and prostitution also affected widespread appeal.⁵⁵ As such, coffeehouses took central stage as the primary institution shaping the emergent public domain.

Drinking coffee became a fundamentally social ritual which directly corresponded with a rupture between the public and private lines⁵⁶. However, even as coffeehouses became a societal and legal norm, they were far from an unproblematic enterprise. In the view of the state, they would remain the “hotbeds of sedition” they had been branded from the outset. Returning to Benjamin, one of the greatest assets of the artificial paradise is “ugliness”, a deviant element intrinsic to the nature of an institution; becoming entirely orthodox legal spaces was not in the nature of such locales. In the same vein, Foucault’s *heterotopia* exist not in direct alignment with societal norms, but as place which are reoriented, and in turn warp and shape common cultural

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Kafadar, “A History of Coffee,” 51-52.

⁵⁴ Serkan Delice, “The Janissaries and Their Bedfellows: Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Early Modern Ottoman Istanbul, 1500-1826,” in Gul Ozyegin (ed.) *Gender and Sexuality in Muslim Cultures*, London: Routledge, (2016), 120-122.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Hélène Desmet-Grégoire, “L’introduction du café à Istanbul (XVIe-XVIIe siècles)” in *Cafés d’Orient revisités*, Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique Éditions (1997), 29.

practice into myriad and often controversial forms⁵⁷. Coffeehouses, by their very nature, would represent countercultural trends long after legality was secured.

Addressing Unrest

Having established the emergence of coffeehouses, their history and impact on public life, we can turn more concretely to the issues of social unrest within cafes. As the primary gathering place for male Ottoman citizens across class lines, the coffeehouse served as the primary nexus of ideas and political debate among the masses; to that end, it represented the place where seeds of radicalism could best be sown. For Habermas, free expression is an integral characteristic of the public sphere⁵⁸. With separation from state oversight, expression manifests criticism, dissent and united action. The impact such an institution has on social culture, within and separate from Ottoman contexts in the early modern period, has been the subject of robust study⁵⁹, and its furthest extents lay beyond the scope of this paper. The intent of this introduction has been to provide a foundation necessary to understand coffeehouses as a radical social phenomenon. With this in mind, we turn to look at sedition and dissent as it manifests within Istanbul's new popular culture.

While several studies have focused on one or multiple areas of crime, unrest or deviancy within Ottoman cafes, no comprehensive study on the complete range of various forms of coffeehouse sedition exists at present. Fariba Zarinebaf's book, *Crime and Punishment in Istanbul, 1700-1800*, is arguably the most complete work on the topic, but its broad scope means

⁵⁷ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 8.

⁵⁸ Finlayson, *Habermas*, 21.

⁵⁹ The works of Cemal Kafadar, Kathryn Babayan, Selma Akyazici Özkoçak, Alan Mikhail, and Ali Çaksu in interpreting the theories of Habermas to understand the Ottoman coffeehouse are extensive, and this introduction acts merely as a foray into such topics.

coffeehouses do not receive a singular focus. Works such as Alan Mikhail's "The Heart's Desire" and Ali Çaksu's "Janissary Coffee Houses in Late Eighteenth-Century Istanbul" in *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee*, as well as Serkan Delice's "The Janissaries and their Bedfellows" and Madeline Zilfi's "The Kadizadelis: Discordant Revivalism in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul", provide fantastic evidence of illicit activity in coffeehouses but only in regards to specific activities. Primary sources, such as the chronicle by Pecevi, the diary of an Istanbuli Sufi, as well as Mustafa Ali's infamous *Ottoman Gentleman*, are relatively comprehensive for their time; however, these works lack nuanced theoretical interpretation and do not always focus on coffeehouses. Finally, some works cover sedition only as it manifests in separate contexts, with mild or hinted connections to coffeehouses and Istanbul. These works include Dror Ze'evi's *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500-1900*, Suraiya Faroqhi's *Coping with the State: Political Conflict and Crime in the Ottoman Empire*, Kathryn Babayan's *The City as Anthology: Eroticism and Urbanity in Early Modern Isfahan*, and Walter Andrews and Mehmet Kalpakli's *The Age of Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society*.

With this bibliography in mind, this paper shall cover unrest, sedition, crime and cultural heterodoxy strictly as it relates to the coffeehouses of Istanbul and Galata between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Broadly accessible for a range of social purposes, these new community staples facilitated resistance to both legal and cultural customs, and as such this resistance spread openly. Coffeehouses served as a popular locale for homosexuality and urban sex life, which was in turn driven by artists, Sufis, intellectuals and sex workers alike. Gang activity and organized crime found coffeehouses to be a perfect forum to gather and recruit. Political movements and revolutionaries used the public sphere to spread their rhetoric and

agitate the masses. Religious dissent found similar opportunities. As this venue of unrest became more prominent, state agents, military and police officials, high ranking courtiers, and perhaps even the odd sultan, found themselves drawn into the counterculture nexus at the bottom of coffee cups. The political world was soon densely intertwined with this new social realm, and Ottoman domestic policy was forced to adapt its legal framework surrounding communal institutions and the radicals they produced. This paper will trace the evolution of coffee as a social phenomenon, and how it created the social conditions to host a massive socio-political underworld in Istanbul. Echoed by a Turkish proverb stating “coffee should be black as hell, strong as death, and sweet as love” (*Kahve cehennem kadar kara, ölüm kadar kuvvetli, sevgi kadar tatlı olmalı*), the socio-political world of the coffeehouse proved equally powerful and bittersweet.

Chapter 1 - Hot Coffee: The Coffeehouse as an Incendiary Political Space

With waning condemnations and broader acceptance among the public and jurists alike, coffee and the use of private property for its consumption and sale had clearly begun to wear down strict bans. While coffee and coffeehouses would remain a legal question over the next century, by 1592 it was free from the threat of total prohibition, and this year is a marker for its continued legality. However, the future of coffee in Ottoman legal discourse was far from settled.

After a period of rampant instability and the unseating of Sultans Osman II and Mustafa I as a result of Janissary revolts, the reign of Sultan Murad IV (1623-1640) was a period of order and strict governance. Having led the coup d'état that dethroned his uncle Mustafa, Murad IV was eminently aware that the forces that had brought him to power - military unrest and palace factionalism - could just as easily remove him. Murad navigated an unstable regency early in his reign, during which Janissaries had stormed the Topkapi Palace and executed his Grand Vizier.⁶⁰ His own coup had been facilitated by factional divisions at court and in the army's barracks, where powerful individuals had risen due to the instability of Mustafa I's reign.⁶¹ Curtailing the power of these cabals, and specifically that of the Janissaries, led to the implementation of strict and sweeping reforms. Murad re-instituted fratricide within the House of Osman. He ordered the execution of top viziers and military officials, and banned luxury goods such as alcohol, tobacco and coffee, all the while targeting the social landscapes (taverns, coffeehouses) that had allowed insurrections to germinate and flourish.

⁶⁰ Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World*, New York: Cambridge University Press (2010), 75, 214. See also, A.H. Groot, "Murād IV," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Leiden: Brill.

⁶¹ Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment*, 125.

It is in the context of these reforms that one apocryphal tale of the Sultan became popular. Clad in dark cloaks and disguised as a commoner, he prowled the streets of Istanbul late at night carrying a hundred-pound broadsword and hunting for delinquent coffee-drinkers.⁶² While tales of Murad's vigilante justice were almost certainly fictional, the image of an all-seeing sultan persecuting coffee-drinkers has etched itself into the Ottoman teleological mythos for both its dramatic quality and as a model for stable leadership. Later accounts of Murad's reign speak to the prominence of coffeehouses and other public gathering spaces during certain periods of unrest; these spaces would often serve as forums for rebellious rhetoric and assembly. Attempts by the state to curtail unrest routinely included bans on coffee. For the Ottoman court historian Mustafa Naima, writing after the 1703 Edirne Rebellion, Murad IV provided an excellent foil to illustrate the danger of coffeehouses to absolutist governance.

“The humble one may state that the fact that the late Sultan [Murad IV] was so severe, and that he threatened to patrol the streets and to put men to death as part of his abolition of coffeehouses and of smoking, was not merely a wanton prohibition or simply arbitrariness. Rather, it is plain that this was a pretext for the purpose of controlling the riffraff and for fighting the common people in the interests of the state. [...] At that time coffee and tobacco were neither more nor less than a pretext for assembling; a crowd of good-for-nothings were forever meeting in coffeehouses or barber shops or in the houses of certain men—houses which were places on the order of clubhouses where they would spend their time criticizing and disparaging the great and the authorities, waste their breath discussing imperial interests connected with affairs of state, dismissals, and appointments, fallings out and reconciliations, and so they would gossip and lie.”⁶³

As coffeehouses evolved and incorporated a broader scope of popular culture and daily life, so too did their capacity to amplify public displeasure. As the popularity of cafes grew, as Naima notes, so too did their incendiary qualities.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Mustafa Naima, *Tarih-i Naima*, Vol 6, Istanbul (1863-66).

Sources of Sedition

Prior to legalization, the clandestine nature of coffeehouses made them natural gathering places for political dissent; predominantly situated in back-alleys or concealed within various establishments and storefronts, coffeehouses could operate out of sight. The issue of public gathering carried moralistic implications. Men thought to be idling outside their homes were often considered vagabonds who were shirking familial duties, while prostitution was often facilitated indoors rather than out in the open.⁶⁴ Barbershops and restaurants, especially sherbet vendors, were often under the scrutiny of the scrutiny on account of the fact that patrons frequently idled on their premises.⁶⁵ The home of the average Istanbuli commoner was small and crowded, and was hardly the place to organize mass criminal activity; urban gangs needed secondary spaces to accommodate them, and were largely dependent on the infrastructure of their neighbourhood.

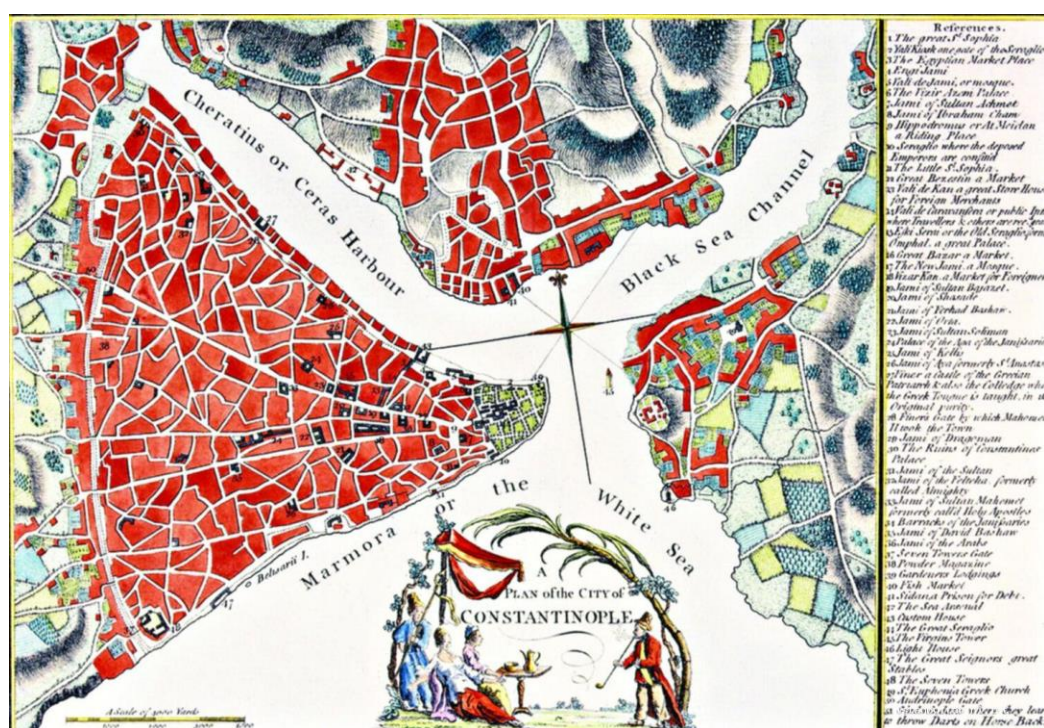
Prior to the existence of coffeehouses, the assembly of criminals in Istanbul relied on the conspicuousness of taverns or impromptu gatherings in alleyways.⁶⁶ Taverns hinged upon their ability to exist under the radar, built in extra-urban or extra-mural neighborhoods like Galata. Sinful and counter-normative behaviour in the 16th and 17th centuries was predominantly associated with Galata, the “European” city, while Istanbul was distinguished as the “abode of felicity”, and thus propagated as the empire’s center of piety. Home to a large population of Christian Ottoman subjects, Galata was subject to somewhat different legal customs. Both Ottoman judicial practice and *sharia* were applied loosely to accommodate foreigners who

⁶⁴ Semerdjian, “Tender and Pretty,” 175-176, 180.

