

Imperial Borderlands

What are the institutions that govern border spaces and how do they impact long-term economic and social development? This book focuses on the Habsburg military frontier zone, which originated in the sixteenth century as an instrument for protecting the empire's southern border against the threat of the Ottoman Empire and which lasted until the 1880s. The book outlines the conditions under which this extractive institution affected development, showing how locals were forced to work as soldiers and exposed to rigid communal property rights, an inflexible labor market, and discrimination when it came to the provision of public infrastructure. While the formal institutions set up during the military colony disappeared, their legacy can be traced in political attitudes and social norms even today with the violence and abuses exercised by the imperial government transformed into distrust in public authorities, limited political involvement, and low social capital.

Dr. Bogdan G. Popescu is Assistant Professor at John Cabot University, Rome, Italy. He completed his PhD in the Department of Political Science at the University of Chicago and has held postdoctoral positions at Princeton University and Bocconi University.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-36516-1 — Imperial Borderlands
Bogdan G. Popescu
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

Cambridge Studies in Economic History - Second Series
Cambridge Studies in Economic History

EDITORIAL BOARD

Gareth Austin: University of Cambridge
Stephen Broadberry: University of Oxford
Naomi R. Lamoreaux: Yale University
Sheilagh Ogilvie: University of Oxford
Şevket Pamuk: Boğaziçi University

Cambridge Studies in Economic History comprises stimulating and accessible economic history which actively builds bridges to other disciplines. Books in the series will illuminate why the issues they address are important and interesting, place their findings in a comparative context, and relate their research to wider debates and controversies. The series will combine innovative and exciting new research by younger researchers with new approaches to major issues by senior scholars. It will publish distinguished work regardless of chronological period or geographical location

A complete list of titles in the series can be found at:

www.cambridge.org/economichistory

Imperial Borderlands

*Institutions and Legacies of the Habsburg Military
Frontier*

Bogdan G. Popescu
John Cabot University

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-36516-1 — Imperial Borderlands
Bogdan G. Popescu
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)



Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India
103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,
a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009365161
DOI: 10.1017/9781009365215

© Bogdan G. Popescu 2024

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions
of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take
place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

First published 2024

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

*A Cataloging-in-Publication data record for this book is available
from the Library of Congress*

ISBN 978-1-009-36516-1 Hardback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence
or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this
publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will
remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>List of Tables</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
1 Historical States, Imperialism, and Development	1
2 Imperialism and Extractive Institutions: A Theoretical Framework	27
2.1 The Literature on Extractive Institutions	29
2.2 The Argument: Empire, Extraction, and Society	33
2.3 Theory Applied: The Military Colony in the Habsburg Empire	44
3 The Habsburg Military Frontier	66
3.1 The Slavonian and the Croatian Frontier	69
3.2 Frontier Institutions in the Banat, Uskok District, and Serbia	76
3.3 Frontier Institutions in Transylvania	77
3.4 The Military Colony: Persistence and Change	81
4 Military Colonialism and Economic Development	100
4.1 Dimensions of Military Colonialism	100
4.2 Measuring the Legacies of Military Colonialism	102
4.3 Socioeconomic Processes: Land Inequality and Communal Properties	117
4.4 Alternative Explanations	132
5 Colonial Institutions and Social Norms	138
5.1 Family Governance: Family Clans and the State	138
5.2 Empire and Clan Politics: The Varžić Family Clan	151
5.3 Associations, Social Capital, and Public Goods	161

vi	Contents	
6	Lasting Legacies Political Attitudes and Social Capital	165
6.1	Attitudes Stemming from Communal Properties	168
6.2	Attitudes Stemming from Historical Under-provision of Public Goods	186
6.3	Transmission of Norms and Attitudes Over Time	192
7	Beyond the Habsburgs	201
7.1	The Russian Military Colonies	203
7.2	Military Colonialism in French Algeria	213
	Epilogue	227
	<i>Appendix A:</i> Supplement for Chapter 4	240
	<i>Appendix B:</i> Supplement for Chapter 6	263
	<i>Bibliography</i>	272
	<i>Index</i>	306

Figures

1.1	Political borders in 1739 and satellite luminosity in 2013	<i>page 3</i>
3.1	The Ottoman – Habsburg border fortresses in the 1550s	71
3.2	The Ottoman – Habsburg frontier, 1699–1718	78
3.3	The Ottoman – Habsburg frontier, 1762–1873	80
3.4	Officer uniforms from the frontier zone, 1762	82
3.5	Memorandum excerpt by Joseph II to Marshall Hadick	91
3.6	The size of the private industry within the military colony, 1830–1842	94
3.7	The market to population ratio within the military colony, 1830–1842	95
4.1	Percentage soldiers in the military and civilian areas in the Habsburg Empire, 1857	101
4.2	Ratio population/families in the military and civilian areas in the Habsburg Empire, 1880	103
4.3	Railroad distribution in the military and civilian areas in the Habsburg Empire, 1879	104
4.4	Balance of geographic variables	109
4.5	Road map for the empirical results	111
4.6	Effect of military colonialism on historical roads and railroads, 1869–2017	113
4.7	Effect of military colonialism on births and access to hospitals for women, 1964–1970	115
4.8	Effect of military colonialism on access to water, sewers, and income, 2011	116
4.9	Effect of military colonialism on land inequality, 1900	121
4.10	Effect of military colonialism on land inequality, 1900 – coefficient plot	123
4.11	Effect of military colonialism on land inequality, 1910	124
4.12	Effect of military colonialism on land inequality, 1910 – coefficient plot	125
4.13	Effect of military colonialism on communal properties, 1880–1895	127
		vii

