

## BOOK REVIEW

**Ottoman Passports: Security and Geographic Mobility, 1876–1908**, by İlkey Yılmaz, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2023, 352 pp., \$85.00, (hardcover) ISBN 9780815638186.

The transformation of a “passport” from a mere travel document to the name given to a system of social control is one of the visible manifestations of modernist *governmentality*. During the Age of Mobility, in the Ottoman case, passports were not often used as travel documents; instead, Ottoman subjects coveted passports as a substitute for naturalization or national identification documents for those domiciled in the Empire. A Greek passport holder belonged to the imagined community of Greek nationals in Greece and the Greek diaspora. As a tangible proof of nationality, the history of passports plays a crucial role in conceptualizing nation and nationality. In this aspect, İlkey Yılmaz’s *Ottoman Passports* is not just an impressive contribution to the growing body of scholarship on mobility studies. The book also stands as a landmark achievement in the studies of Ottoman security policies during the Hamidian Era by placing passports at the center of her scrutiny to contribute to our understanding of what kind of modernization enterprise the Ottoman statesmen desired to establish.

The book contextualizes the Hamidian passport in two temporalities: first, the passport as a document by tracing its lineage from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the Hamidian era, and second, by highlighting the acute need for a renewed means of control during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the use of political violence displayed by anarchist terror in the West. Yılmaz is far more concerned about the latter context; the book’s core narrative is the Hamidian attempts to control the Bulgarian and Armenian populations in the wake of revolutionary activities. In *Ottoman Passports*, the Hamidian security apparatus was closely followed by the *fin de siècle* anti-anarchist policing measures that European powers employed. The narrative lynchpin in *Ottoman Passports* is the international conferences the Ottoman security apparatus attended, namely the Conference of Rome (1898) and the St. Petersburg Protocol (1904).

Any summary of a monographic and thoroughly researched book such as *Ottoman Passports* is bound to overlook some fine details. Instead, this summary aims to make a point: *Ottoman Passports* masterfully harmonizes several debates and chronologies in its chapters. The book’s first chapter opens with a theoretical discussion of the Modern State by building upon the works of Charles Tilly; Yılmaz precipitates that the Hamidian policing and surveillance practices mark a transition to direct rule in the Ottoman Empire. Using Antony Giddens’ ideas, the author locates passports as a culmination of “direct and indirect surveillance” (p.19) with the necessary policing, data storage, and border control required for a passport system to function correctly. In the book, the works of Charles Tilly, Anthony Giddens, and others are recontextualized in Foucault’s *governmentality*. Yılmaz claims that forming a modern state structure is crucial to understanding surveillance and security practices under the Hamidian regime. The second chapter is reserved for a history of the Hamidian Era (1876–1909), in which she introduces momentous acts of political violence clustered under the Macedonian Question and the Armenian Revolutionary activities. Selim Deringil’s arguments are pervasive in this chapter: as a manifestation of a legitimacy crisis, the Ottoman state invested in the “regime’s security” (p.70). She asserts that “what was meant by “security” was, in fact, generally the regime’s security, not the people’s (pp.60–70). Chapter Three brilliantly compares the inter-imperial collaboration of knowledge-making in security practices and how the Ottoman Empire adopted and adapted to these security innovations. Besides contextualizing the acute need for a security collaboration by providing a narrative of anarchist activities since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Yılmaz also provides a detailed analysis of the steps taken by the Ottoman

government in transferring security systems to its vernacular. Chapter Four offers a semiotic survey of the Hamidian lexicon on criminality and contextualizes commonly used words like *anarşist* (anarchist), *serseri* (vagrant), and *fesad* (agitator, seditious, sedition), based on reports provided by the Minister of Police, Hüseyin Nazım Paşa, in 1897; the Police Regulations (1907); and similar documents produced by the Ottoman security apparatus. Yılmaz claims that the language perpetuated by the Ottoman state significantly reduced “the Armenian sedition” to “an us/them dichotomy [...] appears to be an umbrella concept containing such various senses as the Armenian issue, Armenian terror, the Armenian revolutionary movement, and the Armenian national movement (pp.119–120).” Further demonstrated in this chapter is how violence, when perpetuated by Muslims, is contextualized. However, similar acts were essentialized as the nature of Armenian *fesad* by the discursive language of the Ottoman state. In Chapter Five, the anarchist vs. counter-anarchist narrative takes a backseat as Yılmaz recontextualizes what she had already started in her first chapter by demonstrating the practices of the state, from pre-modern to modern, on the regulation of mobility. Practices binding the *reaya* to the land from the Ottoman Classical Age to modernizing attempts to collect information on mobility in the nineteenth century punctuate this historical narrative. In Chapters Six and Seven, Yılmaz considers the state’s methodology of using, regulating, and controlling internal and external passports in the Hamidian Era. She highlights how individuals had to go through a process of proving that they were trustworthy subjects by obtaining surety from their communities. She also observes how the travel documents were used in multiple dimensions to prevent unwanted elements from entering Istanbul, to file and categorize travelers, and, ultimately, to store information on individuals. Finally, she shows how these control practices on travel were not homogenous but outright contradictory. The concluding chapter references the author’s experience in modern Turkish practices in controlling travel.

Yılmaz, throughout the book, employs passports as a lens through which to glimpse the security concerns and, ultimately, the self-perception of the Ottoman state elite. While aimed at scholars and specialists, *Ottoman Passports* may comfortably fit into any graduate-level course syllabi on governmentality and policing and security practices of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The only criticism I can raise is about the weighted reading of the passport merely as a counter-criminal document. Yılmaz omits to mention the extraterritorial aspect of passports, mainly how foreigners in possession of Western passports were benefiting from the extraterritoriality of their respective regimes in the Ottoman Empire, and how the Ottoman state established a passport control regime to prevent the unrestrained ubiquity of foreign passports in the possession of the Ottoman subjects. This archival bias is a result of an inductive reading of the regime of passports in police records and Ministry of Interior files. I should also note that a holistic approach, which includes the Ottoman passport in the system of Capitulations, would agree with Yılmaz’s definition of the “regime’s security,” further demonstrating how a “mere” travel document challenged the day-to-day sovereignty of the Ottoman state.

Berke Torunoğlu 

Bilkent University

[berke.torunoglu@bilkent.edu.tr](mailto:berke.torunoglu@bilkent.edu.tr)

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