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Anarchists and Anarchism in the Ottoman Empire, 1850–1917

Axel B. Çorlu

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"Ey şanlı avcı, damını bihûde kurmadın.
Attın fakat yazık ki, yazıklar ki, vurmadın"

– Tevfik Fikret, Bir Lâhza-i Ta'ahhur

"O great hunter, you did not set your trap for naught;
You fired, but alas; alas, you did not hit what you ought."

– Tevfik Fikret, A Momentary Lapse¹

Anarchists, and in particular propaganda by the deed, occupied the center stage in world politics in the late nineteenth century. The use of political violence in the anarchist mold captured the attention of the public from the Americas to Europe and beyond. The connection of a real power struggle through the symbolic value in the acts of propaganda by the deed as theorized by figures such as Luigi Galleani and Errico Malatesta certainly appealed to many revolutionaries of the time, especially in societies in a state of flux, deep in the throes of dissolution, as in the case of the Ottoman empire.

One of the most fascinating chapters of anarchist history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Ottoman experience has received relatively little scrutiny from scholars. This is surprising not only because of the vast amount of material readily available in archival collections, but also because of the significant Ottoman presence on the central stage in

¹ Tevfik Fikret, the eloquent poet, journalist and intellectual of late nineteenth, early twentieth century Istanbul, wrote the poem including this fragment after the failed assassination attempt on Abdülhamid II by Belgian anarchist Edward Jorris and Armenian ARF members, led by Kristofor Mikaelyan. Fikret was genuinely disillusioned by the failure of the attempt directed at the sultan, whom he hated, and hoped for another, successful attempt.

European politics at the time. The so-called, and much criticized, “decline paradigm” notwithstanding, Ottoman social, political, and economic dynamics were on display constantly in the buzzing centers of anarchist activity such as Italy, France, and Russia.

A veritable flood of anarchists, ranging from the completely unknown characters of the movement to its most intensively studied “leaders” poured into the empire, some even managing to remain for extended periods, with intentions of establishing themselves in the lands of the Sublime Porte. Consequently, the level of anarchist activity in Ottoman lands was certainly comparable to that in Europe, where the actual numbers of anarchists meant little when considered in the context of the *impact* of their actions. But one wonders whether it is correct to assume that anarchism and anarchists represented an utterly alien, imported “threat” to the Ottoman empire, or if there were “native,” and in their relevance to the health of the Ottoman state and society, far more significant elements drawn to the movement. Most visible among such elements were the numerous Armenians, Greeks, Levantines, and other minorities drawn to anarchism in the same way others thought about it and experienced it, or was this a temporary expression of dissent, more appropriately translated into one of the nascent nationalisms of the region?

In either scenario, the response of the Ottoman state apparatus was uniformly predictable: keep the outsiders out, the insiders down, and cooperate with the similarly distressed monarchies and republics of the West in “saving humanity from the menace.” The menace of course, a relative of the “specter” of Marx, was anarchism, and the Ottomans were rarely haphazard or random in their efforts directed against it. It is at this point that the extent to which the late Ottoman state had become a modern, centralized bureaucratic structure reveals itself; certainly, the Ottoman state’s efforts against anarchists were not inferior to what by mid-twentieth century standards

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were the relatively chaotic, but nonetheless ultimately effective measures taken by its European counterparts.²

The transformation of the late Ottoman state and the corresponding, or determining, social changes of the time have been well-documented, and are represented by a stable, established scholarly body of work.³ Kemal Karpat lucidly traces the duality of a rapidly changing state apparatus and the churning cauldron of class formation during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The transformation of the state apparatus is relatively simpler to follow through numerous developments such as the Tanzimat of 1839 or the Islahat Fermani of 1856,

² A word on the use of the term “Levantine”: I am not using this term in its broad definition, which would mean the “people of the Levant;” rather, it is used in the narrower sense, including the established, and mostly though not entirely mercantile, Italian, French, British, Dutch, etc. “minorities” in the port-cities of the empire. These people were not the officially recognized “native” minorities of the empire such as the Greeks or the Armenians, but formed a minority through their extended presence in the region, becoming a significant socioeconomic element in the empire starting with the end of the seventeenth century and peaking during the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries. By the end of the nineteenth century, many of the most “recent” arrivals had been in Ottoman lands for three generations, while the earlier families could trace their beginnings much further. The scholarship on these Levantines has a curious, blatant black hole in the sense that they are rarely treated as inherent, “native” elements of late Ottoman urban society, and typically reduced to ill-conceived categorizations of “foreigners” or as mere numbers in the economic history of the empire, where they admittedly left an indelible mark. Their social and cultural impact as people of Ottoman lands, versus temporary foreigners, remains a relatively unexplored field, despite the presence of a handful of romanticized, stereotypical portrayals in fields other than history. A notable exception on this subject is Philip Mansel, *Levant: Splendour and Catastrophe on the Mediterranean* (Yale University Press, 2012).

³ In fact, the transformation of the Ottoman state or the emergence of a “modern state” in this geography comparable to European or Asian states in similar context can be traced back further, as outlined and argued powerfully, in Abou-El-Haj, Ri-fa'at Ali, *Formation of the Modern State — The Ottoman Empire: Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, 2nd edition (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press), 2005.

as well as the establishment of an enabling control infrastructure (the introduction of a modern postal system in 1834, telegraph 1855–64, and railroad network, 1866) although the same cannot be said for clearly tracing the emergence of the middle and working classes among the minorities, and followed half a century later, from within the Muslim population; an area that offers and demands more challenges and subtleties at the same time. This discussion on the theory of class formation will become very relevant when dealing with Marxian approaches to the existence of socialism or anarchism in Ottoman society in the following pages, complementing and partly explaining the research in this study, which reveals the primary source material, used for the first time in any historical study of anarchism, on the state's response to anarchists.⁴

Closely in rhythm with the experiences of most European states with anarchism and anarchists, one of the most relevant and revealing aspects of the late Ottoman state apparatus is the police force. Following the development of the coercive domestic apparatus of the state offers valuable insights not only towards the understanding of the formation of the modern state, but also, indirectly, on the various “undesirables” it targeted. Ranging from the Police Directorate (*Zabtiye*

⁴ There is an extensive list of publications on the issue of the transformation of late Ottoman state and society. Karpat's article is old, but still relevant, and a strong main text on the subject. Kemal Karpat, “The Transformation of the Ottoman State, 1789–1908,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 3, no. 3 (July 1972): 243–281; Other, more recent significant studies include: Fatma Müge Göçek, “Ethnic Segmentation, Western Education, and Political Outcomes: Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Society,” *Poetics Today* 14, no. 3, Cultural Processes in Muslim and Arab Societies: Modern Period I (Autumn, 1993): 507–538; Selim Deringil, “The Invention of Tradition as Public Image in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1808 to 1908,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35, no. 1 (Jan., 1993): 3–29; Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909* (London: I. B. Tauris), 1999; Selim Deringil, “Legitimacy Structures in the Ottoman State: The Reign of Abdülhamid II (1876–1909),” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23, no. 3 (Aug., 1991): 345–359.

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Müşiriyeti) to the use of the gendarmerie (*Jandarma Daire-i Merkeziyesi*), to the diplomatic corps, as well as numerous paid informants as parts of an unfocused, erratically efficient but decidedly anti-anarchist network, the Ottoman state allocated considerable resources and personnel to ensure its security, with mixed results.⁵

In outlining a conceptual framework for the study of anarchists and anarchism in the Ottoman empire, one particular scholarly project demands attention and invites a lengthy discussion; even though it was published more than a decade ago, *Socialism and Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire*⁶ remains the only study of its scope and kind. The book is a collaboration of various specialists of late Ottoman political history who have approached certain basic questions concerning “socialist” political movements in the empire, each writing from within a specific niche and perspective. The chapter about Armenians is written by Anahide Ter Minassian, the chapter on Greeks by Noutsos, the Bulgarian chapter by Yalimov, etc. This basic division of labor among the collaborators has produced an interesting, if eclectic, platform on which to compare notes among fields that do not talk with each other very often despite the obvious fact that they all share the late Ottoman tapestry as their background.⁷

⁵ Of course, the Ottoman state itself was a “European state” by many definitions; the terminology here is merely for the sake of convenience, replacing long-winded alternatives such as “North, West and South European states,” etc.; Glen W. Swanson, “The Ottoman Police,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 7, no.1/2 (Jan.-Apr., 1972); Nadir Ozbek, “Policing the Countryside: Gendarmes of the Late Nineteenth Century Ottoman Empire (1876–1908),” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 40, 47–67 (2008); Ali Sönmez, “Zaptiye Teşkilatının Kuruluşu ve Gelişimi (1846–1879)” (PhD Dissertation, Ankara University, 2005).

⁶ Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher, eds., *Socialism and Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1923* (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 1994).

⁷ What constitutes a “socialist movement” and what needs to be left out is a continuing debate in this rather narrow field. My approach to this

The book barely mentions anarchists and anarchism in the Ottoman empire, but the conceptual challenges in dealing with socialism and socialists, with very few exceptions, are practically one and the same; thus, the conceptual discussion in this study will respond to the themes in that book as well.

