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Caricaturizing “Cosmopolitan” Pera: Play, Critique, and Absence in Yusuf Franko’s Caricatures, 1884–1896

K. Mehmet Kentel

Abstract: This article explores a unique series of caricatures made between 1884 and 1896 by Yusuf Franko Kusa, a high-ranking Ottoman bureaucrat and a venerated member of fin-de-siècle Pera’s high society. Yusuf Franko’s hitherto unstudied caricatures were comparable to contemporary European caricatures in style, but their subject matter was very local, as he exclusively represented the elite networks that built and enjoyed “cosmopolitan” Pera, one of the central districts of late Ottoman Istanbul, in his art. These caricatures were never published, but bound as an album by the artist himself and circulated among Yusuf Franko’s entourage, members of elite society of Pera. Through close scrutiny of Yusuf Franko’s drawings and especially of the absences in them, the article provides a visual mapping of Pera’s social topography and explores what images can show that is sometimes ignored in textual sources. It is argued that the satirical form and the inter-visual references employed by Yusuf Franko to represent his inner circle promise to unravel the complexities embedded in Pera’s society, with more nuanced criticisms towards his fellow elite members than the conventional literature on Pera. Yusuf Franko appears not only as an illustrator of urban life in fin-de-siècle Pera, but also an active participant in the making of this urban life through his playful acts of elite community-building, i.e., the informal and underground circulation of the images within high society. This article thus attempts to show one particular way in which visual sources can be treated as historical agents themselves, as well as serving as sources for (urban) history-writing.

The young man with a big red nose, a red fez, and a palpable forehead sits comfortably on top of a large drawing album. His arms are open wide, as with both of his hands he is holding several strings. Attached, down the album, are several members of late Ottoman Istanbul high society. The young man, an Ottoman bureaucrat called Yusuf Franko, may very well be sitting comfortably, but the book he is sitting on seems to be on shaky ground, as it is barely standing on the edges of a brush, a pen, and a quill. On the bottom right corner of the image there is a small signature: “R. Preziosi, 1884.” The son of the famous orientalist painter Amadeo Preziosi, Roberto was a dragoman
of the Greek Consulate, and apparently an amateur painter himself, under the auspices of his father. Roberto painted his friend Yusuf Franko as a puppeteer, who sits on the album that holds the entire picture together—for it is that very album in which we find this painting by Roberto. Out of the frame, we see Yusuf Franko’s hand-written note: “Ma charge par le Comte Préziosi” (see Figure 1).

We turn several pages of the album and now face another young man with a black suit and a matching top hat, a stick in his one hand and gloves on the other, with a snake wrapped around his arm, walking hastily after a woman, whose leg and skirt alone are visible. Yusuf Franko’s hand-written note once again frames the image: “Le Comte Préziosi” (see Figure 2). The same Preziosi, who was the artist behind Yusuf Franko’s portrait as a puppeteer, is now drawn by Yusuf Franko as a Casanova of late nineteenth-century Pera.

This article follows the pattern set by these images. They present a complex setting composed of inter-visual references and inter-personal relationships that need to be traced within and outside the album, in order to be properly disclosed and contextualized. The album, titled *Types et Charges* and

![Figure 1: “Ma charge par le Comte Préziosi” (signed by R. Preziosi), 1884. Courtesy of the Ömer M. Koç Collection.](image-url)
inscribed with the name “Youssouf,” is an unpublished and undated manuscript that consists of 124 drawings, including the title and two ex-libris (one in Latin and the other in Arabic script) posted on its pages. Virtually all of the drawings—except the five that are undated—were produced between 1884 and February 1896. They are mostly situated in the “portrait-charge” tradition of European caricature (hence the word “charges” in the album’s title), which depicted individual portraits of prominent men and women, whose body parts were exaggerated in order to give a comical but “likeable” effect. The genre became especially widespread from the mid-nineteenth century onward thanks, in part, to the spread of portrait photography and the development of satirical press.¹ Yusuf Franko used the genre to portray members of elite society of late nineteenth-century Pera, a district in Istanbul that rose to prominence in this period, and was deemed as “cosmopolitan,” due to its religiously and

ethnically mixed population and the emergence of modern spaces that allowed these groups to socialize together.

This article critically analyzes Yusuf Franko’s caricatures in order to ask a series of questions: What do the caricatures of nineteenth-century elites say about their social and material context, especially if they are drawn by a member of the same elite group at the heart of late Ottoman Istanbul? In a heavily censored environment and with no means to publish and disseminate the images, is it possible to understand the artist’s motive, message, and intended audience?

In the following pages, I engage with Yusuf Franko’s caricatures as composite elements of a visual map of “cosmopolitan” Pera. I treat them as his playful acts of community-building among the elites, which offer more nuanced criticisms of his fellow elite members than those produced by other contemporary accounts and secondary literature on Pera. An urban chronicler and an uneasy flaneur, Yusuf Franko tried to make sense of a changing world by creating a visual map of the characters inhabiting it, a map of a world that produced Franko and his work. Finally, a close scrutiny of the absences in Yusuf Franko’s visual map, I argue, will allow us to attain a more critical understanding of Pera’s “cosmopolitanism.”

