Building Beyoğlu
*Histories of place in a central district in Istanbul*
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İSTİKAL CADDESİ
/english high school for girls
Historically Pera housed a great number of foreign or foreign-language schools, with some of the most prominent examples being the German High School, the Austrian Sankt Georg School, the French Saint Benoît Lyceum, Sainte Pulcherie and later Pierre Loti High School, the Italian Primary School and later Middle School for Girls and the English High School for Girls. The English High School for Girls (EHSG) was situated on the top floors of a large building directly on the İstiklal Caddesi. For a school building it is particularly peculiar that the school had no playgrounds. Generally speaking, schools like the EHSG were usually founded for the purpose of providing children education in their native language and adopted curriculae that would relate at least in part to those of their ‘homelands’. From a geopolitical point of view, however, it is significant to note that most schools would admit children from the local bourgeoisie as well. As such they had and have a significant role in building connections and spheres of influence between the Ottoman Empire or Turkey and notably France, England, Italy and Germany. As I will show in this chapter and further on in chapters 7, this also had strong implications for Beyoğlu, marking it as the one of the most significant centres for education and British cultural diplomacy in the country.

The initial contact between Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire had been established through trade, organized in 1581 through the Levant Company’s monopoly granted by Elizabeth I’s charter. Christine Laidlaw and Geoff Berridge argue that trade would be the dominant mode of interaction between England and the Ottoman Empire for many years to follow. Changes in Europe’s balance of powers started to take shape. These shifts were partly driven by the Ottoman Empire’s
power reaching a status quo around the eighteenth century. The empire retained most of its possessions, but no longer posed an acute threat to the major European states as it had in the centuries before. British foreign policy became increasingly directed towards sustaining the Ottoman Empire and protecting its own interests in the Levant trade. Laidlaw indicates that particularly after the invasion of Ottoman Egypt by Napoleonic France in 1798, the British and Ottoman shared a common geopolitical interest against France. The British Embassy’s significance would expand considerably as a consequence and the Crown took over the responsibility for financing the British representation in the Ottoman Empire from the Levant Company, the responsibility it bore for over two hundred years.

The decades following would be marked by an increasingly close connections of the Ottoman Empire with Europe. Edhem Eldem argues that the Crimean War (1853-56) was of particular significance in that sense from a political point of view – the Ottoman Empire struck an alliance with the British Empire, French Empire and the Kingdom of Sardinia against the Russian Empire – but also from an economic point of view. As the Ottoman government became aware that it would need foreign loans to finance its endeavours, it embarked on a programme geared towards the acquisition of loans from Western European powers, notably France and Great Britain. Eldem points out that the first loans in the mid-1850s were acquired at highly favourable rates, a result of the French and British interest in sustaining the Ottoman war efforts against the Russians. This process culminated in a formalized dependency of the Ottoman Empire on foreign powers. Following its bankruptcy in 1875, the Ottoman Public Debt Administration was founded in 1881, in order to structurally settle the Ottoman Empire’s public debt. As Eldem points out this resulted in a ‘state within the state’, in which the Ottoman state was forced to accept the control of foreigners over substantial parts of its finances. He goes on, however, to indicate that this dependency took the shape of an economic rather than a political dependency, since the relation was between creditors and the state, without a structural formal role for the foreign powers.

Effectively, the financial and strategic dependency of the Ottoman Empire on its Western European counterparts, meant that the significance of the foreign presence, political, economically and culturally
speaking, increased dramatically. One notable effect in the Ottoman capital was the increase of organizations geared towards providing in the needs for Europeans, notably churches, clubs, banks, companies and schools. One of the earliest examples of a school, which was set up to educate a growing number of children in Istanbul/Constantinople is the English School for Girls. In a memorandum from the British Consulate General, from approximately 1968, it is stated that the English School for Girls was founded in 1860 and established in a building that was granted by Sultan Abdülmecit to the wife of the British ambassador, Lady Stratford de Redcliffe. She transferred the school properties to the British Embassy in 1881 and established a general committee for the administration of the school. A yearbook of the English High School for Girls from 1960, holds an extract from an article by Miss Thompson, Headmistress of the Girls School for the Journal of Education from 1944. In this extract the school is said to be founded as early as 1849 by Jane Walsh, who died in 1872. The epitaph on her grave at the former Crimean Cemetery in Tarabya stated that she had, with help of her sister, worked for 23 years in an institution established under the protection of the British ambassador at the time Stratford Canning. The author of the article deduces that the institution thus must have been established in 1849. After the Crimean War, according to the author, Sultan Abdülmecit granted to Lady Stratford de Redcliffe the plot on which the present-day school building stands today at İstiklal Caddesi 185. The ‘Trust Deed of Girls School at Constantinople’ from 12 October 1881 indicates that the buildings presented to Lady Stratford de Redcliffe in 1858 were Grand Rue de Pera 347, 349, 351, 353, 355, 357 and 359. The document indicates that this consisted of a large Stone House and six Stone Shops commonly known as “The Casino”. Barrister and historian Edwin Pears wrote in his book Forty Years in Constantinople that the school was originally housed in an old timber building with cafes on the ground floor. This building was then required to be demolished when the authorities claimed a part of the building’s parcel for the expansion of the Grand Rue de Pera.

A new building was constructed around 1901 or 1902, with the bottom floors reserved for shops rented out by the school committee, in charge with the administration of the school. The article by Miss Thompson, however, indicates that a stone building had already served

Map 14: The English High School for Girls’ parcel (846 in the insurance maps of Eduard Goad, 1905.)
The school before, which corresponds with the information of the cited trust deed. She also states that the school served mostly children of British nationals and other foreign members of the bourgeoisie in Istanbul/Constantinople during the final years of the Ottoman Empire, with numbers of around 200 pupils at the turn of the century. The school was closed in 1914 for six years due to the First World War. Following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the Turkish Republic, the status of the school as an ‘established foreign school’ was recognized in 1923 in an exchange of letters between the British ambassador and Prime Minister İsmet İnönü. This was particularly significant considering the stipulations of the Lausanne Treaty. Following the discontent among the Turkish National Movement with the Treaty of Sèvres from 1920, in which what remained from the Ottoman Empire’s territory was divided into Armenian, Greek, Kurdish, Turkish, British, French and Italian territories, a large scale conflict erupted, commonly presented as the Turkish War of Independence. Eventually this led to the Turkish National Movement and Atatürk’s government in Ankara to push for the negotiation of a new treaty in 1923, known as the Treaty of Lausanne, which would essentially define the borders of the Turkish Republic.