⁶⁵ Fariba Zarinebaf, “Policing Morality: Crossing Gender and Communal Boundaries in an Age of Political Crisis and Religious Controversy,” in *Living in the Ottoman Realm*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, (2016), 195, 203.

⁶⁶ Fariba Zarinebaf, *Mediterranean Encounters: Trade and Pluralism in Early Modern Galata*, Oakland: University of California Press, (2017), 241-243.

arrived as part of vast trade networks or for those “people of the book” living in Ottoman lands and paying the *jizya*.⁶⁷ Alcohol, for example, was allowed to be produced for the purpose of sacrament, but its sale to Muslims was considered illegal.⁶⁸ Policing in Galata was somewhat ad-hoc, and was often left to the discretion of neighbourhood religious and community authorities who reported to the local *qadi*.⁶⁹ As such, Galata often served as a refuge for those seeking to engage in disreputable activities, and it was here where Istanbuli nightlife first emerged.⁷⁰



A 1711 map of Istanbul and Galata, distinguishing the city’s many neighbourhoods.⁷¹

As an important religious staple for Istanbul’s Christian community, access to wine was a documented legal conundrum. European traders in Galata and Christian residents of the Ottoman

⁶⁷ Andrews and Kalpakli, *The Age of Beloveds*, 13.

⁶⁸ Cemal, “A History of Coffee,” 52.

⁶⁹ Delice, “The Janissaries and Their Bedfellow,” 115-116.

⁷⁰ Zarinebaf, *Trade and Pluralism*, 241-242.

⁷¹ Hugh Kennedy, *An Historical Atlas of Islam - Atlas Historique de l’Islam*, Leiden, Netherlands: Brill (2002).

empire were afforded the right to purchase a set amount of untaxed wine under Hanafi legal codes provided it was not sold to Muslims.⁷² Loose restrictions, however, facilitated access to alcohol vendors for any Muslims who truly wanted it.⁷³ “Church wine” rarely stayed in church, and a popular drinking culture developed in Galata. Taverns, as well as brothels, were allowed to exist in Galata thanks to weakly-worded and poorly enforced regulations. Both still received heavy scrutiny, especially in neighbourhoods featuring a blend of European and Muslim populations⁷⁴; frequent legal complaints by residents levied against taverns and their patrons resulted in closures.⁷⁵ As the primary public gathering place for distributing intoxicants, taverns naturally facilitated a nightlife that was loud, disruptive, and viewed as impious. Local ire stemmed from stigma that taverns served to facilitate illicit activities, and these beliefs were not unfounded.⁷⁶ Brawls frequently broke out, taverns housed prostitutes, and noise complaints led to the imposition of curfews in Galata.⁷⁷ The crime rate rose steadily in Galata, with major spikes in the 1650s, 1680s, and 1760s. Explorer and diarist Evliya Celebi, one such writer to depict Galata as a city of sin, documented the rampant crime rates in an ever-more congested Galata.⁷⁸ “When I pass through that wicked locale [I] see hundreds of downtrodden tavern-slaves lying in the highway, bareheaded and downtrodden”.⁷⁹

Despite Ottoman propaganda, criminal behaviour was certainly not limited to Galata in terms of Istanbul’s full scope, and differences in public space meant that crime assumed different

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Kafadar, “A History of Coffee,” 55.

⁷⁴ Delice, “The Janissaries and Their Bedfellows,” 115-116.

⁷⁵ Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment*, 100–101.

⁷⁶ Zarinebaf, *Trade and Pluralism*, 243.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Evliya Celebi, *An Ottoman Traveller: Selections from the Book of Travels of Evliya Celebi*, translated by Robert Dankoff and Sooyong Kim, London: Eland Publishing (2010), 18-21.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

forms depending on which side of the Golden Horn it occurred. Within Istanbul proper, alcohol was not completely forbidden under Hanafi law. Firstly, examples of *khamr* (beverages banned by the Quran) are much fewer under Hanafi code than other Islamic legal schools. Consumption of *khamr* beverages is not illegal outright, but instead one must consume only an amount that will not cause drunkenness or intoxication, and without using the beverage to stimulate forms of entertainment.⁸⁰ The Shafi'i legal school, however, opines that any amount of *khamr* produces intoxication, while the Hanafis allow for degrees of mediation. Overindulgence was the source of *khamr* in this case, rather than the beverage itself.⁸¹ This distinction allowed Istanbuli taverns to skirt outright bans.⁸² While subject to rigorous scrutiny, taverns maintained legal operations, and provided secretive enclaves for urban gangs and political dissidents to organize within the political heart of the empire. Hanafi scholars and their limited definition of *khamr* would provide even greater opportunities for the expansion of Istanbul's underworld, as it was largely the debates over *khamr* that eventually allowed the legalization of coffee.

The advent of coffeehouses coincided with increased integration between “felicitous” Istanbul and “sinful” Galata as European residents crossed over regularly while merchants expanded their economic networks further into Galata. Ever increasing social interaction facilitated overlapping Istanbuli identities, and thus incorporated Galata's European cultural attitudes into normative behaviour. Coffeehouses, inherently cosmopolitan, furthered such cultural shifts. Broader access to social consumerism and recreation manifested as social deviation, and deviations bred heterodox behaviour. The expansion of Galatan influence over

⁸⁰ Ralph S Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, (1985), 51-52.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

public spaces and nightlife meant criminal activity centered in the European City could also grow laterally.

For criminal organizations and political movements, coffeehouses were ideally located to access crowds for recruiting and spreading messages. Even during ban periods, as previously demonstrated, popularity surged.⁸³ Underground coffeehouses were routinely packed with patrons who might stay for multiple hours at any time of day. Tentative legality beginning in 1592 saw a boom in the establishment of hundreds of coffeehouses across Istanbul and provided access to wealthy and powerful patrons. The construction of coffeehouses required the approval of the local *qadi*, which could be attained via the submission of a petition; between 1593 and 1620, over a thousand petitions were presented to Istanbuli *qadis* in reference to coffeehouse construction.⁸⁴ Coffee's legality, apart from questions over intoxication, also hinged upon the Sunnah (doctrinal precedents established by either the Prophet or the broader Muslim community). Hanafi jurists, drawing upon various hadiths, argued that innovations after the time of the prophet did not necessarily require precedent to be deemed as legal if these inventions were accepted through the consensus of the Islamic community.⁸⁵ These justifications of innovation formed the basis of the legal concepts of *ijma*, which provided a useful legal loophole to justify the use of popular but legally tenuous goods. *Ijma* was particularly popular among Hanafi jurists, which aided coffee's legal acceptance in the Ottoman state.

Thanks to both legal approval and public opinion, the coffeehouse captured the attention of the masses and became ideal spaces for illicit activity. During the late 16th and early 17th

⁸³ It is important to note that, in this and subsequent cases, the phrase "ban periods" refers to periods of bans on coffeehouse operations, not an overt ban on coffee itself as a beverage.

⁸⁴ Faroqhi, *Towns and Townsmen*, 71.

⁸⁵ Faroqhi. *Coping with the State*, 16-17.

centuries, coffeehouses gradually replaced bathhouses, barber shops, restaurants and most of all taverns as the primary gathering place for criminal activity.

Cities of Cafes

While the precedent of the Sunnah may not have existed for coffee, a precedent for urban coffeehouses in the Islamic world had been established in the 16th century within the Mamluk Empire. Critical to the Mamluk connection with coffee was not only their capital, Cairo, but also their control of the Yemeni port city of Mocha. With the Mamluks controlling Mocha and by extension the entire global coffee trade in its infancy, they became coffee's primary consumer. Just as in the Ottoman Empire, taxation after legalization of coffee remained fairly low, and shipping costs were comparatively reasonable within the empire.⁸⁶ A strong Sufi presence within the Mamluk empire facilitated the distribution of coffee through connected brotherhoods, lodges and networks of scholars.⁸⁷ The beverage was predominantly used to keep Sufis energized for intoxicating rituals or extended periods of debate and study. In such functions, the beverage was permitted, with some praising God for coffee's ability to elongate periods of religious study.

As a result of coffee's popularity in Sufi *tariqahs*, Mecca itself became a center of coffee consumption. This was documented by the historian 'Adb al-Qadir Jaziri, who provides one of the rare documents of this period which was dedicated entirely to coffee, *'Umdat al-safwa fi hill al-qahwa*. An outspoken critic, Jaziri penned a reproduction of the minutes from a meeting of the Mecca *ulema* held in 1511, which had been originally recorded by jurist Sham al-Din Muhammad al-Hanafi and detailed a debate that led to a ban on coffee.⁸⁸ The assembly featured

⁸⁶ Genç, "Contrôle et taxation," 166.

⁸⁷ Çaksu, "Janissary Coffee Houses," 121-122.

⁸⁸ Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses*, 31-36

jurists from three Islamic legal schools (Hanafis, Hanbalis and Shafi'i), along with several physicians, and as such was convened by Kha'ir Beg al Mi'mar, the Mamluk *pasha* and market inspector (*muhtasib*) of Mecca. Those present expressed their concern surrounding those who gathered for the expressed purpose of drinking coffee, often in what were considered "taverns", as well as the effects of the beverage on one's mind and balance of temperament. Such gatherings were banned, coffee stores were torched in the streets, and vendors and patrons were beaten.⁸⁹ Jaziri believed this particular meeting of jurists to be a charade, and depicted Kha'ir Beg as a religious fanatic while the jurists— as secret coffee-drinkers— were obviously hypocrites. This 1511 ban, while initially impactful in Mecca, failed to produce any widespread effects as its call for empire-wide imposition was refuted and its ruling repealed by Mamluk authorities in Cairo.⁹⁰

It was little surprise that Cairene officials opposed such bans on coffee given its popularity and profitability. Cairo's shipping logs provide the first records of coffee's arrival in Istanbul. While Mamluk exports suffered from a financial crisis in the late 16th century, coffee continued to flow in and out.⁹¹ Coffee was so popular that Mamluk officials had to ban soldiers from drinking it, as the army was spending more time in coffeehouses than in the barracks or on patrol.⁹² After its conquest by the Ottomans in 1517, Cairo remained a hub of economic activity in the coffee sector. During the 17th century financial crisis, in which the Ottoman government failed to account for inflation and maintained old price systems during the Price Revolution while trade around the Horn of Africa reduced the importance of Mediterranean markets, the

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Genc, "Contrôle et taxation," 162.

⁹² Faroqhi, "Coffee and Spices," 89.

importance of coffee to European buyers secured Cairo's status as an economic hub.⁹³ The first records of sales tax on coffee emerged in sixteenth-century Cairo during a spike in luxury goods trade, and such taxes became more prominent in the seventeenth century. Furthermore, Cairo represents a model of coffee's popularity before regimented tax,⁹⁴ creating a flourishing industry and consumer network that would prove impossible to reverse. This model was crucial to understanding coffee in Istanbul.

Like Cairo, Istanbul soon developed a large market for coffee after the establishment of the first cafe in 1554. Formal prohibition of coffee ended in 1592, and the popularity of coffeehouses soared. Istanbul was particularly primed as a center of wealth, even beyond what Cairo offered, that could more than support a leisure-based market. Urban development, driven by economic and demographic upswing during the so-called "long sixteenth century", created an infrastructure conducive to an expanded domestic sphere in Ottoman cities.⁹⁵ An expanded domestic sphere, as previously discussed, could broaden the private *selamlık* into the public; the city's very construction was an ideal market for businesses that sold public space as one of its products. Moreover, luxury goods were rising in popularity among a growing middle class across Anatolia.⁹⁶ The integration of refugees and migrants into large urban centers like Istanbul led to the proliferation of luxury goods among ethnically rooted trade and exchange systems.⁹⁷ Istanbul's attraction to coffee represented "transformations in broader consumption patterns and a decline in obedience to religious and legal prescriptions. [Coffeehouses facilitated] the formation

⁹³ Faroqhi, *Towns and Townsmen*, 47.

⁹⁴ Genc, "Contrôle et taxation," 163.

⁹⁵ Faroqhi, *Towns and Townsmen*, 45-55.

⁹⁶ Karababa and Ger, "Formation of the Consumer Subject," 737-740.

⁹⁷ Faroqhi, *Towns and Townsmen*, 45-55.

of an active consumer”.⁹⁸ Consumers used public commodities to construct a public-facing identity; in this case, coffee created a male public which was able to create its own entertainment and leisure within the pre-established space coffeehouses provided.

