



**Elife Biçer-Deveci and Philippe Bourmaud.- *Alcohol in the Maghreb and the Middle East since the Nineteenth Century: Disputes, Policies and Practices* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 232p.**

Elife Biçer-Deveci and Philippe Bourmaud's edited book, *Alcohol in the Maghreb and the Middle East since the Nineteenth Century*, probes into the relevance of alcohol in the Middle East and Maghreb as a powerful catalyst of social and political division. In these Islamic regions, alcohol has raised contentious controversies as this fermented drink (*khamr*) is religiously banned and condemned

by Islamic rules on the one hand, but it is excessively produced, consumed as a largely accepted beverage, on the other. In this vein, the crux of this volume, which is divided into four parts, is to examine the uses of alcohol as a lens through which to understand the power dynamics that buttress societies in the Middle East and Maghreb; the book offers a new understanding of drinking behaviours in the Middle East and North Africa by canvassing the different forms of social authority, be it religious, cultural, or political.

The chapters dispel and challenge three common myths and misconceptions about alcohol in this region by arguing that medical discourses on alcohol dependence conceal positions on national independence in an imperialist context, that the emphasis on religion also frequently tends to obscure disagreements on alcohol as a social struggle, and that disagreements on inebriation are more about judging masculinity than judging private leisure.

On the grounds of the sensitivity of the issue of alcohol and of a *lucunae* in the general historiography, the chapters address the perspective of historical anthropology. The research on alcohol from this discipline helps us understand social practices and symbolic forms which human beings use to organise and regulate their daily life and their coexistence.

In her chapter, Elife Biçer-Deveci demonstrates how the worldwide anti-alcohol movement and Western nations served as inspiration for the growing anti-alcohol movement in Istanbul, and how Turkey's brief prohibition regime in the 1920s was modeled after US prohibition. Hence, the public denial of alcohol consumption in Turkey was tied to minority administrations and the setting of the First World War. On 5 March 1920, *Hilâl-i Ahdar* (the Green Crescent) as a parastatal organisation within the temperance movement was founded in Istanbul by religious authorities and physicians to make anti-alcohol campaigns and addiction prevention activities

in Turkish society. For the author, these campaigns were influenced by the Western prohibitionist and eugenicist ideas during the Armistice period in Turkey, coinciding with the process of secularisation during the transformative era of the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the formation of the Republic of Turkey.

In the face of regional tensions and a developing worldwide regime of truth, which was advanced mostly by volunteer, humanitarian groups and reliant on shifting standards of proof, the British and French governments, enquiring about the issue of alcohol in their mandates in the Levant in the 1930s, attempted to establish a colonial regime of truth. The French and British authorities followed different strategies towards the same goal, asserting their truth on a shifting ground.

In her study of alcohol as a socio-spatial subject, Marie Bonte gives us significant insights into the various forms of authority, and the political and economic exercise of power, in contemporary Lebanon. Individual actors, mainly state, private companies and political parties, deploy a set of strategies to adapt and perform according to changing situations and spatial contexts. The place of alcohol, in its geographical, social and symbolic meaning, is never set: this discrepancy blurs the dichotomy of visible and invisible into a grey zone.

The three chapters in Part 2 discuss administrative regulations in various circumstances. Although they are based on certain normative systems, these laws also result through talks between various stakeholder groups. Sylvie Gangloff analyses alcohol politics in Turkey since the takeover of the government by the Justice and Development Party. With a particular focus on anti-alcohol campaigns, Gangloff shows that drinking in Turkey is politicised, but at the same time stigmatised. There is a significant discrepancy between spaces where drinking is not practised, mostly central and Eastern Anatolian cities, and spaces where attitudes to drinking are permissive such as in Izmir and Istanbul.

Bringing to the fore the anti-alcohol policy in Morocco, Nessim Znaïen attributes the absence of long-term planning within the colonial administration as the cause of the difference between the imperial prohibitionist policy and the burgeoning alcohol-based economy in Morocco. Prohibitive laws were actually enacted as a hasty response to certain local circumstances rather than to entirely ban alcohol. In a similar vein, Philippe Chaudat focuses on Morocco to conduct interviews with people who, despite Islamic doctrine on alcohol, consume and sell alcoholic drinks. He analyses how they deal with religion in their daily lives. Chaudat accentuates the perspective of alcohol consumers on religion and the space in their narratives given to religious practice, tracing out the diversity and flexibility of religious practices of alcohol consumers during the month of Ramadan. In this context, Chaudat refers to alcohol as a “crossroads object,” that is, an object that sits at the crossroads of several domains of society and levels of social life.

Drinking is a way to break the rules, but it also reflects racial and political tensions within a political system. It serves as a lens through which various identities and relationships can be seen, as well as how each person can either live according to and uphold social norms or alternatively defy and undermine them. The areas where drinking is done are “contested” because they permit against the rules behavior. Therefore, a division of space on various scales serves as a buffer between social norms and the limits of anti-alcohol policies: people drink in particular streets, in particular Islamic nations known for their lax alcohol laws, and international travel also serves as a means of outsourcing and erasing the public dilemma within domestic public opinion.

By concentrating on the absence of alcohol from public discourses, Mina Ibrahim contrasts drinking habits in Egypt within the broader framework of communal morals and historical and political trends since 1970. Ibrahim elaborates on his claim that alcohol not only parallels and mediates the “Islamic rebirth,” but also the “revival” of the Coptic Orthodox Church, based on his findings from his anthropological study.

During her anthropological fieldwork, Mariangella Gasparotto provides her findings on drinking customs in Ramallah. Gasparotto places these behaviors in their historical context and in relation to the diversity of the population as well as the sociopolitical conditions brought on by Israeli colonization of Palestine. By doing this, the author illustrates the variety of elements that influence social norms surrounding alcohol in daily life. People adapt to the new laws and customs brought about, for example, by a ban or a change in the economic climate. Her investigation demonstrates that prohibitionist standards about alcohol are invariably violated.

The numerous contributions demonstrate that alcohol can be employed as a widespread analytical tool to comprehend the formation of public space. As the alcohol problem is approached from a more macro perspective, national debates, global doctrines and geopolitics, as well as everyday engagements and negotiations with the pursuit of pleasure and the mutable nature of social norms reverberate, usually with a degree of generalization and simplification.

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