THE ENGLISH HIGH SCHOOLS AS A CENTERPOINT OF BRITISH CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

For the existing foreign schools that were suddenly within the borders of the Turkish Republic rather than the Ottoman Empire the Treaty of Lausanne would be of pivotal importance. Nimet Hadimoğlu argues that the status of foreign schools is hardly regulated and that the continuation of foreign schools in the Turkish Republic was dependent on the letters of İsmet İnönü to the English, French and Italian governments, which can be considered as an addendum to the actual Treaty. In the letters it is stipulated that: ‘religious, educational, health and welfare institutions of these states, which were recognized until October 30, 1914, will continue to exist, that these institutions will be treated the same as Turkish schools, that they will be faithful to public order and laws and regulations and will be controlled in good will’. With that the existing rights of the schools, no more or less, were preserved. As will be shown in this chapter, this rigid result of international diplomacy would lead to ongoing legal problems for the English School for Girls.

It was indicated by the Turkish government that any changes in the location of the buildings or reconstruction of the buildings would mean that the schools would lose their special status as protected foreign entities under the stipulations of the Lausanne Treaty and that their status would have to be renegotiated if such changes were to be made. The British side disagreed with this rigid interpretation, yet also decided to remain within the boundaries of the status quo, which meant that profound financial and practical problems within the schools endured. One of the reasons of the British government’s hesitance to act may have been that despite of the talks that were held at the highest level, the government appeared to have not been certain about what its legal ties and responsibilities were to the school. According to diplomatic cables from the 1960s, this led the British embassy to investigate its ties with the English Schools in 1926, with no result except for the fact that the British government had made a donation of 5000 Pound Sterling to have a new building for the Boys’ School constructed in 1911. Elsewhere, in documents of the Foreign Office, the previously cited text of Thompson is provided in full, yet here there is a lack of clarity regarding the legal ties between the British government and the Girls’ and Boys’ Schools. In the text it is argued that the school after its reopening in 1922 was based entirely on the model of an English High School, with teaching in English – except for foreign languages – by British teachers, primarily for British and other foreign girls as well as – once again – girls from the non-Muslim upper and upper middle classes. Following the Kemalist reforms of the educational system and the earlier quoted stipulations from İnönü’s letters, the school had to start operating within the boundaries indicated by the new regime, although Thompson indicates that the school did not lose its ‘character as an English School’. Certain subjects were from then onwards taught in Turkish and children of Turkey’s citizens joined the school population. She narrates that the years following 1922 were difficult in terms of finances for the school, which nearly caused its demise. Although the school was self-supporting at first – possibly through the rents that were gained from the shop owners on the ground floor of the school’s building as well as
notes that the British Council differed from its Italian, French and German rivals since it was a private entity, although under the supervision of the Foreign Office and with the Prince of Wales as its patron. The reasoning according to her was that projections suggested that the council could eventually become independent from governmental subsidies. The reality turned out to be different: it would become fully dependent on the state. The objective of the Council then became: ‘[…] to promote a wider knowledge and appreciation of Great Britain and the English language abroad, and to develop closer cultural and commercial relations between Great Britain and other countries.’

Van Kessel argues that although the British Council always denied during the interbellum to be involved in cultural propaganda and rather provided information and engaged in cultural diplomacy, the strategies of the Council were reminiscent of the former War Propaganda Bureau. She concludes that this was an outcome of the ties of both organizations with the Foreign Office and the involvement of the Council’s founders in both. Representatives such as Lord Lloyd, chairman of the Council between 1947 and 1941, however, made statements that are significant in understanding the Council’s involvement with the EHS in Istanbul: ‘We do not force them to ‘think British’; we offer them the opportunity to learn what the British think.’

It is in that light also that the British Council’s involvement in the EHS should be considered. The schools were essentially appreciated by the British Council as a way to exert influence over the outlook on life of potentially influential Turkish citizens, particularly with regard to their attitude towards anglophone culture.

This led around the time of headmistress Thompson’s writings, in 1944, to a mixed school population with 20 nationalities, although most pupils were Turkish girls. It is unclear if she means Turkish nationals or ‘ethnic Turks’ in this case, or if the twenty nationalities she refers to also include the Pontic Greek, Armenian, Jewish and other populations that constituted an Ottoman millet before the regime change. The Foreign Office and British Council in the meantime appeared to have shown great interest in the school, for both reasons of required financial investments and the potentially beneficial impact to Anglo-Turkish relations through raising and educating Turkish citizens as anglophiles. Angus Gillan, representative of the British Council in London, writes the following in 1946: ‘On general principles, I feel strongly that an effi-
cient British school which is open to and really used by the natives, is in any country the very best propaganda we can do and should have a very high priority."\textsuperscript{25} The amount of non-British students in both the girls’ school and the related boys’ school in Nişantaşı is estimated to be 75%, with long waiting lists, giving a clue of the impact that this school had on the local population, particularly considering that many of the schools’ graduates would be able to attain established careers.\textsuperscript{26}

The importance of this observation can also be appreciated in the light of iron curtains that were being drawn up. As Turkey was aligning itself with the Western bloc and being actively persuaded to do so by, among others, Great Britain and the United States, the significance of Gillan’s words should not just be understood in a local, national or bilateral context, but also in a world of shifting geopolitics. Great Britain feared the possibility of growing influence of the Soviet Union in Greece and Turkey. With the aggressive rise of a communist party in Greece, the British Government feared that Greece’s sympathies could shift towards the Soviets, which would have a detrimental effect on the position of the United States in the region. Former US Ambassador to Turkey George McGhee argues that the British Government, which had become aware that it could no longer bear the economic burden of supporting the Greeks and Turks, pushed the United States to take up the responsibility of providing aid.\textsuperscript{27} The Truman administration became quickly aware of the potentially hazardous situation and decided in no more than two days that it would support the Turkish and Greek governments and armed forces. McGhee points out that the US government considered Turkey to be a natural barrier against the Soviet Union and expected that the Soviets would not aim to invade the country, but rather to cripple its economy by provoking it just enough to push Turkey into upholding a sizeable standing army.\textsuperscript{28} The US government therefore realized that an aid program would require to surpass the boundaries of military aid and also accommodate the Turks in building a robust economy. This should be considered one of the prime reasons as to why Turkey would receive Marshall Plan aid. Indeed, the Truman Doctrine, considered the pre-eminent geopolitical statement of the Cold War era, was formulated with this goal in mind: halting the potential communist threat to Greece and Turkey.\textsuperscript{29}

