Pluralizing Political Modernity

Recent Russian-Ottoman Transimperial Historiography (Review Article)

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A new generation of scholars is rewriting the history of the transcontinental space ruled by the Ottoman and Romanov dynasties during the nineteenth century. Three recent and remarkable books, each unique in focus, allow us to assess this emerging field of transimperial history, to discuss its characteristics, methods, and early results, and to consider the challenges it faces. Published between 2018 and 2024, these groundbreaking monographs all result from PhD research completed within the past fifteen years in Britain and the United States (Will Smiley, University of Cambridge, 2012; Lâle Can, New York University, 2012; Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky, Stanford University, 2018).[1] While all three historians have a background in Ottoman history,

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* On Will Smiley, *From Slaves to Prisoners of War: The Ottoman Empire, Russia, and International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Lâle Can, *Spiritual Subjects: Central Asian Pilgrims and the Ottoman Hajj at the End of Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020); and Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky, *Empire of Refugees: North Caucasian Muslims and the Late Ottoman State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2024).

1. The overrepresentation of British and North American Universities in the field is partly due to their appeal to young historians with complex migratory backgrounds, possessing rare skills and unique perspectives. The relative freedom in the choice of subjects studied and the selection of thesis advisory panels is another advantage of US PhD programs. Germany is also an important pole for this emerging research, where it is dominated, for the moment, by early modernists.

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each uses both Ottoman and Russian sources, though to varying extents. They investigate the dynamics, forms, and effects of Russian-Ottoman entanglements during a time of interimperial mirroring and interlocked processes of centralization and transformation (or "modernization") that started in the eighteenth century. These processes, often investigated by historians as a result of the dynastic states' confrontation with European modernity and imperialism, are thus reframed by focusing on relations between the two post-Mongol and post-Byzantine empires.[2] This shift in emphasis shows that, far from being solely driven by Europeanization, modernization was also deeply informed by non-European imperial powers and their legacies. Even as they formally entered the European international system, the two empires negotiated shared understandings of the state, sovereignty, international law, subjecthood, nationality, the status of refugees, and the rights of states and individuals. Neither international nor transnational histories,[3] the volumes considered here all follow three main sets of protagonists: Ottoman state actors, their Romanov equivalents, and discrete groups of people moving between the territories of the two empires over the decades—prisoners of war, North Caucasian refugees, and Muslim pilgrims (*hajjis*) from Central Asia.[4]

The three authors systematically examine the complex interactions between those actors, particularly how the two empires negotiated claims over people who

2. On the historiographical debates on modernity in the context of the Russian and Soviet Empires, see Michael David-Fox, *Crossing Borders: Modernity, Ideology, and Culture in Russia and the Soviet Union* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015). For the Ottoman Empire, see the now classic Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (1993; London/New York: I. B. Tauris, 2004). On the ongoing debates on modernization and modernity in Eastern Europe, see Włodzimierz Borodziej, Stanislav Holubec, and Joachim von Puttkamer, eds., *Mastery and Lost Illusions: Space and Time in the Modernization of Eastern and Central Europe* (Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2014).

3. For important new international histories of Russian-Ottoman entanglements, see Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908–1918* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Lucien J. Frary and Mara Kozelsky, eds., *Russian-Ottoman Borderlands: The Eastern Question Reconsidered* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014).

4. The groups studied are overwhelmingly male in the archival sources. The place of women could vary depending on the situation, however, and their invisibilization in the archives reflects a diverse range of realities. Smiley emphasizes that women represented a significant proportion of captives during wartime, whether they were connected to the armies or, as was more often the case, civilians taken during the conflict. Mentions of these women are particularly sparse in the archives for a number of reasons: they were rapidly purchased as domestic slaves and entered Ottoman households, where they were harder to reach; they were of no economic or military interest to the Russian authorities, who showed little concern for their fate; and women who had given birth to a Muslim child in the Ottoman Empire could not legally be sent back to Russia. Hamed-Troyansky remarks that the marked demographic imbalance in favor of men among Circassian refugees reflected far higher rates of female mortality during their migration. Women nevertheless played an important role in the Circassian nationalist movement at the start of the twentieth century. Finally, Can observes that although the hajj was often a family affair, women appear almost exclusively in the sources as wives, daughters, and mothers, leaving little further trace.

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could be difficult to categorize as subjects of one state or the other. These interactions, in turn, transformed both empires from within. The imperial state did not emerge *sui generis*; it was a joint creation, as Romanov and Ottoman state actors often cooperated to enforce their claims *against* their own subjects. Although these volumes show how the movement of people created and relied on networks and political and social spaces that defied imperial boundaries, they do not confine those groups to the social or geographic peripheries, that is, to a space apart from the imperial territorial state. Rather, the diasporic communities that emerged as a result of these circulations are studied as constituent parts of the empires that they came to belong to, and as political actors within them.[5] The perspective on the two centralizing, colonizing imperial states is thus doubly decentered, as it shifts away from the traditional focus on their relationship with European powers, but also from their imperial capitals and central state actors. Modern political orders across Eastern Europe and Western and Central Asia thus emerge not only as products of Europeanization or of endogenous transformations within a single imperial state, but as the non-linear outcomes of circulations, interactions, and negotiations among non-European state and non-state actors.

An International Law of War Across the Black Sea

Will Smiley's *From Slaves to Prisoners of War* offers a detailed analysis of the emergence of a distinct legal, diplomatic, political, and social status for prisoners of war during the repeated Russian-Ottoman conflicts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He uses a wealth of Ottoman archival material, although, regrettably, very few archives held in the former Russian Empire. The volume demonstrates how a specific tradition of the law of war emerged from negotiations between the two dynastic empires that each claimed the legacy of Byzantium. This tradition, based on Islamic law, state practices, and negotiations, shaped a customary law parallel to the European law of nations, with which it later merged in the nineteenth century as the latter was formalized as international law.[6]

5. The monographs discussed here are complemented by still-fragmentary research on these diasporic communities themselves, in national and transnational histories that focus on particular groups, usually treating the empires themselves as resources, hindrances, or simply general context. For the Circassians, see Seteney Shami, "Prehistories of Globalization: Circassian Identity in Motion," in "Globalization," ed. Arjun Appadurai, special issue, *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (2000): 177–204; Zeynel Abidin Besleney, *The Circassian Diaspora in Turkey: A Political History* (London: Routledge, 2014); Elbruz Aksoy, *Benim Adım 1864. Çerkes Hikâyeleri* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2018). See also Brian Williams, *The Crimean Tatars: The Diaspora Experience and the Forging of a Nation* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2001).

6. On the key role of the Romanov Empire in this process of formalization, see Peter Holquist, "The Russian Empire as a 'Civilized State': International Law as Principle and Practice in Imperial Russia, 1874–1878," NCEEER Working Paper (Washington: National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, 2004).

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Smiley starts with the "law of ransom" that governed interimperial captivity in the seventeenth century, a "customary law of the border zone" that treated soldiers taken during war on a par with captives seized in border regions by the many local raiding forces, including the Crimean khanate and the various Cossack armies. These frontier actors provided the two states with military manpower and with slaves or unfree laborers, including women. When they fought for the state, their military service was in large part paid for by the ransoming and selling of captives. The unwritten rules of the "law of ransom" that allowed some captives to escape enslavement relied on the networks and knowledge of those who lived in the borderlands. By the late seventeenth century, however, Muscovy increasingly monopolized the system. It centralized the ransoming of its subjects, put pressure on the Cossacks to end the borderland economy of raiding and pillaging, and sought to regulate ransoming through peace treaties, making it an affair to be resolved between states rather than local actors. In the mid-eighteenth century, this system evolved into the "law of release," where at the end of conflicts between the Ottoman, Safavid, and Romanov empires, all captives were expected to be reciprocally released without ransom, unless they had undergone religious conversion.

