



ARTICLE

The Issue of Drugs, the Industrial Situation, and Psychiatric Debates in Interwar Turkey

Elife Biçer-Deveci 

Abstract

This article explores the multidimensional issue of drug policy in Turkey during the interwar era and its intersection with economic policy, public health concerns, and psychiatric discourse. As one of the world's leading producers of opium, Turkey resisted international opium control conventions until the 1930s, viewing them as a means of Western economic domination. Parallel to this, domestic public debates increasingly framed addiction in medical terms, through the lenses of eugenics, nationalism, and racialized rhetoric. The article highlights the pivotal role of the psychiatrist Mazhar Osman in shaping these discourses, particularly through his reports to the League of Nations. In these reports, Osman portrayed addiction as a symptom of moral decay and presented Turkey's repressive minority policies as a success in combatting the illegal drug trade. Drawing on archival materials, including government documents, medical literature, and contemporary newspapers, this study argues that Turkey's opposition to international drug conventions was rooted not only in economic self-interest, but also in broader struggles over national sovereignty, modernity and the racialized construction of addiction as a social threat.

Introduction¹

In 1931, as Turkish delegates refused to sign the League of Nations Opium Convention, the newspaper *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* declared: “Turkey is not hesitant to join opium agreements, but we reject the injustice of European countries monopolizing drug profits while banning raw producers like us.”² This statement puts in a nutshell Turkey's decades-long struggle over opium—from its status as an Ottoman cash crop tied to colonial trade, to its transformation into a lucrative commodity under the young Republic. This article examines how the issue of drugs became a site of political resistance, and how this resistance was echoed in the public and medical debates in Turkey. In the interwar era, Turkish psychiatry dealt with addictive substances, especially alcohol and drugs. The article pays special attention to the writings of Mazhar Osman, a Turkish psychiatrist, and his reports to the League of Nations, treating them as informative source material on the intertwining of resistance to Western economic dominance, the public health policies of the Turkish state, and Turkey's nation-building project.

The article argues that Turkey's defiance of global drug regulations was not merely economic but rooted in a broader contest over sovereignty, modernity, and the racialized

¹ All translations in this article were done by the author.

² “Afyon Kaçakçılığı: Ecnebi gazetelerde intişar eden haberler asılsızdır (Opium Smuggling: The reports published in foreign newspapers are unfounded),” *Hakimiyeti Milliye*, 11, no. 3410, 9 Kânûn-ı sâni 1931 (9 January 1931), 2.

“danger” of addiction. The archival material for this study consists of Turkish state documents, League of Nations reports, Turkish newspapers as voices of state and public opinion, and Mazhar Osman’s writings on addiction and eugenics as medical texts.

In the interwar era, Turkey emerged as the global epicentre of opium production. The Turkish drug industry supplied both the legal and illegal pharmaceutical industries.³ Additionally, Turkey held the tenth rank worldwide in cannabis production. Its production focused mainly on cultivating cannabis seeds destined for further processing in the production of bags and textiles. This dual role, as a major opium supplier and a big player in cannabis cultivation, underlines Turkey’s historical involvement in the global narcotics trade and its broader economic and agricultural ties to the industry.⁴

The literature on the history of drugs in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey has analysed separately the emergence of opium cultivation and trade in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, as well as the medical use of opium and the position of Turkey within international illegal drug trafficking in the interwar era.⁵ The article contributes to this fragmented historiography by showing the nexus between Turkey’s negotiations in international opium conventions, the domestic industry, and psychiatric discourses.

The literature on the global history of drugs is mostly focused on the following categories: First, the European and North American histories on drugs show the interdependencies of such with imperial power structures.⁶ David T. Courtwright coined the metaphoric term “limbic capitalism” to highlight the economic power structures within its strategic target to the limbic system, the part of the brain responsible for emotions and pleasure.⁷

Second, the historiography of the non-Western world has documented how Western prohibition attempts in the colonies reinforced emerging local elites and triggered novel political dynamics which were intertwined with anti-colonial struggles and globalized

³ Jan Schmidt, *From Anatolia to Indonesia: Opium Trade and the Dutch Community of Izmir, 1820-1940* (Peeters, 1998).

⁴ Deniz Akpınar and Ahmet Nizamoglu, “Osmanlı’dan Cumhuriyet’e Kenevir Üretimi (Hemp Production from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic),” *Social Sciences* 14, no. 4 (2019), 1223–1236; Ufuk Adak, “‘Âdî Kenevirin Bir Dürüsü’: Son Dönem Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda Esrar (‘One Kind of an Ordinary Hemp’: Cannabis in the Late Ottoman Empire),” *Kebikeç*, no. 49 (2020).

⁵ Cengiz Erding, *Overdose Türkiye: Türkiye’de Eroin Kaçakçılığı, Bağımlılığı Ve Politikalar* (İletişim, 2004); Ryan Gingeras, *Heroin, Organized Crime, and the Making of Modern Turkey*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Rüya Kılıç, “‘Afyonun Keyfini Tiryakisinden Sormalı’: Osmanlı ve Erken Cumhuriyet’te Madde Bağımlılığının Tarihi” (“‘One Should Ask the Addict About the Pleasure of Opium’: A History of Substance Addiction in the Ottoman Empire and Early Republic”) *Kebikeç* no. 42, (2016), 147–179; Safiye Kıranlar and Burak Çıtır, “Anatolian Opium and Its Marketing during World War I,” *The Social History of Alcohol and Drugs* 38, no. 2 (2024): 169–195; Daniel-Joseph MacArthur-Seal, “The Trans-Asian Pathways of ‘Oriental Products’: Navigating the Prohibition of Narcotics Between Turkey, China, and Japan, 1918–1938,” *Modern Asian Studies* 56, no. 1 (2022), 207–249; İbrahim I. Poroy, “Expansion of Opium Production in Turkey and the State Monopoly of 1828–1839,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13, no. 2, (1981), 191–211; Timothy M. Roberts, “Commercial Philanthropy: American Missionaries and the American Opium Trade in Izmir During the First Part of the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 19, no. 2 (2010), 371–388.

⁶ See among others David T. Courtwright, *The Age of Addiction: How Bad Habits Became Big Business* (Cambridge et al.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019); Jessica R. Pliley, Robert Kramm, et al. eds., *Global Anti-Vice Activism, 1890-1950: Fighting Drinks, Drugs, and ‘Immorality’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). Martin Booth, *Cannabis: A History* (Macmillan, 2005); Martin Booth, *Opium: A History* (New York St. Martin’s Press, 1999); Paul Gootenberg, *Cocaine: Global Histories* (Routledge, 2002); Dominic Streatfeild, *Cocaine: An Unauthorised Biography* (Macmillan, 2003). William B. McAllister, *Drug Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century: An International History* (London: Routledge, 2000); William O. Walker, *Opium and Foreign Policy: The Anglo-American Search for Order in Asia, 1912-1954* (Chapel Hill, London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Daniel J. P. Wertz, “Idealism, Imperialism, and Internationalism: Opium Politics in the Colonial Philippines, 1898–1925,” *Modern Asian Studies*, 47, no. 2 (2013), 467–499; Dominic Streatfeild, *Cocaine: An Unauthorised Biography* (Macmillan, 2003).

