Urban History, **40**, 4 (2013) © Cambridge University Press 2013
doi:10.1017/S0963926813000187
First published online 3 May 2013

Surveillance, urban governance and legitimacy in late Ottoman Istanbul: spying on music and entertainment during the Hamidian regime (1876–1909)

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ABSTRACT: The topic of this study is the control of urban space in late Ottoman Istanbul, particularly during the reign of Abdülhamid II (1876–1909). Issues of the control and surveillance of public gatherings and popular entertainment are investigated by focusing on the Greeks of Istanbul, the largest non-Muslim population in the city. The article is based on an investigation of petitions, the Ottoman Police Ministry records and spy reports on various planned and spontaneous, private and public activities, such as charity concerts, theatrical performances, and collective singing in private and public meetings.

Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909) came to power in September 1876 in the middle of political turmoil, promising to promulgate a constitution.[1] In May 1876, the pro-reform bureaucrats had deposed Sultan Abdülaziz (r. 1861–76), and in July 1876, Serbia and Montenegro had declared war on the empire in the aftermath of a rebellion that had erupted in Herzegovina a year before. Furthermore, the new sultan Murad V was deposed by fatwa after a reign of three months due to his weak mental condition. According to the proponents of the constitutional regime, the latter would curb European criticism and intervention and the imposition of pro-Christian reforms by turning all Ottoman subjects into equal citizens. The preparation of the constitution and the election campaign to select deputies for the first Ottoman parliament took place during an international crisis that resulted in the Russo-Ottoman war, which began in April 1877. Abdülhamid II inherited a difficult balance of power between the royal court and the Sublime Porte, and yet managed to secure the absolute

* I owe many thanks to Prof. Dr. Edhem Eldem for his help concerning the transcription of some of the documents used in this article.
[1] M.S. Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, 2008), 109–49.

domination of the political system by the former. Hence, during the war, he prorogued the parliament which survived less than a year. As noted by Sükrü Hanioglu, Abdülhamid II believed that his administration was the antithesis of absolutism, as it depended on the strict application of law combined with the Islamic principle of justice.[2]

During the Hamidian regime, the legitimacy of the Ottoman rule was severely questioned in regions that were nominally under Ottoman control or were semi-independent. The hold of the central state in parts of the empire such as Eastern Rumelia, Macedonia, Crete and Arab provinces was constantly deteriorating. Besides, for instance in Egypt, nationalist Arab intellectuals had become seriously preoccupied with the question of the Islamic caliphate and the Ottoman throne.[3] After the Christians of the empire, the proto-nationalist movements were also on the rise among the Muslim subjects like the Albanians, the Arabs and the Kurds.[4] Turkism also began to flourish during the Hamidian era.

Throughout the nineteenth century and in the period under study, the Greek Orthodox constituted the largest non-Muslim population in Istanbul.[5] Following the 1856 Reform Edict, the Greek Orthodox or *Rum* millet had made certain reforms regarding their administration, and the election of their spiritual leader the patriarch of Constantinople, who would henceforth be the head of the nation. The upper-class members of the Greek community were very prominent in the development of the civic life of the city. Moreover, the Greek bankers loaned huge sums of money to the Ottoman government and were mostly on good terms with the sultan.[6] However, a crisis erupted between Abdülhamid II and the Greek Orthodox community in 1890, when the sultan wanted to curb the privileges that granted some autonomy to the community regarding its educational and juridical matters.[7] Thus, having imagined that Abdülhamid would reform Turkey giving the Greek community a leading role when he first succeeded to the throne, they now became severely disillusioned with his authoritarian administration.[8]

[2] *Ibid*., 123.

[3] C. Farah, 'Censorship and freedom of expression in Ottoman Syria and Egypt', in W.W. Haddad and W. Ochsenwald (eds.), *Nationalism in a Non-national State: The Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire* (Ohio, 1977), 151–94, 164. For Abdülhamid's emphasis on his position as caliph of all Muslims and his efforts to shape an 'official belief', see S. Deringil, *The Well-protected Domains. Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876–1909* (London, 1998), 44–67.

[4] Hanioglu, *A Brief History*, 142–3.

[5] S. Shaw, 'The population of Istanbul in the nineteenth century', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 10 (1979), 266.

[6] See H. Exertzoglou, 'The development of a Greek Ottoman bourgeoisie: investment patterns in the Ottoman empire, 1850–1914', in D. Gondicas and C. Issawi (eds.), *Ottoman Greeks in the Age of Nationalism: Politics, Economy, and Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, 1999), 89–115.

[7] See H. Exertzoglou, 'Το Προνομιακό Ζήτημα' (The privileges question), *Ta Historica*, 16 (1992), 65–84.

[8] G.L. Zarifis, *I anamniseis mou. Enas kosmos pou efige Konstantinoupoli 1800–1920* (My Memoirs. A World that Vanished, Constantinople 1800–1920) (Athens, 2002), 159–61.

In the literature, the reign of Abdülhamid II has often been presented as an autocratic rule whose 'suffocating' atmosphere was aggravated even more due to the sultan's obsession with his own security.[9] For instance, most of the books dealing with the Hamidian era give the impression that press censorship was introduced during this period. Contemporaries' memoirs are full of comments regarding the strictness and whimsical nature of censorship during Abdülhamid's reign.[10] However, recent studies have shown that practices which aimed at controlling the spread of radical ideas, especially press censorship, were not unique to the Hamidian epoch. For instance, the first press rules introduced by the Ottomans in Syria and Egypt came into force in 1865 to silence the American press whose activities were construed as political and religious sedition.[11] Thus, as also argued by another study, as far as press censorship during Hamidian era was concerned, it was a phase within the post-Tanzimat censorship practices, whose major distinction was the institutionalization of methods of control.[12] It should also be noted that censorship did not cease after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 which eventually deposed Abdülhamid; in fact, it continued in a more centralized, systematic and institutionalized form.[13]

Surveillance and control over the subject population have been vital to the consolidation of the power of the modern state.[14] Regarding the Ottoman state, surveillance of the population had already become part of its governmentality in the 1830s in parallel with a process in which public opinion emerged as a new element in politics as an implicit source of legitimacy for the government.[15] Furthermore, in their engagement with and interpretation of modernity, non-western empires like the Ottoman empire, and similarly nineteenth-century Russia and Japan, employed particular means of supervision and control over the dissemination of ideas, convictions and teachings coming from the west.[16] Hence, in the old continental empires censorship was not just an act of banning and preventing, but a practice that was closely linked to the import of western modernity. Having said this, the mechanism of censorship developed during Abdülhamid's reign differed largely from the earlier oppressive press rules in the empire in that the Hamidian regime exploited to an