2. Since the 1990s, “cosmopolitanism” has received periodical waves of attention by philosophers, social scientists, literary critics, and historians. This interest has situated cosmopolitanism in different, interrelated registers, including a “socio-cultural condition, a kind of philosophy or world-view, a political project towards building transnational institutions, a political project for recognizing multiple identities, an attitudinal or dispositional orientation, a mode of practice or competence.” See Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen, “Introduction: Conceiving Cosmopolitanism,” in Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context and Practice, ed. Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 9. Proponents and opponents of the concept alike acknowledged the limited nature of historical cases of cosmopolitanism, which implied forms of mobility available only to elites. Its class-based formation was already predicated in the writings of J. S. Mill as well as Marx and Engels, who attached the adjective “cosmopolitan” to capital and bourgeoisie. See Craig Calhoun, “The Class Consciousness of Frequent Travellers: Towards a Critique of Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism,” in Conceiving Cosmopolitanism, 103. Whereas Chatterjee showed the intertwined trajectories of nationalism and cosmopolitanism, others pointed out how the dominant conceptualization of cosmopolitanism took shape within the colonial modernity and was intrinsic to Western imperialism. Partha Chatterjee, “Nationalism, Internationalism, and Cosmopolitanism: Some Observations from Modern Indian History,” Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East 36, no. 2 (2016): 320–34; Peter Van der Veer, “Colonial Cosmopolitanism,” in Conceiving Cosmopolitanism, 166. Outside the field of Ottoman studies, the Ottoman Empire served as an easy, offhand example of historical cosmopolitanisms. See Calhoun, “The Class Consciousness,” 88. Within the field, as well, there is widespread uncritical use of the term as an explanatory frame to identify an accepted sociological reality especially of the nineteenth-century urban diversities and Westernized lifestyles. Such widespread
The Artist

Yusuf Franko Kusa (1856–1933) was an Ottoman bureaucrat who built a career in the foreign office. He attained posts as high as the governor-general of Mount Lebanon (1907–12) and—albeit briefly—the minister of foreign affairs and minister of communications (1918–19). He was the son of another high-ranking Ottoman bureaucrat, Nasrî Franko Kusa, who also had served as the governor-general of Mount Lebanon (1867–73). All of Yusuf Franko’s brothers had more modest careers in the Ottoman foreign office, though his brother-in-law, Naum Duhanî, was the Ottoman ambassador to Paris (1907–11), after he completed his own two terms at what appears to have been almost a required position for this extended family, governor-general of Mount Lebanon (1892–1902).
The family’s Lebanon connection was not merely the result of a posting at the Tanzimat bureaucracy. Yusuf Franko’s grandfather was an immigrant from Lebanon and a member of the Arabic-speaking Melkite Catholic community, which exerted a considerable presence in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the second half of the nineteenth century, despite their quite small numbers relative to the main Ottoman millets. Franko’s extended family depended on their Lebanon connection in multiple ways. The first comers to the Ottoman capital had used it as a point of entry to business and state circles and subsequent generations for building their power within the bureaucratic organization itself.

The City

When the family first moved to Istanbul in the early nineteenth century, they found patronage under the Havva family, Melkites from Aleppo, who had strong commercial connections in the eastern Mediterranean, and used these connections for the service of the Ottoman state. In the nineteenth century, and especially after the 1838 Anglo-Ottoman (Balta Limanı) Treaty that facilitated the Ottoman lands’ integration into the capitalist world-system, those kinds of economic connections became especially important as routes to power and wealth. Within Istanbul the locus of economic activity was increasingly shifting to Galata, the northern side of the Golden Horn, across from the Historic Peninsula. This former Genoese colony had historical connections in the Mediterranean and a resident population of Levantines.

Pera, on the other hand, was a physical extension of the walled city of Galata and developed as a recreational and commercial center, while the latter grew around its port and financial institutions in the nineteenth century. A special factor in Pera’s growth was the establishment of European embassies, especially along the Grand Rue de Péra, the central thoroughfare of the district. This was a trend initiated very early by France in the seventeenth century, but truly emerged in the nineteenth century in parallel with the city’s overall northward expansion, as well as the increased importance of diplomacy and city. Edhem Eldem, “Ottoman Galata and Pera between Myth and Reality” in From ‘milieu de mémoire’ to ‘lieu de mémoire’: The Cultural Memory of Istanbul in the Twentieth Century, ed. Ulrike Tischler (Munich: Meidenbauer, 2006), 21.


the heightened status of the resident diplomats in the imperial capital.6 The region’s special status was formalized in 1857, when the first modern municipal organization in the Ottoman Empire was established under the name of Altıncı Daire-i Belediye (Sixth District Municipality), and took Galata and Pera under its administrative domain. This was followed by aggressive attempts to modernize the urban space, including the destruction of the medieval walls, establishment of new streets, tramlines, and the world’s second oldest subway, creation of new public spaces, and the commercialization of urban life with the introduction of arcades, department stores, hotels, restaurants, and gated parks.7

