

## **Public People. Temporary Labor Migrants in Nineteenth Century Istanbul**

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This paper examines public spheres and public spaces in Ottoman Istanbul from a special vantage point. By showing how marginalized temporary labor migrants (*bekar*) were integrated into city life, this paper aims to develop a better understanding of meanings of »public« in Ottoman Istanbul. With this approach I respond to the recurring demand of historians to extend research on the public sphere beyond the existing research on bourgeois publics of Western Europe. On account of this critique in European historiography, the examination of the historical development of *the* public has given way to an envisioning of multiple publics, which were differentiated according to class and gender (Eley 1992).

In a similar vein, research about the public sphere in non-European societies was informed by an attempt to leave behind this monolithic concept of the Western bourgeois public. Lately, different forms of traditional Muslim publics have been in the focus of this research. Most of these publics had a strong affinity with religion, because they were organized by *ulema* (Islamic religious scholars), but also by more popular and heterodox *sufi* movements. Institutional underpinnings of traditional public spheres in Muslim organizations such as *waqf* (endowment) or the notion of Islamic law and community in general have been singled out (Hoexter/Eisenstadt/Levtzion 2002). However, secular institutions like trade and craft guilds as well as coffeehouses are relevant in this discussion, too (Arjomand 2004).

First I will examine how labor migrants were connected to traditional publics and their supporting institutions. On a basic level the status of migrants and the spaces they were allowed to occupy in Istanbul was defined by public morals and state law. Private and public spaces inform debates concerning the concept of the »Islamic city« in which the notion of private and public has been singled out – often polemically – as one of the key features setting European cities apart from Muslim cities. With reference to this debate, temporary migrants offer an example which shows the layering of various forms of public and private spaces in nineteenth century Istanbul. On an institutional level, trade guilds were charged with the task of integrating migrants into the Ottoman labor market. Whether guilds in Istanbul could be conceived as voluntary public associations that, like in Europe, formed the nucleus of a civil society has similarly been a recurring topic in the debates on the Islamic city (Gerber 2000).

The second part of the paper focuses on the emergence of new public spheres and public spaces in Istanbul during the second half of the nineteenth century. The emergence of these spaces were part of a general transformation Istanbul and Ottoman society, in which migration was an important factor in the acceleration of this transformation. In the second half of the nineteenth century we encounter new publics in the form of philanthropic societies, places like cafés and theatres, and through the availability of print products such as newspapers and books. In general these were publics of an emerging bourgeoisie, but as a result of the spreading nationalisms, these spaces also offered an opportunity for integration of non-bourgeois groups such temporary migrants.

In my analysis of factors responsible for the integration of workers into the public sphere and public spaces of nineteenth century Istanbul different understandings of terminologies relating to the private/public dichotomy are mixed deliberately, because, though overlapping and contradicting, they are nonetheless thematically linked. The two main forms of »public« in this context are the political-deliberative public as well as a public understood as a sphere of sociability (Weintraub 1997). It is my aim to show how migrant workers belonged to »public Istanbul« in many different meanings of the word public and, in turn, to analyze their position in a corresponding »private Istanbul«. Hopefully, this will lead to a more detailed picture of public spheres and public spaces in the Ottoman capital and will also help to understand temporary labor migration in the Ottoman Empire beyond a purely functional economic explanation.

## **Labor migration in the Ottoman Empire**

Labor migration is an old phenomenon in the Ottoman world that, according to some, can be traced back to Byzantine times. Connecting underdeveloped areas with population surpluses to more developed areas suffering from a scarcity of labor is the economic rationale behind labor migration. In order to maintain their economic power, and due to their poor hygiene conditions and recurring epidemics, cities were in constant need of population replenishment; migrants played an important role in maintaining both population and power. Temporary migration – a form of migration in which migrants (usually male) do not settle permanently in the place they work – was and still is a special arrangement offering additional benefits to both migrant as well as receiving cities. The arrival of temporary migrants allowed cities to grow with less strain on their natural resources since the reproduction of the workforce remained located in the mostly rural home regions of the workers and their families. The temporary worker, on the other hand, could profit from the difference between the low cost of living in the village and the high wages offered by city jobs.

Not just men, but also young girls and women came to Istanbul from the countryside to work as servants and maids. As women frequently disappeared into the privacy of the households they were serving, little information is available regarding the particularities and patterns of female labor migration.

