

Kitap İncelemesi

DANGEROUS GIFTS: IMPERIALISM, SECURITY, AND CIVIL WARS IN THE LEVANT, 1798-1864 (2021)*

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About the Author and the Book

Ozan Ozavci (MA, PhD Manchester) has a background in political science, international relations and intellectual history. Ozavci is Assistant Professor of Transimperial History at Utrecht University, and associate member at the Centre d'Études Turques, Ottomanes, Balkaniques et Centrasiatiques in Paris. To this date, Dr Ozavci has conducted research in more than forty archives in Europe, Russia, the United States and the Middle East, which include the archives of major oil companies (e.g. Shell in The Hague), transimperial banks (e.g. the Imperial Ottoman Bank), museums (e.g. The Hermitage in Saint Petersburg) as well as private collections (e.g. Calouste S. Gulbenkian archives in Lisbon). Following the completion of his titled *Dangerous Gifts: Imperialism, Security, and Civil Wars in the Levant, 1798-1864* (Oxford University Press, 2021), he's currently finalizing his third monograph (provisionally titled *The Secrets of Pera*, under contract with Bloomsbury, 2022) that looks into the two Istanbul embassies of the Scottish diplomat Sir Robert Liston. In addition to these, Ozavci is co-convenor of the Lausanne Project and the Security History Network.

His work, *Dangerous Gifts: Imperialism, Security, and Civil Wars in the Levant, 1798-1864*, was published by Oxford University Press in 2021. Although we feel the meaning of the title throughout the text, Ozavci clarifies this situation in the conclusion. Following the author's preference, we will first give general information about the book, then analyze the chapters in detail and then move on to the conclusion and discussions.

Ozavci began with a foreword, explaining how what began as a microhistory turned into a study of nearly a century of European Great Power interventionism in the Levant, its acceptance and consequences, and the enduring patterns and cultures of security. The author sees his narrative as a third way. The driving force here is the concept of security. The author, who shows the Levant as the spatial boundary of the

* <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/dangerous-gifts-9780198852964?cc=nl&lang=en&c.#>, <https://www.uu.nl/staff/HOOzavci/CV>, <https://ata.bogazici.edu.tr/aturk-institute-book-talks-ozan-ozavci-dangerous-gifts-imperialism-security-and-civil-wars-levant>

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book, does not prefer the term Middle East throughout the text, which was not in circulation as of the period he analyzes.

After the preface, Ozavci continued with the introduction. The author begins with the European commissioners who were the first to establish an international security institution in the Levant. They were there as actors of a ‘humanitarian intervention’ after the conflicts in Syria in the summer of 1860. But until that period, there had been many other foreign interventions, such as military occupations and territorial divisions by the Great Powers from the late 18th to the mid-19th century. This is the narrative of the book. The actors of this narrative are not only European states. What distinguishes his book from other studies is that it gives voice to both the Ottoman imperial center and the local Levantine inhabitants. In his introduction, the author states that his claim throughout the book is to foreground how imperialism and security acted as organizing principles of international relations from the late 18th century to at least the mid-19th century. The introduction is also the part where the author’s conceptual framework is laid out. The Eastern Question is particularly emphasized here. Seeing the Eastern Question as a historical embodiment of the imperialism-security nexus, the author does not remain in the loop of classical narratives. The author emphasizes throughout the book that a transimperial security culture is spontaneously woven around the Eastern Question where geostrategic and economic undercurrents are intertwined.

Before moving on to the chapters, one more conceptualization of the author should be mentioned. For this book is, in the author’s words, a “complex history” of European interventions in the Eastern Mediterranean in the era of the Eastern Question. In order for these interventions to occur, certain conflict dynamics have to take place, which the author characterizes as civil war. Acknowledging that there is no universally satisfactory explanation of the concept of civil war, the author states that he prefers this term because the physical struggle took place between the subjects/citizens of a polity (the Ottoman Empire) and within its borders. Thus, he aimed to establish a connection between singularities. However, the author has been criticized in this regard.¹

The book consists of three parts and their sub-chapters. The first part consists of three chapters, the second part of five chapters and the third part of five chapters, thus making a total of thirteen chapters. The book ends with a conclusion and bibliography. The author did not follow a sequential chronological order. Although the fragmentary and loosely temporalized division may confuse the reader, the author has constructed a thematic unity in order to fulfill his purpose. By examining the table of contents, many people can understand how a holistic picture can emerge from the combination of the individual parts.