Historiography of Caricature, History of the Album

These urban developments coincided with the advent of a satirical press in the Ottoman Empire. Led by Armenian humorists, this press started to publish caricatures in the late 1860s, and several periodicals, including Ayine-i Vatan (1867), Istanbul (1867), Diyojen (1870), Terakki Eğlencesi (1870), and Hayal (1873), played important roles in the dissemination of the genre in the Ottoman Empire. This period was quite brief, however, and came to an abrupt end in 1877, when the new Sultan Abdülmecit II banned the publication of caricatures, and the satirical press was suppressed until the Second Constitutional Revolution of 1908.8

The epistemologically traumatic impact of this repressive period—and other repressive periods that followed—looms large on the historiography of Turkish caricature. Apart from some introductory works that deal with the short period before 1877, most studies concentrate on the post-1908 press.9 And in these studies, caricatures are very rarely treated as sources for historical questions,10 except the ones that are directly related to political repression and


In the case of Yusuf Franko, the picture is even bleaker, but for very legitimate reasons. \textit{Types et Charges} was born out of fin-de-siècle Pera and vanished when those conditions gradually eroded into the mid-twentieth century with the fall of the empire, the move of the capital—thus the embassies—to Ankara under the new republican regime, and the ethno-religious homogenization policies that started in the final decades of the empire and continued into the republic. The first time the world outside of Yusuf Franko’s close circle—and his nephew Said Naum Duhanî’s readers in French—heard about the album was in an article in the American magazine \textit{Horizon} in 1966, commissioned by an American family who had bought the album from a rug dealer in the Grand Bazaar in 1956.\footnote{Wendy Buehr, “The World of Yusuf Bey,” \textit{Horizon} 8, no.3 (1966): 24–31. For the journey of the album, see Bahattin Öztuncay, “Editor’s Foreword,” in \textit{Youssouf Bey}, 11–21.} The album, it turned out, had been bought by this dealer presumably after Yusuf Franko’s death in 1933—whether before or after the 6–7 September 1955 pogroms against non-Muslims remains unknown—and then sold again to an American diplomat, Herbert Brooks Walker II, who was visiting Istanbul at the time. The \textit{Horizon} article commissioned by the Walker family had several images from the album, which became part of the canon of Turkish caricature as a result, and some short articles have been published on Franko in the second half of the century that more or less repeated the same
information. His place in this canon has been an uneasy one, however, for Turkish authors have never seen the originals—only copies of a handful of caricatures out of the 124 in the album—and what they have seen was unlike anything published before 1877 or after 1908 in terms of style and artistic competency. The fact that his caricatures were not published also meant that they were not part of the history of the Turkish press, which put them at odds with the rest of the history of Turkish/Ottoman caricature.

After the album was bought by a Turkish collector, Ömer M. Koç, and brought back to Istanbul, a facsimile of the album was printed with an accompanying edited volume in 2016, which was followed by the aforementioned exhibition in early 2017. This article, along with these recent works, should be viewed as among the few attempts to treat Yusuf Franko’s artistic oeuvre seriously as historical visual sources, hoping that more would follow.

Placeless Chronicles of Urban Life

Yusuf Franko’s work, with the significant exception of the cityscape of Istanbul dominating the background of “l’Expiation” (Figure 8), is almost completely devoid of any landmarks. There are very few references to specific places and landscapes. His portraits of individuals are abstracted, in the portrait-charge genre, in which he excelled as an artist. When he gives specifics about a location, it is mostly in the exotic domain—as in the cases of Lord Dufferin, British vice-roy in a Gulliveresque colonial setting in India, Sir Henry Drummond-Wolf, Britain’s special representative in Egypt in front of the pyramids, Rustem Pasha, governor-general of Mount Lebanon riding his camel-shaped advisor, and Russian Ambassador Alexander de Nelidoff in the Russian steppes. Nevertheless, his other paintings present a sense of urbanity of late nineteenth-century Pera in multiple ways.

In the more salient register, his caricatures represented thoroughly urban acts that were the products and symbols of newly emerging places, not only in Pera but also in other major nineteenth-century Ottoman urban centers. A caricature dated to 1889 shows the world-famous actress and singer Sarah Bernhardt, together with her husband and stage partner Jacques Damala, on a theater stage in Pera. Yusuf Franko must have seen Bernhardt performing in the city in 1888, at one of the many of her performances during the first of her several visits to Istanbul, which included a special show for Sultan Abdülhamid II.

in Dolmabahçe Palace. In another caricature dated to December 1884, when Lord Dufferin was still Britain’s ambassador to Istanbul, Yusuf Franko portrays him as carefully watching a stage act. Western-style theater performances had first appeared in European embassies in the Ottoman capital. The institutionalization of theater as a private enterprise began in the 1830s, and a member of Yusuf Franko’s extended family, Michel Naum, played a significant role. The Naum Theater dominated the cultural scene of Pera from the 1840s until 1870, when the Great Fire of Pera burned it to the ground. In 1889, when Yusuf Franko drew Sarah Bernhardt on the stage, Naum Theater was no more, but others continued its legacy, and provided a very popular medium of entertainment to the residents and visitors of the district.