The first issue that demands a resolution stems from geopolitical, or “timespace,” confusion. Are we thinking about an “Ottoman socialism/anarchism,” or is it more useful to divide the field along the lines of the nation-states that emerged from the corpse of the empire?⁸ Both choices have consequences; for instance, identifying Greek or Armenian political movements within the empire under one crudely constructed “Ottoman” label threatens to subsume and forcefully homogenize the vast complexity of each movement as well as the significant differences between them, leaving the researcher with a practically useless conceptual tool.

On the other end of the conceptual spectrum, organizing the field through nation-state lines offers very little flexibility, depth, or larger perspective by definition, even before getting into the problems associated with disentangling the history of these movements from official nation-building narratives. How can we truly understand, let alone fully engage and analyze, an “Armenian anarchism” or a “Greek socialism” if these terms merely consist of a chronology of events and people leading up to the inevitable end result of independence and nation build-

subject is inclusive; any movement identifying itself as such is eligible, and movements that do not “fit” the mold or use obscure terminology need to be inspected on a case-by-case basis, not against a universal set of definitions. Ultimately, this is not a particularly fruitful or inspiring debate, and its significance to an understanding of late Ottoman politics and society is less than marginal.

⁸ The choice of terms concerning the “corpse of the empire” is admittedly connected to organic analogies, a well-criticized and inherent part of the decline paradigm. As much as I agree with the observations on the failings of the decline paradigm and its organic terminology, the stylistic temptation at this instance proved insurmountable.

Centre International de Recherches sur l’Anarchisme (CIRA), Lausanne.

Umanita Nuova, Cronaca Sovversiva, and Il Martello.

International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam.
Collections:

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unpredictable anarchists and their unpredictable, little black spheres.

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Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Zaptiye Nezareti Maruzatı

Yıldız Yaveran ve Maiyet-i Seniyye Erkan-ı Harbiye Dairesi

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Yıldız Mütenevvî Maruzat Evrakı

Yıldız Sadaret Hususi Maruzat Evrakı

Zabtiyye

ing? A similar teleological problem exists for the former approach as well: couched as political movements “during the end of the empire,” the drama and complexity of that conception nearly erases any subtleties, or native, unique elements in these movements.

Given this rather gloomy theoretical outlook, it should by this point be obvious that a soothing panacea is not forthcoming (Zürcher and Tunçay do not offer such a solution, and their project is unable to move much beyond the nation-state or ethnicity as the organizational building block); however, it might seem that in building the conceptual cornerstones of this field, the mere awareness of this initial set of problems is a concrete step forward.

I offer an alternative approach to this sterile duality, stemming from the anarchists’ experience in the region. It is no coincidence that Tunçay and Zürcher produced a book with cracks along the lines of ethnicities within the empire rather than a thematic or systemic approach. Most of the materials available suggest that socialism as well as anarchism were far more visible and tangible among the “minorities” than in the various Muslim populations of the empire. However, one wonders how any political movement among the minorities could remain only and exclusively in that domain when the same communities interacted with the society-at-large on so many levels. Were there truly no viable socialist or anarchist political influences, intellectuals, or even movements among the sections of the population not defined as minorities?

If “foreign” influences in the shape of nationalism and positivism were so readily welcomed and successfully adopted by the intelligentsia as well as the ruling elite in the last decades of an empire that was so clearly and organically connected to the European context, why should any inquiry into the history of left political movements be limited largely to the minorities? The question brings us back, to the issue of sources. It is true that left-leaning intellectuals and any nascent movements were

comprehensively outplayed by the far more popular implementation of nationalism(s), sometimes finding traction in short-lived fusions of these ideologies, and the (number of) sources reflect this observation. The same argument is perfectly valid, in varying degrees, for any European or colonial society, however, and does not provide a conclusive answer for the Ottoman case. To demonstrate this, one can easily argue that Italian anarchism has left behind far fewer sources than Italian nationalism or fascism; this fact is certainly not an indication of the real relative significance of these movements in their context.

Should a study on anarchism in the Ottoman empire ignore a figure such as the eclectic individualist-anarchist intellectual Baha Tevfik because he did not belong to a minority, or because he represented a tiny minority within the “Muslim” population?⁹ Tevfik and the handful of others like him are even more studiously ignored than the anarchists among the minorities in the political history narratives of the late Ottoman empire. This observation in itself presents the seeds of an alternative vision that can break the impasse between the two equally useless conceptions discussed above; after all, why do we need to use any of these two seemingly polar opposite approaches (“Ottoman socialism” versus “Greek/Georgian/Jewish/Serbian/Armenian/Bulgarian/Arab socialism”) when they share a substantial theoretical and practical element by *ultimately aiming for various statist goals?*

The real conceptual division in the late Ottoman picture then, is not necessarily between the well-studied paradigm of the center versus the periphery, or between movements that work towards either the reformation of the existing Ottoman state or the establishment of new national states, *but between the movements’ attitudes towards the concept of the state itself.*

⁹ The almost subconscious use of Ottoman imperial terms and concepts that had been used for social categorization presents a problem throughout the field; I do not find these categorizations useful beyond the immediate and superficial identifications they really are; hence, the quotation marks.

ory and practice nonetheless challenged these nation builders of all hues at a fundamental, paradigmatic level. Freedom was to be gained by demolishing the Ottoman polity, but not replacing it with many other, new apparatuses of oppression. One cannot help but think that their perspective, even through their dire, sometimes violent warnings on the unfolding world in which they lived has stood the test of time considerably better than many contemporary ideologies. Perhaps the “evil anarchists” that so deeply troubled Ottoman authorities were not the disease, but a hopelessly insufficient, symbolic dose of insight on the nature of nation-building that somehow managed to survive the dominant age of nationalism. Today, anarchists are making an unheard-of return in numbers in the same lands they once were perceived to have infested; while their methods of violence have changed, their approach to it, or their role as messengers bearing the unwelcome news of failed social and political experiments, have not.

If Gramsci would have smiled at an experiment such as the Università Popolare Libera, symbolizing his idea of education as a tool for challenging the hegemonic culture by producing an alternative education, Michail Bakunin, Luigi Galleani or Errico Malatesta would have nodded gravely at the role anarchist violence played in openly challenging a hostile environment by bringing attention to the oppressive nature of the late Ottoman state. Much more importantly, the *possibility of change*, accompanied by Tevfik Fikret’s *expectation* of the ominous sound of exploding bombs. This is the point where terrorism and propaganda by the deed parted ways, despite what state apparatuses for more than a century have repeated to their public. The monopoly over coercion and mass violence by and large remained with the nation builders and their states in this region during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as it does today, and they have made generous and horrific use of this monopoly. Nonetheless, the same nation builders once genuinely feared the symbolic potential of the humble but

people with different class and ethnic backgrounds, influences, and styles. It was certainly not a consistent, monolithic ideology. From the direct action and energetic publications of Greek-Ottoman and Italian-Ottoman anarchists, to the violent and deadly propaganda by the deed of the Armenians, and the intellectual elitism of Baha Tevfik, Ottoman anarchism reflected the eclectic, rich, spontaneous, and ultimately “hard to corner” character of anarchism found everywhere from Istanbul and Cairo to Paris, from Rome to Paterson and Buenos Aires. While regional differences were and are always present, the path to understanding the revival of anarchism in the very same places, and its vast popularity in our time strongly points to this shared history.

Conclusion

Both by the reckoning of their friends and their enemies, anarchists played a significant part in defining the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Ottoman lands. If Antonio Gramsci’s conception of hegemonic culture ever held any value, it is in this late Ottoman tapestry: the hegemonic culture in this case was not the culture of the Ottoman bourgeoisie, however that may be defined, but the culture of the “nation builders,” the various national liberation movements including the likes of the Committee for Union and Progress, which paved the way for the heavyhanded establishment of nation states in the Balkans and the Near East.

Most of these states, despite their relatively brief existence, abundantly displayed some of the worst elements of nationalist extremism along with genocidal tendencies in an unstable political structure. The former Ottoman lands in the Balkans and the Near East remain among the most disturbingly, inextricably tragedy-bound, violently conflicted societies in our world. The anarchists, in their chaotic, often inconsistent the-

While most scholars readily characterize the late Ottoman period as one of flux, full of potential for the creation of new nations, new political entities, new societies, in a glaring omission, practically none consider the anarchist presence, promise, work, and impact on this picture.¹⁰

Politically directed preconceptions also hover above the last major theoretical issue that needs to be tackled for a historical study of anarchists in the Ottoman empire: class formation and its relevance to the formation of political movements.

