

Border Crossing and Medicine: Quarantine, Detention and Containment in History and the Present.

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The currently practiced measures of medical and biometric screening of migrants and refugees can be seen as a point of departure from which to raise questions about long-standing historical traditions, changing models of quarantine, detention and containment of immigrants and border crossers. Such considerations formed the starting point for the conference “Border Crossing and Medicine: Quarantine, Detention and Containment in History and the Present”, which took place at the Freie Universität in Berlin from 2nd to 4th February 2017. This transdisciplinary workshop was sponsored by the Fritz Thyssen Foundation and supported by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF); it brought together an international and interdisciplinary group of scholars who discussed the role of medicine in controlling border crossing and border crossers.

The aim of the conference was to reflect upon the current stage of research on medical control technologies at the borders in the forms of quarantine, detention and containment, both in history and the present, as well as to raise new research questions. At this three-day conference, the participants discussed both theoretical approaches as well as diverse historical and contemporary examples. The focus was mostly on European and Mediterranean countries, their border surveillance through bio-political technologies as well as the developments in medical and biologi-

cal science. The respective case studies were based on archival sources and/or ethnographic fieldwork.

The first two sessions addressed “Quarantine in European History” both in imperial contexts and with respect to the emerging national states of the 19th and 20th centuries. URŠKA BRATOŽ (Koper) dealt with the prevention of infectious diseases in the Habsburg commercial port of Trieste, where with the six cholera pandemics during the 19th and the early 20th centuries the authorities had to find a balance between economic interests and the needs of public health. Bratož additionally analyzed the methods which were applied to prevent the introduction of cholera, such as the expurgation of goods and the quarantining of passengers and crews in special lazarettos outside the port facilities. SABINE JESNER (Graz) focused on quarantines at the Habsburg Cordon Sanitaire from the 1730s to the Austrian Plague Law of 1836. In this period travelers from the Ottoman Empire were allowed to enter the Monarchy solely through the *Contumaz*, a network of permanent quarantine stations, where they had to remain for a certain length of time. From a social-historical perspective she outlined various forms of preventive measures, the purification procedure as well as the technical and architectural characteristics of those facilities. The focus of DANIELA TEODORA SECHER (Graz) was

on public health measures that were developed and applied in Moldavia during the Russian Protectorate (1829-1856); as part of these measures, medical authorities engaged quarantine as the principal measure against contagious diseases. Sechel furthermore argued that the quarantine systems of the Danubian Principalities, Moldavia and Wallachia, vis-à-vis the Ottoman Empire, whose vassals – from the formal point of view – they still were, was also a political strategy to prepare for annexation by the Russian Empire. In contrast to their inland pendants, these quarantine facilities at the borders reflect the Russian goals of expanding into South East Europe and securing its geopolitical interest with respect to the Ottoman and Austrian Empires by using medical theories as camouflage.

The third session was about “Quarantine during WWII” and was dedicated to containment and medicine in the national socialist concentration camps. PAUL WEINDLING (Oxford Brookes) dealt with the Nazi concentration camps as sites of human experiments and containment for research purposes. He pointed out the distinction between those people experimented on, and returned to the main camp, and those held in secure experimental blocks as experimental research subjects. According to Weindling, the detention conditions were to prevent not only escape, evasion, and disruptive protest, but also the spread of infections. These issues were considered with regards to the “Department for *Fleckfieber* and Virus Research” at Buchenwald under the Hygiene Institute of the Waffen-SS. Public health officers, the so-called PHOs, were the focus of SABINE SCHLEIERMACHER (Berlin), who presented them as gatekeepers of the Third Reich. Their role was imbedded in a complex organizational framework doing health care policy. The control of epidemics and the handling of forced laborers (mining, agriculture and industry) were in the center of her analysis. PHOs were aware of their particular status; it allowed them to use their sphere of influence if they thought it was appropriate. Schleiermacher exam-

ined the fact that PHOs used their decision-making authority and range of competence to complain to local authorities about the particularly poor living conditions in camps and refused to implement decisions made by the NSDAP with reference to the legal situation. The evening lecture by AMY FAIRCHILD (Texas A&M School of Public Health) discussed the genealogy and politics of public health scares as collective social fear in the face of consequential disease outbreaks. She underlined that panic and fear were not just a social or moral construct used to control anxiety by defining “the other”. Instead, there is what Joanna Bourke calls “the language of fear” with a focus on anxieties about outbreaks beyond the natural borders to which collective fears are normally attached.