In nineteenth century Ottoman cities, this temporary labor migration worked much in the same way as in Europe where historical forms of temporary and seasonal migration have been studied much more intensively (Lucassen 1987; Moch 1992). Although the picture is incomplete, scholars have described temporary labor migration in the Balkans and Anatolia at different times from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century (Faroqhi 1984; Palairat 1987; Kirli 2001; Ginio 2002; Riedler 2008). The Ottoman capital, Istanbul, being the largest of all Ottoman cities and a world city, was particularly dependent on workers from outside. According to population counts around 1850 more than 75,000 temporary labor migrants worked in Istanbul amounting to more than 35% of the city's male population at the time (Karpat 1985; Behar 1996).

Jobs requiring little training were typically filled by male temporary workers. Boatmen, shuttling goods and people from one part of the city to the other, porters distributing goods to the markets, water carriers who distributed drinking water from the public fountains to private households, or bakers and butchers who supplied the city with bread and meat are just a few examples of the jobs migrants in Istanbul occupied. These

professions, usually part of a guild, were critical to the upkeep of the city's infrastructure and were therefore partially controlled by the government. Likewise migrants worked as street vendors and peddlers that also played a crucial role in distributing foodstuff to the residential quarters of the city, but were less supervised.

In principle, these migrants were temporary, i.e., they were no permanent residents of the city. However, unlike seasonal workers in agricultural jobs rowers, porters or street vendors sometimes stayed for several years in Istanbul, before returning to their families in the countryside, only to set out again soon after they arrived. These arrangements as well as their precarious economic condition made them live a life in between the city where they worked and their homes where their families stayed.

Istanbul's authorities insisted on the temporary status of the city's migrant workers. Separation from the city's permanent inhabitants formed the official principle for their »integration«. It should be added, however, that it is difficult to assess if and how this separation was enforced. Temporary workers were not considered normal inhabitants, but strangers in the city. Economic factors coupled with moral and legal norms led to the specific form of life labor migrants experienced, also determining their use of public and private spaces in the city.

The Ottoman government prescribed and sometimes enforced separation of temporary workers from the city's population in order to prevent migrants from becoming permanent inhabitants of Istanbul. After Istanbul had been conquered by the Ottomans, it became the largest city in the Empire and perhaps in Europe. The city's growth coupled with its function as capital, called for additional labor. However, migration above a certain level that could not be controlled was unwanted, because the authorities felt unable to provision a rising city population. Fearing a loss of taxpayers and production capacity in the countryside, the Ottoman government repeatedly evicted workers or tried to prevent migration to the capital in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Aktepe 1958). In an effort to control labor migrant traffic in and out of the city, and make it impossible for labor migrants and their families who often followed closely behind settle permanently in the city internal passports (*mürur tezkeresi*) were introduced at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

One of the clearest calls to prevent migration to the capital and control temporary workers was formulated in 1826, the year when the Janissary Corps was abolished by the sultan. The Janissaries were the city's police force and had also controlled Istanbul's urban economy, collecting dues and protection-money not sanctioned by the government. Thus

new arrangements for the city's security and the regulation of its economy had to be taken by the government. One important step was the re-organization of the Market Inspection Office. Since the fifteenth century, the market-inspector (*Ihtisab Ağası, Muhtesib*) had been part of Istanbul's urban government and was not only responsible for collecting taxes and controlling prices, market weights and measures, but it was also his duty to supervise public morals. In the nineteenth century the Ottoman government discontinued farming out this office and thirty years later it evolved into Istanbul's head of administration (*sehremini*).

A regulation issued in 1826 reorganizing the Market Inspection Office (*İhtisab Ağalığı Nizamnamesi*) (Ergin 1995: I, 328-41), maintained the market-inspector's traditional tasks, but stressed the necessity of supervising migration as well as the different types of temporary workers. To regain lost control over labor migration in the early nineteenth century, the government's new regulations required every worker to register at checkpoints upon entry to the city. Workers were then forced to stay in four supervised inns (*han*) in the bazaar-area of the inner city or in similar institutions in the Galata, Üsküdar or Eyüp suburbs before being handed over to the worker's respective guilds. The new regulations illustrate the governments' consciousness of urban geographies as it tried to abolish previously uncontrolled areas in the city, such as the Sarâchane saddler bazaar (Ergin 1995: I, 335-6).

The regulation of 1826 is a good example for the traditional Islamic understanding of public order (*hisbe, ihtisab*). For the Ottoman government public order meant maintaining the city's security and economy. In practice, the government was responsible for provisioning the city with staples such as grain, bread and meat and controlling its prices (*narh*). Additionally, the maintenance of public order also had religious implications such as the surveillance of the inhabitant's moral conduct (Ak-gündüz 2005).