The predictable classical Marxist approach (to be fair, this approach has come into existence despite Marx himself, who warned about applying social change models based on Western Europe to non-Western societies), also evident in Tunçay and Zürcher’s compilation, formulates that the development of a “proper” bourgeoisie and a “proper” working class in the Ottoman empire did not happen among the Muslim population(s), as it did for/within the minorities; in fact, this is the main pillar for the self-imposed limitation that no concrete socialist or anarchist influence *could* exist outside of the -what must have been almost supernaturally isolated, to fit this picture— world of the minorities. Moreover, this formulation’s dependence on a sequence of events, namely the creation of a bourgeoisie and a working class, followed by the formation of bourgeois ideologies and political movements that dominate political life until the working class achieves class consciousness and counters them with its own, and inevitably successful, revolution has been heavily criticized by various Marxists and non-Marxists for roughly a century; curiously, this antiquated vision of class formation and its relation to political movements appears still to be alive and well in the study of late Ottoman state and society. As tempting and easy as it is to refute such rigid formu-

¹⁰ There are barely, a handful of exceptions, exemplified by Anahide Ter Minassian with her work on Armenian anarchists, such as Alexander Atabekian, but this statement stands as an expression of the dire reality of the field at this moment.

lations, I will point out a few strictly necessary items in the interest of not repeating decades' worth of theoretical work from Weber and Popper to the Frankfurt School, subaltern studies, dependency theorists, and post-structuralists.¹¹

In practice, there are very interesting similarities between the Russian, Spanish, Italian, and Ottoman experiences concerning class structures and political movements in the nineteenth century: with the exception of northern Italy, they all represent relatively under-industrialized, overwhelmingly agrarian societies that spawned a number of revolutionary movements (nationalist, socialist, anarchist, or a combination of these main ideological avenues) based not in the working class as the expectation would be for the latter two, but among the intelligentsia and the peasantry. In all but the Ottoman case, anarchism found extremely fertile ground and was represented in significant numbers of people to make a visible, though often tragic-ending difference.¹² In all cases including the Ottoman experience, anarchists came from a wide spectrum of people, including rural working populations, the urban working classes, the uprooted mercantile families in war-torn regions (most notably the Balkans in the Ottoman case), the petit-bourgeoisie, the intelligentsia, and even the odd aristocrat.

¹¹ The discussion on class formation and its relevance to political change has been going on for more than a century, and even an extremely summarized, mutilated bibliography should not be considered as anything other than colossal. In addition, the last four decades have seen the rise of new paradigms in the shape of dependency theory, subaltern studies, post-structuralist deconstruction, etc which among other things have all dwelled on the myriad pitfalls of using concepts and structural analytical tools for Western European societies (not that there exists any agreement on whether the same concepts are valid for Western European societies in the first place) as universal guidelines.

¹² The 1936–39 Spanish Civil War, numerous failed rebellions led by Malatesta and Bakunin in Italy, the destruction of the Makhnovist movement in the aftermath of 1917 in Russia come to mind instantly, from a long list of similar events.

Born in Smyrna in the 1880s, Tevfik was influenced in his development as an intellectual by prominent figures such as Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Ludwig Buchner. His path towards anarchism follows an indirect, at times almost accidental trajectory. Tevfik studied socialism rather closely, and is correctly credited as being one of the mentors of the early leadership of the socialist movement in the empire. Interestingly however, he never supported socialism, and in fact thought it was “the opposite of anarchism, a movement designed to put the needs of the community before the needs of the individual.”

Tevfik's strong individualist streak leads some of his historians to believe he was a liberal, or perhaps a libertarian, but in his own writing he quite lucidly identifies anarchism as his ideal for the future of Ottoman society. This alignment with anarchism is not coincidental or disconnected from the rest of Tevfik's thinking, either. In his numerous articles, he can be seen to attack the concept of marriage, calling it an “empty gesture,” and strongly hinting at the hopelessness of monogamy, while attacking the “European wannabes” and panturkists/turanists alike for not understanding or consciously misrepresenting the native, “national” character.⁴⁸

Ultimately, Tevfik stands on the intellectual, relatively peaceful end of the anarchist spectrum in the Ottoman scene. To answer the question at the title of this section, as long as the term can be described in a loose, open-ended fashion, there was an Ottoman anarchism; it consisted of a wide variety of

⁴⁸ Mehmet Ö. Alkan, “Baha Tevfik ve İştirak'teki İmzasız Yazıları,” *Tarih ve Toplum* 83 (1990): 7; “Baha Tevfik'in Siyasal Düşünüşü,” in *Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1989), 1814–1815; Aclan Sayılğan, *Türkiye'de Sol Hareketler, 1871–1972* (Istanbul: Hareket Yayınları, 1972); Fűrüzan Hüsrev Tökin, *Türkiye'de Siyasi Partiler ve Siyasi Düşüncenin Gelişmesi, 1839–1965* (Istanbul: Elif Yayınları, 1965); Mete Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Sol Akımlar, 1908–1925* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2009); The two primary sources used for this section are: Baha Tevfik, *Felsefe-i Ferd; Baba Tevfik, Nietzsche: Hayati ve Felsefesi* (Istanbul: Karşı Kıyı Yayınları 2001).

Was There Such a Thing as Ottoman Anarchism?

“Ben bu yeni çağın içinde anarşizmi görüyorum...insanlık en sonunda anarşizme ulaşacak ve orada bireyselliğin bütün bağımsızlığını, bütün azametini duyumsayacaktır.”⁴⁷

– Baha Tevfik, *Felsefe-i Ferd*

“I see anarchism in this new age...Humanity will finally achieve anarchism and there find the complete freedom and magnificence of the individual.”

– Baha Tevfik, *Philosophy of the Individual*

By this point, it should be clear that the minorities in the Ottoman empire produced a profusion of people drawn to anarchism; much of their intellectual output, however, has been published in Europe, addressing universal concerns rather than specifically Ottoman issues. Curiously, of all the Ottoman anarchists who experienced the wrath of the Sublime Porte, of all the famous figures who made a career in Europe after fleeing the empire, the individual that exemplified one of the most genuine and prominent voices of anarchism in Ottoman lands was from the “Muslim/Turkish” category that I discussed earlier, a figure that emerged relatively unscathed from the attention of the authorities: Baha Tevfik.

Baha Tevfik was a quintessential Ottoman enlightenment figure of the nineteenth century, with an eclectic but unique output that included and meshed concepts and issues such as rationality, morality, materialism, the decline of the empire, individualism, and anarchism.

⁴⁷ Baha Tevfik, *Felsefe-i Ferd* (“Anarşizmin Osmanlıcası — Birey Felsefi”) (Istanbul: Altıkkırkbeş, 1992).

Why any scholar should insist on a restrictive theoretical model that is so thoroughly out-manuevered by the existence of so many examples continues to be troubling. However, even if one accepted the classical Marxist approach to Ottoman class formation and its reflections on the political struggle, the focus on minorities alone based on the unproven assertion that the Muslims did not produce their class counterparts “rapidly enough,” remains unresolved. It should be noted that I am not using the idea of an *exact replica* in class terms when it comes to comparing Muslims and minorities, whereas Zürcher and his collaborators are certainly looking for such categories:¹³ A concentration on the non-Muslim communities was unavoidable in this context, given the much slower development of an industrial working class among the Muslims.¹⁴

In other words, one of the main issues of contention here is whether or not the “laws of social change” are written in stone: in order to have modern revolutionary movements, a society absolutely must produce a developed, western-style industrial working class.¹⁵ Feroz Ahmad, in the same study, makes it clear what the “conditions necessary to *receive* socialism” should include:

¹³ One popular, if slightly escapist, approach to the Ottoman class issue is to make use of Weberian terminology involving status groups; a wide range of academics, from Metin Heper in political science to Engin Akarlı in history have used this approach. Examples of this approach, among many are Engin Akarlı, “The Problems of External Pressures, Power Struggles, and Budgetary Deficits in Ottoman Politics under Abdülhamid II (1876–1909): Origins and Solutions.” (Ph.D. Diss., Princeton University, 1976); Metin Heper, “Center and Periphery in the Ottoman Empire (With Special Reference to the Nineteenth Century),” in *International Political Science Review / Revue internationale de science politique*, 1, Studies in Systems Transformation (1980): 81–105.

¹⁴ Tunçay and Zürcher, 9.

¹⁵ Of course, the use of pseudo-scientific terminology involving “laws of change” is intentional, as it adequately represents this particular Marxian narrative.

1. the existence of a working class and trade unions;
2. a class society with class struggle;
3. universal suffrage;
4. internationalism;
5. sympathetic [sic] intellectuals.¹⁶

The formulaic nature of such approaches has been made abundantly clear. What makes this particular example interesting is the ideological veil cast upon scholars who fail to see a non-Christian working class in the Ottoman empire. Mine workers in Zonguldak, for example, would probably discover their non-existence rather amusing. Levity aside, whether the miners in Zonguldak constituted a “class in itself” or a “class for itself” provides endless speculation, but ultimately little useful insight.¹⁷

One last issue concerning the theoretical possibilities in approaching the Ottoman empire, working class, and socialism or anarchism is the role of the state, not merely in the political sense, but as a significant economic actor. While the presence of foreign investment in Ottoman industry steadily increased

¹⁶ Tunçay and Zürcher, 14. Italics by author.

¹⁷ The authoritative work on the subject of the Zonguldak miners is Donald Quataert, *Miners and the State in the Ottoman Empire: The Zonguldak Coalfield, 1822–1920* (International Studies in Social History) (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006).

