



To Kill a Sultan

A TRANSNATIONAL HISTORY OF THE
ATTEMPT ON ABDŪLHAMID II (1905)

Edited by Houssine Alloul,
Edhem Eldem and Henk de Smaele

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Houssine Alloul · Edhem Eldem · Henk de Smaele
Editors

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palgrave
macmillan

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ISBN 978-1-137-48931-9 ISBN 978-1-137-48932-6 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-48932-6>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017939324

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The registered company is Macmillan Publishers Ltd.
The registered company address is:
The Campus, 4 Crinan Street, London, N1 9XW, United Kingdom

PREFACE

While we were working on this book, bombs were exploding in diverse capitals, including our own. Western media and politicians were constantly discussing the dangers of political Islam, the need for far-reaching security measures, a tougher approach toward ‘radicalization’, and more stringent controls of borders and migration flows. To some contemporary readers, the central historical event of this book might therefore seem puzzling at first: a well-planned terrorist ‘car bomb’ attack on the Muslim sovereign of one of the longest-lasting empires in history, perpetrated by (Christian) Armenian socialist, nationalist revolutionaries. Given the widespread Islamophobia in mainstream Western media and the facile (de)politicized and sensationalist coverage of Islamist terrorist violence that persistently de-contextualizes many of the geopolitical and domestic socio-economic inequalities from which it springs, many an observer might be surprised to learn that ‘terrorism’ as we know it today—with suicide attacks, hostage takings, bombings targeting both officials and civilians—originated in Russia and in Western, Central and Southeastern Europe, among leftist revolutionary movements, in response to the deep political, social and economic inequities engendered by authoritarian government, *laissez-faire* economic policies and the massive, unchecked accumulation of wealth in the hands of industrial, financial and governmental elites. In the late nineteenth century, several anarchist, nationalist and/or socialist movements in the Ottoman lands also adopted similar terrorist techniques.

Closely involved in the Yıldız bombing of 1905 was Antwerp-born Edward Joris; or, that ‘Unwanted child of the Scheldt’, as one Ottoman contemporary would later recall him.¹ It was his participation in the plot that propelled the whole event to the international stage, triggered a diplomatic conflict between Belgium and the Ottoman Empire, and gave rise to a heated public debate on international law and the Ottomans’ place in it. Yet the entire episode would have remained unknown to most scholars in Belgium, were it not for a booklet, which one of the editors accidentally encountered: *Dynamiet voor de Sultan. Carolus Edward Joris in Konstantinopel* (1997). A collection of letters, co-edited and annotated by Walter Ressler and Benoit Suykerbuyk, the book was itself the product of sheer coincidence. In 1968, Walter Ressler had found a portfolio with letters in the attic of his parental house in Antwerp. Most of these had been written by Edward Joris in 1907 from an Istanbul jail and were addressed to his great-grandfather, the anarchist writer and publisher Victor Ressler. These and other related documents were carefully transcribed and published by Ressler and Suykerbuyk.

This intriguing collection of letters, completely unknown to researchers outside Belgium, was the main incentive to organize a two-day international workshop on the attempt at the University of Antwerp in June 2013. The workshop invited scholars working in different fields to reflect on this moment of ‘entangled history’, challenging them to think critically about the significance of Euro-Ottoman relations at the turn of the century. Some of the contributions to this book were first presented at this meeting and benefited from the discussions and comments of those who attended.

We would like to thank the following people who joined us then and enlivened the discussions: Erol Baykal, Rik Coolsaet, Saro Dadyan, Saskia Delbecque, Alexander H. De Groot, Sabine Dullin, Anthony Gorman, Pieter Lagrou, Jan Schmidt, and Christophe Verbruggen. We greatly benefited from the financial support of the Department of History and the Research Council of the University of Antwerp, as well as the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO). We would also like to thank Letterenhuis, Antwerp, for granting us permission to reproduce some of

¹S. Naoum-Duhani (1956) *Quand Beyoglu s'appelait Péra. Les temps qui ne reviendront plus* (Istanbul: Edition 'La Turquie Moderne'), p. 28.

the exceptional photographs that illustrate this book. We have very much appreciated the constructive suggestions of an anonymous reader for Palgrave at different stages of this project. The editorial team of Palgrave Macmillan was supportive as well as patient; it was a pleasure working, first with Jane Moulds, and then with Molly Beck and Oliver Dyer. We would like to express our thanks also to Sangeetha Kumaresan from Springer. We are grateful to İpek K. Yosmaoğlu, who kindly accepted our invitation to contribute an excellent conclusion to this book. Finally, a special thanks is due to Wannes Dupont for carefully reading our introduction and for his interest in the entire project.