viii List of Figures

4.14	Effect of military colonialism on occupational structure, 1857–1910	130
5.1	The Varžić family tree	153
5.2	The Varžić land	157
5.3	The Varžić annual spending	158
6.1	Guidelines for cultural attitudes	166
6.2	Location of LITS survey respondents, 2006–2016	172
6.3	Effect of military colonialism on in-out-group trust and corruption	173
6.4	Effect of military colonialism on risk-taking	181
6.5	Effect of military colonialism on preference for authoritarian structures	183
6.6	Effect of military colonialism on women’s roles	187
6.7	Effect of military colonialism on trust in institutions	191
6.8	Effect of military colonialism on political participation	192
6.9	Effect of military colonialism on in-out-group trust and nepotism cohort analysis	196
6.10	Effect of military colonialism on risk-taking cohort analysis	197
6.11	Effect of military colonialism on political participation cohort analysis	198
7.1	Approximate location of Cossack armies in the Russian Empire from the fourteenth to the twentieth century	206
7.2	Russian military colonies in the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century	211
7.3	French military and civilian colonies in Algeria, 1844	220
A.1	Historical and modern Krajina	254

Tables

2.1	Components and intensity of extraction	<i>page</i> 41
3.1	Number of days at the contingency stations	88
5.1	Military colonial booklet prototype from 1606	144
A.1	Covariate balance – Geography and historical economic activity	241
A.2	Modern and historical selective migration	243
A.3	Historical and modern selective migration by Serbs	244
A.4	Historical and modern selective migration by Croats	244
A.5	Historical roads and railroads, 1869–2017	245
A.6	Births and access to hospitals for women, 1964–1970	246
A.7	Effect of military colonialism on access to water, sewers, and income, 2011	248
A.8	Effect of military colonialism on land inequality, 1900	249
A.9	Effect of military colonialism on land inequality, 1910	250
A.10	Effect of military colonialism on communal properties, 1880 and 1895	252
A.11	Effect of military colonialism on occupational structure, 1857–1910	253
A.12	Alternative explanations: Effect of World War II	255
A.13	Alternative explanations: War in Yugoslavia	256
A.14	Alternative explanations: Wars – perceptions	257
A.15	Alternative explanations: Communist collectivization	257
A.16	Alternative explanations: Perception of communist torture	258
A.17	Alternative explanations: Distance to the Ottoman/Bosnian border	259
A.18	Alternative explanations: Ethnic/religious fractionalization and government transparency	260
A.19	Alternative explanations: Involvement in military affairs	261
B.1	Effect of military colonialism on in-out-group trust and nepotism	264
B.2	Effect of military colonialism on collectivist attitudes	265
B.3	Effect of military colonialism on risk-taking	266

x List of Tables

B.4	Effect of military colonialism on preference for authoritarian structures	267
B.5	Effect of military colonialism on women's roles	268
B.6	Effect of military colonialism on trust in institutions	269
B.7	Effect of military colonialism on political participation	270

Acknowledgments

This book focuses on an understudied topic that has remained somewhat elusive of extractive institutions. The literature in the past twenty years has mostly concentrated on the ways in which European colonial empires created institutions in their territories overseas for monetary gains. Yet much less literature discussed the possibility that European empires could use similar extractive strategies only on part of their population. Thus, this book attempts to fill that gap by paying close attention to the modus operandi of extractive institutions in a particular space – the Habsburg Empire – and within a particular context – the forced military enrollment of borderland dwellers.

The idea of this project came in the last two years of my PhD at the University of Chicago, while trying to question the usual tropes about the legacies of the Habsburg and Ottoman empires: the Ottoman Empire had “bad” institutions, which is why Ottoman successor states should feature lower development, while the Habsburg Empire had “good” bureaucracy and institutions, and thus, Habsburg successor states should be better off in the long run. A simple visual examination using satellite luminosity within the two empires showed substantial variation within the two polities. The pattern that got my attention is the lower luminosity in the region which constituted the Habsburg border with the Ottoman Empire, which I subsequently discovered was not coincidental. The southwestern part of the Habsburg Empire was a military encampment for over three centuries, acting as a buffer zone between the two empires. This led me to further dig into the intricate history of the regions that today coincide with Croatia, Serbia, and Romania. The institutional setup and the hierarchies created by the state match very closely the hierarchies created by colonial empires overseas. Some might dismiss and find problematic the comparisons between the sea-based and land-based empires on the grounds that hierarchies describing the two imperial models are fundamentally different, with the former usually being based on race. As some economic historians have argued, race is only one of the many characteristics that might create