[9] In fact, an assassination was attempted on Abdülhamid II at Yildiz Mosque on 21 Jul. 1905.
[10] S.K. Spanoudi, *Sta Palatia tou Hamit* (In the Palaces of Hamid) (Athens, 2009), 97–8.
[11] Farah, 'Censorship and freedom', 156.
[12] F. Demirel, *II. Abdülhamid Döneminde Sansür* (Censorship during the Reign of Abdülhamid II) (Istanbul, 2007), 15.
[13] I. Yosmaoglu, 'Chasing the printed word: press censorship in the Ottoman Empire under the Party of Union and Progress (1908–1913)', Princeton University MA thesis, 1997, 2.
[14] A. Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism,* vol. I: *Power, Property and the State* (London, 1981), 5.
[15] C. Kırlı, 'Surveillance and constituting the public in the Ottoman empire', in *Publics, Politics and Participation: Locating the Public Sphere in the Middle East and North Africa* (New York, 2009), 282–305.
[16] Demirel, *II. Abdülhamid Döneminde*, 18–19.

unprecedented extent the modern press to cement loyalty to the state and cut off opposition. It was also more strict and arbitrary than the comparable cases of censorship in other repressive regimes of the time, such as the Habsburg and the Russian empires.[17]

This article will explore a rather scarcely researched form of censorship during the Hamidian era, the censorship of music and entertainment. It will analyse the mechanisms of this form of surveillance and censorship, in the light of changes in modern urban space. The focus of the article will be the Greeks of Istanbul and their venues of socialization and entertainment.

Creating the modern urban space in the late Ottoman empire

The creation of new kinds of spatial framework and the implementation of disciplinary methods of inspection and control over the subject populations were parallel processes that were crucial in the making of modern political subjects in the nineteenth-century Middle East.[18] The formation of modern urban space in the Ottoman empire and the subsequent state policing of this space were the by-products of a process that began with the proclamation of the *Hatt-ı Şerif-i Gülhane* (Noble Edict) in 1839 which initiated a process of reforms known as the Tanzimat, aiming at the modernization of the state system and of society. The privileged centre of this process was Istanbul, the imperial capital, whose transformation and the particular development of whose functions and structures in the nineteenth century were linked to a process of integration with the west.[19] The Crimean war (1853–56) was a significant landmark in this process in which the Ottoman capital began to acquire a European appearance with its western-modelled urban projects and public transportation.[20] Echoing similar efforts of urban planning in the prominent cities of Europe and its colonies, in Istanbul of the 1850s and 1860s, the urban regulation projects aimed at the enlargement of roads, reordering of cemeteries, opening of parks and lighting of streets. In 1855, in Istanbul, a specific commission for ordering of urban space, the Commission for the Regulation of the City (*İntizam-ı Şehir Komisyonu*) was established. In the commission, the non-Muslim elite and especially the prominent members of the finance sector

[17] Hanioglu, *A Brief History*, 125–6.

[18] For the building of a new system of disciplinary power in Egypt in the 1860s, see T. Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge, 1988), 68.

[19] E. Eldem, 'Istanbul: from imperial to peripheralized capital', in E. Eldem, D. Goffman and B. Masters (eds.), *The Ottoman City between East and West: Aleppo, İzmir and İstanbul* (Cambridge, 1999), 135–207, at 138.

[20] See Z. Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul: Portrait of an Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1993); İ. Tekeli, 'Nineteenth-century transformation of Istanbul metropolitan area', in P. Dumont and F. Georgeon (eds.), *Villes ottomanes à la fin de l'empire* (Paris, 1992), 33–47; C. Neumann, 'Marjinal Modernitenin Çatışma Mekânı Olarak Altıncı Daire-i Belediye', in *Altıncı Daire – İlk Belediye Beyoğlu'nda İdare, Toplum ve Kentlilik, 1857–1913* (Istanbul, 2004), 4–28.

were predominant.[21] Subsequently, an autonomous municipal council composed largely of local Greeks, Armenians and Jews (the wealthy property owners of the district) responsible for the Sixth district which included Pera[22] and Galata (districts with a predominantly modern and European outlook) was founded in 1857–58 to introduce modern urban amenities and to test European methods of municipal government.

The physical changes in urban space had a further impact at the discursive level. For instance, the opening up of the streets for work and leisure at night for the different layers of the society brought forth major changes and shifts in the social discourse on immorality and crime.[23] In the prospering centres of the Ottoman Middle East, the night became 'a new problem zone for law, order, and public morality that was particular to an urban environment'.[24] Hence, new forms of watching and patrolling placed the street under the direct gaze of the public authorities.[25] However, in most of the big cities of the empire, for example, in Salonica, there was no regular municipal police force till late in the nineteenth century, and the streets were patrolled infrequently; as a result of which, thieves and even gangs of child-prostitutes armed with pistols and rifles roamed the streets near the port, and the casinos, cabarets and cafés became places of excessive alcohol consumption and gambling which led to the destruction of public order on the streets.[26]

In addition, a major problem faced by the authorities of the main cities of the empire which drew large populations of seasonal migrants especially during the periods of economic boom and growing infrastructure was how to keep under control these young male populations who were seen as a threat to urban order due to their lack of familial attachment.[27] Indeed, as evidence from the criminal records suggests, the vagrants and homeless of the imperial city (the boundary between seasonal workers and this group was slim) were frequently involved in acts of interpersonal violence.[28]

[21] Neumann, 'Marjinal Modernitenin', 9–11.

[22] Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul*, 39: 'Pera, located on the hill to the north of the walled city of Galata, had its population concentrated along the Grande Rue de Pera, the city's main artery.'

[23] For an interesting approach to street lighting, see N. Ileri, 'Landscaping the uses and the production of urban space: crime, security and night life in *fin-de-siècle* Istanbul' (unpublished paper, 10th Conference of the European Association of Urban History, Ghent, 1–4 Sep. 2010).

[24] J. Hanssen, 'Public morality and marginality in *fin-de-siècle* Beirut', in E. Rogan (ed.), *Outside In. On the Margins of the Modern Middle East* (London, 2002), 183–211, at 190.

[25] S. Zandi-Sayek, 'Public space and urban citizens: Ottoman Izmir in the remaking (1840–1890)', University of California Ph.D. thesis, 2001, 111.

[26] M. Mazower, *Salonica, City of Ghosts. Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1430–1950* (New York, 2006), 138–9.

[27] F. Riedler, 'Wanderarbeiter (*bekar*) im Istanbul des 19. Jahrhunderts: Zwischen Marginalität und Normalität', in A. Pistor-Hatam and A. Richter (eds.), *Asien und Afrika. Beiträge des Zentrums für Asiatische und Afrikanische Studien (ZAAS) der Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel*, 12 (Hamburg, 2008), 143–58.