Pera’s newly opened streets found their passersby in Yusuf Franko’s characters, as we see several of them strolling in their fancy clothes. The newly emerging urban consumer culture of late nineteenth-century Pera had prompted a novel way of engaging with the street, which was called “piyasa etmek” in the period’s lingo, literally meant “being on the market.” These strollers did not have practical reason for their presence in the street, but they rather drifted from one shop window to another. Madameiselle Helbig, a young member of the prominent Levantine-Belgian family of bankers and investors, as well as Monsieur and Madame Brindisi, probably the son and daughter-in-law of famous painter Jean Brindesi, all were drawn by Yusuf Franko walking, their attention given not to the caricaturist but to the street itself.

Such strolls frequently took place in Pera’s parks. The district had a long history of green spaces that the city’s residents or visiting Europeans called “vignes des Péra.” Vineyards were next to cemeteries, which belonged to different religious communities and were filled with cypress trees, lined up side by side from the hills of Pera to the shores of Kasımpaşa. But from the 1850s onward, “the necessity of green spaces” became a popular topic of discussion in the district’s periodicals, as rapid urbanization and new social attitudes created a demand for more organized and controlled green environments. The policymakers and land developers followed the periodicals’ lead. Cemetery spaces became the primary grounds for the creation of such environments, with the first garden, Jardin du Taxim, opening in 1869, and the second, Jardin des Petits-Champs, opening eleven years after, both partially over cemeteries.

15. E. Aracı, Naum Tiyatrosu: 19. Yüzyıl İstanbul’unu’nun Italian Operası (İstanbul: YKY, 2010).
and under the auspices of the Pera Municipality. In what looks like a rough sketch of a caricature from 1884, Yusuf Franko draws the brothers Caro and Achille Lorando, members of one of the wealthiest families in Pera. Levantines of French origin, the Lorando family was a very important player particularly in the real estate market, owning countless land plots and buildings around Galata and Pera. Some of their properties were in the vicinity of the Jardin des Petits-Champs, the establishment of which was legitimized by the municipal officials on the grounds that it would increase the land value of its surroundings by cleaning up the cemetery and creating a new elite leisure space. This was borne out by events as the surrounding neighborhood of Tepebaşı soon became one of the most expensive in Pera, and in fact in the entire city, as many hotels, arcades, and luxurious apartment buildings were lined up one by one around the garden, including the quintessential institution of fin-de-siècle Pera—the Pera Palace Hotel.

Not everything in Yusuf Franko’s Pera was about recreation, of course. The business of the Eastern Question weighed heavily on the shoulders of the diplomats who had to handle the day-to-day affairs of international diplomacy among the Great Powers and the Ottoman Empire. Palace-like embassies were concentrated in a small area along the Grand Rue de Péra, mostly erected in the nineteenth century in monumental sizes that reflected the shifting power balance between the Ottoman Empire and European powers. Ottomans continued to commission the building of palaces and kiosks as well, and Tophane Kiosk, which was designed by a British architect, became the scene of one of the most striking compositions of Yusuf Franko. In 1885, after a rebellion erupted in Bulgaria, representatives of Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy had sat down with Ottoman statesmen in Tophane Kiosk to resolve the question of “Eastern Roumelia.” Being in attendance at this gathering along with his brother-in-law Naum Duhanî Pasha, Yusuf Franko vividly depicted the scene (Figure 3). The gravity of the situation seemed to hit Naum, who oversaw the secretariat with a firm posture, while Yusuf Franko appeared leaning closely to the table in front of him, his hunched back facing viewers of the drawing.

Despite the looming Eastern Question, there was room for entertainment in diplomatic circles, for the embassies’ receptions were among the most anticipated events of Pera’s social life. Yusuf Franko, as we know from Duhani’s narratives, often frequented these gatherings and drew his fellow members of Pera society dancing and flirting with each other in their fanciest dress. In one of his most unusual caricatures and most open reference to Pera and its peculiarities, Yusuf Franko converges many of these themes discussed above and transcends them in striking ways. “Un duel à Péra: Roman sans paroles” is a story told in two successive drawings with eight distinct panels in a format very similar to the comic strips that began to take root in the European press in the nineteenth century (Figures 4 and 5). The scene opens at a reception in what was probably an Ottoman bureaucrat’s mansion (note the Arabic calligraphy hanging on top of the door), populated with Ottoman subjects (noticeable

by their red fez)\textsuperscript{24} and women with colorful low-cut dresses. One tall man, most probably a European gentleman, stands apart from the rest of the crowd with his black tuxedo.\textsuperscript{25} As he and a woman in a red dress seem to get closer, an Ottoman gentleman—older, shorter, and heavier—physically attacks the man in a tuxedo from behind, making him fall on the woman’s lap, presumably out of his jealousy for the woman’s attention. A couple of panels later we find ourselves in a park, where several gentlemen eagerly await a duel between this belligerent duo—only to be visibly disappointed that the duelists are fleeing from the dueling field without firing their pistols.