The implementation of this "law of release" required cooperation between Ottoman and Russian state actors, who worked together to disrupt the slave trade or force the release of those enslaved by now-illegal methods. This entailed compensating and disciplining soldiers, as well as taking on the slave-owning elites and the provincial authorities that supported them. It also meant penetrating into both far-away provinces and private households to identify and free the slaves on whose physical, domestic, and even reproductive labor Ottoman elites, both Muslim and non-Muslim, relied. Smiley argues that this cooperation between Russian and Ottoman authorities was instrumental in massively reducing white slavery in the Ottoman Empire.[7]

The extent of the "law of release" nevertheless raised important issues, as the two states crucially had to agree on who their respective subjects were, and thereby who would benefit from the exchange of prisoners. Two main questions arose. The first concerned the status of people from regions not fully integrated into one empire or the other, primarily in the Caucasus, which had long served as a major source of slaves for the Ottomans and whose annexation by the Russians was contested. The second was the equally complex tension between religious affiliation and subjecthood. On the one hand, the two empires had to address the status of coreligionists who were not subjects. Should the Russians work to free all Christian prisoners, including Georgians, Greeks, Bulgarians, and Serbs, who were either vassals or subjects of the Ottoman Empire? Should the Ottomans release back to Russia Muslim soldiers, who may have been coerced to serve in the Russian army but who could not, by definition, become Ottoman subjects by converting to

7. See also Ehud R. Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade and Its Suppression, 1840–1890* (1982; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Christoph Witzenrath, *The Russian Empire, Slaving and Liberation, 1480–1725: Trans-Cultural Worldviews in Eurasia* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022).

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Islam? Although Russian officials made occasional halfhearted attempts to extend the law of release to all Christians in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the two empires ultimately prioritized state subjecthood over religious identity. Following this logic, the Ottoman Empire would return Muslim soldiers to Russia and publicly execute Greek Ottoman captives, who had no right to the protection of the Russians even when they had fought at their side. The fate of the Georgians did not hinge on their faith, but on the Ottomans recognizing Russian sovereignty over the Georgian kingdoms by the late 1820s.

On the other hand, the issue of conversion raised complicated questions regarding the relation of subjects to imperial authority. Both empires presented themselves as champions of their respective faiths, and thus, in theory, encouraged conversion. Yet apart from those from border regions, who could seek to claim subjecthood of other European empires, conversion was the only way for captives to avoid a "release" that was not always welcome. Release should not be mistaken for freedom; in fact, it usually meant a return to unfreedom, especially for soldiers who would be conscripted back into the army or face charges of desertion, and some captives actively worked to avoid this fate. Conversion was also the main tool available for owners of captives to enforce their rights over the unfree, as it sealed the forced integration of the captive into the local society through bondage. Imperial authorities thus recognized conversion as a way for their captive subjects to change their status and affiliation. Unable to prevent it entirely, they formalized simplified, bureaucratic procedures in order to ascertain its veracity.

Smiley's book is a major contribution to the history of the law of war, offering a fine-grained analysis of the political contexts in which it was negotiated and emphasizing the long-neglected role of extra-European actors. Yet his argument that this was truly a Russian-Ottoman system, based on co-construction and reciprocity, would have been stronger had he paid more attention to the Romanov perspective. He does not discuss, for instance, the Russians' legal reasoning, nor their interactions with Ottoman captives and the Ottoman state representatives charged with obtaining their release.

Refugeedom Before the World Wars

Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky's *Empire of Refugees* traces the history of North Caucasian refugees in the Ottoman Empire from the 1850s to World War I. He uses archives in Russian, Ottoman Turkish, and Arabic from both former empires, held today in Turkey and Russia (including in local archives in the North Caucasus) and in various countries around the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean. From the mid-nineteenth century until the First World War, between one and two million Muslims were displaced from the North Caucasus due to Russian conquest and colonization.[8]

8. See Georgij Alekseevich Dzidzarija, *Makhadzhirstvo i problemy istorii Abkhazii XIX stoletija* (Sukhumi: Alashara, 1982); Peter Holquist, "To Count, to Extract, and to Exterminate: Population Statistics and Population Politics in Late Imperial and Soviet Russia," in *A State*

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Faced with the mass arrival of Muslim refugees, the Ottoman Empire created its own "refugee regime" based on non-Western and non-secular principles, and a specific status for refugees, that of *mucahir*.[9] While the *tanzimat* reforms had defined a non-faith based, egalitarian Ottoman subjecthood and an immigration system in theory open to all, the Ottoman Empire recognized in the *muhacir* a population who, on the basis of religious persecution suffered under Christian rule, deserved specific protection, rights, and resettlement in exchange for its loyalty. Both Ottoman and Romanov policies towards North Caucasian Muslims aimed to consolidate imperial authority over peripheral populations, and in so doing reinforced the "gradual sectarianization" and "religious sorting in the nineteenth-century borderlands."[10] While the Russians used population displacement and land policies to open their newly conquered southern borderland to colonization, the Ottomans used the *muhacir* produced by these Russian measures to control or colonize their own frontier.

Hamed-Troyansky carefully maps the resettlement of North Caucasians throughout the Ottoman Empire. The *muhacir* were destined to become rural settlers and instruments of the empire's efforts to colonize and reinforce its frontier zones. But although they did ultimately change the empire from within, it was rarely in the ways that the imperial authorities had foreseen. In the 1860s, the *muhacir* were mostly settled in the European provinces, which the Russian Empire had sought to capture during the Crimean War of 1853–1856. Left with insufficient economic support to cultivate the land taken from existing local communities, the refugees were increasingly drawn to violence, working as bandits or as militia members in the poorly paid but extremely brutal *başıbozuk*. Instead of helping the Ottoman Empire secure its European borderlands, they thus fueled the rise of sectarian violence, before eventually falling victim to it themselves when they were expulsed en masse from the region after 1878. They were mostly resettled in Anatolia and, in lesser numbers, in the Levant. In other words, the Ottoman Empire used the *muhacir* to reinforce the Muslim presence in regions with heavy Greek settlement and to colonize the empire's internal frontier zones controlled by nomadic communities. They were seen as instruments of the empire's "civilizing mission," and it was hoped that their settlement, which brought land surveyors, tax collectors, and imperial bureaucracy to the borderlands, would help with their economic and agricultural development while also providing an armed presence in these regions.

of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 111–44; Mara Kozelsky, "Casualties of Conflict: Crimean Tatars During the Crimean War," *Slavic Review* 67, no. 4 (2008): 866–91; Dana Sherry, "Social Alchemy on the Black Sea Coast, 1860–65," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 10, no. 1 (2009): 7–30.

9. The term *muhacir* is derived from *hijra*. It became both a legal and administrative category and a term of self-identification for Muslims forced out of Christian states, regardless of the actual circumstances of their displacement. Hamed-Troyansky offers a detailed discussion of the terms and concepts used in the Ottoman space, although his discussion of their Russian equivalents remains superficial.

