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Algerian Migration and the Formation of the *Muhacir* Status in the Ottoman Empire (1830–1908)

Salma Hargal 

History, Sciences Po Lyon, LARHRA - UMR 5190, France
Email: salmahargal@gmail.com

Abstract

This article examines the resettlement of Algerians fleeing French colonial rule after 1830 in the Ottoman Empire (Palestine, Syria, and Anatolia) to analyse the formation of the legal and administrative category of *muhacir*. It argues that the Algerian case offers a privileged vantage point for understanding how this status emerged and was gradually consolidated over the nineteenth century. Because Algerians migrated over a long time span and were not the initial targets of Ottoman resettlement policies - initially designed for migrants from Crimea, the Caucasus, and the Balkans - their progressive inclusion into *muhacir* entitlements makes it possible to trace how this category expanded beyond its original contexts and became a standardized instrument of migration governance. The article shows that Algerians first received assistance through discretionary measures, before being progressively incorporated into a regime of standardized rights after the Crimean War (1853–6). Under Abdülhamid II, access to these rights increasingly became conditional upon Ottoman naturalisation and the renunciation of French colonial subjecthood, revealing how migration policy, legal status, and imperial sovereignty became tightly intertwined. By following Algerian migrants across the French and Ottoman imperial spaces, this paper highlights how late Ottoman migration policy functioned not only as a tool of population management, but also as a key site for the juridical redefinition of imperial belonging in an age of colonial expansion.

Introduction

Under the deafening sound and blinding smoke of cannon fire, thousands of Ottoman military troops perished during the French conquest of Algiers in July 1830.¹ One thousand survivors embarked on French marine vessels, sailing to the city of İzmir in Anatolia as they carried vivid memories of the bombs falling like thunderous rain. The Ottoman governor of Aydın, who was in charge of controlling the port, pushed them back as soon as they arrived.² Yet the city already hosted Muslim exiles coming from Crimea. The Porte³ even gave allowances and subsidies to these Tatars who had gone into exile since Russia

¹ The Ottoman garrison had about 6,000 members. Kemal Kateb, “La gestion administrative de l’émigration algérienne vers les pays musulmans au lendemain de la conquête de l’Algérie (1830–1914),” *Population* 52:2 (1997), 399–428. According to French military reports, around 2,500 survived: Marquis de Bartillat, *Relation de la campagne d’Afrique* (Paris: G-A Dentu, 1832), 100–1.

² Victor Fontanier, *Voyages en Orient entrepris par ordre du gouvernement français de 1830 à 1833* (Paris, 1834), 22–31; BOA (Turkish President’s Archives), HAT 457/22530, 22 safer 1246 (18 August 1830).

³ The “Porte” is a metaphorical expression meaning the Ottoman government.

annexed their country in 1783.⁴ Ottoman authorities considered the latter *muhacir*, whereas the Algerian soldiers were not labelled as such.⁵ Although the term *muhacir* had multiple meanings (migrant, refugee, exile, settler...), it already functioned as a category granting access to state assistance.⁶ While migration studies in Ottoman history have largely centred on movements from the Balkans, Crimea or the Caucasus, North African migration remains underexplored. This article examines the construction of the *muhacir* status through the resettlement of Algerian migrants from 1830 to the end of the Abdulhamid II's era (1876–1908).⁷ It demonstrates that Algerians were initially supported through discretionary measures before being progressively incorporated into an evolving regime of standardized rights after 1856. The access to these rights increasingly became also tied to Ottoman naturalisation and to renunciation of French subjecthood.

A growing body of literature has examined migration flows in the Ottoman Empire since the second half of the nineteenth century, showing that Ottoman authorities increasingly viewed immigration – which by 1882 accounted for a third of the imperial population⁸ – as a means to bolster the imperial population, reinforce state sovereignty, and increase fiscal revenues, particularly through the expansion of agricultural production.⁹ More recent approaches have shifted focus to the experiences and agency of migrants themselves, addressing themes such as trans-imperial solidarity networks, the impact of resettlement

⁴ Yılmaz Fikret, “Portrait d'une communauté méconnue: Les musulmans” in *Smyrne, la ville oubliée: Mémoires d'un grand port ottoman*, ed. Smyrnelis Marie-Carmen (Paris: Editions autrement, 2006), 52–62; Hervé Georgelin, *La fin de Smyrne: du cosmopolitisme aux nationalismes* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2005), 154.

⁵ The Turkish letter “c” is pronounced like an English “j.”

⁶ Ella Fratantuono, *Governing Migration in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2024); Ella Fratantuono, “State Fears and Immigrant Tiers: Historical Analysis as a Method in Evaluating Migration Categories,” *Middle East Journal of Refugee Studies* 2:1 (2017), 97–115.