This work is extraordinary for several reasons. In terms of style and narrative structure, it differs significantly from the charged portraits that filled almost the entirety of Yusuf Franko’s album. Painted on two large papers and spanning two pages, it is the album’s largest work. The number of characters drawn comes a close second to the album’s arguable magnum opus, “l’Expiation,” in which many of the characters from the album have a second cameo. But the content of the work is also worthy of further exploration. The narrative shift from luxurious interiors to the green park of the sixth and seventh panels shows these elite characters in their “natural” environment and would also allude to the integrality of these spaces in their life. “A duel in Pera,” as the title goes, would obviously be initiated during a reception at the large halls of a mansion and culminate in a park, beginning and ending, albeit in failure, in two of the most emblematic types of spaces for the urban experience in \textit{fin-de-siècle} Pera. It is also noteworthy that a landscape painting hanging on the wall, admired by an Ottoman gentleman and another lady in a green low-cut dress, is next to Arabic calligraphy—a visual juxtaposition that serves as an illustration, or rather a \textit{caricature}, of Pera’s cosmopolitanism.

The final act in the scene, i.e., the concurrent escape of the duelists from the field, probably should be read as Yusuf Franko’s \textit{charge par excellence}, raised against the entirety of the social culture in Pera, European and Ottoman alike, rather than named individuals. In a sense, this critique echoes a range of other lampoons received by Pera’s society, from the caricatures published


\textsuperscript{25} The man in the tuxedo holds in his hand an object that seems to be a tray, which could suggest that he is a servant at the reception. However, the fine quality of his clothing in two different settings in the composition makes that very unlikely. I am grateful to William Bamber’s help in “reading” the dresses in this drawing.
in the satirical press of the 1870s, through the first Ottoman novels and Western travel accounts, to the post-Ottoman disdain of Levantine culture, all denouncing, in varying degrees, the “inauthenticity” of the culture built in Pera. Even the Turkish expression used to define Levantines was “tatlı su Frengi,” literally meaning “the European of sweet waters,” i.e., not the authentic Europeans. Pera may have offered some comforts of European cities, but, critics asserted, it was a far cry from the real thing, and its inhabitants or frequenters were said to do things just for show without having the real character to truly experience the urban life they were pretending to have. Sometimes this was in reference to the consumption of food and drinks, while other times to dress or to the built environment of Pera, too. In Franko’s case, it was the dignity and courage required to actually undertake a duel, which was lacking in Pera.

Another rather obvious critique expressed through the sketches of Yusuf Franko is manifest in the 1886 portrait of Monsieur N. A. Jarosjinski, the secretary of the French Embassy (Figure 6). In a full-page drawing, he paints Jarosjinski in the middle of a room laden with oriental objects: carpets with lavish colors and motifs, comfortable sofas, ornamented pitchers, and Arabic calligraphy of his name hanging on the walls. Yusuf Franko’s caption underlines the theme: “M. Jarosjinski, Secrètaire de l’Ambassade de France dans son Salon Oriental.” Our gaze is once again set upon Jarosjinski, his black hair well-brushed, moustache well-trimmed, sitting with his left leg crossed under him and with his right foot keeping the time to the tune of his instrument, an oud: a perfect oriental picture for the enlightened and curious diplomat who went native. The only problem with this perfect picture, Yusuf Franko notes through his satirical touch, is that Jarosjinski holds the instrument backwards. Once again he points his brush strokes at a pretentious culture, which this time could be more easily categorized as “orientalist,” and reveals the fundamental fallacy embedded in it. With all the investments and attention to detail in ornamenting this colorful room, the French diplomat did not possess “true” knowledge of the Orient; his inability to play the oriental tune was an

26. Çeviker, Gelişim Sürecinde, 303–12.
29. Among the many examples, an early one is Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, Sodom ve Gomore (İstanbul: Hamid Matbaası, 1928).
inescapable crack in his seemingly perfect posturing as an Oriental. Again, Yusuf Franko’s caricature can be seen in light of many literary references to the “crooked” ways the European diplomats saw the Ottoman Empire, its politics and culture. This theme was taken up by François Georgeon in his important work on the history of Ottoman laughter, which analyzes Karagöz plays that mocked European diplomats as exercises in power-reversal, a form of “popular resistance” against the European imperial powers.

32. One of the most famous ones was Cevdet Pasha’s dismissal of a French diplomat for he, just like other Europeans, allegedly tried to understand the Ottoman capital solely from the perspective of Pera. Quoted in Fatma Müge Göçek, Burjuvazinin Yükselişi İmparatorluğun Çöküşü: Osmanlı Batılılaşması ve Toplumsal Değişme (Ankara: Ayaç, 1999), 53.

Still, one must be cautious in throwing Yusuf Franko into the same bag with these critics from “outside” of Pera. Yusuf Franko’s caricatures are much more sympathetic to Pera’s community than outsider accounts could have ever been. In fact, Yusuf Franko’s satire was intended to be consumed by the very community he was mocking. The satirical press had been heavily repressed since 1877, when Abdülhamid II closed the first Parliament, and in any case as a bureaucrat of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he could not have risked being exposed as a satirical caricaturist. This dual impossibility of publishing his drawings seems to motivate him to deliver his critiques not as cruel attacks but rather as little games to initiate and sustain social relations.

