

Tejel, Jordi and Öztan, Ramazan Hakkı (eds.). 2022. *Regimes of Mobility: Borders and State Formation in the Middle East, 1918–1946*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 366 pages.

Reviewed by **Arda Akıncı**
University of Salamanca, Spain¹
akinci@usal.es

Almost 30 years after the collapse of Ottoman sovereignty in the Balkans following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, British journalist Henry N. Brailsford published his book entitled *Macedonia: Its Races and Their Future*. In his book, Brailsford narrates a conversation he had with a wealthy peasant at Monastir marketplace. When Brailsford asked whether his village was Greek or Bulgarian, the peasant replied ‘Well, it is Bulgarian now, but it was Greek four years ago.’ Shocked by the peasant’s answer, he questioned how such a miracle happened. The peasant quite calmly told the story how the Greeks held the village by contributing to the salary of the teacher but never appointing a priest. He continued by explaining that when the Bulgarians heard this, they took on the teacher’s salary and appointed a priest, thus turning the village Bulgarian.²

Few anecdotes explain the fragility, obscurity, and ambiguity of the borders emerged in the post-Ottoman territories in the Balkans and elsewhere. The years following the World War I did not only lead to the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire but also witnessed the emergence of new states with their borders that took years to adjust and adapt to the new junctures. However, the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, particularly in the Middle East, did not happen overnight. On the contrary, existing social, economic, and political relationships were transformed but continued to exist for decades.

At this point, the volume edited by Jordi Tejel and Ramazan Hakkı Öztan enters the stage. The term ‘regimes of mobility’ entered the lexicon relatively recently, thanks to Ronen Shamir, but began to occupy an even more crucial place in the literature since the publication of the article by Nina G. Schiller and Noel B. Salazar.³ Within this framework, the volume offers important insights into the regimes of mobility and border-making processes in the Middle East following the World War I until 1946, which transformed the region from a borderless empire into bordered nation-states.

- 1 This work has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 101034371.
- 2 Brailsford, Henry Noel. 1906. *Macedonia: Its Races and Their Futures*. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 102.
- 3 See Shamir, Ronen. 2005. ‘Without Borders? Notes on Globalization as a Mobility Regime*’. *Sociological Theory* 23. 2. 197–217. doi:10.1111/j.0735-2751.2005.00250.x; Glick Schiller, Nina and Salazar, Noel B. 2013. ‘Regimes of Mobility Across the Globe’. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 39. 2. 183–200. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2013.723253.

The focus of the volume on the interwar period is not random either. As stated in the introduction by the editors, it focuses on the interwar period in the Middle East that witnessed a 'radical reordering of the region's existing regimes of mobility.' The strength of the volume, therefore its most significant novelty, lies in its attempt to go beyond singular case studies of border-making processes and re-evaluate the emergence of national borders in the Middle East as a process that was interconnected. Furthermore, by shedding light on the regimes of mobility in the newly created borders in the Middle East, the volume dedicates significant agency to the 'borderlanders,' unlike the traditional narratives of center-periphery paradigm.

The first part of the volume focuses on what the authors call 'Post-Ottoman Territoriality.' In the first chapter of this part Alexander Balistreri brings a fresh look to the border-making process through the lens of New Diplomatic History by examining diplomacy and the actions of individuals to revisit the notion of *millî* (national). In his chapter, the author underlines the simultaneity of the border-making process in 1921, especially by focusing on Turkish negotiations with Russia and the French Mandate in Syria to determine the northeastern and southern borders respectively. The following chapter by Orçun Can Okan also discusses the importance of diplomacy in the border-making process and state succession but from a different viewpoint. The author looks at how the ordinary people living in the former Ottoman territories required Ottoman administrative and legal documents in their daily lives through specific cases studies, all of which prove that, in fact, the new borders did not create entirely separate units.

Other chapters also bring the regional, transnational, and global connectedness, such as the one of Ramazan Hakkı Öztan and Simon Jackson. While in the previous chapter the author explores the impact of emerging borders on the 'connected economy' of Aleppo and its hinterland, the latter traces the transnational connections of the Beirut-based Ford dealer Charles Corm to form a global-micro history narrative of the transformation of Ottoman commercial networks. Both chapters serve as proof that the existing Ottoman network, whether commercial or not, did not disappear instantaneously. Instead, as Öztan argues, disentangled over a long period of time.