Within these circumstances the significance of cultural diplo-
Travelling exhibitions of photography portraying ‘British graphic art and scientific achievement (…) architecture, countryside and educational institutions’ aimed to familiarize people around Turkey with Great Britain and British culture (defined as an ‘unpopular but convenient omnibus term’). Other topics which the Council involved itself in were science, medicine, agriculture, sports and archaeology. The Council meanwhile was able to execute its tasks, which is particularly noteworthy considering the fact that it was forced to close its branches in numerous communist countries and that it was severely curbed in Nasserian Egypt. As such it can be considered as a clear sign that post-war Turkey was strongly embedded in the Western geopolitical sphere of influence. Slightly before the end of World War II, the report on the council’s activities in Turkey indicates that the efforts of Germany had been gradually collapsing, which may have also given additional room for the British to operate within Turkey. Additionally, the authors think that the lack may have also helped launching the council’s efforts with unprecedented success: ‘Even those with the longest memories find it difficult to think of other foreign organisations that have been allowed to make the same progress in the same or indeed in any lapse of time’.

Cables from the British legations in 1944 show that the EHSG’s school population was gradually changing, with the amount of ‘Moslem Turkish girls’ increasing to 47% of the total. British dignitaries reflect on this development as somewhat worrisome, primarily because they feared that an increase in the amount of local students would decrease the quality of English language education and hinder its own goals. Others, however, argued that the rise of local girls would increase ‘in conformity with the wishes and policy of the British Council, if not to the full satisfaction of some of the Teachers and Committee members’. The document suggests not to let the amount of ‘Moslem Turks’ increase beyond 55%, citing the total amount in absolute numbers as 104, while it was 94 at the time of writing. The quality of English speech is explicitly cited as the reason for this recommendation.

It becomes clear, however, that there was a divergence between the aims of the British Council and the EHSG. Whereas the British Council aimed to spread British culture exclusively among ‘Moslem Turks’, the EHSG’s board felt that it could only go as far along with the Council’s objectives as it had until that year: 27 girls from the minorities versus 94 Muslim Turks are cited as being among the school population with 55 Muslim Turkish girls admitted to the school since 1941 against 10 girls from the minorities. The Committee is said to have pointed to its Trust Deed as indicative for its own objectives, namely ‘to show no prejudice or preference for any race or creed’. The report assesses the Charter of the Girls’ School (as well as the Constitution of the Boys’ School in Nişantaşı) to be incompatible with the Lausanne Agreements of 1923, although both documents had no legal standing in a Turkish legal context. They did, however, for the British Government.

The Committee moreover was not registered as a legal entity in Turkey, but functioned as such according to the British government and Embassy. The author of the report questions whether the High Schools would sustain the “Turcising policy” at all if they were not dependent on the subsidies of the British Council. He also stresses that it would be difficult for the High Schools to regulate the inflow of the students population so that the 55% margin of Muslim Turks would be sustained, since the schools would maintain the principle of first come, first serve. It appears, nonetheless, that around 1944 a certain degree of antipathy towards the British Council existed among the schools’ management, i.e. headmaster, headmistress and members of the school committees, which was principally caused by the British Council’s effort to get more Muslim Turks into the schools’ ranks. The number of British pupils meanwhile was dwindling and not expected to increase, while the school became increasingly popular among Turkish nationals (Muslim and others) and non-British foreigners. The British Council would eventually cease to subsidize the schools in 1968 (elsewhere it is claimed that the Boys’ Schools funding had been terminated already by 1966 and that of the Girls’ School in 1967), when it was decided that the sponsoring was ‘no longer justified’. It seems that the funding of a number of British teachers in the schools by the Council, however, continued. It is suggested in diplomatic reports that the British Council and the British government had considerable disagreements over this matter. The official instigation of the British Council to withdraw its support at that point were the ensuing budgetary difficulties of the schools, though no further explanation as to the exact nature of the disagreements between the two British parties is given. However, diplomatic communication from 1962 also shows that the British Council and
Foreign Office seemed to be in agreement that it would be best for the council to ‘entrench themselves in the educational system of a foreign country, rather than seek to maintain extra-national institutions which were exposed to pressures of various kinds. We were inclined to agree with the Council that we could not accept a solution that would put the schools at the mercy of the Turks.’

The duality of the Turkish position is remarkable, because the Foreign Office appears to have been of the opinion that closing the schools would have severe negative effects on Anglo-Turkish relations and was therefore to be avoided.

The Foreign Office and the British Council thus were actively engaged in what Sarah Davies describes in the context of British cultural diplomacy in the USSR as ‘the struggle for men’s minds’. Nevertheless, considering the significant efforts that were deployed in other countries, the British initiatives at the onset of the Cold War seemed to have lacked a clear strategy. J.M. Lee argues that if there was any kind of coherence in what the British were doing on a global scale, it was centred on the question of what would happen to the ‘British presence’ in the post-imperial age. Another issue mentioned by Lee was Arab nationalism and the priority that the UK should retain access to oil reserves. His argument in that context is essentially that objectives of cultural diplomacy in Davies’ ‘war for the mens’ minds’ could be generally easier attained in ‘informal empire and UN mandate’ than in colonial settings. It is the specific context of the 1950s Middle East which pushed the British to compose a more organized strategy of cultural diplomacy Lee concludes.

James Vaughan adds, moreover, that British Council schools in the Middle East were often considered to be the most important branch of British cultural diplomacy. A quote from the Council’s staff members is telling in that sense: ‘their character building reputation’ lent them a level of prestige which enabled them ‘to attract the children of important families and to build up understanding of Britain both by their impact upon the pupils and by their contact with the parents.’