[28] The existence of a number of decrees dealing with vagrants and vagrancy suggests that the Ottoman government recognized it as a serious social problem. See R.A. Deal, *Crimes of*

Maintaining public order and policing the city

In the aftermath of the abolition of the Janissary corps in 1826, the maintenance of order in Istanbul was relegated to the *İhtisab Nezareti* (Ministry of the Superintendence of Guilds and Markets) until 1855, an institution with a rather fuzzy realm of authority. In 1846, the *Zaptiye Müşirliği* (Police Field Marshalship) was established. This office was responsible for the civil administration and the security of Istanbul and its environs, and acted, in fact, like the institution of governorship.[29] Officially created in 1845, the Ottoman police institution constituted a significant step in the construction of the state apparatus and its penetration into the society.[30] The Police Regulation (*Polis Nizamnamesi*) which was published in the same year contained articles on the surveillance of public places, religious ceremonies and entertainment venues.[31] However, the constitution of the police corps was a slow process and only during the Hamidian regime was a police force distinct from the gendarmerie and mainly responsible for the security in the capital constituted. As Noemi Lévy has argued, the specificity of this period lay in the emphasis bestowed on the political dimension of the surveillance of the police corps and the protection of the interests of the regime which meant more extensive control over the whole society.[32] According to a circular issued in 1896, the police were charged with patrolling the quarters day and night, obtaining information from the mayor and the night watchmen about suspect individuals and if necessary entering into houses for investigation, checking the individuals at the entrance points of the capital, exercising surveillance on the various places of worship and preventing the gathering of unemployed people in the markets and other public places.[33] The sensitivity that the Hamidian government showed regarding public security should also be seen within the wider framework of the increase in acts of terrorism beyond the imperial borders. In this context, in 1898, the Ottoman empire joined the European states at a secret conference in Rome against anarchist terror.[34] Hence, the Hamidian government wanted to be part of an alliance against terrorist attacks and to synchronize its own policing and information systems with those of the European states.

Honor, Drunken Brawls and Murder. Violence in Istanbul under Abdulhamid II (Istanbul, 2010), 57–9.

[29] M. Cezar, *Osmanlı Başkenti Istanbul* (Istanbul, 2002), 338–9.

[30] N. Lévy, 'Une institution en formation: la police ottomane à l'époque d'Abdülhamid II', *European Journal of Turkish Studies* (online), 8 (2008), online since 2 Dec. 2009, accessed on 8 Mar. 2013, http://ejts.revues.org/2463.

[31] O.N. Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umur-i Belediyye* (Istanbul, 1995), cited in Lévy, 'Une institution en formation', §11.

[32] Lévy, 'Une institution en formation', §21.

[33] *Ibid.*, §17.

[34] A. Baktiaya, '19. Yuzyil Sonlarinda Anarsist Teror, "Toplumun Anarsistlere Karsi Korunmasi Konferansi (1898)" ve Osmanli Devleti', *Bilgi ve Bellek*, 4, 8 (2007), 43–55.

According to a circular published in 1907, which confirmed the practice that had been established since the 1880s, the tasks of the police were divided into three categories; administrative or preventive, political and judiciary. The administrative function of the police consisted of surveillance of public places, the control of population movements within and into the empire through passport controls, the repression of immoral behaviour in taverns and casinos and taking action against beggars. The political tasks of the police were to 'protect the interests of the regime' by fighting against the conspirators, and to exercise a strict control over the published productions.[35]

In addition to a police corps as such, Abdülhamid II's regime also created a large network of spies directly dependent on the Palace. Imperial residences, public buildings, clubs, societies, theatres, Islamic schools (*madrasas*), Sufi convents and even private houses were spied on. Spies belonged to various ethnic groups and to diverse ranks of society. They included Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Europeans, Kurds, Tatars, Turks, and represented a wide range of occupations from sheiks to street vendors, or simple citizens who spied on people in order to win the approval and gratitude of the sultan.[36]

Legitimacy, public order and the control of the public sphere

The growth of the public sphere[37] in the context of western Europe has been associated with a set of developments such as the struggle against arbitrary authority, increased political participation, flourishing critical liberalism and the formation of a citizenry whose freedoms were guaranteed under the law. These were also the fundamental achievements in the conception of the term from a normative-idealistic perspective.[38] However, the concentration on the overt political process often leads one to adopt misleading, dichotomous and clear-cut assumptions about the 'space' between the state and society, and subsequently to miss the particular dynamics of the relationship between the non-state actors and the central power. Hence, it might be more useful to shift our attention from the manifest political change to 'the growth of an urban culture as the novel

[35] H. Alyot, *Turkiye'de Zabita* (Ankara, 1947), 225–6, cited in Lévy, 'Une institution en formation', §18.

[36] S.K. Irtem, *Abdülhamid Devrinde Hafiyelik ve Sansür* (Istanbul, 1999), 23; Y.S. Karakışla, 'Sultan II. Abdülhamid'in Istibdat Döneminde (1876–1909) Hafiyelik ve Julnalcilik', *Toplumsal Tarih*, 19 (119) (2003), 12–21.

[37] Jürgen Habermas asserted that in the eighteenth-century bourgeois society of Europe, a universal public sphere, a locus of rational public discussion emerged based on an assumption of abstract individuality. See J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Enquiry into a Category of Bourgeios Society* (Cambridge, 1989).

[38] Cengiz Kırlı observed that, owing mainly to the ambivalence in Habermas' original use of the term 'public sphere' which referred at the same time to an existing historical reality and a normative ideal, the concept of public sphere has recently been used more and more in the context of the Middle Eastern (and in other non-western) historiographies, to attain certain normative ideals. See Kırlı, 'Surveillance and constituting', 284.

arena of a locally organized public life', as Geoff Eley has observed.[39] In this vein, we can locate the concept of the public sphere within the processes of the development of associational initiatives[40] and the formation of a local elite, hence within the wider domain of cultural activity, e.g. the theatre, the public spectacle of music as a means of communication and the creation of opinion, and the opening up of alternative means and spaces of forming taste.

The theatre's contribution to the public sphere in Ottoman cities was manifold. From the moment of its introduction into these urban centres, the theatre was welcomed as a sign and a catalyst of progress and reform by large segments of the urban population. Besides, the theatre created a public composed of individuals coming from various ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds that easily communicated with each other, and formulated and disseminated ideas about various social issues.[41] The main institutions which played a role in the introduction and success of the theatre in eastern Mediterranean cities were the municipalities. As far as practical matters were concerned, they provided venues for theatrical performances and also services like transportation facilities and those regarding the maintenance of security on the streets at night. Ilham Khuri-Makdisi noted that municipalities representing 'a liminal space between the state and civil society in which civic ideas could be discussed in a forum that was somewhat different from yet related to the state' offered strong support and patronage to the theatre in cities such as Alexandria, Cairo and Beirut.[42] With their legal power, municipalities were also agents for the implementation of policies concerning theatres and also for supervising and monitoring them.