10. Hamed-Troyansky, *Empire of Refugees*, 10.

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Hamed-Troyansky focuses on two case studies: the mountainous region of Uzunyayla in southern Anatolia and the region of Amman, today in Jordan. In both cases, the Ottoman state offered the refugees military backing, on top of land and rights, to help them against local tribal rivals, be they Turkic, Kurdish, Bedouin, or Druze. The *muhacir* themselves were heavily militarized, joining the Ottoman army or various local militias, serving the state against "rebels" of all stripes or patrolling the Ottoman-Russian border. In southern Anatolia, the North Caucasians chose a secluded valley where they created a "Little Circassia" that remained largely isolated from the surrounding society. In the Levant, North Caucasian settlement coincided with the opening of the Hedjaz railway from Damascus to Medina. North Caucasians were settled in villages in Central Transjordan, on the nomadic frontier, where they thrived as Amman quickly turned from a small settlement to a bustling town and then a city. Although they provided loyal military troops to the Ottomans until the fall of the empire, they ultimately owed their success to their alliances with Bedouin communities and Levantine merchants.

While refugees acquired Ottoman subjecthood as soon as they arrived in the empire and formed a new administrative category of its population, the process of turning this legal identity into a political one was longer, and paralleled similar transformations taking place among the empire's different communities at the turn of the century. In the early twentieth century, North Caucasians in the Ottoman Empire started constituting themselves as an Ottoman people, united by their faith, their history of religious persecution, their loyalty to their Ottoman protectors, and a hard-to-define Circassian identity. The term "Circassian" grouped together various populations, including actual Circassians (Adyghe) but also Abkhazians, Abazins, Kabardians, Chechens, and others, who spoke unrelated languages and had different traditions and political and social structures. During the often-deadly process of resettlement, they relied on their preexisting social networks and community ties to survive, as a result retaining much of their internal diversity. The intellectuals who endeavored to create a common Circassian Ottoman identity thus had to write a common history, invent a shared North Caucasian homeland, standardize a common language, and choose an alphabet in which to write it. Some of these creations, including the first Circassian-language newspapers, printed books, and textbooks, were even briefly reimported into the Russian-owned regions of Kuban and Kabarda, where Circassian schools and newspapers were established by *muhacir* returning after 1905, before being banned by either the imperial or the Bolshevik authorities.

One of the strengths of Hamed-Troyansky's work is the attention that he pays to return migration.[11] Although both Ottoman and Russian authorities expected refugees to leave for good, and deployed considerable joint efforts to bar them from crossing the border a second time, tens of thousands did in fact return, and many more tried to. In the late 1860s, the Romanovs had issued a strict official ban on

11. See James H. Meyer, "Immigration, Return, and the Politics of Citizenship: Russian Muslims in the Ottoman Empire, 1860–1914," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39, no. 1 (2007): 15–32.

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both immigration and emigration for their North Caucasian subjects. Yet they were forced to develop pragmatic solutions to the movement of returning populations, allowing those who made it far enough from the border to render their deportation complicated to remain in the Russian Empire. Circassians thus formed complex diasporic transimperial communities, where migration and displacement were not merely one-way. Information, goods, and people traveled between Amman and Dagestan in both directions. People could leave the Russian Empire as pilgrims, settle in the Ottoman Empire as refugees, and then attempt to return to Russia as Ottoman citizens, regardless of the imperial authorities' efforts to stop these flows, which they suspected were conduits for contraband, revolutionary or pan-Islamic propaganda, and other perceived dangers to the empire's security.

Among those who tried, and often failed, to remigrate to the Romanov Empire, were Circassian slaves. North Caucasian migration had been a communal affair: communities, from extended families to village or tribal confederations, had moved together. These included unfree people, who as enslaved refugees frequently ended up with even fewer rights in the Ottoman Empire than in their homeland. While the Russian Empire sought to break up local hierarchies by forbidding slavery in the North Caucasus, the Ottoman Empire chose to affirm the rights of Circassian slaveholders in order to secure the loyalty of the refugee elite, although formally both free and unfree Circassians were Ottoman subjects and *muhacir*, with the same rights to land and protection. The influx of tens, probably hundreds of thousands of slaves, revived and spread the long-standing institution of Circassian slavery in the Ottoman Empire. Remigration to the Russian Empire, along with rebellion and recourse to Ottoman authorities, became one way for the enslaved to obtain their freedom. Only in the early twentieth century did Circassian elites take up the cause of abolition, as an alliance formed between recently arrived refugees and the older Ottoman Circassian elite descended from the slave trade, and slavery came to be seen as a major impediment to Circassian unity.

Nationality and Belonging

Like Hamed-Troyansky, Lâle Can stresses the difficulty of classing interimperial migrations into neat categories. *Spiritual Subjects* focuses on Central Asian pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina after the Romanov conquest of Central Asia in the second half of the nineteenth century. While affirming the centrality of religion to our understanding of the hajj in the age of high imperialism, Can also looks at pilgrimage as a specific form of migration which structured a diasporic, transimperial space that was being profoundly transformed by colonial expansion and modern transportation.[12] The hajjis she observes did not merely travel from Central Asia to the

12. Unlike other specialists, Can thus rejects the idea that Christian empires can be considered "protectors" of the hajj reduced to its purely logistic dimensions. See Eileen Kane, *Russian Hajj: Empire and the Pilgrimage to Mecca* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015); Valentina Izmirlieva, "Christian Hajjis—The Other Orthodox Pilgrims to

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Haremeyn once in their life; they spent time in Istanbul, living and working there or in other cities and towns. Sometimes they settled along the route or in Medina. Some never returned to Central Asia, others never made it to Mecca, and others still made the journey multiple times. Although their world was informed by a Sufi Persian culture, they were mostly workers, merchants, and other "ordinary" people, rather than dervishes and scholars.

Working with archives from the Russian and Ottoman Empires, particularly in Ottoman Turkish, Chaghatay Turki, Arabic, and Russian, Can shows how these Central Asians on the move challenged and defined forms of subjecthood and belonging between empires. In particular, she investigates how Ottoman authorities struggled to fit these hajjis into the new legal categories of imperial subjecthood. The 1869 Ottoman nationality law had constructed a seemingly clear category of Ottoman subjects, no longer defined by religion, and classified everyone else as "foreigners." All other European states, including the Russian Empire, were in the process of codifying similar legal categories. One of the aims of the Ottoman legislation was to mitigate the effects of the Capitulations and European extraterritoriality by drawing a firm distinction between Ottoman subjects of all faiths and European *protégés*. However, it also meant that non-Ottoman Muslims were now considered "foreign." As such, they faced various restrictions, and were notably barred from acquiring land in the Hijaz. The Ottomans were nevertheless loathe to treat Muslim foreigners as European nationals to whom Islamic law did not apply, and feared that these colonial subjects could become agents of European imperialism against the Ottoman Empire. They thus worked hard to limit the possibility for Muslim hajjis to claim European nationalities, particularly when it came to defining Central Asian subjecthood. By the late nineteenth century, Central Asia had been transformed by Russian and British colonial expansion. A large part had been incorporated into the Romanov Empire as the colony of Turkestan, while the emirates of Bukhara and Afghanistan became protectorates. Although Chinese Turkestan had been reconquered by the Qing, the Russian authorities were increasingly articulating claims of sovereignty in the region, including by extending extraterritorial protection over its inhabitants. Throughout the late imperial period, Ottoman authorities relied on sophisticated readings of international law to deny that Bukharans, Afghans, and Kashgaris could claim Russian or British nationality, asserting that protectorates were in fact semi-sovereign states with their own nationals.[13] The Ottomans' hazy knowledge of Central Asia, moreover, often led them to label all Russian-ruled Central Asians as "Bukharans," thereby denying the imperial citizenship of the colonial subjects of Russian Turkestan.