Yet, Vaughan also reaches the conclusion that cultural diplomacy in the Middle East essentially failed due to setting wrong or unrealistic targets by policy makers; cultural diplomacy typically takes much time to bear fruit, whereas the impact of political and economic diplomacy can have quick and drastic (or even dramatic) effects.

In Istanbul the policies of the British appear to be marked by confusion as well, although within the Istanbul schools the freedom of the British was also severely limited. Nonetheless, the schools were appreciated, very popular and thus successful in their effort to be ‘flag-bearers’ of Britishness in Turkey. From a local perspective, however the schools appeared to have been on the expensive side in comparison with some of the French Schools, such as St Benoit, St Michel, St Joseph (in Kadıköy) and the German School, but in relative consonant with the American College for Girls and Robert College. A report found in the National Archives, however, notes that the facilities offered by EHSG and EHSB are insufficient and not comparable to those of the other schools, making the school fees much too high. The report therefore pushes against increasing the fees, because it would result in a further socio-economic asymmetry in the school’s population or the increase of bursaries. In addition, the report suggests that the schools’ curricula deliberately stray from the rules set by the Turkish authorities in line with ‘various evasions and extensions to the curricula to which the Schools are entitled’.

The author suggests that these ‘irregularities should be condemned if not encouraged’ and argues that considering the circumstances in Turkey at the time efforts should be made to limit the amount of Turkish language classes and other classes taught in Turkish, while pushing to increase the amount of classes on social subjects in English as much as possible.

The author clearly seems to want to praise the schools’ relative liberty (compared to Turkish high schools), as they offered an alternative world view and curriculum to students, thus offering a counterbalance to the growing nationalist grip on the educational agenda of the Turkish Republic. More suggestions and recommendations are made to push back against the increasingly nationalist influence on foreign education in Turkey. The schools, however, are not considered ‘unfavourably’ by the Turkish state, due to the influence of the British Council on the Turkish Ministry of Education and the ‘skillful, even Machiavellian negotiations’ of the schools’ management. Elsewhere it is stated that several British representatives did not have a ‘high opinion of the value of (...) support’ of Minister of Education, Hassan Ali. Further communication between the British and the Turks appears to have balanced awkwardly between flattery and insult. The minister stated in a conversation with (...) that ‘the English Schools are the best of the foreign
schools, but foreign school as a whole are not very good’.54

THE SHADOW OF LAUSANNE: THE EHSG’S KISMET IN BEYOĞLU

The building of the EHSG meanwhile, is described as being inadequate and inconvenient: ‘The Girls’ High School (exclusively for day girls) is a tall six-storeyed building in the middle of the shopping centre [i.e. Beyoğlu] of Istanbul. It is surrounded by commercial buildings and blocks of flats, the noise of traffic is continuous and loud, and there is little access of fresh air or sunlight. (...)’.55 In the documents of the Foreign Office British officials comment on the peculiarity of the buildings and claim that the buildings of both schools were expensive and difficult to maintain and run. The girls’ school is cited as being ‘full of safety hazards’, which is probably in reference to the steep stair cases and the recreational area on the rooftop that students would refer to as ‘the Roof’.56 A British English teacher who started working at the school after its transferal to the Turkish Ministry of Education recounts how he would be very strict about the way girls would go up and down the staircases, since a girl in the past had fallen from the staircase and died.57 A more frivolous example of the peculiarities of the school building is narrated by one of the former girls who had fond memories how they would cross over the fenced area at the rooftop in order to sunbathe. At the other side of the street builders were constructing the Odakule building of the Turkish Chamber of Industry, who almost fell of their scaffolding in awe when they saw the girls relaxing in their school uniforms.

Visitations to the school by British dignitaries, usually sum up in complimenting the staff and questioning how the staff manage to keep up a school in the building. In a telegram from a tour through the Middle East between February and April 1946, Angus Gillan reports that he was not happy about the institutions and their management, more due to financial shortcomings than the management itself. He was content with the way the girls’ school was run, considering it ‘is as well run internally as it can be in a building which is only excelled in unsuitability by the boys’ school’.58 In another cable from the Ankara embassy to the Foreign Office it is stated that the conduct of the schools is not up to standards, though the schools can on the grounds of prestige never be allowed to be closed down.59 These matters appeared to have cleared up to some extent, as the tone of following cables regarding the girls’ school is considerably more positive, though the enduring main problem appears to be the lack of sufficient funding.60 The statement of accounts from 1961-1962 therefore indicate that despite of the age of the building, which is described as old, only the most necessary repairs are executed.61

The issue of funding was a recurring issue, which was essentially caused by the school’s legal status (or rather the lack of it). In a cable from a 1960 a lawyer named Ayhan Unler, lawyer of BP, explains the complications of registering the school building in name of the embassy. It becomes clear that the building and the school were separate legal entities.62 The consul general appears to have, pressed by the Embassy, contacted authorities in Istanbul. The consul points out to the British embassy that this is rather pointless, but necessary nonetheless. He explains that the only motivation to keep in touch with the local authorities in Istanbul was to avoid that the governor of Istanbul at some point would feel at liberty to take definite decisions regarding the school and its properties, in which the governor would claim that he could have intermediated in a more positive fashion to solve any problems of the school if only he had known about them.63 The consul general contacted his German counterpart to see if they had experienced similar problems with the German School in Galata. The German consul general confirmed that the German School indeed had also considerable problems with the Turkish authorities, but he also explained to the British side that taking up the problem with the Vali (governor) of Istanbul would not help a great deal.

In a cable from 1962 new problems appear to arise, now connected to the buildings of both schools, which – according to the cable – urgently need repair and improvements requiring ‘re-building on new sites’.64 Later in the 1960s, however, it became clear that new Turkish legislation forbade the enlargement of existing building or developing new properties elsewhere. This restricted the freedom of movement for the schools even further. The documents suggest furthermore that the law also required foreign schools to become private legal entities. The Turkish authorities appear to have wanted to get rid of these independent schools in their current format, which is in a sense remarkable since the 1960 coup had introduced a constitution that was in essence
more liberal than the previous one and Zürcher points out that in general people and ideas in Turkey were becoming increasingly mobile. This may also be one of the reasons as to why the Turks retained the status quo, but also did not make fundamental efforts to entirely curb the freedom of the EHS. The Foreign Office also notes that there was discord within the Turkish state, which may have had a positive impact on retaining the status quo. The British Embassy’s cultural attaché notes: ‘There seem to be two trends of thought within the Turkish Government. There is the usual anti-foreigner approach, which is evident in the desire that all foreign aid should be handed over at the frontier, including that for schools, and the more broad-minded approach of some Ministries who would like to see us giving technical aid, including, for instance, the running of technical schools.’