⁷ Despite few exceptions – such as Sebhattin Samur, “Osmanlı Devletinde Cezayir Göçmenleri ve Abdülkadir el-Cezayiri,” *Erciyes Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 8 (1992), 141–58 – most studies focus on the flows of migration from Algeria in the colonial context by relying mainly on French sources, including Charles Robert Ageron, “Les migrations des musulmans algériens et l'exode de Tlemcen (1830–1911),” *Annales* 22:5 (1967), 1047–66; Kemal Kateb, *Européens, “indigènes” et juifs en Algérie (1830–1962): représentations et réalités des populations* (Paris: INED, 2001); Ammar Hilal, *al-hijrah al jazā'iriyyah naḥwa Bilād al-Šām (1848–1918)* [Algerian migration towards the Bilad al-Sham] (Algiers: Dar al humā, 2007); Nadia Tarchoune, “al-hijra al-jazā'iriyya ilā al-šarq al-‘arabī fī muntaṣaf al-qarn al-tāsi’ ‘ašar ilā maṭla’ al-qarn al-‘išrīn: namūḍaj Sūriyya” [Algerian emigration to the Middle East from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century: The example of Syria] (PhD diss., Medea University, 2006). See also: Nordine Amara, “Faire la France en Algérie: émigration algérienne, mésusages du nom et conflits de nationalités dans le monde: de la chute d'Alger aux années 1930” (PhD diss., Sorbonne Paris University, 2019). Recent studies started situating Algerian immigration in the Ottoman context by delving on Ottoman documentation – for example, Fouad Bendrimia, “Fransız işgali sonrasında osmanlı ülkesine sığınan Cezayir muhacirleri (Anadolu ve Süriye bölgeleri)” [The Algerians resettled in the Ottoman realm after the French occupation (Anatolia and Syria)] (PhD diss., University of Ankara, 2021); and my own dissertation: Salma Hargal, “Être immigré algérien dans l'Empire ottoman (1830–1918)” (PhD diss., Lumière Lyon 2 University, 2022).

⁸ Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population, 1830–1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press 1985), 184.

⁹ Mark Pinson, “Russian Policy and the Emigration of the Crimean Tatars of the Ottoman Empire, 1854–1862,” *Güney-Doğu Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi* 1 (1972), 37–56; Mark Pinson, *Demographic Warfare: An Aspect of Ottoman and Russian Policy, 1854–1866* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970); Alexandre Toumarkine, *Les migrations des populations musulmanes balkaniques en Anatolie (1876–1913)* (Istanbul: ISIS Editions, 1995); Nedim Ipek, *Rumeli'den Anadolu'ya Türk Göçleri (1877–1890)* [Turk's migrations to Anatolia] (Ankara: TTK Basımevi, 1994); Erdem Ufuk, *Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Muhacir Komisyonları ve Faaliyetleri 1860–1923* [Migrants commissions and their actions from the Ottoman to the Republican period] (Istanbul: Turk Tarih Kurumu, 2018); Bedri Habiçoğlu, *Kafkasyadan anadoluya göçler* [Migrations from Caucasus to Anatolia] (Istanbul: Nart Yayıncılık, 1993); Isa Blumi, *Ottoman Refugees, 1878–1939: Migration in a Post-Imperial World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); Fuat Dündar, *Hicret, Din ve Devlet Osmanlı Göç Politikası (1856–1908)* [Hicret: Religion and state, the Ottoman state migration policy] (Istanbul: İletişim, 2021); Başak Kale, “Transforming an Empire: The Ottoman Empire's Immigration and Settlement Policies in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 50:2 (2014), 252–71. See also note 5.

on capital accumulation, and competition over land tenure.¹⁰ Another line of scholarship has explored the everyday governance of migration, with particular attention to bureaucratic practices and interactions between local and central authorities.¹¹ Most of these studies take the Crimean War (1853–6), the Russian annexation of the Caucasus (1864), or the 1877–8 Russo-Ottoman War as their starting point and interpret the formation of the *muhacir* category in the context of the nineteenth-century centralizing reforms, especially following the first legal regulation in 1856.

The experiences of Algerian migrants offer valuable insights into Ottoman migration policy for many reasons. First, they migrated en masse after the loss of Algiers in 1830¹² and continued to emigrate throughout the century, which allows us to trace how the category evolved after the first provisions introduced during the Tanzimat reforms era (1839–76).¹³ Second, because Algerians were not the initial targets of Ottoman resettlement policy, their gradual incorporation into *muhacir* entitlements reveals how the category expanded beyond its original Crimean, Balkan, and Caucasian settings. Finally, the Algerian case illuminates how the Ottoman state managed migration in relation to colonial subjecthood, particularly as Algeria was the first Ottoman province to come under modern European colonial rule.¹⁴

The first part examines the migration flows from the French conquest of Algiers in 1830 to the mid-1850s, and analyses how Ottoman clerks labelled these newcomers and the types

¹⁰ Vladimir Hamed-Troyanski, *Empire of Refugees: North Caucasian Muslims and the Late Ottoman State* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2024); Vladimir Hamed-Troyanski, “Circassian Refugees and the Making of Amman, 1878–1914,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49 (2017), 605–23.

¹¹ Cevat Eren, *Türkiye’de Göç ve Göçmen Meseleleri, Tanzimat Devri, İlk Kurulan Göçmen Komisyonu, Çıkarılan Tüzükler* [The question of migrants and migrations in Turkey: The first founded migrant’s commission during the Tanzimat period] (Istanbul: Nurgök Matbaası, 1996); Dündar, *Hicret, Dîn*; Ipek, *Rumeli’den Anadolu’ya*; Ufuk, *Osmanlı’dan Cumhuriyet’e Muhacir*; Cuthell David Cameron, “The Muhacirin Komisyonu: An Agent in the Transformation of Ottoman Anatolia 1860–1866” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2005).

¹² Kateb, *Européens*, “indigènes,” 303.