The first theatre of the Ottoman capital was opened in Pera during the summer of 1840 on the land of an Arab Christian named Mikhail Naum.[43] In 1859, the municipality of the Sixth district issued a theatre

[39] See G. Eley, 'Nations, publics, and political cultures: placing Habermas in the nineteenth century', in Craig Calhoun (ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), 291. In his analysis of the public sphere, Eley drew attention to 'the prior transformation of social relations' and 'the institutional reform of the overall context of social communication' as the conditions of existence for the public sphere.

[40] Suggested in *ibid*., 298. For discussion of the emergence of the 'voluntary society' in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century western Europe as a phenomenon which played a role in the transition from the estates to the class society, see T. Nipperdey, 'Verein als soziale Struktur in Deutschland im späten 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert', in *Gesellschaft, Kultur, Theorie* (Göttingen, 1976), 174–205.

[41] For the emergence of the theatre as a central organ in the formulation and dissemination of radical leftist ideas in the nineteenth-century eastern Mediterranean, see I. Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860–1914* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2010), 60–93, at 72.

[42] *Ibid*., 68.

[43] E. Aracı, *Naum Tiyatrosu.19. Yüzyıl İstanbul'unun Italyan Operasi* (İstanbul, 2010), cited in A. Mestyan, 'Cultural policy in the late Ottoman empire? The palace and the public theatres in nineteenth-century Istanbul', in P. Ther (ed.) *Kulturpolitik und Theatre. Die kontinentalen Imperien in Europa im Vergleich* (Vienna, 2012), 127–49. The Naum Theatre was repaired after a fire in 1847 and its new pompous building was reopened in 1848. The Italian theatre

regulation for the Naum Theatre which stated that the municipality was the only authority that could exercise surveillance over the theatre. More regulations on the supervision of the theatres and the theatrical censorship (of the plays themselves) followed in subsequent years. According to another regulation issued by the *Meclis-i Vâlâ* (Legislative Council) in 1860, presumably for a theatre that was newly established in the Gedikpaşa district of Istanbul, the theatre and its artists were put under the direct jurisdiction of the police and the authority of the municipality. Furthermore, a police officer was assigned the task of censoring the contents of the plays.[44] The heavy-handed regime of Abdülaziz and his contest for political power resulted in the banning of theatrical productions and the exile of their authors. A well-known incident in this regard is the exile to Cyprus of Namık Kemal, journalist, poet and one of the prominent supporters of representational government, due to his theatre play *Vatan yahut Silistre* (Fatherland or Silistra) staged in 1873, which promoted nationalism and liberalism.[45]

Returning to the institutional arrangements, the borders between the scope of the responsibilities and authorities of the different institutions of surveillance were rather blurred. According to the '1293 Municipality Law' issued in 1877, municipalities would be responsible for inspecting the order and the cleanliness of the restaurants, coffeehouses, casinos, theatres, places where acrobats performed, street fairs and other places where crowds of people gathered, while the public security of these places would be maintained by the Police Ministry.[46] Finally, in 1883, in the aftermath of the revolution in Egypt, the Ottoman government introduced a special organ entitled *Tiyatrolar Müfettişliği* (Theatre Inspectorship) within the body of the state administration for the surveillance of theatres.[47]

As mentioned before, associational initiatives were crucial for the formation of the public sphere. The Greeks of Istanbul founded various voluntary societies and clubs (theatre, music, sport) as well as numerous cultural, educational and charitable associations. The Medical Society (1861), the Greek Literary Society (1861), the Greek Club 'Vyzantion' (1862), Club 'Mnimosini' in Phanar (1862) had among their members doctors, bankers, merchants, lawyers and teachers. In establishing clubs and cultural associations, the members of educated Greek society drew their inspiration from similar associations and societies of the European inhabitants of the empire. It was a demonstration that they shared common values with the European upper classes such as the educational and moral

groups were the most popular performers of this theatre. For more about the Naum Theatre, see N. Akın, *19. Yüzyılın Ikinci Yarısında Galata ve Pera* (Istanbul, 1998), 257–9.

[44] Mestyan, 'Cultural policy', 140.

[45] For the group of bureaucrats and intellectuals, the Young Ottomans, who demanded constitutional regime, see Ş. Mardin, *The Genesis of the Young Ottoman Thought. A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Princeton, 1962).

[46] Cezar, *Osmanlı Başkenti Istanbul*, 348.

[47] Mestyan, 'Cultural policy', 145.

improvement of society, and the cultivation and advancement of the arts and sciences. Hence, the Greek Medical and Literary Societies became the locus of scientific and literary discussions. Furthermore, these societies became venues for entertainment and social gathering not only for their members but also for the wider public. The major voluntary associations in Istanbul had their own assembly rooms, built by subscription, where various entertainments like theatrical performances, concerts and balls were organized, a situation which can arguably be defined as a 'transitional stage between private and fully public entertainment'.[48]

The larger context of many of these concerts and balls was fund-raising for various purposes. The emergence of such voluntary initiatives and their abundance in the late Ottoman empire have often been seen by historians as signs of the expansion of civil society and the public sphere. According to Nadir Özbek, however, the growth of the public sphere in the nineteenth-century Ottoman empire did not necessarily mean the widening of the distance between the state and society; rather, such fund-raising initiatives served to strengthen the legitimacy and power of the state.[49] For example, the lottery was one of the means through which money was raised for various benevolent purposes usually taken up with the initiative of a philanthropic or cultural society.[50] It seems that the collection of large sums of money through lotteries, especially by the socially powerful non-Muslim Ottoman subjects created anxiety on the part of the authorities and was regarded as a challenge to the power of the state.[51] However, the authorities responsible for the administration and the public order of Istanbul did not tend to ban these activities outright but resorted to different tactics. For instance, regarding lotteries, the petitions for lottery organizations were often delayed through bureaucratic methods like the referral of the petition to another authority.[52] In 1909, the chairman of the 'Mandolinata' music society, which belonged to a Greek school in Phanar (a district in Istanbul), Georgios I. Papadopoulos sent a petition

[48] J.H. Plumb, 'The public, literature, and the arts in the eighteenth century', in M.R. Marrus (ed.), *The Emergence of Leisure* (New York, 1974), 11–37, cited in Eley, 'Nations, publics, and political cultures', 301–2.

[49] For discussion of the expansion of the 'public sphere' in nineteenth-century Ottoman empire, see N. Özbek, 'Philanthropic activity, Ottoman patriotism, and the Hamidian regime 1876–1909', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 37 (2005), 59–81.

[50] See M. Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Piyango Tarihi ve Milli Piyango İdaresi* (The History of Lottery in Turkey and the Administration of National Lottery) (Ankara, 1993).

