

SOCIAL DARWINISM AND THE EASTERN QUESTION

(SOSYAL DARVİNİZM VE DOĞU SORUNU)

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Abstract: *This article argues that the effort to associate the Young Turks with Social Darwinism suffers from questionable academic integrity, marked by mantra-like rhetoric; conclusiveness despite lack of evidence; speculative discussion; and an apparent preconceived commitment. There has been a prejudiced determination to associate the Young Turk with a damning ideology, at the expense of a careful study of Social Darwinism's ideological home in Western Europe and its direct involvement in intensifying relations between Turks and Armenians. The article also suggests that the dangerous popularity of Social Darwinism in Britain eventually waned, but not before it had a powerful negative impact on the perception of Turks and Jews in Europe. This rhetoric had a fundamental part in defining and intensifying the conflict between Turks and Armenians, as well as in defining and intensifying a new breed of anti-Semitism. Still, the article will try to show that unlike the weak and disputable sources that are orchestrated to show trails of Social Darwinism in the Young Turks' view of Armenians, there is ample and overwhelming evidence showing that the British Liberal leadership developed their anti-Turkish ideology hand in hand with Social Darwinism's original development in the 1870s, and though the Turks and Jews were the primary target of this ideology, the Armenian loss of life was substantial among its victims.*

Keywords: *Social Darwinism, Young Turks, Britain, anti-Semitism, Armenians*

Öz: *Bu makale Jön Türkleri Sosyal Darwinizm ile ilişkilendirme çabalarının tuzaklı bir retoriği bulunan, kanıt yokluğuna rağmen sonuçlara ulaşam, spekülatif tartışmalar yaratan ve çok açık önyargılı bir adanmışlık gösteren sorunlu bir akademik tutarsızlık gösterdiğini iddia etmektedir. Jön Türkleri Sosyal Darwinizmin Batı Avrupa'daki ideolojik evinin bir incelemesi ve Türkler ile Ermeniler arasında yoğunlaşan ilişkilerde oynadığı kesin rol gözardı edilmek pahasına*

lanetlenmiş bir ideoloji ile ilişkilendirmek amacı güden önyargılı bir kararlılık bulunmaktadır. Makale ayrıca Sosyal Darvinizmin Britanya'daki tehlikeli popülerliğin zaman geçtikçe azaldığını, ancak bu gerçekleşmeden evvel Avrupa'daki Türk ve Yahudi algısına çok ciddi olumsuz bir etki yaptığını öne sürmektedir. Bu retorik Türkler ve Ermeniler arasındaki anlaşmazlıkları olduğu kadar yeni bir tür anti-Semitizm'in de tanımlanması ve artışını açıklamak açısından büyük önem taşımaktadır. Ancak, makale Jön Türklerin Ermenilere yönelik algısında Sosyal Darvinizm'in izlerini göstermek üzere biraraya getirilmiş tartışmalı ve zayıf kaynakların aksine, Britanya'daki liberal liderlerin Türk-karşıtı ideolojilerini aslında nasıl 1870'li yıllarda Sosyal Darvinizm'in gelişmesi ile eş zamanlı olarak tanımladıklarını ve nitekim Türk ve Yahudiler bu ideolojinin asıl hedefleri ise de, Ermenilerin yaşadığı kayıpların da bu ideolojinin kurbanı olduğunu açıkça gösteren çok fazla ve etkileyici kanıtlar bulunduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Sosyal Darvinizm, Jön Türkler, Britanya, anti-semitizm, Ermeniler*

The back-and-forth regarding the fate of the Armenians in World War I and the responsibility of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP),¹ has taken the shape of a polemic rather than a debate. As such, the arguments brought forth are not designed to establish common ground, but rather to further isolate one's own view by solidifying a unilateral narrative in order to satisfy pressing political needs. Not only is such a trend detrimental to any hope of ever successfully negotiating the differences over the past, but it also leads to poor academic work that is more committed to a political goal than to the actual study of the details. Certain scholars who are committed to a particular goal in such manner are so blinded by it that they cannot see crucial subtleties, or even refuse to look at the inaccuracies they produce.

