

## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

To Kill a Sultan

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