While Marxism certainly offers productive ways of thinking about the working class, the history of labor cannot be merely a dimension of the history of socialism; this formulation in reverse might still be possible, if irrelevant for our purposes. For a stimulating discussion of this issue as well as the role of the state in studying the workers in the Ottoman empire, a requisite compilation (especially the introduction and conclusion) is Donald Quataert and Eric J. Zürcher (eds), *Workers and the Working Class in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, 1839–1950* (New York: I.B.Tauris 1995).

them. Clearly, this was not possible. The attempted solution, then, came from a *choice of discourse*: instead of aligning anarchist violence with political violence in general, delegates started to talk and write about it in common criminal terms. If anarchism was not political, but simply criminal, simply “evil” (Ottoman officials were early and enthusiastic adopters of this approach), there could indeed be a common ground in dealing with it, to the satisfaction of all participants. The main problem with this approach from a governmental viewpoint would be the difficulty of reconciling the concept of common criminal activity to terrorism, a term popularly used for propaganda by the deed, if not always accurately. If terrorism is political by definition, then propaganda by the deed cannot be the praxis of mere criminals. It took governments nearly a century to sort through the conceptual pitfalls exemplified by this paradox, but in a sense, succeed they did.⁴⁶

Such discourse would only “solve” the problem of defining anarchists and their actions vis- a-vis the law and its enforcement agencies, but as far as providing an effective and focused political control apparatus, it was somewhat irrelevant; in the Ottoman case, the existing legal structure concerning criminal law, as well as the institutions and personnel involved were inadequate for immediately addressing the social causes of the spread of anarchism, even if they proved to be capable against individual anarchists, given time.

⁴⁶ Jensen argues a very similar point in his study, but cuts it rather short. The importance of reducing propaganda by the deed anarchism to common criminal activity is a momentous one, nothing less than a paradigm-shift in how modern governments learned to respond to this threat. This paradigm is still very much alive today, with discursive elements such as “terrorism” being used indiscriminately (or, rather precisely and knowingly) for any kind of violence directed against states, regardless of the nature of the targets or the involvement of civilians.

monarchies. Of the moral, even educational, influence of such a plan there can be no doubt.⁴⁵

Unfortunately, the *Times* editorial continued, the conference had taken an exclusive, promonarchy tone, alienating British and Swiss delegates. In reality, things were not so simple; the conflict(s) and maneuvering at the conference were far more sophisticated and layered, and even the excluded British delegates continued their stay and their influence through bilateral meetings with other delegates for the duration of the conference.

Propaganda by the Deed Redefined: Criminals, Terrorists or Both?

Perhaps the most significant observation that can be taken from this conference, however, has nothing to do with the political wrangling and bickering, and not even with the birth of the first legal framework, let alone the idea, of an international police organization, with the widespread adoption of modern techniques for investigative procedures: it was the main reason for the disagreements in the first place. When all the layers of obscure political deals are removed, one issue stands alone as the source of the problems that plagued the conference. If anarchist propaganda by the deed was defined as an act of political violence, finding a common ground and common measures would be nearly impossible, given the vastly different political climates of the participating countries.

If the violence was political, a common definition of anarchism or a common definition or plan of countermeasures would have to include the Ottomans and Russians as well as Britain or Switzerland, with all the vast differences between

⁴⁵ *The New York Times*, December 18, Wednesday, 1898, 18. Italics from original text.

and in many cases replaced the state towards the turn of the century, in many cases, as in Zonguldak, workers dealt with the state as an employer for a considerable period. This is one of the ways in which anarchist priorities and theory of power appear to be as relevant today as they were in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: most socialists of the time offered a vision of class struggle based on workers as the challengers of the existing structure, and the bourgeoisie with the capital and ownership of the means of production. Not surprisingly, this vision ran into problems in the Ottoman case, where the state was a significant economic actor. The anarchist approach (not that there is a homogeneous, consistent, or single version), however, would make a lot of sense, even for economic determinists: positioning the state in its many tentacles and incarnations as a major power-broker, and thus the main obstacle to political *and* economic freedom in the Ottoman landscape offered a basic explanatory rubric from which more sophisticated analyses could be produced.

However, just as there exists no single, monolithic discourse or ideology called anarchism, it is also essential to remember that this theoretical process is as much a reflection as determinant of the material reality of the time. So, who were these anarchists in the Ottoman empire? Where did they come from, where did they establish themselves, and where did they go when their agenda did not work? An in-depth look at the various aspects of Ottoman state surveillance of anarchists and the information therein provides some answers, and a few new questions.

Analysis of the Distribution of Anarchists Reported in Ottoman State Surveillance

The sources of names, descriptions, and backgrounds for anarchists in the Ottoman empire were varied. Most resulted

from diplomatic channels and police activities, but there were independent informants, foreign merchants, ship captains, bank officials, various bureaucrats, hotel managers, and many other minor sources. A survey of these reports reveals interesting trends: displayed on the chart below is the distribution of anarchists according to national/ethnic background.

Figure 1: Distribution of Anarchists Based on Their Background in Ottoman Surveillance Reports

ing diplomats, bureaucrats, and national and municipal police heads.⁴³

From the very beginning, the conference experienced difficulty in achieving anything beyond a general, unified set of goals. Whenever the day-to-day operational details and measures to be adopted came to the attention of the conference, delegates delivered long, tiresome speeches in which they sought to put down political rivals and bolster their reputation against the “work” of concentrating on anarchists. Ottoman delegates’ reports from the conference displayed endless chains of repetitive statements and a fascinating but taxing attitude of underhanded deals and political backstabbing setting the tone for the conference. Even the *New York Times*, reporting remotely through many journalist proxies, alerted its readers to the significance and troubled direction of the conference.⁴⁴

It was expected that the Anarchists, who are not only the natural enemies of monarchies in particular but the foes of society in general, would be dealt with according to a broad and general plan that would be quite as acceptable to republics as to

⁴³ Richard Bach Jensen, “The International Anti-Anarchist Conference of 1898 and the Origins of Interpol,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 16, no.2 (April, 198): 323–347. Also on the subject, including the St. Petersburg protocols, Mathieu Deflem, “International Police Cooperation –History of,” in *The Encyclopedia of Criminology*, ed. Richard A. Wright and J. Mitchell Miller (New York: Routledge, 2005): 795–798.

⁴⁴ There are numerous reports from Ottoman delegates at this conference. Some of the more interesting and informative examples can be found at:BOA. Yıldız Sadaret Hususî Maruzat Evrakı (Y.A.HUS) 389/123 (26 Ca 1316/12 October 1898); the Rome conference of 1898 had a further legacy in the second Anti-anarchist conference in 1904, this time in St. Petersburg. This conference actually yielded well-formulated written protocols (“Secret Protocol for the International War on Anarchism”) signed by all the participants. For an example of Ottoman reports on the St.Petersburg conference, BOA, Emniyet-i Umumi- ye Mudiriyeti Evrak Odası Belgeleri (DH.EUM.VRK) 9/62 (14 March 1904).

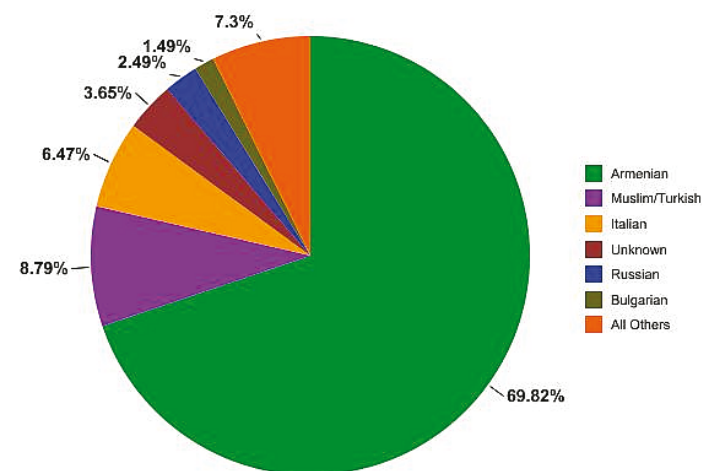
Fear of Anarchists Leads to International Initiatives

The Ottoman intelligence-gathering operations against anarchists were not limited to recruiting foreign government employees or random informants. In addition to agents working directly for the Sublime Porte, the level of international cooperation among European states (including the Ottoman state), most of which were at war with each other at one time or another, is surprising. It seems that hostilities between France and Prussia, or the Ottomans and Russia had little corrosive effect on the ability of their police forces to cooperate and even coordinate their efforts against anarchists. The strong and continued presence of such cooperation among states in a period of uncertainty and change is a formidable sign of the importance each state allocated to the anarchists in its prioritized list of threats. In other words, anarchists were significant enough for these states to put aside other threats to their security, sometimes including even war.⁴²

The strongest evidence of the prioritization of anarchism by states comes from a little studied, obscure conference held in Rome, in 1898. A look at this conference reveals that in no uncertain terms, anarchists were directly responsible for the birth of the International Police Organization, the Interpol. The name of the conference was, predictably, the International Anti-anarchist Conference, and the participants came from all over Europe: 21 countries, represented by 54 delegates, includ-

embassy already, remains unclear. There is also the considerable probability that he was aware of the chances of British intelligence intercepting his message, and thus perhaps was attempting to cover his position in recruiting the employee of a foreign government to the service of the Ottoman state by showing disapproval of such behavior on the part of Elias for “volunteering” information.

⁴² This statement is certainly valid until 1914; the beginning of World War I changed the priorities of these states, to put it mildly.



The period covered in my random sampling of reports that mention anarchists, 1850 to 1917, is also the ideal period to look for anarchists as it corresponds to the first “golden age” of anarchism worldwide. Before analyzing this data, its nature and limitations need to be discussed.¹⁸

First, the level of accuracy and detail in these reports is uneven; e.g., one police report describes an Austrian anarchist by name, place of birth (Dusseldorf), age (30), date of birth (February 9, 1880), occupation (stone mason), height (medium), hair (chestnut), mouth and nose (small, pointed), languages spoken (German, Italian), and “special characteristics” (missing teeth, scar left by a bullet on one knee), while another (diplomatic) report mentions the same person only by his fake name or epithet, and leaves it there. Matching and correlating these loose ends in the sources was not always possible.