Brussels, Belgium
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August 2016

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Introduction

Anatomy of the Yıldız Bombing: Tracing the Global in the Particular

Houssine Alloul, Edhem Eldem and Henk de Smaele

Istanbul, Friday 21 July, 1905: a crowd has gathered at the Hamidiye Mosque, in Yıldız, for the *selamlık*, a weekly public procession for the Sultan's Friday prayer.¹ As, for most people, it was the only chance to

¹On the domestic political and symbolical significance of the Friday prayer ceremony, see S. Deringil (2011/1999) *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876–1909* (London: I. B. Tauris), pp. 16ff, and specifically at pp. 23–25; and D. Stephanov (2012) ‘Minorities, Majorities,

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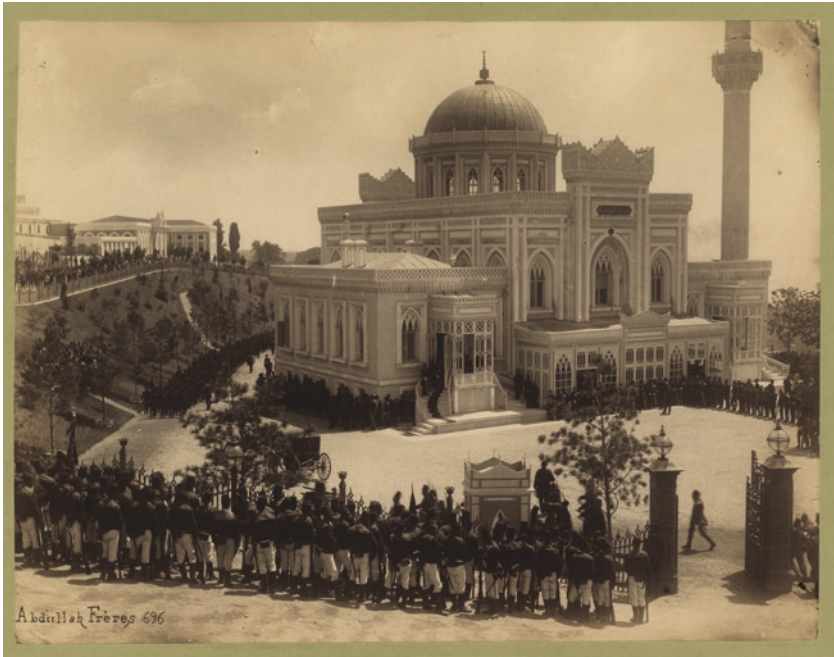


Fig. 1.1 Photograph, *selamlık* at the Yıldız Hamidiye Mosque, Istanbul, by Abdullah Frères, s.d. (taken between 1886 and 1893). *Source* Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., LOT 13549-1, no. 21

catch a glimpse of the Ottoman sovereign, this highly ritualized and grandiose ceremony attracted large numbers of spectators, including many foreign diplomats and visitors (Fig. 1.1). Just moments after Abdülhamid II came out of the mosque, a bomb planted in a nearby carriage exploded, leaving 26 dead and another 58 wounded

and the Monarch: Nationalizing Effects of the Late Ottoman Royal Public Ceremonies, 1808–1908’, Ph.D. thesis (University of Memphis), pp. 34–35, 182–183, and 211–214. Recently, some Russian footage has been discovered of the *selamlık* in which Abdülhamid II is shortly visible. The footage probably dates from after the 1908 Young Turk Revolution and can be watched on YouTube.

or mutilated. By sheer accident, the Sultan, although its main target, escaped the attack unscathed. The operation had been carefully planned by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) [Hai Heghapokhakan Dashnaksutyun] following a strategy aimed at drawing international attention to the fate of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire and to force the Sublime Porte to implement administrative reforms in the eastern Anatolian provinces. A week after the bombing, the Ottoman police arrested a Belgian citizen in Istanbul, Edward Joris (Fig. 1.2), as one of the prime suspects behind the plot. Joris, a self-proclaimed anarchist, had moved to the Ottoman capital some 4 years earlier for work, and had gotten involved with ARF members. The police soon arrested other suspects, uncovering the whole plot. In December, an Ottoman court sentenced Joris and three Armenians to death. In the meantime, Joris's arrest had already sparked an international reaction: support committees were established and a press campaign was launched, demanding his immediate release. Two years later, in late December 1907, Joris was suddenly pardoned, discreetly released from prison, and allowed to return to his native country.

As the incidents surrounding the failed assassination attempt faded from memory, the plot was relegated to the status of a footnote in early twentieth-century history, filled with much more momentous events. The authors of this book do not claim that this particular incident was world changing. They do maintain, however, that the conspiracy that led to it and the subsequent developments offer a unique opportunity to reconsider some of the ways in which the histories of the Ottoman Empire, Europe, and the rest of the world were interconnected. The 'Yıldız bombing'—so called because it happened in close vicinity of Abdülhamid's Yıldız Palace and Mosque²—leaves many

²Yıldız (Star in Turkish) was the name given to a palatial complex built on the hill overlooking Beşiktaş, on the Bosphorus. Although the history of this imperial domain goes back to the seventeenth century, it owes its development as an imperial palace to Abdülhamid II, who, finding his predecessors' seaside palaces of Dolmabahçe and Çırağan too vulnerable, turned this location into his heavily guarded and inaccessible residence. In 1885–1886 the Sultan added to this very eclectic assemblage of kiosks a mosque bearing his name, Hamidiye Camii, built at a stone's throw from the palace, thus allowing him to perform his public Friday prayers within the secured perimeter of the palace. This palace was so closely associated with Abdülhamid that Yıldız came to be used in the political jargon of the time to represent his personal and autocratic rule, while the (subdued) government continued to be named after the [Sublime] Porte (Bab-ı Âli).