1 Jens Hanssen, “Jens Hanssen’s Review of *Dangerous Gifts: Imperialism, Security, and Civil Wars in the Levant, 1798–1864*,” *The American Historical Review*, Volume:128, Issue:2, 2023, p. 1068.

Dangerous Gifts: Imperialism, Security, and Civil Wars in the Levant, 1798-1864

The first part is titled *Avant Le Mot*. Immediately afterwards, the first chapter begins with *Crossing the Mediterranean*. This section is about Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, which began in 1798.² By revealing the first invasion of the Levant and how the first intervention was legitimized, the author presents us with many patterns that we will encounter throughout the 19th century. The author goes beyond the classical narratives by showing the political and commercial grounds for the invasion through the intra-elite debate in France between the proponents of the invasion of Egypt -the interventionists- and the opponents -the conservationists-. The author reveals that the positions of the interventionists or those in the camp against it are meaningful within the framework of the perceived weakness of the Ottoman Empire, which became more visible from the end of the 18th century onwards, and the question of what could be done against it, thus shedding light on the Eastern Question through the Egyptian occupation.

Chapter two is entitled *The Circle of Justice and the Napoleonic Wars*. In this chapter, the author turns to the other side of the invasion, the Ottoman Empire, and explores what Napoleon's action meant for the Ottoman world. Considering how Sultan Selim III and his ministers perceived and reacted to the French enterprise, as the author puts it, allows us to see the limits of the French imperial vision and knowledge of the 'Orient' and the workings of the various relational dynamics that constituted the emerging Eastern Question. One of Ozavci's claims throughout the book is that the Eastern Question has intersubjective relational dynamics, a perspective that distinguishes the book from one-sided narratives.

The third chapter is titled *The Chase in the Desert: Empires and Civil War in Egypt, 1801-1812*. In this chapter, the author focuses on what happened in Egypt after the French invasion. The author argues that the civil war in Egypt in 1801-12 was not only an early example of the convergence of global imperial struggles and local animosities, but also one of the earliest examples of proxy wars in the Levant. The parties were Britain, France, the Ottoman Empire, and the Egyptian Mamluks of the local scene, with Mehmet Ali emerging from the chaos as a force to be reckoned with. Thus, the Egyptian region had become an area of inter-imperial rivalry even after the French occupation. This rivalry led to what the author calls a civil war. At this point, an emphasis of the author is important. According to the author, just like Mount Lebanon, which he discusses in Chapter III, Egypt also witnessed civil wars from time to time before it became the focal point of the Eastern Question. In short, he stated that instability and insecurity did not only arise after the interventions of European states.

2 In these months when the release of the Napoleon movie is approaching, popular readers who want to read the historical background of the occupation can find it in this book.

The first part of the book explores the French invasion of Egypt in 1798, how it incorporated the Levant into the transimperial security culture, and the political developments and insecurities that emerged in the aftermath of the war.

The second part is titled *The Invention of The Eastern Question*. This section also has sub-sections within itself. Continuing with the fourth part, the author titled this chapter *A New Era? The Vienna Order and the Ottoman World*. In this chapter, the author now moves on to a new era. This period is the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the establishment of a new order. The author characterizes this system as one in which the states that defined themselves as Great Powers assumed administrative responsibilities in order to prevent the devastation brought about by these wars from happening again and developed the understanding that security was a public good that could be achieved through cooperation among themselves.