Second, the level of knowledge and/or focus among the people who created these sources is also uneven; some of them display a keen understanding of ideological nuance, correcting other reports that mistakenly catalog some activists under surveillance as “socialists” rather than “anarchists” or vice versa. At the same time there are a number of reports in which the term “anarchist” clearly is used as an all-purpose label to identify a handful of genuine anarchists as well as outsiders, “troublemakers,” vagabonds, or criminals, and other politically active groups such as socialists. In other words, even though I spent considerable time refining the results, there is no way of

¹⁸ 612 reports were used for this study, mentioning anarchism and anarchists. I have sampled 400 for the purpose of collecting the representative numbers displayed in the chart. I have used roughly half of these documents for more in-depth research, as many of them were merely a few sentences in length or edited copies of others. 400 out of 612 represents a 65 percent sampling rate which should be solidly free of any significant statistical deviation. The numbers represent individuals, and repetitions of names or duplicate reports have been filtered out.

The most impressive level of surveillance and perhaps most useful long-term source of informants outside Ottoman lands came from foreign governments and bureaucracies; a typical report from one such source identifies a Mr. Henry Elias (or “Henry Ilyas Bey”), third clerk at the British embassy in Paris. The Ottoman diplomatic officers in London were very pleased with Mr. Elias, who had initiated contact with Ottoman authorities, volunteering information. In one particular case, he helped Ottoman bureaucrats to track a wanted criminal, Firari Mahmud Aga, who was constantly moving around Europe to avoid detection and extradition. Originally not an anarchist (although we know little about his crime in Ottoman jurisdiction), Mahmud Aga made contacts with several anarchists “with evil intentions” while in London and Switzerland. All this information came from Mr. Elias, who also warned Ottoman authorities in London that Mahmud Aga was about to return to Britain, and suggested that they contact British authorities to affect his arrest and transfer to the Ottoman embassy. The Ottoman author reporting all these events from London to Constantinople, in true Ottoman style, also felt it necessary to admonish Mr. Elias for by-passing his superior officers and disrespecting the British ambassador in Paris, while at the same time speculating about him as a young, ambitious and intelligent man whose “willingness and enthusiasm in serving the padişah has been noted.”⁴¹

Hususi, (i.HUS), 50/1314/ Ca-28 (17 Ca 1314 / 23 November 1896);BOA. Sadaret Mühimme Kalemi Evrakı (A.MKT.MHM) 544/17 (10 S 1316 / 30 June 1898); BOA. Zabtiyye, (ZB), 616/112 (25 M 1324 / 21 March 1906); BOA. Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Hariciye Nezareti Maruzâtı (Y.PRK.HR), 27/24, (10 Z1316 / 21 April 1899).

⁴¹ BOA. Yıldız Esas Evrakı (Y.EE) 15/65 (26 Ş 1320/28 November 1902).

It is worth noting that the Ottoman officer in London who penned this report is not admonishing Elias directly, but rather to his own superiors in Constantinople; whether this is because of a sense of propriety or a subtle hint in questioning from an Ottoman viewpoint of usefulness the long-term reliability of a man who has once deceived his superiors in the British

In the presence of numerous reports that heavily criticize inept bureaucrats, however, one could get the partially correct, but fundamentally problematic impression of the Ottoman bureaucracy of the late nineteenth, early twentieth centuries as a blundering, inefficient, blind behemoth directed by incompetent buffoons; an ailing and corrupt relic unable to meet the challenges of the relatively novel ideologies “invading” the empire. In terms of efficiency or corruption, almost everything I have seen in Italian state archives matches the Ottoman situation, and yet, both bureaucracies ultimately managed to curtail anarchists and their ambitions at a level comparable to any state apparatus of the time. Obviously, they must have been doing *some things* “right” to weather the high tide of anarchism in its golden age.

Informants made it possible for the Ottoman bureaucracy to keep a detailed, sometimes intimate level of surveillance on anarchists from many nations, ethnicities, destinations, and protective network of supporters. These informants were not merely paid imperial agents who roamed the world, seeking anarchists; in addition to more professional and directly controlled agents, the Ottomans made use of an immense variety of people as informants. The list of “everyday people” who at one time worked as informants includes, but is not limited to, hotel employees, crew from passenger ships, restaurant owners, and post-office workers.⁴⁰

BOA. Yıldız Sadaret Hususî Maruzat Evrakı, (Y.A.HUS), 383/123, (7 T 1298 / 19 October 1882);

BOA. Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Askerî Maruzat, (Y.PRK.ASK), 244/24, (25 M 1325 / 10 March 1907).

⁴⁰ Ottoman reports are very uneven in revealing details about this type of informant; in some cases we learn their names, location, age, citizenship, marital status, level of reliability, etc. while in others merely a name and occupation is given without further information.

BOA. Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Hariciye Nezareti Maruzâtı, (Y.PRK.HR), 27/2 (8 Z 1316 / 20 March 1899); BOA. Yıldız Mutenevvi Maruzat Evrakı (Y.MTV), 165/221, (26 Ra 1315 / 18 February 1898); BOA. iradeler

knowing *exactly* how many people in these reports were genuine anarchists.

Third, the national/ethnic categorizations in this distribution are arbitrary both because of ambiguity or errors in the sources and the nature of the empire itself. For instance, while there are only three “Jewish anarchists” mentioned as such in these reports, one report mentions, of all people, Emma Goldman (who was suspected by Ottoman and Austrian authorities of an attempt to infiltrate the Ottoman lands) as a “German anarchist.”

The aforementioned caveats can be classified as universal in the study of anarchists for any archival collection. I have made similar observations and analyses concerning the material in the Italian state archives (ACS). The fourth caveat distinguishes the Ottoman case: the researcher in this field needs to be very much aware of the *intent* behind these sources. While European nation states of late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were certainly far from the homogeneous, unified entities as their nationalist narratives would have us believe, none of them compare favorably with the Ottoman lands in terms of the number of ethnicities, religions, cultural and status differences, or the ratio of these elements in such a heterogeneous society. To illustrate this point, Italy did not have its version of several million Armenians or Greeks, to name merely two significant elements in Ottoman society. The United States was certainly comparable to the Ottomans in heterogeneity, thanks to massive immigration, but neither state apparatus had to respond to strong national liberation movements disguised as (or fused with) socialism and anarchism. These are not small, inconsequential differences. Their impact is clearly visible in the varied efforts of the Ottoman state.

Arguments for exceptionalism may create as many problems as they solve (American exceptionalism comes to mind), but the reality of these differences is inescapable. All these observations ultimately mean that the Ottoman state responded to a substantially different set of priorities when it was directing

its resources against anarchists.¹⁹ While the ideology itself was certainly considered to be a threat to the existence and well-being of the Ottoman state, its association with and spread among certain elements of Ottoman society made it a particularly potent explosive in the eyes of the ruling elite and bureaucracy. It is well known that a politically active, influential Jewish community existed in Salonica; where then, are the deluge of reports representing this community?²⁰ There are certainly a few reports directly related to them, as well as a small number of references and hints, but compared to the overwhelming numbers of Armenians, distantly followed by still significant numbers of Italians and Bulgarians, the Jewish community seems to have attracted the ire of the Sublime Porte considerably less.²¹

Having discussed the nature and limitations of the sources, the next step is analyzing what is revealed by the distribution of anarchists in Ottoman reports:

The immediately obvious aspect of the distribution is the dominance of reports on Armenian anarchists; seven out of

¹⁹ There is one notable European exception that is very comparable to the Ottomans in its priorities and troubles, in the shape of the Habsburg empire.

²⁰ Although the Jewish political activists of Salonica get the most attention, they were by no means the only Jews in the Ottoman Empire to become politically active. The Jerusalem-born Abraham Frumkin lived in Constantinople as a well-known anarchist (as well as London, New York, and Paris) and published anarchist literature in the 1890s.

²¹ Avraam Benaroya, "A Note on the Socialist Federation of Saloniki," *Jewish Social Studies* 11, no. 1 (January 1949): 69–72; Paul Dumont, "Une organisation socialiste ottomane: la Federation ouvriere de Salonique (1908–1912)," *Etudes Balkaniques*, no.1 (Sofia, 1975): 76–88; George Haupt, "Introduzione alla storia della Federazione Operaia Socialista di Salonicco," *Movimento Operaio e Socialista* 18 (January-March 1972), 99–112.

If one considers Zionism a nation-building project, by the time of its rise to prominence, the Ottomans had a lot more on their plate to worry about, as the very survival of the Ottoman state was at stake. During the nineteenth century, the main sources of Zionism remained outside the empire, unlike the Armenian or Bulgarian cases.

evil within these (anarchists) without further special investigation.³⁸

The assumption that Armenian telegraph workers were responsible for obstructing investigative efforts on the anarchists is interesting, if unsupported in the remainder of the document. The focus of the report, however, is on bureaucratic leadership rather than external factors; this report, among many other contemporary inspector reports, displays a trend in Ottoman thinking on "how to deal with" the anarchists. Even though they were perceived to be a grave and evil threat to the foundations of Ottoman society, -and on this point all reports from all sources unanimously agree, given properly strict and focused surveillance and policing, most Ottoman officers believed the anarchists could be controlled, if not entirely suppressed. Thus, any "success" of anarchists in Ottoman lands was perceived as little more than an internal bureaucratic failing; a mechanical problem, to be fixed by changing a few gears and cogs, rather than a potential social revolution in-the-making. This functionalist attitude among Ottoman bureaucrats is paradoxical, given the importance they all affix to anarchism as a fundamental threat.