The first session of the second day was dedicated to “Maritime Quarantines: The Mediterranean Sea”. Starting with JOHN CHIRCOP (Malta), the panel introduced the audience to the Mediterranean under quarantine in a historical cross-section through the long 19th century. Chircop examined the complex relations that developed between quarantine institutions and the geopolitical borders imposed by European colonial powers whose geostrategic, imperial, and commercial expansion coincided with the use of rapid transport (by steam energy) which led to the swift dissemination of disease. Hence, lazarettos on the North African and the Levantine coasts were transformed into border mechanisms applying bio-political techniques such as isolating and screening people. In North Africa and the Levant, quarantine reconfigured the stereotype of the “contagious Arab” and thus legitimized a whole set of practices which detained, watched over, and “sanitized” Arab/Muslim pilgrims and travelers when crossing European and colonial borders. SARAH GREEN (Helsinki) discussed quarantine and the control over the movement of people, animals, and plants across the Aegean Sea from a social-anthropological perspective. She compared the EU’s policies on the control of disease across the

Aegean with Greek/Turkish and previous Ottoman policies. She argued that quarantine against disease comes in between politics, science, religion and territory, and at the nexus of epistemological, cosmological, and political thinking and action. She disentangled how the relation between places is understood through the different discourses and techniques across the Aegean.

The session on “Quarantine and Spaces of Isolation” pointed out cases in which the demarcation between quarantine and spaces of isolation are blurred. Going back to the 19th century, CHRISTIAN PROMITZER (Graz) enriched the conference by giving an insight into pictorial representations of quarantines in the Balkans and the Middle East (1828-1912). He presented contemporary plans to explain the changing spatial arrangement of quarantines in these two regions not least because of the development of germ theory and bacteriology. He concluded that since the 1890s, a deployment of quarantine facilities for certain risk groups can be observed – as was the case with the sanitary control of Mecca pilgrims for whose treatment he could present impressive photographic material. The presentation by SEVASTI TRUBETA (Berlin) turned to the present day and discussed contemporary refugee camps as sites of humanitarianism, disease prevention, and simultaneously abjectness. She addressed vaccination efforts associated with the institutionalised “welcoming culture” in Europe, and especially in Germany and Greece. Analysing the diverse preventive measures used to protect society from contagion as an indicator of the relationship between the community and the individual, the authorities and the citizenry, she argued (using a sociological approach) that in both case studies vaccination actions directed toward refugees are embedded in an integration project; however, their implementation suggests that the integration of refugees into the public health system occurs under different conditions than those for ordinary citizens. In the case of the refugees, disease prevention by vaccination becomes associated with

the overall surveillance of the refugees, whose spatial coordinate is the camp. The refugees’ exceptional treatment and the camp as an abject space render the line that separates the refugee camp from the quarantine blurry.

The session “Biometric Screening and Border Crossing” offered new impulses in the fields of biometric screening and border crossing. NADAV DAVIDOVITCH (Be’er Sheva) reconstructed the quarantine practices as they have evolved since the establishment of the state of Israel. Ending with current discussions of quarantine, he suggested that the way quarantine practices and debates (professional and public) are framed has masked out quarantines as being perceived as part of nation-building efforts in favor of a general model of securitization which also incorporates matters of public health concerns. TORSTEN HEINEMANN (Hamburg/ Berkeley) showed that since the 1990s, many countries around the world have begun to use DNA analysis to establish biological relatedness in family reunification cases. While the right of family members living abroad to join relatives in a given country has been an integral part of many countries’ immigration policies, today 21 nation-states resort to DNA tests as part of their decision-making on immigration. Presenting the results of an international research project on the use of DNA testing for family reunification in Europe, Heinemann compared these results with the situation in the US. In this context, he concluded that biological criteria and a biological concept of the family play an important role in decision-making on citizenship rights in national states.

The final session of the third day, “National Medical Control to Immigrants: Historical and Comparative Perspectives”, addressed medical control of immigration in several European countries from a comparative perspectives. SASCHA TOPP (Berlin) examined the medical screening of the “guest workers” in Germany (1950-1975). Based on archive documents, Topp focused on fac-

tors that can be addressed as the limits of control. He analyzed the recruitment process from five different perspectives: first, German industry and the labor market; second, the German authorities; third, the local conditions of selection procedures connected to the interests of the countries of origin; fourth, the German physicians; and, fifth, the applicants, who, for example, creatively faced the regulations with individual or collective strategies in order to successfully pass the examinations or even bypass the procedure. ROBERTA BIVINS (Warwick) elucidated the issues of illness, immigration, and the National Health Service in Britain after the Second World War. Especially since 1962, British law explicitly empowered the medical inspection and even the rejection as well as the exclusion of migrants. From a cultural perspective, Bivins rightly analysed the National Health Service as a national symbol and as a physical institution, and raised the question as to why medical control has itself proven politically elusive and persistently suspect in Britain.