The matter of Social Darwinism and its important role in the Turko-Armenian conflict serves a strong example of this. It is noticeable that the concept of Social Darwinism is being utilized by certain scholars toward the end of promoting a sense that the Young Turks have treated the Ottoman Armenians in a manner that is comparable to the treatment of Jews by Nazi Germans. The comparison between the Young Turks and Nazi Germans has been deliberately attempted because it would automatically equate the claims of the Armenians to those of the Jews. However, such an attempt suffers from insensitivity to detail, being that it is so stubbornly focused on the general goal it seeks to achieve, namely to accuse the Turks of genocide and elevate the status of Armenian claims against them. Politically, this insensitivity will

¹ Mainly referred to here in their less official name, Young Turks.

only create wider gaps between the two sides; academically, this insensitivity has promulgated biased study that misdirects and distracts from the greater influence of Social Darwinism on the conflict between the Turks and Armenians.

Nazi ideology was inspired by, and intertwined with, the view of Social Darwinism, which saw humanity through a lens of racial division. Such a view taught that similar to how the stronger and fitter species who prove more adaptable to their conditions are the ones to survive in nature, so does human society comprise of different races with different capacity to survive. The belief that one race is better developed and more equipped to survive than other races also meant a perception according to which there are superior and inferior races. The unequivocal association between Nazi ideology and Social Darwinism meant that vilification by association with Nazi Germans can be attained by presenting Social Darwinism as an ideological tool that was also practiced by the Young Turks. As a result of this opportunity to equate the Turks with the Nazis, any commitment to accuracy is abandoned for the sake of promoting an agenda driven syllogism: being that the Nazis (A) were undoubtedly Social Darwinists (B) in their view of Jews, a successful claim that the Young Turks (C) were also Social Darwinists (B) in their view of Armenians, would lead to the desirable conclusion that A and C are alike.

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At the core of the reasoning provided by those who speak of the Young Turks in the same breath as the Nazi Germans is the claim that both faced hard times of national decline and both employed Social Darwinism in their efforts to rebuild their nation and define a greater sense of nationalism at the expense of a minority. One scholar even goes as far as presenting the history of racial ideology in such a reckless manner that will surely confuse the readers' chronological grasp of Social Darwinism: "Pan-Turkism contained some rudimentary forms of racist ideas that later became the main ideological weapon of the Nazis."² Such a phrasing does not just twist history for the sake of politics, but bends it completely out of shape.

In truth, Germany was the first nation outside Britain to heed Darwin's teachings, and advance it further through the works of German scholars, decades before the Young Turks took control of the Ottoman state. In his letters, Darwin himself makes reference to his theory's successful acceptance

2 Nora Arissian, "Comparative Aspects of the Armenian and Jewish Cases of Genocide," in *The Armenian Genocide: Cultural and Ethical Legacies*, ed. Richard Havannisian (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2007), 298.

in German science,³ and even considered the future of his study to be reliant upon the support it receives,⁴ as well as the progress that is made,⁵ in Germany, where his book *On the Origin of Species* was translated and published in 1860,⁶ within a year after its original publication in Britain. Going by “the number, status, and influence of scholars in late nineteenth century Germany propagating Social Darwinist tenets of some sort, it is evident that Social Darwinism was a dynamic intellectual current.”⁷