⁷ Courtwright, *The Age of Addiction*, 6.

trade markets.⁸ Within this scholarship, Maziyar Ghiabi developed the concept of “narco-capitalism” to refer to continuing colonial power relations in the context of the Global South through the alienation of addicts via the exploitation of their bodies.⁹ And third, scholars with particular interest in the Middle East have highlighted the transregional interactions in the history of opium cultivation, narcotic trades and the development of international conventions.¹⁰

This article does not situate Turkey in one of the regions nor does it want to consider it as isolated from regional categories. Paul Gootenberg’s recently published *The Oxford Handbook of Global Drug History* (2022) devoted a chapter to the drug history of Turkey focusing on the illegal heroin trade in the interwar era.¹¹ The chapter is included in the section “Global South and Middle East” which gives food for thought about the extent to which this categorization of Turkey reflects the view of contemporary sources which sometimes classified the country as part of Europe and sometimes as part of the Middle East. However, this article wants to emphasize the transitional character of the geographical situation of Turkey and its domestic political context. Turkey is situated between Europe and the Middle East, reflecting both cultural and political elements based on the European model of republicanism while keeping Islam as a strong element of its national identity. Moreover, in the first half of the twentieth century, it was in the course of becoming independent from indirect imperial rule.

The first section analyses the resistance of the Turkish state to the international opium conventions. It highlights how Ankara framed these conventions as economic subjugation and at the same time fostered a state-controlled narcotics industry. Following this, the second section analyses public and medical debates in the 1920s and 1930s. These debates paralleled the anti-drug policies of the Turkish state. This section shows how the psychiatrist Mazhar Osman and other medical figures framed addiction as both a moral and biological threat, and how this was intertwined with eugenic ideology, racism, and nationalism. Next, the third section explores Osman’s role in shaping Turkey’s engagement with international narcotics control through his reports to the League of Nations. In these reports, Osman portrayed drug use as both a moral failing and a threat to national modernity. By equating hashish dens with Sufi Tekkes and linking mysticism to mental illness and political subversion, Osman’s discourse reflected and reinforced the Turkish Republic’s secularist agenda and efforts to delegitimize religious institutions. The report indicates efforts

⁸ Luis Astorga, *Drogas Sin Fronteras [Drugs Without Borders]* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 2003); Diana S. Kim, *Empires of Vice: The Rise of Opium Prohibition Across Southeast Asia, Histories of Economic Life* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2020); Brian G. Martin, “The Green Gang and the Guomindang State: Du Yuesheng and the Politics of Shanghai, 1927–37,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 54, no. 1 (1995), 64–92; Kathryn Meyer and Terry Parssinen, *Webs of Smoke: Smugglers, Warlords, Spies, and the History of the International Drug Trade* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 235–266; Edward R. Slack, *Opium, State, and Society: China’s Narco-Economy and the Guomindang, 1924–1937* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001); Frederick Wakeman, “Licensing Leisure: The Chinese Nationalists’ Attempt to Regulate Shanghai, 1927–49,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 54, no. 1 (1995), 19–42.

⁹ Maziyar Ghiabi, “Critique of Everyday Narco-Capitalism,” *Third World Quarterly* 43, 11 (2022), 2557–2576.

¹⁰ Among studies in this realm, Rudi Matthee’s work investigates drugs in Iranian history during the period spanning from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries: Rudi Matthee, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Drugs and Stimulants in Iranian History, 1500–1900* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005). Similarly, Cyrus Schayegh explored the narcotics trade in the region. Cyrus Schayegh, “The Many Worlds of ‘Abud Yasin: Or, What Narcotics Trafficking in the Interwar Middle East Can Tell Us About Territorialization,” *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 2 (2011), 273–306. Liat Kozma investigated the cannabis ban in Egypt in the late nineteenth century as an expression of concern for public health, of religious piety, and as a facet of the self-civilizing mission of local elites. The initiative for international hashish ban passed in 1925 was inspired by similar policies in Egypt.

¹¹ Ryan Gingeras, “Turkey and the Formation of the Global Heroin Trade,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Drug History*, edited by Paul Gootenberg, Oxford Handbooks Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022); 536–551.

for legitimizing the sovereignty of the Turkish republic through anti-drug policies which contradicted somehow to the State's resistance to opium conventions.

Turkey's Drug Policies and International Pressure

The resistance of Turkey to ratifying international opium conventions in the 1920s, as expressed in the quote at the beginning of the introduction, is rooted in the history of Anatolian opium production, which dates back to the early nineteenth century. During this period, Anatolian opium gained prominence in global markets, partly due to the First Opium War in China (1839–1842), which dismantled political and legal barriers hindering European and American trade.¹² With China opening its markets, it soon became the global centre of opium consumption. In response, the Ottoman Empire increased its production to meet the rising demand.¹³

Between 1828 and 1838, opium production in the Ottoman Empire was placed under the control of a state monopoly (*yed-i vahid*) to regulate trade and increase revenue for the treasury.¹⁴ This system came to an end with the signing of the Treaty of Balta Liman in 1838, a trade agreement between the Ottoman Empire and Great Britain. The treaty aimed to strengthen commercial and political ties with Britain at a time when the empire faced growing threats, particularly the invasion of Palestine and Syria by Mehmet Ali Pasha (1769–1849), the viceroy of Egypt. Britain and France viewed this invasion as a danger to regional stability and global security and feared that the collapse of the Ottoman Empire would enhance Russian power.¹⁵ The treaty abolished the state monopoly and granted Britain trade privileges.¹⁶ Ottoman markets became flooded with British manufactured goods. And the Empire remained a supplier of raw materials under unfavourable trade terms.¹⁷

By the early twentieth century, the opium trade transformed again. The rise of pharmaceutical industries in the United States and Europe increased the value of Anatolian opium due to its high morphine content. World War I marked another turning point. The Young Turk regime undid the capitulations system and began developing a “national economy” free from Western and non-Muslim (mainly Ottoman-Christian) influence.¹⁸ In parallel, the Ottoman state attempted to control the sale and consumption of opium and its derivatives. In 1907, it restricted opium sales to pharmacies and required a valid medical prescription. However, these measures proved ineffective.¹⁹ The market of formal and informal producers and traders continued to grow.²⁰

The domestic opium industry also expanded factories such as the Oriental Products Company (founded in 1926 by the Japanese Sakan brothers and the Armenian chemist Hosvsep Celalyan), ETKİM (Eczayı Tıbbiye ve Kimyeviye [Pharmacy Medicine and Chemicals] founded in 1929 with French capital), and TETKAŞ (Türk Eczayı Tıbbiye ve Kimyeviye Şirketi [Pharmacy, Medicine and Chemistry Company] backed by French and Belgian interests)

¹² Gregory Blue, “Opium for China: The British Connection,” *Opium Regimes: China, Britain and Japan, 1839–1952*, edited by Timothy Brook and Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 31–54; Kim, *Empires of Vice*.

¹³ Matthee, *The Pursuit of Pleasure*, 207–218.

¹⁴ Mehmet Genç, “Yed-i Vâhid (Monopol),” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* 43 (2013), 378–383.

