

BORDERS, MOBILITIES, AND STATE FORMATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST, 1920-1945

Convened by
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Organized within the framework of ERC Project
"Towards a Decentred History of the Middle
East: Transborder
Spaces, Circulations, Frontiers Effects and
State Formation" BORDER 725269

BORDER explores the social construction of international frontiers at the borderlands located between Turkey, Syria, and Iraq in the interwar era. The project seeks to provide a much more holistic yet finely-grained understanding of the formation of the territorial states in the Middle East in the aftermath of the First World War.



FACULTÉ DES LETTRES
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Borders, Mobilities, and State formation in the Middle East, 1920-1945

CONFERENCE
10-11 October 2019

Faculté des lettres
et sciences humaines

Espace Tilo-Frey 1
2000 Neuchâtel

Room R.S.38



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BORDERS, MOBILITIES, AND STATE FORMATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST, 1920-1945

In the last few years, an increasing number of scholars have pointed to the striking paradox of the first wave of globalisation in the Middle East and beyond. While the globe witnessed an unprecedented intensification of the movement of people, goods, diseases, and ideas, states also adopted themselves by developing more or less effective techniques for monitoring and controlling such movements. Border areas constitute a privileged site to observe this process of how globalizing practices interacted with more exclusivist agendas. Middle Eastern states, for one, transformed the physical and social landscape in border areas by creating border posts and implementing shared practices between border authorities, among which was the introduction of symbolic as well as material tools such as passports, and border crossing cards.

Taking its cue from scholarship that suggests to interpret the “centre” through the lens of the “periphery”, this conference seeks to explore to what extent historians can also account for the first wave of globalization in the Middle East through a careful observation of how border areas and its populations found themselves at the centre of influence, movements and tensions on regional and global levels. While we do not dismiss the centrality of diplomacy and high-level geostrategic dynamics in the resolution of international conflicts and the shaping of economic policies, we argue for the necessity of linking different scales of analysis as well as the roles played by non-state actors in those processes in order to better understand the emergence of the modern Middle East in the interwar years.



10th OCTOBER

8h45 Welcome

9h Introduction

Jordi Tejel (University of Neuchâtel)

9h30 Panel 1

Ottoman heritage and Borders

Chair: Maurus Reinkowski (University of Basel)

- Resat Kasaba (University of Washington)
“Long Term Determinants of Mobility and their Clash with Modern Borders in the Middle East”
- Alexander E. Balistreri (University of Basel)
“The Formation of Turkey’s Northeastern Border in Comparative Perspective”

10h45 Coffee Break

11h15 Panel 2

Frontier Zones in Transition

Chair: Jordi Tejel (University of Neuchâtel)

- Ramazan Hakkı Öztan (University of Neuchâtel)
“The Last Ottoman Merchants: Regional Trade in Aleppo’s Hinterland, 1921-1929”
- Katharina Lange (ZMO, Berlin)
“Local Heroes? Excavating Armed Struggles against France in the Kurd-Dagh Region”

12h30 Lunch

14h Panel 3

States and Borders in the Levant

Chair: Daniel Meier (PACTE-CNRS, Grenoble)

- Orçun Can Okan (Columbia University)
“Reference to Ottoman Records in the Construction of Post-Ottoman Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq”
- Adrien Zakar (Stanford University)
“A New Gymnastic of the Eye and the Brain: Borders, Mobility, and Military Vision in Interwar Syria”
- Lauren Banko (Yale University)
“Border Transgressions, Border Controls: Mobility along Palestine’s Northern Frontier, 1930-1946”

15h30 Coffee Break

16h Panel 4

Mobility across Borders I: Circulations

Chair: Ellen Hertz (University of Neuchâtel)

- César Jaquier (University of Neuchâtel)
“They Squeeze the Pilgrims for as much as they Can: Channeling Automobile Traffic across the Iraqi-Syrian Border, 1925-1945”
- Norig Neveu (IREMAM, Aix-en-Provence)
“Polysemic Borders: Solidarity Networks, Circulation and Territorialisation; Melkite and Orthodox Clerics and Laymen in the Emirate of Transjordan, 1920s-1940s”
- Simon Jackson (University of Birmingham)
“Personal Boundaries and Regional Crossings: the Emotions of Capitalism in the post-war Eastern Mediterranean”

17h30 End of the First Day

11th OCTOBER

9h Panel 5

Mobility across Borders II: Bedouin Dynamics

Chair: Aline Schlaepfer (University of Geneva)

- Carl Shook (University of Chicago)
“Bordering the Shammar: A Study in Tribal Politics and Policy in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Syria in the Inter-war Period”
- Laura Stocker (University of Neuchâtel)
“Sheep and the Colonial State: Policing Livestock Movement in the Iraqi-Syrian Borderland, 1919-1945”
- Robert Fletcher (Warwick University)
“When Nomads Flee: Bedouin displacement and the Great War for the Middle East”

10h30 Coffee Break

11h Panel 6

Diseases and Agricultural Reforms

Chair: Jérémie Forney (University of Neuchâtel)

- Mehdi Sakatni (IREMAM, Aix-en-Provence)
“The Bedouin in the Realm of Land Law: Agrarian Reform and the Settlement of Nomadic Tribes in French Mandate Syria, 1920-1938”
- Samuel Dolbee (Yale University)
“Borders of Disease and Diseases of Borders in the Post-Ottoman Middle East.”

12h Round-table

- Resat Kasaba (University of Washington)
- Robert Fletcher (Warwick University)
- Maurus Reinkowski (University of Basel)
- Jordi Tejel (University of Neuchâtel)

12h 30 Lunch

End of the Conference