With no preconceived expectations of behaviour associated with coffeehouses, these spaces offered a malleable social platform. Turkish economists Eminegül Karababa and Gülz Ger describe the coffeehouse as offering three things to its patrons: *sociopleasures*, *physiopleasures* and *ideopleasures*.⁹⁹ The first two are encompassed simply in social discourse and consumption of coffee, although both have the capacity to be expanded into the realm of illicit activities and existed in some form within Istanbul prior to 1554. Ideopleasures, however, had never been so widely available for manipulation by the general public; ideological determination and engagement had previously been typically dominated by church and state, or confined to small gatherings in houses or in communal domestic space. The general public had never had such access to a forum of information and debate.

Such an emancipation of space for ideological discourse served as an activation of the communal body, in which “[la Café] marquait une rupture dans un espace/temps réservé à la prière, pause revivifiant les corps physiques et le corps communautaire dans un contexte d'austérité,” as argued by Hélène Desmet-Grégoire.¹⁰⁰ As with the future salons of Paris or cafes of London, political idealists and public intellectuals flocked to the coffeehouse. From their very inception, coffeehouses became centers of neighbourhood press; a common greeting to a coffeehouse owner after removing one’s shoe was the utterance of a phrase akin to “what’s the

⁹⁸ Karababa and Ger, “Formation of the Consumer Subject,,” 738.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Desmet-Grégoire, “L’introduction du café,” 30.

news?”¹⁰¹ Local affairs, once discussed piecemeal among smaller social networks, were amalgamated into much larger discussions within the communal body. Thus, having incorporated the male domestic realm, coffeehouses made the communal *selamlık* a political space. For anyone trying to spread a message, the value of a crowd was massive.

Power in Public

Perhaps the best source we have on coffeehouse culture in Istanbul comes from one of its most outspoken contemporary critics. Mustafa Ali (1541-1600) was a moralist, a bureaucrat and a member of the Ottoman social elite. One of the most prolific 16th-century authors, Ali and his career coincided with the rise of coffeehouses, which he strongly opposed. *Meva'idu'n-nefa'is fi kava'idi'l-mecalis*, his work on proper manners for the elite colloquially referred to as *The Ottoman Gentleman*, provides critical insight into Istanbul cafes, coloured by Ali's fierce anti-coffee rhetoric but nonetheless valuable as an astute first-hand source. In their infancy, coffeehouses were initially a poor man's phenomena; cheap and local, here the rich drank their coffee in a designated room within the home, something Ali also condemned among his peers.¹⁰² As for the coffeehouse, Ali saw them as hotbeds of lower class immorality, as well as a place for lazy idlers to gather amongst Sufis, drunks and criminals.¹⁰³ These arguments are predicated on lines of piety, morality and civility; coffeehouse patrons shirked duties of prayer, responsibilities of employment and family obligations to lounge in disreputable establishments open to the public eye. Ali saw those who frequented cafes for social purposes as flaunting personal affairs

¹⁰¹ Mikhail, "The Heart's Desire," 148-149.

¹⁰² Douglas Brookes. *The Ottoman Gentleman of the Sixteenth Century: Mustafa Ali's Meva'idu'n-nefa'is Fi Kava'idi'l-mecalis: Tables of Delicacies Concerning the Rules of Social Gatherings*, Boston: Harvard University Press, (2003).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

and defying socio-religious norms which emphasise modest lifestyles and privacy.¹⁰⁴ His condemnation of coffeehouses is telling; Ali openly opposed social mobility, and believed in the inherent nature of men's inequality and limitation to one's designated station.¹⁰⁵ For such a defender of the established hierarchy, coffeehouses represented a threatening democratization of class structure through the diversity of intellectual engagement they offered.

What did the physical space that comprised an Istanbul coffeehouse look like? Ali's evidence for coffeehouses as sources of sedition provides a glimpse of how such spaces operated. Alan Mikhail's article "The Heart's Desire" also maps out useful elements of the coffeehouse. Having removed one's shoes at the door, a patron would typically enter the *meydan*, one large open room in the back of the building, which was bordered by the kitchen and bar with a variety of *fincan* cups hung on display. Coffee was prepared on the *ocak*, a furnace placed in the corner.¹⁰⁶ The open windows of a coffeehouse's front facade looked out onto a small walkway, though patios did expand into the street, where an outdoor *ocak* and water pipes were set up forming "chair coffee houses". Cafes were typically constructed within plazas and arcades in *mahalle* neighbourhoods and markets, or as part of *waqf* complexes.¹⁰⁷

Ali condemned the lack of defined stratum within cafes, where the *meydan* seating was structured to allow patrons to mingle.¹⁰⁸ He noted that the only sense of hierarchy were the high couches, called the *bassedir*, which were reserved for revered elderly regulars and sufi masters, with no segregation based on class.¹⁰⁹ Ali was disturbed by the overtly sexual topics that Sufis

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Cornell Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali, 1541-1600*, Princeton: Princeton University Press (1986).

¹⁰⁶ Mikhail, "The Heart's Desire," 149.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 148-151.

¹⁰⁸ Brookes, *The Ottoman Gentleman*, 81.

¹⁰⁹ For information on the *bassedir*, see Mikhail, "The Heart's Desire," 151. For Sufis in places of reverence within the coffeehouse, see Çaksu, "Janissary Coffee Houses," 121.

publicly discussed casually alongside matters of politics and religion; he frowned upon such conversations for their ‘rabble-rousing’ qualities, while he looked askance at the young beardless male servers which were employed by the coffeehouses.¹¹⁰ In summation, Ali objected to the crass, socially inflammatory behaviour of unenlightened intermediate social bodies, and this was a critique of organized gatherings that echoes an Abbasid political tradition of preventing the free assembly of structured groups.¹¹¹ For all his detail and critique, Ali claims to never have entered a coffeehouse personally, and insists that his reports predominantly stem from observations made from outside, where he took advantage of the open fronts and patios to make judgement. Whether Ali’s alleged purity in regard to coffeehouse patronage is true or not, his criticism is nonetheless illuminating.



The *Meydan* of an 18th century Istanbul coffeehouse with a view of the Bosphorus.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Andrews and Kalpakli, *The Age of Beloveds*, 39-52.

¹¹¹ Faroqhi, *Coping with The State*, 117.

¹¹² Christine Woodhead, “The Ottoman World,” *The English Historical Review* 130, no. 543 (2015), 385.

Such concerns about public immodesty were not reserved for private individuals such as Mustafa Ali; they were also central to the state's treatment of the coffeehouse. Ottoman officials regarded coffeehouses as transgressive to the sanctity of privacy and vision, which were notions grounded in Quranic and Hadith traditions that prohibited visual intrusions.¹¹³ The construction of coffeehouses, with their open fronts, allowed patrons to see out as well as be seen. A typically insular *mahalle* neighbourhood was rendered into a forum of human traffic by a coffeehouse, and as such violated prescriptions regarding privacy.¹¹⁴ Whereas domestic architecture in Muslim cities was typically regulated by architectural studies such as the work of Maliki jurist Ibn al-Rami - who delineated the rules for building homes which could not be seen into – the coffeehouse openly invited exposure of the public eye upon and from its patrons.¹¹⁵ Visual prohibitions motivated the closure of transgressive coffeehouses by Ottoman jurists, especially in the cases of “chair coffee houses” which were set up in the street and directly impeded communal space.¹¹⁶

Likewise, what could be heard from a coffeehouse was a subject of great concern for officials. The state rightly viewed conversationally-oriented social forums as sources of rumour and gossip, or what Mikhail styled as the “idle chatter's version of *realpolitik*”.¹¹⁷ Coffeehouses were viewed as potentially incendiary spaces for their ability to spread information. Legal prescriptions and *hadiths* similar to those regarding visual intrusions also existed for auditory

¹¹³ Mikhail, “The Heart's Desire,” 151-154.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Besim S Hakim, *Arabic-Islamic Cities: Building and Planning Principles*, 2nd ed, S.I: Besim Salim Hakim (2008), 38-39.

¹¹⁶ Mikhail, “The Heart's Desire,” 151.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 157. The Turkish proverb from which Mikhail draws the title of his work, a phrase regularly passed around in coffee houses, is noteworthy here. “The heart desires conversation. Coffee is just an excuse.” Mikhail, in his analysis of coffeehouse conversation, also provides a useful distinction between gossip and rumour. *Ibid.*, 154-158.

intrusion. Mustafa Ali describes the conversations held within coffeehouses as “snakelike-winding sweet lies that clash with the facts.”¹¹⁸ Through studies on the spy reports and *journals* of undercover state agents eavesdropping on cafes, who themselves seem unbothered by ethics of overt surveillance, we find that talk in coffeehouses could often have a deeply political nature.¹¹⁹

Coffeehouse patrons routinely shared opinions of current events, and this type of conversation was referred to as *devlet sohbeti*, ‘state talk’, by officials.¹²⁰ One *journal* documents lower class Istanbuli men discussing ongoing conflicts in Syria and eastern Anatolia¹²¹, while some soldiers in 1603 were overheard discussing replacing the sultan.¹²² Rumour could often trigger rebellions, a major facet of sedition and deviance, and therefore what was heard and openly said in public spaces could be deemed a security concern of major importance. In praising Murad IV’s crackdown on coffee-drinkers, Naima cites the rumours and conspiracies which were first hatched in coffeehouses.¹²³ Mustafa Ali’s critique of coffeehouses being home to a variety of social deviants was thereby a valid claim in the eyes of the state.

To this end, who was gathering in coffeehouses proves representative of their insubordinate power. Just as Meccan Sufi groups had indulged in coffee in rituals and gatherings, Sufi orders within the Ottoman empire had access to the commodity prior to 1554, thanks in

¹¹⁸ Brookes, *The Ottoman Gentleman*, 47.

¹¹⁹ Cengiz KIRLI, "The struggle over space: coffeehouses of Ottoman Istanbul, 1780–1845," Ph.D. dissertation, Binghamton: State University of New York, (2000), 184, 200. It is important to note that while almost all conversations recorded in the *journals* of spies had a political nature, the ears of the state would be tuned to record such talk, and likely be less concerned with recording average, more mundane talk. It should not be assumed, therefore, that all coffeehouse talk was politically charged, though much was.

¹²⁰ Andrews and Kalpakli, *The Age of Beloveds*, 106-112.

¹²¹ KIRLI, "The struggle over space," 200

¹²² Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire*, 184. It is unclear whether these soldiers were referring to Mehmed III or Ahmed I.

¹²³ Naima, *Tarih-i Naima*, 171.

large part to connections between mystical orders across borders.¹²⁴ By the turn of the 17th century, coffee was a staple for many Sufi mystics, and they were among the very first to adopt coffeehouses into their social lives. Urban Sufis were already major proponents of practices that enjoined the domestic and the public sphere and were known to frequently nap in shops and gather in public squares¹²⁵, and thus had come to view the domestic corpus as indistinguishable from the communal. Sufis introduced terminology such as *ba'de' l-kahve*, “after coffee”, was used for the ordering domestic time, which might be akin to English idioms such as “tea time”.¹²⁶ In terms of time, Sufis had more to spare than most anyone, and as such could devote themselves to patronizing coffeehouses. Given the strong interconnectedness between Sufis and coffee, coffeehouses were soon adopted as meeting places by several urban orders. Many cafes eventually served as full-blown lodges for an entire order, a practice most common among Istanbul's Helveti mystics.¹²⁷

Written between 1661 and 1665, the *Sohbetname*, the diary of an Istanbuli dervish named Seyyid Hasan, describes the strong interconnection between coffee and Sufi activity. Written during the early Koprulu Era (1656-1683), which saw ironhanded repression of coffeehouses by high-ranking viziers, coffee nonetheless pokes its head out routinely. Seyyid Hasan makes noted use of the term *ba de l-kahve* and documents many cases in which he drank a cup of coffee in social settings, which he describes as “coffee parties” held among various Sufi orders.¹²⁸ In place of banned coffeehouses, Seyyid Hasan enjoyed coffee in bathhouses, spaces which took on an

¹²⁴ Derin Terizoglu, “Sufis in the Age of State Building and Confessionalization,” in Christine Woodhead (ed) *The Ottoman World*, London: Routledge (2011), pp. 86-99.

¹²⁵ Kafadar, “Self and Others,” 24-25.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment*, 114.