As Michael Cook (2000: 469) notes, *hisbe* is an important measure for the demarcation of public and private spheres in Muslim societies. *Hisbe* is exercised in the public sphere – the sphere in which the government is allowed and obliged to enforce »good order« according to the principle of »commanding right and forbidding wrong«, as it has been called in classical Islamic discourse. In Ottoman Istanbul to a large degree public space identical with the economic sphere of the city, in spatial terms the bazaar area, as the concrete tasks of the office responsible for public order, the *muhtesib/İhtisab ağası*, suggests. The next sections of this paper will deal more extensively with the spatial implications of public and private in Ottoman Istanbul in the context of the debate on

the »Islamic city«. Recapitulating this debate will help to understand the normative nature of the separation and surveillance of labor migrants.

### **Private and public in the »Islamic city«**

For quite some time the appearance and function of cities in Muslim societies has attracted scholarly attention and, in older scholarship, has led to the construction of the so-called »Islamic city« model. Since the 1960s this model has increasingly been criticized on account of its orientalist assumptions and its rigidity. Critics pointed out that the traits of the »Islamic city« were generalized characteristics of cities in the Maghreb while other significant cities in other Muslim countries were overlooked. Moreover, the model saw religious norms as the predominant factor in shaping cities in Islamicate societies, while many other urban characteristics could be explained with reference to secular factors such as geography and technology. Several critics rejected the term »Islamic city« and instead attempted to introduce wider and supposedly more neutral descriptions such as »traditional« or »oriental« city or »city in dar al-Islam« (Hourani 1970; Wirth 1975; Abu-Lughod 1987).

Despite this critique, revisionist literature also describes common structural elements found in cities in Muslim societies, which is called their »deep structure«. One of these elements is the division between private and public spaces. On opposing ends of the public and private spectrum are bazaars (public) and residential quarters (private) – a dichotomy that traditionally has been interpreted as a strict separation between the two spheres. In between, however, there are multiple zones of semi-private and semi-public spaces like courtyards, cul-de-sacs and small streets in residential quarters that question this separation between public and private. Furthermore, the divisions between public and private could switch according to time of day and use, so that a very complex pattern developed that defied a static spatial division of the public and the private. The main factor causing this deep structure was the gender divisions in Muslim societies. Female/private spaces and male/public spaces were segregated, but linked through social constructions of in-between spaces that assisted cities to function more smoothly (Abu-Lughod 1980).

After Istanbul became the capital of the Ottoman Empire, it shared many features with other cities in the Muslim Middle East. One of these features was the function and composition of the city's neighborhoods (*mahalle*). The *mahalle* was not only an important administrative unit, but also provided a framework for social interaction and the traditional

communitarian lifestyle of the city's residents. In Istanbul the *mahalle* usually comprised a few hundred houses, grouped around a mosque, church, or synagogue and a public bath. Its population was not socially stratified; poor and rich inhabitants shared the same space. The *mahalle* was a small community with strong solidarities and code of honor that had to be protected against outsiders. The imam of the local mosque functioned as the middle-man between government and population. In the early nineteenth century a secular official (*muhtar*) replaced the imam in this function (Duben/Behar 1991: 29-35).

During certain periods, the organization of the Istanbul neighborhoods showed similarities to neighborhoods in the cities of the Maghreb that mainly inspired the »Islamic city« model presented above. One was the common origin of people living in the same quarter. After the conquest of Constantinople, people from various regions of the Empire were given plots to settle in the city. Often the names given to new quarters gave away the settlers' origins as for example, in the case of Aksaray, Çarşamba and Balat. Another example of such a similarity is the seclusion and self-sufficiency of quarters. At the end of the sixteenth century, some Istanbul neighborhoods were furnished with gates that were supposed to be locked by night. In general, however, these similarities were vanishing from the sixteenth century onwards. Istanbul's quarters, unlike those in some other Muslim cities were not autonomous or self-sufficient entities that could seal themselves off from the city proper and exist independently. Moreover, solidarities between inhabitants that did rely on external factors such as origin lost their predominant influence on shaping the settlement patterns in the city. To a certain degree this is also true for religion. Although Istanbul neighborhoods were usually formed along religious rather than along social lines there are many examples of areas with a religiously mixed population (Kreiser 1974; İşin 1995: 39-40; Behar 2003: 3-10).