¹³ During the reigns of Sultans Selim III (1798–1808) and Mahmud II (1808–39), the Ottoman Empire developed a new army and implemented a financial restructuring to raise tax revenue. See, for example, Stanford J. Shaw, “The Origins of the Military Reform: The Nizam-ı Cedid Army of Sultan Selim III,” *Journal of Modern History* 37:3 (1965), 291–306. In 1839, the late sultan’s advisers created a high council of Tanzimat (literally, “the reorganizations”) under Abdulmecid I. This council was meant to spearhead the restructuring of the administration and the army, to harmonize administrative and legal practice, and to foster state sovereignty in the peripheries. For a short introduction, see Donald Quataert, “The Age of Reforms, 1812–1914,” in *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Halil İnalcık and Donald Quataert (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 2:749–943. Ottoman officials also worked to expand cultivation and encouraged the settlement of nomads. Among recent publications, see Talha Çiçek, *Negotiating Empire in the Middle East: Ottoman and Arab Nomads in the Modern Era, 1840–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023). Officials also achieved greater control over mobility within cities – see Betül Basaran, *Selim III, Social Control and Policing in Istanbul at the End of the Eighteenth Century: Between Crisis and Order* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

¹⁴ Mostafa Minawi, *Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and the Hijaz* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2016); Mostafa Minawi, “International Law and the Precarity of Ottoman Sovereignty in Africa at the End of the Nineteenth Century,” *International History Review* 43:5 (2020), 1–24; Turan Kayaoğlu, *Legal Imperialism: Sovereignty and Extraterritoriality in Japan, the Ottoman Empire, and China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Jessica M. Marglin, “Extraterritoriality and Legal Belonging in the Nineteenth-Century Mediterranean,” *Law and History Review* 39:4 (2021), 679–706; Tufan Buzpınar, “Suriye’ye Yerleşen Cezayirli Muhacirlerin Tâbiyeti Meselesi (1847–1900),” *İslam Araştırmaları Dergisi* 1 (1997), 91–106. For other examples of European colonial subjects legal status in the Ottoman Empire, see Lâle Can, “The Protection Question: Central Asians and Extraterritoriality in the Late Ottoman Empire,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 48 (2016), 679–99; Ahmed Faiz, “Contested Subjects: Ottoman and British Jurisdictional Quarrels in re Afghan and Indian Muslims,” *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 3:2 (2016), 325–46; Michael Christopher Low, “Unfurling the Flag of Extraterritoriality: Autonomy, Foreign Muslims, and the Capitulations in the Ottoman Hijaz,” *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 3 (2016), 299–323...

of rights they were granted, prior to the promulgation of the 1856 regulations.¹⁵ The second part investigates how the legal provisions introduced for the refugees of the Crimean War (1853–6) influenced Algerian settlement patterns and helped shape the rights they received. By closely researching shifts in terminology, this section also explores the secularization of the concept of *muhacir* during the Tanzimat era, the impact of the reforms promoting equality between Muslims and non-Muslims, and the overlap between older and newer meanings of the term. The final section focuses on the ambiguity of Algerians' legal status during Abdulhamid II's reign.

Who Is and Who Is Not *Muhacir*?

In the aftermath of the French conquest of Algeria, thousands of Algerians sought refuge in neighbouring Morocco and Tunisia, in Egypt, as well as in the Ottoman provinces under direct imperial sovereignty – primarily Anatolia, Bilad al-Sham, and Hijaz.¹⁶ By the end of the Hamidian period (1876–1908),¹⁷ an estimated 16,000 to 20,000 individuals identified as Algerians were living in the Arab provinces of the Empire.¹⁸ The first significant group to flee to Ottoman territory consisted of approximately 1,000 soldiers drawn from the administrative and military elite that had governed Algeria called the *ocak* – many of whom had originally been recruited from the Anatolian and Thracian provinces.¹⁹ However, large-scale migration towards the Ottoman heartlands only followed the decisive military defeats of Amir Abd al-Qadir in 1843 and the surrender of one of his lieutenants in Kabylia in 1846.²⁰ Around 500 Algerian combatants who had fought alongside Abd al-Qadir initially settled in the holy cities of the Hijaz before relocating to Damascus and other parts of Bilad al-Sham.²¹ Those who remained in the Maghreb gradually followed this migratory path, with the movement intensifying in 1855 when Amir Abd al-Qadir himself joined his compatriots in Damascus.²²

Algerian migrants were first officially designated as *muhacir* in Ottoman administrative records in connection with two notable figures: the intellectual Hamdan Hoca and the Islamic scholar Fethi Efendi. Both men marked their allegiance to the Ottoman state through a lengthy poem composed in honour of Sultan Abdülmecid I upon his accession in 1839.²³ Hamdan Hoca settled in Istanbul, while Fethi Efendi arrived in the imperial capital following the French defeat of Ahmad Bey of Constantine in 1838.²⁴ The term *muhacir*

¹⁵ Roger Zetter, “Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 4:1 (1991), 39–63.

¹⁶ The term *Bilad al-Sham* refers to the area stretching from Mount Taurus to Aqaba and bordered to the east by the Jezireh desert and to the west by the Mediterranean Sea. Today, this territory includes Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, Jordan, and southern Turkey.

¹⁷ “Hamidian” refers to Abdulhamid II.

¹⁸ Courneuve Centre of Diplomatic Archives, 206CPCOM493, letter from Tahir (grandson of Emir Abdelkader) to A. Chaumat (lawyer at the appeal court of Paris), 23 May 1908.

¹⁹ About the *ocak*, see Tal Shuval, *La ville d'Alger vers la fin du XVIIIe* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2002), chap. 2.

²⁰ Colonel Robin, *Notes historiques: La Grande Kabylie de 1838 à 1851* (Algiers: Imprimerie Adolphe Jourdan, 1905); BOA, HR.MKT. 60/71, folio 3, 17 şaban 1269 (24 July 1253); letter from Algerian sheikhs to the Grand Vizir (1852).

