“Nursing the Ottomans: Military Nursing in Ottoman Palestine during World War I”:

**Submitted to the**

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1. Statement of the research aim and purpose:

Military nursing during World War I (WWI) 1914–1918 is a very popular topic in the research on the history of nursing. A review of the literature reveals many manuscripts and books, dealing with professional aspects of nursing and its contributions to the war efforts. The role of nursing has been well documented, especially of the American and British armies’ involvement in battle arenas all over the globe. However, there is a gap in the knowledge about nursing and military nurses in WWI in Palestine. Palestine, then under the Ottoman Empire regime, stood in the middle of a strategic military crossroads between the British and Turkish-Ottoman forces. Health in wartime Palestine was characterized by poor sanitation, a serious shortage of medicine and medical equipment, and outbreaks of cholera and spotted fever throughout the country. A few local Jewish nurses as well as German, French, and Austrian nuns offered nursing services. The American Colony in Jerusalem played an essential role in providing healthcare and welfare for the local population. When the war broke out, and particularly when the American Army joined the war against the Turkish, the political status of the American Colony became problematic, although they had a good relationship with Turkish governor, opened four military hospitals, and kept nursing and caring for British and Turkish soldiers alongside the civilian population. Yet, there is a lack of published knowledge about the American Colony nurses and particularly about nursing in Palestine in those days.

The aim of this research is to fill in the gap of knowledge about the historical development of nursing in Israel. This research may shed light on the pivotal role of military nursing, giving a new angle of understanding. The following research questions will enable me to achieve these goals:

A. Who were the nurses in Palestine during WWI? How did they train? What were their qualifications? What was their military/civilian status?

B. Where did the nurses serve? What was their clinical and management role?

C. What was the nurses’ contribution? What kind of influence did they have on health, welfare, and political aspects in Palestine? What was their influence on shaping nursing in Palestine during the British Mandate and later on in Israel?

The Karen Buhler-Wilkerson Fellowship Research Award will enable me to examine the most exclusive and essential historical materials for my research on nursing in Palestine during WWI: books, articles, and archival materials located in the Barbara Bates Center for the Study of the History of Nursing. In addition, the fellowship travel will be an excellent opportunity to meet experienced scholars of nursing history for advice and discussions about the project.

2. The project description:

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 was the greatest fatal conflict up until that time, during which entire societies fought one another. In 1918, at the end of four years of fighting, ten million military personnel had died and the world order had totally changed. Empires had collapsed and the entire world had to face new challenges of totalitarian regimes and ethnic-religious conflicts (Ahlstrom, 2014). For the first time, new fatal weapons were used, such as exploding artillery and smokeless powder-propelled rifles, causing military medicine to face new demands for advanced care. During this war, the new medical developments included the diagnosing of bacteriology, improved mobile x-ray machines, an intravenous saline infusion in the resuscitation procedure, and advanced surgical devices. All were crucial for treating the wounded (Gabriel, 2013). Alongside medical advancements, the demand for professional physicians and nurses rose. British army nurses were drafted to the frontlines without any prior preparation (Bernthal, 2014). Nurses functioned as surgeon assistants during surgical and anesthesia procedures. They also cared for those wounded by gas burns, washed infections of deep abdominal injuries with antiseptic solutions, and managed the evacuation of the wounded from the frontline to the home front hospitals via ships and trains (Summers, 1988). The nurses’ contribution was not limited to only treating physical injuries; Hallett (2010) has argued that nurses also helped to alleviate the soldiers’ physiological trauma, helping them to maintain a state of completeness.

With the entry of the American Army into World War I in April 1917, 403 nurses served together with 170 reserve nurses; a year later, their numbers rose to 12,186, and they were sent to serve all over the world (Feller & Cox, 2000). The war emphasized the need for qualified nurses and contributed to accelerating the academization and education of military and civilian nursing (Palmer, 1991)

What about the Ottoman military nurses? Until 1910, healthcare in the Ottoman Empire was delivered by untrained men. In 1910, women began to participate in paid work and social activities. The Balkan war in 1912 witnessed the first Turkish women military nurses. Unfortunately, their numbers were few, and the Ottomans had to rely on the seven Red Cross nurses and eleven German nuns who cared for the Ottoman soldiers wounded in WWI. Although the “Red Crescent for Ottoman Society for the Wounded and Ill Soldiers” had been founded in 1868, it was not until 1913 that the organization recognized the nursing practice, which was based on women’s traditional abilities as mothers and caregivers, and characterized by sensitivity and mercy for the wounded. Nursing courses in Turkey were opened in 1913–1914, preparing 300 nurses to serve on several fronts (Sançar, 2016). The work of the Red Crescent nurses during the war and particularly in the Palestine front is still absent in the historical literature.