Literature on urban structure in Muslim societies has attributed neighborhoods with »private« functions in contrast to the »public« character of the market. However, also inside the neighborhoods being the basic building blocks of the city there existed public space. During the sixteenth century the coffeehouse became one of the main places where the public of the *mahalle* congregated. It coexisted with and integrated the public functions of the mosque and, to a lesser degree, public baths (*hamam*). In the coffeehouse the men could meet and discuss politics and other matters of local concern; coffeehouses were places in which public opinion was expressed. For men the coffeehouse functioned as the extended public part of their home, the *selamlık*, where they could welcome visitors. Especially for poorer inhabitants the coffeehouse as a

*selamlı* was particularly important, since their homes were too small to allow the functional differentiation into female/private and male/public spaces (Hattox 1985: 122-30; Georgeon 1997: 40-45; Kirli 2004).

While in the coffeehouse the aspect of public as sociability – the open sociability of men in contrast to the hidden sociability of women who could meet friends at home – was dominant, other institutions mediated between *mahalle*-society and state. Many Istanbul neighborhoods established foundations to collect municipal taxes (*avarız*) from the quarter's inhabitants. Through these local foundations, the neighborhood was connected to one of the most important institutions of the traditional public sphere in Muslim societies, the *waqf/vakif*. As has been noted, such foundations provided the framework for citizens to express and negotiate their interests relatively unimpeded by the state also on a larger and less local scale (Gerber 2002: 75-77).

As strangers to the city, at least in theory, temporary migrants had to be kept away from the »private« world of the *mahalle* and therefore also had limited access to its relatively closed publics. It is telling labor migrants were called *bekar* in Turkish, a word that originally meant »without a (proper) job«, but in the course of time became to mean »bachelor«. This shift points to the public image of migrant workers who were perceived as unattached – although many migrants had their own families in their villages – and thus were perceived as potentially threatening to the family values of the *mahalle*.

The dwelling places of migrants, inns (*han*) or bachelor rooms (*bekar odaları*), were a world almost opposite and separated from that of the neighborhood. The *han*, usually a rectangular two-storey building in which cell-like rooms were arranged around a large courtyard, was a multifunctional building that was used as accommodation for strangers in the Ottoman city such as travelers and merchants, but could also contain shops and workshops. These large buildings were located in the bazaar area of cities, but sometimes also near the city gates. Besides offering shelter at night it also allowed strangers to obtain legal residence during their visit to the city. The *han* acted as an official address that was valid for business transactions; the inn-keeper was the residents' guarantor (*kefil*), and was responsible for their security, their belongings, and generally supervised the *han*, too. Functionally speaking, the *han* served as the travelers' »homes« and was a private enclave within the public space of the bazaar where they were usually situated. For the individual, however, there was little privacy or intimacy to be found in a *han*. European visitors have described them as places where !! »everything was done everywhere«; eating, sleeping, washing, praying etc. was performed with or close to the other inhabitants of the inn. These de-

scriptions show differing definitions of privacy that depended on the social and cultural origin of the observers (Tamdoğan-Abel 1997).

Not only merchants and travelers lived in inns during their visits to the city, but also labor migrants could choose a *han* as their residence. In the case of Istanbul such a migrants' *han* was usually not one of the prestigious big buildings in the city centre that have survived until today, but a smaller, less impressive structure. Usually migrant workers of the same profession lived together in one *han*. Most of them were not in the business district around the Grand Bazaar, but in Fatih, Üsküdar and Tophane. Boatmen and day-laborers typically resided on the outskirts of town. An eye-witness account of the life in two such inns or »rooms« (*oda*) from a British consul describes the following:

»1. There are 150 lodgers [in total]. In a room, 12 feet by 15 feet, and 12 feet height, lodge 5 men. The rent of a room is 10s. a month. It contains scarcely anything beyond bedding-quilts and three small boxes. Within the oda is a coffee-house, where pipes, coffee, and raki are to be found, and to which a barber is attached. There is likewise a shop where cabbages, onions, and lemons are sold, as well as bread, candles, and charcoal. The entire building is of wood, 2. The oda contains the means of lodging 350 persons. The master is a Turk. Of 36 rooms 29 are inhabited by Armenians and 7 by Mussulmans. The rooms, all of wood, are on two storeys. In the courtyard vines grow. There is in the centre a large tank. The oda contains a coffee-house and a kitchen. The lodgers have one meal a day, in the evening. The food now being prepared is soup, with pieces of meat in it, dolmas (leaves of cabbage stuffed), and beans. A quantity of cherries is being reduced to syrup.« (Watson 1869)