Moreover, a focus on a significant book from 1868, *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte* (In English, *The History of Creation*), the work of Ernst Haeckel, a German scholar who led the way in the early processing of Darwinism in German society,⁸ shows a racially based analysis that is biased toward the German⁹ to such an extent that it is hard to envision those outside the designation of this alleged racial superiority, such as the Young Turks, agreeing with Social Darwinism and admitting that they themselves are in fact racially inferior to Germans. Not only was Social Darwinism boosting the self-image of Aryans and Anglo-Saxons in a manner that would be likely objectionable to members of other so-called inferior races, but the emphasis on race in itself was not at all the ideological style of the Young Turks. The evaluative elaboration on physical racial characteristics such as hair, skin, skull, lips, chin, and nose to determine racial superiority or inferiority, as done systematically by Haeckel, had absolutely no echo in Pan-Turkism. The definitional focus of Pan-Turkism was inward, on what commonalities made Turkish nationalism, and not outward, on how other races compared with them. In order to find proof of “ancient persisting bonds” that would tie Turkish co-nationals together, Pan-Turkism adopted “a ‘historicist’ approach” which meant an almost exclusive focus “on those issues of linguistic, historical and literary research,”¹⁰ leaving out physiological aspects.

Therefore, even if Pan-Turkism did involve some measure of ethnic pride, it was not displayed along with labels of racial science, and even had there been an attempt at making a scientific claim about Turkish racial superiority, it would not have counted as Social Darwinism because the British and German scholars whose work defines Social Darwinism have found the

3 Francis Darwin, ed., *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1896), 250.

4 *Ibid.*, 270

5 *Ibid.*, 120

6 *Ibid.*, 150.

7 Richard Weikart, “The Origins of Social Darwinism in Germany, 1859-1895,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54 no. 3 (July 1993): 486.

8 *Ibid.*, 475.

9 Ernst Haeckel, *The History of Creation, or The Development of the Earth and Its Inhabitants by the Action of Natural Causes*, trans. E. Ray Lankester, Vol. 2 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1887), 323.

10 Jacob M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism: From Irredentism to Cooperation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 183-184.

Aryans and Anglo-Saxons, not the Turkic people, to be superior. Social Darwinism is not defined as a theory of general claims for racial superiority, but when put in proper context it is viewed as exact claims about Aryan and Anglo-Saxon racial superiority. If one were to suddenly claim that the Papuans present a race that is superior to the white European, then that would not be Social Darwinism, but something else, for it would not meet the Social Darwinist analysis of what makes a race superior.

Additionally, the effort to associate the Young Turks with Social Darwinism suffers from questionable academic integrity, marked by mantra-like rhetoric; conclusiveness despite lack of evidence; speculative discussion; and an apparent preconceived commitment. The accusations that the Young Turks were Social Darwinists appear in somewhat of a list form which includes elitism, positivism, materialism, and scientism.¹¹ The similarities in the delivery of these lists suggest a copycat technique where scholars mechanically mimic previous arguments because they share a common goal, and an attempt to create a truism by way of repetition. Another trait involving arguments that the Young Turks were Social Darwinists is the decisive tone employed despite the recognition that evidence is “scant”¹² and “scarce.”¹³ Not only is there lack of evidence, but dubious evidence is presented as worthy, as for instance two sources who are decidedly acting outside the CUP circle, the spiritual leader of the Trebizond diocese, Archbishop Havhannes (Jean) Naslian, and exiled anti-CUP Kurdish nationalist Mevlanzade Rıfat, are brought forth as “convincing information on the Ittihadist inclination toward the ideas of Social Darwinism.”¹⁴ The second and third hand sources on the perspective of the Young Turks, is not just removed from the Ittihadist body, but is attached to rival bodies who were in conflict of interests with the Young Turks and well-motivated to vilify them. Disagreeing with those who say that Social Darwinism was “the chosen guide of so many Young Turks,”¹⁵ Taner Akçam says “that although some within Unionist ranks were indeed inclined toward racism or social Darwinism, the mainstream of Unionist thought was nourished from other sources.” Akçam offers no evidence to explain why Social Darwinism should be associated with the Young Turks at all, and his offhand disagreement with those who highlight

11 For instance, see: Taha Parla, *The Social and Political Thought of Ziya Gökalp, 1876-1924* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 20-21; M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902-1908* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 313; and Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 87.