¹²⁸ Kafadar, “Self and Others,” 22, 25.

expanded role during the Koprulu Era for Sufis and other social deviants usually found in cafes.¹²⁹

The connection between Sufis and coffeehouses was further entrenched by the Janissaries, a group that was perhaps more integral to Ottoman political life than any other. Using the metric of *devlet sohbeti* and its interactions with public space and structured gatherings, Janissaries were significantly impactful. As the main point of police contact with urban populaces, the Janissary *kolluk* police-stations acted as socio-political spaces. Many neighbourhood *kolluks* featured a dedicated coffeehouse, and in some cases a local regiment might construct and designate a coffeehouse to serve as a *kolluk*.¹³⁰ Throughout the seventeenth century, Ottoman administration had routinely attempted to limit the power of the Janissaries, who in interactions with urban populations became both a local mafia-style authority and “a formidable social force that provided a check against absolutism.”¹³¹ The influence of the Janissaries in dictating political events and controlling Istanbul’s populace through bullying and intimidation ultimately led to the disbanding of the corps in 1826. In the meantime, economic downturn alongside reform efforts led to a decrease in military salaries; as such, Janissaries were allowed to operate civilian business ventures to supplement their income and prevent unrest.¹³² Janissary coffeehouses, owned, operated and patronized by military men, were viewed as the central spaces of society’s most seditious group. ‘Felicitous’ Istanbul was in fact viewed by many as an “inflammatory” city due to the concentration of discontented Janissaries¹³³, whose further integration into public life through economic means corresponded with an increased Sufi

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Çaksu, “Janissary Coffee Houses,” 118.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 118-119.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Delice, “The Janissaries and Their Bedfellows,” 126.

presence. Members of the Bektashi order, synonymous with the spiritual practice of the Janissaries, became staples of *kolluk* cafes; the opening of new Janissary coffeehouses marked by a ceremony led by a Bektashi master who oversaw various Sufi rituals within the cafe.¹³⁴

Janissary activity carried an inherent capacity for crime and violence as the primary point of access to physicalized justice within domestic locales.¹³⁵ *Kolluk* cafes located in centers of economic activity served as both market inspection offices as well as personal business offices for their Janissary owners. Centralized control over local economies facilitated corruption; Janissary police units engaged in smuggling, racketeering, and tax farming within the districts they oversaw. *Ihtisabiye* market dues on coffee were doled out unevenly, and a local Janissary regiment's monopoly on allocation of resources, taxes and quotas in their local market allowed them to squeeze vendors who had earned their ire.¹³⁶ Led by a *zorba*, some Janissary groups formed powerful urban gangs that used coffeehouses as their headquarters. From there, smuggling rings took advantage of monopolies on local trade, with many soldiers-cum-coffeehouse owners becoming noticeably wealthy.¹³⁷ Racketeering of protection money or property through debt collection, extortion or the practice of "axe-hanging" were common tools employed by *zorb*as to obtain capital.¹³⁸ Conflicts over territory between Janissary units could erupt into full-blown gang wars.¹³⁹ Mercenary bands used coffeehouses as networking hubs,

¹³⁴ Çaksu, "Janissary Coffee Houses," 125-127.

¹³⁵ For a complete study on methodology surrounding the nature of policing and corruption therein, see Sanja Kutnjak Ivković, and Maria R. Haberfeld, eds. *Exploring Police Integrity: Novel Approaches to Police Integrity Theory and Methodology*, Cham: Springer (2019).

¹³⁶ Faroqhi, *Towns and Townsmen*, 27.

¹³⁷ Çaksu, "Janissary Coffee Houses," 125-131.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

which increased the capacity for violence in coffeehouses.¹⁴⁰ criminal enterprises aside, the Janissaries remained a political unit within their coffeehouses, and not infrequently, such units could entertain sedition and agitation against the Ottoman court.

The Koprulu Period to The Tulip Age

In response to several violent Janissary insurrections, the Koprulu Period saw ironhanded repression of the public sphere. Janissary agency within the public sphere, agitated by the army's inherent political influence, exploded out of coffeehouses and rocked the foundations of the state. Here, we return to the instability that preceded the reign of Murad IV. Urban Janissary power had already established itself as a check to royal authority, and as a pressure group they enmeshed themselves with the status of the viziers.¹⁴¹ Their complaints formed the primary body of political opposition within the state by the reign of Osman II in the early seventeenth century, and much of this was concentrated in Istanbul's coffeehouses. Even compared to the barracks, the coffeehouse was the primary place for political debate and action on account of its distance from the palace and state.¹⁴² Osman II, following recent economic trends, attempted to curtail this insubordination with further pay cuts and attempts to recruit a new loyal replacement army; the recent Celali rebellions had exacerbated the need for military reform and recruitment as the long-term rebellion had both entrenched Janissary power within the army and impacted reserve structure.¹⁴³ In the aftermath, the empire saw an influx of now-unemployed mercenary bands,

¹⁴⁰ Faroqhi, *Coping With The State*, 117-118.

¹⁴¹ Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire*, 182-183.

¹⁴² Delice, "The Janissaries and Their Bedfellows," 127-128.

¹⁴³ Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire*, 153-163, 140-141.

who either found work as *sekbans* in military reform efforts¹⁴⁴ or congregated in Janissary coffeehouses where dissatisfaction mounted.¹⁴⁵ In 1622, amid complaints of pay cuts and rumours surrounding new recruitment now swirling in Istanbul's cafes, Osman II announced plans to become the first Ottoman sultan to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, and in a gesture of paranoia, he announced he would bring the entire imperial treasury with him.¹⁴⁶ The Janissaries believed that Osman II's true purpose was to spend a year in Arab lands amassing a new force, at which point this army would wipe out the disloyal Janissary corps; correspondence between bureaucrats seems to suggest some truth to this rumour.¹⁴⁷ The consequences of *devlet sohbeti* in the new public sphere now came to a head. The Janissaries demanded Osman II cancel his planned pilgrimage. When he refused, the Janissaries stormed the palace, and enthroned Mustafa I; Osman II was killed in the first regicide in Ottoman history¹⁴⁸, an act which first germinated in the *meydans* of Istanbul's coffeehouses.

In such a light, the full political weight of Murad IV's crackdown on public gatherings and the consumption of coffee becomes clear. Subsequent bans became coloured with the memory of the 1622 revolt, and absolutist political theory held that public assembly was a threat to state security. In 1632 Murad IV executed a popular general and appointed a close associate, Hasan Halife, as commander of the Janissaries, which led to another brief revolt and the death of Halife and other top officials.¹⁴⁹ The need for stability ushered in the Koprulu Period, a time for recovery under the autocratic rule of grand viziers from the Koprulu family, which first began

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Faroqhi, *Coping with The State*, 117-118.

¹⁴⁶ Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire*, 163.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 153-170.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Groot, "Murād IV".

with the viziership of Koprulu Mehmed Pasha in 1656. The Koprulu viziers responded to the crisis of dissent by exerting personal control over both court and the military; they brutally suppressed a cavalry revolt in 1658 and subsequently oversaw twenty-five years of fear, obedience and tranquillity.¹⁵⁰ The Koprulu viziers also aided the rise of the Kadizadeli movement, to be discussed in greater detail further, which fuelled the morality wars of the seventeenth century as moralist ideology condemned coffeehouses and other forms of public gathering.¹⁵¹ During the Koprulu period, the sultans following Murad IV, especially Mehmed IV, were viewed as ‘junior partners’ to the grand viziers.¹⁵²

However, for all its iron-fisted reform, the Koprulu dynasty was not invincible. After the Ottoman mortification at the Siege of Vienna, Kara Mustafa Pasha was executed and the Koprulu line was severed. Mehmed IV’s attempts to assert his own power beyond his viziers backfired as it lacked the support of the *ulema* or the military, and Mehmed IV was replaced in a bloodless coup by his brother Suleiman II. Historian Baki Tezcan illustrates that this 1687 coup “was a clear sign of the maturity of the Ottoman system of limited government.”¹⁵³ Rather than sparking a new round of autocratic repressions, instead it led to an increased culture of openness within state politics.¹⁵⁴ New policies promoting commerce and consumerism, coinciding with a growing republican literati promoting “transculturalism”, reinvigorated coffeehouse culture.¹⁵⁵ Viziers began patronizing the construction of coffeehouses as a cultural investment program, and

¹⁵⁰ Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire*, 213-217.

¹⁵¹ Zilfi, “The Kadizadeli,” 251-269.

¹⁵² *Ibid.* See also, Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire*, 214-215.

¹⁵³ Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire*, 217.

¹⁵⁴ Ariel Salzmann, “The Age of Tulips: confluence and conflict in early modern consumer culture (1550–1730),” in Donald Quataert (ed.) *Consumption Studies and the History of the Ottoman Empire, 1550–1922: An Introduction*, Albany: State University of New York, (2000), pp. 83.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* I borrow the phrase “republican literati” from Salzmann to describe Tulip Age scholars and men of letters.

building cafes as personal business ventures, according to Pecevi.¹⁵⁶ The continuation of such publicly-minded economic and cultural trends helped launch the Tulip Age between 1718-1730, which saw the expansion of trade and promotion of Ottoman art and culture across a range of activities, from literacy to gardening. Tulips represent both “a charming emblem of the old regime [and] a precautionary tale of the perils of precocious modernization.”¹⁵⁷ Coffee proved an inverse to the popular view on tulips; coffee represented a celebrated aspect of progress among the poor and the gentry, a product of Ottoman origin rather than an adopted Western fashion. Coffee’s continued acceptance marked a noteworthy stage in Ottoman policy in regard to luxury goods.¹⁵⁸ Coffeehouses, already expansive and now once again fully legal and state endorsed, were critical gathering places in the Tulip Age for intellectuals and the new republican literati.¹⁵⁹ Such a departure from the policies of the Koprulu viziers clearly demonstrates an embrace of the public sphere. The Tulip Age could be heralded as the victory of the coffeehouse, and the solidification of the Ottoman public sphere. However, it was not the end of their controversy. Coffeehouses were not necessarily deemed as beacons of a ‘felicitous’ urbanity, and would continue to fuel sedition and dissent throughout the 18th century.

Having established Janissary-run coffeehouses as places of political discourse with an inherent capacity for violence, we can turn to their roles in further instances of rebellion after their re-emergence in the Tulip Age. The public structure’s impact on political sedition and its end results is expressed strongly by Kafadar;

¹⁵⁶ Kafadar, “A History of Coffee,” 52.

¹⁵⁷ Salzmann, “The Age of Tulips,” 83.

¹⁵⁸ Senciuc, “Exotic Brew,” 163-168. Senciuc suggest that widespread acceptance of coffee in the Tulip Era can be demonstrated in the gifts given among dignitaries and the emergence of coffeehouses in the Ottoman Empire’s European territories, showcasing the transcendence of coffee and the public sphere it provided across class and racial lines in the early 18th century.

¹⁵⁹ Salzmann, “The Age of Tulips,” 89-90.

“It is against this background [of social transformation and public contestation of ‘the Ottoman constitution’ in the (long) seventeenth century] that the *histoire evenementielle* of the revolts ultimately needs to be told, for they arose in response to and were shaped by tensions inherent in the new social realities and the impasses in their political and cultural mediation.”¹⁶⁰

The Janissary response to contemporary events, and the influence of popular sentiment on military revolts, is evidenced in the unique chronicle of Huseyn Tugi, a former Janissary who documents the deposition of Osman II. Tugi stresses the impact of both political tensions and individual economic stresses on the Janissary corps. He documents anxiety within the barracks over salaries, personal privileges and the mundane daily routine of troops in the build-up to the 1622 revolt.¹⁶¹ Such a chronicle demonstrates, as Kafadar argues, the importance in understanding public sentiment and the undercurrents within urban social spheres when analyzing broader political upheavals.

The 1703 Edirne Revolt, also known as the Edirne Incident, has been well documented as an important instance of Janissary influence over sultanic legitimacy. Historians writing on the revolt stress the importance of urban unrest within Istanbul’s popular social forums as a major contributing factor. The Treaty of Karlowitz saw the loss of large swaths of territory in the western empire, and in turn Sultan Mustafa II fled the capital for Edirne.¹⁶² The reinvigorated Tulip Age coffeehouses were alive with inflammatory *devlet sohbeti* surrounding the sultan's diplomatic and physical retreats; the atmosphere of discontent among the public no doubt influenced Mustafa II’s decision to flee Istanbul. Food shortages, extraordinary war taxes and delays in Janissary salaries likewise fuelled unrest.¹⁶³ It was the lack of pay that caused the

¹⁶⁰ Cemal Kafadar, “Janissaries and Other Riffraff of Ottoman İstanbul: Rebels Without a Cause?” in *International Journal of Turkish Studies* Vol. 13, Nos. 1 & 2 (2007), 121.

¹⁶¹ Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire*, 158-159, 164.

¹⁶² Virginia H. Aksan, *Ottoman Wars 1700-1870: An Empire Besieged*, 1st ed, Harlow: Longman/Pearson, (2007).

