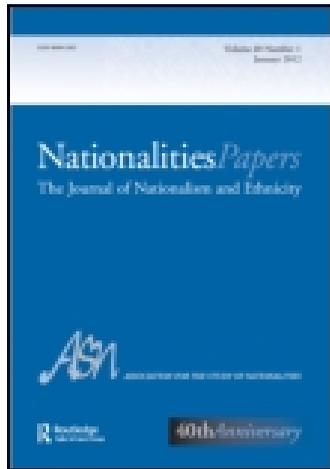


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No return, no refuge: rites and rights in minority repatriation

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little use of outside polling data, a good deal of which is easily available. Nor is there a serious engagement with the professional literature. The sparse endnotes include only a few peer-reviewed citations, none of which are later than 2003. In short, this is a piece of well-informed journalism coupled with two survey events, rather than a work of high-level scholarship. Still, those who are quantitatively disposed will find some tantalizing empirical data, coupled with solid insights into the period through the mid-2000s.

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No return, no refuge: rites and rights in minority repatriation, by Howard Adelman and Elazar Barkan, New York, Columbia University Press, 2011, 360 pp., US\$39.50 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0-321-15336-2

Over the last three decades, the idea of “returning” refugees to the regions and states from which they have been expelled has come to dominate the international stance on the refugee problem. The powerfully titled book *No Return, No Refuge: Rites and Rights in Minority Repatriation* presents a compelling critique of this ideology of return by addressing several historical cases and by examining the concept of return in its philosophical context. The main argument of the work is that the failure to return is the empirical norm, and that minority repatriation should therefore not be considered the preferred solution in situations of ethnic conflict.

Howard Adelman and Elazar Barkan’s book is a unique comparative study which succeeds in retaining the historical particularity of a strikingly diverse range of cases while building an overarching policy argument stemming from all cases. The authors take great care to examine each case in its own historical and legal contexts, paying great attention specifically to the outcomes of each particular group’s displacement. Analysis is intertwined with extensive empirical evidence, allowing Adelman and Barkan to add nuance to their argument against repatriation on the pages of every chapter.

In their book, the authors have focused on the contexts and conditions under which people were displaced on account of their ethnic, national and religious identities over the course of the twentieth century. The introduction contains a rigorous outline of the book’s main conceptual assumptions and claims. Chapter 1 presents the main arguments of the book and sets the stage for a historical overview of international law and international practice regarding repatriation, which continues in greater detail into the next two chapters. Chapters 2 and 3 address the principles and practices of expulsion, resettlement and repatriation from 1900 to 1945 and in the post-1945 period, respectively. Chapters 4–8 are comprised of case studies of refugee crises, including the cases of Bosnia and Kosovo, the context of Asia, crises in Africa, the Jewish case in a broad historical perspective and the Palestinian uprooting. The last two chapters of the book contain a philosophical contextualization (Chapter 9) and a broader policy proposition for the current refugee crisis (Chapter 10).

Adelman and Barkan begin by showing that the idea of return was not initially grounded in ethical or moral considerations. In a very critical and historically grounded analysis, the authors postulate that repatriation rhetoric in international politics resulted not from ethical

concerns or policy experience, but was rather a consequence of the inability of the international community to respond to the Indochinese refugee crisis in the late 1980s, turning “a policy failure into a virtuous stance” (19). The authors reconstruct the logic of support for repatriation which stemmed from the 1980s crisis in the following manner: if expulsion and denaturalization of groups of people from the side of the state are crimes, repatriation appears to follow logically from the right *not* to be expelled as the solution in those cases when expulsion occurs. The authors dispute this logic in a number of paradigms, from functionalist arguments in terms of utility to constructivist grounds, and from historical perspectives to codes of civil and international law.

The analytical framework of the book is based on the central claims that minority repatriation has proven unsuccessful throughout history, and that return is possible only under the conditions of majority repatriation, or, rarely, as a result of military victory. The authors argue that adherence of the international community to the “right of return” perpetuates refugee suffering by blocking more politically plausible solutions like integration in the country of asylum or resettlement in a third country. Adelman and Barkan expand upon this predicament by juxtaposing “rites” and “rights:” they define rights as politically viable outcomes, whereas rites are described as performative and infeasible. “When the implausibility of return becomes apparent, advocacy turns into ritual and rights gradually metamorphose into rites” (xi), and return becomes a mantra often repeated against the wishes of the refugees themselves by actors indifferent to the feasibility of such a plan. Advocacy for return thus becomes a ritual.