Fig. 1.2 Photograph, Anna Nellens (b. 1871) and her husband Edward Joris, Istanbul, ca. 1902. *Source* House of Letters, Antwerp

questions unanswered. How did the ARF succeed in circumventing the Hamidian secret police, prepare their '*machine infernale*' and carry

out their attack, the first recorded use of a ‘car bomb’? How does one explain the involvement of a Belgian anarchist in an Armenian terrorist cell? What is one to make of the international public support for a radical leftist bomber who not only tried to kill the head of state of a major power, but was also an accessory to the murder of 26 people? Why was Joris eventually released after receiving a death sentence? What were the legal strappings of the affair that eventually led to international debates on the ‘capitulations’ system?³ In this book, we reflect on many of these questions.

Although the Yıldız bombing remains largely forgotten today, the event is still likely to captivate the public’s attention.⁴ For the most part, the occasional and very superficial interest shown for this event in Turkey has more to do with a renewed fascination with Sultan Abdülhamid among conservative circles than with genuine curiosity for the attack itself.⁵ One of the most obvious reasons for this amnesia is that the attack failed to achieve its principal goal—liquidating Abdülhamid II—and therefore never attracted the kind of extensive, indeed sometimes obsessive, attention that more notorious attempts of the period have received. Think of the assassinations of Tsar Alexander II (1881), of Empress Elisabeth–Sissi—(1898) and of Archduke Franz Ferdinand (1914), to name but a few. Understandably, then, the Young Turk revolution, which put an end to Abdülhamid’s autocracy (1908) and eventually to

³It is not our ambition to have the last word on the ‘specifics’ of the conspiracy and we readily admit that many thorny questions remain shrouded in mystery. For instance, did St Petersburg ‘know’ of the plot? Were some of the conspirators actually working for foreign governments? Did Sofia withhold from Istanbul some intelligence on the conspiracy? How to understand the ARF’s ‘plan B’, which envisioned in case the attempt would fail, bombing ‘for eight to ten consecutive days’ major Ottoman and foreign landmarks in Istanbul and Izmir, but was quickly uncovered by the police? (The quote is from a study by Garabet K. Moumdjian, which provides some details on this parallel plot. See (2011) ‘From Millet-i Sadıka to Millet-i Asiya: Abdülhamid II and Armenians, 1878–1909’, in M. H. Yavuz and P. Sluglett (eds.) *War and Diplomacy: The Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 and the Treaty of Berlin* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press), pp. 332–333.) Some of these more thorny issues are touched upon in Chap. 2.

⁴A Turkish author of crime novels has very recently published a novel based on the event: Ahmet Küçükerniç (2015) *Kıskaç. Yıldız Suikastı* [The Clamp: The Yıldız Attempt] (Istanbul: Profil Yayıncılık). While working on this book, we have been contacted by radio broadcasters, several journalists and even a playwright.

⁵See the epilogue.

his reign (1909), has left an incomparably deeper trace. Finally, one cannot help thinking that the ‘peripheral’ status of the Ottoman Empire from the perspective of mainstream Western historiography may have also helped further marginalize an already secondary event. It is quite telling in this sense that the prolific writer-scholar and activist Mike Davis, in his widely acclaimed *Buda’s Wagon: A Brief History of the Car Bomb* starts his narrative only in 1920—15 years after the ARF’s attempt—when an Italian anarchist parked and then detonated a horse-drawn carriage filled with explosives in Wall Street, leaving almost 40 people dead.⁶ No wonder, then, that the existing scholarship is scant. Apart from a source edition by the Belgian amateur historians Walter Ressler and Benoit Suykerbuyk,⁷ the attempt is analyzed or only briefly mentioned in a handful of articles, monographs and theses.⁸

To fully understand the plot, one needs to engage with various historical subjects (global radicalism, imperialism, diplomacy, nationalism, humanitarianism, international law) and browse thousands of archival documents and publications in many different languages (at least Ottoman Turkish, Armenian, Dutch, French, German and English) from all over the world. Such an endeavor is too vast for any single researcher. That is why we have brought together an international team of scholars with different areas of expertise and specialization. In that sense, rather than an edited volume in the classical sense, this book may be viewed as a monograph by a collective of authors, coordinated by a trio of editors. The guiding question throughout the book is what the failed ARF plot can tell us about broader historical processes, by combining ‘old-school’,

⁶M. Davis (2007) *Buda’s Wagon: A Brief History of the Car Bomb* (London: Verso). We thank the anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

⁷W. Ressler and B. Suykerbuyk (1997) *Dynamiet voor de Sultan. Carolus Edward Joris in Konstantinopel* (Antwerp: b+b).