Nevertheless, statutes were drawn up to ensure a relative independence from the Turkish state, proposing to turn the schools into ‘Anglo-Turkish entities under Turkish law’. It was hoped that the schools would become foundations, retaining the characteristics of the British educational tradition while conforming to the Turkish system. ‘A war for the minds of men’, offering an alternative (or in the minds of some: superior) outlook on life, thus also appeared necessary for the British Council and the Foreign Office in Turkey. The British appeared reluctant to consider closing the schools, since it may have incited legal action from parents and the necessity of sale of the properties which would have been ‘extremely complicated’, since the buildings and schools’ status was so diffuse. This resulted in a dragging legal case in 1962, in which it was made clear that the properties could not be turned over to the British embassy as the grounds would require to be granted diplomatic immunity in that case which was impossible as the lot was designated for educational purposes. In the meantime it also proved impossible to move the properties away to sites in Tarabya or other parts of Istanbul owned by the British state. The Turkish state appeared hesitant to allow the schools to be allowed to become foundations (tesisler) rather than associations (kurumlar), but the school committees insisted that the schools would become foundations since otherwise there would have been a serious risk of losing control over the distinct British character of the schools and their educational programs. At the same time officials from both the Turkish and British sides, up to the levels of the Turkish Minister of Education stressed how important they considered the British contribution to the Turkish educational system to be and how closure of the schools would negatively impact the Anglo-Turkish relations.

A noteworthy observation is made in a communication from the 1960s. In it the question of the school’s embedding in the Turkish school system is brought up again, with particular regard to the relevance of the provisions indicated in the school’s trust deed. Was the school committee legally obliged to conform to it or was it by now more a guideline than a legal document? The author, who signs as D.F. Duncan and is most likely working at the Foreign Office, wonders whether the school should be ‘Protestant’ and part of the ‘Church of England’, since this is indicated in the School’s Trust Deed of 1881. As this would run against the legislations of the Turkish school system and considering the fact that there are very little to none Protestant girls in the school, he argues against taking too much notice of the considerations of the Trust Deed. Despite of this, several former girls who were students in the EHS in the 1970s indicate that some of the English teachers asked the girls to say grace before lunch. Rosamund Wilkinson, a math teacher who worked at the school in the mid-1970s, puts this remark into perspective. She describes her decision to come to Istanbul to be inspired both by a desire for adventure as well as a Christian calling. She adds, however, that she was always very careful with regard to explicating her religious convictions and quickly understood she should not discuss these with her students at length. She did occasionally talk about her faith when her students asked about it, but she was always very careful, because she felt and feels that in Turkey people should not be evangelized under the age of 18. Most students were Muslims at the time, though in the mid-1970s approximately a third was still Christian or Jewish according to her estimates.

It also becomes clear that considerable confusion exists considering the exact prescriptions of the founding deed and the regulations in which the agreements were set up with the Ottoman government. In an investigation carried out by the British Embassy in 1956, which is cited in cables from the 1960s, it was found out that the founding deeds of the Boys’ School from 12 April 1911 had permitted the School’s premises to be listed in the name of the British Embassy’s name. The cables point
out that this became a problem only when on 1 March 1916 the Ottoman government decreed that no other land could be claimed by a foreign legation except for consulates and embassies, bringing the provision in the title deeds in conflict with Ottoman law. Consequentially the Boys’ School officially had no owner. When the authorities pushed the school to have its properties registered in 1956 and 1957 it was only possible to do so in the name of the school. Interestingly also, possibly from a legal perspective as well, the British documents do not discriminate here between the Ottoman and Turkish governments, simply referring to the Ottoman Empire as ‘Turkey’ when discussing the acts of 1916. 73

The British Government did make efforts through the British Embassy to have the Girls’ School’s premises registered in its name when the ‘local land commission’ found out that it had no registered ownership, but the requests were refused by the Turkish Foreign Ministry several times. Eventually, similar to the Boys’ School, the EHSG Committee had no other option than to allow the premises to be registered in its own name. Guarantees were given by the Turkish side not to interfere in the administration of the school: ‘Fears that it would incur setting up and Anglo-Turkish Committee which might lead to embarrassing Turkish interference in the management of the Schools particularly of their finances were dispelled by the Turkish authorities’. 74 The documents further suggest that the Boys’ School had been accepted by the Turkish government as a legal entity and was therefore entitled to own its building. When checking the registries in 1967 it was found out that the property was still without owner. Following the problems of registration of the Boys’ School, which are cited confusingly to be in the name of the school. Guarantees were given by the Turkish side not to interfere in the administration of the school: ‘Fears that it would incur setting up and Anglo-Turkish Committee which might lead to embarrassing Turkish interference in the management of the Schools particularly of their finances were dispelled by the Turkish authorities’. 74

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In cables from 1968 the issue still appears unresolved. Until the 1970s it had not caused severe problems that would risk dispossess of land that was used as a playfield in Şişli primarily by the boys’ school, was disowned to construct a new road leading to the first Bosphorus bridge. Gwyneth Petter, the headmistress writes in the yearbook from 1972 that the school held its last Speech Day in 1971 at the playfield since the highway Authority claimed the property for the construction of the highway. She describes it as ‘(…) a fine scheme, but one which, in depriving us of our valuable playing area, is a great blow to the school’. 78 A year later she once again expresses her sadness with the loss of the playing field, but also narrates that the school was able to use the Tarabya Gardens of the British Consulate and the track facilities in the Dolmabahçe stadium, the later Beşiktaş JK stadium. 79 She hopes, however, that the school will at some point be able to use a small plot of land that was not dispossessed by the Turkish state. In cables from the British legations, it is found out that a compensation for the part of the land that was taken was paid, but when the committee of the school disagreed about the amount the authorities argued that there was no legal ownership connected to the plot. 80 This runs contrary to suggestions made in British memoranda that in fact the plot was registered in the name of the school on authority of the Beyoğlu Prefecture (Beyoğlu Kaymakamlığı) at the
Land Registry of Beyoğlu. The estimated value in 1968 was 200,000 Pound Sterling and the British Consulate’s documents state that it was expected that the value would increase once the Bosphorus Bridge was constructed. The exact amount granted by the Turkish authorities is not clear. The properties in Beyoğlu and Nişantaşı remained unaffected nonetheless, while plans for rebuilding on different sites and sale of the buildings appear to have been abandoned.