²¹ About the life of Abdulkadir, see Ahmed Bouyerdene, *La Guerre et la Paix: Abd el-Kader et la France* (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2017); Bruno Etienne, *Isthme des isthmes (Barzakh al-barazikh)* (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 2003).

²² After his defeat, they were first imprisoned in France and then transferred to the Ottoman Empire in the context of French and Ottoman diplomatic rapprochement under Napoleon III and Abdülmecid I. He was first exiled in Bursa then settled in Damascus (Bouyerdene, *La Guerre et la Paix*, chap. 1, 2, 3, and 6; and Etienne, *Isthme des isthmes*, part.2).

²³ BOA, MF. 119/5928, 23 şaban 1255 (1 November 1839).

²⁴ Abdeljelil Temimi, *Le Beylik de Constantine et Hadj Ahmed Bey (1830–1837)*, vol. 1 (La Goulette: Publications de la Revue d'histoire maghrébine, 1978), chap. 4.

was later applied more broadly by Ottoman clerks to Algerian migrants arriving in greater numbers, particularly after the fall of Amir Abd al-Qadir in 1847.²⁵ Unlike the early Algerian soldiers who fled after the fall of Algiers in August 1830, whose arrival was reported to local Ottoman authorities at the same time as the French capture of the city, these later arrivals received state assistance and were granted specific legal rights under the *muhacir* framework. In contrast, the soldiers of 1830 were not recognized as *muhacir* and were not formally accepted by the state. This differential treatment invites further examination, especially when compared to the earlier reception of Crimean Tatars following the Russian annexation of Crimea in 1783, who were incorporated into the empire under the same legal status. Understanding why the soldiers of 1830 were excluded from *muhacir* classification, unlike both the Tatars and later Algerian arrivals, sheds light on the evolving criteria of Ottoman migration policy.

A deeper understanding of this categorization can be gained through semantic analysis. The term *muhacir* derives from the Arabic root *h-j-r*, meaning “to separate” or “to abandon.” It entered the Ottoman Turkish lexicon through Islamic legal discourse. Performing a *hicret* (Arabic: *hijra*) refers to the act of leaving a territory under non-Muslim rule or recently conquered by non-Muslims in order to migrate to another region within the *dar al-Islam* (the abode of Islam).²⁶

The Ottoman state classified Muslims fleeing from conquered Algerian territories as “*muhacir* from Algeria” (*Cezayir muhacirleri*). In contrast, other refugees who arrived in the empire during the same period, such as the Hungarians who fled after the revolutions of 1848, were not designated as *muhacir*, although they too received assistance from the Porte.²⁷ Moreover, the Ottoman authorities extended greater privileges to Algerian migrants who had actively resisted French forces. Archival evidence reveals the state’s interest in verifying the military background of these individuals. For instance, when the governor of Damascus reported the arrival of forty Algerians to Bilad al-Sham in 1851, the Ottoman foreign minister, Ahmet İzzet Pasha, launched an investigation into their past.²⁸ In his correspondence, the minister expressed both gratitude for the efforts of local officials and sympathy for the hardships endured by the Algerians in the mountains of Kabylia. For the Ottoman state, those who had fought against the French and defended the empire’s former western frontiers were perceived as more loyal and thus more deserving of state support.²⁹ In contrast, members of the Ottoman local army in Algeria who had sought exile since the summer of 1830 were not regarded in the same way.

Ottoman authorities initially labelled the first Algerians who attempted to disembark in İzmir as “bachelors” (*bekarlar*). This classification echoes earlier policies from the

²⁵ On Algeria flows of migrations, see Kateb, *Européens*, “indigènes,” 303.

²⁶ For the concept of *hicret*, see Jocelyn Hendrickson, *Leaving Iberia: Islamic Law and Christian Conquest in North West Africa* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2020); Wilferd Madelung, “Has the Hijra Come to an End?,” *Revue des études islamiques* 54 (1986), 225–37; Patricia Crone, “The First-Century Concept of *Hiğra*,” *Arabica* 41:3 (1994), 352–87; Alan Verskin, *Islamic Law and the Crisis of the Reconquista: The Debate on the Status of Muslim Communities in Christendom* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

²⁷ Dündar, *Hicret, Din*, 88; György Csorba, “Hungarian Emigrants of 1848–1849 in the Ottoman Empire,” in *The Turks*, vol. 4, ed. Cüzel Hasan Celâl, Oguz Cem, and Karatay Osman (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye, 2002), 224–5. In a similar vein, during the early modern period, the British authorities in North America applied the category of “refugee” among French migrants only to the Protestant victims of Catholic persecution. Bertrand Van Ruymbeke, “Réfugiés or Émigrés? Early Modern French Migrations to British North America and the United States (c. 1680–c. 1820),” *Itinerario* 30 (2006), 12–33.

²⁸ BOA, HR.MKT, 39/91, 27 muharrem 1268 (22 November 1851).

²⁹ Likewise, during the early nineteenth century, those who left lost provinces of Spain’s colonial empire were treated with similar consideration by Spanish authorities. Sarah Chambers, “Expatriados en la madre patria: El estado de limbo de los emigrados realistas en el imperio español, 1790–1830,” *Estudios interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe* 32:2 (2021), 48–74.

mid-eighteenth century, when unmarried men were barred from entering Istanbul during periods of political unrest, such as the Patrona Halil revolt in 1730 and the Ottoman-Iranian war between 1743 and 1756.³⁰ Bachelors, or men who settled in the city without their families, were viewed as a potentially disruptive social group. As such, they were closely monitored and, in some cases, expelled. Similarly, the Ottoman authorities considered the thousand Algerian soldiers arriving in İzmir a threat to local stability and to the growing community of European merchants in the port city.