12 Boris Barth, “Racism and Genocide,” in *Racism in the Modern World: Historical Perspectives on Cultural Transfer and Adaptation*, ed. Manfred Berg and Simon Wendt (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 99.

13 Arissian, “Comparative,” 298-299.

14 Ibid. The vague reference by Dr. Nazim to plants and animals eating each other does not reflect Social Darwinism, and is yet another weak source that does not provide any foundation to the claim that the Young Turks were Social Darwinists.

15 Hanioglu, *Preparation*, 313.

Social Darwinism in the Young Turk approach confirms the conjectural level of discussion.

This leads to a strong sense that there has been a prejudiced determination to associate the Young Turk with a damning ideology, at the expense of a careful study of Social Darwinism's ideological home in Western Europe and its direct involvement in intensifying relations between Turks and Armenians. Although some of the sources which accuse the Young Turks of Social Darwinism, point out its Western European origin,¹⁶ there is no demonstration of any intention to expand on how those who taught and developed Social Darwinism in Western Europe viewed the Ottomans. Boris Barth shares with his readers that "the notion that some peoples were inevitably about to die in the figurative sense and that the reason for this had something to do with their racial or ethnic quality was already widespread among the European elites before World War I," without making mention that the Turks were viewed as the primary example of a nation that is dying due to racially rooted incompetence; Barth's choice to sum up European application of Social Darwinism by making reference to Robert Gascoyne-Cecil of Sailsbury,¹⁷ the Conservative British Prime Minister at the turn of the century, is misdirecting because the Liberals in British politics, not the Conservatives, were the ones who allowed a much greater measure of racial ideology to dominate their foreign policy, and their views on the Ottoman state in particular.

An important yet basic question has been neglected in this context: To what extent is Social Darwinism rooted in its place of origin, and to what extent is it exclusively reflective of the racial perspective of white Europeans such as the Anglo-Saxons and Aryans? Once the historical background of Social Darwinism is properly tracked, it should then be asked: How has Social Darwinism manifested itself from the perspective of the British Liberal elite, in view of the Turks and the Armenians?

Upon addressing these questions, it should be first considered that Darwin himself was not necessarily the one who paved the way for Social Darwinism. Greta Jones makes a compelling argument that "even if Darwin had never existed" there would have been an attempt to give biological backing to social theories, and accordingly, Social Darwinism was necessitated by sociological assumptions that had already been in existence before Darwin.¹⁸ In other words, "Social Darwinism was a justification for

16 For instance, see: Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 190; Barth, "Racism," 99.

17 Ibid., 98.

18 Greta Jones, *Social Darwinism and English Thought: The Interaction between Biological and Social Theory* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1980), 4, 8.

existing social relations and a vehicle for a belief in the inequality of race and class.”¹⁹ It is worth noting that the preexisting social assumptions of which she speaks are rooted in British society. Specifically, scholars argue that the staunchest promoter of the Social Darwinist way of thinking at its peak in Britain was Herbert Spencer.²⁰ Spencer was Darwin’s contemporary, and while the latter’s ideas focused more on the biological aspects, it was the former who expanded on the idea of natural selection in the context of the socio-political realm. It is interesting to note that even Spencer himself was aware of the possible confusion between Darwin’s work and the originality of his own, as in 1880, in the preface to the fourth edition of *First Principles*, Spencer points out to his readers that he had begun work on this book, which first came out in 1860, before the first edition of *On the Origin of the Species* made its first appearance in October of 1859, and that his work was independent of Darwin’s.²¹