¹⁵ Panayiotis J. Vatikiotis, *The History of Modern Egypt: From Muhammad Ali to Mubarak*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 66.

¹⁶ Şevket Pamuk, *Osmanlıdan Cumhuriyete* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2008), 33–36.

¹⁷ Ferenc Majoros and Bernd Rill, *Das Osmanische Reich (1300–1922). Die Geschichte einer Grossmacht* (Regensburg, Graz: Pustet; Styria, 1994), 332–333.

¹⁸ Kıranlar and Çıtır, “Anatolian Opium and Its Marketing during World War I,” 177.

¹⁹ Ryan Gingeras, “Beyond Istanbul's ‘Laz Underworld’: Ottoman Paramilitarism and the Rise of Turkish Organised Crime, 1908–1950,” *Contemporary European History* 19, no. 3 (August 2010), 215–230, 223.

²⁰ Kıranlar and Çıtır, “Anatolian Opium and Its Marketing during World War I,” 179–180.

played significant roles in this development.²¹ TETKAŞ even had Turkish parliamentarian Hasan Saka on its board, which gives us an example of the political ties of the industry.²² These factories employed dozens persons, producing hundreds of kilograms of morphine, heroin, and other alkaloids monthly for European and U.S. markets.

For the Turkish state, the growth of the opium industry and trade provided an income to repay debt, fund industrialisation, and stabilise the economy.²³ In 1923, it introduced a state monopoly on opium. Regarding the first international opium convention in 1912, the Turkish state prioritised national economic interests and refused to sign. Despite the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) committing Turkey to the 1912 Opium Convention, it was negligent in fulfilling this agreement with regard to restricting the opium trade.²⁴

The growing drug market also meant the increase of domestic drug consumption. State authorities gradually viewed drug consumption as a threat to the health of the nation and public order. In 1925, Turkish MP Mazhar Müfit (Denizli) raised the issue in parliament and condemned in his speech the widespread practice of giving opium to infants: “Gentlemen! Putting an opium pouch into the mouth of a four-month-old baby who hasn’t even teethed yet, just to make it sleep. [...] Of course, it will die.”²⁵ This reflected both the pervasiveness of opium use and concerns about public health.²⁶

The Ministry of Health was particularly concerned by the number of drug addicts among the workers at the Oriental Products Company and ordered the prohibition of the illegal import, sale, and consumption of narcotics such as opium, morphine, heroin, cocaine and hashish. However, the law lacked clarity regarding the responsibilities of institutions overseeing legal production and distribution. On 8 April 1928, a broader law (“On the Production, Preparation, and Supervision of Narcotic Substances”) was passed, giving the Ministry of Health authority to regulate the industry.²⁷ This marked Turkey’s initial steps towards fulfilling its international obligations regarding the restriction of the illegal opium trade.

In 1930, Turkey’s domestic production of refined opiates became a key issue at the League of Nations’ preliminary conference for the 1931 Convention. The proposed quota system for opiate production was seen by Turkish delegates as favouring long-established European producers over Turkey’s emerging industry. Turkey refused to sign. Its refusal caused criticism in the European and American media, which labelled Turkey a hub of the illicit drug trade. Several Turkish newspapers responded to this criticism by emphasizing Turkey’s goodwill, legal reforms, and efforts to regulate narcotics.²⁸

²¹ MacArthur-Seal, “The Trans-Asian Pathways of ‘Oriental Products,’” 231; Murat Tekin, “Cumhuriyet Döneminde Türkiye’de Uyuşturucu Madde Kullanımı İle Mücadele (1920-1940) (The Fight Against Drug Use in the Republic of Turkey (1920-1940))” (Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi, 2005), 54.

²² League of Nations Archives C.716.M.304, “Advisory Committee on Traffic in Opium and Other Dangerous Drugs: Summary of Illicit Transactions and Seizures Reported to the League of Nations Between October 9, 1930, and March 1, 1931,” (Geneva, 1931), 31-33; MacArthur-Seal, “The Trans-Asian Pathways of ‘Oriental Products,’” 234.

²³ Gingeras, *Heroin, Organised Crime, and the Making of Modern Turkey*, 58-59.

²⁴ Gingeras, *Heroin, Organised Crime, and the Making of Modern Turkey*, 58-59.

²⁵ Grand National Assembly of Turkey, Official Minutes (Zabıt Ceridesi), 2nd Legislative Term, vol. XV, session 73, meeting no. 291, March 9, 1925 (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Zabıt Ceridesi [TBMM ZC], D.II, C.XV, 73. İçtima: 291).

²⁶ The opium use was also in different regions of the world part of the daily life. See for instance, Ram Nath Chopra, and I. C. Chopra. “Quasi-medical use of opium in India and its effects,” *Bulletin on Narcotics* 7, no. 3-4 (1955), 1-24; Keen Meng Choy, Ichiro Sugimoto “Opium consumption and living standards in Singapore, 1900 to 1939” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 2023; 54, no. 1, 116-131; Maziyar Ghiabi, *Drugs politics: Managing Disorder in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 38-39.

²⁷ Grand National Assembly of Turkey, Official Minutes (Zabıt Ceridesi), 3rd Legislative Term, vol. IV, session 81, meeting no. 323, May 23, 1928 (TBMM ZC (23 Mayıs 1928, D.III, C. IVV, 81. İnkat:323)

²⁸ For instance, “Ticaret âleminde: Afyon meselesi,” *Vakit*, 14, no. 4674, 11 Kânunsani 1931, 6. [“In the World of Trade: The Opium Issue,” *Vakit*, 14, no. 4674, January 11, 1931, 6.] and “Cihan iktisadiyatı: M. Venizelos Yunan tütünlerine mahreç arıyor – Afyon ticaretimize suikast” *Akşam* 13, 7 Kânunusani (1931), no. 4398, 5. [“World Economy:

The newspaper *Akşam* reported the conference as a foreign assault on Turkey's economy:

All this propaganda [referring to the foreign press] is almost like an assault against opium cultivation and the opium products industry, which are important pillars of Turkey's economic structure. If the restriction of opium cultivation and industry is to be done fairly and globally, we are ready to negotiate. However, we cannot accept that other countries, which do not cultivate any opium themselves, demand the lion's share.²⁹

Turkish delegates at the 1931 conference protested what they saw as economic injustice, as countries with little or no opium cultivation tried to monopolize the distribution of products derived from opium. A newspaper reported about a meeting of the Turkish Chamber of Commerce at which members of the international opium convention and Turkish opium traders were present. One member of the chamber described the drug industry in Turkey as a success and international conventions as a scheme of foreign markets to suppress this industry. He criticized the League of Nations for having failed in preventing opium smuggling. He emphasized further in a similar manner to that of the above quotation but did so with a racial undertone: "Foreign merchants, through various intrigues, are working to incite the commission against us. In our city, there are also Bulgarians, Greeks, Romanians, and Jewish individuals engaged in propaganda, trying to portray us as smugglers. The police have become aware of this network and have begun interrogations."³⁰