¹⁶³ Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment*, 61.

Edirne Revolt to finally break out, when unpaid Janissary *cebeci* were ordered to mobilize in Georgia.¹⁶⁴ Despite the revolt's title, the bulk of the revolt took place in Istanbul, with the Janissaries organizing in coffeehouses before eventually taking control of the city with the backing of the ulema.¹⁶⁵ With civilians and mercenaries throwing their lot in with the army, the public nature of the Edirne Revolt demonstrated how urban social institutions could spread revolutionary rhetoric and action.¹⁶⁶ The Janissaries eventually marched on Edirne, and then deposed Mustafa II before crowning Ahmed III.¹⁶⁷ While the Tulip Age may have invoked designs of intellectualism and culture upon the public sphere, the period clearly did not placate undercurrents of unrest, nor should it be argued that stagnation was the goal of the age. The Edirne Revolt demonstrates that the Tulip Age in fact facilitated sedition through patronage of spaces like coffeehouses.

Brought to the throne by a coffeehouse-aided revolt, Ahmed III would likewise lose his sultanate in the same way. Ahmed III officially abolished the already collapsing *devshirme* military recruitment system which had staffed traditional Janissary ranks for centuries.¹⁶⁸ The decline and abolition of the *devshirme* system led to decentralized recruitment which put power in the hands of individual soldiers to attract vulnerable young men to the corps. While the full effects of this will be discussed further later, individual Janissaries obtained immense social influence as gatekeepers to elite military units and institutions, and they leveraged this greatly

¹⁶⁴ Aksan, *Ottoman Wars*,

¹⁶⁵ Faroqhi, *Coping with The State*, 117-118.

¹⁶⁶ Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire*, 115-153.

¹⁶⁷ Aksan, *Ottoman Wars*, 90.

¹⁶⁸ Virginia H. Aksan, "Military reform and its limits in a shrinking Ottoman world, 1800-1840" in, Virginia H. Aksan and Daniel Goffman, (eds) *The Early Modern Ottomans: Remapping the Empire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2007), 123.

while working in civil and domestic spaces.¹⁶⁹ Through coercion, Janissaries traded admission into their ranks and the privileges therein for economic and sexual favours.¹⁷⁰ It is most likely through this “locus of disorder”¹⁷¹ that an aspiring Albanian named Patrona Halil gained admission into the Janissary corps. A frequent patron of *meyhane* taverns in Galata and a bathhouse attendant (and possible prostitute¹⁷²), Patrona Halil would have frequently found himself in Janissary coffeehouses; some sources even claim Halil was a coffee shop owner himself.¹⁷³ Leading what was initially a small band made up of Albanian artisans and bathhouse attendants, aided by the head of a Janissary *kolluk*, Patrona Halil organized what would become a massive rebellion in 1730 against Ahmed III and his policies of reform and westernization. The Patrona Halil Revolt operated out of the coffeehouse of the aforementioned *kolluk*, belonging to the 56th *orta*¹⁷⁴, from which it then spread across Istanbul until Ahmed III’s abdication.¹⁷⁵ While Patrona Halil and his comrades would eventually be executed, the revolt’s mandate against westernized modernization brought about the end of the Tulip Age.¹⁷⁶

A variety of factors linked the 1622 deposition of Osman, the Edirne Revolt and the Patrona Halil Revolt as “coffeehouse revolts.” The importance of the coffeehouse as a distinct facet of public imposition on Ottoman political systems therefore cannot be ignored. Across

¹⁶⁹ Delice, “The Janissaries and Their Bedfellows,” 126-127.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Aksan, “Military reform,” 123.

¹⁷² Delice, “The Janissaries and Their Bedfellows,” 121-127.

¹⁷³ Dana Sajdi, “Decline, its Discontents and Ottoman Cultural History: By Way of Introduction,” in Dana Sajdi, *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee: Leisure and Lifestyle in the Eighteenth Century*, London: Tauris Academic Studies (2007), 34.

¹⁷⁴ Çaksu, “Janissary Coffee Houses,” 125.

¹⁷⁵ Sajdi, “Decline,” 34-35.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

more than a century and in the face of cultural and authoritative trends, coffeehouses provided the staging grounds for some of the most important rebellions in Ottoman history.



Patrona Halil, clad in Janissary garb, depicted barefooted, and with the affectation of a bathhouse shampooer (left)¹⁷⁷
and Sultan Murad IV with his infamous broadsword in hand (right)¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Jean Baptiste Vanmour, “An Albanian Sailor” (1737).

¹⁷⁸ Abdulcelil Levni, “Sultan Murad IV, *Kebir Musavver Silsilname*, (1715).

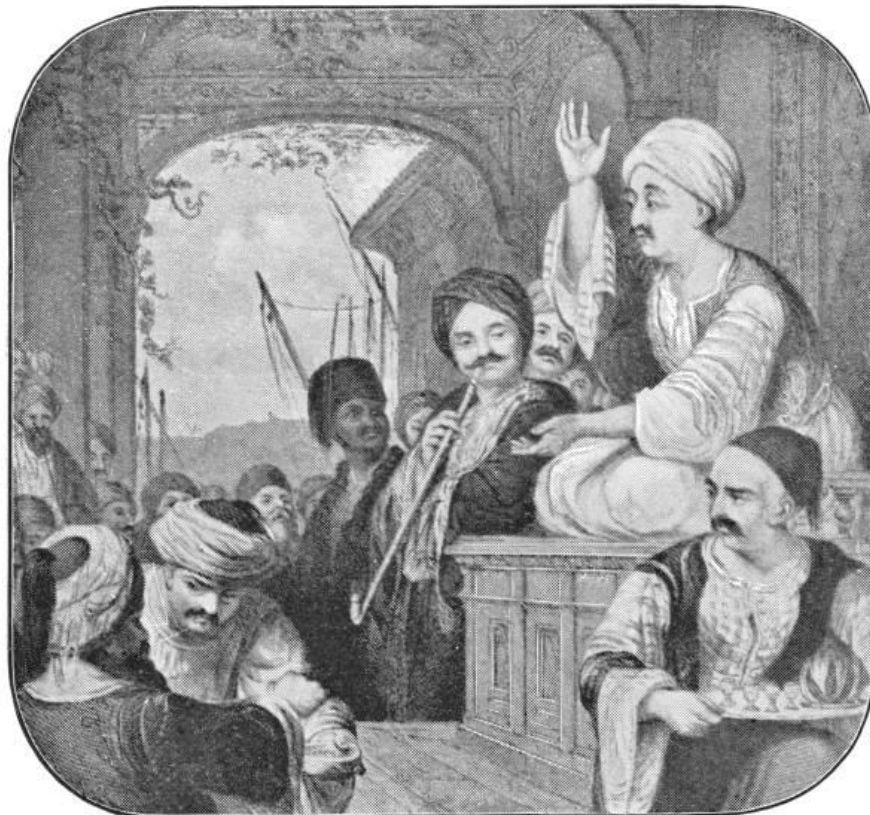
Chapter 2 - “Who loves not cannot truly human be”: Heterodoxy, Homosexuality and Legal Responses to Social Deviance

Due to the complex and often paradoxical nature of custom and behaviour in Ottoman society, it is important to define conceptions of heterodoxy as they evolved. In his own work on Habermas, social scientist Craig Calhoun has offered the conception of a “counterpublic” as an example of the public sphere existing in multiple, offshoot collective identities which “contested the hegemonic construction of dominant publics.”¹⁷⁹ Calhoun supports those critics of Habermas who suggest that his “classic public sphere” is hegemonic and that it fails to incorporate a diversity of circumstance and politics represented by the collective public; for Calhoun, diverging conceptions of self creates the possibility of counterpublics. Integral to the notion of the public sphere is the fact that in establishing an orthodox meaning of ‘public’, the social pressures that determine heterodoxy are also created. The existence of rules implies the existence of rule-breaking. Already, we have seen that the use of a purely Habermasian public sphere is problematic for the purposes of discussing the Ottoman coffeehouse, and it functions here only as a model to which Istanbul is a forerunner. In discussing social deviance as it manifests itself within the public sphere, Calhoun’s idea of counterpublics proves much more enticing.

The coffeehouse provided a home for counterpublics that existed along similar terms to the wider social space, but could not be entirely integrated within it. The *kolluk* cafes of Janissary *ortas* represents one such example, as they amalgamated the predefined social structures of police station and cafe into one space while facilitating counter-normative behaviour. Behaviour perceived as criminal or threatening to the status quo, Foucault argues, must be separated from the public eye of orthodox culture which perceives offenders as antithetical to civilized

¹⁷⁹ Craig Calhoun, “The Public Sphere in the Field of Power,” *Social Science History*, vol. 34, no. 3, (2010), 303, 305.

society.¹⁸⁰ The need for *heterotopias* emerges from this tension, where spaces like coffeehouses can offer a reorientation of societal norms to suit the needs of heterodox actors. The unity of a common cultural staple like coffee with illicit or illegal conduct serves as one potential formation of a strong counterpublic, whose lifestyles differ from traditional public demands but whose relationship with the social world is still facilitated.



Scholars, Sufis, “idlers” and the rabble of the general public converse in a coffeehouse.¹⁸¹

The *meydan* of each coffeehouse in Istanbul was in effect its own counterpublic and was governed just as much by local circumstance and its flavour of patrons as by prevalent behavioural prescriptions. The coffeehouse, both in Istanbul and the wider early modern world,

¹⁸⁰ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 8.

¹⁸¹ “Storyteller (meddah) at a coffeehouse in the Ottoman Empire,” Public Domain.

was a place of self-determination, and thereby the perfect staging ground for counter-culture social movements and a refuge for nonconformists. Such spaces are essential to the entire history of an empire beyond the political realm, as their very existence disproves notions of some imagined “hypertrophy of the state, from which all initiatives are proceeded”.¹⁸² The Ottoman legal system should not be considered an all-encompassing machine, and while the empire employed more direction over the social lives of Ottoman citizens than its European counterparts in many respects, the self-determining nature of the Ottoman public sphere demonstrates that the social and political realms within the empire were incredibly distinct.¹⁸³ In studying social deviance as it pertains to the Ottoman Empire, the myth of “Oriental Despotism”, in which no independent civil society exists beyond the state, collapses.

The Moonfaced of Istanbul

In a Muslim society such as the Ottoman empire, homosexuality occupied in a unique legal position. For some jurists, the act of sodomy was considered on par with *shirk*, the unforgivable sin of idolatry.¹⁸⁴ When judged with such a level of severity, *zina*, the sin of illicit sex, was punishable by death; jurists however were hesitant to pass such sentences, as wrongful accusations of *zina* were considered *qadhif*, slander, a major transgression in itself.¹⁸⁵ Because acts of sodomy occurred almost entirely in private, and for the majority of the time between consenting parties¹⁸⁶, obtaining the necessary evidence for a charge of *zina* was difficult. Eyewitnesses were rare, and the owners of establishments that facilitated homosexual

¹⁸² Faroqhi. *Coping with the State*, 1.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Semerdjian, “Tender and Pretty,” 179.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ Instances of *zina* without consent will be further discussed later, and more complete accounts of homosexual rape and its punishments can be found in Semerdjian, “Tender and Pretty,” 176, Elyse Semerdjian *Off The Straight Path: Illicit Sex, Community, and Law in Ottoman Aleppo*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press (2008), Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment*, and Delice, “The Janissaries and Their Bedfellows,” 126-128.

interactions were unlikely to testify. When the punishment for slander was increased during the Kadizadeli period (1631-1685), accusations of *zina* in cities like Istanbul and Aleppo dropped dramatically in number. Homosexual activity was seen by the broader population to be an immoral but inevitable aspect of public life; it was “tolerated and accepted, inasmuch as it was functioning under certain ‘institutional’ rules.”¹⁸⁷ Historian Serkan Delice argues that homosexuality functioned as one of the manifestations of the relational nature of social practice, one to which the Ottoman state adapted as an objective facet of life which had to be navigated.¹⁸⁸ The myriad forms of masculinity enacted by Ottoman citizens had direct political repercussions, and were fundamental to the formation and reformation of the public sphere. By the mere fact of its existence, as expressed in Foucault’s positivist view of history and socialization, homosexuality was a governing factor in public life.

