LOCUSTS OF POWER: BORDERS AND ENVIRONMENT IN THE LATE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND AFTER, 1858-1939

My current book project is one of the first environmental histories of the late Ottoman Empire. It focuses on the region known as the Jazira, the borderlands stretching today across northeast Syria, southeast Turkey, and northwest Iraq. The project uncovers the environmental coherence of this politically embattled region from the late Ottoman to the immediate post-Ottoman period (1858-1939) by following the locust, the insect that over those decades repeatedly took advantage of the region’s political ecology. Not only was the Jazira a mix of cultivated and uncultivated arid lands, it was also divided between Ottoman provinces and, subsequently, British Iraq, French Syria, and republican Turkey. What this meant was that locusts used the region’s agroecology as well as human political divisions to thwart dreams of transforming the Jazira into a breadbasket. With each chapter centered on one group of moving people who were compared to locusts--among them Arab and Kurdish nomads, Armenian deportees, and Assyrian refugees--the project traces how a region slated for nomadic settlement in the nineteenth century became the killing fields of the Armenian genocide and then some of the Middle East’s most agriculturally productive lands in the twentieth century. All the while, locusts emerge not only as organisms that forced humans to move and starve, but also creatures upon which humans projected their own anxieties, hopes, and fears. Altogether, the project revises our understanding of borders in the late Ottoman Empire and regional history, exposing a longer trajectory of state violence, agrarian development, and popular challenge with reverberations into the present. *Locusts of Power* presents this unique view based on archival materials, fiction, memoirs, and newspapers in Arabic, English, French, German, Modern Turkish, and Ottoman.

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To attend, CLICK HERE Thursday October 8th at 2:00 PM
Meeting ID: 818 6023 8641       Passcode: 887876