



Shattered Dreams of Revolution: From Liberty to Violence in the Late Ottoman Empire

Bedross Der Matossian

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The Ottoman revolution of 1908 is a study in contradictions—a positive manifestation of modernity intended to reinstate constitutional rule, yet ultimately a negative event that shook the fundamental structures of the empire, opening up ethnic, religious, and political conflicts. *Shattered Dreams of Revolution* considers this revolutionary event to tell the stories of three important groups: Arabs, Armenians, and Jews. The revolution raised these groups' expectations for new opportunities of inclusion and citizenship. But as post-revolutionary festivities ended, these euphoric feelings soon turned to pessimism and a dramatic rise in ethnic tensions.

The undoing of the revolutionary dreams could be found in the very foundations of the revolution itself. Inherent ambiguities and contradictions in the revolution's goals and the reluctance of both the authors of the revolution and the empire's ethnic groups to come to a compromise regarding the new political framework of the empire ultimately proved untenable. The revolutionaries had never been wholeheartedly committed to constitutionalism, thus constitutionalism failed to create a new understanding of Ottoman citizenship, grant equal rights to all citizens, and bring them under one roof in a legislative assembly. Today as the Middle East experiences another set of revolutions, these early lessons of the Ottoman Empire, of unfulfilled expectations and ensuing discontent, still provide important insights into the contradictions of hope and disillusion seemingly inherent in revolution.

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