This is more obvious in some of his works than others. The two caricatures at the beginning of this article, the former showing Franko as a puppeteer of Pera society and the latter showing Roberto Preziosi as a womanizer racing after ladies on the streets of Pera, are perfect examples of such camaraderie built around a mutual talent for drawing. This game Yusuf Franko played with Preziosi, or Madame Gritzenko’s portrait of 1885, which she signed with
the sympathetic note “Très apprécié par l’original,” shows that his talents were not only known but were actually appreciated by at least some members of a limited social circle. In another example, an undated caricature titled “Une Idée,” he presents the inner workings of the game and allows us to have a rare inside look at his creative process (Figure 7). Again in the comic strip format, Franko tells the story of how Baroness von Hobe, the wife of a member of the German military mission in Istanbul, asked him to draw something on her album. Franko takes her album to his place and deliberates on what to draw in desperation over the span of several panels. Suddenly he comes up with “an idea,” draws it in the album, and celebrates the outcome. The caption reads: “Dessiné dans l’album de Mme la Barones de Hobe.” We understand that this was the very drawing, depicting his desperation and eventual success, painted in her album. It is perfectly clear that Franko not only socialized through his drawings, but he occasionally added further layers to complicate the game, presumably making it more fun, elongated, and refined for his playmates. This is a point made by historians of European caricature, especially in the early modern period, when the art was practiced “largely as a private artistic amusement in which [there] was scope for malice, which [was] certainly not the dominant element.”

The play element is arguably nowhere more apparent than the final image of Yusuf Franko’s album, his colorful and dramatic exit: “L’Expiation.” Forming a meta-narrative that ties the entire album together, this extravagant painting incorporates many of the characters that are featured in other pages, all attending in different ways to the public hanging of Yusuf Franko himself, who appears already dead with a rope on his neck and a vulture on his shoulder. There are three groups in the attendance: The first is the executioners, commanded by Ristow Pasha, a member of the German military mission. Among those holding the ropes are Franko’s good friends, İzzet Fuad Pasha and Roberto Preziosi, as well as Rustem Pasha, who was a member of the rival party in the competition for public office in Mount Lebanon. A second group is composed of his family, including his sister, brothers, brother-in-law, and a mysterious woman only shown as a black silhouette, all holding handkerchiefs and crying for their loss. And the last group in the image is foreign diplomats, watching the scene from a little afar, observing the final punishment Franko received at the hands of his fellow members of Pera society. In

36. There is an 1888 drawing of the same woman, again as a black silhouette—could it be his wife Lucie, whom he protects from his own satire?
Figure 8: "L'Expiation." Undated. Courtesy of the Ömer M. Koç Collection.
the background appears the cityscape of the Ottoman Istanbul for the first and the only time in the entire album.

This striking painting is followed by Yusuf Franko’s ex-libris in Arabic letters and a blank page, after which the album is ended. “L’Expiation,” while undated, seems to be the final touch of a project that went on, in varying stages, for twelve years. What was the reason for such a dramatic rupture? Did Yusuf Franko really perceive a threat from higher authorities in the Ottoman bureaucracy or his fellow Pera residents? While censorship in this period was no doubt extreme, it is difficult to know for certain how dangerous such unprinted images would have been found as long as they did not criticize the sultan or the high authorities of the Ottoman state. Perhaps his concern had more to do with the potential damage to his image as a respected statesman than the risks that came from the contents of his drawings. In any case it is safe to say that he chose to add the real or imagined threat as an additional layer to his game at the very moment he closed the album and ended it, metaphorically killing Youssouf Bey the caricaturist.

Even if Franko did not receive any personal threats that motivated his visual public hanging, his caricature production was from the outset defined by the impossibility of its being printed in the Hamidian Ottoman capital. More important than ascertaining whether he wanted to print his caricatures or not, I argue, is pointing out the fact that this very impossibility drew the contours of his art and his targeted audience. It was, in a way, a work of art in the age of political non-reproduction. Obviously he could not reach a large audience without printing his drawings, so he opted to show them to a few people within his entourage and initiated a game that would have been impossible—or very different—had the drawings been published. In the absence of such a publication, the game went on for twelve years, with changing participants, and in an interactive way, allowing Franko to add layers, make inter-visual references, and build a community. Indeed, as much as “L’Expiation” signified the climax and the tragic end of the game, it also showed Yusuf Franko’s characters as a virtual community, created not only by the urban space they shared, but also by the games he and others played, making it possible to imagine such a gathering, even if solely in the artistic domain. Doizy notes the visual continuity of Franko’s portrait as a puppeteer, made by Preziosi, holding the...
strings of Pera society and “L’Expiation,” made by Franko, in which the Pera society holds the rope around Yusuf Franko’s neck.\textsuperscript{39} It was his drawings—the strings of the puppeteer—that made the community possible, but it was also true the other way around: His drawings were possible because there was a community—pulling the ropes—whose existence relied on material networks, social games, and the exclusion of others, to which I now turn my attention.

