



Minorities at War from Napoleon to Putin

Conference Report

Organizers: BASEES Study Group for Minority History (SGMH), Costantin Ardeleanu, Raul Cârstocea, Samuel Foster, Olena Palko

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The third biennial symposium of the [BASEES Study Group for Minority History \(SGMH\)](#) took place on 11.-12. May 2023 in the New Europe College, Bucharest. It was supported by the Centre of Culture and Governance in Europe at the University of St. Gallen (Switzerland). The organizers facilitated a broad temporal and geographical approach, making a significant contribution to challenging the perpetual and potential victimhood of minorities and emphasizing their diverse roles within the context of war across the local, national, and regional levels.

In the first panel, chaired by CONSTANTIN ARDELEANU (Bucharest), the four presenters explored different perspectives on imperial history prior to the First World War. KARINA GAIBULINA (Luxembourg) and MASHA CEROVIC (Paris) referred to the conquest of the Central Asian periphery as well as formerly Ottoman territories of the Russian Empire, highlighting concepts of borderlands and 'the frontier'. IGOR DESPOT (Zagreb) focused specifically on the Arbanasi Albanians and their activities during the transitional phase from one empire to another in the Balkan Wars of 1912-13, using newspaper articles to demonstrate how the press was utilized to mobilize the population. JAN RYBAK (London) examined the responses of Galician Jews to the outbreak of the Great War, focusing, in particular, on gender and generational differences and the complex dynamics of communal, national and imperial identities. The panel ultimately explored three dimensions in which the imperial project can be viewed from a historical perspective. The first focused on territorial expansion, conquest, contact zones and the search for security (CEROVIC and GAIBULINA). This also highlights the significance of land as an imperial tool for instilling loyalty (CEROVIC) and the use of "Other" and weaponised identities in contacts between different population groups (GAIBULINA). The second dimension concerned the issue of population, with all the papers touching on the nexus of social engineering, colonisation and civilization. The third dimension addressed the administration of empires, being a story of elites who largely represent the majority but also hail from minority groups (GAIBULINA). Each paper also addressed the key terms of "security" and "loyalty," both of which held great significance for these different approaches towards imperial history.

The second panel, chaired by OLENA PALKO (Basel), dealt with minorities experiences during the Great War. SEMION GOLDIN (Jerusalem) delved into the impact of the First World War on Jewish communities, shedding light on the differing forms of hostility and mistreatment endured by Jews in the frontal zone. Perceived as a threat to security, they were forced to leave Galicia, occupied by the Russian Army. DOINA ANCA CREȚU (Prague) built on this theme to explore the plight of the Galicians Jewish population during its period of confinement in various refugee camps across wartime Austria, and their becoming objects of international humanitarian and state aid, which made them a 'dual' – political and social – minority. While the Great War proved to be an obvious disaster for certain minorities, for others it represented an opportunity to have their claims and desires heard and acknowledged. MIKHAIL AKULOV (Astana) demonstrated how minorities – in this case, German settlers in southern Ukraine and the Crimean Tatars in Crimea, seize on the possibility to become subjects with agency, exploring the concurrent processes of colonisation and decolonisation and their overlapping dynamics. The panel also emphasised the conflict's colonial and national

dimensions (AKULOV), the national segregation of welfare (CRETU) and subsequent national mobilisation, as well as the concept of (dis)loyalties (GOLDIN/AKULOV).

The final panel of the day was chaired by SERGIU DELCEA (Bucharest) and served to illuminate the role minorities played in the processes of nation-state building during the interwar period. ANNA ADORJÁNI (Vienna) opened the discussion by focusing on experimental concepts of national self-determination and minority protection in Hungary in the immediate aftermath of the Great War, specifically political reforms aimed at broadening minority representation. TOMAS BALKELIS (Vilnius) assessed the ambitions and patterns of active participation by Belarusians in the nation-building process of independent Lithuania. Shifting the focus to the *long durée*, BÉLA BODÓ (Bonn) analysed the ethnic and class hierarchies of Jews and Germans in the various significant phases of Hungarian nationalism before, during, and after 1918. Summarising the panel, DELCEA concluded that all three papers addressed nationalism as a polymorphous phenomenon influenced by time, space and a diverse range of perspectives — an approach that seeks to comprehend the multiple dimensions and faces of nationalism as a social movement, cultural force and political ideology. In this regard, these studies could be viewed as a response to typical macro-level approaches prevalent within the social sciences.

The second day commenced with a keynote lecture delivered by MACIEJ GÓRNY (Warsaw), who presented an alternative perspective to the viewpoints previously observed and discussed, addressing the topic of majorities during the era of the Great War and the subsequent collapse, or partial collapse, of the German, Habsburg, Ottoman and Russian empires. The talk also shed light on the intersection of statistics, science and national politics across different pasts and temporalities, touching upon dominant themes such as migration, hostility and loyalty to one's respective state or community. GÓRNY emphasised that these shared experiences did not result in growing communication among the war's diverse and segregated refugee groups but rather led to processes of national mobilisation. This included a comprehensive examination of the usage, manipulation and criticism of imperial censuses, raises questions concerning continuities and ruptures among those involved in compiling these surveys and whether there had been any changes in the language used by elite and expert communities. It was noted that while there were no substantial changes in methodologies and statistics, this period was marked by a discernible shift in attitudes. The combination of professionalism and nationalism emerged as a notable process that primarily unfolded during wartime, with many intellectuals participating in national movements, through which they came to formulating many of their ideas while coming to accept one another as a cohesive block.