⁸V. Engin (1995) ‘Sultan II. Abdülhamid’e Düzenlenen Ermeni Suikasti ve Bu Sebeple Belçika İle Yaşanan Diplomatik Kriz [The Armenian Attempt on Sultan Abdülhamid II and the Ensuing Diplomatic Crisis with Belgium], *BELLETTEN*, 225, 413–428; C. Verbruggen (2009) *Schrijverschap in de Belgische Belle Époque. Een sociaal-culturele geschiedenis* (Ghent: Academia Press; Nimeguen: Vantilt), pp. 161–166; F. Georgeon (2003) *Abdülhamid II. Le sultan calife (1876–1909)* (Paris: Fayard), pp. 389–393; R. Kévorkian (2011) *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London: I. B. Tauris), pp. 35–36; Moundjian, ‘From Millet-i Sadıka to Millet-i Asiya’; S. Delbecque (2012) ‘“Die jongen moet vrijkomen”. De aanslag van Edward Joris op de Ottomaanse Sultan Abdülhamid II’, MA thesis (University of Antwerp).

rigorous and patient historical methodology with historiographical and theoretical reflection. By studying the ‘anatomy’ of a heretofore unexplored historical event, we aim to uncover and better understand some of the intersections of the global and the local, of governments and sub-state nationalist movements, and of ideology and practice. This multi-pronged narrative focus on one particularly dramatic episode allows for a truly transnational and ‘entangled’ analysis of the events, which challenges the historical paradigms that take the nation as the natural unit of analysis without, however, losing track of how the nation operates as a powerful ideology that ‘changes over time, and whose precise elaboration at any point has profound effects on wars, economies, cultures, the movements of people, and relations of domination’.⁹ In so doing, *To Kill A Sultan* opens a unique window onto several new topics related to Ottoman, European, international and global history.

This book should also be seen as a ‘microhistory’, although it departs in many ways from the genre as it has been developed since the 1970s to offer an alternative and corrective method to generalizing, teleological and reductive ways of writing history.¹⁰ Microhistories typically focus on local realities, and tend to disregard international and/or transnational mobility and dynamics. Although detailed, small-scale and case-oriented analyses are far from absent from the historical literature on international relations, such studies usually center on diplomatic and political elites and have very little in common with the methods and ambitions of *microstoria*. Moreover, diplomatic historians are prone to privileging a unilateral approach, usually by looking at a crisis from the perspective of one of the powers or countries involved.¹¹ Without arguing for any methodological or theoretical orthodoxy, we believe that a more consistent attempt at ‘transnational microhistory’ has the potential to add empirical wealth to such relatively new approaches as ‘entangled’ history

⁹L. Briggs, G. McCormick, and J. T. Way (2008) ‘Transnationalism: A Category of Analysis’, *American Quarterly*, 60 (3), 625–648. Quote is at p. 644. See also Chap. 3 for a detailed treatment of some of these questions.

¹⁰G. G. Iggers (1997) *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press).

¹¹There are many exceptions of course and especially the work of Akira Iriye on U.S.-Japanese relations has been exemplary to many scholars in the field.

(or *histoire croisée*),¹² which bear the risk of developing a discrepancy between theoretical sophistication and empirical poverty. Indeed, more broadly speaking, ‘global history’ has often been criticized for favoring long-term structural processes over individual human agency.¹³

As Lara Putnam has aptly suggested,

...microhistory has excelled at demonstrating connections’ and ‘has had the most impact in cases in which prior assumptions of separation were so strong and so fundamental that the mere demonstration of such connections forces readers to reconsider basic claims about the societies within which the connections were found.¹⁴

So too, the history of the 1905 assassination attempt and its aftermath prompts ‘Europeanists’ and ‘Ottomanists’ to look at their fields as interconnected in unexpected ways. As can be seen from the contributions to this volume, it triggers new dialogs and collaborations.

Adopting very different angles, Chaps. 2 and 3 uncover some of the ARF’s transnational foundations, showing how the organization attracted Armenian volunteers from Russia, the Ottoman Empire and the diaspora, and equally gained the support of European radicals (such as Joris and his wife Anna). Chapter 4 explores how the Hamidian regime responded to domestic terrorism and political violence and participated in interstate collaborative attempts to ‘fight’ anarchism. Chapter 5 demonstrates to what extent Belgian diplomats interpreted international law to fit their own national interests. The Chap. 6 in turn reveals how Ottoman jurists ‘spoke back’, wielding the same legal tools and language, hence challenging our conception of how international law was both contested and reproduced by ‘peripheral’ actors throughout the long nineteenth-century. Chapters 7 and 8 respectively deal with Western mass media and ‘humanitarian’ mobilization, approaching these subjects

¹²M. Werner and B. Zimmermann (2006) ‘Beyond Comparisons: Histoire croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity’, *History and Theory*, 45, 30–50.

¹³See e.g. L. Colley (2007) ‘One Life reveals a Global History’, *RSA Journal*, 154, 38–43; L. Hunt (2014) *Writing History in the Global Era* (New York: Norton). For a similar plea within the field of IR studies, see B. Mabee (2007) ‘Levels and Agents, States and People: Micro-Historical Sociological Analysis and International Relations’, *International Politics*, 44, 431–449.

