

**KEN R. CRANE**, *Iraqi Refugees in the United States: The Enduring Effects of the War on Terror* (New York: New York University Press, 2021). Pp. 208. \$89.00 cloth, \$28.00 paper. ISBN 781479873944.

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The last three decades have seen scholarship expose the racial and colonial underpinnings of the United States' welcome to refugees and immigrants alike.<sup>1</sup> The American welcome for refugees, which has historically dwarfed countries in the European Union in terms of its numbers, has been inconsistent and much less generous over the past few years: from allowing 132,531 refugees in 1992 to a measly 11,411 in 2021.<sup>2</sup> This decline mirrors political developments and rival ideologies: from the "War on Terror," which began in 2001 and slowed arrivals to 27,131, to Donald Trump's "Muslim Ban" in 2017, which sent numbers into a decline from which they have still not recovered.<sup>3</sup> During the period 2015–2021, Germany has stood out in the EU with its welcome of over a million refugees from countries in the Middle East and Africa.

In addition to changing numbers, domestic politics also determine the context of reception and integration. The critique of American reception ranges from the minimal help given to asylum seekers and resettled refugees to the ways in which American racial politics assign the status of different groups. Like many other countries, domestic structures and politics determine the welcome and resettlement of refugees. Aihwa Ong's essay on racial value, though somewhat controversial, was a brilliant introduction on racial politics shaping refugees' settlement in the United States.<sup>4</sup> Castles and Davidson's study follows the ways in which social capital, a key concern of Crane's, determines the patterns of settlement.<sup>5</sup> Since much of the earlier literature does not focus on refugees in particular but on migration more broadly, it is less concerned with the politics of

religion, the role of trauma, and how legacies of the United States' imperial wars affect settlement.

Crane's book fills in those gaps by focusing on refugees from Iraq, who were resettled after the United States' invasion of Iraq in 2003. Crane makes two broad arguments: One, refugees are disciplined into acculturating in particular ways within American society and that determines how they feel at home within American society. And two, refugees who flee political violence caused by the uprooting of settled, thickly networked societies have a hard time re-establishing social networks that would enable them to acculturate.

Crane's interviews and conversations with fifty Iraqis of different religious and social backgrounds make up the bulk of the book's ethnographic details. He follows their histories from the causes of their flight from Iraq to their arrival in the United States, to their attempts to make lives for themselves. In the process, Crane questions the economic basis of acculturating or fitting in that most Americans see as a successful model. Referencing the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) and resettlement organizations like Catholic Charities, through which the ORR does its job, Crane shows how these bodies "suggest, define and direct adherence to democratic, racial and *market norms of belonging*" (29; italics in the original). These interactions lead refugees to evaluate their decision to flee as a success or failure, depending solely upon their economic worth. As Crane says, "For immigrants in the US, the meaning of belonging and good citizenship has been historically tied to their economic value as laborers and entrepreneurs" (3). Learning and being comfortable with the English language is key to economic success and conversely, a lack of linguistic adaptation keeps many Iraqi men out of the mainstream of work and work cultures. The brutal demands of economic success as a basis of social acceptance are a shock to many Iraqis. Crane points out how many Iraqi youth sarcastically call their new home "'money country,' fearing that this preoccupation with economic success would tear families apart" (4). This new life is radically different from the kinship and network structure of Iraqi urban life, and its isolation and lack of resources can lead them to helplessness and persistent underemployment. Crane interviews many men who enrolled in English or trade courses but gave up because of the pressure to start earning income. However, the economic choices were always seen as conflicting with family cohesion. Two of Crane's interviewees, Khalid and Saddiq, who are brothers, speak movingly about giving up on their

career choices to stay closer to their families because “I owe it to them. They sacrificed for us and I need to pay them back” (31).

Iraqi women face different challenges as they negotiate family and social networks mediated by American society’s insistence on seeing them as subjects to be “saved” or protected from religious symbols like the hijab. This is an example of how America’s determination to see war as a progressive intervention around tropes of modernity and tradition leads to hyper-visibility, and often violence, against Muslim women who cover. Crane points out how this gendered experience of existing in public spaces is haunted by a specific precarity and fear of violence. Nuha, one of his interviewees, points out to Crane that there are two kinds of citizens, “People like you and then people like us, who come to the country . . . because of the hijab” (81). This differential citizenship, in Nuha’s experience, is overshadowed by violence, since Americans define the hijab as a symbol of radicalization and danger.