In contrast, migrant family units appeared to provoke less suspicion. Groups that included women and children were more likely to receive assistance and were seen as more legitimate recipients of public support. This distinction is evident in the petitions submitted by Algerian exiles who arrived after the defeat of Amir Abd al-Qadir. These migrants frequently emphasised their family status, stating, for example, “We came with our wives and children,” as a way to strengthen their claims for aid.³¹ The central and provincial authorities often acknowledged such appeals, and both state discourse and migrants’ own narratives confirm that the presence of relatives could enhance one’s eligibility for support. However, even married members of the Algerian local army who arrived with their families in the 1830s and 1840s were not recognized as *muhacir* and did not benefit from institutional assistance. This inconsistency reflects the absence of a formal legal framework governing the settlement of such groups. Nonetheless, the available sources allow us to discern the implicit principles that guided the responses of both provincial officials and the central administration in their treatment of these newcomers.

The case of Ahmad bin Salim, a lieutenant of Amir Abd al-Qadir who led a group of migrants to Damascus in 1848, offers valuable insight into the principles underlying Ottoman responses to Algerian exiles. One of the key recommendations made by provincial authorities was that the Porte provide pensions and financial assistance to Algerian religious notables, particularly leaders of Sufi orders and figures described as “Muslim scholars and preachers” (*ulama ve daiyeler*).³² The determination of the amount was left to the discretion of the sultan and the central government. This differentiated treatment reflected both the administrative hierarchies within the Ottoman state and the pre-existing social distinctions among the migrants themselves, shaped by their status in Algeria prior to displacement.

Unlike ordinary peasants, thirty religious figures received a collective donation of 30,000 piasters.³³ In their private correspondence with associates who remained in Algeria, these Sufi leaders described their new situation in notably elevated terms: “Praise God for this moment [that we are living]. Sultan Abdulmejid honoured us and donated thirty thousand [Ottoman piasters] to the poor and indigent. As for me, I had four thousand, and so did Sheikh Ahmad Tayyib and Sheikh Mubarak.”³⁴ In this context, the term “poor” connoted both religious humility and a lack of material means. It is likely that these men were treated differently not only due to their symbolic capital as religious authorities, but also because they may have lacked other sources of subsistence.³⁵

³⁰ Betül Başaran, *Selim III, Social Control and Policing in Istanbul at the End of the Eighteenth Century: Between Crisis and Order* (Leiden: Brill, 2014): 23–37.

³¹ BOA, HR/MKT,60/71, folio 3, 17 şaban 1269 (24 July 1853); BOA, I.HR, 4749, 4 receb 1269 (13 April 1853); BOA, ŞD.2273/15, 2 rebiulahir 1309 (5 November 1892); BOA: I.DH, 1311, 29 rebiulahir 1310 (20 November 1892).

³² BOA, A.MKT.MVL, 8/47, 25 rebiulahir [12]64 (31 March 1848).

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ BULAC (Library of Oriental Languages and Civilizations, Paris), ARA 1740, letter of Mahdi bin Ahmad Saklawi to Muhammad Amazian bin Haddad, 10 zilkade 1263 (15 August 1853).

³⁵ On the *ilmiye* order, see Madeline Zilfi, “The *ilmiye* Registers and the Ottoman Medrese System Prior to the Tanzimat,” in *Contributions à l’histoire économique et sociale de l’Empire ottoman*, ed. Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont and Paul Dumont (Leuven: Peeters, 1983), 309–27.

Since the empire's legal system was based on the Hanafi tradition, these scholars of the Maliki school of Islamic law – corresponding to the majority of Maghribi people – were not formal agents of the Ottoman State.³⁶ Nevertheless, their social prestige afforded them special treatment, including exemptions from taxation and military service. This is evident in the case of the former Hanafi mufti of Algiers, who received substantial financial support that enabled him to acquire a school and two residences in İzmir.³⁷ In this way, the social hierarchies that had existed in Ottoman Algeria were largely reproduced in the settlement patterns and benefits granted within the empire.

On the other hand, Ottoman authorities directed Algerian peasants with agricultural backgrounds towards uncultivated lands, encouraging them to engage in year-round farming. These settlers were allocated state lands in the Hauran region, in what is today northwestern Jordan, an area with a sparse population and only limited oversight from the central government.³⁸ The aim was twofold: to cultivate idle lands and to ensure local security by placing settlers with both military and agricultural experience in frontier zones. This dual objective of promoting agricultural development and establishing a defensive presence paralleled practices observed in other parts of the world. For example, in the aftermath of the American Revolution (1776–83), the United States encouraged Canadian refugees loyal to the revolutionary cause to relocate to territories where Indigenous resistance challenged central authority.³⁹ However, the Ottoman settlement strategy differed in significant ways from settler-colonial models because they did not grant settlers legal superiority over local populations. Algerian migrants who were not yet tied to fixed communities were seen as useful instruments for consolidating state authority in peripheral regions. In this context, the state's logic was primarily utilitarian, aiming to make use of the exiles' military capabilities to reinforce control over remote areas. This approach is exemplified by the recruitment of some Algerians as irregular soldiers and their organization into a distinct North African military unit, which later participated in the Crimean War (1853–6).⁴⁰

In sum, the Ottoman state appears to have implicitly classified Algerian newcomers according to political, religious, and social criteria. The resulting hierarchy reflected both the internal social structure of Algerian society and the broader dynamics of imperial governance. Differentiation in treatment, along with the provision of relief through the sultan's charity, served to reinforce his image as a benevolent Muslim ruler. Moreover, the emphasis on promoting sedentarization and agricultural productivity contributed to the evolving definition of *muhacir* as a legal-administrative category within the framework of Ottoman reforms. Nonetheless, this status remained exclusively reserved for Muslims, underscoring the continued interdependence of religion and state policy in the empire's migration regime.

