

BOOK REVIEW

Ramazan Hakkı Öztan & Alp Yenen (eds.), *Age of Rogues: Rebels, Revolutionaries and Racketeers at the Frontiers of Empires*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021, xxiii+400 p., ISBN: 978-1-4744-6262-4.

Cengiz Yolcu*

Edited by Ramazan Hakkı Öztan (PhD.) and Alp Yenen (PhD.), *Age of Rogues: Rebels, Revolutionaries and Racketeers at the Frontiers of Empires* was published by Edinburgh University Press in 2021. The book consists of three main parts with twelve articles, a foreword, and an afterword.

Part I, "Rogues in History", starts with four chapters. The first article, titled "Age of Rogues: Transgressive Politics at the Frontiers of the Ottoman Empire" deals with the age of rogues as a framework for studying transgressive politics at the frontiers of the Ottoman Empire. The first section of the article focuses on the turn-of-the-century Ottoman frontier in Macedonia, which is "a historical theatre of charged interstate competition

* PhD candidate, İstanbul 29 Mayıs University, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-6861-3036,
e-mail: cyolcu@29mayis.edu.tr

and local rivalries that gave birth to a particular brand of rogue actors”¹. Secondly, Öztan and Yenen intersect the history of the Macedonian revolutionary organisations in the early twentieth century and pick up the biography of İsmail Enver, later well-known Enver Pasha, to illustrate the individual trajectory of a rogue between forces of revolution and empire. Thirdly, the authors aim to explain the historical sociology of transgressive politics that led to the emergence of an age of rogues at the frontier of empires.

The second article of the Part I, “Gendered Narratives of Transgressive Politics: Recovering Revolutionary Rubina” by Hourı Berberian deals with the issues of gender in transgressive politics. Using published and unpublished documents and correspondence from the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) archives, a French-language Ottoman report of the operation, an Armenian-language account of the act, Berberian attempts to reconstruct the biography of an Armenian revolutionary Rubina, whose activities were silenced in the male-dominated narratives of revolution and nationalism, as well as to insert her acts into the larger Armenian revolutionary narrative.

In the third article, titled “Caucasian Banditry in Late Imperial Russia: The Case of Abrek Zelimkhan”, Jeronim Perović presents the life of Zelimkhan Gushmazukaev. Perović, aims to give insights into the phenomenon of Caucasian ‘banditry’ (*abrechestvo*) in tsarist Russia at the turn of the twentieth century. By discussing various episodes from Zelimkhan’s life and his actions, Perović sheds light on not only the transfiguration of an “ordinary man” into a bandit, but also the social and the political conditions across the Russian-controlled Caucasus.

The fourth and the last article of Part I is a study by Olmo Gözl, titled: “Racketeers in Politics: Theoretical Reflections on Strong-man Performances in Late Qajar Iran”. In his article, Gözl takes readers to Qajar Iran, to evaluate the sociological and historical significance of the heroic pre-figurations of the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911, as discussing the ambiguous perceptions of the two national heroes, Sattar Khan and Baqer Khan, a horse dealer and a bricklayer, against the backdrop of the *luti* ethos in twentieth-century Iran.

¹ Alp Yenen & Ramazan Hakkı Öztan, “Age of Rogues: Transgressive Politics at the Frontiers of the Ottoman Empire,” in Ramazan Hakkı Öztan & Alp Yenen (eds.), *Age of Rogues: Rebels, Revolutionaries and Racketeers at the Frontiers of Empires* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), p. 10.

Part II, titled “Rogues and Regimes”, starts with Anna Vakali’s article, “Conspiracy under Trial: Christian Brigands, Rebels and Activists in Bosnia during the Tanzimat”. Using the unearthed archival materials, such as the interrogation protocols in the Ottoman courts, Vakali focuses on a series of local uprisings in Ottoman Bosnia during the late 1850s and early 1860s. The author states that, “the process of ‘nationalisation’ was less linear and reductionist than has been accepted”; and the agents of the society were from among the various social groups and operated simultaneously; even if they were motivated and mobilised by different agendas.