When discussing homosexuality in an Ottoman context, one must be careful about imposing modern conceptions of same-sex relations and their corresponding moralities. Homosexuality in 16th- to 18th-century Istanbul did not function with the same gender dynamics we observe today as these were based much more on a divide between *eros*, procreation, and physical love. Drawing from the work of Delice alongside Andrews and Kalpakli’s *The Age of Beloveds*, a broader view of Ottoman society is needed to contextualise homosexual relationships. Within a public and intellectual sphere completely dominated by men, male lovers offered a degree of intellectual connection and companionship that women could not provide; in a society that restricts women’s capacities for education, debate and public engagement, it should come as no surprise than men searching for deeper connections found like-minded romantic

¹⁸⁷ Marinos Sariyannis, “Prostitution in Ottoman Istanbul, Late Sixteenth-Early Eighteenth Century,” *Turcica* 40 (2008), 62.

¹⁸⁸ Delice, “The Janissaries and Their Bedfellows,” 115.

peers among other men. Male-dominated spaces created male-dominated theories of love. The hypermasculinity of the public sphere, rooted in the segregation of spaces such as coffeehouses, meant socialization, flirtation, conversation and its byproducts like poetry, desire and sex were all constructed with men as the only available target object. Sexuality “implies the existence of a separate sexual domain within the larger field of a man’s psychophysical nature,” and as such this domain was dictated by conceptions of gender and sexual preference both foreign to our own and dictated by alternative forms of conduct.¹⁸⁹ Thus, Ottoman men often sought familial comforts with women, and intellectual and romantic comforts with other men. As Andrews and Kalpali observed: “if a society is primarily phallocratic, if the primary subculture of males is the army of other all-male groups, [...] then men and women have very different experiences and usually remain quite foreign to one another in many respects.”¹⁹⁰ Comparisons have been made between the Ottoman homosexual sphere and the Ancient Greek one¹⁹¹, and while connections do exist, it would be reductionist to view Ottoman homosexuality as an offshoot rather than its own culture.

In translating an anonymous 18th-century treatise on sexuality, Delice makes note of a group of men the author describes as *hîz*, or catamites; they are “hanging out in several places and offering friendly attentions to countless other men when they were in companionship with a lover”.¹⁹² These “catamites” upon whom the anonymous author places many a curse are young, beardless boys who allowed themselves to be penetrated anally, either as prostitutes or as willing lovers. The beardless boy, often referred to as a *tâze* in legal documents, occupied a unique

¹⁸⁹ Eva Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus*, Berkely: University of California Press, (1985), 2.

¹⁹⁰ Andrews and Kalpakli, *The Age of Beloveds*, 14.

¹⁹¹ Mark Kelly, *Foucault’s History of Sexuality Volume I, The Will to Knowledge*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press (2013).

¹⁹² Delice, “The Janissaries and Their Bedfellows,” 116.

position within the public sphere as a both passive and active disruption of moral practice; they participate within adult relational and sexual worlds that do not belong to them. A *hîz* individual derived a great deal of influence over the public sphere, as they monopolized the desires of Ottoman men for romantic connection, and created distinctions between gender and its naturalized forms as expressed by gender theorist Judith Butler.¹⁹³ Beardless youth were viewed in some cases as a third gender, undermining the traditional masculine-feminine hierarchy, and thus incorporated sexual passivity into the hypermasculine public sphere.¹⁹⁴ Public conceptions of the beloved in art and literature reflected “a society in which the beloved was ambiguously gendered on the surface with a strong bias toward the masculine.”¹⁹⁵ Conceptions of the erotic were publicly understood to reflect such proclivities.

‘Beardlessness’ represented an important moralist marker in Islamic societies, and served to brand those who may be straying outside the lines of accepted sexual practice. Beardless *tâze* were praised for their beauty, which blended masculine features and feminine tenderness, known in poetry as “the moon-faced ones”.¹⁹⁶ Growing a beard, however, was viewed as part of the entry into maturity and manhood, and came with religious obligations; in accordance with the Sunnah, growing a beard was viewed as part of pious imitation of the Prophet. Those *tâze* who were too young to grow a beard were viewed with suspicious acceptance, while men who shared their beards faced heavy scrutiny as they were seen as intentionally trying to tempt and ensnare other men with their clean-shaved faces.¹⁹⁷ Islamic legal edicts prescribed against shaving,

¹⁹³ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, New York: Routledge (2004).

¹⁹⁴ Ze’evi, *Producing Desire*, 24.

¹⁹⁵ Andrews and Kalpakli, *The Age of Beloveds*, 37.

¹⁹⁶ The imagery of moons and moon-faces dominates the poems translated by Andrews and Kalpakli in *The Age of Beloveds*, 59-113.

¹⁹⁷ Andrews and Kalpakli, *The Age of Beloveds*, 32-59, 270-290.

accusing men who did of trying to look like women.¹⁹⁸ William Ouslely (1767-1842), brother to the British ambassador in Tabriz, described with disgust the game of seduction that took place in public festivities: “After the usual refreshments of coffee and *kaleans*, a dance was exhibited, the performer being a *birish* or beardless boy of fifteen or sixteen years, wearing the complete dress of a woman and imitating, with most disgusting effeminacy”.¹⁹⁹ With beards being a marker for maturity, those who regularly shaved were viewed as attempting to neglect duties of manhood to their family, community and faith.²⁰⁰ To be viewed with desire by adult men was considered unavoidable for adolescent boys; maturity was viewed as a critical step, as well as a moral, social and patriotic duty to transcend the lust associated with youth.²⁰¹

The public sphere, and especially spaces like coffeehouses, served as the foundational forum for homosexual activity to manifest. Same-sex romance, geared towards intellectual communion, cropped up frequently in the nexus of Sufis and scholars assembled at coffeehouses; these intellectual spaces merged platonic socialization with sexual desire and display. Coffeehouses routinely employed beardless youth as servers to entice patrons, and such servers were often documented within the *divans*, or collected works, of poets as beloved popular objects of affection.²⁰² Such a practice, used to incorporate the sexual realm into an economic one, was adopted from Istanbul’s *hammam* bathhouses. Before the advent of coffeehouses, public baths were well-known hotspots for homoerotic activity in a public environment. Sensual by nature, Evliya Celebi describes the well-known reputation and associated innuendos surrounding bathhouses in his travel accounts; he describes many bathhouses throughout his travels as spaces

¹⁹⁸ Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*, Berkeley: University of California Press (2005), 279.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 35.

²⁰⁰ Andrews and Kalpakli, *The Age of Beloveds*, 32-59, 270-290.

²⁰¹ Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches*, 15, 24, 120.

²⁰² *Ibid*, 11-15.

specializing in the erotic: “in all these baths lovers dally freely with their darling boys, embracing them and going off into a corner. It is considered youthful exuberance and not improper behaviour.”²⁰³ Bathhouse attendants and shampooers regularly doubled as prostitutes, with bathhouses providing safe and clean working conditions akin to a legalized brothel.²⁰⁴ Beardless prostitutes, often at risk of becoming victims of rape, would use bathhouses to vet clientele and lay down a necessary infrastructure for work.²⁰⁵

Bathhouses' blatant use of sex as marketing made these spaces politically and morally inflammatory, and petitions by neighbours often shut down baths which were believed to be operating predominantly as brothels. Bathhouse managers were required to appear before local *qadis* and defend their employee registries, providing proof that none of their staff were engaging in prostitution or practicing *zina*. Like coffeehouses, baths were also regarded as hotbeds of sedition and *devlet sohbeti*. Attendants were integral to the organization of the Patrona Halil revolt; Patrona Halil himself was a shampooer.²⁰⁶ While baths themselves were considered essential for the religious purpose of performing full-body cleanings and ablution, their capacity for sexual and political unrest led to frequent closures.²⁰⁷ Nonetheless, the sexualized nature of bathhouses was generally accepted, with Celebi noting that it was typically known by all which bathhouses to visit and which to avoid depending on one's purposes and proclivities.²⁰⁸ As such, the presence of *tâze* youth in public spaces continued as common practice, eventually making its way into newly established coffeehouses.

²⁰³ Celebi, *An Ottoman Traveller*, 41. Celebi describes many beautiful boys and acts of sexual conduct throughout his accounts, in bathhouses and beyond.

²⁰⁴ Delice, “The Janissaries and Their Bedfellows,” 126-128.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ Aksan, “Military reform,” 123.

²⁰⁷ Nina Ergin, “The Albanian Tellâk Connection: Labor Migration to the Hamams of Eighteenth-Century Istanbul, Based on the 1752 İstanbul Hamâmları Defteri,” *Turcica* 43 (2011), 242.

²⁰⁸ Celebi, *An Ottoman Traveller*, 38-42.

Local *kolluks* kept a registry of known prostitutes in each neighbourhood; this list of “catamites” included male victims of sexual assault alongside consenting parties.²⁰⁹ Victims of sexual assault were vulnerable to repeated assault, and were targeted by the same stigma cast upon consenting male prostitutes. Victims were often already within social circles where same sex intercourse was common, welcomed and taken advantage of.²¹⁰ For many so-called catamites, the protection of their family was missing; young adventurous men who lived alone were known as *levends*, and they comprised a huge portion of youth culture in Istanbul’s coffeehouses.²¹¹ Within the realm of illicit sexual conduct however, a life without attachments could be dangerous, and *levends* sought out older benefactors to serve as wards, boon companions and lovers. *Levends* were often connected to the military in some form, typically as mercenaries, or were seeking induction into the army through social connections. With the collapse of the *devshirme* system and Janissary recruitment falling to individual cases, applications far exceeding demand, the role of “Janissary candidates” known as *civeleks* emerged.²¹² These candidates, drafted from amongst a Muslim urban populace, sought access to the Janissary corps and petitioned their case by attaching themselves to a particular officer, serving them as both an attendant and a bedfellow.²¹³ Coffeehouses, as the link between the *kolluks* and the general public, served as centers of recruitment and interaction between Janissaries and potential *civekels*. “Senior protector Janissaries” extorted candidates sexually in exchange for eventually membership in the army when a *civelek* came of age, in the meantime providing a bed in the barracks, moving them up the waiting list, and teaching them how to

²⁰⁹ Çaksu, “Janissary Coffee Houses,” 125-130.

²¹⁰ Semerdjian, “Tender and Pretty,” 178-180.

²¹¹ Andrews and Kalpakli, *The Age of Beloveds*, 52, 63.

²¹² Delice, “The Janissaries and Their Bedfellows,” 125-127.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

“twist their moustache” and live in the Janissary style.²¹⁴ Moreover, senior protectors were extremely protective of their *civelek* from unwanted sexual advances, both through the use of threats and violence and by placing a tasselled veil over the face of their beloveds while out in public.²¹⁵ The use of veils touches on an interesting aspect of public romance; just as prescriptions on sight and unwanted looks were a legal issue, they were also a sexual one, as shall be discussed further in the following section. Janissary socialization after the collapse of *devshirme* became oriented around the imposition of such hierarchies, and access to *kolluk* coffeehouses was an important marker of a *civelek*'s inclusion into those social circles. Indeed, the larger contexts of coffeehouse culture and the public sphere were governed by the sexual proclivities of those who occupied space. Coffeehouses served to facilitate this pseudo-social recruitment of lovers into military ranks, highlighting how the Janissary corps had become a public force amid institutional breakdowns.

The Soul of the Poet

In his poetic biography of a fellow writer and lover named Sani, the poet ‘Ashik concludes his work with the couplet.

“The jugs are broken, the goblet empty, the wine is no more,
You’ve made us prisoners to coffee, alas, destiny, alas.”²¹⁶

The poem, which touches upon topics like sexuality, the public and the military, revolves entirely around cafes in Istanbul as the ultimate source of socialization and the theatre of all homoerotic love. For the city’s artists, poets and public intellectuals, it certainly was. Given its

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Andrews and Kalpakli, *The Age of Beloveds*, 51.

unique position, the coffeehouse was the ideal place for lovers to meet publicly and mingle; for those seeking to engage in conviviality and romance beyond the purely sexual realm, a coffeehouse was an ideal meeting place. Energized by caffeine, lovers could stay up late into the night, engaging in Celebi's "youthful exuberance" which served as a driving force for the emergence of nightlife. Cemal Kafadar notes in his treatise on Istanbul's nightlife that homosexual lovers looking to congregate beyond the proto-domestic sphere were a primary factor in extending social activity into the night time.²¹⁷ Intimate conversation, *sohbet*, was coloured by both communal and personal forms of love. The public aspect of homoerotic coffeehouse culture served to facilitate Sufi notions of love and the beloved, which is clearly visible in the poetry of Sani, 'Ashik and their contemporaries.

