Infection and the Politics of Space: The *Cordon Sanitaire*

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Since the start of the pandemic, the measures taken to control the spread of coronavirus have been consistently spatial. Some of the first responses, undertaken before the winter of 2020 ended, included the erection of *cordons sanitaires* in China and subsequently in Italy. The *cordon sanitaire* has a long history, and one of the uncanniest aspects of the pandemic has been the return of techniques of disease control — and social control — that seemed to belong to a distant past. Indeed, as we show below, cordons, by making certain forms of movement impossible, have an impact not only on space but also on time, casting people back into pre-modern forms of transport, even if augmented by the latest technological aides. We also observe how cordons — historically and now — have a complicated and shifting relationship to pre-existing boundaries and barriers, both military and administrative. Cordons are for the most part arbitrary in relation to the existing built environment, but at the same time tend to reinforce pre-existing and predominantly intangible administrative and security infrastructure. [1]

In the decades of the Cold War, when it had fallen out of use as a public health technique, the *cordon sanitaire* existed primarily metaphorically as a political buffer zone designed to avoid triggering conflict by tacitly accepting distinct spheres of influence. The resurrection of the *cordon sanitaire* in the literal sense has turned our attention to the specific details of its design and operation. [2] A *cordon sanitaire* is, strictly speaking, a physical barrier restricting individuals' and goods' entry into, and exit from, an area, for the primary — or ostensible — purpose of controlling the spread of infectious disease. Often it operates in conjunction with a quarantine system — that is, with the isolation of people or goods in transit until they are deemed to be free of infection and can continue on their way. A cordon can be intended either to keep a defined region free from disease coming from the outside, or it can be to contain the disease within a given area to prevent it from spreading into regions further afield. A close relative of the *cordon sanitaire* is the boundary enclosing an area (usually with what is deemed to be an exceptionally high rate of infection) within which a set of restrictions on individuals and businesses operate. The boundary differentiates it from the areas beyond — but these restrictions do not necessarily include a ban on movement into or out of the area.

Cordons vary widely, both in the shape they take and in the extent and nature of their material existence. Some are rings around urban centers or islands. Others are lines, often across

great distances or extending from one coast to another. They can be continuous (a fence, wall, or unbroken and controlled protective barrier) or discontinuous (blocks or checkpoints set up across selected transport routes but without barriers between them). Elements of the cordon might also exist within the perimeter of an enclosed area—for instance, at the entrance to railway stations in the center of a city. And of course, the "barrier" can consist of legislation or fiat to suspend the operation of mass transport into or out of an area, or laws (or advice) against individual travel beyond a particular boundary, either in conjunction with, or in place of, physical boundaries such as roadblocks. Both tangible and intangible cordons depend on surveillance for enforcement, whether in the form of military or police patrols, civilian informants, or remote video monitoring.

   The elements that make up a cordon respond to the mode of transport that is most often used to enter or leave an area. Before mass air travel, regions and cities on maritime trade routes used cordons during times of plague, yellow fever, and cholera to maintain strict control over access from the sea. [3] The officials governing the Spanish island of Majorca, for instance, set up cordons around the island twenty-eight times between 1787 and 1899; these consisted of "defensive rings set up in order to guard the whole of the island perimeter intensively from the land, with the support of coast guard boats." [4] New Zealand was highlighted during the 2020 pandemic as one of the nations that has most successfully kept the virus at bay, ensuring freedom of movement within the nation in large part by closing its borders and keeping any infected parties out. The fact that it is an island nation has naturally played a role in this, but the crucial element of its cordon is the restriction of air travel, not a defensive ring of coastal lookouts and patrolling boats. [5]

   Similarly, the type of land-based transport used to access an area and connect it to other significant population centers determines the form a cordon takes. In Wuhan, as the urban studies academic Fei Chen explains, urban design decisions concentrating the land access to the city into a few channels (rail lines and multi-lane motorways) meant that the strict cordon established there in January 2020 consisted of a limited number of road blocks (some of which were reinforced toll barriers) and government orders cancelling rail services. "People who live on the periphery of the city may still be able to get out through small local road networks that mainly lead to villages or the countryside," she wrote. "As long as the major roads are closed off, they are not able to reach other major cities with a large, concentrated population and the quarantine remains effective." [6]

3 Pere Salas-Vives and Joana-Maria Pujadas-Mora, *"Cordons Sanitaires* and the Rationalization Process in Southern Europe (Nineteenth-Century Majorca)," *Medical History* 62, no. 3 (July 2018), 314–32, here 315–16.