HANI ZIBIDA (Yezreel Valley) in conclusion gave the floor to non-Jewish labor migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Israel. He showed that in contemporary Israel there are growing numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers from Africa, mainly from Sudan and Eritrea, whose experience is covered by a discourse of uncleanness in the context of a modern Israel. This public discourse concerns a symbolic issue rather than a concrete one. It does not engage these issues but broaches the topic as one of “objectivity” and hygiene. He pointed out that ideas of foreignness, being unhygienic and being disease-ridden became easily accepted.

The organizers ended the conference with concluding remarks and an extensive closing discussion. The conference promoted productive debates about several aspects of border crossing and medicine, especially themes of quarantine, detention, selection, isolation and containment both historically and in the present. The final debate

carved out new research perspectives and future networking. For example, the question of the selection of people – who had to pass certain medical examinations before being accepted on “this side of the border” – was revealed as a central theme and a conditional premise for research on different case studies and entanglements. A central question addressed by the participants was the need for future research to deal with the involvement of diverse actors besides the state authorities and medical professionals, and their own action in violating quarantine and containment.

Overall, the conference offered a significant contribution to research: Theoretically, by taking into account the differences between isolation and quarantine as concepts, and by focusing on the working out of systems and how the systems affect people and movements, and empirically, by laying out a great variety of case studies, relations and comparisons.

Whereas some presentations focused on the symptomatic parallel development of national states and classical quarantines, there was also agreement on the need to analytically overcome national historiography and other dichotomies. As an incentive, a “glocal” perspective, meaning the incorporation of regional developments into general issues of securitization with regard to public health concerns, could provide additional interesting perspectives beyond dominant areas such as Western and South Europe, the U.S. and the Mediterranean Area. Departing from the current state of research in the field, the conference opened a fruitful academic discussion and highlighted border crossing and medicine as a highly promising research object for upcoming conferences.

Conference Overview:

Panel: Quarantine in European history I

Chair: PAUL WEINDLING (Oxford Brookes)

URŠKA BRATOŽ (Koper): Cholera in Trieste in the 19th century: power and importance of quarantines in a Mediterranean port city

Panel: Quarantine in European history II

Chair: NADAV DAVIDOVITCH (Be'er Sheva)

SABINE JESNER (Graz): Discipline and the territorial state: the quarantines at the Habsburg Cordon Sanitaire until the Austrian Plague Law of 1836

DANIELA TEODORA SECHER (Graz): Quarantines and the empowerment of nation states: the role of the Moldavian example (1830-1856)

Panel: Quarantine during WWII

Chair: SASCHA TOPP (Berlin)

PAUL WEINDLING (Oxford Brookes): Quarantine and the Holocaust: Containment for Research

SABINE SCHLEIERMACHER (Berlin): Gatekeepers for the Third Reich: Public health officers, forced labour and control of epidemics

Evening lecture:

AMY FAIRCHILD (Texas A&M School of Public Health): Outbreak Anxieties: The Genealogy and Politics of Public Health Panics

Panel: Maritime Quarantine: The Mediterranean Sea

Chair: HANI ZUBIDA (Yezreel Valley)

JOHN CHIRCOP (Malta): The Mediterranean under Quarantine in the long 19th century

SARAH GREEN (Helsinki): Locating disease: quarantine and the movement of people animals and plants across the Aegean Sea

Panel: Quarantine and Spaces of Isolation

Chair: ROBERTA BIVINS (Warwick)

CHRISTIAN PROMITZER (Graz): Segmented space: pictorial representations of quarantine in the Balkans and in the Middle East (1828-1912)

SEVASTI TRUBETA (Berlin): Vaccination vs. Quarantine? Humanitarianism and Disease Prevention in Contemporary Refugee Camps in Europe

Panel: Biometric Screening and border crossing

Chair: JOHN CHIRCOP (Malta)

NADAV DAVIDOVITCH (Be'er Sheva): Quarantine in Context: From Mass Immigration to Biosecurity in Israel

TORSTEN HEINEMANN (Hamburg/ Berkeley): Cellular Migration: DNA Testing and Family Reunification in the United States and Europe

Evening lecture and Round Table:

Networking and Platforms

Panel: National Medical Control to Immigrants: Historical and Comparative perspectives

Chair: TORSTEN HEINEMANN (Hamburg/ Berkeley)

SASCHA TOPP (Berlin): Limits of Control: Medical Selection of Migrant Workers in postwar Europe, ca. 1950-1975

ROBERTA BIVINS (Warwick): Screening Suspects and Suspect Screening: Illness, Immigration, and the National Health Service in Britain

HANI ZUBIDA (Yezreel Valley): A Question of Cleanliness/ Hygiene, Culture or Nationality? Non-Jewish labor migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Israel

Conclusions, Round table: New research perspectives and future networking

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