This report expressed what the Chamber of Commerce thought about international conventions. It viewed these conventions as a plot against Turkey's economic development, a plot in cooperation with drug traffickers in Istanbul. The emphasis on the ethnic background of the drug dealers was, on the one hand, racially charged; on the other hand, it also highlighted the alleged heterogeneous composition of the groups involved in transnational illegal drug trafficking.³¹

Turkey's refusal to sign the 1931 Convention led to a boycott against Turkish opium, first by the U.S. and then Europe. Also, the European pharmaceutical industry, including Merck, Roche and Sandoz, exerted pressure to enforce their monopoly on the stock market and to lower the prices of raw opium.³² As a result of this attempt, the prices of Turkish poppy fell drastically, which led to unrest among farmers.³³

Moreover, Turkey took symbolic steps to show cooperation with international conventions: the government ordered ETKİM's closure in 1931 and expelled foreign personnel involved in smuggling.³⁴ Prime Minister İsmet Pasha and Health Minister Dr. Refik Saydam held talks with foreign officials like Eric Einar Ekstrand and American Ambassador Charles H. Sherrill to ease tensions.³⁵

M. Venizelos Seeks Outlet for Greek Tobacco – An Attack on Our Opium Trade." *Akşam*, 13, January 7 (1931), no. 4398, 5.]

²⁹ "Cihan iktisadiyatı" *Akşam*, 7 Kânunusani (1931), 5.

³⁰ "Ticaret âleminde," *Vakit* (1931), 6.

³¹ Gingeras, "Turkey and the Formation of the Global Heroin Trade," 541-542.

³² Siraceddin Kayihan, *Afyon ve Diğer Uyuşturucu Maddeler (Opium and Other Intoxicants)* (Istanbul: Ahmet Sait Matbaası, 1946), 138.

³³ Ali N. Babaoğlu, *Uyuşturucu ve Tarihi: Bağımlılık Yapan Maddeler (Drugs and Its History: Addictive Substances)* (Kaynak Yayınları, 1997), 105-106.

³⁴ League of Nations Archives C.575.M.282, "Advisory Committee on Traffic in Opium and Other Dangerous Drugs: Minutes of the 15th Session, August 18 1932" (Geneva, 1932); League of Nations Archives 3188, "Report on Mission to Turkey by the Director of the Opium Traffic and Social Questions Sections: February 26 1932" (Geneva, 1932); Erdinç, *Overdose Türkiye*, 103-104.

³⁵ Erdinç, *Overdose Türkiye*, 103-104.

In the early 1930s, these efforts culminated in stronger international cooperation. With Turkey's accession to the 1931 Geneva Conventions, the country committed to combating drug trafficking. Law No. 2313 (1933) granted the state a full monopoly over narcotic production, import, and export.³⁶ A new agency, the Narcotic Substances Monopoly Administration (Uyuşturucu Maddeler İhisar İdaresi), was established. Cultivation of Indian hemp was banned entirely.³⁷

Turkey's drive to join the League of Nations was also a motivating factor. Membership was crucial to assert Turkey's sovereignty, especially amid disputes with France and Britain over Mosul.³⁸ On 18 July 1932, Turkey officially joined the League.³⁹ Shortly after, on 25 December 1932, it adopted seven measures to combat the drug trade, including closing Istanbul's opium industries and banning drug trafficking.⁴⁰ On 14 January 1933, the Grand National Assembly ratified the Hague and Geneva conventions.⁴¹ To mitigate its economic losses, Turkey signed a bilateral agreement with Yugoslavia on 14 April 1932, for joint opium marketing, implemented on 14 October 1933.⁴² Together, they supplied 80% of the legal global opium demand for medical purposes. Meanwhile, ETKİM moved its operations to Bulgaria to continue drug production and exports.⁴³ The Turkish government launched anti-smuggling and anti-addiction campaigns as a means to deflect international criticism.⁴⁴ At the same time, any criticism in the public was censored and labelled as "ugly propaganda" produced by foreign elements.⁴⁵

Psychiatric Framing of Drug Use

The strict anti-drug measures of the Turkish state contributed to a more entrenched and clandestine drug economy rather than solving the problem of illegal drug trafficking. One anonymous comment in the newspaper *Akşam* exclaimed: "Hashish—everywhere, hashish! In gas canisters, in the pockets of vagabonds roaming the streets, in the handbags of dignified men and women. In homes, in cabarets, in coffeehouses—hashish pervades everything..."⁴⁶ Throughout the 1930s daily newspapers increasingly reported on this phenomenon of widespread hashish use. The titles of reports referred to the mushroom-like proliferation of "esrar tekkeleri"—secret hashish dens hidden in basements, ruins, and the back rooms of cafés. Often these sensationalized and moralistic articles portrayed drug users as criminals, vagrants, and threats to social order.⁴⁷ Certain neighbourhoods—Galata,

³⁶ T.C. Resmî Gazete (24 Haziran 1933), 7, Kanun Numarası 2435 (Republic of Turkey, Official Gazette, 24 June 1933, 7, Law no. 2435).

³⁷ T.C. Resmî Gazete (8 Haziran 1933), 2649, Kanun Numarası 2253 (Republic of Turkey, Official Gazette, 8 June 1933, 2649, Law No. 2253).

³⁸ Yücel Güçlü, "Turkey's Entrance into the League of Nations," *Middle Eastern Studies* 39, no. 1 (2003), 186–206, 191.

³⁹ Erdinç, *Overdose Türkiye*, 87.

⁴⁰ Erdinç, *Overdose Türkiye*, 98–99.

⁴¹ The Republic of Turkey, Grand National Assembly of Turkey, Parliamentary Minutes, Term 4, Vol., 12, 24. The session, January 14, 1933, 93.

⁴² "Historical Survey," *Bulletin on Narcotics* 3, (1953), 3–8; T.C. Resmi Gazete, 22 June 1935; Suphi R. Arıkan, "Türkiye'de Haşhaş Ziraatı (Cannabis Cultivation in Turkey)," *Dönüm* 5, no. 10 (1940), 433–434.

⁴³ Babaoğlu, *Uyuşturucu Ve Tarihi: Bağımlılık Yapan Maddeler*, 106.

⁴⁴ "Türkiye'de On Yıl Cumhuriyet Hayatı, 1923–1933," *Cumhuriyet Ticaret ve Sanayi Odası Mecmuası*, 49, no. 7, (1933), 99.

⁴⁵ MacArthur-Seal, "The Trans-Asian Pathway," 239.

⁴⁶ Akşamcı, "Akşamdan Akşama: Esrar İçinde" ("From Evening to Evening: Within Heroin"), *Akşam* 16, no. 5461, 21 Kânunuevvel 1933 (21 December 1933), 3.

⁴⁷ "Bir kumar ve esrar ocağı meydana çıkarıldı" (A Gambling and Hashish Den Was Uncovered), *Milliyet* 4, no. 1361, 26 Teşrinisani 1929 (26 November 1929), 5; "Esrarkeş Duası" (The Hashish Smoker's Prayer), *Yarın* 2, no. 531,

Tophane, Sirkeci, Kadıköy—were already long associated with vice and illicit trade.⁴⁸ Other labels such as “miskin tekkesi” (den of the miserable) and “tembelhane” (house of the lazy) reinforced stereotypes of hashish users as poor, weak, and passive.⁴⁹

For the psychiatric clinics in Istanbul, this development meant that they were receiving an increasing number of people with addiction problems. The medical community viewed this development a troubling enigma that challenged both scientific paradigms and social norms.