In the second article of the second part, titled “The Abode of Sedition: Resistance, Repression and Revolution in Sasun, 1891-1904”, Toygun Altıntaş focuses on the Sasun rebellion, which showed the complex confrontations between the Armenian insurgency and the Hamidian counterinsurgency, and its suppression. Altıntaş aims to explore how Armenian revolutionaries utilised transgressive politics and propagated its use to further their goals at the turn of the twentieth century.

İlkay Yılmaz examines the dynamic relationship between the security politics of Ottoman government during the Hamidian era and the larger international context of security, especially against anarchism in the article titled, “Conspiracy, International Police Cooperation and the Fight against Anarchism in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1878-1908”. Yılmaz’s study focuses on the emergence of a security regime between the Treaty of Berlin and the beginning of the Second Constitutional Period.

The last article in Part II is from Aline Schlaepfer. Schlaepfer’s work, “Between Ruler and Rogue: Sayyid Talib al-Naqib and the British in Early Twentieth-century Basra” focuses on an Iraqi strongman, Talib, who survived under both Ottoman and British regimes in Basra. Using mainly British correspondence and reports from Basra, Baghdad, Istanbul, Cairo, Damascus, Delhi and Bombay between 1904 and 1929, and also Iraqi historiography, press and memoirs on Talib, the author aims to show how Talib used of his liminal position between Ottoman and British empires in order to negotiate his political status: rogue and ruler.

“Chemistry of Revolution: Naum Tyufekchiev and the Trajectories of Revolutionary Violence in the Late Ottoman Europe”, by Ramazan Hakkı Öztan is the first article in Part III, “Rogue Trajectories”. Öztan’s study depicts the life of a rogue, Naum Tyufekchiev, who was a refugee chemist-cum-bomb-maker and arms merchant. Öztan focuses on how the complex late nineteenth-century transformations shaped the personalities

of such rogues as Tyufekchiev, who involved in a range of high-scale assassinations, bombing campaigns and arms transfers, all of which kept the Russian, Ottoman, and Bulgarian authorities at the turn-of-the century.

The second work of the third part is by Benjamin C. Fortna. Fortna's study, "Late-Ottoman 'Rogues' and their Paths to Power: A Prosopographic Study" deals with the men of violence, who were actors in a larger political game in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century. Fortna offers a prosopographical approach to examine issues of patronage and rivalry among the Young Turk activist officers.

Michael Provence's article, "A Man of the Frontier: Ramadan Shallash and the Making of the Post-Ottoman Arab East" is the third contribution to the Part III. Provence focuses on the life history of a frontier warrior in the Arab Middle East, named Ramadan Shallash. The study shows that, how men like Shallash were crucial to the survival of the state in the first quarter of the twentieth century, however a couple decades later, when times and conditions changed, how such men had become less useful and more dangerous.

The final piece of the third part is from Jordi Tejel. Tejel's work "The Last Ottoman Rogues: The Kurdish-Armenian Alliance in Syria and the New State System in the Interwar Middle East" focuses on "the last Ottoman rogues", examining the Khoybun League and the formation of Kurdish-Armenian alliance in the post-Ottoman Middle East. Using Turkish, British and French Mandate archival sources as well as Kurdish and Armenian activists' pamphlets and memoirs, the study discusses "the Khoybun League which, in 1927, brought together the formerly Istanbul based Kurdish activists with the Armenians of the Dashnak Party into a revolutionary organisation active in French Syria and Lebanon with the aim of 'liberating' Armenia and Kurdistan from the Republic of Turkey"².

Finally, in "Afterword" Erik Jan Zürcher ingeniously offers the "keyword" of the whole book: transgression. Zürcher explains the reason behind his selection, as stating the rogues' acts transgressive "in the sense that it overstepped the boundaries set by the state in its laws, particularly where it concerned the use of violence",³ and in the eyes of one of the states involved all of the "rogues" were criminals.

² Jordi Tejel, "The Last Ottoman Rogues: The Kurdish-Armenian Alliance in Syria and the New State System in the Interwar Middle East," in Öztan & Yenen (eds.), *Age of Rogues*, p. 357.

³ Erik Jan Zürcher, "Afterword," in Öztan & Yenen (eds.), *Age of Rogues*, p. 383.

Age of Rogues is a significant contribution to the late Ottoman history in terms of how agents of political violence, rebels, and colourful personalities shaped the frontier zones of the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East in the post-Ottoman era.