Just as one might observe a mountain or a river in wonder and praise the beauty of God's creations, so too did Sufis observe their beloveds. A beautiful boy represented the pinnacle of God's capacity to create, life and the human form being viewed as that which only the Almighty could envision, and to contemplate such a magnificent creature could be viewed as an act of piety. As Semedjian notes, "the presence of the beautiful youth facilitated the transcendence into ecstasy desired by Sufis on their path to divine union."²¹⁸ *Nazar ila'l-murd*, meaning contemplation of the beardless, emerged as a common Sufi practice in which sheiks would gather publicly at a cafe and observe attractive youths, often composing poems and engaging in *sohbet* about those they found the most attractive.²¹⁹ Beloveds knowing themselves to be the object of such observation would engage with these lookers, and accusations of intentionally inciting *nazar ila'l-murd* often came with criminal charges disrupting public decency.²²⁰ Evliya

²¹⁷ Kafadar, "The City Opens Your Eyes," 8-10.

²¹⁸ Semerdjian, "Tender and Pretty," 189.

²¹⁹ Andrews and Kalpakli, *The Age of Beloveds*, 11-18, 70-73.

²²⁰ *Ibid*, 32-59, 270-290.

Celebi describes the open flirtation of urban spaces, where “there is a bazaar for boys in every coffee house, where pretty boys are on display, [...] catching the hearts of lovers in the traps of their flowing locks.”²²¹ This “game of looking”, known as *shahid bazi* and colloquially referred to as “boy-gazing”, was largely facilitated through coffeehouses as the primary point of access for assembly and contemplation. Ritual gazing was a stage that some Sufi devotees had to master on their journey toward union with the divine; its aim was to provoke the simultaneous sensations of separation from and longing for their object of desire. Boy-gazing depicted the practitioner, often an older bearded man, contemplating a beautiful beardless youth, who represented the divine on earth.

Notions of romantic love or *eros*, called *‘ishq*, were considered to be united with *sawda*’, melancholy, in the longing for God; this longing was manifested through observation of the beloved²²². By entrancing oneself with *‘ishq* through carnal means such as boy-gazing, spiritual enchantment might follow. In theory, boy-gazing Sufis did not long for the beardless youth, but for the Creator of his beauty; Sufis argued that *shahid bazi* was an act of piety in which the ultimate beloved was God. One poet, Zati, went so far as to suggest that the dichotomy of lover and beloved reflect creation and the revelations of the Prophet, writing “Allah’s the lover and the beloved [Muhammad],”²²³ and further posited that the world was created thanks to God’s love for mankind through the beloved of the Prophet Muhammad. Because the looker was allegedly longing for the divine and not the carnal, he was theoretically forbidden from tainting this spiritual quest and acting on his physical desire. This conception of homosexuality through boy-gazing was permissible on the grounds that one could look, but did not touch, mediating on the

²²¹ Celebi, *An Ottoman Traveller*, 425.

²²² Babayan, “Adab as Urbanity,” 10-25.

²²³ Andrews and Kalpakli, *The Age of Beloveds*, 41.

beloved but not enacting his desires²²⁴; bans on beardless youth appearing in the public prove the obvious, namely that such restrictions which mediated the physical interaction of observers and beloveds were rarely followed.²²⁵ The Kadizadelis, who shall be further discussed in the following section, cracked down on boy-gazing extensively.²²⁶

The *divans* of many Istanbuli poets from the early modern period are rife with references to large groups spending nights in coffeehouses. Attending readings by fellow writers, the authors and their friends are depicted in poetry as admiring their own lovers, the boys working the cafes, and the many beardless youths populating the general public sphere. Similar to notions of the city as the “abode of felicity”, poets such as Sani view Istanbul as a place of great public revelry and social upheaval. Throughout these accounts of urbanity, analogies surrounding sex are frequent. Moon-faced boys with bodies likened to thin cypress trees are described as “disruptors” for their seductive and heart-breaking tendencies.²²⁷ For the coffeehouse revellers appearing in such poetry, libertine, bon-vivant lifestyles extended across Istanbul and Galata in the sixteenth and seventeenth century; accounts of public intoxication, noise complaints, and acts of sexual intercourse in public became more and more frequent as cafes increasingly served as party hubs.²²⁸ For conservative Istanbulis, the pervasiveness of illicit sexual activity in the public sphere would spark intense backlash.

²²⁴ Babayan, “Adab as Urbanity,” 10-25.

²²⁵ Semerdjian, “Tender and Pretty,” 178-184.

²²⁶ Ze’evi, *Producing Desire*, 45.

²²⁷ Andrews and Kalpakli, *The Age of Beloveds*, 46.

²²⁸ See *Ibid*, 270-304, Ze’evi, *Producing Desire*, 42-49, Babayan, “Adab as Urbanity,” 10-25, Semerdjian, “Tender and Pretty,” 178-184, and Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment* for statistics and arguments correlating the increase in coffeehouses and rises in criminal activities categorized as ‘social deviance’.

The Kadizadeli Morality Wars

The Hanafi legal school's permissive nature and prevalent use of independent reasoning, previously discussed, did not receive unanimous support from the orthodox scholarly community. Many of the more conservative men of letters and members of the *ulema* saw the lax imposition of moralist laws as a major factor in the decline of the state, especially in response to the rampant revolts discussed in the previous chapter. Instability, fear and the perception of moral decay led to the rise of extremist preachers, and throughout the seventeenth century "Istanbul's pulpits were shaken by denunciations of Ottoman religious leaders and of the pliant bounds of orthodoxy."²²⁹ Broad movements attempted to counterbalance the influence of the Hanafis and Sufism within both Istanbul's Friday mosques and its royal court.²³⁰ Spearheading this wave of conservatism were the Kadizadelis, who were some of the seventeenth century's most influential preachers.

Founded by Kadizade Mehmed and further popularized by Ustuvani Mehmed, the Kadizadeli movement targeted *bida*, or innovation, after the time of the Prophet. Kadizade Mehmed, the leading preacher at the imperial mosque of Aya Sophia, split from his original Sufi mentors due to his dogmatic intensity and commitment to orthodox belief, and began preaching fundamentalist rhetoric.²³¹ Focusing on the importance of the Sunnah, the traditions of the prophet's life as a model for all Muslims, Kadizade argued that innovation marked a blasphemous diversion from this blueprint of proper conduct. Given the Prophet Muhammad's designation as the last prophet of God, many orthodox scholars viewed the passage of time as a

²²⁹ Zilfi, "The Kadizadelis," 251.

²³⁰ Faroqhi, *Coping With The State*, 16, 116.

²³¹ Zilfi, "The Kadizadelis," 252-253.

damaging distance between the contemporary Islamic community and an age of proper conduct. The Kadizadelis condemned *bida* as the marker of deviation from the Prophet's original mandate, with Kadizade routinely citing the Hadith that stated "every innovation is heresy, every heresy is error, and every error leads to hell."²³² The foundation of Kadizadelis belief was rooted in such hadiths, and even more so in regards to the Quranic invocation to "enjoin all that is good and forbid all that is evil."²³³ This popular line from the Qur'an was recycled across generations of preachers who attempted to delineate their own conceptions of right and wrong. Condemnations of perceived evil associated with this passage were conceptualized as a metaphorical *jihad*, an act that transcends the political realm.²³⁴ Hanafi scholars viewed the call to forbid wrong as potentially harmful, as it could be used to justify violence in order to suppress perceived evil; the Hanafis argued that the passage only should be used when it did not come at the expense of the broader community.²³⁵ For the Kadizadelis, innovation was an evil that must be forbidden, even at the cost of directly suppressing the urban community as a whole.

Coffee represented one such innovation, and its contested designation as *bida* led to some of the first discourses over its potential illegality. As discussed in the previous chapter, due to popular Hanafi dominance, a general acceptance of innovation prevailed for coffee despite a lack of prior legal precedent, as such precedents were seen as the typical way to circumnavigate accusations of *bida*. The use of *ijma* by Sufi scholars likewise helped the case for legality. Such arguments were enough for Hanafi jurists, but the rise of the Kadizadelis brought new conditions and scrutiny. Elevated to the status of imperial preacher by Mehmed III, Kadizade and his

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ Quran, 31:17.

²³⁴ Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2000), 2-7.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

conservatism was kept in check by the many Sufis who populated the Sultan's retinue; Abdulmecid Sivasi, a top Sufi and Halveti order leader, routinely attacked Kadizade's beliefs from his pulpit amid death threats from Kadizadeli followers.²³⁶ This rivalry between Sivasi and Kadizade fuelled notions of orthodoxy existing in opposition to Sufism²³⁷, though throughout the 1620s and 1630s the actual lines between Sufi, *ulema*, orthodox and counter-normative preachers were more akin to a shifting field of alliances and beliefs.

Imperial patronage of both Sufism and the Kadizadelis continued into the reign of Murad IV, with Abdulmecid Sivasi and Kadizade Mehmed being awarded near-equal quantities of honours and influence. Despite his inclination towards order and control, Murad IV appointed a wine-loving Sufi named Zekeriyazade Yahya as *seyhulisalm*, the head of the *ulema*.²³⁸ A poet and strong advocate for looser restrictions on innovation, Yahya was the antithesis of the Kadizadeli movement. Kadizade remained influential however, as Murad IV expertly balanced the diversity of belief in his court to justify his sweeping reforms. Murad IV weaponized Kadizadeli doctrine to shut down and bulldoze taverns and coffeehouses, and in doing so he was justified by Kadizade's urgings²³⁹, while also executing those who defied bans on tobacco wine and coffee.²⁴⁰ Murad IV deployed the Kadizadelis in bursts to intensify and amplify his absolutist campaigns, a role in which Kadizade and his followers thrived happily. The Sultan was careful however not to allow these fundamentalists too much leeway, and here preachers like Sivasi and Yahya served useful when they restricted Kadizadeli condemnations to things like

²³⁶ Zilfi, "The Kadizadelis," 255-257.

²³⁷ Faroqi, *Coping with The State*, 16, 116.

²³⁸ Zilfi, "The Kadizadelis," 258.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment*, 62. The exact number of people executed during Murad IV's reign for violating bans on illegal goods is contested but is generally accepted to be upwards of a thousand. See also Zilfi, "The Kadizadelis," 256-260, and Ze'evi, *Producing Desire*, 80.

scientific works, prayer at the shrines of saints, and elevation of pre-Islamic figures to the status of believers.²⁴¹ While Kadizade Mehmed's preaching career proved influential, he did not live to see any of the sweeping bans he had pushed for. However, Murad IV's death a year later allowed the Kadizadelis to influence weaker successors.

Lacking the political finesse needed to balance the diversity within the *ulema*, Sultan Ibrahim I fell under the overwhelming influence of Kadizadeli preacher Ustuvani Mehmed, and in doing so broke away from the tradition of having multiple imperial preachers; Ustuvani proceeded to conduct and give sermons for every Friday prayer. From his headquarters at the Fatih Mosque, Ustuvani concentrated power over the Kadizadeli movement with the help of the palace guard, some of his most fervent followers.²⁴² After Ibrahim's death, seven-year-old Sultan Mehmed IV proved even easier to manipulate. As sole imperial preacher, Ustuvani advocated for physical attacks on and legal repression against Sufi lodges, and used the rationale of "enjoining good and forbidding evil" to instigate several outbreaks of violence in Istanbul in the otherwise-quiet 1650s.²⁴³ In particular, Halveti sheiks were targeted, as were Halveti lodges which often doubled as coffeehouses.

Halveti lodges and secular coffeehouses soon became synonymous in the eyes of their accusers, as the open and unrestricted nature of public space welcomed and facilitated Sufi practice and demonstrations of heterodoxy. 'Boy-gazing' became a major target of the Kadizadeli jurists, and coffeehouses were condemned as spaces which encouraged the mingling of beardless youth with an array of patrons.²⁴⁴ Critics often cited the 14th-century Hanbalite jurist

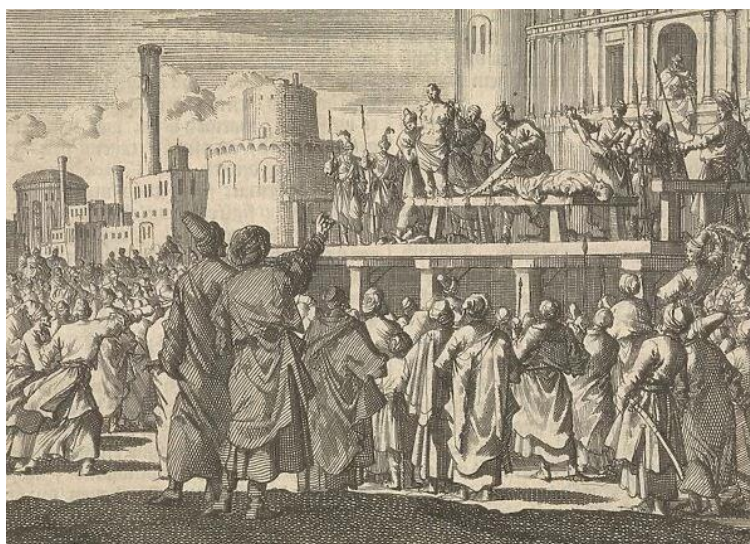
²⁴¹ Fariba Zarinebaf, "Policing Morality: Crossing Gender and Communal Boundaries in an Age of Political Crisis and Religious Controversy," in *Living in the Ottoman Realm*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press (2016), 195.