Jerusalem," *Slavic Review* 73, no. 2 (2014): 322–46. For an overview of European empires as "Muslim powers" organizing the pilgrimage and the parallel structuration of a trans-imperial Muslim space during the colonial period, see Luc Chantre, *Pèlerinages d'empire. Une histoire européenne du pèlerinage à La Mecque* (Paris: Éd. de la Sorbonne, 2018). 13. See Lauren Benton, "From International Law to Imperial Constitutions: The Problem of Quasi- Sovereignty, 1870–1900," in "Law, War, and History," ed. David S. Tanenhaus, special issue, *Law and History Review* 26, no. 3 (2008): 595–619.

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This left Central Asian migrants in the Ottoman Empire in a difficult position. Not only were they foreigners excluded from the rights accorded to Ottoman subjects, they were nationals of states that could not offer them protection, as the protectorates could not conduct their own foreign policy and the Qing had no diplomatic relations with the Ottomans. However, while they enjoyed no rights or protections based on "viable legal nationality," they were nonetheless Muslim hajjis in the caliph's lands, at the very moment the sultan was seeking to revive the caliphate to bolster his legitimacy: the Ottomans thus argued that Central Asian hajjis came solely under the protection of the caliph, their spiritual sovereign.[14] Can shows that the caliphate was not simply a matter of pan-Islamic discourse or the instrumentalization of religion, but a key political institution of the Ottoman state as a Muslim empire. Tracing the interactions between Central Asian hajjis and Ottoman authorities, she examines how the latter created regimes of rights and expectations that gave material, institutional, and legal weight to this caliphal protection. This placed a growing burden on the empire itself, which had to fulfill these expectations even when they clashed with its financial and political interests. The hajjis required funds to travel and places to stay, which were particularly costly in the Hijaz. They contributed to the spread of disease, begging on the streets of a capital city that the authorities wanted to imagine as modern, clean, and free of vagrants, and their presence led to repeated conflicts with foreign consuls. By the early twentieth century, both Russian and Ottoman authorities were actively interested in stemming the increasing numbers of Central Asian pilgrims traveling across the Caspian and the Black Sea to Istanbul and westward, but their efforts were confounded by the binding internal and international obligations created by both legal and spiritual subjecthood.

Moreover, Central Asians' connections with the Ottoman Empire did not only depend on imperial categorizations of subjecthood. Thanks to an exceptional access to its archives, Can offers a fascinating analysis of the role and workings of a Bukharan *tekke* in Istanbul. These lodges, which served poor pilgrims along the road to Mecca, had become Ottoman imperial institutions in the nineteenth century.[15] Their shaykhs registered and policed the pilgrims on behalf of the Ottoman state, while also providing imperial support by relaying their petitions and vouching for them when necessary. The *tekke* formed a long-lasting network that spanned the entire empire and reached into Central Asia. They were social and economic institutions for migrants, providing housing, food, work, contact with the surrounding society, and community. Central Asian pilgrims with links to the Naqshbandi order were welcomed there as "countrymen," *hemşeri*, whether they were Bukharan, Qing, or Russian subjects.

The *tekke* was not the only Ottoman institution that treated Central Asians as Ottomans, or at least not as foreigners. Lower-level bureaucrats, especially provincial authorities in the Hijaz itself, refused to suddenly relabel as foreigners

14. Can, *Spiritual Subjects*, 30.

15. The Central Asian lodges in Istanbul studied in this volume were founded between the late seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries by notables linked to the Naqshbandi order.

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people who had long been part of local communities. Laws on foreigners acquiring land or marrying Ottoman women were routinely disregarded when it came to Central Asian hajjis. As Can stresses, these were not episodic visitors who arrived once a year in Mecca. The hajj was indissociable from economic, mercantile, and scholarly activity, and was mapped onto older Naqshbandi networks that linked Arabia with Central Asia. It sustained a transimperial community that defied the modern empires' attempts to categorize people by legal nationality, while also offering an alternative definition of belonging and different ways of becoming Ottoman. Many Central Asians ultimately took Ottoman citizenship in the 1910s; others volunteered to serve in the Ottoman army while retaining their Russian nationality. Whether they were legal Ottoman subjects or not, they had become Ottomans through the practices, networks, and institutions of the hajj. At the very same moment, Christian Ottomans, who were theoretically equal and full-fledged legal subjects of the empire, were being violently excluded through deportation or extermination.

While Can firmly anchors her argument in the field of Ottoman history, she states that her project originated with a completely different research question, centered on Sufi rebels' claims to Ottoman support during the 1898 Andijan uprising in Russian Turkestan. Unfortunately, she does not return to this initial interrogation. Nevertheless, there seems to be an implicit hypothesis running throughout her book: that Andijani appeals to the Ottomans had little to do with pan-Islamism or pan-Turkism, but instead stemmed from the hajj and their experience as the caliph's spiritual subjects, an alternative model to the colonial subjecthood imposed by the Russian Empire.

Can's argument would have also benefited from a clearer exploration of the category of "Central Asians." It was clearly based on the ambiguous status of the Bukharans as the subjects of protectorates, but seems to have extended to the subjects of Turkestan, even though their inclusion or exclusion was never made explicit. The category of "Central Asians" was at once vague and precise for the Russian and Ottoman imperial authorities, who, depending on the context and on their interests, alternated between enforcing the strict new legal borders imposed on Central Asian societies and claiming all Central Asians as one subject group. These state-imposed distinctions did not correspond to community borders as negotiated and experienced by the populations on the ground, either in Central Asia or throughout the Russian and Ottoman Empires. It also remains unclear how "Central Asians" negotiated their own identities. Kashgari, Bukharans, and Andijani may have been undistinguishable in Odesa or Istanbul, but Can reminds us that they themselves were well aware of their differences. Did the experience of the hajj, supported by Naqshbandi networks and newly accessible to tens of thousands of people beyond the traditional pilgrim elite, also lead to the emergence or strengthening of "Central Asian" identities in the face of imperial subjugation, as these groups traveled through the Russian and British Empires to become Ottoman spiritual subjects?

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Interimperial Colonization: The Emergence of the Modern State

These three books all explore new sources and address new questions. Each makes an important contribution to its respective field—anchored mainly, but not exclusively, in Ottoman history. When they are read together, however, a broader scholarly proposition emerges, a compelling shift towards the Russian-Ottoman transimperial history that has garnered attention in recent years.[16] This approach is above all characterized by a systematic decentering of imperial history. Decentering here does not mean merely switching the focus to actors or regions once seen as "peripheral"—in other words, displacing the center. Rather, it implies considering interactions between state and non-state actors on all levels as the matrix of imperial institutions. This movement is particularly visible in the three works reviewed here, which explore more recent periods than much scholarship in the field, primarily focused on intellectual, cultural, and economic circulations during the early modern period rather than states, in line with the concerns of the "New Imperial History."