The second part of the volume deals with cross-border mobilities. The first chapter (Chapter 7) of this part by Samuel Solbee focuses on the role that diseases, specifically cattle plague and malaria, played in shaping the Syrian borders with Turkey and Iraq. The author demonstrates how the spatial perception of diseases starting from the Ottoman period but extending well into the 1920s and 1930s influenced the emergence, formation, and consolidation of the borderlands and territoriality. This part of the volume also challenges our pre-existing judgements that the emergence of new states and borders sharply ended with the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. Just like the networks in the borderlands continued to exist, so did the mobilities. In certain cases, as César Jaquier shows in his chapter (Chapter 8), the mandatory authorities supported and even encouraged the trans-desert mobilities between Iraq and Syria, as the route served the political and economic interests of the British and French. In the following chapter, Lauren Banko examines the mobility along Palestine's northern border with Syria, Lebanon, and Transjordan. The author captures

attention by investigating illicit border crossings in Palestine by non-Zionist Arabs and non-Arab migrants who challenged the border infrastructure created by the British. The author's attention to the non-Zionist group certainly broadens the perspective of how the consolidation of borders met with resistance and was contested by the 'borderlanders.'

Just as the reader begins to wonder why there are no chapters regarding the borders in the Arabian Peninsula, Robert Fletcher's chapter comes into play. Fletcher touches upon on a subject that have become more relevant in the past decade – refugees. Focusing on the nomadic societies of the Syrian and northern Arabian deserts, the author aims at bringing the nomadic migration and refugee flights into the same framework by looking at the perception of Bedouin flights – either as 'raider,' 'rebel,' or 'refugee.' By presenting three episodes of Bedouin flight, the author demonstrates – unsurprisingly, like today – how the status of refugee was fluid in the interwar Middle East. Furthermore, Fletcher successfully shows the limits between imperialism and humanitarianism and their boundaries, while also bestowing significant agency – in line with one of the volume's main aims – to the refugees in shaping the reforms of political authority within Iraq's southern desert.

The chapters in the volume, however, are not mere glimpses from a hundred years ago. On the contrary, as Reşat Kasaba aptly puts in the foreword of the book, they also serve as evidence of how the events of the past remain relevant today. With all the contemporary crises in the Middle East such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Syrian civil war and the refugee crisis having its roots in the developments following the partition of the Ottoman Empire in the post-WWI period and the emergence of states with new borders.

One striking aspect of the volume is how not only the two parts, but also the chapters fit perfectly with one another. To a certain extent a significant challenge while preparing edited volumes like this is the cohesion among the chapters. In this particular case, it almost makes the reader feel as if the book is a single-authored monography composed of different episodes of border-making process in the Middle East during the interwar period, rather than an edited volume. In that sense, such cohesion not only makes the volume easier to read and grasp the subject-matter but also allows the distinct chapters to complement one another.

Another importance of the book lies in its success in bringing different historiographical trends together to explain the transformation of the Middle East in the aftermath of World War I. Moving beyond Borderland Studies, the chapters in the volume do an impressive job of incorporating trends like Global and Transnational History, Cross-Regional History, Environmental History, and New Diplomatic History as well as innovative approaches to the interwar Middle East, such as using Social Network Analysis (see Chapter 5 by Norig Neveu). In this regard, the book not only appeals to the historians of the Middle East or post-Ottoman Spaces but also can attract scholars of different fields and areas of expertise.

One final aspect that deserves mention is the variety of sources used by the authors in the chapters. The volume incorporates a significant number of primary sources from a wide range of archives, not only from the Ottoman Empire and the countries

of post-Ottoman spaces, but also from British and French mandatory administrations, as well as oral history (see Chapter 6 by Katherine Lange).

However, one issue, as mentioned by Cyrus Scayegh in the afterword, pertains to the absence of chapters regarding air and sea borders, which are not covered in the volume. While land borders and border-making processes occupies a significant place in the post-Ottoman territories, air and sea borders between newly emerged countries in the Middle East are equally important. Recognizing that each book and study has its limits, this particular issue can serve as a reference point for the future studies to consider, including these aspects in new research.

Ultimately, the volume provides a fresh perspective on understanding how the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire impacted on the borderlands of the newly emerged states and transformed regimes of mobility. Considering the recent popularity of and interest in the Borderland and Mobility studies, the book can also be read in comparison and parallel with other recent studies, such as ‘Age of Rogues: Revolutionaries and Racketeers at the Frontiers of the Empires,’ edited by Alp Yenen and Ramazan Hakkı Öztan, and ‘Borders, boundaries and belonging in post-Ottoman Space in the Interwar Period,’ edited by Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet.⁴

- 4 Öztan, Ramazan Hakkı and Yenen, Alp (eds.). 2021. *Age of Rogues: Rebels, Revolutionaries and Racketeers at the Frontiers of Empires*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; Boyar, Ebru and Fleet, Kate (eds.). 2023. *Borders, Boundaries and Belonging in Post-Ottoman Space in the Interwar Period*. Leiden; Boston: Brill.