¹⁴L. Putnam (2006) ‘To Study the Fragments/Whole: Microhistory and the Atlantic World’, *Journal of Social History*, 39, p. 616.

as fundamentally trans and international in kind. By turning this micro-history into the collective project of a team of specialists with different linguistic and disciplinary backgrounds, we have explored the feasibility of writing a multi-perspectival, ‘entangled’ history of the affair. In this respect, we have attempted to respond to the challenging methodological questions recently raised by the Canadian historian John Price, whether ‘the individual monograph can continue to be the standard for historians’, and whether we should not, instead, ‘be constructing multi-lingual research consortia’.¹⁵

The Yıldız attempt occurred in the midst of heightening international tensions and happened shortly after, or in the midst of, several momentous episodes of world history. The Japanese military victory over Russia in May 1905 had a profound impact on international politics. The German Reich took advantage of the Russian defeat to strengthen its own position, but more importantly, the military victory of an ‘Oriental’ nation triggered a new political awareness throughout the non-Western world, as well as a Western anxiety about a ‘yellow peril’.¹⁶ In many ways, the Russo–Japanese War revealed the complexities as well as entanglements of the early twentieth-century world. The war was covered extensively in the international media.¹⁷ The outcome of the conflict challenged racist assumptions about the inferiority of the Asian peoples, while it simultaneously reinforced racist interpretations of world politics.¹⁸ While politicians and commentators constantly evoked the otherness of Japan and of the ‘yellow races’, Japan was equally hailed as an example of successful ‘modernization’ and emulation of the ‘European

¹⁵Introduction to the 2013 H-Diplo Roundtable Review, vol. 14, of J. D. Meehan (2011) *Chasing the Dragon in Shanghai: Canada’s Early Relations with China, 1858–1952* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press).

¹⁶R. Kowner (2007) *The Impact of the Russo-Japanese War* (New York: Routledge); C. Aydin (2007) *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press); P. Mishra (2015/2012) *From the Ruins of Empire: The Intellectuals Who Remade Asia* (London: Penguin); S. Esenbel (2004) ‘Japan’s Global Claim to Asia and the World of Islam: Transnational Nationalism and World Power, 1900–1945’, *The American Historical Review*, 109, 1140–1170.

¹⁷M. Gerbig-Fabel (2008) ‘Photographic Artefacts of War, 1904–1905: The Russo-Japanese War as Transnational Media Event’, *European Review of History*, 15, 629–642.

¹⁸Z. I. Búzás (2013) ‘The Color of Threat: Race, Threat Perception, and the Demise of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance (1902–1923)’, *Security Studies*, 22, 573–606.

model'.¹⁹ Moreover, the way Japan conducted the war, meticulously respecting international law (in contrast to Russia), elicited approval among (predominantly Western) international lawyers and contributed to the 'internationalization of the family of nations'.²⁰ Leading circles within the Ottoman Empire closely followed the domestic developments in Japan as well as the country's position in the newly emerging world order.²¹

The so-called Moroccan Crisis (March 1905–May 1906) was another important international incident involving a non-Western country, which showed that Great Power relations were in flux. The crisis erupted after Kaiser Wilhelm II had publicly expressed his support for the resistance of the Moroccan Sultan Abdelaziz against French interference in his kingdom's domestic affairs. This was generally viewed as an example of Germany's intention to extend its sphere of influence in North Africa, and ultimately, to expand its colonial domain. Although the tension between Germany and France escalated to the level of military preparations, the dispute was eventually settled diplomatically at the Algeciras Conference. Imperialism was increasingly turned into a diplomatic affair, a shared 'responsibility' of civilized nations. As historian Heather Jones has argued, 'the whole process of imperial takeover of Morocco was cloaked in the respectable language of international diplomacy'.²²

While one can indeed argue that '[t]he 'golden decade' of colonialism (1896–1906) was coming to an end now the world was almost entirely occupied, this did not mean that European imperialism was on the wane.²³ On the contrary, international politics were more and more determined by imperialist agendas, with far-reaching consequences for the Ottoman Empire. Throughout the nineteenth-century, the Empire was considered to be in decline—the 'Sick Man of Europe'—and the so-called

¹⁹A. M. Nordlund (2015) 'A War of Others: British War Correspondents, Orientalist Discourse, and the Russo-Japanese War, 1904–1905', *War in History*, 22, 28–46.

²⁰D. Howland (2011) 'Sovereignty and the Laws of War: International Consequences of Japan's 1905 Victory over Russia', *Law and History Review*, 29, 53–97.

²¹R. Worringer (2004) "'Sick Man of Europe" or "Japan of the Near East"?: Constructing Ottoman Modernity in the Hamidian and Young Turk Eras', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 36, 207–230.

²²H. Jones (2009) 'Algeciras Revisited: European Crisis and Conference Diplomacy, 16 January–7 April 1906', *EUI Working Papers. Max Weber Programme*.

²³R. Schulze (2000) *A Modern History of the Islamic World* (London: I. B. Tauris).

Eastern Question had been mainly about preserving the European ‘balance of power’, avoiding that one of the Great Powers should unilaterally profit from the Empire’s imminent collapse. Around 1900, however, the British looked at the region from a new geopolitical perspective. Securing the British position in India required establishing a more direct control over the Ottoman lands, including the Arab provinces.²⁴ For the time being, the British were satisfied with a European ‘informal empire’ in the Ottoman realm, but the case of Egypt had made it clear that they were ready for a more formal takeover when their interests and privileges seemed at risk.²⁵ The way the British government dealt with the Ottomans during the Aqaba crisis (1906) showed how London looked at the region from an aggressively imperialist and strategic viewpoint, and how little patience they really had with Ottoman claims of sovereignty.²⁶ The attitude of Wilhelmine Germany toward the Ottomans was friendlier. To the dissatisfaction and distrust of the other powers, Germany became the Ottomans’ most reliable partner in the international arena.²⁷