In all three volumes, the state itself emerges as a major product of these trans- and interimperial interactions. Russian and Ottoman imperial actors worked together, from the eighteenth century onward, to jointly define and enforce new forms of state sovereignty across Western and Central Asia. The processes of the transformation, centralization, homogenization, and modernization of the Romanov and Ottoman Empires, usually examined separately, were deeply interlocked, as the two empires relied on each other to implement new sovereign orders. Their claims had to be negotiated and mutually recognized; their laws and regulations had to be adjusted to accommodate those of the other. Imperial agents collaborated across borders to enforce claims against frontier actors who could not or would not accept their often violent integration into the modern imperial state. The shift from the "law of ransom" to the "law of release," in Smiley's account, was predicated on the monopolization of captives as a human resource by the central state. This was a major part of the destruction of the political and economic order of the Eurasian steppe by the emerging imperial states. Across the region, Saint Petersburg and Istanbul agreed on this effort and worked against the inhabitants of their own border zones in order to recover and free enemy captives. They also cooperated in different ways to facilitate the displacement of borderland populations. Movements of Christian and Muslim populations alongside retreating armies had been a common phenomenon in Russian-Ottoman wars, but in the nineteenth century such relocations became political instruments of empire. Displacement along religious lines was codified with the Russian-Ottoman agreement on Western Circassian resettlement in 1860 and in the *droit d'option* clause of the 1879 Peace

16. See especially Stefan Rohdewald, Stephan Conermann, and Albrecht Fuess, eds., *Transottomanica — Osteuropäisch-osmanisch-persische Mobilitätsdynamiken: Perspektiven und Forschungsstand* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2019); Ninja Bumann et al., eds., *Handbook on the History and Culture of the Black Sea Region* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2024).

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of Constantinople. These expulsions of Muslim populations not only led to the emergence of the Ottoman refugee regime, but also necessitated active cooperation between the two empires' police, military, and consular authorities, and adjustments to their laws on nationality and immigration. Again and again, we see Russian and Ottoman agents cooperating against local elites, tracking slaves in Ottoman households, using diplomacy and international law to circumvent or undermine local judges, and giving more weight to consuls and foreign ministry officials than to regional administrations and communities. What better symbol of this cooperation than the award of the Russian Orders of Saint Anna and Saint Stanislaus to the Ottoman officers who opened cannon fire on Chechen refugees trying to cross the border back into the Russian Empire in 1865? The refusal by the Ottoman authorities to admit Abkhazian refugees in 1878 is a rare occurrence that, as an exception to the rule, underlines the importance of Ottoman cooperation in the Russian subjugation of the Northern Caucasus.

Within their shared conceptual frame of state sovereignty, Russian and Ottoman officials also worked together, if often with adversarial positions, to define and reduce the status of political entities that did not fit the mold of the modern state, from the Georgian kingdoms in Smiley's account to the Central Asian emirates considered by Can.[17] As the latter stresses, the effects were not localized to one specific region: negotiations between Ottoman and Russian actors in Jeddah were directly linked to the imposition of the Russian state's claims on Chinese Turkestan.[18] The history of the "Eurasian borderlands" is not just one of expansion from imperial centers and rivalry between empires, it is also a history of cooperation between imperial agents to impose their shared concept of state sovereignty across the continent, undermining, delegitimizing, and subjugating alternative political actors.[19]

17. This is supported by Alexander Morrison, *The Russian Conquest of Central Asia: A Study in Imperial Expansion, 1814–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). Morrison shows that the Russian conquest of Central Asia was predicated on the refusal of the Russian imperial state to recognize Central Asian khanates and emirates as legitimate political actors, even as its authorities cooperated with their British counterparts to seal the new interimperial order in the region, despite the discourse of the "Great Game." Although they were entangled with other European empires, the Russian and Ottoman Empires' concept of sovereignty appears to combine forms and temporalities of legal reform, territorialization, nationalization, and colonization that were distinct from those seen in Western European colonial empires. See Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

18. For a transnational history of Chinese-Russian Turkestan, see David Brophy, *Uyghur Nation: Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

19. The best account of the history of Eurasia through the prism of imperial expansion fueled by interimperial rivalry is that offered by Alfred J. Rieber, *The Struggle for the Eurasian Borderlands: From the Rise of Early Modern Empires to the End of the First World War* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014). Recent historiography has revisited the dynamics and effects of this interimperial rivalry in the Eastern European and Anatolian borderlands in the early twentieth century. See Donald Bloxham,

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Though not involving direct cooperation, the two imperial states' subjugation of their borderlands was likewise intertwined, as their colonial projects across the Black Sea region and beyond complemented one another.[20] This is clearly shown by Hamed-Troyansky, who tracks how victims of the Russian colonization of the Caucasus were in turn used as agents of Ottoman colonization. Smiley also hints at the importance of the "law of release" in securing not only military labor but also settlers, the two often going hand in hand in the Russian colonization of the empire's southern borderlands. Greek corsairs captured in the Mediterranean balked at being released to the Russian state because they did not want to be sent to Crimea; the Ottomans returned captive Cossack deserters to Russia, and their army prevented Circassians and Chechens from returning to their homelands. The extent of the transfers and mirroring involved in this interlocked process of borderland colonization is yet to be fully understood. The groups mentioned in the volumes discussed here were far from the only ones concerned—Greeks, Bulgarians, and Armenians were important instruments of Russian colonization around the Black Sea, while Zaporizhian Cossacks, expelled by the Romanovs, had played a key role in securing Ottoman rule in the Balkans, just as the Crimean Tartars, as well as the Circassians, did in the nineteenth century. The mix of often violent pressure to emigrate and incentives to immigrate varied, but this vast movement of borderland populations across the Black Sea region can hardly be reduced to a spontaneous or bottom-up process of "sorting," even if shifting religious and political allegiances did influence the strategies of the populations concerned.

In the late nineteenth century, the nationalization of the Russian Empire and the increasing importance accorded to ethnicity over religion began to unravel this joint colonization effort.[21] The Russian state started to view all Ottoman subjects with increased suspicion, and showed a growing reluctance to use foreigners as

The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz, eds., *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

20. On the conquest and colonization of this frontier, see Nicholas B. Breyfogle, Abby Schrader, and Willard Sunderland, eds., *Peopling the Russian Periphery: Borderland Colonization in Eurasian History* (London/New York: Routledge, 2008); Michael Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500–1800* (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002); Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Brian J. Boeck, *Imperial Boundaries: Cossack Communities and Empire-Building in the Age of Peter the Great* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Reşat Kasaba, *A Moveable Empire: Ottoman Nomads, Migrants, and Refugees* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).

21. See Stefan Berger and Alexei Miller, *Nationalizing Empires* (Budapest/New York: Central European University Press, 2015); Darius Staliūnas, *Making Russians: Meaning and Practice of Russification in Lithuania and Belarus After 1863* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Darius Staliūnas and Yoko Aoshima, eds., *The Tsar, the Empire, and the Nation: Dilemmas of Nationalization in Russia's Western Borderlands, 1905–1915* (Budapest/New York: Central European University Press, 2021).