The stature of the school is still apparent in the documents of the late 1960s, with the committees stating that a closing of the schools would have a detrimental effect on the ‘British standing in Istanbul’. Despite all of its problems, the popularity of both schools was far from decreasing. It is suggested that both the boys’ and girls’ schools have a considerable reputation among businessmen, with the schools having trained many businessmen, and – showing the painful reality of a patriarchal society in the 1960s – ‘hardly less important, many top private secretaries and wives of, for instance, important officials’. It should be pointed out that this gender dichotomy in the career perspectives of the EHS graduates may not have been as black and white as the British reports suggest. In the interview with Wilkinson, teacher of the girls’ school, she narrates how she is often surprised how many of the girls would become professors, doctors and set up their own enterprises.

To protect the school’s legacy it is proposed once again by the British side, including the committees of both schools, to have the EHSG and EHSB turned into Turkish private schools. It becomes clear in the documents that an update of the statuses of the schools is required as it was by the late 1960s still based on the provisions made in the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923 which guaranteed the continuation of existing British institutions in the Turkish Republic. This would grant the schools more freedom to stipulate their own fees, which were already high in comparison with other comparable schools, and avoid the feared risks of losing the schools’ ‘Englishness’ that a turnover to the maarif would entail. Considerable confusion appears to exist on the British side about the legal connections of the UK with both schools and what plans for the future would mean in reality. At one point a British MP seems to have thought both schools are closed, in case of which the legation in Turkey has to explain this is in fact not the case.

Another example of the ensuing misunderstandings is the sug-
gestion of the Foreign Office to have the schools established on the line of the English-language Ankara College. This college was set up as a foundation by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk to push for education in English, in which – the British documents suggest – he pushed his circle to invest considerable funds. The Foreign Office appeared to consider the school a state school, whereas in fact it was a foundation not under the direct control of the Turkish Ministry of Education. The Foreign Office then suggested to hand the schools over to the Turkish authorities and have it run in a similar fashion as the Ankara College. This resulted in the British Consul General, who was chairman of the Girls’ School Committee in 1968, indicating that neither the school committees of the EHSG nor the EHSB were prepared to hand over the schools to the Turkish authorities for the reasons of losing the schools’ British character. The Consul General added to this that he thought Anglo-Turkish relations would experience considerable harm from the schools’ closures and have a highly adverse effect on our commercial prospects in Istanbul. The British Embassy appears to have disagreed and suggested that the Consul General is to speak with the Turkish authorities only as representative of the School Committee from then onwards, since the committee has ignored the wishes of the Foreign Office, the ambassador and the British Council in London. He is also advised to resign as Chairman of the Girls’ School Committee. The Embassy indicates that handing over the schools would not be damaging to Anglo-Turkish relations and that the Embassy will do whatever it can to help the schools, although the British Government decided not to support the schools with subsidies.

The girls’ school meanwhile housed 250 pupils in 1974, and a report notes that though the majority consists of ‘Moslem Turkish girls’, a total of eighteen different nationalities are represented at the school. Rosamund Wilkinson, however, recounts:

‘(…) The girls who came were all Turkish nationals. The majority Muslim background, some, probably around a third Jewish and Christian.’

She also notes the following on the quality of education at the school:

‘it was called the English High School for Girls, but the education didn’t really correspond with what it was like in England. We used English textbooks, but it was more like a grammar school really. Quite rigid really, because of being here in Turkey. (…) We didn’t have permission to open the lise part, we only had the middle school part. There were always students who went to either the boy school, or Robert College or Üsküdar American High School. Some of the best girls went on to Robert College, they often were the top students. We had a two-year prep, which gave them a really good grounding. Üsküdar had, I think, one year of prep, so they had English, but not quite as good as our girls had got. That’s what we used to tell ourselves anyway.’

The mixed population would remain a fact until after its transferral to the Turkish state and Wilkinson narrates how girls would basically get along regardless of their background, with a third of the girls being Jewish in some classes, though occasionally the racist influences of Turkish nationalism would trickle down into the school lives of the girls as well:

‘It was good academically and – I felt – a good atmosphere. Although I have talked to some students, one of the Jewish girls, she was actually harassed really because of her Jewishness. So there were a lot of things going on that we didn’t pick up and that saddens me.’

Regarding the socio-economic divisions in the schools she recounts that most girls were from the ‘old middle and upper middle classes’ in Istanbul, reminiscing her of Orhan Pamuk’s description of his family life in his memoir-like Istanbul. In this description she arguably establishes a synthesis between personal and cultural memory in a way quite similar to the process that has been coined by Marianne Hirsch as postmemory. This ran contrary to the times when she taught in Robert College when a nouveaux riche class had started to develop in Istanbul. Despite of the fact that fees for the schools were kept relatively low (though they were much higher than state school fees), the competition to get into
the school made it particularly hard for children from less well-off families to get their children on the school. It is probable that the fees were also simply too high for some families as a report from 1960, discusses a visit by a Turkish inspector who stated that the school fees of the English schools were above those of all other schools in Turkey. An ongoing quarrel between the Turkish and British side about these fees would ensue over the next two decades. Wilkinson mentions the following about this:

‘(...) They were from quite wealthy families, a lot of them. (...) There were some who were poorer, but mostly they were from quite wealthy backgrounds. (...) The school has been part and parcel of Istanbul and the mix that’s here, it was obviously very elitist which I think is the downside of the school really.’