However, more often, temporary workers could be found in smaller rooms, so-called *bekar odaları*. In order to save money, many labor migrants lived in the rooms above their work-places, shops and workshops. Many workshops were concentrated in certain areas of the city, as where the *bekar odaları*. Evliya's seventeenth century description of Istanbul recalls numerous examples of such living and working quarters, in which the shoemakers of the central bazaar are perhaps most famous for their unruly population of young men (*Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*: II, 123-4 and V, 394). Like the inns, the *bekar odaları* were controlled by the police and each of them was required to have a headman (*odabaşı*) responsible for the inhabitants. The rooms were plain and contained little furniture, reflecting the low economic status of the labor migrants who lived in them, as well as the fact that the migrants were not at home in the city. Descriptions of such places like the following of an Armenian baker are rare.

»The room that we had taken was a dry place adjacent to the storage room for the flour. In front of the window a bench [spanned the length of the wall.] [...] There was not even a chair because we had no time to sit down anyway. Every night we spread out our beds on the floor and lay down. And every morning we gathered them together again. Well, the bishop [a frequent visitor] knew this and even was used to the emptiness of the room.« (Mintzuri 1993: 71)

These rooms potentially disturbed the urban order that divided the city into residential and business areas, its private and public spaces. The aforementioned regulation of 1826 that envisioned centralized lodging for all labor migrants explicitly addressed this problem. It banned rowers and porters from living in rooms »here and there«. Instead they were ordered to take up residence in inns assigned to them and stay there when not working. Likewise, landlords were instructed not to rent their rooms to people from abroad (Ergin 1995: I, 332).

The regulation of 1826 made an interesting exception to this rule regarding water-carriers (*saka*). With the permission of the neighborhood's imam, water-carriers were allowed to stay overnight in residential districts to be able to deliver the water on demand, and so they could be on site quickly in the case of fire. This exceptional and sometimes venerated status of the water-carriers was confirmed by a European traveler who came to Istanbul later in the nineteenth century (Ergin 1995: I, 335; White 1846: II, 16-19).

The separation of the residential population from the temporary migrants remained an ideal, and explains the standard »Bekar Sokağı«, a Bachelor Street, many Istanbul neighborhoods contained. In later censuses many labor migrants were registered in residential quarters outside the central bazaar area (Duben/Behar 1991, 29-30). Debates over the uses of urban space also seemed to occur frequently. In the early nineteenth century complaints about *bekar odaları* were handled by the *kadi* (Ertuğ 2006: 146), but later the police and city authorities were responsible. A case in 1905 shows that even a *han* in a busy quarter like Akasaray could be regarded as unsuitable to house labor migrants on account of its location not only on the edge of a Muslim quarter, but also in the vicinity of a mosque and a sufi lodge (*dergah*). In one case a group of women in Beyoğlu complained to the authorities, because they felt disturbed by *bekar odaları* in their neighborhood. The inhabitants were expelled and a warning given to the owners of the *bekar odaları*. Additionally, the authorities considered the erection of a wall to separate the *bekar odaları* from the other houses (BOA: ZB 375-112, 11 Şubat 1322 and A.MKT.MVL 47-50, 26 M 1268).

All this shows that the separation of temporary workers from permanent residents was managed on a finer scale than the spatial order assumed by the model of the »Islamic city« or the Ottoman authorities in the regulations discussed above. Research on Istanbul's micro-level spatial structure reveals the internal division of neighborhoods into residential and business zones. In the nineteenth century Istanbul had to absorb all kinds of newcomers, such as refugees and other immigrants, apart from temporary migrants. Moreover, many temporary migrants became permanent inhabitants by either marrying into Istanbul families or bringing their families from the country to the city. The former was the only legal way to settle permanently in the capital and there seems to have been a market for marriage brokers and match makers (Koçu 2002: 179-80).

Bringing a family from the country to the city was, despite its illegality, common and, as it turns out, at the end of the nineteenth century, it was not difficult to obtain the necessary papers to legalize one's stay. Usually newcomers to the city relied on networks consisting of other people from their region who had already settled in Istanbul. Through these networks migrants to the city could find shelter and work in the informal sector. In such networks, not surprisingly, owners of coffee-houses played a crucial role in acting as guarantors for migrants who wanted to settle in the city (Behar 2003: 95-129). Although these coffee-houses were set apart from the usual *mahalle*-coffeehouses, they nonetheless served similar functions. For example, particular coffeehouses in Istanbul's business-district were known to be frequented by people from certain regions to exchange news, transact business, or to rent a room while they were in the city (Georgeon 1997: 51). Many conversations in these places were concerned with the situation in home provinces, as spy reports from the 1840s reveal. The behavior of officials like governors and tax collectors in the provinces was a favorite topic of discussion. Thus also the coffee-houses of migrant communities were places of public political opinion (Kırlı 2004: 89-90).

