



Towards a Decentred History of the Middle East: Transborder Spaces, Circulations, Frontier Effects and State Formation, 1920-1946

We are happy to publicize the start of a new research project in the Department of History at the University of Neuchâtel. The programme is funded by the H2020 European Research Council with a consolidator grant 725269 (BORDER). The project was launched in September 2017 and our research team is made up of five members; Prof Jordi Tejel (Principal Investigator), Ramazan Hakkı Öztan (post-doctoral research fellow), Victoria Abrahamyan, César Jaquier, and Laura Stocker (doctoral candidates).

Based on two epistemological notions – borderlands as *histoire-problème* (history-as-problem) on the one hand, and the co-production of borders between state and society (and ultimately the nation-state) on the other – our research program proposes to rethink the classical historical narrative about the emergence of the post-Ottoman Middle East. It takes its cue from transborder phenomena: on the one hand, the circulation of people (migrants, refugees, pilgrims, borderlanders), goods (both licit and illicit) and ideas; and, on the other hand, the negotiation of ties between local actors and representatives of state authority.

In so doing, the project departs from normative approaches about bordering processes and state sovereignty. While it pays attention to issues such as international treaties and diplomatic negotiations over the delimitation of boundaries following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, our history-based research agenda is mainly inspired by methodological and epistemological debates among geographers, anthropologists and sociologists.

Our research is guided by three principle objectives, namely to offer:

- A socio-historical analysis of state violence in the borderlands of the Middle East;
- An examination of the capacities (agency) of border populations to create the history of the borderlands, nation-states, and the region as a whole; and
- A study of the “frontier effects” based around notion of space and time, and involving various levels of observation (macro, meso and micro), in order to identify the ruptures and continuities evoked by the delineation of new borderlines in the Middle East.

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

For further information, see our website: <https://www.unine.ch/histoire/home/recherche/projet-erc-consolidator-grant.html>