

# From the Frontiers of the Empire to the Borders of the Nations:

Questions of Borderland Security and Safety in the (post-)Ottoman Spaces (1700–1939)

Research Group *The Ottoman Europe*



„Das osmanische Europa –  
Methoden und Perspektiven der  
Frühneuzeitforschung zu Südosteuropa.“

September 19–20 2024, Leipzig

**Thursday, September 19**

Venue: S 102 Seminargebäude Augustus Platz

**Welcome and Introduction**

9:30–10:00

*Arda Akinci, Giorgio Ennas, Fatma Aladağ*

(Post)Colonial Questions of Borders, Security and Health  
*Stefan Rohdewald (Universität Leipzig)*

10:00–10:30 *Coffee Break*

**Panel 1 Sanitary Policies (Chair: Giorgio Ennas)**

10:30–12:30

**The Turning Point of the 1830s: Epidemics and Health Control at the Borders in Mediterranean Africa**

*Salvatore Speziale (University of Messina)*

The 1830s constituted a truly turning point in the fight against epidemics throughout the Ottoman Empire and, for partly different and partly coincident reasons, in Mediterranean Africa, with important repercussions in the configuration of its internal borders. From an epidemic point of view, it took place the transition from the age of the dominant plague to that of cholera with an important series of repercussions on medical theories (contagionism and anti-contagionism) and above all on the practical implications in the health field which, it must be underlined, are divergent between the two shores of the Mediterranean. On the political side, during the long process of progressive autonomy of the provinces, we witness the advent of French colonialism in Algeria and the resumption of control over the Regency of Tripoli by the Ottomans after the long government of the Caramanli. These are all factors of great change that undermine the traditional lability of borders, especially in times of epidemic. Furthermore, the different and often opposing directions in the field of combating epidemics, undertaken by the various European countries, often dictated by economic-commercial demands, constituted further complications to the indicated framework as they lead to significant interference in the health management of the territories of the Empire. For these and other reasons that will be highlighted in the contribution, in the short space of the 1830s health councils of different configurations were created in all the provinces of the Empire and with particular implications in Mediterranean Africa. With them, a different and more regular control of maritime and land borders was achieved in view of real demarcations that prefigured the colonial period. It is therefore a complex combination of epidemic, medical-health, political and economic motivations that we intend to explore starting from the existing bibliography and archival sources of various European and North African origins.

**Disease, Borders, and Sovereignty in Ottoman Baghdad, 1848–1890**

*Hande Yalnızoğlu Altınay (Oxford University)*

Ottoman Baghdad was among the worst hit regions of the empire during the second cholera pandemic (1829–49) as the disease swept through the province in 1846–47. A year later it was announced that a quarantine infrastructure would be swiftly laid down in important border towns, as well as the major cities of Ottoman Iraq, which were gateways to merchants, pilgrims and disease from Iran and further East. With focus on the province of Baghdad during the period 1848–1890, this paper asks what it meant exactly for an Ottoman quarantine post to become operational institutionally in terms of human resources, finances, and space and whether these three elements were always in synchronicity. Through a close look and a comparative framework with other quarantines active during this period, it shows that although Baghdad's highly prioritized quarantine infrastructure was officially established in 1848, lack of financial resources as well as border ambiguities and security challenges, meant that no purposeful infrastructure for controlling disease was laid down in the province for a significant part of the nineteenth-century. Despite being a highly disorganized institution represented solely by appointed directors and physicians, the quarantine infrastructure was nevertheless used in subtle ways to extend power and sovereignty in the easternmost part of the empire.

**Quarantine, Health, and Taxation: A New Revenue for Maintaining Public Health in Ottoman State**

*Şahin Yeşilyurt (Cambridge University)*

The Ottoman administration gave great importance to the protection of public health and border security, preventing the spread of epidemic diseases occurring outside its borders or taking some precautions to eliminate emerging diseases in the Ottoman lands. The Ottoman administration, for example, established the Quarantine Council in the 1830s to avert the epidemic diseases that were common in the 19th century from spreading to the Ottoman lands and to eradicate the diseases existing in the Ottoman lands. To ensure that this council operates effectively, there were expenditures on personnel, buildings, and equipment, mainly in the border areas. The main source of income used to finance these expenses was the "quarantine tax" introduced in the 1830s. However, there were archival documents in the Ottoman Archives showing that during the implementation of the quarantine tax, there were some problems as well as taxpayers' requests, i.e., some taxpayers stated that they were not able to pay the tax in question, citing solvency problems. On the other hand, there were also some documents contained that some tax collectors working in quarantine areas resorted to inappropriate practices such as embezzlement and collecting taxes contrary to the tariff. All in all, based on the Ottoman archives this study investigates the quarantine tax, which was introduced to finance the quarantine practice that came to the fore in the prevention of epidemic diseases and to maintain health in border areas as well as in interior places in the Ottoman society throughout the 19th century.