The position of the Ottoman Empire within the international system was rather ambiguous. Since the end of the Crimean War (1856), the Empire was formally a member of the ‘Concert of Europe’ and henceforth a peer of the other European states, entitled to the benefits of international public law. Consequently, it had heavily invested in the formation of a ‘Western-style’ staff of professional diplomats and international

²⁴O. F. Khalil (2014) ‘The Crossroads of the World: U.S. and British Foreign Policy Doctrines and the Construct of the Middle East, 1902–2007’, *Diplomatic History*, 38, 299–344; G. Çetinsaya (2003) ‘The Ottoman View of British Presence in Iraq and the Gulf: The Era of Abdulhamid II’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 39, 194–203. The British General Staff, asked about the possibility of a British attack on the Dardanelles, came to the conclusion, however, that such an undertaking would be highly hazardous. See K. Wilson (2013) ‘Reality-Check 1906–1907: The British Government Recognizes the Limitations of its Power of Offence against the Ottoman Empire’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 49, 517–527.

²⁵J. D. Savage (2010) ‘The Stability and Breakdown of Empire: European Informal Empire in China, the Ottoman Empire and Egypt’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 17, 161–185.

²⁶J. Burman (2009) ‘British Strategic Interests versus Ottoman Sovereign Rights: New Perspectives on the Aqaba Crisis, 1906’, *Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History*, 37, 275–292.

²⁷On German-Ottoman relations, see S. McMeekin (2010) *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany’s Bid for World Power* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press); İ. Ortaylı (2006) *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda Alman Nüfuzu* (Istanbul: Alkim).

lawyers.²⁸ It was also an empire with a long history, ruled by a dynasty with an impressive pedigree. Yet the Ottoman Empire was also always Europe's other, allegedly lagging behind in civilization and modernity.²⁹ During the nineteenth-century, the threats and challenges to its position in the hierarchy of states seem to have steadily increased.³⁰ Its precarious financial situation and the accumulation of an enormous amount of foreign debt further increased the Empire's dependence on the goodwill of the major foreign powers, which increasingly treated the Ottomans in semi-colonial fashion. This was certainly the case insofar as the Empire's European dominions were concerned, particularly the area then known to the West as Macedonia. Ever since 1903, the Ottomans had been facing local 'nationalist' insurrections and the Great Powers severely pressured Abdülhamid to implement 'administrative' reforms in the region. In January 1905, and again in April, the Ottomans were forced to accept a plan for financial reform, which amounted to giving up fiscal control over its own provinces. What was really at stake was the opening up of these territories to Western financial and economic interests. By November 1905 (coinciding with the trial of Joris and the other suspects of the Yıldız bombing), the Great Powers even decided to resort to a joint naval demonstration—or more aptly to 'gunboat diplomacy'—in order to coerce the

²⁸M. S. Palabıyık (2015) 'International Law for Survival: Teaching International Law in the Late Ottoman Empire (1859–1922)', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental & African Studies*, 78, 271–292; Ö. Kürkçüoğlu (2004) 'The Adoption and Use of Permanent Diplomacy', in A. N. Yurdusev (ed.) *Ottoman Diplomacy: Conventional or Unconventional?* (London: Palgrave), 131–150; S. Kunalalp (1982) 'The Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic', in Z. Steiner (ed.) *The Times Survey of Foreign Ministries of the World* (London: Times Books), 493–510.

²⁹The literature on this subject is vast. See, for instance, L. R. Schumacher (2014) 'The Eastern Question as a Europe Question: Viewing the Ascent of 'Europe' through the Lens of Ottoman Decline', *Journal of European Studies*, 44, 64–80; I. B. Neumann IB. (1999) *Uses of the Other: 'The East' in European Identity Formation*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 39–64.

³⁰On the complex system of international 'stratification', see E. Keene (2014) 'The Standard of 'Civilisation', the Expansions Thesis and the 19th-century International Social Space', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 21, 651–673. For a concrete attempt to rank nations according to their prestige, see (for what it is worth) J. D. Singer and M. Small (1966) 'The Composition and Status-Ordering of the International System', *World Politics*, 18, 236–282. In this list, 'Turkey' reached fourth position in 1827, where it remained until the middle of the century. It then gradually dropped to tenth position in the 1880s. By 1904, it ranked twelfth.

Sultan to implement further ‘reforms’, and they even occupied the Aegean islands of Mytilene and Lemnos, a repetition of a French exercise carried out a few years earlier to force the Ottoman government to pay its outstanding debts to the bankers Lorando and Tubini.³¹

The hardening lines of Western governments vis-à-vis Istanbul had a lot to do with the rise of ‘Turcophobia’ in European public opinion, which in turn overlapped to a large extent with Abdülhamid II’s reign. Liberal opinion makers in particular, depicted the Sultan as a blood-thirsty Oriental despot, ruthlessly persecuting his Christian subjects. Indeed, the fate of the Empire’s Christian populations provoked particularly strong feelings of sympathy and outrage. The ‘Bulgarian horrors’ (1876–1878), so powerfully publicized by Gladstone,³² followed by the ‘Armenian massacres’ (1894–1896) had further reinforced anti-Turkish sentiments (Fig. 1.3).³³ By 1900, ‘humanitarianism’ and ‘Orientalism’ echoed each other in most Western European countries, and Liberal reformers pleaded repeatedly for ‘humanitarian intervention’ in the Ottoman Empire.³⁴ In the face of such European obtrusiveness,

³¹On the Ottoman Balkans in this period, see I. Blumi (2011) *Reinstating the Ottomans: Alternative Balkan Modernities, 1800–1912* (New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave); İ. K. Yosmaoglu (2013) *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878–1908* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).