Part of the Sixth Turkish Medical Congress in 1935, held in Istanbul, focused on drug consumption and its health impacts. Reports by some physicians noted that many soldiers injured during wartime had become addicted to morphine, which had been administered to them for pain relief. However, they also emphasized that only a minority of soldiers developed full-blown morphine addiction.⁵⁰ In addition to the above medical congress, more and more intellectuals and doctors voiced their concerns about the degeneration of national “genetic stock” due to drug use and mental illness. For example, Celâlettin İzmirli addressed hereditary risks in his article “The Issue of Heredity.”⁵¹ Another physician, Cevad Zekai Bey, linked neurological disorders to addiction in a 1935 report on İzmir’s branch of the Green Crescent.⁵² Increasing numbers of patients suffering from conditions linked to alcohol, syphilis, and narcotics such as morphine, cocaine, and ether were particularly emphasized.

Addiction was for the medical community a novel and perplexing condition, even though there existed a psychiatric literature dealing with the use of opium and other substances like tobacco, coffee, and tea since late nineteenth century. Besim Ömer (Akalin) (1862–1940) initiated medical debates about the health effects of these substances in 1890s.⁵³ Another influential physician was Raşit Tahsin (Tuğsavul) (1870–1936). Tahsin considered drug addiction to be linked to mental illness—though he argued that such disorders were rare in the late Ottoman context.⁵⁴

Tahsin was a mentor to Mazhar Osman (Uzman) (1884–1951), a pivotal figure in the institutionalization of psychiatry in Turkey, who shaped the public view on addicts through the lens of eugenics in Turkey. In his early writings and temperance activities, Osman was more focused on the issue of alcohol and had long interpreted alcoholism as a manifestation of individual moral and psychological weakness. He tied sobriety to the broader project of rescuing the Turkish nation from degeneration and saw his profession as ideally capable of solving certain social problems such as drinking and saving the nation from alleged

14 Haziran 1931 (14 June 1931), 4; “Aşçı dükkânında esrar davası” (A Hashish Case in a Cookshop), *Vakit* 16, no. 5348, 28 Teşrinisani 1932 (28 November 1932), 4; “Esrarkeşler mahkemedede” (Hashish Smokers in Court), *Milliyet* 8, no. 2666, 14 Temmuz [July] 1933 (14 July 1933), 3; “Esrarkeşler” (Hashish Smokers), *Son Posta* 4, no. 1418, 6 Temmuz 1934 (6 July 1934), 2; “Esrar ve eroin kullananlar artıyor” (The Number of Hashish and Heroin Users Is Increasing), *Cumhuriyet* 13, no. 4507, 28 ikinciteşrin 1936 (28 November 1936), 2.

⁴⁸ Adak, “Âdî Kenevirin Bir Dürüsü”, 131–132.

⁴⁹ Nuran Yıldırım, “Miskinler Tekkesi,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam ansiklopedisi*, 30 (2020), 185–186.

⁵⁰ The reports were summarized by Nazım Şakir (Şakar), “Alkolden Başka Zehirlerle Toksikomani (Uyuşturucu maddelerle): Klinik, Tedavi ve Mücadele” (“Intoxication with Poisons (Drugs) other than Alcohol: Clinic, Therapy and Repression”), *Altıncı Millî Türk Tıp Kongresi* (Ankara: Kader Matbaası, 1935), 56–57.

⁵¹ Celâlettin İzmirli, “İlm bahisleri: İrsiyet Meselesi” (Scientific talks: The Question of Inheritance”), *Kurun*, 21 Nisan 1938 (21 April 1938), 3.

⁵² Cevad Zekai Bey, “İzmirde Yeşilay: Memleket hastanesi asabî hastalıklar mütehasssının bir teşebbüsü” (“The Green Crescent in İzmir: An Initiative by the specialist in nervous diseases at the state hospital”), *Akşam*, 4 Haziran 1935 (4 June 1935), 5.

⁵³ Besim Ömer, *Mükeyyifât ve Müskiratdan Afyon, Kahve, Çay, Esrar* (Amongst Intoxicants and Stimulants: Opium, Coffee, Tea, Hashish) (İstanbul: Mahmud Bey Matbaası, 1305 (1889)).

⁵⁴ Raşit Tahsin, *Berlin Emraz-ı Akliye ve Asabiye Kongresi* (The Congress on Mental and Neurological Diseases in Berlin) (İstanbul 1910), 4–5.

degeneration and backwardness.⁵⁵ He attributed his inspiration of abstinence to the German psychiatrist and anti-alcohol activist Emil Kraepelin (1856–1926) and other scientists of his time, including Alois Alzheimer (1864–1915), Walther Spielmeier (1879–1935), Hugo Spatz (1888–1969), and Alfons Maria Jakob (1884–1931) during his research stay in Munich.⁵⁶ The German anti-alcohol movement was for him a hallmark of Western modernity.⁵⁷

Early psychiatric literature often failed to clearly delineate between addiction and mental illness and left room for speculation and broad categorization. In Osman's writings—as well as those of contemporaries such as Auguste Forel and İsmail Hakkı Milaslı⁵⁸—alcoholism was often attributed to the adoption of Western lifestyles, particularly among the bureaucratic and intellectual elite.⁵⁹ For these psychiatrists, addiction and madness were the pathological side-effects of modernity itself, a view reinforced in Turkey by physicians like Fahrettin Kerim Gökay (1900–1987), who remarked that “modern times strain the nerves.”⁶⁰

Under the leadership of Osman, the Association for Mental Hygiene (Hijyenmental Cemiyeti) was founded in 1930 and actively propagated eugenic ideologies.⁶¹ The members of this association sought to scientifically substantiate their beliefs, often invoking methods of negative eugenics.⁶² During a conference at a community house in Beyoğlu, a district in Istanbul, Osman presented statistics from the Nazi regime on the financial burden that mentally ill people caused each year. He advocated measures to prevent increasing the number of people with mental disorders as well as thieves, prostitutes, and people he categorised as “weak”:

The Republic of Turkey is obliged to embrace eugenics on both fronts; as a matter of fact, it has gone very far in such matters as the encouragement of marriage and childbirth and the certification of the capacity to marry with a medical report. Today, we need strong arms to work for the defence, welfare, construction and progress of our beloved homeland, which we have acquired by pouring blood into every palm of our hands. [...] It is not desirable to fill the homeland, which is in need of re-structure on many fronts, with degenerates and to raise generations for hospitals and prisons. Therefore, we must encourage and oblige the healthy to reproduce. We should tell the rotten ones that you are enough; there is no need for a generation from you.⁶³

Osman viewed addicts as a social burden and believed he could explain their addiction through the theory of eugenics. He postulated that various forms of “toxinomaniacs” and heroin addicts emerged from individuals with weak personalities. Osman portrayed addicts as biologically weak, morally bankrupt, and economically parasitic. Heroin users,

⁵⁵ Mazhar Osman Uzman, *Konferanslarım (Medikal, Paramedikal)* (Istanbul 1940), 120–121.