Different generations of children of Iraqis lead a more divided life in the United States. While some children acculturate to American society faster than their parents because of public education, they feel torn between the individuality of their host society and the comforts of family networks and kinship ties exemplified by the older generation. Of the different Iraqi groups that Crane discusses, this generation negotiates such duality most successfully, perhaps because they have equal access to both. Crane provides an example of an Iraqi teenager’s valedictorian speech at a high school graduation in order to emphasize how that address is no different from any other high schooler’s speech (152). In looking to the future, Crane ends on a slightly uplifting note, but his overall argument, that refugees from the Middle East experience overwhelming odds in their resettlement because of American imperial and anti-terror policies, remains a dark one.

Crane weaves his interviews through chapters on religions, generational differences, gender, and class differences. He also speaks to Iraqis who arrived in the nineties and those who came after 2003. One of the most valuable parts of his book is the emphasis on non-Muslim Iraqis, their histories, and their resettlement. Groups such as the Chaldeans and Assyrians find different kinds of support from mainstream society and coreligionists than do Muslims. However, the process of acculturating within American groups which have different cleavages results in the loss of a multicultural, multiethnic Iraqi society that was torn apart and then reconstituted along sectarian lines.

In fact, the connections that Crane draws between imperial wars, colonization, and refugee resettlement adds considerably to the literature on the subject.<sup>6</sup> The connections that Black British intellectuals and activists once phrased as “We are here because you were there” in the context of postcolonial migration, is one of the historically interesting aspects of the book. Rightly so then, Crane ends his book by examining Donald Trump’s Islamophobic rants and the steep increase in deportations and arrival bans that inaugurated his presidency. He sees the normalizing of Islamophobia under Trump as another barrier to belonging, and ultimately as a failure of the American promise to equality.

The book has tremendous scope and ranges from Istanbul, Jordan, and Iraq to the San Bernardino Valley. Perhaps because of its complexity, sometimes different personas can crowd the narrative, making it hard for the reader to follow their stories. I found myself wishing that Crane had chosen fewer subjects as his focus and let them speak for themselves more. Instead, he uses a mixture of reported speech and direct quotations, which makes for some uneven reading and at times, confusion. Though Crane claims in his introduction that he is going to look at the impact of settling Iraqis in predominantly Latinx neighborhoods, ultimately that analysis forms a small part of his concluding chapters.

This book can be a useful addition to classes on refugee integration, migration, and acculturation. There are many interesting connections to the earlier work of sociologists like Rumbaut and Portes and Renato Rosaldo who have worked on issues of cultural citizenship and segmented assimilation.<sup>7</sup> For historical reasons the US academy is much behind European studies of specifically Muslim immigrants and their children, and thus the book provides a good, introductory analysis of Middle Eastern homemaking in the United States.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021); Karen Isaksen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California’s Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1992); Karen L. Ishizuka, *Serve the People: Making Asian America in the Long Sixties* (London: Verso Books, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Statista Research Department, “Refugee Admissions in the U.S. FY 1990–2021,” Statista, 28 October 2021,

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/200061/number-of-refugees-arriving-in-the-us/>.

<sup>3</sup> No Muslim Ban Ever, "Understanding Trump's Muslim Bans," National Immigration Law Center, last updated 8 March 2019, <https://www.nilc.org/issues/immigration-enforcement/understanding-the-muslim-bans>.

<sup>4</sup> Aihwa Ong, "Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making," *Current Anthropology* 37, no. 5 (1996): 737–62.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Castles and Alastair Davidson, *Citizenship and Migration: Globalization and the Politics of Belonging* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> *Exterminate All the Brutes*, directed by Raoul Peck (HBO, 2021), streaming (HBO Max, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> Ruben G. Rumbaut and Alejandro Portes, *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Renato Rosaldo, "Cultural Citizenship, Inequality and Multiculturalism," in *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space and Rights*, eds. William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1997), 27–38.