In some cases members of labor migrant networks also organized themselves politically to react to the conditions in their home provinces. In 1846 a group of laundry men from Nevşehir, a town in Cappadocia, petitioned the Ottoman government to exempt them from paying their taxes, due to the bad harvest in their home region. Petition writing was as an important political activity in the traditional public sphere (Quaataert 1994: 24-25).

## From traditional to new publics

Traditional forms of public in Istanbul were anchored in city neighborhoods defined by the extent their inhabitants participated in social activities that centered around the mosque (or church or synagogue) and the coffee-house. Labor migrants were not supposed to inhabit these publics on account of their separation from the residential population of the capital. Nonetheless, despite government precautions, there seem to have been plenty of opportunities for migrants to settle in the city. Usually their entry into the neighborhoods was facilitated by regional networks that also assisted migrants, even those who did not intend to settle, to integrate into city life. Often such regional networks operated in the framework the established guild-system as well as in the informal labor-market.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Istanbul saw the development of new public spheres and spaces beyond the traditional ones that were associated with *mahalle* and religious life. They were – sometimes unintended – effects of the official modernization policies or part of global trends the Empire was subject to. A developing bourgeoisie, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, adapted European models and practices of sociability which they enacted in their city. The resulting publics were open to various degrees of participation. While, for example, mason lodges were somewhat elitist establishments, participation in voluntary associations, newspaper reading, visiting the new-style cafés, or the attending the theatre included a wider cross-section of inhabitants disregarding ethnic and religious boundaries. Together with these new forms of sociability, new political nationalist publics also came into being which often countered bourgeois cosmopolitanism. The concluding paragraph of this essay will assess the position of temporary workers in this field of non-traditional publics.

First by the government and later on a private basis newspapers were one of the most palpable innovations in Empire's public sphere. Despite severe censorship in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman capital maintained a large and varied press. A special journalistic genre called »City Letters« (*sehir mektublari*) popular at this time, is particularly relevant to this paper, as these letters describe many of emerging public places such as streets, parks, and cafés generating a public image of this new Istanbul. The journalists' subjective descriptions contained in the City Letters of the particularities of city life, hinting at curiosities, grievances and nuisances, enabled the readers to envision themselves as common inhabitants of the city. The organizing principle of these letters was the idea of a stroll through the city and

people and places mentioned or left out reinvented the city according to the tastes and needs of the newspaper audience (Bartolovich 2000).

These letters were intended for the newspaper reading male inhabitant, which usually did not include labor migrants, most of whom were illiterate. Migrant stories, perspectives and interests were similarly neglected. If they were mentioned, migrants were considered to spoil the imagined order of the city. A column by Basiretçi Ali Efendi, one of the first journalists who regularly used this genre in his newspaper from 1871 to 1878, demonstrates how migrants were omitted from the narration. In the rare cases that working class people were written about, they were portrayed as either cheating on other citizens, molesting women, or were associated with contagious diseases. Dirty conditions in the inns in which people were »stacked like firewood« were a common subject of complaint. These conditions were no longer reprimanded in the moral language of court chroniclers like Cevdet or Şanizade in the first half of the nineteenth century, but it seems that the journalist neglected to call for a betterment of their lot (Basiretçi Ali 2001: 24, 41, 76, 129, 180, 218).

One of the most prominent columns written by the most famous letter-writer Ahmed Rasim maintains a lighter tone, but is primarily occupied with bourgeois problems and public places like parks and restaurants. The tendency to overlook Istanbul's working class in descriptions of the city makes it difficult to assess in how far they really participated in various new public spheres and places. A scarcity of self descriptions written by the workers themselves reinforces this problem. The biographical account of Hagop Mintzuri, mentioned previously, an Armenian who came to Istanbul from Eastern Anatolia just before the turn of the century to work with his father and uncles in a bakery in Beşiktaş, but also to attend school in the capital, therefore is a very important source of information. His stories relate much of the precarious integration of the labor migrants in the city and their access to old and new publics and public places.