4 Salas-Vives and Pujadas-Mora, *"Cordons Sanitaires,"* 319.

5 Michael Plank et al., "How New Zealand Could Keep Eliminating Coronavirus at Its Border for Months to Come, Even as the Global Pandemic Worsens," *The Conversation*, July 16, 2020, https://theconversation.com/how-new-zealand-could-keep-eliminating-coronavirus-at-its-border-for-months-to-come-even-as-the-global-pandemic-worsens-142368 (accessed October 8, 2020).

6 Fei Chen, "Coronavirus: Why China's Strategy to Contain the Virus Might Work," *The Conversation*, January 30, 2020, https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-why-chinas-strategy-to-contain-the-virus-might-work-130729 (accessed October 8, 2020).

A press image of a roadblock on a motorway leading out of Wuhan conveys the vast scale of transport infrastructure but also the way the rationalization and concentration of travel into a few enormous corridors means that the infrastructure contains within itself the means of stopping as well as facilitating travel. **fig.1** The block is positioned at a place where traffic pauses anyway at a toll barrier. While evoking the pleasure of rapid mechanical movement with its swooping, roller coaster-esque superstructure, the barrier has, with only a few lightweight, ephemeral, and multicolored barriers, been converted into a link in the cordon "chain"

fig.1 Roadblock on motorway leading into Wuhan, China, January 25, 2020
Source: Hector Retamal—Getty Images

around Wuhan. The image conveys the unique morphology of this barrier. It is a field rather than a line, the toll barrier itself just one element in a thick, layered composition consisting of supplemental barriers, empty space, and human patrols. The woman waiting with her suitcase in the foreground (a nurse waiting for a lift back into Wuhan, according to the caption) seems transplanted from a slower world of pedestrians and taxi lines; the space behind her suddenly emptied of the streams of speeding vehicles that would normally eradicate the possibility of the stationary, unprotected human body. A channel of movement has become an empty square. This local spatial transformation signals a citywide one, which is also a temporal transformation. The people of Wuhan during the period of the cordon, with the channels of mass transport switched off, were projected back into a past era of transport, relying, if they wanted to leave the city, on the small-scale, unplanned web of city—countryside connections which continued to exist, neglected, on the periphery.

A much more intimate, continuous, and obviously confining type of *cordon sanitaire* comes about when the area being contained or cut off is relatively small and the routes into it are many (especially when people normally enter and leave by car, by horse, or on foot). This kind of cordon can be seen in a 1911 image from the *Illustrated London News*, in which the artist depicts a fenced-off rural village. 7 **fig.2** The accompanying text tells us that this is a village in Romania that has been isolated during the cholera pandemic that affected large swathes of Asia, the Middle East, Russia, the Balkans, and parts of Europe. 8 In the image's middle ground is a continuous fence, about six feet high, made of woven willow. Behind the fence, presumably having climbed up on supports, are three young women in local costume, and directly behind them is a picturesque jumble of thatched cottages. The women are speaking with two men in military uniform in the foreground; these men stand on a track which runs along the fence; two more soldiers patrol in the middle distance along another stretch of the fence, which, with its accompanying track, disappears into the distance. The text tells us that the image represents an "infected hamlet," which has become "the center of a circle of soldiers"—we are meant to imagine the willow fence, track, and the soldiers tightly enclosing the village, cutting across and rendering impassable a web of roads and tracks leading from the settlement into what we imagine to be the agricultural land surrounding it. 9

The cordon here, then, is a single continuous physical barrier, like an ephemeral city wall—though without, at least in this image, any gates. But whereas in the image of the Wuhan road block the bodies being contained within the cordon are only implied as anonymous inhabitants of the shadowy tower blocks in the distance, this image and the cordon it represents operate at such a small scale that we see the contained bodies and their dwellings straining against the barrier and its miniature militarized zone beyond.