Towards a Full-Fledged *Muhacir* Status

The outcome of the Crimean War (1853–6) significantly altered the conditions under which Algerians settled in the Ottoman Empire. On one hand, the Porte introduced the first legal

³⁶ Guy Burak, *The Second Formation of Islamic Law: The Hanafi School in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1–16.

³⁷ BOA, A.MKT, 115/46, 10 rebiulahir 1264 (16 March 1848).

³⁸ Eugene Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850–1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), chap. 1.

³⁹ Evan Tapparata, “‘Refugees as You Call Them’: The Politics of Refugee Recognition in the Nineteenth-Century United States,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 38:2 (2019), 9–35; Joshua Gedacht, “Exile, Mobility, and Re-Territorialisation in Aceh and Colonial Indonesia,” *Itinerario* 45:3 (2021), 364–88.

⁴⁰ Cornac, “L'émir Abd al-qâdir et les Ottomans,” 242–3.

framework for managing migrants in 1856. On the other hand, Algerians from Kabylia – many of whom were connected with earlier settlers in Bilad al-Sham – became increasingly inclined to emigrate, especially following the destruction of the headquarters of the Rahmaniyya brotherhood in 1857.⁴¹ The settlement of Amir Abd al-Qadir in Damascus in 1855 further encouraged the migration of his former companions, particularly those whose living conditions had deteriorated under French colonial rule.⁴²

When Muslim populations from Crimea and the Caucasus began arriving in large numbers at the end of the war, many gathered in 1856 in the province of Silistra (in present-day Bulgaria), located along the eastern coast of the Black Sea.⁴³ In response, the sultan issued instructions to the local governor, which were formalized in the Silistre talimatnamesi (Silistra Regulations) on 3 May 1856. This was the first legal text to define specific rights for those designated as *muhacir*.⁴⁴ Migrants were to be settled on productive, state-owned land, which they were expected to cultivate. The law granted a ten-year tax exemption and a twenty-five-year exemption from military service. However, those who voluntarily enrolled in the army received a salary, and their families were entitled to additional support in the form of land, farming tools, and other resources. Administrative procedures required that all donations be formally registered and submitted by the provincial governor to the Ministry of Finance. Once *muhacir* refugees became financially self-sufficient, they were expected to reimburse the state for the value of the tools and materials initially provided.⁴⁵

Ottoman records on the settlement conditions of Algerians reveal a clear normative evolution. The Porte's guidelines marked a departure from earlier decades, as those designated as *muhacir* began receiving expanded privileges and fiscal exemptions. Throughout the 1860s and 1870s, Ottoman officials continued allocating uncultivated land to Algerians under similar conditions. In Tiberias, near the Sea of Galilee, an area largely depopulated after the 1837 earthquake, newcomers established new villages.⁴⁶ For example, a group of Algerian migrants who arrived in Damascus in the 1860s submitted a petition requesting resettlement.⁴⁷ The governor of the Sham proposed relocating them in the Palestinian coast. In August 1868, the grand vizier confirmed: "They will be exempted for a suitable period from paying fees themselves, and their children who are eligible to participate in the conscription will be exempted. They will not be forced to pay any fees for passage and will enjoy the same rules of exemption that apply to all other Muslim migrants."⁴⁸ In this decree, both Algerians and other Muslim newcomers, including refugees from the Crimean War, were designated as *İslam muhacirleri* ("Muslim migrants/refugees"), indicating their shared inclusion into a unified legal-administrative category. However, the duration of the exemptions was not determined according to the Silistra Regulations. Instead, the newly created Advisory Council of State (*Şura-yı Devlet*), established in April 1868, was tasked with

⁴¹ Mohamed Brahim Salhi, "Société et religion en Kabylie 1850–2000" (PhD diss., Paris 3 University, 2004), chap. 2.

⁴² Cornac, "L'émir Abd al-qâdir et les Ottomans," 232–43; Kateb, *Européens, "indigènes,"* 303–4.

⁴³ Abdullah Saydam, *Kırım ve Kafkas Göçleri, 1856–1876* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1997), 81–5. [The immigrants of Crimea and the Caucasus]. There were about thirteen thousand refugees in May 1856.

⁴⁴ Eren, *Türkiye'de Göç ve Göçmen*, 40–1; Toumarkine, *Les migrations des populations musulmanes*, 23.

⁴⁵ There were points in the Silistra regulations that were similar to those in the Edict of Potsdam issued in 1685 in present-day Germany. The Elector of Brandenburg issued a text that exempted the French Protestant refugees from taxes for a ten-year period, as well as for military service. Susanne Lachenicht, "Refugees and Refugee Protection in the Early Modern Period," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 30:2 (2017), 261–81.

⁴⁶ Mustafa Abbasi, "From Algeria to Palestine: The Algerian Community in the Galilee from the Late Ottoman Period until 1948," *Maghreb Review* 28:1 (2003), 41–59.