As trite and problematic as organic analogies have proven to be, an attractive method of explaining the all-pervasive mood in these reports is based on the analogy of the empire as a human being, and the anarchists as forms of a deadly virus that is attempting to penetrate and kill the organism; viewed in these terms, the mechanistic attitude adopted by Ottoman bureaucrats towards anarchism despite the apparent paradox mentioned above starts to make more sense.³⁹

³⁸ BOA. Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Adliye ve Mezahib Nezareti Maruzatı (Y.PRK.AZN) 21/28 (24 R 1318/21 August 1901).

³⁹ BOA. Yıldız Kamil Paşa Evrakı, (Y.EE.KP), 8/794, (1314 / 1897.); BOA. Yıldız Esas Evrakı, (Y.EE), 84/122, (1298 / 1881);

The Ottoman State Apparatus Responds to the “Anarchist Evil”³⁷

If the anarchists themselves display such colorful profiles and adventurous experiences in Ottoman lands, the multi-faceted and layered response of the Ottoman authorities serves to complete this picture. The issue of border security was only one of the concerns for the bureaucrats, but it is a useful starting point.

The Ottoman authorities were anything but blind to the security risks posed by the lack of adequate access control at borders and ports. An example is provided by the frustrated report of an inspector of the justice department named Reşat, from Salonica:

Secure sources have informed me that a number of anarchists ... have arrived in Salonica, awaiting an opportunity to leave for the capital...It has come to my attention that previous such occurrences have not been reported to me because the telegraph workers here are of the Armenian millet... The incompetence of the chief of police here, along with the ignorance of the gendarmerie commander have enabled these anarchists to enter Salonica without any obstruction whatsoever. It is clear that because of the advanced age of the vali [governor] of Salonica, his powers have become limited, and it will be impossible to uncover the

Nezareti Maruza- ti (Y.PRK.ZB), 28/31 (6 Ra 1319 / 17 December 1901); BOA. Yıldız Yaveran ve Maiyet-i Seniyye Erkan-i Harbiye Dairesi, (Y.PRK.MYD), 23/61 (1318 / 1901).

³⁷ “Anarşist musibet.”

every ten reports concentrate on Armenians. Directly or indirectly, anarchist ideas certainly did influence many politically active Armenians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but this disparity of numbers in “favor” of Armenians compared to every other group indicates motives concerned with issues beyond the numbers or activities of Armenian anarchists alone. In other words, the combination of “Armenian” and “anarchist” identities bothered the Ottoman authorities more than any other anarchist presence.

The reasons for this specialized attention are not difficult to fathom: state oppression and Armenian uprisings with disastrous results had become a fixture of the second half of the nineteenth century in Ottoman lands, especially in Asia Minor. The 1915–16 genocide at the hands of the Union and Progress leadership proved to be merely the tragic ending to a decades-old struggle. Thus, the emphasis on *Armenian* in “Armenian anarchist” was probably the reason for this inflated number of reports, even though Armenian anarchists certainly “deserved” some of the attention through their activities such as the 1896 Ottoman Bank takeover in Constantinople, led by members of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF, also known as Dashnaksutyun), not to mention the assassination attempt on Abdülhamid II.

Perhaps more unexpected than the Armenian presence in the chart, Muslims and Italians constitute a considerable percentage of total reports. The “Muslim/Turkish” category is much harder to work with than the Italians. Not only do the reports fail to mention “Turks” (they list “Muslim anarchist troublemakers” in anarchist name-lists), but the names themselves do not always indicate ethnic or national identity clearly. This is all to be expected, of course, given that the idea of the “Turk” as a specific, cohesive national unit within the Ottoman empire was barely in its infancy at the end of the nineteenth century. Its subsequent history notwithstanding, during this period, a “Turkish nation” simply did not exist,

and had to be manufactured by the intelligentsia. Figures such as Ziya Gökalp (who came from a Kurdish family in Diyarbakir), Yusuf Akgura (from a family of Kazan Tatars), Tekin Alp (originally Marcel Samuel Raphael Cohen, from the Jewish community of Salonica) experimented with ideas such as panturkism, and wielded tremendous influence over the founders of the Committee for Union and Progress, not to mention the founders of the Turkish Republic.²²

The “Muslim” label should not be left unchallenged, either. Even though the Ottoman administrative apparatus knowingly used the category to describe a vast array of communities scattered across the empire, its utility in analyzing late Ottoman politics is minimal. There is no way to determine what kind of people one is reading about when a group is labeled “Muslim.” It is true that the term was used broadly, and not necessarily as a narrow, strictly religious category, but even in a religious sense it does not tell much. When does it include or exclude Alevites, for example? Again in a religious sense, it is an oxymoron, though perhaps not impossible, to think of a “Muslim anarchist” as the two ideas are poised against each other at every imaginable major intersection of thought and faith. Even when the constantly shifting multitude of definitions for anarchism or Islam are taken into consideration, not to mention unique and obscure mechanisms that enable them to coexist for/within the same individual, there remains more than a trace of the absurd in comparing “Muslim anarchists” to Armenian, Italian, or Bulgarian anarchists as opposed to “Christian anarchists,” a term that is equally ambivalent and useless.²³

²² Çağlar Keyder, “A History and Geography of Turkish Nationalism,” in *Citizenship and the Nation-State in Greece and Turkey*, ed. F. Birtok and T. Dragonas (New York: Routledge, 2005).

²³ It should be noted that this kind of fusion is not impossible; one example is Tolstoy, the great Russian writer and anarchist who spent considerable effort in reconciling anarchism and Christianity. Nonetheless, attempts such

The case was almost certainly not over. The assassination mentioned in the ambassador’s report was none other than the 29 July Monza killing of Italy’s king, Umberto I in 1900 by Gaetano Bresci, an Italian-American weaver who was among the original founders of the influential anarchist magazine, *La Questione Sociale*, in Paterson, N.J. Camilieri was suspected of being one of his accomplices who had departed Italy, traced in Zanzibar and Egypt for nearly three years, and apparently looked suspiciously similar to the blond, thin countenance observed by the Ottoman authorities.³⁵

At this point, it should be obvious that the Ottoman intelligence on Camilieri, although detailed, contained a number of inconsistencies and gray areas. We do not know precisely which parts of the information were offered by Camilieri himself (or the percentage of truth in such accounts), and the mystery of his possible involvement in the assassination as a supporter of Bresci remains veiled to this day. We do, however, retain a sense of the depth of Ottoman involvement and of the resources invested in the worldwide anarchist hunt. Italian, Portuguese, and British intelligence agencies supported the Ottoman investigation of a single, possibly unimportant individual. One can barely imagine the commotion caused by the passage of an extremely well-known figure such as Malatesta through Ottoman lands. We also get a good sense of the transient nature of many of the anarchists in the empire. Despite the efforts of the Ottoman state and its European partners, however, traversing across borders was not as great a challenge as it might appear from these reports, as nearly every anarchist originating inside or outside Ottoman lands crossed the porous Ottoman borders numerous times.³⁶

³⁵ BOA. Yıldız Müfettişlikler ve Komiserlikler Tahrirati (Y.PRK.MK), 20/150, (5 R 1323 / 10 May 1905).

³⁶ BOA. Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Umum Vilayetler Tahrirati (Y.PRK.UM) 69/98 (24 Ra 1322/8 June 1904); BOA. Yıldız Kamil Paşa Evrakı (Y.EE.KP) 25/2498 (26 C 1323/ 28 August 1905);BOA. Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Zaptiye

All this information provided a background for the question that mattered most to the consular officers: was Camilieri an anarchist? He denied being an anarchist, but the consular officer helpfully noted in his report that when compared to a recent, encoded telegram from the Baş Kitabet Dairesi, this information was suspect. An informant named Halil Abdulhay of Crete had a conversation in French with Camilieri during his journey, where he gave most of the information found in the report, with the warning that Camilieri was an anarchist and not to be trusted. Another telegram, this time sent by the Ottoman ambassador in Athens, addressed to the Mabeyn-i Humayun Baş Kitabeti, urged extreme caution in dealing with Camilieri, who was suspected of involvement in a recent assassination. Simultaneously, the Ministry of the Interior sent a telegram to regional administrative headquarters at Aydin (which had jurisdiction over Smyrna), warning them about “Hasan Abdullah,” an Italian who had a British passport, and directing Aydin to apprehend him at the first opportunity. This flurry of communication about Camilieri (including numerous telegrams and reports not discussed here) resulted in the involvement of at least nine Ottoman offices and more than two dozen individuals within three-and-a-half months during the summer of 1903. Clearly, the gears of Ottoman bureaucracy were not very rusty or inefficient when it came to an important subject.

The Camilieri, or Hasan bin Abdullah, case drops from the official record after a report from Smyrna, indicating that he was detained by the local police there and sent to Istanbul for further questioning. The very last mention of Camilieri in a report occurs in the police report from Smyrna; it appears that he was on his way to Istanbul, accompanied by a man named Hasan Husnu, but neither Camilieri nor this man showed up in Istanbul or any other destination, mysteriously disappearing, whereupon a new investigation was started by the Ottoman authorities.

