

**DAVID GUTMAN, *The Politics of Armenian Migration to North America, 1885-1915: Sojourners, Smugglers and Dubious Citizens, Edinburgh Studies on the Ottoman Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019). Pp. 264. £80.00 cloth. ISBN 9781474445245.**

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David Gutman's book, *The Politics of Armenian Migration to North America, 1885-1915: Sojourners, Smugglers and Dubious Citizens*, is an important contribution devoted to examining the 65,000 Ottoman Armenians migrating to the New World and the subsequent return to their homelands in the last decades before World War I. Gutman approaches this phenomenon on interconnected levels, examining the control of overseas migration by the Ottoman and the US bureaucrats, the underground economy of migrant smuggling, and the formation of citizenship in these countries. In order to provide this multilayered analysis, Gutman relies on the documentation from the Ottoman archives and supports it with US official documents and memoirs of Armenian migrants available in English.

The book is divided into three main sections, and consists of six chapters in total, in addition to an introduction and a conclusion. In the first section, "Migrants, Smugglers, and the State," Gutman includes three chapters focusing on different aspects of the outmigration of Armenians from the Ottoman Empire. Chapter one, "Migrants," provides the reader with the social and economic history of the region of Harput-Mezre, which was the main sending community, producing more than half of the Armenian migrants to the United States. This chapter argues for the relative political and economic stability of the region when compared to the eastern regions of the Ottoman Empire, where the security and political rights of Armenians were under threat. Likewise, the author also introduces the reader to the political history behind the state's ban on Armenian migration in 1888, which was

primarily a response by the Ottoman bureaucrats to the emerging Armenian revolutionary politics abroad.

In subsequent chapters, Gutmann examines the different actors and their policies regarding the return of migrants whom the Ottoman bureaucrats believed would have been exposed to radical political views in the United States. The second chapter, “Smugglers,” examines the growth and increasing sophistication of smuggling networks as the state’s ban intensified. It depicts the various “intermediaries,” among them guides, innkeepers, the local elite who kept agents at migrant transit and arrival points, consuls who used their position to smuggle migrants, and some state officials who turned a blind eye while migrants were smuggled out of the country. By providing case studies, Gutman demonstrates the central role of the intermediaries in improving the mechanics of migrant smuggling and how the geography of migration shifted from one port to another in response to the ban. In the following chapter, Gutman turns his focus to “The State,” as he examines the two major problems that the Ottoman bureaucrats had to solve in the face of growing overseas migration of Armenians: How to control migrant smuggling and who was responsible? The search for the answers to these questions reveals divisions within the bureaucracy, as the demands of Istanbul were not carried out effectively at the provincial level, and the bureaucrats in the sending communities and port cities blamed each other for laxity in controlling migration. Likewise, another issue was defining and distinguishing legitimate and illegitimate travel, a problem which had been present since the Ottoman State introduced travel restrictions within the empire, complete with an “internal passport” system, in 1841. The bureaucrats developed different methods, such as a system that required migrants to be “vouched for” – that is, someone would guarantee that the migrant was travelling only within the empire. The chapter, moreover, skillfully demonstrates the limits of the central state’s power as “local politics and the powerful actors that animated them could easily frustrate and impede the ability of the central state to exercise power on the ground” (91).

In the second section of the book, “Fortifying the Well-Protected Domains,” Gutman shifts his focus to the policies of the Ottoman State regarding the return of Armenians and their citizenship once they return to their homelands. In the fourth chapter, “Return,” Gutman examines the changing Ottoman policies regarding their ban on migrant returns and the legal background for it. The ban was first instituted in 1893 and then turned into a partial ban – a ban only on the

ambiguous category of the “suspicious ones” – in 1898; it was more forcefully applied again after 1901 due to political changes in the empire. After providing this legal background, in the following chapter, “Dubious Citizens,” Gutman shifts his focus to international law and how categories of citizenship were constructed in the connected US and Ottoman histories. The major issue was determining whether returning Armenians had obtained US citizenship or not, and if they were naturalized citizens of the United States – a capitulatory state with certain rights and privileges in the Ottoman Empire – whether the returning migrants could benefit from those rights. The Ottoman State had extended its efforts to ban the return of Armenian migrants who, as naturalized US citizens, would be under the protection of their state (127). In order to succeed, however, these efforts required a shared understanding with the United States. Gutman reveals that although the anti-Armenian violence in the Ottoman Empire in the mid-1890s had engendered sympathy in the United States, by the late 1890s, American attitudes toward Armenian migrants began to change, as a general anti-immigrant rhetoric in American politics began to be coupled with the image of Armenians as “troublemakers” in the public (132).