\textit{Flanerie} and its limits in Pera

Yusuf Franko was a traveler in the city and an avid observer of fashion in the increasingly commercialized Ottoman capital; he was a theatergoer, a café attendant, a street stroller. In a certain way, what he did through his caricatures was similar to what panorama essays and urban physiologies that became very popular in mid-nineteenth-century Europe, and especially in Paris, tried to achieve. The authors and painters of these works had seen themselves as “historians of manners,” who aimed to document “who we were and what we did in our time; how we dressed; what clothes our women wore; what our houses, our habits, our pleasures were; what we understood by that fragile word, subject to eternal changes, that is called beauty.”\textsuperscript{40} The resulting emblematic figure of nineteenth-century urban modernity, the \textit{flaneur}, was surely different than the characters of Yusuf Franko. The \textit{flaneur}, according to Walter Benjamin who is primarily responsible of creating this mythic figure for urban studies, is a “man of leisure [who] is already out of place. He is as much out of place in an atmosphere of complete leisure as in the feverish turmoil of the city.”\textsuperscript{41} Franko or his characters may not have wholeheartedly shared the \textit{flaneur}’s supposed obsession with open public spaces or his interest in dark mysteries of the city.\textsuperscript{42} Still, Franko’s voyeur gaze over his characters and the urban moments they experienced, which often documented his characters as they were in action, not being interested in the viewer, unmistakably echoes the \textit{flanuer}’s detached observations of city life. Just like the latter’s ability to observe worked hand in hand with his imaginative powers, Yusuf Franko documented urban life in Pera, armed with a strong gift of imagination, which in turn contributed to the very urban experience through his little games as exercises of community-building, creating a visual text of and about the city.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{39.} Doizy, “The Difficult Experience of Caricature,” 45.
\textsuperscript{42.} Janin, \textit{Les Français}, 55.
\textsuperscript{43.} Ibid., 70.
This visual text included diplomatic palaces, clubs, balls, and parks. By reading this text through Yusuf Franko’s travels in the urban realm and moments in late nineteenth-century Pera, one can weave through the life of a typical elite in the European quarters of late Ottoman Istanbul, cataloguing the types of places he was likely to frequent and the types (les types) with whom he would most probably hang out in social and political spheres of his life, with a touch of playful and sometimes critical imagination. Yet, as a critic of the exhibition had pointed out, these travels represented in Yusuf Franko’s portraits were “cliché.”

It is indeed true that Franko’s portrayal of his social life and his entourage was cliché, a caricatural version of Pera’s fin-de-siècle cosmopolitanism. As a matter of fact, it is precisely thanks to the cliché nature of these portraits that we could easily associate his abstracted, seemingly placeless compositions as quintessential depictions of a Pera that once was, and that has been imagined, not only by him, but by many of his peers and those to come.

To put it another way, again with reference to Benjamin, most of Yusuf Franko’s drawings related to Pera’s “acts of civilization”—embassies, theaters, parks, public spaces. They documented these “cultural artifacts” that are now cherished by urban activists, who are trying to protect the current urban fabric inherited from late nineteenth-century Pera and selectively used by the policymakers to create a nostalgic effect for their new plans over the urban space.

Yet like all acts of civilization, building Pera was dependent on “acts of barbarism.” One must ask then, what were the constitutive “acts of barbarism” that made it possible for the “acts of civilization” to become the eventual clichés, to be remembered and nostalgized upon a hundred years later? What and who did Franko’s playful imagination exclude, making the game possible in the first place?

One obvious absence in Franko’s drawings is the working class of Pera. Because the district was a continuous construction site from the second half of the nineteenth century onward, Pera’s construction workers, coming from various millets and from abroad, working to construct apartment buildings, hotels, various forms of infrastructure, constituted a constant sighting in the elites’ daily life (and sometimes as a small news item in their dailies when work-

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44. The implication was that the exhibition had subscribed to a cliché narrative as well.
45. Benjamin, Illuminations, 256.
ers died on construction sites).\textsuperscript{47} Service workers such as servants, waiters, drivers, porters, as well as low ranking employees of financial and commercial enterprises, were even more visible—in daily life, not in Yusuf Franko’s drawings—as a large service economy had developed with the establishment of embassies and with investments in finance and real estate, triggering the opening of hotels, restaurants, department stores, cultural and arts institutions in the area. Migrants and beggars, who filled the streets of Pera after the Ottomans lost successive provinces in the Balkans, are absent from the picture, too.