**The Protection of the Borders of the Greek State against the Transmission of Epidemic Diseases during the 19th Century**

*Yannis Gonatidis (University of Crete)*

The declaration of the Greek Revolution (1821) led to the establishment of rudimentary lazarettos, mainly municipal ones, in order to limit the transmission of epidemics that affected various areas of the Greek state. After the finalization of the borders of the independent Greek state (1832), lazarettos and quarantine services were established, mainly in important port-cities as well as in cities that reside on the border with the Ottoman Empire. Greece's successive territorial expansions and annexations during the nineteenth century (1864 Ionian islands: 1881 Thessaly and the province of Arta) were constantly changing the network of lazarettos and quarantine services. The aim of the paper is to trace the evolution of the public health measures taken by the Greek state for its protection from the spread of epidemic diseases, particularly plague and cholera, from abroad, and the development of the network of health authorities during the course of the nineteenth century. The paper will draw attention to the active, constantly changing, and dynamic policy which was followed by the Greek state during the course of the nineteenth century, in contrast with the meagre accounts in the international bibliography, which represents it as having been fixed, unchanging, and centered simply on the use of quarantine as a protective measure.

12:30–14:30 *Lunch Break*

## **Panel 2: Safety & Security Policies (Chair: Arda Akıncı)**

14:30–16:30

### **Conversations in Constantinople: The role of Britain and the Concert of Europe in the suppression of Barbary 'piracy'** *Gianpietro Sette (University of Torino)*

In the first half of the 19th century, immediately after the chaos of the Napoleonic wars, the Congress of Vienna and (especially) the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle clearly stated the urgency of adopting proper methods to enact the suppression of piracy and slave-trade in North Africa, since the three regencies of Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli were considered among the major security threats to the newly achieved European peace. Between the Anglo-Dutch military expedition of 1816 and the Anglo-French diplomatic expedition of 1819, a crucial conversation took place in Istanbul (1819): the British ambassador R. Liston and his colleagues of the Quintuple Alliance tried to persuade the Ottoman Reis Efendi of joining them in a concerted action on the southern shores of the Mediterranean, but the Ottoman minister resisted, knowing that the efforts made by the confederated powers could affect the very existence of the allied Barbary states. Using diplomatic and political-military sources such as ambassadorial correspondence, pamphlets, bilateral and multilateral treaties, this paper shows how British (and French) imperial expansion began in an informal way, hiding behind the banner of peace, free-trade, civilization and international law and in few decades brought with it war, commercial unbalances and the destruction and replacement of the regional and legal tradition that characterized commercial and diplomatic intercourse in the previous century; the paper also aims at unveiling how the cultural debate on the suppression of slavery and slave-trade informed the military endeavours for the fight against piracy and influenced the political decisions of the Concert

### **An Empire of Borderlands: The Proposed Division of the Ottoman Empire into General Inspectorates, 1913–1914**

*Patrick Schilling (Georgetown University)*

This paper examines a little-studied proposal for the administrative reorganization of the Ottoman Empire which found a number of adherents among the Ottoman Turkish political and intellectual elite after the Ottoman defeat in the First Balkan War. This proposal involved the division of the empire into six general inspectorates (*umumi müfettişlikler*), each to be headed by a general inspector equipped with wide-ranging powers to govern the territory under his control in accordance with the 'needs and characteristics' of the local population. This proposal was passed into law by the Unionist-dominated government of Said Halim Pasha in July 1913, but its implementation was abandoned following the outbreak of the First World War. This paper draws on state documents and contemporary print publications to trace the origins and evolution of this proposal, as well as the circumstances surrounding its implementation and eventual abandonment. It argues that the proposed administrative reorganization revived a governing institution which had originally been created during the Hamidian era to administer the imperial borderlands of Macedonia and Eastern Anatolia, and imposed it on all parts of the empire. This marked a turn away from the two principles which the Committee of Union and Progress had ostensibly upheld since the constitutional revolution of 1908, but which had, in the committee's eyes, proved incapable of unifying and strengthening the empire: popular participation in government and the equality of all Ottomans. In the face of growing internal dissent and external crises, the division of the empire into general inspectorates – by combining an authoritarian, top-down form of government with a recognition of the differences, real and perceived, which existed between different parts of the empire – appeared to offer better prospects of the empire's survival.