⁴⁷ David Grossmann, *Rural Arab Demography and Early Jewish Settlement in Palestine: Distribution and Population Density during the Late Ottoman and Early Mandate Periods* (London: Routledge, 2011), 65.

⁴⁸ BOA, A.MKT.MHM.416/3, 15 rebilahir 1285 (5 August 1868).

setting the exemption period.⁴⁹ This shows that Algerians, along with other groups categorized as Muslim *muhacir*, were entitled to similar rights under a gradually formalizing framework.⁵⁰

The provincial councils, established under the *Vilayet Kanunnamesi* (Law of Provinces) of 1864, played a key role in notifying the central government of new arrivals and recommending settlement measures. The Advisory Council of State, inspired by French and Austrian institutional models, coordinated between local and central authorities and issued recommendations on *muhacir* policy, among other state matters.⁵¹ Ottoman authorities continued to manage migration on a case-by-case basis while applying general principles, such as temporary exemptions and land grants. Crucially, it was provincial officials who bore the primary responsibility for housing and integrating *muhacir*.

The Tanzimat reforms brought about a semantic shift in the term *muhacir*. By the late 1850s, it had evolved into a generic label for individuals and groups residing outside their country of origin. For instance, Ottoman records refer to settlers from the French metropolitan territory living in Algeria as *Cezayir'de Fransız muhacirleri* ("French *muhacir* in Algeria").⁵² This secularization of an originally Islamic term is even more evident in legislation intended to attract Europeans and Americans to live and invest in the Ottoman Empire. As part of a broader policy to promote foreign trade, the Immigration Law (*Muhacerat Kanunnamesi*), passed on 9 March 1857, invited Westerners to cultivate the empire's numerous uncultivated lands.⁵³ It explicitly emphasised respect for the religion of immigrants and permitted them to request and obtain the right to build places of worship.⁵⁴ This legal provision echoed the spirit of the 1856 Imperial Rescript of *Gülhane* (*Hatt-ı Humayun*), which had proclaimed the equality of Muslim and non-Muslim Ottoman subjects.⁵⁵

However, Muslim migrants, such as most Algerians, were not governed by the 1857 law.⁵⁶ Instead, they were managed through measures largely modelled on the Silistra Regulations. The change in terminology is significant. Prior to the Crimean War, these migrants were generally referred to simply as *muhacir*, but from the latter half of the 1850s onwards, Ottoman officials increasingly labelled them *İslam muhacirleri* ("Muslim immigrants/refugees"). As shown above, the Ottoman administration also began to conceive of this group as a distinct legal and administrative category. The differentiation between Muslim and non-Muslim migrants is unsurprising, as it aligned with the *millet*

⁴⁹ Stanford Shaw, "The Central Legislative Councils in the Nineteenth Century Ottoman Reform Movement before 1876," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 1:1 (1970), 51–84.

⁵⁰ Similarly, although the 1695 Edict of Potsdam targeted the French Protestant refugees in Brandenburg, other groups also claimed and benefited from the privileges granted by this legal provision. Lachenicht, "Refugees and Refugee Protection," 272–4.

⁵¹ Shaw, "The Central Legislative Councils."

⁵² BOA, Y. EE, 42/150, 15 ramazan 1300 (20 July 1883).

⁵³ Karpat, *Ottoman Population*, 60–5.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Candan Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean War (1853–1856)* (London: Brill, 2010), 326–60. The aftermath of the Crimean War gave a new impetus to other reforms like the prohibition of the African slave trade.

⁵⁶ Unlike 1856 regulations, to be eligible, immigrants benefiting from 1857 needed to demonstrate financial solvency by possessing at least sixty gold *mecidiye* coins. In contrast to the Silistra Regulations, the 1857 law made no mention of exemptions from military service, as it was specifically intended for non-Muslims Foreigners (Grégoire Aristarchi Bey, *Législation ottomane, ou Recueil des lois, règlements, ordonnances, traités, capitulations et autres documents officiels de l'Empire ottoman* (Istanbul, 1873), 16–9). Many Europeans and Americans seized this opportunity. A recent study, for instance, investigates the rural German communities established in Artas, near Jerusalem, in Palestine: Falestin Naïli, *La Palestine entre patrimoine et providence: Imaginaires bibliques et mémoire du village d'Artàs (XIXe–XXe siècles)* (Paris: Karthala, 2022).

system, which structured the governance of imperial populations along religious lines.⁵⁷ Furthermore, military conscription – applicable only to Muslims – formed a key component of the social contract between the state and Muslim settlers. Finally, the rights associated with the status of *islam muhacirleri* (Muslim immigrant) were not standardised across the Empire, as they were often defined and implemented at the local level.

The Algerian *Muhacir* as Ottoman Citizen

In the aftermath of the 1877–8 war with Russia, the Ottoman Empire lost nearly all of its European provinces. Sultan Abdulhamid II, who had ascended the throne in 1876, sought to reinforce state authority over the remaining territories. To this end, he established a more centralized and authoritarian regime, dissolving the first elected parliament and suspending the constitution promulgated by the Tanzimat reformers that same year.⁵⁸ Abdulhamid's rule also benefited from the expansion of telegraph lines, the revival of the postal system, and improvements in transportation infrastructure, which enabled more direct control from the centre over provincial affairs.⁵⁹

Despite these political shifts, the settlement patterns of refugees and migrants largely continued the practices established during the previous era. To manage the accommodation of 1.5 million refugees from Rumelia displaced by the 1877–8 war,⁶⁰ the sultan created a new commissions tasked with registering and organizing the resettlement of these populations.⁶¹ The legal framework that emerged in 1878 required provincial authorities to submit reports to the central government.⁶² The new commissions scattered the refugees and enticed them to settle on underutilised lands, as some of them settled freely and others bought these lands, depending on the localities.⁶³ Refugees were dispersed across regions and encouraged to settle on uncultivated lands; some received plots freely while others purchased them, depending on local conditions. A key innovation of this period was the reduction of state allowances and exemptions benefiting refugees, reflecting the empire's deepening fiscal crisis following the economic collapse of 1875.⁶⁴

Within the scope of available evidence, the Hamidian commissions appear to have been the first Ottoman institutions to formally assume responsibility for North African

⁵⁷ Michael Ursinus, "Millet," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 7, ed. C. E. Bosworth et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 61–4.