Spencer speaks of the “perfect man” as being the very inspiration for morality and law obedience,²² claiming that as Man becomes perfect, all things evil and immoral disappear.²³ Particularly, Spencer talks of physical perfection, the opposite of which is physical imperfection, which like a tool that lacks some vital feature, or is awkwardly shaped, fails “to fulfil its purpose in the best manner.”²⁴ However, it is significant to bear in mind that for Spencer this perfection is strictly relatable to white Europeans, be it due to the superiority of their physical traits, their art, their science, or their language. Markers of physical evolution such as “increasing heterogeneity in the vertebral column, and more especially in the segments constituting the skull” are “stronger in the European than in the savage.”²⁵ The advancement of art in Europe manifests itself in a variety of aspects, such as the “perfect” apparatuses used, and the sophisticated detail of the paintings and music produced.²⁶ Similarly, European scientific progress, especially at the classificatory level, is an indicator of European racial superiority.²⁷ Lastly, the minimal use of syllables in the English language in comparison to the “many-syllabled names” among “uncivilized races” presents the inferiority of the non-European from the lingual angle.²⁸

19 Ibid., 158.

20 Weikart, “Origins,” 474.

21 Herbert Spencer, *First Principles* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1894), ii.

22 Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics, or The Conditions Essential to Human Happiness Specified and the First of Them Developed* (New York: D. Appleton and Company), 69.

23 Ibid., 80.

24 Herbert Spencer, *The Data of Ethics* (New York: D. Appleton and Company), 33.

25 Spencer, *First*, 341.

26 Ibid., 324-326.

27 Ibid., 323, 393-394.

28 Ibid., 319.

This theoretical view was forcefully converted into political conviction that the Turkish sovereignty in the Ottoman territory must be challenged, and it was believed to reflect what Spencer meant by the evil of “the non-adaptation of constitution to conditions.”²⁹ Considering Spencer’s clear teachings on how society is inherently unequal and that between peoples the more advanced races who have fitted themselves most successfully to changing circumstances are the ones to survive, the inspiration of Social Darwinism in the claims made by the British Liberal elite against the Turks is immediately recognizable. The unmistakable connection between the roots of Social Darwinism in Britain and the view on the Turks held by the Liberal leadership in late nineteenth century is clearly exhibited in the writings of Britain’s most prominent Liberals at the time: William Ewart Gladstone, the Prime Minister; Andrew Carnegie, the man known as the richest in the world; James Bryce, the famous scholar and politician; and Edward Augustus Freeman, the distinguished Oxford historian.

While it is debatable to what extent, if at all, Social Darwinism influenced the Young Turks who were not its intended audience, Gladstone consumed Social Darwinism from the very mouth of Herbert Spencer, with whom he “breakfasted... during the 1870s and 1880s, and they exchanged copies of their books...”³⁰ His disdain for Turkey, which became abundantly clear on many occasions during that time, was intensified by the Bulgarian revolt and atrocities, and he publicly stated in the House of Commons his wishes to see “the Turks... one and all, bag and baggage... clear out from the province they have desolated and profaned.”³¹ The commitment to upend the British government’s pro-Turkish policy was a “dangerous game, but Gladstone felt that morality demanded such steps,” and that this “cause of morality” was part and parcel with “the best interests of Europe.”³² Gladstone’s insistence on Britain’s moral role may or may not have been sincere, but it surely echoed Spencer’s focus on the moral commitment of the “perfect man.” Gladstone’s perception of the British was in line with Spencer’s perception of their superiority among the races. Interestingly, Gladstone must have been aware that any intervention in Ottoman matters could not be free of imperial considerations, and yet he firmly maintained his position that British views on the Eastern question were a matter of taking action against what is wrong, consistent with principles of their moral code.³³ In view of the Turks, Gladstone did not just think he was acting on Britain’s behalf, rather he “believed that in the struggles over the Eastern Question he was defending a race as well as a civilization,” specifically, “the great English-speaking race,”

29 Spencer, *Social*, 73.

30 Mark Francis, *Herbert Spencer and the Invention of Modern Life* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 341.