Naturally absent from Yusuf Franko’s drawings are historical/spatial layers as well, over which his world was partially built. I have mentioned how cemeteries of the district were used as grounds for the establishment of parks, which were only open to those who could pay the entrance fees. Yusuf Franko understandably did not draw portraits—charged or otherwise—of the people who had previously populated the cemeteries as spaces for leisure before those spaces became reserved for the elites. And similarly, no portrait was made of the people whose lands were expropriated for large-scale infrastructure and land development projects or who were made homeless after the fire of 1870 which, luckily for some and devastatingly for others, cleared a huge section of the district for real estate investments.\textsuperscript{48}

But of course, Yusuf Franko was not a journalist, nor was he a social realist photographer; and one cannot judge the historical value of his caricatures by what this late nineteenth-century bureaucrat-cum-caricaturist did not draw. That is not the point. The importance of these absences does not result from the fact that they leave the picture incomplete, though of course they do that. But they are crucial for they let us appreciate the role of exclusion as a constitutive principle of the world that made Yusuf Franko’s album possible. Exclusion also lay at the heart of the communal game played by Franko and his entourage, making the album a relic belonging to a private, closed society. This is what this scrutiny promises to do—giving the kernel of truth regarding the narrative of cosmopolitanism. If Yusuf Franko’s characters exemplify the types of people that were most associated with late Ottoman “cosmopolitan” spaces, then contemplation on the absences in his caricatures has the potential to open up a window into how such spaces actually depended on exclusion. Following the recent critiques of cosmopolitanism, one must note that experience of what was historically framed as cosmopolitan Pera was not only limited to

\textsuperscript{47} The \textit{Levant Herald} reports the death of two workers and the injury of one during the construction of \textit{Tünel}, the underground railway between Galata and Pera. See \textit{The Levant Herald} 4/16 (17 Sept. 1872), 2; Vahdettin Engin, \textit{Tünel} (Istanbul: Simurg, 2000), 55 (Engin slightly errs the date of the newspaper).

\textsuperscript{48} Le Dr. Brunetti, \textit{Souvenir du 5 Juin 1870 – Épisode de La Catastrophe de Péra} (Constantinople: Typographie et Lithographies Centrales, 1870).
an elite group, but its condition of possibility was this exclusion, represented in Franko’s caricatures. As Annibale Carracci, one of the founding figures of the art of caricature in Renaissance Italy, was credited to say, the task of the caricaturist “was to grasp the perfect deformity and reveal the very essence of a personality.” Yusuf Franko’s caricatures then grasped the perfect deformity of cosmopolitan Pera and showed its very essence in its “caricaturized” version of the cosmopolitan urban life.

Conclusion: Pera’s (?) Dance of the Death

This article has explored the Ottoman bureaucrat Yusuf Franko’s caricatures, made between 1884 and 1896, as a gateway for a deeper engagement with the late nineteenth-century Pera district of Istanbul. In my scrutiny of his drawings, I treated Yusuf Franko’s wit and artistic talent as his toolset for documenting the urban experience, but also for initiating an insider game to play with his fellow Pera residents. What is more, this game had the potential—albeit not always actualized—to initiate an imminent critique of Pera’s fin-de-siècle culture in general. Lastly, I have looked at the absences of Yusuf Franko’s urban narrative which, I argue, reveal a deeper truth about “cosmopolitan” Pera and the exclusion that was at the heart of its making.

And perhaps the absences in Yusuf Franko’s album were not that straightforward either. Benjamin famously wrote in his Theses on History, “The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again... To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was’ (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.” Perhaps we can find a similar image—“dialectics at a standstill”—flushing in one of the last drawings in the album. The undated painting that has a certain Mihran Balassan playing the composer Camille Saint-Saens’ famous piece, Danse Macabre, is rich in detail (Figure 9). It is nighttime, and clouded skies cannot hide the full moon. Balassan plays the piano inside a building, and while he plays he is also staring outside his window or balcony, where he sees skeletons dancing to his tunes, next to the ruins of an ancient city. With these visual traits Franko referred to the centuries-old European motif of Dance of Death and a poem by Henri Cazalis, which was the inspiration of Saint-Saens’ composition:

50. Benjamin, Illuminations, 255.
Mais psit! Tout à coup on quitte la ronde,
On se pousse, on fuit, le coq a chanté
Oh! La belle nuit pour le pauvre monde!
Et vive la mort et l’égalité!53

In the absence of written sources, it is next to impossible to know what Yusuf Franko’s motive was in paying homage to this trope. Perhaps it was simply his love of Saint-Saens’ *Danse Macabre*, composed in 1874. Nevertheless, I think we can use his out of the ordinary drawing as a fitting allegory for *fin-de-siècle* Pera. Just before his grand exit from the album and his life as a caricaturist, Franko gives us a “flash” where the modern tunes of music are played over the sight of the ruins and skeletons of the past. Pera’s “acts of civilization,” as we have seen, were built over the spaces of the dead and over the ruins of the past. And those playing these “civilized” tunes or drawing “European-style” caricatures in Pera must have felt, at least on some days,

Figure 9: “M. Mihran Balassan.” Undated. Courtesy of the Ömer M. Koç Collection.

like Balassan, “at a moment of danger.” Did such “flashes” from Pera’s history motivate Franko’s drawing of Balassan? Or did the image itself give such a flash as he drew it? We do not know. But this, at least, is how the history of late nineteenth-century “cosmopolitan” Pera now reveals itself to the modern reader, in an aural and visual “flash,” played by an Armenian, drawn by a Melkite, with looming images of the undead and the ruins, praising death and equality—the latter only to be found in the former.

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