⁵⁶ Saygılı, *Mazhar Osman*, 69–70.

⁵⁷ Mazhar Osman Uzman, *Konferanslarım (Medikal, Paramedikal)*, 120–121.

⁵⁸ August Forel, “Reiseindrücke aus dem Orient,” *Die Umschau*, 2 July 1910, 536; İsmail Hakkı Milaslı, *İçki Belyyesi ve Kurtulmanın Çareleri (The Scourge of Alcohol and Ways to Overcome It)* (Dersaadet: Hilal Matbaası 1915).

⁵⁹ Mazhar Osman (Uzman), *Keyif Veren Zehirler (Intoxicating Poisons)* (Eskişehir: Dorlion Yayınları 2023 (first published 1925)), 87–90. Mazhar Osman (Uzman), “Hilâl-i Ahzar (Yeşil Hilâl) ve İçki Aleyhtarı Gençler Birliği,” *Sıhhat Almanakı (Health Almanach)*, edited by Mazhar Osman (Istanbul: Kader Matbaası, 1933), 776–782.

⁶⁰ Kılıç, *Deliler ve Doktorları*, 20.

⁶¹ Fahreddin Kerim Gökay, *Türkiyenin Hijyen Mental Ve Psikiyatri Sahasındaki Hizmetleri: (Practices of Turkey in the Area of Mental Hygiene and Psychiatry)* (Istanbul: Kader Matbaası, 1939).

⁶² Mazhar Osman Uzman, “Öjenik (Eugenics),” *C.H.P. Konferanslar Serisi 2* (Ankara: Recep Ulusoglu Basimevi 1939), 3–12, 10.

⁶³ Mazhar Osman Uzman, “Öjenik” 4–5.

in his view, often sought hospital admission not for recovery, but as a means to escape imprisonment or acquire scarce supplies during periods of drug shortage.⁶⁴

These characterizations underpinned his belief that addiction could not be adequately addressed through medical intervention alone—it required state regulation of the population itself. For Osman, any kind of treatment for addicts was unnecessary and thus the costs caused by treatment were an unnecessary burden on resources of the Bakırköy Psychiatric Hospital. He suggested that the number of addicts who were admitted this hospital for at least six months by court order after the amendment of the Penal Code was no less than two hundred. These admissions caused an annual cost of at least 73,000 liras in the hospital's modest budget. He also emphasised that this figure did not include the salaries of the medical staff, including the doctors and nurses who took care of the addicts.⁶⁵

For Osman, drug users were a danger to national health, like other criminals and prostitutes. His views are to be framed within eugenic ideologies.⁶⁶ The national health is to be kept pure and strong through fostering individuals' physical health and strength, whereas the individual was mostly thought of as a male person whose primary duty was to fight for the nation. Osman linked the concept of addiction to racism in his description of drug addiction as an attribute to non-Turkish and non-Muslim groups. Also, the prostitutes about whom he reported in his writing,⁶⁷ were all from non-Turkish and of non-Muslim origins. He tried to illustrate the connection between ethnic background and drug addiction through photographs of addicts.⁶⁸

Within the context of heroin use, he blamed the heroin companies in Istanbul, which according to him were in the hands of Armenian, Japanese, and Jewish families. He also singled out illicit dealers, holding them responsible for their rapacious pursuit of wealth and for taking advantage of the current economic turmoil:

The police find new heroin stalls, punish the perpetrators severely, and imprison them. It does not fail to pursue heroin smokers vigorously. The court sentences them to treatment in our hospital for at least six months at the first visit and then imprisons them. Especially those who sell heroin are punished very severely. However, they still won't settle down; I guess it's a profitable business in these times of depression! He goes to jail; his wife sells it. His shop is closed; he starts distributing it secretly at home. At tram stations, in restaurants, and at beaches, secret messengers inform the opium smokers about their cigarettes with a password.⁶⁹

There is a striking resemblance of these descriptions in Osman's book with the press reports on esrar tekkeleri and on hashish use everywhere. It seemed for Osman that all efforts of the police and all government measures were ineffective in the face of drug dealers' relentless pursuit of wealth of drug dealers. He pointed out that heroin users were young men between

⁶⁴ Osman, *Keyif Veren Zehirler*, 202.

⁶⁵ Erdinç, *Overdose Türkiye*, 81-82; Mazhar Osman Uzman "Öjenik – İyi Nesil Yetiştirme ("Eugenics - Raising the Good Generation")," *İstanbul Seririyatı* 21 (1939), 2, 35-41.

⁶⁶ For eugenic debates in the interwar era in Turkey, see Yücel Yanıkdağ, "Psikopatlar, Frengililer, Veremliler, ve Mâderzâd Caniler: Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet Türkiye'sine Dejenerasyon Korkusu (Psychopaths, Syphilis Sufferers, Tuberculosis Patients, Bastard Brutes)", *Osmanlı'dan, Cumhuriyet'e Salgın Hastalıklar ve Kamu Sağlığı*, edited by Burcu Kurt and İsmail Yaşayanlar (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2017), 47-70; Yücel Yanıkdağ, *Healing the Nation: Prisoners of War, Medicine and Nationalism in Turkey, 1914-1939* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 208-248.

⁶⁷ Osman, *Keyif Veren Zehirler*, 187;

⁶⁸ Osman, *Keyif Veren Zehirler*, 176, 185, 198, 204. See also the Master's research on Osman's photographic collection about patients in psychiatric clinics: Selin Gökçe Süzmetaş *İlk bakışta delilik: Mazhar Osman'ın Fotoğraf Arşivi Ve Deliliğin İnşası* (Madness at a Glance: Mazhar Osman's Photo Archive and the Construction of Madness) MS thesis. Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University (Turkey), 2021.

⁶⁹ Osman, *Keyif Veren Zehirler*, 164.

the ages of 18 and 25, trapped in poverty as a result of their harmful habits: “[A] bunch of poor young men with their clothes off, their bodies melted, the last penny in their pockets spent! Unemployment, lack of money, and fear of the police make them turn to us to get rid of heroin.”⁷⁰

He further attributed the “moral decay” in Istanbul— including the increase in prostitution, gambling, illicit trade, and more—to the migration of Russian refugees.⁷¹ Recognition of any social or economic factors forcing these women into sex work were absent in his accounts. Instead, his descriptions assumed a voyeuristic tone, evoking imagery akin to pornography, while he asserted that cocaine abuse was an alien concept in the city before the armistice era. He portrayed the dire transformation that overtook Istanbul when foreign forces occupied the city: “[T]he city witnessed a tremendous moral collapse. While the men of honour and patriotism were mourning the loss of their homeland, the mob was running amok in a lawless, government-less city with no police.”⁷²

In the context of this chaos, according to Osman, Russian refugees made available the use of cocaine in bordellos and among the youth.⁷³ This marked for Osman the inception of cocaine abuse in Istanbul:

The pleasure of cocaine became fashionable in the salons of Istanbul. Elegant prostitutes could not resist cocaine addiction. They started to use it not only in such private houses but also in ordinary public houses. Brothel owners became rich by selling cocaine to their customers. These houses, which used to offer raki to their customers, now started to serve white cocaine.⁷⁴

Another group, which Osman blamed for spreading use of drugs, were the “money-driven” peasants. According to him, Anatolian peasants saw cannabis as a lucrative opportunity for income generation through plant cultivation, thus ramped up production despite the state’s prohibition. He believed to have understood the legal loopholes which these peasants exploited:

I’ve even heard that, given the law that fields cultivated with hemp should not be harvested, people inform the authorities when the time is due. Government officials then harvest the forbidden fields and leave them unattended. This allows the farmers to avoid the expenses associated with harvesting.⁷⁵

For Osman, the illegal cannabis trade was not only a consequence of prohibition, inadequate regulation or the shift to the black market, but above all a consequence of the temptation of financial gain.