In the fourth panel, chaired by RAUL CÂRSTOCEA (Maynooth), the symposium's focus shifted towards discussion of minorities in Romania during the Second World War. GIUSEPPE MOTTA (Rome) revisited the theme of refugees within a humanitarian context, projecting it onto post-war Romania, which once again perceived potential dangers and disloyalty from minorities in its new border regions, drawing on the continuity of anti-Semitic imagery. CRISTINA STOICA (London, Canada) was the first to bring the Roma community into focus, highlighting their significance as a minority throughout the periods under discussion. Adopting the state's perspective she examined the resettlement project of Roma in a colony in Transnistria, linking it to notions of internal colonialism and "delayed genocide." ANCA FILIPOVICI (Cluj/Vienna) analysed acts of resistance and underground Zionist movements based on archival documentation, with a specific focus on differing forms of "soft resistance" exhibited by Jewish adolescents and shedding further light on the agency of victims and wider minority communities.

The final panel extended its focus from the 1970s up to the present day, enriching the discussion with new geographical perspectives. Focusing on the role of Cypriot Turkish minority PAVLOS IOANNIS KOKTSIDIS (Cyprus) provided a unique contribution by applying a political scientific approach that examined the role of kin-states in minority mobilisation and the relationship between the two, as well as their influence on agency and vulnerability. ALEKSANDAR PAVLOVIĆ (Belgrade) directed attention to the questions minorities during the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, situated between the poles of "Yugodenyning" and "Yugosplaining," with reference to Francis Fukuyama's "End of History" thesis in the context of Southeast Europe. LESIA BIDOCHKO (Kyiv) and ALEXANDR VORONOVICI centred their discussions on minorities in the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict. By tracing historical narratives and propaganda tactics from the Soviet past to the present, BIDOCHKO highlighted the plight of the Crimean Tatars as a threatened and historically marginalised group. Through analysis of online discourses during the full-scale invasion in early 2022, she exposed key narratives propagated by Russian propaganda, aimed at stripping the Tartars of their political agency and excluding them from the public sphere. VORONOVICI once again emphasized the non-uniformity of minorities, focusing on the Moldovan Gagauz and their positioning in relation to the war. The ensuing discussion regarding aspects of these ongoing conflicts brought the symposium to a lively conclusion.

In conclusion, it can be observed that conflict and war in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe led to waves of violence both within and along the borders of empires. Trends preceding, during and following the Great War served

as a prolonged prelude to the atrocities committed against minorities in the Second World War. However, the Cold War also possessed distinctive features as a global conflict with significant impacts on minority groups. Victimhood experienced by marginalized groups during war could be countered through the demonstration of local agency. While predominantly focusing on ethnic and religious minorities, the symposium represented an important initial step towards broadening the scope for examining underexposed groups, notably those defined by gender, generation, and social background, within a broader category of non-uniform minorities. This development appears highly productive and offers the potential for enhancing scholarly awareness of the increasing diversity now present within this field of research. There are also emerging capacities to contribute to a better understanding of sexual minority groups.

Symposium overview:

Session One “The Long Death of the Nineteenth Century”

Chair: Constantin Ardeleanu (Bucharest)

Karina Gaibulina (Luxemburg): The Polish ‘Siberian Triangle’: Colonial Conquest and the ‘Ideology of Progress’

Masha Cerovic (Paris): The Making of an Imperial Frontier: The Russian Conquest of Kars (1877–1882)

Igor Despot (Zagreb): Zadar’s Settlement of Arbanasi during the Balkan Wars

Jan Rybak (London): Maccabeus and the Emperor: Jewish Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Galicia

Session Two “East-Central Europe in the Era of the Great War”

Chair: Olena Palko (Basel)

Semion Goldin (Jerusalem): The Russian Army and the Jewish Population during the First World War: Questions about Modernity and Barbarity

Doina Anca Crețu (Prague): Jewish Refugees, Encampment, and the Humanitarian Paradox in Austria-Hungary during the First World War

Mikhail Akulov (Astana): The Mobilization of the Black Sea Germans in Romania and Ukraine in 1918

Session Three “The ‘Rise of Nationality’”

Chair: Sergiu Delcea (Bucharest)

Anna Adorjáni (Vienna): 1918, Hungary: A Laboratory of Minority Protection?

Tomas Balkelis (Vilnius): Belarusians in the Making of Modern Lithuania, 1918–1923

Béla Bodó (Bonn): “The Jews are our Misfortune!” Or Perhaps it is the Ethnic Germans? The Changing Perception of Jews and Ethnic Germans in Hungarian Political Discourse Between 1918 and 1946

Keynote

Chair: Olena Palko (Basel)

Maciej Górný (Warsaw), Majorities at War: Transformation of East-Central Europe, 1914–1923

Session Four “Persecution, Occupation and Resistance in the Second World War”

Chair: Raul Cârstocea (Maynooth)

Giuseppe Motta (Rome): The ‘Jewish Invasion’: Myth and Reality of the Refugee Question in Interwar Romania

Cristina Stoica (London, Canada): Purificare etnică a poporului Român (The ‘Ethnic Purification’ of the Romanian People): The Persecution of the Roma under the Antonescu Regime

Anca Filipovici (Cluj/Vienna): The Memory of Jewish Youth resistance during the Holocaust in Romania

Session Five: From the Cold War to the ‘End of the End of History’

Chair: Samuel Foster (Norwich)

Pavlos Ioannis Koktsidis (Cyprus): Ethnic Minority, National Partner, Proxy Gadget: The Instrumentalization and Militarization of the Turkish Cypriot Community

Aleksandar Pavlović (Belgrade): The Specters of the Yugoslav War: Minority Responses to State Disintegration

Lesia Bidochko (Kyiv): Crimean Tatars and the Russia-Ukraine Struggle: From Ethnic Cleansing to War

Alexandr Voronovici (Independent scholar): A Pro-Russia Minority on the EU’s Border: Gagauzia and Moldovan Gagauz in the Times of Russia-Ukraine War