The last section, “Revolution, Genocide, and Migration’s Legacies,” serves as an epilogue and briefly pursues the story of Armenian mobility in the 1910s and early 1920s. It focuses on the changes in the control of mobility after the Constitutional Revolution of 1908 which lifted the ban on Armenians’ overseas migration and return. Yet, as the chapter demonstrates, even the most liberal regime has limits. With the introduction of universal conscription (including Armenians) after 1909, stricter controls over mobility were imposed once again, this time to thwart draft evaders. The chapter ends a bit abruptly by touching on the post-genocide developments regarding Armenian mobility, particularly the Kemalist regime’s policies on the return of the survivor Armenians when the state reverted to the measures that had been in place before the 1908 Revolution.

*The Politics of Armenian Migration to North America* makes a number of points regarding the late nineteenth-century Armenian migrations to North America which highlight the global efforts of state-building, border-making, and construction of citizenship as a universal institution. In these efforts, as the book demonstrates, late nineteenth-century transhemispheric migration and attempts to regulate it were central. The book further provides useful global comparisons with the contemporaneous developments of Chinese exclusion from the United

States and the Ottoman Empire's restrictive policies towards Armenian migration from the United States. Moreover, through its study of networks in the Ottoman Empire, the book also shows that the history of migrant smuggling is an old phenomenon, very much shaped by contemporaneous global attempts to place limits on migration. The book skillfully places the Ottoman Empire in the center of these developments and attributes to it a major role in the history of transhemispheric migration, interdependent with the role of the United States.

Gutman's study also makes important observations by comparing the Armenian case with the better studied phenomenon of Lebanese overseas migration. It demonstrates that the political relations between the Armenians and the Ottoman central state resulted in much stricter policies towards the Armenians than those applied to other groups, particularly the Lebanese. What is even more striking, as Gutman also shows, is that the bureaucrats defined "Armenian" as an ethnic category, not only a religious one, and the ban was extended to all migrant Armenians regardless of their religious denominations. Yet, this was not simply a story of discrimination and dispossession, as many provincial Armenians acted as powerful intermediaries during the politically turbulent years of the late nineteenth century. The overseas migration of Armenians, as the book aptly underlines, provides significant opportunities to produce a more nuanced history of the Armenian communities and its comparisons with other groups in the late Ottoman Empire before the Armenian Genocide in 1915.

David Gutman's very important contribution leads the reader to think about questions for further research. To begin, would a study of the Armenian migration to South America, a topic not discussed much in the book, lead to similar conclusions; for instance, whether the majority of migrants there also originated from the region of Harput-Mezre. Likewise, one wonders about the author's conclusions if one directs the geographic focus to Transcaucasia, where thousands of Armenians migrated from the Ottoman East to work in the booming industry and port cities, and were exposed to Armenian revolutionary activism.<sup>1</sup> These and similar questions may lead to a more comprehensive global history of Armenian migration, as policies in one country may have had an impact on the migration to other.

I regard *The Politics of Armenian Migration to North America* as an important contribution to the study of this underexamined and insufficiently understood phenomenon of human mobility within and

outside the empire, and its impact on the building of modern states across the globe. Gutman's book will appeal to many different audiences interested in migration and human mobility, as it skillfully showcases how a study of Armenian migration from the Ottoman Empire can contribute to the understanding of local, imperial, and global history, while opening a sound and fertile ground for future research.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For a recent work on the Ottoman passport regime and its control of Armenian mobility particularly from Russia and Europe to the empire, see İlkey Yılmaz, "Governing the Armenian Question through Passports in the Late Ottoman Empire (1876–1908)," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 32 (2019): 388–403.