[51] After the Hamidian era, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) government whose ideological base was fed by a nascent Turkism strengthened its restrictions on lotteries and charity concerts. As suggested by Nadir Özbek, the increased control over the public sphere under the new circumstances might have been connected to 'the desire for a strict control over the social beneficiary activities in view of a tendency to channel these social resources in a centralized manner towards national aims'. See N. Özbek, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Sosyal Devlet. Siyaset, Iktidar ve Meşruiyet, 1876–1914* (Istanbul, 2002), 294.

[52] Özbek, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Sosyal Devlet*, 258–9. Özbek also argued that an imperial circular which was issued in 1906 imposed even more control and restrictions on the organization of lotteries.

requesting the organization of a lottery to raise money for the music society. A document produced by the Internal Ministry on 20 November 1909 stated that the lottery should stay within the confines of the school, otherwise for such occasions a licence had to be applied for from the municipality.[53]

The Hamidian regime was especially alert regarding the gathering of crowds in public places. Therefore, events like concerts were strictly monitored due to the sultan's and the government's fear of sedition. The general practice was to permit concerts within closed areas which could be kept under control more easily than the large open air spaces. A letter signed by Yıldız Imperial Palace Chief Secretary Office (*Yıldız Saray-ı Hümayun Baş Kitabet Dairesi*) on 3 Muharrem 1312 (7 July 1894) referred to the petition of Christos Chatzichristos, a Greek high school director, asking permission to organize a concert in the Taksim Park[54] for the benefit of the earthquake-stricken people in Greece. The letter stated that the concert in question could not be allowed to take place in the Taksim Park since concerts of this type were not delivered in the open air ('bu misillü konserler açıkta verilmeyüb') but rather inside buildings such as embassies or in the Tepebaşı Theatre.[55] Not surprisingly, two days later, on 9 July 1894, the order of supervision was given to the authorities; a letter was sent to the municipality (*Şehremaneti*) and the Police Ministry informing them about the planned concert.[56] Likewise, the annual public fund-raising concerts of the Armenian Patriarchate for the community hospital in Yedikule (Istanbul) were permitted only in closed places and often took place in the Municipal Concert Hall in Beyoğlu/Tepebaşı.[57] Nevertheless, what has been said thus far about the lotteries and the concerts organized by the non-Muslim subjects should not lead to the conclusion that similar activities were better tolerated on the part of Muslims.[58] For instance, in 1893 an attempt to organize a ball by the chief of the Regie (Tobacco Monopoly) in Büyükada (Princess Island) in order to raise funds for the poor was prevented under the pretext of cholera epidemics in the city. The regime's control over Muslim subjects was justified by upholding the traditional

[53] Basbakanlik Osmanli Arsivi (Ottoman Archives, Istanbul, hereafter BOA) DH. MUİ 7 Zilkade 1327 (20 Nov. 1909). After the April 1909 military uprising in Istanbul, a new regulation (issued 6 Sep. 1909) authorized the municipalities to inspect and strictly watch over public entertainments such as concerts and theatre performances, and other activities like charity bazaars. Özbek, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Sosyal Devlet*, 293.

[54] The Taksim Public Park was constructed between 1864 and 1869 on the area previously occupied by Christian cemeteries, as part of the general restructuring of the city undertaken by the commission for the ordering of urban space. See Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul*, 69.

[55] BOA DH. MKT 258/3 ves. no. 11, 3 Muharrem 1312 (7 Jul. 1894). Tepebaşı Theatre or *Théâtre des Petits Champs* was owned by the municipality and was rented to private Italian, Ottoman Armenian or French impresarios seasonally or yearly. Mestyan, 'Cultural policy', 143.

[56] BOA DH. MKT 258/3, 5 Muharrem 1312 (9 Jul. 1894).

[57] Özbek, 'Philanthropic activity'.

[58] Özbek, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Sosyal Devlet*, 262–3.

moral values which constituted a significant source of Abdülhamid II's authority and the basis for the legitimacy of his rule.

It is plausible to suggest that the government authorities reacted even more cautiously towards the concert visits of musical bands coming from outside the empire. In 1893, the Philharmonic Society of Athens wanted to organize two concerts in Istanbul and Izmir for the benefit of a music school attended by poor workers. The letter from the chairman of the Philharmonic Society Spyridon Spathis to the Greek foreign minister on 12 March 1893 reveals that the Hellenic parties expected difficulties in receiving permission since the chairman of the Philharmonic Society requested the mediation of the Greek ambassador from the foreign minister.[59] On 18 March 1893, the Greek ambassador N. Mavrokordatos sent a letter to the Greek foreign minister notifying him that he would assemble a committee composed of Greek citizens in order to prepare for the welcome for the Society and the concerts. The ambassador further wrote that there was no need for his mediation, as it might cause the 'familiar groundless suspicions' of the Turks.[60] Finally, according to the letter from N. Mavrokordatos to the Greek foreign minister on 30 March 1893, the Society received permission and gave two concerts in the Ottoman capital, in the buildings of the Greek embassy and the Theatre *Mnimatakion* (Tepebaşı Theatre) in Taksim.[61] The Greek ambassador's reservation might be explained with reference to the well-known tradition of conflict and rivalry between the Ottoman political elite and the representatives of the European states. Throughout the nineteenth century, foreign consuls were considered by the former as arbitrators of the interests of the states that they represented whose intervention into state affairs and reforms were to be strictly avoided.

Surveillance over symbols: singing anthems and 'suspect' allegiances

Although the argument is debatable for the heyday of nationalist movements, Engin D. Akarlı has claimed that Abdülhamid II was convinced that his subjects would be loyal to their government if it provided the conditions necessary for a productive, secure and peaceful life.[62] Hence, the establishment of a modern economic infrastructure, the

[59] Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens (AMFA), 1893, 29/2, from the chairman of the Philharmonic Society Spyridon Spathis to the Greek foreign minister, No. 310, 12 Mar. 1893.

[60] AMFA, 1893, 29/2, from N. Mavrokordatos (Constantinople) to the Greek foreign minister, No. 656, 18 Mar. 1893.

[61] AMFA, 1893, 29/2, from N. Mavrokordatos (Constantinople) to the Greek foreign minister, No. 742, 30 Mar. 1893. The letter noted that during the reception at the embassy, the Society played Greek and Ottoman hymns.