In the context of the book, what interests us here is what are the reflections of this new era, which provides peace and security especially in Europe, on the rest of the world. Did this system mean the beginning of a new era in the Levant? In this chapter, the author first reveals what the Eastern Question was like in the 1810s. Here, the author shows us that the Ottoman Empire did not want to be included in the Vienna system of its own will. Instead of the traditional narrative on this subject, the author presents factors that are more descriptive and enable us to understand what actually happened. The general theme of the book continues with a subtitle describing the Navarin Intervention, an intervention carried out during this period. In this respect, the author asks the question: What were the effects of the Ottoman Empire's exclusion from the Order of Vienna on the Levant? After all, although this order was based on peaceful principles in Europe, it could take different manifestations - occupation, armed intervention, etc. - elsewhere. One of the author's emphasis here is very important: "The Vienna Order helped to prevent, albeit with partial success, the great European Powers that made up the European Harmony from intervening and invading the Levant on their own" (p. 116). All these developments led Sultan Mahmud II and his ministers to realize that the dynamics of Euro-Ottoman relations were now different under the Vienna Order. Europe's imprudent provision of security in a foreign territory, where the more immediate interests of the Powers were paramount, tended to create new vulnerabilities in the Levant and greater demands for security in Europe. In the next chapter, the author moves on to these insecurities.

The fifth chapter is titled *Old Enemies: Cairo, Istanbul, and the Civil War of 1832-1833*. In this chapter, the author discusses Mehmet Ali Pasha's war against Istanbul. The relational dynamics that he tries to reveal throughout the book are also present here. One of these dynamics is intra-elite rivalries. Because these rivalries are one side of the Eastern Question. While in the first chapter the author shows this through the interventionists and conservationists, here he reveals it through the rivalry between Mehmet Ali Pasha and Hüsrev Pasha. The rivalry between the two men was not the

sole cause of the violence. According to the author, their emotions only served as a catalyst for the political turmoil that resulted from a series of developments that irrevocably damaged relations between Cairo and Constantinople. At this point, the author analyzes how the Egyptian Pasha's challenge to Constantinople through Syria and his advance towards the capital affected the relations between the Great Powers and the Ottoman Empire and among themselves through Russia's assistance to Constantinople. Because, according to the author, the civil war in the Ottoman world thus acquired a transimperial character and led to a Europe-wide crisis, bringing the Great Powers to the brink of war more than once.

The sixth chapter is titled *The Russian Peace in the Levant*. One of the topics that the author emphasizes from time to time throughout the book is the changing policies and perspectives of the Great Powers towards the Ottoman Empire. In the case of Russia, he illustrates this with the ebb and flow between the idea of a complete disintegration of the sultan's empire and the policy of a weak neighbour that aimed to keep the Ottoman Empire whole but still weak. This is the period when Russia improved its relations with Istanbul and pursued this weak neighbour policy (the Ottoman project). This led to the anger of other states in Europe. According to the author, the fear that the balance of power in Europe might be upset brought the Powers to the brink of war in the summer of 1833 for the first time since the Napoleonic Wars. In this respect, the author presents a discussion of this new chapter of the Eastern Question, in which the war between Cairo and Constantinople and the rivalry between Mehmed Ali and Hüseyin turned into an inter-imperial stalemate.

The seventh chapter is entitled *An Unusual Quest for Revenge: Civilization, Commerce, and Reform*. According to the author, the literature on the final phase of the Eastern crisis in the 1830s usually focuses on the policy of one or more leaders of the European Great Powers (including Lord Palmerston, Prince Metternich, Count Nesselrode and Adolphe Thiers). Noting that there are many impressive studies detailing how these 'great men' sought to restore order in Europe and the Levant, how they spearheaded bureaucratic and military reforms in Constantinople, and how they then brought an end to the crisis through their shrewd diplomacy, loyalty or opposition to European Harmony, the author shifts his projection to Ottoman bureaucrats. In this chapter, he takes a prosopographical approach to the experience of the Ottoman statesman and diplomat Mustafa Reşid. Ozavci shows Mustafa Reşid's influence in themes such as the adoption of the idea of 'civilization' in the official Ottoman lexicon, the further opening of Ottoman markets to the global capitalist economy, and the promulgation of the 1839 Gulhane Edict, which committed to guaranteeing the security of life, safety and property of all Ottoman subjects. However, the author's most important emphasis in this chapter is the role played by Mustafa Reşid in the solution of the Egyptian problem.