Despite this, the situation described in the archives of the Foreign Office makes clear that the schools were not allowed to increase their fees to a level that would allow for a healthy budgetary balance. The math teacher recounts how this would affect the lives of teachers in the schools on a daily basis:

‘Eight years I taught there, I realized those were the best years of my teaching career. It was a very nice school and a very nice atmosphere. We didn’t have much. The blackboards were awful and I got them painted and then in the end I had to do it myself, because they put green gloss paint on it. It has to be matte. There was a lot of do it yourself stuff, just to make it work. We had funding, but not a lot. The girls had to pay for all their textbooks. There wasn’t a lot of money for doing things, so we did do some things ourselves. Mostly we had quite good foreign teachers who all worked together.’

Alumni from the years that Rosamund Wilkinson was a teacher at the EHSG also shared fond memories of their years in the school. They also recounted the strict discipline that was upheld in the school. During a dinner at the EHS Alumni Association in Arnavutköy, a number of former graduates from the girls’ school memorized how teachers were strict about the stairs routine. Saturday detention and other disciplinary measures were also taken when girls would speak in Turkish during the breaks. School uniforms were mentioned as a matter of embarrassment for some as the girls would be required to wear hats which would inspire men on the streets to call them ‘hostesses’ on the street. Despite of the apparent stringent regime of the school, the girls would occasionally be able to get away to spend time in a café near Galatasaray which was, according to the girls, also frequented by the Galatasaray football players. When a teacher found them they felt like they were walked back like a gaggle of geese. Rosamund Wilkinson recounts how teachers and school administration was also quite strict about speaking English. She still wonders how some of the students managed to learn the language properly since the teachers in the prep school were usually not native speakers.

The school’s status as a foreign school came to an end, following Margaret Thatcher’s election as Prime Minister in the United Kingdom and her decision to close all foreign schools in 1979. The schools were nonetheless maintained as English language institutions after the closing and reopened as Anatolian High Schools, (Anadolu Liseleri), a selective public high school system. The change of attitude towards the importance of English language education as a means of cultural diplomacy is reflected in a letter from the Foreign Office by Parliamentary Under Secretary of State Richard Luce, dated 21 November 1979. In this letter Luce points out that the British government has ‘no responsibility for the education of British children living overseas; and certainly none for foreign children living in their own country’. There was, however, considerable discord on the British side. In a letter in the National Archives Gasford Willis, former headmaster of the Boys’ School and described in diplomatic cables as ‘an extremely persistent correspondent’, questions whether the ambassador was properly briefed on the matter since the closure would cause ‘genuine hardship & distress and bitter anger against the British which would be caused among all the 600 sets of highly influential Turkish parents as a result of the handover’. He goes on by saying that ‘did the CG [consul general] make it clear that we were giving away at least £2½ million sterling worth of British assets held by us for ¾ century – longer for the EHSG – without getting anything in return except a vast amount of odium and contempt. [emphasis
Though financial difficulties of the girls’ school are frequently cited in the British documents, it does seem that the financial difficulties were primarily caused by the deficits of the boys’ school in Nişantaşı. The British Ambassador, Derek Dodson, indicates that the boys’ school had been troubled by financial issues since it was founded in 1905. One of the main causes was in fact the lack of income, since, contrary to the EHSB, the EHSB did not have any shops in its buildings from which it could collect revenues. Apart from that it becomes clear in the initial meetings of school committees and the British legations to discuss the transfer the school indeed had also financial reserves. This is confirmed by Wilkinson:

‘(...) Actually the girls’ high school was quite well off. They had not only some fees coming in, but they owned the shops as well underneath. So they had rents coming in. And then they must have had shares or even gold actually. Because I remember one of the heads commenting, and the head had to sell it. There was someone on the board who was quite astute and knew about investments, but then it was the head mistress, who had to take the action to sell or buy. So I think we had quite a lot of private investments or gold.’

In the Foreign Office’s files concerning the transfer of the schools to the Turkish authorities it is indicated that the Boys’ School was essentially about to go bankrupt whereas the Girls’ School would only be able to sustain itself for another two years. An important reason was the rapid inflation which strongly affected the EHSB’s financial assets on the one hand and the necessity to increase salaries of the British teachers if the school were to attract new teachers on the other. Agitation was rising meanwhile among representatives of the Foreign Office. In one cable it was stated that the issues surrounding the schools had taken up far too much time of the consulate, embassy and British Council. On the schools’ side Mr Sharland, the headmaster of the EHSB, wrote a letter to an MP in the UK asking for support and indicating the sacrifices the staff had made financially to keep the school open, because they believed in its purpose. Eventually, despite efforts, the properties were transferred to the Turkish Ministry of Education and the girls’ school was named Beyoğlu Anatolian High School, or Beyoğlu Anadolu Lisesi in 1980.

Despite of this, on the British side efforts were made by various parties to retain the links with Britain. In a protocol set up to facilitate the transfer it was indicated that the British Council would have a ‘privileged position’ in the policy of both the girls’ and boys’ school. The continued use of English as the language of instruction was considered as another safeguard for preserving the schools’ ‘Englishness’. This ‘British experience’ appears to have been one of the hallmarks of the school and its popularity. Wilkinson recounts that the girls were influenced by the school, its teachers and curricula considerably. She wonders occasionally about what they were doing and whether this school system really helped them to establish livelihoods and cope in Turkish society:

‘One thing that I often wondered about, because I thought about doing an MA in education. If I had done that I would have liked to have looked at the influence of the school on people culturally. I felt in a way – looking in retrospect – we were very British. There were lots of British teachers, even though you were not teaching British culture, it comes over. English literature and stuff like that. (...) I have often wondered whether we really helped the girls in some way. How able they were to fit into Turkish society. (...) They often went to English universities or universities in America and so on. (...) It wasn’t obviously our fault, we were just part of a system. This is a long history of foreign education. (...) Those countries [France, Italy, Germany] would have probably fostered that. The influence it would have on the leadership of a country and so on. In a way it was a bit sad when the British government in 1980, didn’t want to continue to have these schools here. It’s sort of saying like we don’t want a link with Turkey in a way. It was a time when we were having cuts, but I think it’s a shame in a way. There wasn’t that ongoing connection [anymore]. I mean you can’t influence everyone, but I think there is value: it just gives a different viewpoint.’
After the school was turned into an Anatolian High School the school managed to uphold its reputation as an English-language institution for a number of years. A former student of the Beyoğlu Anadolu Lisesi recounts how classic English and American literature was part of their classes, with a prefect-system still in place. She also argues that the school remained very popular due to the increasing importance of English in Turkey. There was one British English teacher who made a particular impression on her at the school. The English teacher remembered by the student started working at the school in 1979 and he also narrates how the school appears to have retained its appeal among Turkish parents:

“When it became a Turkish government school suddenly it was flooded with pupils. We had inspectors coming round to see if even the little room where the tea was made could be turned into a classroom, because people were complaining that the school was not accepting enough pupils. Because a lot of parents wanted their pupils to get in, so we had lots of people trying to get in – shall we say the backdoor. Getting their girls into other Anadolu Lisesi and then transfer them to our school. We also got people who had been the daughters of Turkish diplomatic staff or military attachés abroad and so we had part from those, we also had a girl from India. I don’t know how she managed to get in.”