[62] E.D. Akarlı, 'The tangled ends of an empire: Ottoman encounters with the west and problems of westernization – an overview', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 26 (2006), 353–66, at 357.

maintenance of security and order and reforms which would guarantee the equality of everyone before the law and which would strengthen the loyalty of the Ottoman subjects to their sultan.[63] Given the multiple modalities of social integration in both the urban and rural settings, and the possibility of negotiating one's urban/professional class and national commitments according to any given situation, especially when there was no need to take sides, this was probably the case.[64]

It might be surprising to see that multiple loyalties and even overt political allegiances to external nation-states were expressed, especially on certain occasions in the public and communal spaces of the major Ottoman cities.[65] A letter from the Greek consul general in Izmir to the Greek Foreign Ministry on 25 April 1886 stated that, on 23 April (St George's Day) in the Greek Orthodox Church of St George, a doxology was sung on the occasion of the name day of the king of Greece. The consul further reported that 12,000 citizens were gathered inside and outside the church during the doxology, and subsequently the crowd acclaimed the royal family, the prime minister and the Greek army.[66] This kind of 'tolerance' on the part of the Ottoman authorities often surprised the European travellers who visited Izmir in the 1890s. The French journalist Gaston Deschamps wrote: 'they [the Greeks] are even allowed to sing the Hellenic national hymn or raise the Hellenic flag in religious celebrations but on the other hand they work jointly with the Turks and even enjoy pompous (Ottoman) titles'.[67]

Regarding the display of competing loyalties, in Istanbul, the imperial official ceremony clearly outstripped other celebrations. It is well known that the nineteenth century witnessed the rise of symbolic display through ceremonies and celebrations in the major monarchical regimes of Europe.[68]

[63] What I have in mind here is loyalty to the state and the government. I am not referring to the well-known emphasis on personal loyalty in the Hamidian regime and that employment in the civil service depended on loyalty to the sultan. For personal loyalty, see Hanioglu, *A Brief History*, 125.

[64] For the slippery ground on which the notion of loyalty operated and the existence of a range of multiple and competing loyalties in late and post-Ottoman regions of south-east Europe, see 'Introduction', in H. Grandits, N. Clayer and R. Pichler (eds.), *Conflicting Loyalties in the Balkans. The Great Powers, the Ottoman Empire and Nation-Building* (London, 2011).

[65] See S. Zandi-Sayek, 'Orchestrating difference, performing identity: urban space and public rituals in nineteenth-century Izmir', in N. Alsayyad (ed.), *Hybrid Urbanism: On the Identity Discourse and the Built Environment* (Westport, 2001), 42–66.

[66] AMFA, 1886, 29/2, from the consul general of Greece (Smyrna) to Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Greece), No. 974, 25 Apr. 1886.

[67] G. Deschamps, *Sur les routes d'Asie* (Paris, 1894), 153, cited in V. Kechriotis, 'The Greeks of Izmir at the end of the empire. A non-Muslim Ottoman community between autonomy and patriotism', University of Leiden Ph.D. thesis, 2005, 60.

[68] R.S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vol. II (Princeton, 2000), 4–5, 344–58; R. Wortman, 'Rule by sentiment: Alexander II's journeys through the Russian empire', *American Historical Review*, 95 (1990), 745–71; T. Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy. Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* (Berkeley, 1998). For the interesting aspects of the ritual interaction between local elites and their rulers in colonial India, see D.E. Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India. The Shaping of a Public Culture in Surat City, 1852–1928* (Berkeley, 1991), 126–37.

The public image of the ruling monarch was crafted through journeys through the empire, coronations and public processions. In line with these, Abdülhamid II's reign was marked by a remarkable amount of symbolic representation of the imperial power and efforts at image making.[69] Hence, the Hamidian period abounded with the reinvention and use of Ottoman traditions. In the words of Selim Deringil, pomp and symbolism were directed towards the empire's subjects to ward off a 'legitimacy crisis'.[70] Thus, the sultan's procession to the Friday Prayer often became a grandiose public spectacle. Despite efforts to expand the ceremony and pageantry of the empire to the provincial capitals, Istanbul and the other major cities of the empire remained privileged in this sense. For most of the nineteenth century, the symbolic apparatus and the practices such as anthems, flags, uniforms, parades and fireworks remained if not unknown, yet unfamiliar to the Ottoman subjects who were living in the distant provinces of the empire.[71]

Flag and national anthem were/are two of the major symbols of loyalty to the state and the nation. In addition, by the late nineteenth century, official music was a significant factor in the field of competition for prestige between the states. The Ottoman official music was Europeanized during the reign of Mahmud II (r. 1808–39), as the sultan sought a modern image for the empire. Besides its symbolic and semiotic importance, music also conveyed emotional messages in the interaction between the sultan and his subjects.[72] Thus, as might be expected, during the Hamidian regime, there was considerable surveillance and control over publicly sung anthems, songs and marches.

In 1886, in the garden of the Concordia Theatre in Pera, an Italian opera group performed two acts of *Lucretia Borga* and one act from the *Carnaval de Naples* gratis, at an evening performance organized under the aegis of the Greek consul Mavromatis for the benefit of the earthquake-stricken in Greece, which was attended by over 530 spectators. According to a spy report delivered to the Police Ministry (*Zaptiye Nezareti*), during the intermission the orchestra played the imperial march of his majesty the sultan, as well as the Greek, Italian and French anthems, the anthems of the foreign sponsors of the occasion. In the report, it was also stated that

[69] S. Deringil, 'The invention of tradition as public image in the late Ottoman empire, 1808 to 1908', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 35 (1993), 3–29; also see Deringil, *The Well-protected Domains*, 16.

[70] S. Deringil, 'Legitimacy structures in the Ottoman state: the reign of Abdülhamid II (1876–1909)', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 23 (1991), 345–59, at 353.

[71] For instance, the inhabitants of Damascus experienced these symbols, which would later become part of the repertoire of their national rituals, during the visit of Kaiser Wilhelm in 1898 which was celebrated as a grand public occasion. See L. Hudson, *Transforming Damascus. Space and Modernity in an Islamic City* (London, 2008), 105–8.

[72] For the practice of singing encomia to the Ottoman sultan at the annual examinations of the non-Muslim communities' schools, see S. Anagnostopoulou, 'The "nation" of the *Rum* sings of its sultan: the many faces of Ottomanism', in L.T. Baruh and V. Kechriotis (eds.), *Economy and Society on Both Shores of the Aegean* (Athens, 2010).

during the playing of the imperial march several gentlemen took off their hats, and also that the Greek anthem was very much applauded by the audience.[73] The spy report bears witness to the fact that the public or semi-public performance of the official music of foreign states took place under the gaze of the spies, the police and, hence, of the Palace, which was directly informed by them. Remarkably, the report mentioned not only the national anthems which were sung during the intermission but also the reaction of the audience to them.