In this early twentieth-century image of disease control measures in the rural Balkans for the London reading public, we see the alluringly disordered and dangerous past under control by a scientifically minded present, but only just. The barrier containing the villagers is flimsy, and the soldiers, representatives of the state, are susceptible to the charms of the three women, whose embroidered linens and head scarves allude to prevalent stereotypes of Balkan women as standing for a continuous, pre-industrial past existing within the present. 10 The tree branches and stakes bearing broken pots and an ox skull hovering significantly over the head of one of the soldiers may allude to

7 "The Universal Enemy: A Dread Foe the World Is Fighting," *Illustrated London News*, November 18, 1911, 13.

8 "The Universal Enemy," 13. The text also relates that the village represented had been a particular target for isolation since the rumor had taken hold there that doctors were killing infected people, and therefore inhabitants refused to be treated. There is no commentary on the skull and other ornaments on the fence—we presume they are meant to represent talismans, warding off the evil which the villagers see as coming from outside.

9 "The Universal Enemy," 13.

10 Thank you to Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius for sharing forthcoming material on the topic of the trope of Eastern European women in ethnic dress. Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, *Imaging and Mapping Eastern Europe: Sarmatia Europea to Post-Communist Bloc* (New York: Routledge, 2021).
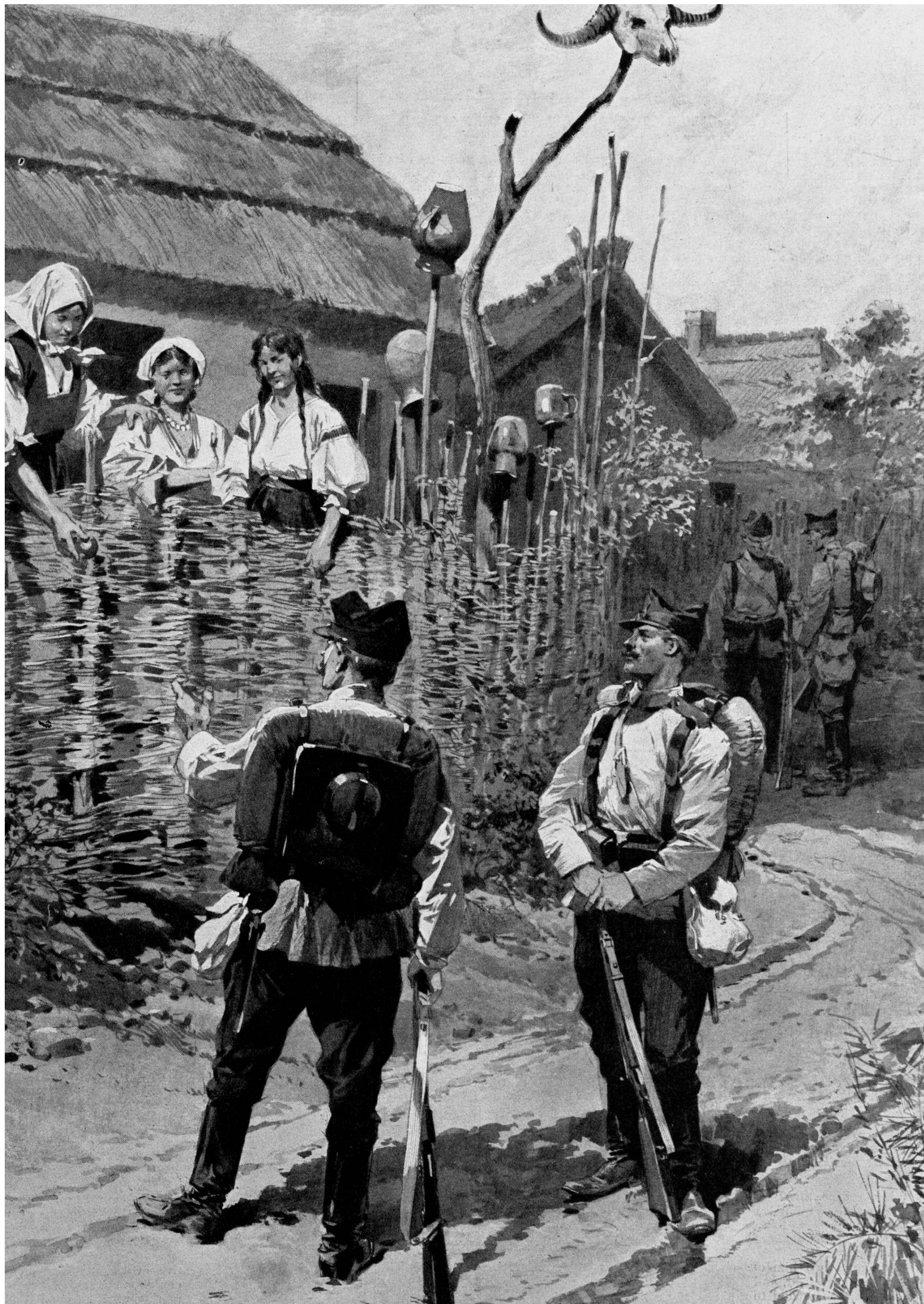
the more archaic past of pagan tree-cults. 11 The project of cordoning off disorder and disease seems a precarious one, undermined by unruly elements of a past that lives on into the present.