⁷⁰ Osman, *Keyif Veren Zehirler*, 164.

⁷¹ Osman, *Keyif Veren Zehirler*, 136.

⁷² Osman, *Keyif Veren Zehirler*, 135.

⁷³ The arrival of Russian refugees to Istanbul and to Cairo coincided with the use of drugs among soldiers. See Liat Kozma “White drugs in interwar Egypt: Decadent pleasures, emaciated Fellahin, and the campaign against drugs,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 33, no. 1 (2013), 89–101; Carole G. Woodall, “Decadent Nights: A Cocaine-filled Reading of 1920s Post-Ottoman Istanbul,” *Mediterranean Encounters in the City: Frameworks of Mediation between East and West, North and South*, edited by Michela Ardizzoni and Valerio Ferme (Lexington Books 2015), 17–36.

⁷⁴ Osman, *Keyif Veren Zehirler*, 135.

⁷⁵ Osman, *Keyif Veren Zehirler*, 141.

Osman's League of Nations Report

Osman's activism against drug use extended beyond his clinical work. By the 1930s, Turkey had become an increasingly active participant in the League of Nations' efforts to coordinate international narcotics control. Osman authored detailed reports on cannabis production and usage for the League, written in both French and English. These reports reflected a dual orientation of Osman: domestically, he framed drug consumption as a result of moral collapse; internationally, he positioned Turkey as a responsible state committed to the norms of modern opium control policies.

In these reports, Osman distinguished between *Cannabis sativa*, used for textile production, and *Cannabis indica*, rich in psychoactive properties.⁷⁶ He further noted that the highest quality of Indian hemp was cultivated in Orhangazi, a region characterised by thick vegetation in Asia Minor. Before its prohibition, this district was known for extensive cultivation of this particular type of cannabis. In the French report, he described *esrar tekkeleri*, in difference to the reports of the Turkish daily press, in a detailed manner evoking images of Dervish lodges:

The hachiche smoking rooms, "tekké", are located in out-of-the-way places, in abandoned houses. [...] The houses in which hachiche is smoked consist of several rooms and are equipped with beds and blankets for those who want to sleep; the owner and his associates do the cleaning themselves. Most of the clientele is made up of vagrants, swindlers and women of modest means. Depending on their size, these smokehouses can sometimes house 50 people at a time. It is not uncommon to see such houses set up in wealthy neighborhoods. If the police are tracking their trail, they hasten off to set up somewhere else.⁷⁷

He described the cannabis dens as localities with moral decay, poverty, and criminality. Whereas the term *Tekke* was clearly associated with hashish dens in the Turkish daily press, in Osman's report to the League, it served to evoke associations with Sufi orders. In the English section of his report, he accused Dervish sects of spreading hashish addiction. Under the guise of religion, Osman claimed, the Dervish *Tekke* encouraged idleness: "Apart from a religious ceremony accompanied by music, which occurred once or twice a week, their adherents shirked all the burdens and duties of ordinary life, and most were ignorant. The *Tekkes* were the heretical creation of a small number of reformers anxious to escape from the austere precepts of the Muslim faith; at the end, they became hotbeds of corruption dominated by hashish addiction and homosexuality."⁷⁸

The interesting rhetorical connection between the Dervish *Tekke* and "*esrar tekkeleri*" echoed the negative connotations that the Turkish state had with Dervish lodges during its secularization programme. Osman appropriated the religious terminology in his description on drug dens to reflect the broader republican agenda to delegitimize religious minorities. In the reforms for laicism, such as the abolishment of *Khalifat* and the

⁷⁶ League of Nations Archives 12.36534.6043, "Advisory Committee on Traffic in Opium and Other Dangerous Drugs; Sub-Committee on Cannabis."

⁷⁷ League of Nations Archives 12.36534.6043, 5: On éteblit les fumoirs de hachiche, 'tekké' dans des endroits bien écartés, dans des maisons délabrées. [...] Les maisons, dans lesquelles on fume le hachiche, consistent de plusieurs pièces et sont pourvues de lits, de couverture pour ceux qui veulent dormir, le patron et ses associés font le ménage eux mêmes. La plupart de la clientèle se recrute des vagabonds, des escamateurs et des femmes de moeure legère. Ces maisons-fumoirs peuvent, suivant leur grandeur, abriter parfois 50 personnes à la fois. Il n'est pas rare de voir de telles maisons s'établir dans les quartiers riches. Si la police suit à leur piste ils décampent de toute hâte pour s'installer ailleurs.

⁷⁸ League of Nations Archives 12.36534.6043, 2.

standardization of education, the Turkish state also banned the Dervish sects in 1925.⁷⁹ The consequence of this ban was the persecution of numerous religious minorities. These repressions were justified under the pretext that these lodges harboured secret societies and criminal activities.⁸⁰ As a result the Tekkes' assets and premises were left abandoned. Osman's depictions of hashish houses correspond to the abandoned houses of Tekkes.

The report also included a specific case that exemplified the state's use of brutal repression. In 1930, a group of followers of the Sufi order of the Naqshbandi initiated a rebellion against the state in Menemen, known as the Menemen Incident.⁸¹ Osman's account provided an insight into their approach:

Initially, they shut themselves up for a month in a house where they smoked hashish night and day. Then, singing psalms and hymns in chorus, they came down from the hills towards the village of Menemen. Of a small group which attempted to intercept them, they killed a lieutenant and the night watchman of the village. They proclaimed with shouts that Calif's imaginary armies were massing on the frontier and soon coming to their aid and invited the population to join them. They were all at once captured, tried and sentenced to be hung. Before execution, the Sheikh and his followers one and all declared that hashish had been the cause of what they had done.⁸²

It is difficult to verify if this group consumed hashish or not. The news around the events and that was published months after about the court processes only mentioned that the members were consuming drugs without reference to any facts or police reports. Also, the existing literature on the history of Dervish Tekke refers to the members as using opium for medical reasons only,⁸³ not as part of religious ceremonies, whereas alcohol consumption is reported as being part of religious ceremonies in Bektashi orders.⁸⁴

All the news outlets were in agreement that this particular group of Nakshbendi were backward and part of a plot against Turkish political and economic sovereignty. One article in *Akşam* was interesting in that it connected the issues of hashish use and Dervish orders with anxieties of losing sovereignty. The article remarked on a letter that a member of the Iran Research Delegation, Lydie de Dyges, wrote to Mustafa Kemal. The letter emphasized that the Tekkes were centres of Iranian culture and the Dervishes were pure and modest. However, the article interpreted the letter as a call to "wealthy who are tired of the West" to be entertained by scenes of Tekkes and opium. It contained an interesting allegory:

when the Chinese could not stop the Turkish raids from the North even with their famous walls, they found two solutions — Tekkes and opium. They infiltrated the Turks, and after a while, the Turkish horsemen abandoned their horses and raids, and

⁷⁹ For the banning of Dervish sects in Turkey in the 1920s, see Sabit Dokuyan "Tekkelerin Kapatılması ve Tafsiri Süreci 1925-1938" (The Closure and Liquidation Process of the Dervish Lodges, 1925-1938) *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Veli Araştırma Dergisi* 98 (2021), 217-244.