In response to growing nationalist and separatist tendencies, the manifestations of allegiances to rival powers came to be attentively controlled and banned by the state authorities. The singing of the national anthems of foreign powers was seen as a real threat to the existence of the state. The following incident is telling about the supervision of the Armenians of Istanbul. The protests of the city's Armenian community in autumn 1895 after the massacres in Eastern Anatolia and the attack on the Ottoman Bank by a group of Armenian revolutionaries in the summer of 1896 brought severe restrictions on travelling for Armenians and similarly strict monitoring of them, especially for Armenians from lower economic backgrounds who were explicitly associated with Armenian nationalism and terrorism.[74] A spy report sent to Yıldız Palace in the aftermath of these episodes in Istanbul in 1896 is illustrative of the hunt for 'suspect' music, as well as being interesting for its meticulous and detailed account of the happenings in a private space. The report stated that a major private gathering had been planned at the house of Gabriel Effendi in Mühürdar (Kadıköy) on Saturday ('Cuma ertesi günü Mühürdar'da Gabriel Efendi'nin hanesinde ictima-i azim olacağı mukarrer iken'). However, upon the recommendation of Apik Effendi, the event was restricted to a small meeting. According to the report, during the gathering, although Gabriel Effendi suggested singing British national anthem and an Armenian song ('fakat esna-yı cemiyetde İngiliz marşı terennüm edilüb Ermenilere mahsus bir milli şarkı dahi terennüm edilmesi Gabriel Efendi tarafından arzu edilmiş ise'), his mother intervened. Finally, the report did not fail to mention that a few days earlier several Armenians had had lunch together in Gabriel Effendi's residence.[75]

Similarly, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Education were alarmed when, during a school excursion, Ottoman subject Greek students hoisted the Greek flag on their boat and sang the Greek national anthem accompanied by a music band on board ('Yunan bandırası çektikleri ve beraberlerinde bulunan muzıka ile Yunan marşı terennüm eyledikleri görülüp işitilmekde olub').[76] The letter sent to the ministries

[73] BOA Y. PRK. ZB 3/64, 22 Muharrem 1304 (2/20 Oct. 1886), the letter from the Police Ministry to the Palace containing the spy report written in French – signed by a 'Bonnin' – and its translation into Turkish.
[74] Riedler, 'Wanderarbeiter (*bekar*) im Istanbul', 153–4.
[75] BOA Y. PRK. AZJ 31/54 1312 (day and month unknown 1896).
[76] BOA ZB 334/94 23 Haziran 1325 (6 Jul. 1909).

stated that the excursion organizers and the high school directors were to be warned about those acts and to be told that even though this was a normal practice for foreign subjects, it was inappropriate for Ottoman subjects.

Notwithstanding the particularities of each case, it is plausible to suggest that the Ottoman authorities dealt with regularized and spontaneous events differently. We may assume that the monitoring of events/rituals such as the name day of the Greek king or the Easter ritual and procession which took place every year was well organized and planned ahead and the outcome could almost be predicted depending on previous experience. However, the authorities were obviously aware of the effect of 'the memory of emotional, interpersonal contact during the performance of rituals'[77] and were especially hesitant in allowing particular spontaneous rituals whose emotional dynamics could threaten the silence about the issues of the territorial integrity of the empire. The following example concerns a divine service held for the deceased Greek fighters in Macedonia. Constant moves to expand on the part of Bulgaria, which had become an autonomous principality as a result of the 1878 Berlin Treaty, had initiated a period of armed struggles between the Greek and Bulgarian bands in Macedonia at the turn of the century. In 1906, the Greek opera company *Ellinikon Melodrama* visited Lesvos. During its stay, the news spread that some Greek fighters had been massacred in Aghialon in Bulgaria. A religious service was organized in the Greek church of St Therapon in memory of the deceased. The participation of the *Ellinikon Melodrama* singers in the service enraged the governor of Lesvos Mehmed Bey, who asked the opera company to leave the island.[78]

The next example is illustrative of the supervision of places of entertainment in Istanbul and the control on the spontaneous playing/collective singing of foreign national music. A police report sent on 18 July 1907 to the district governor of Küçük Çekmece stated that the night before, at the tavern of Hacı Mihail in Sakız Ağacı Makriköy (a district near the old city walls of Istanbul), the Greek national anthem entitled the 'Freedom and Joy of Greeks' ('İstiklal ve Bahtiyari-i Yunani' [*sic*] nam Yunan milli marşı') was sung publicly accompanied by the piano, and that nobody present intervened in its singing. Nor did the report fail to mention that the anthem's lyrics were hostile to Islam and to the Ottoman state and were nothing but 'obscene words and wrong accusations' ('güftesi İslamiyet ve Devlet-i Aliyye-i Osmaniye aleyhinde elfaz-ı galizeden ve isnadat-ı leimaneden ibaret olan').[79] Abdülhamid's regime employed Islam and Islamic motifs prominently both as a pillar of the state and as elements in

[77] A. Chaniotis, 'Rituals between norms and emotions: rituals as shared experience and memory', in E. Stavrianopoulou (ed.), *Rituals and Communication in the Graeco-Roman World* (Liege, 2006), 211–38, see 226.
[78] D. Lavrangas, *Apomnimoneumata* (Memoirs) (Athens, n.d.), 177.
[79] BOA ZB 477/58, 5 Temmuz 1323 (18 Jul. 1907).

the symbolic communication between the caliph-sultan and his Muslim subjects.[80] As the phrasing of the report suggests, acts that were considered to threaten the legitimacy of the sultan and the state were readily labelled as anti-Islamic and/or against the moral values of the society.

Censoring the staged plays, spying on the theatre-goers

The urban institutions involved in theatrical censorship in the late Ottoman empire have already been mentioned. In Abdülhamid II's regime surveillance of theatrical performances had taken the form of strict control not only over the contents of the plays, but also the theatres (buildings) and the public as well. Since the 1860s, performances of the Italian, Greek and Armenian (both Ottoman and non-Ottoman subjects) theatre ensembles had become common in the imperial capital. However, in 1905, the Ottoman authorities banned the Greek composer Spyridon Xyndas' opera *O İpopsifios Vouleftis* (The Deputy Candidate) which was to be staged at the Concordia Theatre in Pera by the opera company Ellinikon Melodrama from Greece.[81] According to the director of the opera company, Dionysios Lavrangas, the reason for the censorship was that the deputy candidate in the opera's plot hinted at Prince George who was at that moment candidate for the governorship of Crete.[82] Lavrangas requested the intervention of the Greek consul but the latter said that it was better not to insist. Finally, thanks to the intervention of Fehim Pasha who had been attending the performances of the Melodrama regularly, the ban was lifted. Hence, as this example shows, not only overtly subversive acts against the state and the government but even 'ambiguity' could not be tolerated when it came to the production of meanings which could endanger the legitimacy of Ottoman governance.[83] Actually, this particular incident of banning a play attests more than anything to the sensitivity of the Cretan issue regarding which any publicizing of information or opinion was strictly controlled or silenced by the Ottoman authorities.