To place the discussion in a broader philosophical context, the authors draw from Hannah Arendt’s conceptualizations of the “tension between the state and humanity:” human rights and the rights of states are not only opposed, but inextricably linked, since one must belong to a state to have rights. Here Adelman and Barkan situate the “fatal conflict” between the modern nation-state system and universal human rights: since there are fewer nations than there are “nationalities,” only a limited number of groups enjoy the privilege of exercising collective rights. Thus, in the case of rights of return, forcing return upon a state undermines the fundamental principles of the international system – the right of self-determination, sovereignty and commitment to peace and security among states. Here, the book largely leaves unmapped the historical and continuing evolution of the nation-state as a political unit and as a backdrop to the population transfers and refugee policies of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The concept of sovereignty as a pillar of the international system and the international community’s understanding of security have not remained static over time, and a discussion of refugee rights in relation to sovereignty and security would help contextualize the problems raised in this book.

An especially poignant point in this study is a passage in the last chapter about the experience of a Shi’a woman from the al-Amariya district of Baghdad returning to visit her house, which was occupied by a Sunni family. The woman came from a prosperous middle-class background, and her family had fled to Syria after the US invasion of Iraq. She came back to her old neighborhood when she had no more money. The family living in her house had, in turn, been expelled from a Shiite area. She knocked on the door, asked to come in, and surveyed her belongings, which she described as looking dirty and misused. She demanded that the family pay her rent for the house, as she had no more means to survive. They paid some money and threatened her, telling her not to return again. The woman described her homecoming as traumatizing; she felt “houseless as well as homeless,” her connection to the past through memories had been shattered, and she faced a “new identity as a refugee” (238). This tale illuminates the links between place, property, and the feeling of “home.” Depriving a person of their feeling

of “home” is a profound trauma for their sense of self, as well as for their sense of past, present and future. In this way, the book addresses a crucial topic grounded not just in international law and advocacy, but in deep human suffering and in people’s chances for having and building a life.

In addition to providing a rich historical background and a clear policy argument against repatriation, the book stimulates readers to ask further questions about refugee policies, cases of expulsion and about the international system at large. Further theoretical and empirical studies can be devised on the basis of the ideas brought forth by Adelman and Barkan. It would be especially fruitful to conduct qualitative research on the state of refugee groups in order to closer investigate refugees’ constructions of “home” and “return.” A discourse analysis of “return” advocacy could also yield a more nuanced understanding of different kinds of claims for repatriation.

Even in the event that readers disagree with certain policy interpretations presented in the study, this well-argued work inspires much-needed reflection about the nature of the international system and the contexts of refugee crises. The book is therefore worthy of the attention of peace and security studies scholars, international relations specialists, scholars in the sphere of international law, and policy-makers in the fields of refugee policies, international humanitarian work, conflict resolution and international advocacy and diplomacy work.

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Rediscovering the Umma: Muslims in the Balkans between nationalism and transnationalism, by Ina Merdjanova, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, map, bibliography, index, xvi + 198 pp., £47.99 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-19-996403-1

Ina Merdjanova’s new book focuses on Muslim communities in the Balkans. Unlike some scholars, she sees both remote and proximate factors affecting social and political behavior today, and for that matter, culture more generally. Thus, while the Ottoman legacy is still relevant more than a century since the Ottoman Empire was pushed out of the Balkans, she draws attention to the impact the secular enlightenment had in spawning notions of liberty, equality, and tolerance. The volume includes some material on the Muslims of Yugoslavia, Albania, and in passing also Romania, but mainly on the Muslims of Bulgaria. This reflects not only the author’s specialization in Bulgarian history but also her desire to fill in some lacunae in the literature on the Bulgarian past. The book is divided into four chapters.

Chapter 1 bears the title “Islam and National Identities in the Balkans” and discusses the Muslims of Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo, and Macedonia. As she notes, the nineteenth century saw not only the spread of enlightenment ideals but also the growth of particularistic nationalism. Among the Christian populations of the Balkan Peninsula, this nationalism was closely associated with hostility to the Ottoman Turks. Unfortunately for non-Turkish Muslims, they were often viewed as “Turks” by local Christians, who made them feel unwelcome in the lands in which they had long lived. To take just the example of Bulgaria between the 1870s and 1912, about 548,000 Muslims left that country. In the years