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

Convened by
Professor Jordi Tejel
Dr. Ramazan Hakki Öztan
Victoria Abrahamyan
César Jaquier
Laura Stocker

For more information, please contact
jordi.tejel@unine.ch

Participation is free, but please register via
ramazan.oztan@unine.ch

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.
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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 their Clash with Modern Borders in 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"
- 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"
10h45 Coffee Break

10h15 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"
- 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: Elen Hertz (University of Neuchâtel)
- César Jaquier (University of Neuchâtel)
  "Reference to Ottoman Records in the Construction of Post-Ottoman Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq"
- Daniel Meier (PACTE-CNRS, Grenoble)
  "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"
- Laura Stocker (University of Geneva)
  "Diseases and Agricultural Reforms"
17h30 End of the First Day

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

12h30 Lunch

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 Dislocation and the Great War for the Middle East"
10h30 Coffee Break

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End of the Conference