The *Illustrated London News* image, with its play on tropes of the "wild East," echoes in miniature the historically most-notorious *cordon sanitaire*, which until 1871 formed an entire border region on the eastern edge of Europe. The so-called *Militärgrenze* (military frontier), a deep strip of land along the edge of the Habsburg Empire where it met the border with the Ottoman Empire, was established in 1522 and consisted materially of a series of fortified outposts and military garrisons. The *Militärgrenze* was meant to defend the empire from Ottoman military attack. Beginning in the early eighteenth century, the border, which extended from the Adriatic to Transylvania, gained the additional function of a permanent *cordon sanitaire*, intended to prevent the spread of bubonic plague from outbreaks in the Ottoman Empire. 12 A map from 1830 shows that this was not just a border but a wide, ribbon-like region. fig.3 According to William O'Reilly, over time, "the 33,422 square kilometers of land that comprised the military frontier metamorphosed into a complex region with different law codes, privileges, and customary duties when compared with other areas in the empire." 13 Boro Bronza refers to it as a "living wall." 14

The fortresses and military garrisons along the border were designated the task of defending the Austrian Empire as well as enforcing border, customs, and refugee regimes. This existing military infrastructure provided a good base for the complex *cordon sanitaire* system, and since the 1970s, historians have revised the traditional military historians' views of the *Militärgrenze* to stress its significance not only as a military but also as a *Pestfront* or sanitary frontier, especially after the threat of Ottoman invasion grew smaller in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. 15 Gary Magee describes how the cordon:

"consisted of a chain of manned lookouts, each within musket range of each other, regular patrols and Bauernsoldaten stationed ... along the frontier. Guards

11 Tree worship, its roots in ancient religions and its continuation among the European peasantry, were discussed at length in James George Frazer's widely read *The Golden Bough* (London: Macmillan, 1890). Thank you to the editors for alerting us to this reference.

12 "Militärgrenze (English), AEIOU," in Austria-Forum, *das Wissensnetz*, https://austria-forum.org/af/AEIOU/Militärgrenze (accessed February 10, 2021); Gary B. Magee, "Disease Management in Pre-Industrial Europe: A Reconsideration of the Efficacy of the Local Response to Epidemics," *Journal of European Economic History* 26, no. 3 (January 1997), 605–23, here 610–11. The measures establishing quarantine were taken gradually beginning in 1710, but Bronza dates the beginning of the *cordon sanitaire* proper to 1728, when a patent was issued for the construction of a system of quarantine along the border. Boro Bronza, "Austrian Measures for Prevention and Control of the Plague Epidemic Along the Border with the Ottoman Empire During the 18th Century," *Scripta Medica* 50, no. 4 (December 2019), 177–84, here 179.

fig.2 "The Universal Enemy: A Dread Foe the World Is Fighting," *Illustrated London News*, November 18, 1911, 13

13 William O'Reilly, "Fredrick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis, Orientalism, and the Austrian *Militärgrenze*," *Journal of Austrian-American History* 2, no. 1 (2018), 1–30, here 9.