²⁴² Zilfi, "The Kadizadelis," 258.

²⁴³ Zarinebaf, "Policing Morality," 196.

²⁴⁴ Ze'evi, *Producing Desire*, 45.

Ibn Taymiyya, who wrote of homosexuals that “they kiss a slave boy and claim to have seen God.”²⁴⁵ In this way the facilitation of public assembly was heavily restricted by Kadizadeli jurists.²⁴⁶ Designated as “hatcheries of sedition” during the reign of Murad IV, Sufi patrons were likewise branded enemies of the state; Sufi poets writing criticisms of Kadizadeli rule within coffeehouses were silenced through appeals to the Sultan.²⁴⁷ On the offensive, Ustuvani used his leverage to begin chipping away at an array of “innovations” defended by Sufis.



Two men have his arms cut off publicly for violating Murad’s prohibitions on illegal goods during the early Kadizadeli period, ca. 1630.²⁴⁸

Ijma, or consensus, collapsed as a legal defence during the Kadizadeli period. New buildings, including coffeehouses, had always required the approval of the local *qadi*, and petitions to construct new cafes struggled to contend with heightened requirements of legal precedent.²⁴⁹ Coffee, atop its status as *bida*, was despised by preachers as it kept coffeehouse

²⁴⁵ Semerdjian, “Tender and Pretty,” 176.

²⁴⁶ Zilfi, “The Kadizadeli,” 257.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ Jan Lukyten and Pieter van der Aa, “Sultan Murad IV has the arms and legs of two men cut off because they had smoked,” 1698.

²⁴⁹ Faroqhi, *Coping with The State*, 75.

patrons occupied and out of mosques, and this was a behaviour Ustuvani sought to correct. Moralistic rhetoric intensified, and beardless youth were barred from public spaces and men who shaved their beards were fined on the grounds of attempting to excite sexual desire.²⁵⁰ Checks on assembly began to fuel unrest among the public. A minor Janissary revolt in 1651 led to the closure of shops across Istanbul²⁵¹, and Kadizadeli thugs alongside palace guards broke up many public gatherings within cafes. The culture war against Sufism devolved into vigilantism, and the pulpit became the staging ground for gang violence. As condemnations of coffee continually were used to justify unchecked Kadizadeli control, state officials within Mehmed IV's court began to view Ustuvani and his followers as more dangerous than the Sufis and coffee-drinkers they denigrated. In 1656, the appointment of Korprulu Mehmed as Mehmed IV's new Grand Vizier brought about the end of Kadizadeli movement; he formed a council of the *ulema* who "declared the Kadizadeli claims to orthodoxy false and their actions liable to punishment."²⁵² Ustuvani was exiled to Cyprus, an armed mob at the Fatih Mosque was suppressed, and the traditional *ulema* hierarchy was restored.

Despite the collapse of the Kadizadeli movement, their impact was evident in subsequent legal mandates surrounding coffeehouses. Korprulu Mehmed capitalized on suppressions of public assembly in order to maintain his rule and suppress potential revolts before they could take root, and coffeehouses suffered as part of this. Only the advent of the Tulip Age in 1718 would fully restore the public sphere to what it had been before the outbreak of Kadizadeli morality wars. Persecution of homosexuality had gained newfound rhetoric, and in fact after the Kadizadeli period, the number of men convicted for sodomy increased drastically.²⁵³ The

²⁵⁰ Semerdjian, "Tender and Pretty," 178-184.

²⁵¹ Zarinebaf, "Policing Morality," 206.

²⁵² Zilfi, "The Kadizadeli," 262.

²⁵³ Semerdjian, "Tender and Pretty," 180.

morality wars exposed the mercurial nature of Ottoman moralist law and the impact of preachers, as well as the capriciousness of weak sultans in the face of strong scholars. Such dynamics are important in understanding coffee's precarious legal standing despite generations of debate and several waves of acceptance.

Conclusion

After the sudden end of the Kadizadeli Movement, scrutiny of coffeehouses sharply declined. The Kadizadeli period saw the legal language surrounding coffee begin to predominantly target politicized discourse within a space, rather than the goods provided. *Devlet sohbeti* remained a significant topic through to the fall of the Ottoman Empire, but coffeehouses were viewed less and less as inflammatory spaces, thanks in large part to their continued popularity. Cafes were turning into a cultural stable; they became too conventional to prosecute as heterodox, with the majority of coffeehouse culture merged into the habitual aspects of social life.

Navigating the complex history of the Ottoman public sphere, one must make note of the perceptible blind spots in what can be crudely condensed into the genre of social history. Coffeehouses, while serving as the staging grounds of the myriad political and social phenomena discussed above, were nonetheless predominantly the casual meeting places of the lower class. The overwhelming majority of what took place within coffeehouses is inaccessible due to its mundanity, unrecorded smalltalk lost to time. The disconnect between the social historian and the individual in history, the “subaltern”, as described by historian Gayatri Spivak²⁵⁴, leaves many voices unheard. The conversation of a coffeehouse patron were tinted by the political trends and manifestations of the body politic in an evolving public sphere, and through this we can hear their collective voice, individual voices are muted. Generalizations of public opinion emerge in representations of the majority as all-encompassing. Within the specific context of Ottoman coffeehouses, a microcosm of public space for which little precedent existed in the Muslim world, the subaltern speaks only through the collective. While this paper has attempted

²⁵⁴ Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press (1988), 287.

to locate the source of public opinion, the focus has been large-scale social trends as they manifest outwardly from the interior desires and ideals of the individual. Alan Mikhail however, who's work proved integral to the origin of this paper, argues that the value of this collective voice, the "cacophonous noise" of the public, is integral to hearing the lower-class individuals within social history's broad scope and focus.²⁵⁵ Through this process, "the subaltern *can* speak and [...] the historian *can* hear him." It has been one of the goals of this study to listen.

What quickly becomes evident in the study of Istanbul's coffeehouses is how instrumental these spaces were to the development of 'popular sovereignty'²⁵⁶. Never before had the average Istanbulite man been provided a forum for common sociality and intense political engagement. As the premier staging ground for socio-political activity, and eventually the main muster point for any neighbourhood fraternization, social life became tinted with political action. Conviviality, a blank slate, took on the undercurrent attitudes of its subaltern patrons. The source of the public sphere flipped. At first, publicity created coffeehouses, but eventually coffeehouses were creating the public. While the social world of Istanbul had once flowed *in* off the streets to the city's coffeehouses, but it wasn't long until what took place within began to define what happened outside, so that the social world was flowing *out* of the *meydans* and into the city.

As such, the Istanbul *heterotopia* can be viewed as a self-defining entity. The development of discursive spaces, and the separation from tradition that innovation brings, creates a civic realm entirely driven by its own internalized infrastructure. The insular nature of a coffeehouse was created by the ethos of its patrons; Janissary *kolluk* cafes took on a militant role, Halveti lodges were inherently antinomian spiritual spaces, and the typical *mahalle* and

²⁵⁵ Mikhail, "The Heart's Desire," 156.

²⁵⁶ I borrow the phrase 'public sovereignty' from Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches*, 117, and her discussion on the contrasting, simultaneously emerging conceptions of state and social identities in late 19th century Iran.

neighbourhood cafes adopted the roles of community centres and gossip exchanges. In each case, the coffeehouse served as a manifestation of public will, one which produced the very conditions necessary for its development.

The voices of the coffeehouse remain tuned for modern ears. In order to claim a personal stake in a Westernizing process, it has been at times convenient to reject connections to the Ottoman past.²⁵⁷ Modern Turkey's relationship to the Ottoman Empire, defined by Kemalism and the formation of a modern Turkish republic, is a fraught and complex one, at times intentionally distant and in other instances fervently nationalistic. As a preeminent Islamic and Turkish state, natural sympathies and connections advocated by Neo-Ottomanist rhetoric; contemporary political movements are coloured with an exploration of multiple simultaneous Turkish identities. Under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the state's use of the philosophy of Kemalism was defined by attempts to distance Ottoman and Republican Turkish identities.²⁵⁸ The Kemalist period saw a notable rise in ethnic nationalism²⁵⁹, a cross picked up once again in the 1980s and 2010s amid mass immigration.²⁶⁰ Status as the world's leading host of refugees²⁶¹ has come with divisive political agendas far beyond the scope of this study. Modern Turkey, thus, is constantly navigating its own history as a cosmopolitan empire, with urban spaces like Istanbul playing a central role in these conversations. Gay rights remain a polarizing issue, with same sex marriage illegal but sexual activity decriminalized, and public polls on such topics fairly evenly split amongst supporters and detractors of homosexual

²⁵⁷ Andrews and Kalpakli, *The Age of Beloveds*, 10-11.

²⁵⁸ Sinan Ciddi, *Kemalism in Turkish Politics: The Republican People's Party, Secularism and Nationalism*, London: Routledge (2009).

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ Jared Conrad-Bradshaw, "Turkish Nationalism and the Incorporation of Migrants and Minorities into the Turkish State: A Study in the Civic and Ethnic Contours of Turkish Nationalism," *Border Crossing* 8, no. 2SI (2018), 521–536.

²⁶¹ Juliette Tolay, "Discovering Immigration into Turkey: The Emergence of a Dynamic Field: Discovering Immigration into Turkey," *International Migration* 53 (2012), 57–73.

legality.²⁶² The public sphere remains a hot zone of activity, with bans on Istanbul's Pride celebrations leading to violent police confrontations in 2019 and 2022.²⁶³

Amid his 2018 re-election campaign, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan reinforced the importance of coffeehouses as markers of Turkish civilization and promised the construction of "People's Coffee Houses" to promote public literacy programs and offer free coffee, tea and cake²⁶⁴; such promises were attacked by Erdogan's opponents, in language echoing Mustafa Ali, for creating spaces that encouraged gamblers and idlers.²⁶⁵ UNESCO, having included the Turkish preparation of coffee on a list of intangible cultural heritage, stated that the coffeehouse "is regarded as part of Turkish cultural heritage; It is celebrated in literature and songs, and is an indispensable part of ceremonial occasions".²⁶⁶ After centuries navigating scrutiny under Ottoman rule, modern Turkey has embraced coffee as a bastion of cultural inheritance, even as it navigates a murky relationship with its broader Ottoman history.

To return finally to the Ottoman past, one now mired in controversy, and to the recurrent legal controversy that was coffeehouses, we find an informative perspective on the fickle nature of Ottoman law. Fluctuating legalistic dispositions across the Hanafi and Halveti schools and the larger infrastructure of the *ulema*, the ever-changing predilections of subsequent sultans, orthodox movements such as the Kadizadeli campaigns and liberal backlash, and the influence of Sufi and Janissary groups all converged in the coffeehouse. Volatile bans, capricious acceptance,

²⁶² Zehra Arat and Caryl Nuñez, "Advancing LGBT Rights in Turkey: Tolerance or Protection?" *Human Rights Review*, 18.1 (2017), 1–19.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ Ergin Hava, *Free Tea, Coffee for the People: Erdogan's Latest Election Promise*, DPA International (English). Hamburg: dpa Deutsche Presse-Agentur (2018).

²⁶⁵ *Erdogan's 'Coffee House' Project Dominates Turkey's Election Race*, BBC Monitoring European, London: BBC Worldwide Limited (2018).

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

and constant popularity regardless of legal decree demonstrate how the legal and public spheres in Ottoman urbanity were subject to wild shifts.

The coffeehouse, more than a figurative example of such a mercurial legal landscape, played a tangible role in facilitating political movements. Just as revolutionaries might gather in one *kolluk* cafe, others served as meeting places for palace officials, bureaucrats and other such elites seeking a place to converse outside regimented institutional spaces.²⁶⁷ The importance of the coffeehouse as a source of political sedition and social deviance cannot be understated, as it served as the formative prototype, etched into urbanity itself. Without the public, there is no coffeehouse, and without the coffeehouse, the Ottoman public would have evinced itself completely differently. Coffee, as echoed by an old Turkish proverb, is just an excuse for sociality. The heartbeat of political life flowed through the coffee cups of the empire, from the private rooms of palaces and estates to the smallest neighbourhood *meydans*.

²⁶⁷ Senciuc, "Exotic Brew," 163-168.

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