

VLADIMIR HAMED-TROYANSKY, *Empire of Refugees: North Caucasian Muslims and the Late Ottoman State* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2024). Pp. 360. \$32.00 paper. ISBN 9781503637740.

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In the face of the current global crisis of having more than 5.5 million displaced refugees from the Middle East living in neighboring countries, scholars have increasingly grown interested in the refugee systems established by the League of Nations in the interwar period and the United Nations postwar. However, such a course of study reduces our understanding of refugee systems to Eurocentric models of international protections that focus primarily on ethnicity and nationality. It is in this vein that Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky's book, *Empire of Refugees*, provides an original contribution to perceiving refugee-state dynamics by tracing the issue of refugee systems back to the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire. Focusing on the Balkans, Anatolia, and the Levant, Hamed-Troyansky weaves together a compelling narrative to argue for an Ottoman refugee regime, one that predated twentieth-century international organizations and created a nineteenth-century "open-door policy for Muslims refugees" (*muhajir* in Arabic, *muhacir* in Turkish).

This ambitious revisionist history provides a new lens to scrutinize migration and its relationship to the political economy of the late Ottoman Empire. More importantly, it contends that migrations to and throughout the Ottoman Empire were largely part of the first wave of global migration, which, in the general historiography, has typically focused on white immigrants to the Americas, southern Africa, and the Pacific. What differentiates the Ottoman case, as Hamed-Troyansky contends, is the religious concept of hijra or emigration that created a distinct type of migration for Muslims to resettle in Ottoman lands. At the core of the book is the conception that Muslim identity was integral to the newly established Ottoman resettlement regime whereby North

Caucasian Muslim refugees collectively became a social identity and a new administrative category. In this newly established resettlement regime, which was organized under the auspices of the sultan and his Ottoman Refugee Commission (Muhacirin Komisyonu), the Ottoman state intended to benefit from the refugees' physical labor, agricultural productivity, and religious status as Muslims. For the Ottoman state, to be a refugee meant being a loyal and productive Ottoman Muslim subject.

Throughout the book, the author focuses on the experiences of North Caucasian Muslim refugees and how their entry into Ottoman lands remolded the empire into an empire of refugees. The book highlights thoroughly, however, that resettling and caring for refugees had its limits, as refugees were often left to their own devices given the financial constraints of the Ottoman government, especially with the collapse of the Ottoman Balkans and the introduction of Ottoman Public Debt. Nevertheless, the Ottoman refugee regime was a response to Russian imperialism and paved the way for multiple channels of state-driven centralization and refugee-driven migration and resettlement. Far from treating migration as a simplistic process of accepting and resettling refugees, the book presents a collage of collaboration and tension between refugees and the Ottoman and Russian governments, making this study a considerable intervention in transimperial historiography.

The book consists of seven chapters divided into three thematic parts corresponding to refugee migration, refugee settlement, and diaspora and return. It also includes eight maps, nine figures, and eleven tables that effectively support the author's contention with statistics, photography, and visual representations of various Ottoman territories. Part I (chapters 1 and 2) addresses the impact of Russian imperial expansion and its exclusionist policies in the North Caucasus. The result of these geopolitical shocks was the creation of an Ottoman refugee regime. Besides providing refuge and aid, this regime entailed the implementation of various models of resettlement that reinforced the conception of *hijra* and the caliphate. The author makes clear that the Ottoman refugee regime was "required" to protect Muslims and resettle them in the countryside (63). In part II (chapters 3, 4, and 5), the author addresses the obstacles that materialized with the refugee regime such as severe financial constraints and the lack of available land.

Part II also draws attention to the conflict between North Caucasian communities and other settled and nomadic communities. Throughout Hamed-Troyansky's analysis of Circassian slavery, he

stresses that the Ottoman state faced a conundrum of both safeguarding the institution of slavery and acting as the arbiter of Islamic justice—an issue that was never resolved but still propagated frictions within territories with Circassian refugees (102–3). Likewise, part II spotlights how refugee families created outposts in Transjordan and the “Little Caucasus” in Uzunyayla—both resettlement projects ended in different outcomes: one with a flourishing economic center of capital in Amman, the other with economic and demographic stagnation in Uzunyayla. Part III (chapters 6 and 7) presents an illuminating examination of North Caucasian diaspora networks and the return to their homelands. Regarding the former, Hamed-Troyansky contends that refugee villages, the Circassian Union and Support Association, and North Caucasian Muslim intellectuals all participated in the shaping of the North Caucasian diaspora. Through his examination of print media such as *Ğuaze* (Guide) and competing voices and written mediums, he argues that it was the conjunction of these historical actors and associations that led to the institutional and intellectual foundation of the North Caucasian diaspora (213). Furthermore, his last chapter introduces clandestine Russian policies that permitted approximately 40,000 North Caucasian Muslims to return to their homeland. As an unwritten reimmigration policy between 1867 and World War I, this evaluation of secret readmittance of refugees offers an invaluable perspective to an often-overlooked phenomenon of return in migration studies.

The author’s considerable access to and scrutiny of a vast number of primary and secondary sources contributes to the impressive breadth of this work. Researching in twenty public and private archives across ten countries, Hamed-Troyansky explores top-down and bottom-up understandings of refugee resettlement in Arabic, Bulgarian, Ottoman Turkish, Russian, and northern Caucasian languages. Most notable is his examination of a treasure trove of private letters from North Caucasian families such as the Sayetkhan family and the Khutat family, to name a few, whose experiences in Transjordan and Uzunyayla, respectively, showcased the interconnectivities among refugee families, merchants, and authorities, and their rise as elites in Ottoman Anatolia. Also noteworthy is his consultation of Ottoman land records for the Amman region, provincial data on refugee settlement from uncatalogued boxes in Bulgaria’s National Library, British and Russian consular records, Ottoman registers and documents on the Ottoman Refugee Commission from the Ottoman Archives in Istanbul, newspapers, and private documents preserved in Nalchik, Vladikavkaz, and Tbilisi.

Hamed-Troyansky's book constitutes a new and welcomed addition to a variety of subfields in world history and global studies: empire, migration studies, globalization, and capitalism. Scholars of these subfields will benefit most from this book, and it is a highly recommended reading for undergraduate and graduate courses alike. By introducing a counterbalance to studies focusing on the interwar and postwar refugee regime, *Empire of Refugees* breaks new ground by illuminating the importance of the religious dimensions of migration and resettlement during the late Ottoman imperial era. It invites scholars to participate in more in-depth discussions about expanding the framework of global migration to include non-Eurocentric models of resettlement and consider other patterns of migration in a global context.