In addition to the terminological difficulty, this Muslim/Turkish category is problematic in the sense that most anarchists were reported only as names in lists. Compared to the Armenians, Italians, or any other group, this group very rarely was the subject of detailed reports. Nonetheless, the very presence of such a group as the second most numerous among the reports on anarchists speaks volumes in response to Zürcher, Ahmad, and other scholars who patiently expect the “correct” class formulas for their scenarios.

Explaining the strong Italian presence among the reported anarchists is a relatively straightforward task. The Ottoman sociopolitical landscape attracted numerous political activists from Italy, including a number of high profile anarchists, ranging from early figures such as Amilcare Cipriani who had once fought alongside Garibaldi and became involved in the fighting against the Ottomans in Crete, to one of the “fathers” of propaganda by the deed, Errico Malatesta, who traveled in Ottoman lands extensively.²⁴

Ultimately, explaining Italian anarchists in the Ottoman empire through the presence of “celebrities” alone will not be sufficient. In addition to well-known figures, large numbers of anarchists traveled through and sometimes established themselves in Ottoman lands, from Tunis to Smyrna (Izmir). What drew them to a land that generated multiple visions of Orientalism in the West, a land that was supposed to be so alien, so irrelevant to the European experience? First, of course, the Ottoman polity was neither alien nor irrelevant to European

as these remain historically highly exceptional, and not without an extensive list of reasons.

²⁴ Further reading: Pier Carlo Masini, *Storia degli Anarchici Italiani nell'Epoca degli Attentati*, (Milano: Rizzoli Editore 1981); Nunzio Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism, 1864–1892* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1993). For Cipriani’s recollections on Crete, *Almanach de la question sociale et de la libre pensée: revue annuelle du socialisme international*, published by Paul Argyriades (Paris, 1891–1903).

society and politics. It was in fact perceived as a fertile ground for new, young anarchist movements, with its well-connected, politically active minorities as well as the disgruntled agrarian masses that would be of immediate interest to an anarchist like Malatesta.

More significantly, there were already well-established communities of Italian immigrants in Ottoman lands. Whereas many of the earlier immigrants had been of mercantile origin, the nineteenth century saw the influx of Italian artisans and workers. Their presence was mostly limited to trading centers and port cities, but many of them had become permanent features of late Ottoman society, occasionally intermarrying with native Christians as well as other western European immigrants. The flow of ideas from Italy to these communities was rapid and direct, and their connections eased the way for the passage of prominent figures as much as it did for any worker who identified himself as anarchist.²⁵

The last, and perhaps most important element in explaining the strong Italian presence among Ottoman anarchists, their

²⁵ The history of nineteenth century Italian immigrants with non-western (other than European, North and South American) destinations is still an understudied field. There are a number of local, non-academic and romanticized studies of the subject, but when it comes to a major historian in the field, we are still left empty handed. A good example of the focus of current scholarship on Italian migration is *Italy's Many Diasporas* by Donna Gabaccia. Gabaccia sets out to produce a comprehensive picture of Italian migration patterns, but the study falters where non-western destinations are concerned. Gabaccia is without a doubt a major scholar of Italian migration, and the study is one of the most recent in the field; and yet, the numerous Italian communities in the Ottoman empire do not even deserve any mention, including the handful of references and hints to "Asia" as a destination. Had the author of this study not been part of the Levantine Italian community in Izmir (or Smir- ne -ita., Smyrna, in the former Ottoman lands), he would discount the existence of such communities as hallucinations altogether after scanning the bulk of the body of scholarship on Italian migration; Donna Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000).

British ship. He left the ship at Cape Town, where he studied in a military school until his graduation, at which time he left for the Portuguese colony at Lorenzo Marquez to work in a brick factory owned by his brother, "Paoli."

Roughly around this time, his parents died on the island of Malta, where they had permanently settled. After living with his brother for four years in the African Portuguese colony, Camilieri left again and worked as a personal servant to various merchants, moving from place to place, resurfacing again at Zanzibar, with 120 pieces of gold in his pocket. In Zanzibar, Camilieri reportedly met an "Arabian girl," fell in love with her, and converted to Islam, taking the name Hasan bin Abdullah. He soon ran out of funds in Zanzibar, but impressed several employers with his good command of English, Italian, French, Spanish, and Portuguese. He left Zanzibar (and presumably the girl), and managed to move first to Aden, and then Port Said, where he secured a job with the local police force as an informant/constable. Predictably, Camilieri found the paltry pay from the police force insufficient, not to mention the unpleasantness of his less than desirable treatment at the hands of his compatriots due to his religious conversion, and decided to move yet again, this time taking the *Ismailiye*, a passenger ship of the Khedivate, bound for Smyrna through Piraeus.

Apparently worried that he would not be allowed to land in Smyrna, he contacted the Ottoman consulate in Piraeus, where he was told that his "documents of conversion" to Islam should be sufficient, and that he should not worry about being denied entry or being expelled at the port in Smyrna. At this point, Camilieri declared his willingness to live in Ottoman lands and become an Ottoman subject, informing the consulate that both his brother and an Italian friend had converted to Islam in Zanzibar, taking the names Mehmed Said and Suleyman Salih, respectively, after which his brother had remained in Zanzibar, while his friend had traveled to Egypt.

the public opinion or reflected in the Ottoman state's attitude at the time, and neither were most of these anarchists nihilistic in their approach to propaganda by the deed. More or less the same people who founded a university in Egypt were equally as likely to blow up Abdulhamid; a telling duality, though not necessarily a paradox, that does not receive the attention it deserves.

Drifters and Adventurers? Profile of an Anarchist in Ottoman Lands

If the range of anarchist activity in the empire was so rich and all-inclusive, it is only reasonable to expect the same of the anarchists themselves; not only did they have varied origins, but their individual "adventures" within, and around, the empire, gleaned from Ottoman reports, leaves a lasting impression. Among the many reports, we come across a fascinating, representative example of the anarchist in Ottoman lands, one Hasan bin Abdullah. The foreign ministry report dated 1903, average in the level of detail among other similar reports, asserts that a man, around 22 years of age, blond and thin, traveled to Zanzibar from Ipsara, only to come back to Egypt, and from Egypt, to Piraeus. He was questioned and his background investigated in Piraeus, while he was en route to Smyrna, and the information gathered about the man reveal a fascinating level of detail. Apparently, this "Hasan Abdullah"³⁴ was originally named Cesare Camilieri ("Sezar Kamilyeri"), son of Antonio Camilieri ("Anton Kamilyeri"), of "a famous family;" he was born in Rome, moved to London when he was eight years old, and was carrying a British passport at the time of his encounter with the Ottoman port authorities. His long journey from London to Smyrna involved serving as a cabin boy on a

³⁴ The reports show differences in his name(s); the text reflects this variation.

constant persecution and pursuit in Italy, only became worse as the *attentati* became more deadly and public opinion, combined with increasing police efficiency, made life very difficult for anarchists in their homeland. At least as many of the travels by Italian anarchists to other countries were determined by these conditions as they were for organizing immigrant communities and networking with anarchists of different origins. The one ephemeral but significant advantage of avoiding persecution by going East rather than West was the relatively late and lax initial response of the Ottoman authorities, compared to their French or German counterparts. This situation would change gradually starting in the 1890s and become very visible in the 1900s. Italy's proximity at multiple points to Ottoman borders also made it a relatively easy destination: whether from Trieste, Brindisi, or Palermo, the passage by sea took no more than a few days. Ottoman records are full of arriving intelligence from Italy, France, Austria, and even Britain, concerned with the departure of known anarchists in ships or trains bound for Ottoman ports and border-stations.²⁶

The Ottomans tried to understand the popularity of anarchism among Italians. Foreign ministry documents allocated plenty of space to find the root causes of the "anarchist evil." One document outlines how Italy has been a land divided among competing city-states since medieval times, quoting Machiavelli on the idea of "the ends justify the means," concluding by observing that "thus, most of the greatest crimes of the start of the century have been committed by Italians." The report includes a detailed description of the Italian political scene, identifying the socialists, the republicans, and the anarchists as the chief causes of "evil." The anonymous author

²⁶ The story of Hasan bin Abdullah, as documented in detail in the following pages, provides an excellent example of the composition and nature of such records.

of the report believed that socialists and republicans in Italy were merely “the tentacles of the real evil of anarchism,” and that neither one had a bright future as they would all be consumed by the “anarchist menace.” As proof of socialist and republican complicity, the author noted their lack of support for anti-anarchist legislation, and observed that “since ancient times secret organizations thrived in Italy;” it was no wonder that their modern counterparts were now so popular. The report even criticized the previous king for being too soft on anarchists and leaving the government of the country to the parliament, while expressing approval of the new king’s resolve and strength for silencing political opposition.