xii Acknowledgments

power asymmetries. Other characteristics could be religion, social status, affiliation to a particular group, or possession of specific sociopolitical privileges defined by the center. The creation of the legal category – the *Grenzer* and the subsequent association with negative characteristics such as “savage and wild,” together with the imperial needs of having troops always ready to act – is what kept this institution in place for over 300 years on the southwestern side. Thus, borderland dwellers in the Habsburg frontier experienced particular kinds of discrimination in the form of limited access to public goods and incomplete property rights.

I write this book aspiring to make a theoretical contribution to both political science and economics by unpacking the notion of extractive institutions and examining its components: use of violence, limited property rights, and under-provision of public goods. These three components together help us understand why extractive historical institutions can have negative long-term effects. The book contributes to the historical literature on the Habsburg Empire, which mostly focuses on the whole of the Habsburg Empire or its multiethnic and multireligious composition, which was meant to put substantial pressure on the capital. The book is a crafting project. I scanned and georeferenced a variety of maps from the Austrian Archives. I geolocated historical districts, villages, and cantons in what is today Croatia, Serbia, and Romania and made maps which show us different socioeconomic characteristics of the region. To keep a certain level of parsimony, not all the maps made it into this book. I also consulted a variety of archival documents: letter exchanges, cadastral plans, travel books from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, legal documents from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries documenting the rights and obligations of border inhabitants.

The project, which was initially only one chapter in my PhD dissertation, grew into a book during my postdoctoral fellowships at Princeton and Bocconi universities. I am very grateful to the Bobst Center for Peace and Justice at Princeton, specifically, Carles Boix and Amaney Jamal, who believed in this project and supported me for one year. My research and the writing of this monograph was supported by the European Research Council Horizon 2020 Starting Grant “Spoils of War,” led by Prof. Tamás Vonyó as a principal investigator, and the Dondeña Centre for Research on Social Dynamics and Public Policy at Bocconi University, where I was postdoctoral research fellow from 2019 to 2022.

I also revised the manuscript at Magdalen College, Oxford, where I worked as a lecturer. In the fall of 2021, I organized a book workshop at Bocconi, where Mark Dincecco, Grigore Pop-Eleches, Kristin Fabbe, Tomáš Cvrček, and Tamás Vonyó provided incredible feedback on the project. They took the time to read the draft manuscript and provided

thoughtful comments, which allowed me to write a much better book as a result.

I am also very appreciative of the support of the Executive Publisher for History at Cambridge, Michael Watson, and the Economic History Series editors who supported the project. To be published by the flagship book series in economic history at the world's oldest university press is indeed an honor.

Beyond funders and publishers, a number of individuals deserve special praise for their graciousness. I am grateful to Miroslav Birclin, director of the Pančevo Museum in Serbia, who gave me permission to use Paja Jovanović's "The Great Migration of the Serbs" as a cover for the book, and to the Austrian Archives in Vienna, who allowed me to reproduce the letter from Joseph II in Chapter 3 and the map of Zelcin in Chapter 5.

In the long and arduous road of writing *Imperial Borderlands*, a few mentors deserve special recognition. Robert Gullotty was an incredibly helpful mentor in my final year at the University of Chicago, who allowed me to get more clarity on my theoretical framework and gave me advice on navigating the intricate, sinuous ways of academia. Mike Albertus at the University of Chicago was also very supportive and believed in the originality of the historical data and the quantitative historical approach. I am also thankful to Monika Nalepa and James Robinson, who chaired my dissertation and who pushed me to write a more interesting project.

My intellectual interlocutors – too many to name them all – have contributed directly or indirectly to this project in essential ways: Scott Abramson, Andrea Bartoletti, Michael Bernhard, John Brehm, Volha Charnysh, Maura Cremin, Francisco Garfias, Jacob Hariri, Melissa Lee, Isabela Mares, Yusuf Magiya, Daniel Mattingly, Steve Monroe, Stefan Nikolic, Tom Pavone, Mircea Popa, Beth Simmons, Fer Sobrino, Joan Ricart, Holly Shissler, Andres Uribe, Steven Wilkinson, Mihnea Zlota, and Christina Zuber.

Some of these individuals may not remember it, but they shaped my growth as a social scientist by supplying inspiring conversations, thoughtful written feedback, essential contacts, and invaluable friendship when I needed it most. I am also very grateful to Hector Salvador for proofreading the manuscript and providing valuable comments and support.

Finally, I must acknowledge those whose love has warmed my spirit and kept me going: my parents, Virgil and Elena Popescu, who supported me in becoming the first person in my family to get an undergraduate degree, and subsequently obtain a PhD.