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**Living in the “Shatterzone of Empires”: Architecture in Sofia after the Last Russo-Ottoman War, ca. 1878-1900**

I propose to present preliminary research for my dissertation, which studies architecture in today's Bulgaria before, during, and shortly after the formation of the nation-state in light of recent developments in imperial history. The dissertation traces interactions among the construction projects of three empires: the Ottoman, Russian, and the Austro-Hungarian. By studying architecture as my primary evidence, I show how empire operates on the a concrete, physical level. I argue that there was some continuity from Ottoman modernization projects in the post-Tanzimat city, through the Russian occupation in 1877-78, to the nation state's building projects, which were often implemented with the help of foreign architects, many from Austria-Hungary. I further explore and problematize the relations between imperial and nation-building projects, which, I argue, were not necessarily opposed to each other.

In the Danube Vilayet, which later became the Principality of Bulgaria and eventually the independent Bulgarian state in 1908, architectural types and styles characteristic of nation-building coexisted with gestures of imperial domination such as religious buildings and monumental complexes that were sponsored by a foreign power and displaced local populations. In my discipline, architectural and urban history, the Balkan nation-states are located in a no man's land between Western European nationalisms and studies of imperialism and colonialism disproportionately focused on Britain and France. Architectural historians often rely on the “colonial city” as a typology, and, in cases where this is not applicable, ideas of difference, diversity and hybridity are used without an explicit critique of power. I argue that the Danube Vilayet/Bulgaria provides an opportunity to study the effects of imperial dynamics that operate in more subtle and diffuse ways--via adaptation, emulation, co-optation, displacement, and minor confrontations in the built environment. I use methods including the study of urban form, construction histories, stylistic and functional readings of particular buildings, and analysis of texts and drawings in the architectural press, to analyze imperial tactics and power in the city.

In my presentation, I will focus on the konak or governor's palace in Ottoman Sofia, a regional administrative building that was taken over by the Russian army during the

occupation in 1879, and later refurbished as the palace of the new nation's monarch. The Ottoman building's stripped classicism was transformed into a more ornate European palazzo type to house the Bulgarian knyaz, who came from Vienna. Two of the architects responsible for the remodeling, too, were Austro-Hungarian. In this building's incredible history, progressive Ottoman rule, imperial occupation, nationalism, and "elective imperialism" (Bulgaria's voluntary orientation towards Vienna) intersected. It was the site of takeovers by rulers and armies "from above" and by ordinary citizens "from below." A microhistory of this building and the urban space around it shows the complex and messy reality of imperialism in the "shatterzone of empires."<sup>1</sup>

The working title of my dissertation is: "Architecture at the Intersection of Empires: Building a Balkan Nation between the Ottoman, Tsarist, and Austro-Hungarian Domains, 1864-1912."

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<sup>1</sup> Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz, *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands* (2013).