In general, Mintzuri's account conveys the feeling of dissimilarity between migrant workers and Istanbul residents. These dissimilarities were not limited to status, but were also defined by tastes, clothes, and language. Mintzuri's ventures into the residential quarters where he delivered bread allowed him observe the strict rules of privacy relating to the female sphere of homes to which strangers were not permitted (Mintzuri 1993: 22-25). At the same time his account provides an insight into the networks that facilitated the migrants' survival in the city. Here, the most important binding element is neither religious nor ethnic belonging, but geographical origin, *hemşehrilik*. Turkish, Armenian and

Kurdish migrants from the east in the milieu of small shopkeepers and craftsmen assisted each other with their business, as described by Mintzuri. It seems that migrants from different religious and ethnic backgrounds formed, to a certain degree, a common public that maintained strong relations to the home provinces.

According to Mintzuri's account, factors preventing labor migrants' participation in modern city life were primarily of economic nature. Putting aside money even to pay for the horse drawn tram was avoided in order to save. Moreover, regarding other public spaces a serious cultural barrier seems impacted their use by migrants. A Sunday visit to the Bomonti beer-garden is cut short, because the drink differs from the author's usual diet. But even more traditional products like olive oil are inedible to the people from the east – an experience also familiar to other Turkish immigrants as related by the Turkish author Aziz Nesin in his autobiography (Mintzuri 1993: 20-25; Nesin 1966: I, 56-58).

This almost natural exclusion of migrants due to class and culture could nevertheless be overcome due to a strong affinity modern public spheres maintained to nationalism. In their political understanding, publics promised the equality to their participants. To the degree that such publics focused on and tried to define ethnic-national groups they offered means of integration even for poor newcomers. Flourishing philanthropic societies offering schooling and material help to various members of society provided the main vehicle for this integration. Once again, Mintzuri, one of the few migrants who could read and write, illustrates this mechanism in the context of the Armenian community. Before entering Robert College he attended the Getronagan School in Galata which also was attended by many other boys whose fathers worked in Istanbul as inn keepers (*hancı*), caretakers (*kapıcı*), or porters (Mintzuri 1993: 81). The school was run by the established Gregorian community of Istanbul and certainly had no overt nationalistic goals. However, it had to react to attempts by, on the one hand, Protestant missionaries and, on the other hand, nationalist Armenian groups to win the support of migrants for their organizations.

This new generation of pupils was able to participate in literary culture like Mintzuri did, who discovered in particular Armenian and French literature. The main place of this emerging culture was the reading room (*kiraathane*), yet another evolution of the coffeehouse. Here one could read newspapers or books, discuss politics or other topics, sometimes listen to lectures, and have a cup of coffee and a smoke. In principle, these establishments where open to anyone who could read; because they offered free papers the reading rooms could be also frequented by people who could not afford to buy a paper. It is an interest-

ing fact that the first reading room in Istanbul, Serafim Efendi's Kiraathane-i Osmani, had, on its top floor, a residence for Armenian labor migrants. Whether or not they also frequented the lower floors, however, is unknown (Georgeon 1997: 66-70).

In the late nineteenth century, Greek Orthodox voluntary associations multiplied at such speed that this phenomenon was referred to as »club-mania«. Some of these associations had philanthropic goals that also included assisting Greek migrants in Istanbul and in their home regions. Like in the case of the Armenians, education offered the chance of social advancement including the teaching of a »proper form« of Greek to inhabitants of distant and rural parts of the Empire like Cappadocia or the Pontos. In the public spheres these associations created Hellenic nationalism flourished, although in most cases their principal aim remained philanthropic (Kitromilides 1989: 168-72).

The nationalization of these publics was by no means inevitable as it has sometimes been portrayed. The late Ottoman state, well aware of the possible sedentary effects philanthropy and education might have upon its non-Muslim subjects, tried to create an imperial public as a counter-weight. By tolerating certain philanthropic associations and launching donation campaigns for patriotic goals the state tried to expand its legitimacy and create a positive image of the Sultan. In the long run, however, the imperial aims of this policy and consideration of different publics – among these a Muslim public, which was especially dear to the Sultan – were in conflict with each other. Turkish intellectuals began to form a counter-public to the official imperial discourse. It was not until after the Young Turk Revolution in 1908, however, that this group was able to shed its marginal status (Özbek 2005).