31 Erich Eyck, *Gladstone*, trans. Bernard Miall (New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1968), 258.

32 Peter Stansky, *Gladstone: A Progress in Politics* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 124-125.

against the Turks who were “the one great anti-human specimen of humanity.”³⁴

Gladstone’s racially coated battles with the Turks were accentuated by the element of his faith, as he believed that his “public duties” were related to “the primary purposes for which God made and Christ redeemed the world.”³⁵ Andrew Carnegie, the Scottish-born steel industrialist who made a great fortune in the United States before becoming politically active, attested that Gladstone, his close friend, “was devout and sincere if ever man was.”³⁶ In Carnegie’s case, the strong influence of Social Darwinism came at the expense of his previous theological beliefs, as he said: “Spencer and Darwin were then in the zenith” and “I began to view the various phases of human life from the standpoint of the evolutionist” while “All the remnants of theology in which I had been born and bred... now ceased to influence me or to occupy my thoughts.”³⁷ So influenced was Carnegie by Spencer’s works, *The Data of Ethics*, *First Principles*, and *Social Statics*, that he proclaimed: “Few men have wished to know another man more strongly than I to know Herbert Spencer, for seldom has one been more deeply indebted than I to him and to Darwin.”³⁸

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In effect, Carnegie’s epiphany, his ridding of “theology and the supernatural” for what was perceived as the scientific “truth of evolution,” meant that to him Man’s quest was to rise “to the higher forms” and “march to perfection,” which entailed an ideological commitment to “rejecting all that is deleterious, that is wrong.”³⁹ Considering that Carnegie’s wealth in the late nineteenth century enabled him to purchase “eighteen British newspapers with the idea of promoting radical views,”⁴⁰ it should not be taken for granted that his philanthropic efforts in the early twentieth century were purely for the

33 Stansky, *Gladstone*, 128-129.

34 David W. Bebbington, *William Ewart Gladstone: Faith & Politics in Victorian Britain* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 171.

35 Ibid.

36 Andrew Carnegie, *Autobiography of Andrew Carnegie*, ed. John C. Van Dyke (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920), 319.

37 Carnegie, *Autobiography*, 206.

38 Ibid., 338.

39 Ibid., 339.

40 Ibid., 330.

“betterment of mankind,” as put by the editor of his autobiography;⁴¹ rather, it could be constructed that Carnegie’s philanthropic activity was more precisely in keeping with his own interpretation, in the style of Social Darwinism, of what constitutes evolutionary progress for mankind. Once Carnegie perceived the Turks as opponents of enlightenment, then his understanding of the “betterment of mankind” cannot mean the betterment of the Turks at all, but rather their destruction. In a book by the Russian, Arthur Tcherep-Spiridovitch, a retired general and an active anti-Turkish campaigner in the early twentieth century, it is written that on September 15, 1905, upon receiving from Tcherep-Spiridovitch a diploma and an honorary membership in the Slavic Society of Moscow at Carnegie’s Skibo castle, the known benefactor said that it is a disgrace to the whole civilized world that Turkey remains in Europe, and that Christians who allow their own massacre without defending themselves deserve their fate.⁴²

James Bryce (also known as Lord or Viscount Bryce), who sat as a trustee in The Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland,⁴³ had much in common with Carnegie. Both were of Scottish origin, close in age, pivotal in British-American relations, and formulated a strong worldview that is based on Social Darwinism. Before becoming involved in the conflict between the Turks and the Armenians, Bryce developed an adherence to Social Darwinism. Addressing an American audience, Bryce described Darwin as “one of the glories of our common race”⁴⁴ whose effect on England was extraordinary and unprecedented: “We all talked about it... with the greatest ardor... and it was all the same all over England.”⁴⁵

Not only did Social Darwinism penetrate deep into Bryce’s thought process, but being that he considered himself a member of a superior race, he expressed a bias toward the stronger race in a self-excusing manner:

*Where the backward race is either small in numbers or of weak physical stamina, and is still in the savage stage, it vanishes quickly. This need not be the fault of the stronger race. Sometimes, no doubt, the invader or immigrant kills off the natives, who resent the seizure of their hunting-grounds or prove themselves thievish neighbours.*⁴⁶

41 John C. Van Dyke, editor’s note in *Autobiography*, by Carnegie, vii.

42 Arthur Tcherep-Spiridovitch, *L’Europe sans Turquie: La Securite de la France L’exige* (Paris: Edition de la Ligue Franco-Slave, 1913), 159.

