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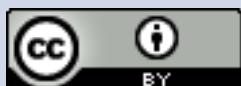
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Minorities at War, Part 1: State Policies in Times of Conflict

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Abstract

This short introduction provides an overview for the first part of the special issue of ‘Minorities at War’. The issue’s overarching theme explores how periods of conflict influenced the relationship between minority groups in Central and Eastern Europe and their respective host states during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The articles featured are based on contributions originally presented at the BASEES Study Group for Minority History’s second official biennial symposium, ‘Minorities at War from Napoleon to Putin’, which was held at the New Europe College in Bucharest, Romania from 11-12 May 2023.

Keywords: *war; minorities state policies; the security state; violence*

Originally penned in 1927, Benito Mussolini's *La Dottrina del Fascismo* ('The Doctrine of Fascism') attempted to bring a sense of ideological coherence to what had previously been a movement of increasingly reactionary ideas rather than a system of governance. At the core of the essay was an overt rejection of both individual and communal rights. For Italy's dictator, a people's true value and purpose lay in their prescribed role as subordinates of 'the State':

For if the nineteenth century was a century of individualism (Liberalism always signifying individualism) it may be expected that this will be the century of collectivism and hence the century of the State.[...] The foundation of Fascism is the conception of the State, its character, its duty, and its aim. Fascism conceives of the State as an absolute, in comparison with which all individuals and groups are relative, only to be conceived of in their relation to the State (Mussolini, 1934, pp. 20-21).

Somewhat unsurprisingly, *Il Duce's* theoretical proclamation, first published in 1931, engendered a degree of backlash, most notably from the Catholic Church. In an unusual act of polemical defiance, Pope Pius XI unequivocally condemned Italian fascism's "pagan worship of the state – the 'Statolatry'" in an encyclical released a few months later to protest the regime's forced dissolution of the Church's civil and youth groups (Momigliano, 1964, p. 972; Gentile, 2009, p. 155).

While broadly accepted as a form of human association that exists to maintain order and security, debates over how to best define the relationship between the state and its citizens dominated European political thought since its post-feudal conception in the sixteenth-century. (Keohane, 1983, pp. ix-x). The international ramifications of the 1789 French Revolution, and the wave of international socioeconomic changes engendered by the First Industrial Revolution, reconfigured the idea of the state as something distinct from civil society. Leading English utilitarians, such as Jeremy Bentham, dismissed earlier notions of the state as possessing any sort of 'legal and moral personality', viewing it, instead, as an artificial mechanism that existed to maintain security and social stability (Bourcier, 2021, pp. 289-292). Building on this concept, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels presented it as the primary vehicle of class oppression through which the interests of capital were enforced (Jessop, 1978). In a lecture originally delivered at the height of the German Revolution that had broken out in October 1918, the economist and sociologist Max Weber codified this contemporary

understanding by defining the modern state as a multi-faceted system of institutionalised power which held the monopoly over the legitimate use of physical force (Weber, 1919).

However, the onset of the French Revolutionary Wars also gave rise to what could be described as Europe's first modern 'security state' within the First French Republic. The creation, expansion and empowering of a vast, centralised government bureaucracy; policies that prioritised warfare and military adventurism over domestic social and economic programmes; and the use of 'emergency measures' permitting the military to bypass constitutional rule and intervene directly in the sphere of civilian governance, especially in relation to civil liberties, from 1795 to 1804, represented a contemporary blueprint on which other European and non-European countries would continue to draw in times of conflict (Brown, 2012). In his seminal 1917 treatise, *The State and Revolution*, Vladimir Lenin reaffirmed Marx and Engels in characterising the 'bourgeois state' as "an organisation of violence" that rendered any democratic pretences illusionary through the continuing influence of the bureaucratic and military elites (Lenin, 1963, pp. 338). Despite a rhetorical commitment to its destruction, however, Lenin conceded that the practical realities of preserving the revolution necessitated that an incoming dictatorship of the proletariat would assume a role akin to that of the security state (*ibid.*, p. 381).