Only at the beginning of the twentieth century the first examples of how workers and their organizations were drawn into nationalist politics appear. In the struggles with the foreign companies who operated the new harbor facilities in Istanbul, the porters' and rowers' guilds found themselves in opposition to their government that had conceded to the foreign companies. The porters' and rowers' guilds became natural allies of the Young Turks who, after the revolution of 1908, tacitly supported them against the Port Company in a dispute over port control, employment rights and pay. The guilds, at the same time, were instrumental in bringing the boycott against Austrian goods to a success (Quataert 1983: 95-120).

Only further research can show if there were other examples of how labor migrants were integrated into the nascent Turkish national public and how they were later integrated in the public of the Turkish Republic. Apart from classical labor organizations, voluntary organizations

founded by labor migrants like the so-called *hemşehri örgütleri* began to emerge in the 1940s. In the present day, thousands of these organizations exist (Hersant/Toumarkine 2005). These voluntary organizations created public spheres and spaces for migrants under the particular economic and political conditions of Republican Turkey. If and how these organizations evolved from the informal networks of Ottoman times would offer an interesting vantage point of the evolution of public spheres from Empire to nation state.

## Conclusion

This paper examined temporary labor migrants, the publics they formed as well as their relation to other publics in Ottoman Istanbul. They are an example of a non-bourgeois and non-elite group in a non-European setting. Under »public«, I mainly understand a sphere and space of sociability. Such sociabilities, the popular culture that gave shape to them as well as emerging plebeian publics (Medick 1982) have not only been a field of historical research in Europe, but in the Ottoman context inquiries have also been made into this thematic field (Faroqhi 1995; Geor-geon/Dumont 1997) without, however, consideration of temporary migrants.

Family and work are the two basic factors that conditioned urban life styles of non-elites, be it in early modern Europe be it in the Ottoman Empire. These were the factors that also had an impact on popular culture, sociabilities and its public spheres and spaces. In the case of the Ottoman city, the sphere of the family was the *mahalle* which therefore acquired the quality of a private space vis-à-vis the whole city. The life worlds of the *mahalle* and that of the temporary migrants in the city were in opposition with one another. On account of their status as single males, at least in theory, labor migrants had little access to the world of family of the ordinary city dweller. City authorities tried to police the borders between the different spheres of the city according to the status of their inhabitants. The only »home« and thus privacy these migrants were allowed in the city were the inns, which paradoxically were situated in or near public bazaars. While the private life of temporary migrants lacked intimacy, whether their lifestyle was altogether different from the situation of non-elite Istanbulites, remains questionable. It has been claimed that the notion of »intimacy« gained popularity among urban populations in the Ottoman Empire from the eighteenth century onwards (Faroqhi 1995, 311-2). However, its form and manifestation according to class and social status must be determined in greater detail.

In addition to its overall »private« function, the *mahalle* allocated special places for male sociability and its publics, the most important being the coffee-house. Access to these male publics by labor migrants was also restricted. Instead they had places, often coffee-houses, of their own in which extended publics from their home regions formed. These publics were expressions of the migrants' networks on which their survival in the city was dependent. If there were other places in Ottoman Istanbul where migrant publics formed, remains another question for further research. Investigating if and how labor migrants used marginal and peripheral public spaces in Ottoman Istanbul (cf. Alanyali Aral and Bas Bunter in this volume) could yield interesting results.

While the family formed one important element of urban life worlds, work was a second important conditioning factor. For migrants, work assisted their integration into the urban society providing them an opportunity to earn a living and the right to stay in the city. Trade guilds that were supposed to control the temporary workers also offered their members a public sphere, however little is known about the nature of this public. More information about the relationships between temporary workers and guilds in urban settings is needed. It is an ongoing debate as to the extent guilds were voluntary organizations that represented the interests of their members or whether they have to be regarded as instruments of the government used to control economy and society. This question of guild-migrant relations, however, only concerns a certain proportion of temporary labor migrants who worked in one of the organized and officially sanctioned sectors. Others who worked in the informal economy had to find their own ways of integration into the labor market.

Finally, during the nineteenth century process of modernization in the Ottoman capital, increasingly expressions of a new kind of sociability emerged in public spheres and places. Many of these such as theatres and newspapers were formed and frequented by a new type of urban bourgeoisie that *prima facie* excluded non-elite groups. However, increasingly the public could now be understood in the sense of political deliberative publics that became part of the process of the formation of nations and nationalisms (Eley 1992). Armenian and Greek temporary labor migrants were especially involved in these processes; through new publics they were recruited to communities that increasingly began to resemble nations. Whether Muslim labor migrants also experienced and drove such a process remains, still, and open question.

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