Ironically, the “new king,” who so impressed the author of the report was Umberto I, was assassinated later in an act of revenge against the 1898 Bava-Beccaris massacre in Milan, which he had applauded. The report also warned about the immigrant Italian community in the U.S., citing Paterson, N.J., as a particularly important location for “troublemakers,” where they were given free rein to publish and agitate as they wished. The solution proposed involved the careful selection of consular staff along the coast of Italy, and: “since these anarchists consider themselves beyond the law, and attack people like wild animals, the use of violence against them is legitimate.”²⁷

The three leading ethnic groups (Armenian, Muslim/Turkish, Italian) in the survey constitute 85 percent of all anarchists reported in the period 1850–1917. However, this percentage can be misleading because of the rich variety of people that found themselves in these reports. In addition to these groups, the documents mention more than twenty ethnic/national identities including Russians, Bulgarians, Spanish, Catalans, Iranians, Greeks, French, Germans, Jews (national origin is not

²⁷ Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Hariciye Nezareti Maruzatı (hereafter referred to as BOA. Y.PRK. HR), 30/36 (29 Z 1318 / 19 April 1901).

Sadly, founding and operating a university attracted much less attention from the public than attempting to assassinate a head of state. The assassination attempt in question was the result of the infamous collaboration between the Belgian anarchist Edward Jorris and Armenian ARF members led by Kristofor Mikaelyan; they had carefully observed Abdülhamid’s Friday routine, including a trip to the Yıldız mosque, and placed a time bomb, called the “Machine Infernale,” in his car awaiting the return trip. Unfortunately for the anarchists, that bomb exploded in Abdülhamid’s car moments before he reached it, the sultan atypically delayed by a chat with the Şeyhülislam Celalettin Efendi outside the mosque. The massive explosion killed 26 people, including Mikaelyan, wounded 58, crushed 17 cars, and killed 20 horses in the neighborhood.³²

Anarchists were not the only group to use political violence within the empire. Various national liberation movements certainly dabbled in violence, sometimes on a mass scale. The activities of the IMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) and its numerous predecessors as well as future fragments come to mind, but none of them were representative of propaganda by the deed.³³ All of these movements ultimately aimed at establishing new nation-states of varying homogeneity, while the anarchists were trying to destroy not only the Ottoman state, but also any regional successors. The fact that they would not succeed in this agenda was not established in

³² Sources from the time cited various numbers of killed and wounded. The suppressed Ottoman newspapers did not produce details about the event in the immediate aftermath. *The Guardian* reported “death of 24 persons, while there were 57 wounded and 55 horses injured.” *The New York Times* reported “a few persons were killed or injured.” *The Guardian*, “The Sultan’s Escape” (July 24, 1905): 7; *The New York Times*, “Bomb Misses Sultan; 40 Persons Killed,” (July 22, 1905); *The American Monthly Review of Reviews*, vol. 32, (1905): 280.

³³ An interesting personal account of this period involving the IMRO/VMRO is Albert Sonnichsen, *Confessions of a Macedonian Bandit: A Californian in the Balkan Wars* (n.: Narrative Press, 2004).

ity in Ottoman lands, in this case Egypt.³⁰ By 1901, political activism based on working-class consciousness was certainly not a new revelation in the Egyptian scene; as outlined by scholars such as John Chalcraft, Joel Beinin, and Zachary Lockman, the late nineteenth century saw the rise of a new working class that promptly started working towards improving its predicament by experimenting with a volatile mix of nationalism and nation building, as well as socialism to a lesser extent. Interestingly, the UPL was not based exclusively in the labor movement or the working class, but found support also in the middle and upper classes, including, not surprisingly, many Italians as well as Greeks and French citizens.³¹

³⁰ Of course, at the time, Egypt's political status as an "Ottoman province" was merely nominal; it would not become officially separated from the empire until 1914. Nonetheless, the anarchist presence and activities in Egypt are certainly part of a larger regional, "Ottoman" experience. Scholars who discount the existence of an Ottoman working class, in addition to the problems I have outlined earlier, are also making the mistake of treating Egypt as an extraneous, distant land with no real claim to being "Ottoman."

³¹ For a thorough discussion of the labor movement in Egypt during this period, Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882–1954* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987); John Chalcraft, "The Coal-Heavers of Port Sa'id: State Building and Worker Protest, 1869–1914," *International Labour and Working Class History* 60 (2001):110–124; John Chalcraft, *The Striking Cabbies of Cairo and Other Stories: Crafts and Guilds in Egypt, 1863–1914* (Albany: State University of New York Press 2004); John Chalcraft "Popular Protest, the Market and the State in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Egypt," in *Subalterns and Social Protest: History from Below in the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. S. Cronin (New York: Routledge, 2007): 69–90. A good discussion on the meaning(s) of socialism as Ishtirakiyyah can be found at Mourad Magdi Wahba, "The Meaning of Ishtirakiyyah: Arab Perceptions of Socialism in the Nineteenth Century," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no.10, Marxism and the Critical Discourse,(1990): 42–55. An in-depth work on the UPL, also the source of most of the information on this subject in the text is Anthony Gorman, "Anarchists in Education: The Free Popular University in Egypt, (1901)," *Middle Eastern Studies* 41, no. 3 (2005): 303–320.

always clear), Dutch, Belgians, Polish, Austrians, Romanians, Irish, Macedonians, Hungarians, English, and even one man from Luxemburg.²⁸

Perhaps the last real surprise in this survey is the low number of Greek anarchists mentioned. While the early history of Greek anarchism remains a gray area, we do know that significant early anarchists such as Emanouil Dadaoglou (not surprisingly, from Smyrna, and a close contact of Cipriani and Argyriadis) and Plotinos Rodokanatis were active in organizing and publishing, as well as later anarchists in Patra (the city's geographic location and proximity to Italy and the strength of an early anarchist movement here is probably not a coincidence).²⁹

One possible explanation for the relatively small number of Greek anarchists in Ottoman reports is from an Ottoman "threat assessment" perspective: the Armenians had not yet succeeded in creating a nation-state out of the lands of the empire, thus they were a continuing threat. The Bulgarians were in a similar position until they achieved independence late in the nineteenth century, and the Italians, while in no position, as well as lacking the necessary motivation or numbers, to launch a similar movement within the empire, represented an influential, economically active and politically significant element of Ottoman society. An increase in the number or influence of anarchists among them could inflict considerable damage in all these fields, not to mention the threat of "contamination" of locals and other minorities thanks to the

²⁸ The list is representative of the actual numbers in reports, in descending order.

²⁹ James Sotros, *The Greek Speaking Anarchist and Revolutionary Movement (1830–1940) – Writings for a History* (n.p: No Gods-No Masters, 2004); G. Kordatos, *The History of the Greek Workers Movement* (Athens: Mpoukomanis Publications 1972); Paul Pomonis ed., *The Early Days of Greek Anarchism: 'The Democratic Club of Patras' & 'Social Radicalism in Greece'* (n.: Kate Sharp-ley Library 2004).

polyglot communities they formed. The unwavering attention of the Sublime Porte on the suspected Muslim/ Turkish anarchists despite their small number and minor influence is an excellent indication of such “contamination.” A “native” anarchist movement in strength would certainly be considered a grave threat to Ottoman sovereignty.

By contrast, Greek independence had been achieved a half century earlier: 1821–1829 for the war of Independence, and 1832 Treaty of Constantinople for the official recognition of Greece as an independent nation-state by the Ottoman empire. One may argue that Greek anarchism represented no new separatist threat to Ottoman sovereignty. The problem with this argument is the continuing struggle of Greek-speaking people in the remaining lands of the empire, with a certain degree of success (the previously mentioned conflict in Crete comes to mind). Even when one disqualifies the Ottoman territories bordering on or close to the new Greek state, there were still more than a million Greek-speakers spread throughout the empire, only second in number to the Armenian population among the minorities.

The “threat assessment” argument, so attractive in the Armenian, Bulgarian, Italian, or Muslim/Turkish cases, thus falls apart in the Greek case, with one possible exception: we have records of Greek-speaking anarchists operating within Greece, regardless of their land of birth, but we have very limited information on their anarchist activities in the remaining territories of the empire. While only a speculation still awaiting the unearthing of new primary sources, it is possible that once a Greek *state* had been created, most of the efforts of Greek-speaking anarchists throughout the empire were directed first and foremost towards influencing events within, and the structure of, that state; the Ottoman origins of the prominent early figures of Greek anarchism seems to support this speculation.

Anarchy in the Empire: An Overview

The historiographical overview and the survey of primary material completed, the next step in understanding anarchists and anarchism in the Ottoman empire is looking at the countermeasures taken by the Ottomans, as well as the anarchist intellectual output alongside their activities. In other words, it is time to discuss the intricate battle between anarchists and their governmental counterparts, as experienced within Ottoman lands.

The most visible, though not necessarily most significant, dynamic of the anarchist presence in the late nineteenth century is violence. This was not simply violence as such, or any generic form of political violence, but *propaganda by the deed*. High profile assassinations of kings, queens, presidents, and other heads of state covered daily press and dominated political discussions throughout Europe. The situation was not appreciably different in the Ottoman empire; even when the actions themselves were not in Ottoman lands, the state apparatus as well as the press intensively studied these actions, and in the case of the former, willingly cooperated in capturing the responsible individuals. Various politically active groups within the empire also took notice; the result was a period of highly visible, but somewhat symbolic violence in the Ottoman territories that as often as not lacked a politically focused, detailed agenda. It would be a mistake, however, to categorically equate the anarchist experience in the Ottoman empire with violence and mayhem; the fact that anarchists and their actions amounted to a lot more than these most visible aspects is as true of the Ottoman case as it is for the rest of the world.

In 1901, the Università Popolare Libera (UPL), reflecting clear anarchist influence and principles, opened its doors to students, an important example of non-violent anarchist activ-