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borderland settlers.[22] The Ottoman Empire was also imposing ever more rigid criteria for loyalty, as it progressively conflated internal resistance and external imperialism. As both empires started to view transimperial groups as dangerous, Armenians for example became suspicious to Ottomans and to Russians. The latter's growing hostility led to a rapid deterioration of the situation of Armenian refugees, as Russian authorities started to turn them back at the border as early as 1878.[23] When hundreds of thousands fled the Hamidian massacres in the 1890s, they were met with closed borders and, for those who made it across, official hostility. Russian officials in the border provinces considered them Ottoman subjects, and therefore ineligible for the land and fiscal advantages accorded to the resettled, or *pereselentsy*—until then granted to all displaced persons, regardless of the reason for their migration. On the eve of the Armenian genocide, refugeedom as a Russian-Ottoman imperial institution was collapsing. It nevertheless remains crucial to understanding the emergence of the modern refugee regime. Hamed-Troyansky stresses that the regime created by the Russian-Ottoman management of North Caucasian Muslims provides essential background to the population exchange between Greece and Turkey, and shaped refugee regimes across the twentieth-century Middle East. It also underpinned responses in the Levant and in the Russian Empire to the Armenian refugees who survived the genocide. It may be worth considering whether the nineteenth-century Russian-Ottoman refugee regime, based on *muhacir* and *pereselentsy*, subsequently merged, at least partly, with the international regime created in the postwar years in response to refugee crises that originated in the two former empires but were no longer contained by them.[24]

Rather than expulsing undesirable populations and inviting foreign ones to settle, from the 1870s both empires increasingly made use of closed borders and internal deportations, a process that lasted well into the twentieth century (and was, to no little extent, predicated on the mutual construction of a sealed border between the Soviet Union and Turkey).[25] By the mid-twentieth century, most of the groups involved in the ethnic and religious "sorting" and cross-colonization of

22. This was also manifested in a new mistrust of certain populations previously favored for internal colonization, including Germans and Armenians.

23. Stephen Badalyan Riegg, *Russia's Entangled Embrace: The Tsarist Empire and the Armenians, 1801–1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 195 sq.

24. On the reconfiguration of refugee resettlement as a national rather than imperial project in the wake of the genocide, see Jo Laycock, "Developing a Soviet Armenian Nation: Refugees and Resettlement in the Early Soviet South Caucasus," in *Empire and Belonging in the Eurasian Borderlands*, ed. Krista A. Goff and Lewis H. Siegelbaum (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), 97–111. On the emergence of the modern refugee regime, see Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Can mentions the continuous arrival in the Middle East of Central Asian refugees fleeing the Soviet Union in the interwar years. Much work remains to be done, however, on the place of former Ottoman regions in the transit but also the hosting of refugees fleeing the 1917 revolution, the ensuing civil wars, and Bolshevik violence.

25. Étienne Forestier-Peyrat, "Retrouver le Caucase. Histoire d'une diplomatie frontalière 1905–1938" (PhD diss., Sciences Po Paris, 2015); Forestier-Peyrat, *Histoire du Caucase au XX^e siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2020).

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the Black Sea during the nineteenth century had been internally displaced within Turkey and the Soviet Union. The precise nature of the interconnections between these borderland colonization processes is still not well understood, but they clearly invite historians to revisit concepts and practices of colonization and colonialism in the Russian-Ottoman context. It is to be hoped that this will lead to a broader discussion on the necessity of pluralizing our understanding of colonialism, beyond the framework of Western European maritime empires.

State and Religion: Redefining Political Affiliations

At the heart of modern state formation in both empires was the joint definition and imposition of legal subjecthood, a common thread running through all three books under review. Both underwent a parallel transformation in the nineteenth century, from dynastic empires ruling through a series of specific "deals" with varied constituencies to modern, centralized states ruling an increasingly homogeneous mass of subjects (as opposed to a theoretically just as homogeneous mass of foreigners) through law.[26] All three authors show that this was not merely an endogenous or Europe-inspired process of reform, but a transimperial dynamic. The system of "allocating individuals between [states]" was fundamentally interactional.[27] Not only was the legal category of subjecthood constantly renegotiated between actors at all levels of the imperial administration, it also relied on the expectation of mutual enforcement. This included, as Smiley argues, the two states working together to enforce a transimperial regime of unfreedom.[28] It took various forms, ranging from slavery and serfdom to conscription, forced labor, deportation, and the legal attachment of free peasants to the land. What the two empires undeniably shared was an understanding of subjecthood as a prerogative of the state, imposed by the sovereign on often unwilling and unfree populations. None of the subjects studied by the three authors, with the exception of some converts, had a say in the claims that the imperial states had on them. Even though some transimperial subjects did "play" Ottoman against Russian subjecthood for their own gain, as Can stresses,

26. On the history of imperial subjecthood, nationality, and citizenship in the two empires, see Eric Lohr, *Russian Citizenship: From Empire to Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); Michelle U. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); Dina Rizk Khoury and Sergey Glebov, "Citizenship, Subjecthood, and Difference in the Late Ottoman and Russian Empires," *Ab Imperio* 2017, no. 1 (2017): 45–58. The authors of the three volumes reviewed here choose to employ the category of "subjecthood," arguing—sometimes explicitly, with precise terminological analysis—against the confusion created by the use of "nationality" or "citizenship" as translations of the Russian and Turkish terms.

27. Smiley, *From Slaves to Prisoners of War*, 99.

28. Will Smiley, "The Burdens of Subjecthood: The Ottoman State, Russian Fugitives, and Interimperial Law, 1774–1869," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46, no. 1 (2014): 73–93; Witzenrath, *The Russian Empire, Slaving and Liberation*.

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their cases were exceptional. More generally, this forced recourse to the empires' categories of subjecthood by no means implied a recognition of their legitimacy, nor, as a result, of imperial rule.[29]

All three books also highlight the "tensions between religious and political affiliations" in this story of imperial transformation.[30] In the mid-nineteenth century, both states faced a similar challenge: even as they were promoting "liberal" models of legal subjecthood inside their borders, each revived claims to universal religious leadership as a source of legitimacy, largely, though not exclusively, in response to the other.[31] The Romanovs renewed the "Third Rome" trope, placing the defense of Christianity at the center of an anti-Ottoman discourse from the Crimean War on, adapting it to mobilize their own populations or Christians in the East, and more broadly as an argument in diplomatic negotiations. The Ottomans responded in kind, proclaiming Holy War, reviving the caliphate, and occasionally supporting Muslim rebels across the border. In both cases, these claims directly clashed with the assertion of a territorialized sovereignty over religiously diverse subjects. On this issue, the three authors come to seemingly contradictory conclusions. Smiley stresses that over time state subjecthood trumped religious affiliation. Hamed-Troyansky, on the contrary, emphasizes the increasing overlap between religious and political affiliation, as across the borderlands imperial authorities conflated religious identity with loyalty to the state. Can offers a more ambivalent answer, underlining the unresolved tensions between legal and spiritual subjecthood.

