

## Late Ottoman Paramilitary Networks

### Abstract:

Despite the centrality of military successes and failures in framing historical notions of “Ottoman decline” and the Eastern Question, the Ottoman military as an institution remains understudied. Like all European powers, the Ottoman army was undergoing modernization reforms throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Yet while most armies were consolidating and streamlining their forces, irregular militia bands seem to have taken center stage in Ottoman military strategy from 1861 to 1918. The Ottoman-Russian War of 1878, the Libyan campaign of 1911, the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913, and the First World War witnessed the utility and threat of paramilitary forces, contributing to a distinctly Ottoman way of warfare. This lecture will describe the birth and role of Ottoman paramilitary networks, specifically the *Teşkilat-i Mahsusa* (TM) commonly translated as “Special Organization”. It will convey the central role of ethnicity in the TM, focusing on the disproportionate representation of Circassian migrants and other Muslim minority populations in the hierarchy of these newly emerging Ottoman clandestine apparatuses.

### Bio

Alika Zangieva is a fourth-year PhD Candidate in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University. She recently completed a yearlong Arabic program in Amman, Jordan, where she also conducted fieldwork with Circassian diaspora groups. Alika received her BA in International Affairs from The George Washington University with a minor in Arabic. She has spent two summers studying Turkish at Boğaziçi University, once through the American Research Institute in Turkey (ARIT) Fellowship. Alika’s research aims to combine the methodologies of anthropology and military history to examine notions of martiality in the Ottoman context. Her research seeks to engage with military studies, indigeneity, migration, and borderlands by interrogating the “innate martiality” and ethnic configurations of Ottoman “indigenous warrior populations,” known sometimes as “*levend*,” “*çeteci*,” “*deli*,” “*sekban*” or “*başibazuk*” forces.