## **Unmaking Ottoman Subjecthood: Armenian Transatlantic Mobility and Photographic Documentation at the End of the Empire**

*Hazal Özdemir (Northwestern University)*

My paper demonstrates how denaturalization and surveillance methods initially devised to control mobility, including a photographic archive, were a crucial part of a broad repertoire of technologies of governance aimed at Armenian transatlantic migrants during the reign of Abdülhamid II (1876–1909). I explore how the meticulous effort of the state to document the identities of emigrating Armenians by creating a photographic database is the confluence of border securitization technologies and an exclusive conception of imperial subjecthood. Armenians had to submit two photographs circulated to various Ottoman ministries and ports of entry, foreclosing the possibility of circular migration. Although it must have been challenging for officers at the Ottoman ports to check all the files containing migrants' photographs when an Armenian attempted to re-enter the empire, the government set about constructing a technological apparatus, a predecessor to today's surveillance technologies that we see most prominently at airports, such as eye scans and fingerprints, to demonstrate that the modern state has the tools to keep undesirable subjects outside its borders. The entanglement of legal procedures, visual technologies, and documentary practices demands a critical engagement with the written and photographic record and its history. By refusing the assumption that Ottoman membership was inclusive and equal (Campos, 2011; Phillips Cohen, 2014; Akçasu, 2021), my paper reveals the steps the Hamidian state took to undermine the fluid notion of imperial belonging predating nation-state membership and regimes of partition and transfer. Denaturalization was not some stop-gap measure to limit the numbers of Armenians who could come back to the empire as American citizens, which had a fiscal rather than ethnic logic; rather a wholesale policy targeting an ethno-religious community deemed dangerous. Although the Bureau of Nationality, which was a Foreign Ministry office, oversaw the expatriation cases in the empire, a special commission under the Interior Ministry was responsible for denaturalizing Armenians, proving that Armenian migrants had become a security threat.

### **Changing the Face of a Region: The Politics of Civil and Military Security in Romanian Dobruja**

*Giuseppe Motta (Sapienza University of Rome)*

The Congress of Berlin (1878) decreed the independence of Romania, including Northern Dobruja which was ceded to Bucharest as a compensation for the amputation of Bessarabia, a part of historical Moldavia. Northern Dobruja was an intricate mixture of different nationalities, with Turks, Tatars, Bulgarians, Russians, Gagauz and Greeks, while the Romanians represented a clear majority only in the western area. In 1913, after the Balkan Wars, Romania incorporated Southern Dobruja too, a region known as the Cadrilater for its great military importance. During this period, until the Treaty of Craiova of 1940, Dobruja transitioned abruptly from its multicultural imperial heritage to the homogenizing order of the nation-state. Throughout the years, Bucharest developed multifold strategies of integration, which combined the militarization of the new frontier, the exclusion of Muslims from Romanian citizenship and more specific identity-building measures, including the colonization of the region with Vlach immigrants from the Balkans. All these aspects interacted and were mutually interdependent: public order was undermined by widespread brigandage and by the activities of the Internal Dobrujan Revolutionary Organisation, which on their side conditioned bilateral relations with Bulgaria, while the policies of colonization generated an internal civil war which opposed different ethnic communities. In conclusion, the case of Romanian Dobruja fully exemplifies the complicated historical transition that many former imperial regions experienced at the turn of the twentieth century and the deep connection between security and nation-building. In the region, securitization was not only a military affair, but necessarily implied a wider transformation of civil, social and economic structures.

16:30–17:00 Coffee Break

### **17:00–18:00 Keynote Lecture: Jovan Pešalj (Universiteit Leiden)**

19:30 Dinner

**Friday, September 20**

Venue: S 102 Seminargebäude Augustus Platz

**Panel 3 Borderland & Frontier Societies (Chair: Fatma Aladağ)**

9:30–11:30

**The Organization of Hotin as the New Ottoman Administration Centre on its Border with Poland–Lithuania (1712–1714)**

*Natalia Królikowska–Jedlińska (University of Warsaw)*

The organization of Hotin as the new Ottoman administration center on its border with Poland–Lithuania (1712–1714) marked a significant period in state-level relations between the Ottoman Empire, the Crimean Khanate, Poland–Lithuania, and Russia. This paper focuses on an underutilized archival collection of letters discovered in the Main State Archive in Dresden (HStA Dresden, 10026 Geheimes Kabinett 3491/1). These letters, exchanged between Crimean khans, Ottomans, and Polish officials during the years 1712–1714, shed light on the Ottoman decision to reconstruct the fortress of Hotin and designate it as the new administration centre on the border with Poland–Lithuania. Aside from broader interstate diplomatic issues, this paper specifically examines the initial stages of organizing borderland relations between the governor of Hotin and local Polish officials across the Dniester River. It delves into how officials on both sides addressed everyday challenges, including supplying necessary goods in a region heavily affected by previous military campaigns (such as provisions for the army and building materials for fortress reconstruction), managing migration across the border, and resolving border disputes related to theft and physical harm. Next to the materials from the Dresden Archive, the paper utilizes the relevant unpublished correspondence preserved in the Main Archive in Early Act in Warsaw, Czartoryski Library as well as published Russian and other Ottoman sources.

