By the late nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire had become home to a number of revolutionary organizations that would play crucial roles in the transformation of the imperial polity. Late Ottoman revolutionaries were young, educated, and politically ambitious, but were often denied access to formal channels of politics, whether in the imperial metropole or in emerging national capitals. They organized themselves into secret societies and operated underground, tapping into a broad range of ideologies from nationalism to socialism and anarchism. Their willingness to employ tactics of violence, however, was what united this heterogenous mix of individuals who saw violence as a way of facilitating historical ruptures in the service of revolutionary goals. Over the course of time, particularly after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, their organizations gradually turned into political parties that ultimately oversaw the violent transition from empire to nation-state. This course revisits this contentious historical period spanning from the mid-1850s well into late 1920s, sampling the existing historiographical literature along the way.

In traditional historiographies, late Ottoman revolutionaries are either demonized due to their violent legacies or romanticized as a result of later ideological re-appropriations. In this course, we hope to approach them in their complexity and develop a working set of tools to historicize them as agents of change in their own right. In so doing, this graduate seminar will first of all help students attain a more complex empirical understanding of revolutionary politics in the late Ottoman history. Some basic questions will drive this mission: what really sets apart the late nineteenth-century revolutionaries from their earlier counterparts? Why did revolutionary organizations suddenly begin to mushroom in the Ottoman Empire by the mid-1880s? What explains the specific context and timing of their violent acts? Such context-driven questions will also enable us to develop a more critical approach to studying the end of the Ottoman Empire, forcing us to come to terms with the powerful narratives that continue to shape the history writing on the period.

Assignments & Evaluation

1) Participation & Presentations (20 percent)
Students are expected to participate in each session, come to the class having done all the required readings and be active during the discussions. Students will also be asked to present, at least once, if not twice, to present selected pieces from optional readings.

2) Response Papers (30 percent)
Students will be required to write a total of three response papers (2 pages long, double-spaced), discussing the required readings for the weeks of their own choosing. Please submit your response papers on Mondays, a day before the class.

3) Final Paper (50 percent)
Students will write a final paper due July 3 (10-15 pages, double-spaced for MA students; 15-20 pages for PhD students). You have to discuss the topic of your final paper with me beforehand, preferably before the start of the spring break.

Course Schedule

Week 1, March 23
Introduction


Week 2, March 30
Ottoman Empire in the Age of Revolution


Optional Readings


Week 3, April 6
Revolutions of 1848 and the Ottoman Empire

Anna Vakalis, “Tanzimat in the Province: Nationalist Sedition (Fesat), Banditry (Eşkiya) and Local Councils in the Ottoman Southern Balkans (1840s to 1860s),” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Basel, 2019, pp. 116-99.


Optional Readings


Week 4, April 13
Heightened Interstate Competition


Optional Readings


Week 5, April 20

Changing Horizons of Expectations


Optional Readings


Week 6, April 27

Patterns of Elite Competition


Optional Readings


Week 7, May 4
Émigré Milieu and Diasporas


Optional Readings


Week 8, May 18
Global Economy of Discontent


Optional Readings


Week 9, May 25
New Tools, New Tactics


Optional Readings


**Week 10, June 1**

**Connected Revolutionaries, Connected Revolutions**


Optional Readings


**Week 11, June 8**

**Revolutionary Paths out of Empire**


Optional Readings


Week 12, June 15
Post-Ottoman Revolutionary Trajectories


Optional Readings


Week 13, June 19 – July 3
Finals Week

Final Papers due July 3