The island was effectively detached from the empire by the establishment of an autonomous government in 1898. However, since the 1860s the Cretan issue had provoked emotional response and public criticism against the Porte due to its inability to deal with the insurrections on the island. The disappointment was owing largely to the contrast between the glory of its conquest in collective memory and the present

[80] Deringil, *The Well-protected Domains*, 18.

[81] Lavrangas, *Apomnimoneumata*, 163. Xyndas' opera composed in 1867 is known for its strong social critique, its theme of the dishonesty of politicians and the fact that it was the first melodrama which was composed by a Greek composer based on a Greek libretto.

[82] It is not clear from Lavrangas' memoirs whether the Ottoman authorities thought that it was what the librettist meant or whether they anticipated such an interpretation from the audience.

[83] For a relevant account of how the Soviet authorities problematized and dealt with the issue of polyseme in the 1930s, see J. Plamper, 'Abolishing ambiguity: Soviet censorship practices in the 1930s', *Russian Review*, 60 (2001), 526–44.

humiliation of the Muslim population of the island.[84] In the wake of a serious insurrection in Crete in 1866, the Turkish poet and journalist Namik Kemal wrote an article in the newspaper *Tasvir-i Efkar* which he was editing, criticizing the impertinence of the local Greeks in singing songs in their cafés that had as leitmotiv the extermination of the Turks.[85] At the turn of the century, as the island's situation became more precarious, examples of enhanced surveillance, censorship and control over the Greek subjects of the empire multiplied. On 29 November 1898, the Istanbuliot Greek newspaper *Tahidromos* was closed down temporarily due to its publication of the news that the Russian tsar had donated 200,000 francs to the Cretan Christians.[86] Moreover, the political-separatist stimuli to the Cretan question were easily taken up by the revolutionaries in the wider Ottoman world. In Egypt, 'after one politically charged play on Cretan independence', one spectator, as he was 'moved by the spirit', started a political speech in which he demanded freedom. The speaker was interrupted by the chief of police and was taken away.[87]

Incidents of mid-performance intervention by the police seem not to have been uncommon. In 1902, the Greek musician and folksong collector Georgios Pachtikos staged Euripides' drama *Iphigenia in Tauris* with an amateur theatre group, whose members were from the Greek families of Istanbul, in the hall of Alliance Française. The tragedy was much appreciated and warmly applauded by the audience who demanded its repetition. However, the re-enactment was strictly forbidden and the amateur actors, the director of the theatre group and the composer of the chorals (G. Pachtikos) and the translator of the tragedy (Christos Chatzihristos) were persecuted. Furthermore, the tragedy was reported to Yıldız Palace to be anti-dynastic and anti-Hamidian. After the event, Pachtikos sought to leave for his hometown Bithynia taking with him a photograph of a scene from the drama as a souvenir. However, he was checked by the police at the Haydarpaşa train station, who were startled at the sight of the swords of Orestes and Pylades in the photograph, and consequently confiscated the photograph and arrested the musician.[88]

As mentioned before, the government agents of supervision and the Hamidian spies were especially careful to report situations in which foreign connections were involved. A spy report sent to Yıldız Palace on 29 November 1907 stated that the Greek Orthodox tenants of the three theatres in Beyoğlu (out of four that were found in the district) employed theatre groups from Greece. It continued: 'every night thousands of Greek Orthodox families hurry to those theatres as if they go to church' ('her

[84] Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 25.
[85] *Ibid*., 27.
[86] Demirel, *II. Abdülhamid Döneminde Sansür*, 70.
[87] Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean*, 74. The incident was reported in the daily *Al-Muqattam*, 8 Jul. 1910.
[88] 'Sophocleous Philoctetes', *Mousiki* (Feb. 1912), 38–9.

gece binlerce Rum aileleri kiliseye gider gibi tiyatroya şitaban olmakda').[89] According to the report, most of the plays staged in those theatres were national pieces, and that hence some of them contained sentences against the Ottoman state ('mezkûr tiyatrolarda verilen piyeslerin ekserisi milli parçalardan ibaret olub bazılarında da dolayısıyla Devlet-i ebed-müddet-i Osmaniye aleyhinde cümlelere tesadüf edildiği'). Interestingly but not so unexpectedly, the report stated further: 'And particularly one of them, a nasty one from the point of view of public morality and decency' ('ahlak ü adab-i umumiye nokta-i nazarınca gayetle çirkin add edilen piyeslerden') also displayed the erstwhile capture of Crete by the Ottoman state ('kezalik vaktiyle Girid'in Devlet-i Aliyye tarafından suret-i istilası da mevzi-i temaşa kılınmakda').[90] Hence, the Palace was informed about the enthusiasm of the local Greeks living in Pera for theatrical plays with national themes such as the capture of Crete by the Ottomans. In addition, the wording of the report reveals that the theme of potential political sedition easily merged with threats to the public moral order.

Conclusion

In late Ottoman Istanbul, as in most of the modernizing cities of the nineteenth century, urban institutions played a crucial role in the creation of new platforms for social communication and entertainment. City-planning commissions and municipalities supported and literally opened up spaces like theatre buildings and parks for theatrical performances and concerts. The regime of Sultan Abdülhamid II used these modern means of communication, the newly created spaces and places, and in general the public sphere, in order to enhance a particular image of the sultan and his administration. The government tried to make sure that the official ritual and representation, and not any other rival foreign state or a collective/individual voluntary initiative, was visible and dominant in the open air public spaces of the imperial city. Pursuing a delicate, balancing foreign policy against the Great Powers, the sultan was careful about keeping seditious and provocative public discourse under control, especially regarding precarious regions such as Eastern Rumelia, Macedonia and Crete, etc. Thus, in the Hamidian era, concomitant with the increased institutionalization of the surveillance methods, the parks, streets, entertainment places and private houses came under the strict gaze of the state authorities.

Based on petitions and police and spy reports on the theatrical and musical venues and the entertainment places of the Greeks of Istanbul,

[89] BOA Y. PRK. AZJ 53/48 23 Şevval 1325 (29 Nov. 1907).

[90] For instance, the British authorities in post-Rebellion India believed the two were linked and posed extreme measures of clamping down on 'obscene' publications. See C.A. Bayly, *Empire and information. Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge, 1996), 340.

the largest non-Muslim population of the city, this article has discussed the state surveillance and censorship of music and popular entertainment in late Ottoman Istanbul within the larger framework of modern urban developments, in view of issues such as the growth of the public sphere, the legitimation crisis of the state and the management of rival national symbols. It has also been shown that, given the particular Islamism of the Hamidian era, in the discourse of the state and government agents, seditious acts were articulated as a threat as much to the legitimacy of the state as to the traditional moral values of the society.