Beyond the debates about the political uses of religion in the two empires, all three books underline how profoundly religious affiliation inflected imperial institutions, sometimes in spite of reluctant state actors. "Protection," the main definition of the relationship between subject and sovereign, may have been unwanted and unasked for by the subjects on whom it was imposed, but it shaped regimes of rights from which state actors could not easily escape. In both empires, "protection" as interaction relied on customary practice and regimes of expectation as well as legal formalization, as all three case studies show. Here, the authors make extensive use of petitions to show not only the deftness of some subjects in writing them, but also all

29. For a transnational history that emphasizes how people could use legal pluralism and overlapping claims of sovereignty in the Russian-Ottoman context, see James H. Meyer, *Turks Across Empires: Marketing Muslim Identity in the Russian-Ottoman Borderlands, 1856–1914* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). A groundbreaking analysis of the forms and practices of subjecthood between empires in the Tunisian protectorate, which informs Can's reflection, can be found in Mary Dewhurst Lewis, *Divided Rule: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 1881–1938* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

30. Smiley, *From Slaves to Prisoners of War*, 99.

31. On discourses and rituals of imperial legitimacy in the nineteenth century, see Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy from Peter the Great to the Abdication of Nicholas II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909* (London/New York: Tauris, 1998); Kemal H. Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

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the burdens they placed on state authorities. In the historiography of the Ottoman Empire, protection is largely associated with European claims of extraterritoriality and imperial encroachment, and, in this context, with ideas of portability, strategic choices, and fluidity—but this appears to be just one manifestation of a political relationship that profoundly transformed imperial orders across Eurasia.[32]

Another common thread in these discussions of political and religious affiliations is the importance of forms of belonging and communal identity that often trumped legal categories of subjecthood, even in the eyes of state officials. No amount of imperial legislation could make Russian railway officials treat Central Asian pilgrims as fully Russian, or Ottoman officials in Mecca see hajjis as foreign. Smiley and Hamed-Troyansky evoke the multiple ways in which imperial authorities failed to subvert these community understandings of belonging. These affiliations should not be seen as less coercive than imperial subjecthood. They included forms of social pressure and collusion that made it possible, for instance, to defend slave owners against state encroachment or enforce bans on apostasy among certain groups. Nor were community definitions of belonging atavistic or fixed; all three books offer plenty of examples of their transformation, including, of course, through the integration of foreign migrants, which did not depend on automatic religious solidarity. All three monographs stress the importance and endurance of transregional networks of interrelations. These defy easy categorization, as they could mix kinship, tribal, ethnic, religious, trade, and political ties, which themselves overlapped and evolved across space and time. The borderland networks that enabled the "law of ransom" and the slave trade outlasted the international emergence of the "law of release"—and, quite plausibly, the fall of the empires themselves. Villages, tribes, and households migrated across borders, while hajjis carried letters between the *muhacir* and their relatives and Naqshbandi networks adapted to the era of imperialism and mass transportation. Circassian *muhacir* slave owners allied with Circassian Ottoman elites, themselves descended from slaves, to provide financial and political support for North Caucasian resettlement and to articulate a new Circassian Ottoman national identity.[33]

Many transnational histories of these communities remain, of course, to be told.[34] The books considered here, however, focus less on that aspect than on the

32. On the protection regime created by European extraterritoriality in the Ottoman Empire, see Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Extraterritorial Dreams: European Citizenship, Sephardi Jews, and the Ottoman Twentieth Century* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Will Hanley, *Identifying with Nationality: Europeans, Ottomans, and Egyptians in Alexandria* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

33. The articulations and overlaps that may have existed between older Circassian networks issued from slavery and the newer ones produced by their mass displacement merit further study. This would also offer an intriguing way of connecting the Russian-Ottoman and French-Ottoman transimperial histories that are currently developing in parallel. See M'hamed Oualdi, *A Slave Between Empires: A Transimperial History of North Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

34. For recent examples of such transnational histories in the region, see Houri Berberian, *Roving Revolutionaries: Armenians and the Connected Revolutions in the Russian, Iranian,*

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ways that these networks participated in the transformation of the imperial order. The imperial states increasingly saw such networks as either irrelevant or dangerous. They nonetheless played a decisive role in the redefinition of sovereignty, identity, subjecthood, protection, and power. The transimperial history in evidence here is not one of state against society, empire against nation, domination against resistance, or colonizers against colonized; it is the history of the dynamic, fraught emergence of modern political orders from the interactions between state and nonstate actors—itself a fluid boundary, as refugees could become imperial officers or soldiers slaves. Although the three authors focus on the Ottoman Empire, they hint at the fact that these interactions and networks continued to evolve and transform, shaping other state formations as revolution and war swept across the dynastic empires. The short-lived independent states that emerged in the North and South Caucasus (as well as in Ukraine and southern Russia) in 1918–1920, before the Bolsheviks reconquered the region, together with Kemalist Turkey and the new Arab states, were all also shaped by the actors who feature in Hamed-Troyansky's and Can's studies, as they reinvented forms of belonging in now purportedly national states. It is to be hoped that an interactionist, decentered history of state formation across the space ruled by the Romanovs and the Ottomans will look beyond the fall of these dynasties. In so doing, it will help scholars avoid the pitfall of presuming that the political organization of this vast and complex transcontinental space was necessarily driven from Istanbul, Saint Petersburg, and Moscow.

Rethinking Territory

Finally, all three books stress the spatial discontinuity of these interactions and networks, including that of the states themselves, and avoid equating claims of territorialized state sovereignty with actual control of a territory. Smiley examines the places where prisoners of war were interned, the roads of the Ottoman state, and its attempts to project its authority outside the capital and inside elite households with the help of Russian agents. Beyond the roads and newly built railways, different actors traced their own paths across vast distances, sometimes using imperial infrastructure, sometimes their own routes, which were deemed illegal when they crossed the shifting official borders. Hamed-Troyansky offers a cartography of refugee resettlement on the imperial, regional, and local scales, using exceptional archives of private correspondence to trace their connections. The *khachesh* maintained as guesthouses by the Circassian elite and the *tekke* that hosted poor pilgrims were both traditional institutions that were repurposed and transformed during the nineteenth century, but which still served as key spaces in articulating networks that were becoming diasporic. Cities and regions took on new political, national, and religious significance as they were experienced by diverse populations

and Ottoman Worlds (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019); Danielle Ross, *Tatar Empire: Kazan's Muslims and the Making of Imperial Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020).

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on the move. State actors also had their own transimperial maps, their capitals, offices, police checkpoints, border controls, embassies, and consulates. All three authors masterfully deploy these shifts between scales, combining methodologies in a rigorous but inventive fashion in order to construct the interlocking space of power and interaction that shapes their stories. At issue here is not simply (trans-) imperial connectivity, but the coexistence of competing experiences and conceptualizations of territory, a spatial plurality that cannot be reduced to the limits of a sovereign, bounded state, despite the efforts of imperial authorities to render it a homogeneous and legible map on which to trace their projects.[35]

This also challenges the simplistic distinction between "core" and "periphery" within the empires. While all three books give an important role to borderland actors, these were by no means confined to the (ill-defined) geographical space of the frontier zones. In fact, they were much more likely to be found in the imperial capitals than in some far-away periphery. Can stresses that the hajj was not an event confined in space and time—a yearly pilgrimage to the Haremeyn—but a constant, if low-level, concern for state officials and various communities throughout the empire. This is even more true of Hamed-Troyansky's refugees, whose history extends far beyond the "crisis" of their arrival in Ottoman port cities, as the borderlands reached out across the empire. Even the handling of wartime captives stretched well beyond the limited time-space of interstate war. In this transimperial history, the "borderlands" were therefore only partially territorialized. They were primarily a specific socio-political configuration of relations between a plurality of state and non-state actors in an imperial context, defined by competing understandings of subjecthood rather than by their territorial identity. These configurations could be found throughout the empire, placing the "borderlands" firmly at its heart rather than on its margins. The imperial capitals belonged to the borderlands as much as Van or Odesa, and future research may consider whether the Russian and Ottoman Empires were just as much "defined by their diasporas" as the Soviet Empire.[36]

This reconceptualization of imperial space as fragmented and connected has proven very productive in our understanding of maritime empires.[37] The illusion of spatial continuity inherent to traditional cartographic practice, however, continues

35. See Rohdewald, Conermann, and Fuess, *Transottomanica*. On the mapping and control of space across the lands ruled by the Romanovs, see Jane Burbank, Mark von Hagen, and Anatolyi Remnev, eds., *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700–1930* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); Borodziej, Holubec, and Puttkamer, *Mastery and Lost Illusions*; Frithjof Benjamin Schenk, *Russlands Fahrt in die Moderne. Mobilität und sozialer Raum im Eisenbahnzeitalter* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2014); John P. LeDonne, *Forging a Unitary State: Russia's Management of the Eurasian Space, 1650–1850* (Toronto/Buffalo/London: University of Toronto Press, 2020); Steven Seegel, *Mapping Europe's Borderlands: Russian Cartography in the Age of Empire* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

36. This reconceptualization of the Soviet Empire as "not simply a federation of nationalities confined to titular republics" but "an empire of mobile diasporas" was formulated by Erik R. Scott, *Familiar Strangers: The Georgian Diaspora and the Evolution of Soviet Empire* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 3.