43 Carnegie, *Autobiography*, 269.

44 James Bryce, “Personal Reminiscences of Charles Darwin and of the Reception of the ‘Origin of Species,’” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 48 no. 193 (Sep-Dec 1909): iii.

45 Bryce, “Personal Reminiscences,” ix-x.

46 James Bryce, *The Romans Lecture 1902: The Relations of the Advanced and the Backward Races of Mankind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), 10.

In other words, Bryce taught that the racial superiority of the conqueror legitimizes their dominion of the inferior races, when handled in the fashion of the ancient Romans, as did the English in India, the French in Algeria, and the Americans who liberated the slaves, even though “the Backward race may be really unfit to exercise political power, whether from ignorance, or from an indifference... or from a propensity to sudden and unreasoning impulses.”⁴⁷ Not only was Bryce seeing the world racially, but he so clearly assumed the perspective of a superior race when he optimistically tried to calm his audience that despite there being problems “raised by the contact of races,” there is hope because “the spirit in which civilized States are preparing to meet those problems is higher and purer than it was when, four centuries ago, the great outward movement of the European peoples began.”⁴⁸

This influence on Bryce was apparent in how he approached the Eastern question, which he himself took part in raising. Already in the late 1870s, his arguments against the Turks were largely based on Social Darwinist terminology, which sought to present the Turks as an inferior race. According to Bryce, “No Mohammedan race or dynasty has ever shown itself able to govern well even subjects of its own religion”⁴⁹ and when taking “the race as a whole... they appear hopelessly stupid, apathetic, helpless.”⁵⁰ Bryce argued that “A wise [British] policy... would seek in the elevation of the native races the means of excluding those neighbours whose real or supposed ambition excites so much alarm.”⁵¹ Consistent with his racially based views, on the eve of WWI, despite the bloodshed that followed the rise in Armenian nationalism in the late nineteenth century, he still pushed for a view of the Armenians as a means to oust this failing Turkish race and replace its sovereignty with that of the Armenians whom he perceived as “the equals of any of the European races.”⁵² The rise of the Ottoman Armenians must have been instrumental in Bryce’s vision of a world without Islam:

*Conceive what a difference it might make if Islam were within two centuries to disappear from the earth! The thing is not impossible: perhaps not even improbable.*⁵³

The blending of religious aspects of anti-Turkish sentiments along with the

47 Bryce, *Romans*, 37-38.

48 Bryce, *Romans*, 47.

49 James Bryce, *Transcaucasia and Ararat: Being Notes of a Vacation Tour in the Autumn of 1876* (London and New York: Macmillan and Company, 1896), 425.

50 Bryce, *Transcaucasia*, 427.

51 Bryce, *Transcaucasia*, 442.

52 James Bryce, introduction to *Travel and Politics in Armenia*, by Noel Buxton and Rev. Harold Buxton (London: Smith, Elder and Company, 1914), vii.

53 Bryce, *Romans*, 46.

already offensive racial aspects was a natural occurrence in the British political scene of the mid 1870s in which the Liberals under Gladstone were unseated by a non-religious Prime Minister with Jewish heritage against whom they could rally major Christian support on the Eastern question.

Possibly the most blatant among the Liberal elite during Benjamin Disraeli's run as Prime Minister between 1874 and 1880 was the highly respected historian, Edward Augustus Freeman, who constructed forward arguments against Turks and Jews on racial and religious grounds. According to Freeman, the Turks are "A race which stands apart from the other races of Europe in all which makes those races European,"⁵⁴ and "all the nations of Europe belong to one common Aryan stock."⁵⁵ This racial distinction from Asiatic or African races is based on "the common possession of Aryan blood and speech"⁵⁶ and the shared history in following the path of Rome,⁵⁷ leading him to conclude that "the Turk has no share in that original kindred of race and language which binds together all the European nations."⁵⁸ Additionally, Freeman stresses that "Besides being Aryan and Roman, Europe is also Christian"⁵⁹ and accordingly "No Mahometan nation can really become part of the same community of nations as the Christian nations of Europe."⁶⁰