³²W. E. Gladstone (1876) *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East* (London: John Murray); Idem (1877) *Lessons in Massacre; Or, the Conduct of the Turkish Government in and about Bulgaria since May, 1876* (London: John Murray). The scholarship on the subject is vast. See, among others, T. Sahara (2011) ‘Two Different Images: Bulgarian and English Sources on the Batak Massacre’, in M. H. Yavuz and P. Sluglett (eds.) *War and Diplomacy: The Russo–Turkish War of 1877–1878 and the Treaty of Berlin* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press), 479–510; and S. Prévost (2013) ‘W. T. Stead and the Eastern Question (1875–1911); Or, How to Rouse England and Why?’, *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 16(1), <http://www.19.bbk.ac.uk/index.php/19/article/view/654/898>.

³³D. Gürpınar (2012) ‘The Rise and Fall of Turcophilism in Nineteenth-Century British Discourses: Visions of the Turk, “Young” and “Old”’, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 39, 346–371.

³⁴J. Laycock (2009) *Imagining Armenia: Orientalism, Ambiguity and Intervention* (Manchester: Manchester University Press); D. Rodogno (2012) *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Intervention in The Ottoman Empire 1815–1914*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press); J. Perkins (2015) ‘The Congo of Europe: The Balkans and Empire in Early Twentieth-Century British Political Culture’, *The Historical Journal*, 58, 565–587; A. Heraclides (2012) ‘Humanitarian Intervention in the 19th Century: The Heyday of a Controversial Concept’, *Global Society*, 26, 215–240.



Fig. 1.3 ‘Abdul-Hamid II; Or Thirty Years of Killings’, in *L’Assiette au Beurre*, 1903. After the 1894-1896 mass killings of Ottoman Armenians, Sultan Abdülhamid II was widely dubbed in Western European news media as the ‘Red Sultan’ for his putative responsibility (or inability to prevent) these pogroms. The title of this caricature, the cover image for a 1903 issue of the renowned French satirical leftist weekly, *L’Assiette au Beurre*, is an allusion to the sovereign’s international immunity

Abdülhamid II seemed to embody resistance against Western imperialism; at least for some Muslim subjects living under European colonial domination who cherished the hope that he would organize opposition against the West. Istanbul did encourage such hopes by supporting ‘pan-Islamic’ currents (although European publicists tended to exaggerate and misrepresent the Sultan’s pan-Islamism).³⁵ In 1905, at the height of the ‘Macedonian crisis’ and during the Joris trial, the *Times* repeatedly warned its readers against the danger of antagonizing the Ottoman sovereign and Caliph of Islam too strongly.³⁶

At the same time, for many of his own subjects, Sultan Abdülhamid II represented the pinnacle of autocracy. He had suspended the Constitution in February 1878, barely more than a year after its promulgation in December 1876, ending a short episode of constitutional rule and parliamentary representation. Moreover, the Ottoman Empire was by definition ‘imperialist’, and it had its own power inequalities between center and periphery, increasingly informed and justified by Orientalist representations of these regions.³⁷ This created growing tensions and intensifying forms of resistance, which recent scholarship has studied within a global perspective. A major event with global ramifications was the revolutionary process in Russia (1905), the first in a worldwide wave of constitutional revolutions, with Iran following in 1906 and the Ottoman Empire in 1908.³⁸ An adequate understanding of this sequence

³⁵C. E. Farah (1995) ‘Reassessing Sultan Abdülhamid II’s Islamic policy’, *Archivum Ottomanicum*, 14, 191–212; B. W. Andaya (1977) ‘From Rüm to Tokyo: The Search for Anticolonial Allies by the Rulers of Riau, 1899–1914’, *Indonesia*, 24, 123–156; Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia*; A. Özcan (1997) *Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, the Ottomans and Britain, 1877–1924* (Leiden: Brill).

³⁶‘Sympathy with the Turkish government extends throughout the whole Mussulman world’, including ‘the millions of British subjects who confess the [Islamic] faith [...] That alone ought to induce humane and pious persons amongst us, who are moved to engage in the denunciation of Turkish atrocities, not to indulge in language which may even seem to convey that there is nothing they would relish so clearly as active measures of coercion directed against the Sovereign, who is widely regarded as the earthly head of Islam’. *Times*, 28 November 1905. For more context and analysis, see Chap. 7.

³⁷U. Makdisi (2002) ‘Ottoman Orientalism’, *The American Historical Review*, 107, 768–796.