The eighth chapter is *Return of the Ashes: The Concert of Europe and the 1840 Intervention*. In this chapter, the author reveals how European states came to the point of intervening in the Istanbul-Cairo Ottoman civil war. In short, in this chapter, Ozavci focused on the intervention of European Harmony in the civil war in the Ottoman world. One of his emphases here is on how Russia moved from the position it gained over the Ottoman Empire to the point of acting together with other European powers. In the same way, it also shows the dilemma that France fell into. Because rebellions broke out in many places, especially in Mount Lebanon, against the rule of Mehmet Ali Pasha in Syria, which France supported. The detail here, according to the author, is the fact that the French were the historical protectors of the Maronites, the Catholic Christians of Lebanon who had revolted against Mehmed Ali. In short, by 1840, it was an opportune moment for the Ottoman Empire and, by extension, for security in Europe, to remove the insecurity created by Mehmet Ali Pasha. At this point, the author showed us how a new intervention emerged in the Levant and how the armed resistance and then the diplomatic resistance of the Egyptian administration was broken. Ozavci also touches upon the importance of the idea of “civilization” in this context and its role in legitimizing the interventions. Because, as the author will reveal in other chapters, the European Great Powers will once again intervene in Syria in the name of ‘civilization’ and ‘humanity’ and to solve the endless Eastern Question.

The ninth chapter is the first part of Part III of the book. The subtitle of Part III is *The Mountain*. Chapter 9 is entitled *Beginnings: Mount Lebanon before 1840*. In this chapter, the author focuses on Mount Lebanon, which made the 1840 intervention possible and whose struggles helped to break the diplomatic resistance of Paris and Cairo to the Quadruple Alliance and the Porte. This is because Mount Lebanon in particular and the Syrian region in general will be the setting for future chapters. According to the author, who states that many studies have been conducted on Mount Lebanon, his own work expresses a different point. Accordingly, Ozavci views Mount Lebanon through the transformative role of persistent vectors such as the Eastern Question that make violence more complex, persistent and difficult to contain. Of course, the author’s view of the Eastern Question is intersubjective and relational, as he emphasizes throughout the book. In this context, he does not present an exclusively European narrative, but assesses the period and developments from the perspective of the Ottoman Empire and the Lebanese as local actors. Ozavci tries to explain how the Eastern Question reached Mount Lebanon and how it extended to the estates of the feudal lords or so-called muqatadjis, who for centuries formed the core of Lebanese society in Greater Syria.

Another aspect that distinguishes the author from other authors is his claim that sectarian segregation in Mount Lebanon began to form before the 1840 intervention. According to Ozavci, the class and sectarian identities of the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon changed and crystallized since the beginning of the 19th century

due to various factors. It was therefore the existing rift in the social order that provided European and Ottoman imperial actors with channels for influence, intervention and control, and unique opportunities to pursue their interests.

The tenth chapter is titled *The Age of the Eastern Question*. In this chapter, the author looks at the aftermath of the 1840 intervention in Syria, which was an important break on the road towards the end of Egyptian rule. After the end of Egyptian rule, what would be the position of the muqatadjis and their tenants, the peasants? How would order be restored in an environment where old feudal ties were weakening and egalitarian ideas were spreading? Mount Lebanon would be the center of many civil wars between 1841 and 1860. The author devotes this chapter to the conflicts between the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon in general and the Druze and Maronites in particular. According to Ozavci, unlike all previous civil wars on the Mountain, the violence in 1841 and beyond had an inter-imperial character. Claiming that Mount Lebanon was incorporated into the transimperial security culture in the early 1840s, the author reveals how the Powers intervened in the internal problems and solutions of the Mountain. The most important instrument at this point was conferences, whereby competition was mitigated through cooperation.

