

İLKEY YILMAZ, *Ottoman Passports: Security and Geographic Mobility, 1876–1908* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2023). Pp. 345. \$39.95 paper. ISBN 9780815638117.

REVIEWED BY ELLA FRATANTUONO, Associate Professor of History, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, NC, email: efrantant@charlotte.edu



İlkay Yılmaz's *Ottoman Passports*, updated and translated from her 2014 Turkish-language monograph, is a well-theorized and carefully researched contribution to scholarship on the historical development of the laws, techniques, and administrative practices of documentary regimes and mobility restrictions.¹ Yılmaz draws on theories of state power, governmentality, and *raison d'état* to analyze Ottoman elite approaches to security and order prior to and during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909). In doing so, she contributes to historians' understanding of how internal and interimperial politics contributed to the stigmatization of groups in the empire as well as to scholars' broader understanding of mobility and modern state-building. Ultimately, the book reveals how "challenges to sovereignty gave rise to new attempts to restrict mobility," and, just as crucially, that "sovereignty, modern power, and security created new kinds of marginalities and helped the state define new classes of subjects" (10). While *Ottoman Passports* reveals inherent challenges in writing about "the state," the book is essential reading for those seeking to understand late nineteenth-century Ottoman governance, the global development of "mobility restrictions and state documentation" (7), and "the historical development of terrorism and counterterrorism" (9).

Across the course of an introduction, seven chapters, and a conclusion, *Ottoman Passports* deftly moves from the theoretical to the concrete and from the broad to the specific. Yılmaz's approach successfully embeds Ottoman history within global trends, elaborating the empire's unique circumstances without pathologizing the Ottoman state. Similarly, Yılmaz historicizes Ottoman state policies of exclusion and contextualizes episodes of violence, charting, for example, how

officials' stigmatization of Armenians aligned with and diverged from their casting of other groups as suspicious and threatening to the state. As such, this work stands as a crucial contribution to scholars' ongoing reassessments of mobility, migration, and state-society relations in the late Ottoman Empire.

The first chapter identifies the three pillars of Yılmaz's historical sociological framework: theories of the modern state and social power (e.g., infrastructural, regulatory, biopolitical); the significance of *raison d'état*—that “the well-being of the state, its continuity and interests” became “among the most important justifications of the state” (31); and the linking of “policing” with “the regulation of society” (33). In the second chapter, Yılmaz lays out the contours of state security and threat in the Hamidian era. Yılmaz considers the confluence of the Armenian, Macedonian, and Eastern Questions; Ottoman state-building and legitimacy practices; and the challenges of nationalist and autonomist movements. By approaching these issues in terms of “security,” Yılmaz historicizes officials' relationships to groups that faced exceptional violence by the empire's end.

In chapters 3, 4, and 5, Yılmaz further examines elites' conception of security, public order, and *raison d'état* to demonstrate how mobility controls became central to Ottoman governance. In her third chapter, Yılmaz's detailed discussion of the 1898 Conference of Rome and the 1904 St. Petersburg Protocol reveals shared anxieties and practices intended to combat anarchism. Concern with social disorder and the conflation of anarchism with acts of terror encouraged the development of synchronous and collaborative policing techniques across Europe. Though Ottoman techniques aligned with those of other states, participation in international anti-terror administrative and information networks encouraged Ottoman elites to further extend identification practices as a means of social control. In chapter 4, Yılmaz traces how the elevation of identity documents within policing practice worked alongside Ottoman officials' labeling of specific groups as fundamentally threatening vectors of disorder. She does so by analyzing how officials mobilized existing concepts of social dis/order in the face of newly perceived threats to state legitimacy. Hamidian-era Ottoman elites drew from an older vocabulary of movement and order within the empire—*serseri* (vagrant) and *fasad* (sedition, seditious, villain)—to understand and ultimately conflate threats of anarchism, sedition, and Armenian separatism. The flexibility and breadth of these terms allowed them to be “easily linked to other social identities or stigmas” (118), to the extent that elites' approaches “thus stigmatiz[ed] every person or group . . . as Armenian and every Armenian as *fasad*”

(121). As with chapter 4, chapter 5 provides insight into how earlier Ottoman approaches to mobility and state security influenced late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century practices. Existing mechanisms of population monitoring persisted in Ottoman governance across the reform era.

The final two chapters focus on Hamidian-era passport policies and policing tactics. In chapter 6, Yılmaz demonstrates that the internal passport system depended on social networks, such as those of the *millet* system, rather than “anonymized,” standardized, and direct relationships between state and citizen (165). Nevertheless, internal policies stemmed once more from newly perceived threats and security-focused concerns that allowed for the further stigmatization of specific groups within Ottoman society (188). In chapter 7, Yılmaz explores how those concerns contributed to the regulation of foreigners and Ottoman subjects. She describes the multidimensional utility of passports as tools to know and shape the population. Once more, Yılmaz’s approach highlights the breadth of concerns held by Ottoman elite, who sought to regulate the mobility of not just Bulgarians and Armenians but also Italians, anarchists, and the lower classes. Together, these two chapters persuasively drive home that Hamidian-era mobility controls coupled new concerns and new methods of identity verification with earlier, existing strategies of social control. Her detailed discussion of passport regulations in chapters 6 and 7 is a tremendous resource for historians of the Ottoman Empire and for scholars interested in global trends in the development mobility controls. Aside from the main chapters, Yılmaz also offers a succinct and up-to-date bibliographic essay.

Yılmaz’s analysis of Hamidian-era state-building draws from an impressive range of Ottoman bureaucratic sources. Throughout the text, she wields a striking array of critical approaches to studying “the state,” and she is careful to identify the words and ideological stances of individual bureaucrats. Nevertheless, *Ottoman Passports* reveals the challenge of studying and conceptualizing “the state” without slipping into language that reifies it as a purposeful agent capable of “emphasizing” or “longing” (35). Rather than a serious limitation, this occasional slippage reinforces the stakes of Yılmaz’s goals and approach. Theoretical sophistication coupled with analysis of the unique aspects of Ottoman history may provide terminology historians can use to understand the tremendous bureaucratic, administrative, infrastructural, and ideological changes of the Hamidian era. After all, Yılmaz’s experience with the Turkish state and the international passport regime following her signing of the 2016 Peace Petition offers

poignant insight into the ways identification documents and the arbitrary, seemingly unified workings of state power unfold on an individual level.

Ottoman Passports is ideal for scholars and graduate students of Ottoman, migration, mobility, and security studies, particularly those exploring the global history of documentation and identification regimes. Yılmaz's historical sociological frame and prioritization of security captures interwoven systems of internal, short-distance movement and cross-border, long-distance migration, and readers of *Mashriq & Mahjar* will benefit from Yılmaz's tracing of the interplay of local, regional, and global discourses, strategies, and networks that regulate mobility.

NOTES

¹ İlkay Yılmaz, *Serseri, Anarşist ve Fesadın Peşinde, II. Abdülhamid Döneminde Güvenlik Politikaları Ekseninde Pasaport, Mürür Tezkeresi ve Otel Kayıtları* (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2014).