These exceptional circumstances under which the state and its controlling government historically legitimised an expanded wartime presence was one of the throughlines explored at the BASEES Study Group for Minority History's second biennial symposium, held at the New Europe College in Bucharest, Romania in May 2023, and where the articles featured in this special issue were originally presented. Bringing together scholars specialising in the modern history, politics and culture of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe, the symposium explored the myriad roles these regions' ethnic and religious minorities have played in times of war. Seeking to challenge Western-centric assumptions of perpetual victimhood and historical persecution by innately hostile state authorities, the symposium's attendees also explored how these groups often engaged with different aspects of the security state as well as the impact of its policies.

Karina Gaibulina opens the issue by exploring the role of 'subalterns' in the Russian Empire's nineteenth-century conquest of Central Asia. Through the diary records of the Polish officer Bronisław Zaleski and Iskander Batyrshy, a translator of Tatar origin, Gaibulina reveals how the military and bureaucratic structures of the imperial state often served as an all-encompassing framework that stimulated, restricted, and regulated relations between the Tsar's diverse subjects. The article also offers fresh insights into attitudes towards territorial

expansion, the notion of the ‘frontier’ among those whose own identities placed them outside of Russia’s own ‘imperial core’ and how this, in turn, shaped encounters with the conquered. Consequently, notions of identity among Imperial Russia’s minorities were, like in other colonial empires, often determined as much by a sense of loyalty and affiliation to the security state and its policies as memories and cultures of historical resistance.

Maciej Górny considers how national majorities were mobilised in service to the state during the First World War, and the subsequent collapse of the German, Habsburg, Ottoman and Russian empires. Taking this period and geographical region in its entirety, Górny demonstrates how the era of the Great War reflected a pivotal moment of historical transition and a distinctive phase in Europe’s reconfiguration as a collection of nation-states. In contrast to the comparatively self-contained destruction of the Western Front, widespread disruption across Central and Eastern Europe created hundreds of thousands of refugees. As the historical boundaries of the imperial states were replaced by the borders of newly founded nation-states, this movement of people itself became a form of both national mobilisation and state-led social engineering. Key to this was the intersection between politics, statistical science, and state bureaucracy with procedures such as imperial or national census-taking growing increasingly significant as a tool for codifying the national majorities of specific areas in the face of mass displacement.

Continuing with these subthemes of borders and mass displacement, **Giuseppe Motta** discusses the deliberate revival of the antisemitic ‘Jewish invasion’ myth in interwar Romania and its interrelation with wider anxieties concerning matters of national security. Alongside having to incorporate a considerably larger Jewish population with the annexation of Transylvania and other former Habsburg territories, from the end of 1918 the Romanian state discovered that its newly acquired northeastern region of Bessarabia was quickly becoming host to a sizable number of Jews fleeing the violence and persecutions of the Russian Civil War. Nationalist propaganda wasted no time in depicting these new arrivals as parasitic invaders seeking to exploit traditional Romanian hospitality. This dovetailed into concerns that linked the refugee presence in Bessarabia with conspiratorial fears of ‘Judeo-Bolshevism’. As a result, the refugee emergency was subsumed into an increasingly toxic debate on the nature of post-war Romanian identity and state policy towards citizenship and the treatment of minorities.

Rounding off this first part of the special issue, **Lesia Bidochko** shifts this discussion of minorities as a subversive ‘Other’ into the twenty-first century context of the Russian Federation’s ongoing military invasion of Ukraine by assessing how the modern-day security

state works to perpetuate its policy agenda within the online space. Focusing on depictions of the Crimean Tatars since February 2022, Bidochko identifies the importance of global and regional social media platforms, such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Telegram, Odnoklassniki and VKontakte, as conduits for Russian state propaganda. The dissemination of such discourse, itself a revival of imperial and Soviet-era narratives, echoes Motta's assessment of the inter-war Romanian state's scapegoating of Russian Jewish refugees. As the war in eastern Ukraine continues, Crimea's already beleaguered Tatar community has found itself increasingly cast as 'fifth columnists' and a potential threat to Russian state security.

On behalf of the Study Group and BASEES, we wish to express our sincerest gratitude to all those who helped make the symposium such a success. Special thanks to Constantin Ardeleanu and his colleagues at the New Europe College for serving as our superlative hosts while also supervising travel, accommodation, and both evening socials. Thanks as well to the University of St. Gallen's Center for Governance and Culture in Europe for making the event possible through generous grant funding.

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