14 Bronza, "Austrian Measures," 179.

15 O'Reilly, "Fredrick Jackson Turner's Frontier," 10, 12; Bronza, "Austrian Measures," 177–79.

16 Magee, "Disease Management," 610.

17 We are grateful to Richard Kurdiovsky for his assistance in determining the approximate date of this drawing through reference to comparable design drawings by architects working for the imperial bureaucracy.

fig. 3 Map of the Austrian *Militärgrenze* from 1830. J.N. von Metzberg, "Übersichtskarte von der Militärgrenze," *Tafel zur Statistik der Österreichischen Monarchie*, 3 (1830), n.p. Source: Austrian National Library, Bildarchiv

were under orders to fire on all illegal traffic attempting to enter the Empire without passing through a quarantine station." **16**

Three watchtower designs — dating from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century — emphasize viewing angles for spotting smugglers and potential plague carriers. **17** **fig. 4** This is the type of *cordon sanitaire* infrastructure of the Austrian *Militärgrenze* that would have been experienced by the British writer Alexander William Kinglake while traveling over the border into the Ottoman Empire. In his 1844 travel narrative *Eothen*, which recounted a journey from ten years earlier, he describes the strict separation of two frontier towns which "are less than a cannon-shot distant, and yet their people hold no communion. ... It is the Plague, and the dread of the Plague that divides the one people from the other." The strict enforcement of frontier quarantine was administered by the Austrian officials who were themselves living in a state of "perpetual excommunication" as "compromised" individuals; that is, those who were "in contact with people or things supposed to be capable of conveying infection." The punishment for transgressing the cordon was severe: "if you dare to break the laws of quarantine, you will be tried with military haste; the court will scream out your sentence to you from a tribunal some fifty yards off; the priest, instead of gently whispering to you the sweet hopes of religion, will console you at a dueling distance, and after that you will find yourself carefully shot, and carelessly buried in the ground of the Lazaretto." **18**

O'Reilly has shown that, despite the sanitary effectiveness and rational military organization of the frontier area, the image of the *Militärgrenze* was that of a wild territory of crime and adventure in the minds of Westerners and Austrians alike. In the widespread image of Balkanism, the military frontier was seen as "a place simultaneously forbiddingly unknown and desirably exotic, hostile and romantic." **19** We can see these kinds of Orientalist tropes still at play in the 1911 image of the isolated Balkan village discussed above. The soldiers in the foreground could be from any of the European armies; their uniforms and military technology are familiar to the readers of the *Illustrated London News* and could be taken to represent modernity, framing as

18 Alexander William Kinglake, *Eothen, or Traces of Travel Brought Home From the East* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997 [1844]), viii, 1–2.

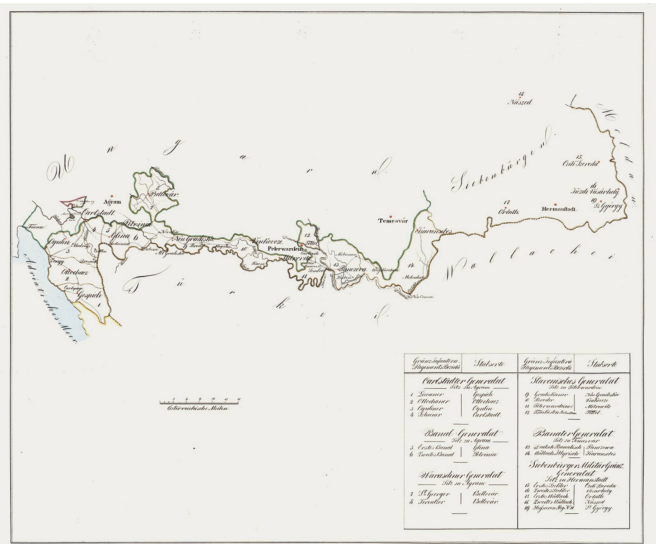**19** O'Reilly, "Fredrick Jackson Turner's Frontier," 15.

well as containing the uncontrollable (cultural, infrastructural, or epidemic) wilderness beyond the *cordon sanitaire*.