The author focuses particularly on the policies of France and Britain. France wanted to maintain its position as the historical protector of the Maronites as well as its centuries-old dominance in the Levant. Britain, on the other hand, wanted to maintain its political and commercial position in the region, which it had been actively involved in since the turn of the century, especially after 1840. At this point, Mount Lebanon became a geostrategic battleground for the two great powers. According to the author, all of this drew the boundaries of the Eastern Question period in Lebanon. Ozavci includes the positions and reactions of European states and local Lebanese actors, as well as the center of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the author presents us the backdrop of the civil war that would take place in Mount Lebanon in September 1841, and shows the aftermath of the war from the perspective and reactions of these actors. After the civil war of 1841, the author expresses the pressures and collaborations of the Great Powers on Bab-ı Ali in order to restore governance and security in the Mount and presents us how security was ensured in the Levant at that time. However, the post-war order would also bring new insecurities.

The eleventh chapter is titled *The Two Wars: Crimea and Mount Lebanon*. The Crimean War was the first inter-imperial war between the Great Powers since the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815. While some historians argue that this event symbolized the collapse of the European Harmony, the author offers an alternative assessment and claims that the Harmony continued to exist after the Crimean War. Because, according to Ozavci, it was fought for the preservation of existing security models, self-restraint among the Powers, multilateral action and the preservation of the European balance of power by ensuring Ottoman territorial integrity. Empha-

sizing the fragility of the post-war peace period, however, the author shows that it was precisely during this period that existing and new tensions emerged in Mount Lebanon. In this chapter, the author examines the global and local dynamics that once again led to violence in Ottoman Lebanon, with an emphasis on the new consequences of the Eastern Question in the 1850s that led to the Crimean War and its shattering effects in the Levant. In this context, the author first describes the economic, demographic and cultural changes that the Lebanese region underwent between 1845, when order was restored, and the civil war in 1860. Because all these changes and their embodiments set the stage for the civil war of 1860. In May-June 1860, the most devastating class/sectarian civil war of the century took place in Mount Lebanon. However, this civil war was neither a war of religions nor a total war of entire societies. While there are many narratives about the causes of this war, the author argues that what matters most is the role of the Powers and the Porte in determining the next step to bring order to Lebanon.

The twelfth chapter is titled *An Untimely Return of the Eastern Question?* In this chapter, the author analyzes the events of 1860 in Syria and the reactions of the Great Powers. The most important issue that the author emphasizes here is the conflict between the states that were in favour of an international intervention and those who opposed it. While France and Russia supported the intervention, Britain changed its position several times. The Ottoman Empire believed that under the terms of the Treaty of Paris, the European Powers should respect the territorial integrity of the Sultan and the internal affairs of his empire. According to the author, the discursive practices employed by the Powers and the Porte during the 40 days between the reports of Christian ‘massacres’ from Mount Lebanon and the final decision on whether to send European troops to the Levant constituted a unique episode in the Eastern Question, which suddenly returned to the center of inter-imperial diplomacy. At this point, the author shows us the controversial face of the concept of intervention as articulated by international jurists since the beginning of the 19th century. He explains how public support for an intervention in the Ottoman Empire was obtained and legalized. The author also explains what the Porte did in response to all this - such as sending Foreign Minister Fuad Pasha to the region as an extraordinary envoy to restore order - and finally reveals that the five great powers finally agreed to intervene in Syria. Again at this point, two treaties were signed with the intervention of the conferences. So how did the Ottoman Empire agree to an armed intervention? This is one of the aspects of the book that distinguishes it from other works. The author never neglects economic issues and presents the economic reasons behind the Ottoman Empire’s acceptance of such an intervention, continuing in the next chapter. The author sees this as a defining feature of the Eastern Question and the transimperial security culture around it.