**Frontier Fables – Ottoman Roaming along the Habsburg Edges (1772–1826)**

*Zeynep Arslan Çalık (Ruhr-Universität Bochum)*

Habsburg officials registered Ottoman subjects present in the Habsburg hereditary lands in 1823, 1824, and 1825. The resulting three extensive archival registers (referred to as Bücher in German) contain detailed information on the registered individuals dating back fifty years. The intended geographical scope for the registrations was the hereditary lands. However, the extent of the registered mobility greatly surpassed these intended regions, encompassing areas as far reaching as London in Northern Europe, St Petersburg in the North, and spanning through to the eastern regions of Turkey, Iraq, Morocco, Tunisia, and Cairo in the Southern parts of Northern Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean. As a component of a recently completed PhD project, these registers have been transcribed into a spreadsheet, providing now detailed dataset on 6,930 individuals in total. The significance of the registers for this workshop lies in their comprehensive content, which includes not only details about cross border mobilities but also insights into the Ottoman border societies along the Habsburg Ottoman frontier. Therefore, this study aims to exclusively uncover the patterns of mobility within various categories of Ottoman mobility occurring during the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century in the Habsburg Ottoman border zone

**A Comparative and Transnational View on Imperial War, Collective Memories and National Identities in the Borderlands of the Empire**

*Aytaç Yürükçü (University of Eastern Finland)*

Imperial War, Collective Memories and National Identities in the Borderlands of Empires: Identity Formation among Peripheral Minorities during the Russo–Turkish War in 1877–78. The 1877–78 Russo–Turkish War, involving the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire's Eastern Orthodox–Pan–Slavic coalition (including Bulgarians, Serbians, and Montenegrins), significantly influenced Eastern European nationalism, ethnic boundaries, and national identities. It also impacted peripheral minorities in the Russian Empire's army, such as Finns, Estonians, Latvians, and Prussians. Examining these minorities; involvement in the conflict between two major land empires reveals insights into how war affects identity and the history of nationhood among Russian and Ottoman minorities, especially Finns and Bulgarians. The war reshaped realpolitik across Europe, notably affecting the Balkans and Baltic Provinces during the late nineteenth-century golden age of nationalism. Within the imperial context, the war influenced the media, as well as the perspectives of the people and army officers. Leading experts in nationalism and collective memory have largely focused on major powers, neglecting borderland minorities. This study aims to examine and comparatively analyze war diaries and collective memories (focusing on enemy images, national and religious propaganda, massacres, alleged atrocities, and civilians) from soldiers' and ordinary newspaper readers' perspectives by using diaries and newspapers. The study delves into the depiction and conveyance of national narratives during close/distant war, and the representation of national perspectives, minority understandings, ideologies, and nationalistic propaganda by individuals and soldiers. The study utilizes qualitative content analysis and digital humanities tools to scrutinize key themes in written texts, including society, soldiers, solidarity, narratives, news, and enemy images. It asks how and why these narratives and emotions manifested in newspapers, diaries, and soldiers; letters.

**Bordering on the micro-level: The case study of Palestinian al-Bassa 1918–1948**

*Lily Eilan (Universität Heidelberg)*

This proposed paper will follow the formation of the Palestinian–Lebanese border and borderland between 1918–1948 and the social–economic changes ensued during this process. The paper traces the process of bordering and local actors' role in shaping the process of bordering in the period of transition from Ottoman rule, to British rule and then Israeli. The paper will provide a micro-level examination of a border-making process looking at the changing mobilities in and around the evolving borderland, and the changing social and economic realities which constituted this process. The paper will examine an area around one Palestinian town, al-Bassa, and its involvement into a frontier town with the gradual imposition of an international border. Looking at different social groups in this area: nomad and sedentary Bedouins, Christian and Muslim village dwellers, land owners, agricultural workers, Jewish settlers, policemen, soldiers, and smugglers; the paper demonstrates the importance of a micro-level investigation of processes of bordering, and the crucial roles long-standing social and economic networks had in al-Bassa for constituting an evolving "borderland milieu" during the heightened period of bordering. The paper demonstrates the crucial role the Great Arab Revolt (1936–39) had in shaping the border itself, and specifically the British counter-insurgency and border control practices. The processes of militarization and securitization of the border at this stage were halted in the 1940s only to then further consolidate during the 1948 war. The paper ends with the fall of al-Bassa, its people fleeing relying on the dirt roads connecting the town with its vicinity across the border, and its occupation by Israeli Army forces. The borderline, porous throughout most of the period, transitioned into a highly militarized border and the area itself was bisected with a border separating Israel and Lebanon.

11:30–12:00 Coffee Break

**12:00–13:00 Closing Remarks**