In an April 2020 opinion piece for the *Wall Street Journal*, the historians of Habsburg Austria, Charles Ingrao and A. Wess Mitchell (who served as Assistant Secretary of State for Europe-
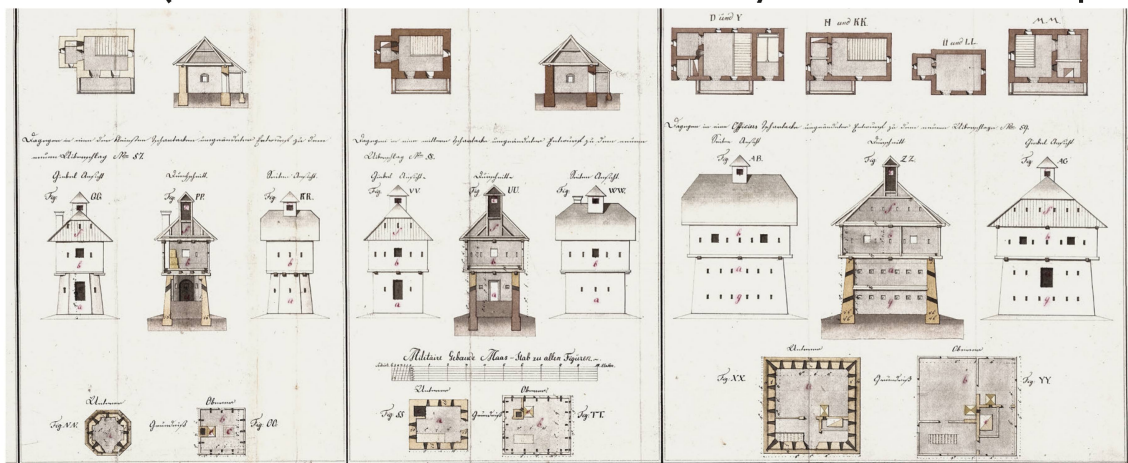
an and Eurasian Affairs in the Trump administration between 2017 and 2019), drew parallels between the *cordon sanitaire* along the Habsburg *Militärgrenze* and the US restrictions on travel from China (source of "the world's worst contagions — SARS (2002—2003), avian flu (2005) and now Covid-19") in March 2020. [20] As we write this article in October 2020, the parallel with the United States' extensive land border with Canada seems more apposite. An existing enforced border stretching thousands of miles has become a *cordon sanitaire*; at this stage in the pandemic, Canada, with its science-focused government and relatively low rate of infection, is in the role of the Hapsburg Empire, defending itself against infection from the "wild," irrationally governed, and COVID-19-ridden United States. [21] Of course in 2020, the measures taken to control infection by no means end at the border, with Canada (along with almost all other countries across the world) employing increased surveillance and limiting movement via mobile applications, voluntary and imposed quarantine measures based in people's homes, and different regimes of movement and selective population control for different groups of people within the same geographical area. A delineation of territory along a single line controlled by border posts, fences, and walls exists alongside a much deeper zone of surveillance and movement restriction. On closer inspection, such one-layered delineation perhaps never existed on its own. A zone made up not only of the border line itself but crucially supplemented by the auxiliary infrastructure both in front and behind the line of control is a characteristic of many of the older, even pre-modern *cordons sanitaires*. This depth existed in the operations of the *Militärgrenze*. As Magee describes:

20 A. Wess Mitchell and Charles Ingrao, "Emperor Joseph's Solution to Corona-virus," *Wall Street Journal*, April 6, 2020, https://www.wsj.com/articles/emperor-jo-sephs-solution-to-coro-navirus-11586214561 (accessed February 10, 2021). One of the "insights for our times" that the history of the Habsburg *cordon sanitaire* provides, according to the authors, "is that physical space matters in fighting epidemics. Hard as it is to swallow for Western publics habituated to globalization, well-regulated, rational borders contribute substantially to the public good. Early critics of the Trump administration's travel restrictions failed to appreciate the urgent medical rationale. As Anthony Fauci testified to Congress, no public-health strategy can contain a contagion already inside the country without stopping the influx of new carriers."

21 Paula Newton, "Covid-19 Built a 'Northern Wall' between the US and Canada and It Could Stay Up Longer than Anyone Expected," *CNN Travel*, September 1, 2020, https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/covid-wall-canada-us-trnd/index.html (accessed November 17, 2020).

22 Magee, "Disease Management," 610—11.

23 "Covid-19 Local Lockdown — Postcode Checker," *Tableau Software*, 2020, https://public.tableau.com/views/Covid-19Local-Lockdown-Postcode-Checker/Postcodes (accessed October 1, 2020).

24 Sam Jones, "Protests in Madrid over Coronavirus Lockdown Measures," *Guardian*, September 20, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/20/protests-madrid-coronavirus-lockdown-measures-spain (accessed October 7, 2020).

25 "STA: Janša Says Restrictions Here To Stay, No Inter-Municipal Movement During Holidays," *English.Sta.Si*, April 25, 2020, https://english.sta.si/2756863/jansa-says-restrictions-here-to-stay-no-inter-municipal-movement-during-holidays (accessed October 7, 2020).