Chapter thirteen is titled *Returning the Sense of Security: The International Commission on Syria*. In this chapter, the author discusses the intervention to restore se-

curity in Syria in accordance with the protocols signed between the powers in the previous chapter. In this context, he focuses on the French military campaign and the International Commission on Syria, which was composed of representatives of the five great powers. Comparing the importance of this military campaign for France with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, the author concludes that the aim of both was to secure French interests in the Levant. There was, however, an important difference between the two periods. The French army was acting on behalf of the other four great powers of Europe and with the sultan's consent, however reluctant. In short, there was no unilateral action. Moreover, unlike in 1798, in 1860 the French army was accompanied by an international commission composed of delegates from each of the major European powers as well as the Ottoman Empire. This chapter concretely demonstrates how the culture of security in the Levant after the establishment of European Harmony, which the author emphasizes throughout the book, was embodied in the Levant. The international commission - consisting of five delegates and Fuad Pasha, the foreign minister of the Ottoman Empire - is an important subject of this chapter.

He begins the introduction of the book with the representatives of this commission and returns to them in the final chapter. In this last part of the book, Ozavci discusses their experiences and how their tasks were shaped on the ground, their efforts to control the operations of French troops, to find ways to prevent the recurrence of violence, to monitor the processes of relief, punishment and compensation, and to propose new administrative models in Mount Lebanon. The five great powers now had a much greater say in maintaining security in the Levant, while keeping their imperial goals and interests on the agenda through their instructions to their representatives. For me, it is in this last part that the author says the most crucial sentence of the book: "The processes of retribution, reparations, and administrative reconstruction inevitably became politicized and tied the fate of security in Syria to the compromise of imperial interests (p. 319)." A sentence that summarizes the whole chapter, perhaps the book and even the future. The author concludes this chapter by describing the compromise reached by the great powers and the Ottoman administration over the governance of Mount Lebanon. However, the new system was able to establish peace only after it was revised in accordance with local realities.

The concluding chapter of the book is titled Epilogue. Ozavci has presented the alleged Great Power interventions in the Levant for the benefit of the local population and how they exacerbated the disasters affecting the region. In this chapter, the author draws four general conclusions and offers an assessment. Since discussing these conclusions here would be like rehashing chapters, we will focus only on the author's assessment. The author argues that lessons from the early history of Great Power interventions in the Levant can be a means of understanding ourselves, organizing our age, and thus transcending it. This is because, he argues, the debates of that

period are at the core of today's debates on foreign intervention. "The experience accumulated in the period between the late eighteenth century and the early 1860s has served as a model or inspiration for generations". He argues that a non-productive security culture, in which historical actors have changed but within certain patterns, is common between the present and the past, recognizing us as their contemporaries. At this point, he gave the example of the US intervention in Iraq in 2003. Writing about this intervention, Fouad Ajami, characterized the war as a 'a foreigner's gift' to Iraqis.³ However, given the presence of insecurities after the intervention, he titled his book 'dangerous gift'.

The book provides the reader with an enormous amount of information as it is based on a wide range of archival sources and secondary sources that dominate the literature. It also presents us with the shortcomings of the traditional and revisionist literature on the region, showing that, as the author says, a "third way" is indeed possible. In contrast to the neglect of the international system in history books and the 'presentism' that dominates international relations books, this book blends both. Another valuable aspect of the book is that it gives a voice to the Ottoman Empire, which has been neglected in European literature. Lebanese actors have spoken in many texts, but the voice of the Egyptian Mamluks is often barely heard. All of this is included in the book.

However, a few criticisms are also possible. The work is a nuanced historical study, but the loose chronology makes it difficult to read. Another aspect of a topic may appear in later chapters. It makes sense in a thematic context, but it is necessary to keep the reader's mind open at all times. Also, is it necessary to include the contemporary Middle East and interventions in the conclusion? Is there a need to legitimize examining the interventions in the relevant period of the book with today? The period in question is valuable in itself and deserves to be analyzed. Besides all these, I think the contribution of the book to the literature is very important.

Kaynakça

Ozavci, Ozan (2021). *Dangerous Gifts: Imperialism, Security, and Civil Wars in the Levant, 1798-1864*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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Etik Onay: Bu çalışma etik onay gerektiren herhangi bir insan veya hayvan araştırması içermemektedir.

3 Fouad Ajami, *The Foreigner's Gift: The Americans, the Arabs and the Iraqis in Iraq*, New York: Free Press, 2006.

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