While the Turk is hated, "The Jew is the tool of the Turk, and is therefore yet more hated than the Turk."⁶¹ The framing of there being a "union of the Jew and the Turk against the Christian"⁶² had a particular political context that cannot be ignored, and showcased a type of focus on Jewish blood that, following its Nazi version, will never be forgotten:

*The Jew must be very nearly, if not absolutely, a pure race, in a sense in which no European nation is pure. The blood remains untouched by conversion; it remains untouched even by intermarriage... the genus remains a genus by birth, and not by legal fiction.*⁶³

Freeman provides a chilling conceptual precedent to the Nazi hunt of Jews, whom they designated as Jewish, not necessarily by faith, but by blood. This

54 Edward A. Freeman, *The Ottoman Power in Europe, Its Nature, Its Growth, and Its Decline* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1877), 1-2.

55 *Ibid.*, 4.

56 *Ibid.*, 5.

57 *Ibid.*, 6.

58 *Ibid.*, 41.

59 *Ibid.*, 7.

60 *Ibid.*, 56.

61 *Ibid.*, xx.

62 *Ibid.*, xx.

63 Edward A. Freeman, "The Jews in Europe" In *Historical Essays* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1892), 234.

claim about how Jewishness cannot be touched by conversion or intermarriage, made by Freeman, an anti-Semite and anti-Turk, was later applied by the German Nazis who would execute those who have Jewish ancestry even if they were no longer members of the practicing Jewish community. It is important to consider to what extent Freeman's emphasis on the permanence of Jewish blood was designed specifically to raise the suspicions of his readers against Disraeli who was a Jew by blood but not by faith. At any rate, it appears as if Social Darwinism did not just serve Britain's Liberals in their hostility toward the Turks, but also in their campaign against Disraeli. In this context, it has been found that "The Transfer of prejudice from Islam, a perceived anti-Christian international force, to Anglo-Jewry, another perceived anti-Christian international force was facilitated by the widespread view of the Jews as an 'Oriental' or 'Asian' people."⁶⁴

Unlike the weak and disputable sources that are orchestrated to show trails of Social Darwinism in the Young Turks' view of Armenians, there is ample and overwhelming evidence showing that the British Liberal leadership developed their anti-Turkish ideology hand in hand with Social Darwinism's original development in the 1870s, and though the Turks and Jews were the primary target of this ideology, the Armenian loss of life was substantial among its victims.

The dangerous popularity of Social Darwinism in Britain eventually waned, but not before it had a powerful negative impact on the perception of Turks and Jews in Europe. It had a fundamental part in defining and intensifying the conflict between Turks and Armenians, as well as in defining and intensifying a new breed of anti-Semitism. Social Darwinism became significantly less appealing when Britain's main threats were Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany whose subjects were of the same allegedly advanced and pure stock of white Europeans.⁶⁵ However, the fact that Social Darwinism has since then emerged mainly in the context of Nazi Germany, should not derail scholarly work from tracking its roots in Britain of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, and especially from a sincere evaluation of its role in raising the Eastern question, and Britain's response to it. Unlike the weak and disputable sources that are orchestrated to show trails of Social Darwinism in the Young Turks' view of Armenians, there is ample and overwhelming evidence showing that the British Liberal leadership developed their anti-Turkish ideology hand in hand with Social Darwinism's original development in the 1870s, and though the Turks and Jews were the primary target of this ideology, the Armenian loss of life was substantial among its victims.

64 Anthony S. Whol, "'Dizzi-Ben-Dizzi': Disraeli as Alien," *Journal of British Studies* 34 no. 3 (July 1995): 389.

65 Jones, *Social*, 177.

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