26 Rhea Mahbubani and Alison Millington, "Italy Has Put 16 Million People on Lockdown to Control the Escalating Coronavirus Outbreak," *Business Insider*, March 8, 2020, https://www.businessinsider.com/italy-lockdown-lombardy-11-provinces-coronavirus-crisis-2020-3 (accessed October 7, 2020).

27 "Coronavirus: Australia to Close Victoria-New South Wales Border," *BBC News*, July 6, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-53303317 (accessed October 7, 2020).

28 "Coronavirus: Leo Varadkar 'Now Is the Time for Further Action,'" *BBC News*, March 27, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52071733 (accessed October 7, 2020).

29 The main extra restriction imposed in Leicester was a ban on households mixing with each other, either at home or elsewhere. Department of Health and Social Care, "Leicester: Local Restrictions," July 17, 2020, https://www.gov.uk/guidance/leicester-lockdown-what-you-can-and-cannot-do (accessed October 6, 2020).

"Supplementing the cordon was a network of government agents, operating within the Ottoman Empire, who sought out information on the current status of the plague in Turkey ... Based on this information, the cordon could be strengthened or relaxed, depending on the current gravity of the threat." [22]

The *cordons sanitaires* of the 2020 pandemic have been stylistically ad hoc and spatially contingent. Without a pre-existing epidemiological public health infrastructure in place, the spatialized surveillance and movement control measures were often hastily applied to a wide range of pre-existing administrative divisions within national borders, such as postcode areas (UK [23]), district and municipal boundaries (Spain [24] and Slovenia [25]), and regional borders (Italy [26] and Australia [27]). In addition to these, other more spatially abstract limitations on freedom of movement were devised, such as a two-kilometer radius around one's home (Ireland [28]).

What all these ways of defining the *cordon sanitaire* share is the almost complete intangibility and invisibility of the border. In contrast to the sentry towers of the *Militärgrenze*, and the fencing surrounding Balkan villages during cholera outbreaks, these boundaries are visible only on maps. The continuous updating of digital map data obscures the history of the movement of the cordon. Unsurprisingly, they have also given rise to much confusion. When, after a local increase in COVID-19 cases, the city of Leicester in England had extra restrictions imposed on it in July 2020, a question about the precise boundaries of the city and the quarantine area was raised immediately. [29] It was only at this point that the archaic nature of such a question became evident. The precise boundary of the city in pre-modern Europe was a question of pragmatic importance, because of different legal, taxation, and security regimes that the position on one or the other side of the line brought with it. The most extreme form of this boundary, the city wall, presented the limit as a physical fact. It has been over a century since the last cities were stripped of functioning walls, and the border shifted to the exterior perimeter of the nation state (or, more recently, of a group of states like the Schengen states in

the European Union). [30] Therefore, the dismay over the spatial re-imposition of boundaries around elements of the state, like cities, is understandable.

In the case of Leicester, the city council's original solution was to publish a city map (based on an Ordnance Survey map) with a red line delineating the area of

the lockdown. fig.5 Furious reaction over the unclear boundary due to the width of the line and the small scale of the map (that put parts of the city into an ambivalent zone that was neither within nor outside of the lockdown zone) followed, and, after the unclear status of those living in the area "on the line" was realized, the city officials acknowledged the deficiency of the mode of representation of the ad hoc boundary with a statement: "nothing is perfect and that includes this map." [31] Instead of the map, the city council set up a website with the list of postcodes included in the lockdown. [32] This measure was more precise but even more abstract than the map and hard to navigate due to the large number of postcode areas arranged in an administrative and alphabetical order, rather than spatially (that is, corresponding with how the postcode areas are actually perceived, used, and connected to one another). The city council soon published a code checker where it was possible to check whether one's postcode was within or outside of the lockdown zone. [33] Finally, on July 16, 2020, the Secretary of State for Health, Matt Hancock, changed the lockdown boundary definition. Local media informed the public that, from July 18, 2020, "only residents who live in the City of Leicester and the borough of Oadby and Wigston are in the lockdown zone. This means that if you pay your council tax to Leicester City or Oadby and Wigston Borough Council, you remain in the restricted area." [34] There was an uneasy coupling of reliance on the individual resident to determine whether or not they lived in the restricted zone (via the postcode checker or their own tax records) with coercive top-down enforcement through policing and penalties. [35] Thus, we can see that the definition of the swiftly imposed *cordon sanitaire* changed three times over the course of fourteen days. Each of the three definitions was based on a different set of spatial parameters: the first was based on a general survey map, the second on a postal service administrative division, and the third on the taxation register. This raises the question of the difficulty and arbitrariness of imposing and enforcing ad hoc delineations within the largely seamless urbanized space, within which liberalized rules of movement operate in contemporary societies.