Palestine during WWI was in a deep political, economic, and health crisis (Bar-El & Greenberg, 2006). The country had been severely hurt by Turkish restrictions of foreign money transfers to the population and by the confiscation of food, water, oil, and goods for the needs of the Ottoman military. Jerusalem was recognized as the center of the Turkish home front in Palestine and drained off the medical and economical aspects of the Turkish army (Shiloni, 1991). As a result of the poor sanitary conditions, outbreaks of cholera, spotted fever, varicella, and malaria were ubiquitous (Shiloni, 1991). The diseases and the starvation caused 15,000 deaths among the civilian population (Ruppin, 1968). In addition to the poor conditions of public health, the Turkish military recruited the majority of the Jewish physicians and nurses and confiscated all the basic medical equipment from the local clinics (Smilansky, 1934), while the Ottomans deported the foreign nurses from enemy countries, such as Russia, Britain, and France (Shiloni, 1991). In those complicated political and health conditions, nursing became quite a challenging job. The American Colony nurses even undertook the management of four Turkish military hospitals despite the complicated political relations between the United States and the Ottomans (Spafford, 1951). Another testimony of military nursing activity, reflected only in photographs, showed the Turkish Red Crescent nurses (Kalbian, 2015) and the Rosary sisters standing next to medical officers’ staff (Schwake, 2014). The role of nursing and the function of the nurses has remained rather obscure. Keeling and Mann Wall (2015) have argued that nurses’ abilities of being innovative and being able to perform their duties despite political sensitivities and international conflicts are a critical part of disaster response. Wartime nursing also challenged nurses’ practice and their social and professional place from a gender perspective (Dixon Vuic, 2013). This project aims to examine those aspects.

3. The Center’s Collections:

For this research, I intend to use the Center’s primary sources, books, monographs, and other printed materials that focus on nursing during World War I. For example, MC: 227, 236, 224, 10, 171, 222, 220, 188.

4. Budget outline and itemized details:

The fellowship will enable me to travel (air fare+ accommodation) to the center, find crucial materials for my project, and meet with the center’s nurse historians. It will also enable me to visit additional American archives, duplicate documents and photographs, including the National Archives and the Library of Congress, both in Washington DC, The Women’s Memorial Foundation in Arlington VA, Five College Archives & Manuscript Collections in MA, and interviewing Dr. Kalbian who hold a private collection of military medicine in Palestine during WWI.

In addition, in Israel, I hope to conduct research at the Central Zionist Archives, Yad Yizhak Ben Zvi Archive, and the Jerusalem Municipality Archives, in Turkey at the Red Crescent Archives, and in Britain, at the Wellcome Library and the National Archives. All those centers contain essential primary and secondary sources for my research project.

**Project Time-Line:**

September 2021–September 2022: data collecting; October–December 2022: manuscript writing, January 2023: presenting and publishing the project’s outcome.

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**Summary of my Activities and Future Plans**

I am a lecturer and a nephrology nurse, who is primarily interested in: (1) medical education—military nursing history, nursing history and healthcare systems developments; (2) transcultural nursing and cultural competence in health care systems, and (3) nephrology nursing—improves patients’ quality of life, nursing clinical skills.

I am working on historical research projects about the history of “Laniado,” the Jewish ultra-Orthodox nursing school; history of nephrology nursing aspects, and a number of clinical research projects conducted simultaneously with multidisciplinary colleagues. I intend to continue applying new nephrology nursing treatments and methods issues involving quality of life measures, thus improving the health of patients in end-stage renal disease. In the transcultural nursing arena, I collaborate with several colleagues in social work and behavioral sciences. I plan to focus on conducting more history projects in the field of military nursing during wartime and conflict in both the Middle East and global arenas.