37. See especially Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty*.

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to obscure our understanding of the territorialization of land-based empires, just as the seemingly self-evident spatial discontinuity of maritime empires contributes to naturalizing the distinction between metropolis and colony. Transimperial histories offer an opportunity to open up fruitful dialogue about the various ways that networks, infrastructures, and claims of legal sovereignty created a diversity of modern imperial orders across both land and sea.

Beyond Area Studies?

A new generation of polyglot historians are exploring interlocked and decentered histories of the Romanov and Ottoman Empires. It is unsurprising that none of the volumes discussed here completely succeeds in its endeavor, with Russian state actors especially receding from the view of three researchers trained in Ottoman history. This is less a criticism of their work than an invitation to historians of the Russian Empire to engage with it. The barriers erected by area studies, including the traditional language requirements for studying a given region, are unfortunate obstacles to this enterprise, which should, by necessity, be collaborative. This is all the more true as "area studies" have traditionally reproduced the Ottoman and Russian imperial orders in the academic field. Not only have they often placed exaggerated focus on the imperial centers, they have also struggled in overcoming the essentialized claims of hostility and "civilizational" difference that structured the political cultures of both empires, defined negatively against each other. It should be stressed that the Russian-Ottoman entanglement did not merely function along an east-west axis structured by Islam—an assumption which implicitly leads many historians of the Russian Empire to underestimate its importance, confining it to the internal, peripheral, and colonial "other." There were also intense connections along the same axis between Christian populations on either side of the Black Sea, as well as along another reaching from north to south. Alongside Caucasian and Central Asian populations, and as well as Turks and Russians, Tatars, Cossacks, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Armenians, Georgians, Jews, Germans, Poles, and many others moved across the vast borderlands. They did so as pilgrims, refugees, revolutionaries, merchants, corsairs, settlers, soldiers, diplomats, and imperial administrators, and it is crucial to remember that the Romanov and Ottoman Empires were in reality neither Russian and Turkish nor Christian and Muslim states, even at their very end. The importance of this understudied axis of interrelation has been recently underlined by Stefan Rohdewald as part of the groundbreaking *Transottomanica* project.[38]

The challenges when it comes to writing such transimperial histories are numerous. Beyond the linguistic skills required to access relevant sources, both Hamed-Troyansky and Can stress the importance of fieldwork to the decentering of imperial history. It was their local knowledge that enabled them to gain access

38. Rohdewald, Conermann, and Fuess, *Transottomanica*.

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to private correspondence and pictures, orally transmitted family histories, *tekke* archives, and even Ottoman land records held by Jordan's ministry of the interior, all crucial in complementing records held in national archives across the two former empires. Current wars and political conditions severely limit the possibility of such fieldwork in many of the countries concerned. Nor is work in the archives of the former imperial centers a straightforward exercise, as Moscow, and to a lesser extent Istanbul, actively instrumentalize history, including through their archival policies, to buttress neoimperial political projects, raising ethical issues even for those historians who may have continued access. Many of the postimperial independent nation-states have built their political legitimacy on rejecting all implication in the former imperial orders and their legacies. Majority Christian nation-states also actively invest in their Europeanness, looking west and north as a way to differentiate themselves from the oriental empires. Even in non-authoritarian states, where imperial-era sources are theoretically accessible to all, many have not been fully integrated into the national archives, are held in poor conditions, or are not inventoried (as with the "minute provincial data on refugee resettlement on the Black Sea coast of Bulgaria and Romania, preserved in yet uncatalogued boxes in Bulgaria's National Library in Sofia" consulted by Hamed-Troyansky). Finally, in contrast to historians of European empires, specialists of the Ottoman and Russian Empires have yet to fully acknowledge how contemporary archives reflect and reproduce the imperial and colonial orders that generated them.

Smiley, Hamed-Troyansky, and Can are among a remarkable cohort of historians who look to transimperial history to answer the challenge of writing a decentered imperial history beyond the traditional boundaries of Ottoman and "Russian" area studies. They open paths to new understandings of non-European political modernities, beyond the binary alternative between Europe and civilizational *Sonderweg*. State formation, sovereignty, legal subjecthood, colonization, and international law emerge as products of intense interactions between a variety of actors rather than a dominant center. Mass violence and routine cooperation between the states fueled the establishment of interlocking imperial orders and the closing of their frontiers. Nonetheless, central state actors never established full hegemony, in spite of the illusions constructed by their maps and archives. We can only hope that these books will encourage more historians to cross the traditional borders of area studies—and, maybe, to open a real intellectual and historiographical dialogue between historians of maritime and land-based empires in the age of high imperialism.

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Abstracts

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Pluralizing Political Modernity: Recent Russian-Ottoman Transimperial Historiography (Review Article)

A number of recent monographs testify to the dynamism of transimperial analyses of the Russian and Ottoman Empires in the late modern period. In particular, the study of prisoners of war, refugees, and pilgrims has enabled three young scholars, Will Smiley, Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky, and Lâle Can, to offer fresh perspectives on the history of institutions central to political modernity. By exploiting new sources, focusing on interactions between state and non-state actors, exploring ordinary practices of government, and decentering perspectives, these volumes contribute to shaping a powerful historiographical renewal. Reading them together, this article considers the dynamics of the co-construction of imperial orders based on shared conceptions of sovereignty, subjecthood, and protection. It underlines the systemic entanglement of the two empires' colonization projects, the centrality of borderland actors, and the complex redefinition of affiliations and belonging that took place in the course of these often violent processes of modernization.

"Pluraliser la modernité politique. Actualité de l'histoire transimpériale russo-ottomane (note critique)"

Des monographies récentes témoignent du dynamisme de l'histoire transimpériale russo-ottomane contemporaine. L'étude des prisonniers de guerre, des réfugiés et des pèlerins permet notamment à trois jeunes historiens et historienne, Will Smiley, Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky et Lâle Can, d'offrir des perspectives neuves sur l'histoire d'institutions centrales de la modernité politique. Par l'exploitation de sources nouvelles, l'attention portée aux interactions entre acteurs étatiques et non étatiques, et aux pratiques ordinaires de gouvernement, comme par le décentrement des perspectives, ils tracent les contours d'un puissant renouvellement historiographique. Leur lecture croisée invite à interroger les dynamiques d'une co-construction d'ordres impériaux fondés sur des conceptions partagées de la souveraineté, de la sujétion et de la protection. Elle souligne l'imbrication systémique des projets de colonisation des deux empires, la centralité d'acteurs des marches impériales et la redéfinition complexe des affiliations et appartenances au cours de ces processus de modernisation souvent violents.

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