³⁸N. Sohrabi (2002) ‘Global Waves, Local Actors: What the Young Turks Knew about Other Revolutions and Why It Mattered’, *Comparative Studies in Society & History*, 44, 45–79; N. Sohrabi (2011) *Revolution and Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire and Iran* (New York: Cambridge University Press).

of revolutions requires a proper contextualization of the interplay between transnational and local factors. In their fight against autocratic power, local Liberals and Radicals followed the events elsewhere, made contact with likeminded leaders abroad, and tried to learn from foreign experiences. Thanks to the work of Anthony Gorman and Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, we now have a fairly accurate image of the highly active transnational networks of anarchists and radicals operating in the major cities of the Eastern Mediterranean, such as Cairo, Alexandria or Beirut.³⁹ Monarchs, too, realized that they were facing a transnational phenomenon of contestation and that opposition movements abroad could have harmful repercussions at home.

It is against this backdrop of growing internal and geopolitical tensions that the failed attempt on Abdülhamid's life and its historical importance should be understood. In the first weeks that followed the explosion, everyone was speculating about who the perpetrators were, even though the attack was more or less claimed by the ARF the day after in a note delivered to the French, Russian and Austrian embassies.⁴⁰ Many thought the Young Turk opposition was behind the event; some assumed that Bulgarian or Macedonian revolutionaries were responsible; others still believed that disappointed Zionists were to blame.⁴¹ If anything, these conflicting rumors clearly showed that Abdülhamid II had many enemies, a fact of which he himself was well aware. Across the

³⁹A. Gorman (2013) 'Radical Internationalists on the Nile and across the Mediterranean', in A. Lymperatos (ed.) *Social Transformation and Mass Mobilisation In the Balkan and Eastern Mediterranean Cities, 1900–1923* (Heraklion: Crete University Press), 307–21; I. Khuri-Makdisi (2010) *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press). An earlier generation of labor historians pioneered the field, however. The late Donald Quataert, for instance, already considered the exchange of ideas between Western workers (with experience in trade union action) and locals employed in foreign-owned companies in his 1983 classic *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire, 1881–1908: Reactions to European Economic Penetration* (New York: New York University Press).

⁴⁰The ARF's message in question, addressed to the 'representatives of the Powers, signatories of the Treaty of Berlin', did not refer to the attempt in explicit terms. For the full text of the note, see Ressler and Suykerbuyk, *Dynamiet voor de Sultan*, pp. 73–74.

⁴¹J. Hanssen (2011) "'Malhamé–Malfamé': Levantine Elites and Transimperial Networks on the Eve of the Young Turk Revolution', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 43, 25–48: 'Many thought the bomb was planted by Zionists because of Abdülhamit II's refusal to sell Palestinian land; others believed that Bulgarian revolutionaries were behind it'. See also Chap. 7.

globe, ‘anarchists’ had long begun to target heads of state, particularly crowned heads. While some, such as Kaiser Wilhelm I (1878, 1883), Belgium’s Leopold II (1902), and most recently Spain’s Alfonso XIII (1905), had survived such assaults, others were less fortunate.⁴² Among them were the already mentioned Tsar Alexander II (1881), President Sadi Carnot of France (1894), King Umberto I of Italy (1900), and the American president William McKinley (1901). In 1905, this international wave of political assassinations was far from over. King Carlos I of Portugal was killed in 1908, King George I of Greece in 1913 and Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914. This series of violent attempts on the lives of those symbolizing the repressive regimes targeted by anarchists and other activists instilled deep fear among the ruling elites.⁴³

Sultan Abdülhamid was highly perturbed by the news of the anarchist assassinations of his royal peers in Europe and Russia, to the point of censoring news about these attempts in the local press.⁴⁴ He had always led a highly reclusive life, a move driven by both psychological motives—a fear of assassination verging on (somewhat justified) paranoia—and political pragmatism.⁴⁵ Alarming reports by overzealous palace officials, Ottoman diplomats, an army of secret agents, and ordinary informers further helped kindle the Sultan’s anxiety. The word ‘anarchist’ (*anarşist*) had become quite common in the vocabulary of Ottoman state officials, who used it in a very broad way to denote any

⁴²Alfonso XIII (r. 1886–1931) notoriously survived at least ten assassination attempts throughout his long reign.

⁴³For a highly readable, well-documented narrative history of European anarchism before the Great War, see A. Butterworth (2011) *The World That Never Was: A True Story of Dreamers, Schemers, Anarchists and Secret Agents* (London: Vintage).

⁴⁴Consider, for instance, that after an anarchist gunman killed Umberto I of Italy in the summer of 1900, draconian ‘security’ measures were implemented in Istanbul and access to the *selamluk* was heavily restricted. See the reports of the Belgian plenipotentiary to the Ottoman Empire on 5 and 21 August 1900, Archief van Buitenlandse Zaken, Brussels [hereafter ABZ], Political Correspondence ‘Turkey’ (new series), vol. 3.

⁴⁵F. Georgeon (1997) ‘Le sultan caché. Réclusion du souverain et mise en scène du pouvoir à l’époque de Abdülhamid II (1876–1909)’, *Turcica*, 29, 93–124. For a portrait of Abdülhamid’s personality and character, see F. A. K. Yasamee (1996) *Ottoman Diplomacy: Abdülhamid II and the Great Powers, 1878–1888* (Istanbul: The Isis Press), pp. 19–29.