30 John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship and the State*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 1–3.

fig.5 Initial Leicester July 2020 lockdown boundary
Source: Dan Martin/ Leicestershirelive, July 2, 2020, https://www. leicestermercury.co.uk/ news/leicester-news/ council-explains- leicester-lockdown-zones- 4287492 (accessed October 3, 2020)

31 Dan Martin, "Council Explains Lockdown Zone Boundary After Furious Reaction," Leicestershirelive, July 2, 2020, https://www. leicestermercury.co.uk/ news/leicester-news/ council-explains- leicester-lockdown-zones- 4287492 (accessed July 9, 2020).

32 "Covid-19 Local Lockdown—Postcode Checker."

33 Dan Martin and Amy Orton, "This Is the Postcode Checker for the Leicester Lockdown Zone," *Leicestershire- live*, 2020, https://www. leicestermercury.co.uk/ news/leicester-news/ postcode-checker- tell-you-you-4280178 (accessed July 9, 2020).

34 "Covid-19 Local Lockdown—Postcode Checker."

35 The main UK government guidelines for Leicester residents stated that "the police will be able to take action against those who break these rules," and stipulated a scale of fines for individuals and business, increasing for multiple offenses. Department of Health and Social Care, "Leicester: Local Restrictions."

If the contemporary *cordons sanitaires* have been improvised on the existing foundations of administrative and largely intangible divisions quite unlike the physical *cordons sanitaires* of the past, the desired effect of the cordon has hardly changed at all. The limitation of movement to the radius of a city, municipality, or even a walkable two-kilometer radius (as in the case of Ireland) seems to invoke the transport and physical movement patterns of a pre-modern society, even if the measures for implementing these limitations have become high-tech, digital, and virtual. Wuhan, with its mobile applications and drone surveillance but also with its improvised roadblocks and controlled checkpoints that are merely an update of the *cordon sanitaire* from the *Illustrated London News*, has became both more of a pre-modern and technologically advanced city than before the outbreak. Something similar can be observed in the case of Leicester, although the cordon was enacted with surveillance and enforcement techniques more in tune with the standards of liberal democracy. For both Wuhan and Leicester, the present-day physical city fabric, largely dating from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, represents neither a hindrance nor a welcome infrastructure. The cordon exists quite independently of the physical fabric of the city, which can accommodate both the archaic movement patterns and the high-tech surveillance techniques equally well. The *cordon sanitaire* city of 2020–2021 is more determined by invisible administrative borders, controlled checkpoints, and virtual geolocation applications than by its walls and surfaces.

This short and by no means comprehensive overview of the history of the *cordon sanitaire* suggests that certain elements of the sudden and spatially arbitrary rewriting of the use of space reoccur. Cordons past and present may differ strikingly in appearance, location, and function, but they often share a similar negating relationship to the contexts in which they are imposed. They upend the ways we delineate and move through space because they act as barriers against a dynamic occurrence (such as a pandemic) that spreads through the existing infrastructure of communication, culture, and trade networks. In that sense, the *cordon sanitaire* can be seen as a contextual negation of the preceding and surrounding space. In many of the cases of the *cordon sanitaire*, both historical and contemporary, its area and operations are targeted precisely against the very spatial qualities that are meant to make infection possible: unbounded movement, liberalized trading, unlimited connection, and easy transgression of borders that have shed their physical properties, keeping merely their administrative and abstract lines on maps.

The Habsburg *Militärgrenze* represents a spatial model of rein-forcement rather than negation. Here the *cordon sanitaire* evolves on top of a pre-existing militarized infrastructure and shares the longevity of that infrastructure. The 2010s were a period in which armed boundaries and borders were erected anew across the globe; it will be interesting to see whether this relatively fresh, armed infrastructure leads to a more durable system of *cordons sanitaires*. Together with the newly imposed *cordons sanitaires* that include district, municipal, and regional borders, they might with time evolve, transmute, and solidify into permanent and overt social control, exclusion, or containment infrastructure.