⁸⁰ "İstiklal Mahkemeleri" *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* 5, no. 1095, 2 Kanunvevvel 1925 (3 December 1925), 1.

⁸¹ Feroz Ahmad, "Islamic Reassertion in Turkey," *Third World Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1988), 750-769.

⁸² League of Nations, 12.36534.6043. Advisory Committee on Traffic in Opium and Other Dangerous Drugs and Sub-Committee on Cannabis, 'Cannabis Addiction in Turkey - Physiological and Psychological Effects of Intoxication,' 3-4.

⁸³ Adak, "Âdî Kenevirin Bir Dürüsü", 125.

⁸⁴ Nicolas Elias "The Drinking Dervishes. An Enquiry into Ritual Inebriation Among a Bektashi Congregation," *Aesthetic and Performative Dimensions of Alevi Cultural Heritage*, edited by Martin Greve, Ulas Ozdemir, Raoul Motika (Baden-Baden: Ergon-Verlag, 2020), 33-44.

began to doze off in the corners of tekkes, lying on fleeces. And China could finally catch its breath. Apparently, Lydie de Dyges wants the same thing.⁸⁵

For the author, both opium and Tekkes were associated with national subjugation. He accused Lydie de Dyges of having sympathies for religious opponents to the Republic: “[B]eneath Lydie de Dyges’ lines that reek of dervishes, gall, and opium, one hears the voices of René Valande, Mehmet Ali, and Mustafa Sabri. As long as they keep saying “caliph,” they believe they’ve found the hen that lays golden eggs. They cannot stay silent, nor can they change their tune.”⁸⁶

The metaphor of the golden-egg-laying hen implies that these individuals—and their sympathizers—continue to profit from religious conservatism and are unwilling to embrace modern reforms. According to the article, their ideological influence remains palpable, even in the words of seemingly well-meaning foreigners like Lydie de Dyges. The connection drawn between mysticism, opium addiction, and national subjugation reinforces the idea that clinging to old traditions may ultimately serve foreign interests and undermine Turkish sovereignty.

Another connection between Tekkes and opium use was made in an article in the newspaper *Vakit*. This article’s content contradicted the statement about the letter of Dyges. It reflected the sentiment on international opium conventions as an effort to suppress the economic independence of the young Republic and linked these efforts with the Menemen case: “Every attempt to hinder our export economy is an attack against the nation. These conspiracies against our opium industry are no different in intent from the Menemen incident. Their goal is to keep Turkey backward—to condemn it to death.”⁸⁷

Osman’s view was closer to the statement on de Dyges’ letter than to that in *Vakit*. For him, behaviours linked to beliefs in the supernatural and acts of superstition reflected signs of mental instability. And as a further proof of this mental instability was in the view of Osman the use of hashish within the realm of Dervish orders. This perspective reveals a bias against practices that deviate from his notion of rationality. His assertion that all behaviour associated with belief in the supernatural are symptomatic of madness underlines his rejection of spiritual practices and cultural beliefs outside his paradigm. The example of the Nakshbendi followers shows his habit of attributing any behaviour he holds to be irrational or unsuitable to the hashish consumption of the believers. In doing so, Osman overlooked the complex socio-political and historical dynamics that might have contributed to such events, instead simplistically attributing them to the influence of hashish.

Conclusion

The resistance of Turkey to signing international conventions was an expression of resistance against the economic dominance of Western powers over Turkey. It was deeply linked to anxieties going back to the Treaty of 1848, which led the Ottoman Empire to be in a position of semi-colonial dependence. These anxieties were expressed in forms of seeing international conventions as plots against the industrial growth of the country. Parallel to the efforts to resist international conventions, the Turkish state pursued control of domestic drug use and treated it as a public health concern.

Public health measures are to be seen as part of a broader nation-building process aimed at producing a healthy nation. Driven by medical, legal, and political interests, a

⁸⁵ “Mustafa Kemal Paşaya Açık Mektup” (An Open Letter to Mustafa Kemal) *Akşam* 14, no. 4912, 14 Haziran 1932 (14 June 1931), 4.

⁸⁶ Mustafa Kemal Paşa Açık Mektup.

⁸⁷ Sadri Etem “Yeni Casuslar” (New Spies) *Vakit* 14, no 4682, 19 Kânûn-ı sâni 1931 (19 January 1931), 5.

complex system of laws, institutions and practices to combat the illegal drug market emerged between 1925 and 1933. The Turkish Republic was not only a recipient of international standards but also developed its own state instruments to prevent drug abuse and outlaw drug use.

In the press and medical debates of the time, there was a pathologizing and moralizing discourse of addicts as being degenerates and often alienated as criminals, vagrants, and threats to the social order. The issue of drug use was entangled with eugenic arguments in medical debates, with addicts portrayed as biologically degenerate. This racialized narrative appeared in the report of Mazhar Osman to the League of Nations. In this report, Osman portrayed Dervish Tekkes and participants in the Menemen uprising as having been intoxicated from hashish. Through this approach, he attempted to demonstrate at one point how the Turkish state had previously managed to control drug use in the country and at another point presented the drug issue as a threat to the unity of the Turkish state.

This study has shown that the issue of drugs in the interwar Turkey was a contested terrain in which resistance to Western economic dominance, public health concerns, and the politics against ethnic and religious minorities converged, sometimes in a contradictory manner. A legacy of that convergence is that the illicit drug trade persists today. It is aligned with geopolitical strategies that often find expression in supporting the international networks of the illicit drug trades, stigmatizing addiction as a moral failure and suppressing political opponents by accusing them of drug trafficking.

Acknowledgements. I am grateful to Liat Kozma, who discussed and commented on earlier drafts of this article and the discussion with participants of the conference “Drugs and the industrial situation,” ETH Zurich, August 2022 on the results of this study. I would also like thank to anonymous reviewers of the journal for their constructive feedback.

Biçer-Deveci Elife, Ph.D. (2016), is historian with focus on international organizations in the twentieth century, reform movements, alcohol and drugs, international development and agriculture. She is the author of *Ottoman-Turkish Women's Movement in the Context of International Organizations* (Bonn University Press, 2017, German) and co-editor of *Alcohol in the Maghreb and the Middle East Since the Nineteenth Century* (Palgrave Macmillan, St. Antony's Series, 2021).