His remarks in fact echo the reports of a school inspector who visited both the boys’ and girls’ schools in 1960 and complained about the small numbers of students in the classes of the boys’ schools, describing it as ‘a very expensive luxury’. On a different note, the English teacher remembers that the population of the school still included significant representations of girls from the minorities. Regarding the student population he mentions the following:

“There were a lot of Armenian, Greek, Jewish girls at the school when it was the high school. But that carried on, after it had been taken over, we still had quite a lot of girls from the Christian and Jewish communities.”

The school would eventually, however, transform into a regular Anatolian High School, though at first British involvement continued through the funding of two British English teachers and one math teacher. The changing of the head mistress would have had a considerable impact, according to the English teacher:

“In the end, however, it appears that the school started to become integrated in the regular system of Anadolu Liseleri. (...) Well, we lost our head mistress, [...], she went off to be the head mistress of Darüşşafaka. Then we had a guy who stayed for about a year, then we had a lady from Kadıköy Anadolu Lisesi, but the new Turkish head mistresses and head masters had not been in the British system. The thing about [the head mistress who went to Darüşşafaka] was that she had been at the school when it was a British school, so she knew how things were run in the British system. And she knew what sort of things British people liked and didn’t like. The people who came after were completely Turkish in their mentality, so it was very difficult for me in particular, because I was trying to hang on to some of the British traditions to get through to this lady. So that made life very difficult and it became very stressful, so I left.”

Regarding the British traditions he tried to uphold the teacher tells:

“First of all, the system of prefects. The teachers on duty and this going up and down the stairs in single file and quite quietly, because in the late seventies a girl killed herself by sliding down the bannisters, and of course there were six or seven floors. [...] What else... I think in general, discipline, because of course it had been a smaller school and it was easier to get people to go up and down stairs in single file and line up, cue up for instance in the canteen when they wanted food. That’s a very British thing to cue up and the British are very strict about that. So that’s the sort of thing that started to go.”
The Beyoğlu High School remains in its present building up to this date, though education in English and its ‘British character’ has waned through the years as it became further integrated in the system of Anatolian High Schools. The most prestigious historical schools that offer education in English nowadays are embedded in an American, rather than a British, tradition, notably Robert College and Üsküdar American High School. The school was turned into a co-educational institution after 2002. In recent years there has been debate about turning the school back into a high school for girls only, which stirred a debate among parts of the general public as well as among students, both claiming it to be a move of the conservative AKP-government to push for separation of boys and girls in the educational system. The director of the school claimed it was for ‘historical reasons’, since the school always had been a girls’ school he had seen it fit to turn the school back to its ‘original state’, suggesting that he proposed it to the Ministry of Education which had granted him the go-ahead. Pictures from 2018 on the school’s website show, however, that the amendments have not been made and that the school still holds a mixed student population. The ties with the historical institution that was once a standard-bearer of ‘British-ness’ in the city, however, have been severed and little reminds of the anglophone culture that was upheld in the EHSG and the early years of BAL.

ENDNOTES

1 I am not mentioning the various other reputable schools of the Ottoman millets here, as well as the Mekteb-i Sultani, which is currently the Galatasaray High School and is the focus of chapter 4.
5 Eldem, ‘Ottoman financial integration’, 434.
6 Ibidem, 441-443.
8 TNA, ‘Memorandum’, 2.
15 The National Archives, ‘Confidential notes on legal status of EHS’, 1, FO 195/2717 English High Schools 1962.
Building Beyoğlu English High School for Girls

22 Ibidem, 54.
23 Ibidem, 57.
25 The National Archives, ‘Letter from Mr Kelly, British Embassy to Mr Gillan, British Council’, 1, BW 61/7 English high school for girls.
26 TNA, Letter from Mr Kelly’, 2.
29 Ibidem, 19-44.
32 The National Archives, ‘Four years of the British Council in Turkey’, 1-3, FO 924/35 British Schools in Ankara and Istanbul 1944.
33 The concept of Halk Evleri is explained in chapter 3 on Freemasonry in Part II of this dissertation.
34 TNA, ‘Four years of the British Council in Turkey’, 1.
42 Ibidem, 8.
43 Ibidem, 7.
I needed a special term to refer to the secondary, belated quality of my relationship with times and places that I had never experienced or seen, but which are vivid enough that I feel as though I remember them. My “memory” of Czernowitz, I concluded, is a “postmemory.”

74 Ibidem, 2.
75 Ibidem, 5.
77 The National Archives, ‘File Note: English High School for Girls Foundation Deed’, 1, FCO 13/903 EHS Transfer to Turkey 1979.
82 Ibidem, 2.
83 Ibidem.
86 The National Archives, ‘Letter by William Rodgers (From the Parliamentary Under-Secretary (21-2-1968)’, 1, FCO 13/48 English Schools in Turkey 1968.
88 TNA, ‘Letter by A.D.F. Pemberton-Pigott’.
93 Ibidem.
94 Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010) 9. Hirsch describes the process as follows: When I began to write about my own early memories and about the phenomenon of personal and cultural memory in general,
karma-egitime-veda-abartilacak-bir-sey-degil-origjinaline-dondu/.
116 Diken, ‘Beyoğlu Anadolu’da karma eğitime veda’.
117 T.C. Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, ‘Website Beyoğlu Anadolu Lisesi’, http://beyogluan-
adolu.meb.k12.tr/, accessed 19-12-2018.