⁵⁸ For a general introduction, see François Georgeon, *Abdulhamid II le sultan calife* (Paris: Fayard, 2003), 317; Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), chap. 3.

⁵⁹ Headrick Daniel H., *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); Yakup Bektaş, "The Sultan's Messenger: Cultural Constructions of Ottoman Telegraphy, 1847–1880," *Technology and Culture* 41:4 (2000), 669–96; Minawi Mostafa, "Beyond Rhetoric: Reassessing Bedouin-Ottoman Relations along the Route of the Hijaz Telegraph Line at the End of the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 58:1–2 (2015), 75–104.

⁶⁰ On the war refugees of the 1877–8 war, see Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821–1922* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin, 1996); Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky, "Imperial refuge: Resettlement of Muslims from Russia in the Ottoman Empire, 1860–1914", (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2018), 113–31.

⁶¹ Ufuk, *Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Muhacir*, 69–116.

⁶² The 1864 provincial law was amended during the 1877–8 war. The rural delegates (*muhtar*) restricted the power of the members of the consultative council, and henceforth the municipality of Istanbul no longer possessed the right to levy taxes on other towns: Gabriel Baer, *Fellah and Townsman in the Middle East* (London: Frank Cass, 1982) chap. 2.; Élie Massicard, "Le fonctionnaire inachevé? La figure du maire de quartier (*muhtar*)," in *L'art de l'État en Turquie. Arrangements de l'action publique de la fin de l'Empire ottoman à nos jours*, ed. Marc Aymes, Benjamin Gourisse, and Élie Massicard (Paris: Karthala, 2013), 259–92.

⁶³ Ipek, *Rumeli'den Anadolu'ya*, 155–9.

⁶⁴ Şevket Pamuk, *The Ottoman Empire and European Capitalism, 1820–1913: Trade, Investment and Production* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

migrants. Although this special commission primarily focused on war refugees, it also extended concern to Algerian migrants, especially from 1880 onwards, once the broader resettlement program was underway. Meanwhile, emigration from Algeria increased as inequalities intensified under French colonial rule during the 1870s. Under the Third Republic (1870–1940), Muslim Algerians increasingly experienced marginalisation, as colonial land policies disproportionately favoured European settlers at the expense of Muslim peasants.⁶⁵ Within the Ottoman Empire, although the category of *muhacir* remained loosely defined, Muslim Algerians received assistance in accordance with the evolving imperial norms.

The settlement of Algerians during the reign of Abdulhamid II faced significant obstacles due to conflicts arising when individuals considered Ottoman subjects by local authorities claimed French nationality. In 1888, one illustrative incident involved an Algerian fugitive who sought refuge in the French consulate in Beirut, only to be pursued by Ottoman gendarmes (*zabtiye*). The forced entry of Ottoman forces into the French consular premises in the Levant provoked a diplomatic crisis, resulting in the recall of both the French ambassador and the Ottoman governor of Beirut.⁶⁶ At that time, Algerian migrants in the Ottoman Empire had the right to claim French protection, as they were colonial subjects of France. Napoleon III's 1865 decree granted Algerians French nationality, albeit without full citizenship.⁶⁷ By the 1880s, amid the end of exemption periods and growing social and economic hardships within the Ottoman Empire, increasing numbers of Algerian migrants and their descendants sought French protection to avoid taxes and military service. The Porte, however, firmly opposed this practice, asserting that individuals who had resided in the empire for more than three years could no longer be considered French nationals.⁶⁸

Although the Ottomans had officially ceased to claim sovereignty over Algeria by the late 1840s and did not assert such claims at the 1856 Paris Conference, the Hamidian regime began to reinforce its authority over Algerians who had settled in the empire, particularly those receiving state subsidies.⁶⁹ This move aligned with broader efforts to curtail the scope of extraterritorial privileges granted to subjects of Western powers.⁷⁰ By contrast, Ottoman claims over Tunisian immigration in the Ottoman realm in the 1880s were more assertive, reflecting Istanbul's rejection of France's unilateral imposition of a protectorate over Tunisia despite prior international agreements.⁷¹ To encourage Algerians to relinquish their French nationality, Sultan Abdulhamid II extended the military exemption period of those living in Syria and Palestine to twenty years and promised additional land allocations to both current settlers and future migrants.⁷² Legal belonging to the Ottoman state – by virtue of the nationality law of 1869 – was already an indispensable condition for the newcomers to access *muhacir* rights.⁷³ Following the 1889 agreement between the sultan

⁶⁵ Didier Guignard, 1871. *L'Algérie sous séquestre* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2023).

⁶⁶ Pierre Bardin, *Algériens et Tunisiens dans l'Empire ottoman de 1848 à 1914*, (Marseille: éditions du CNRS, 1979), 57–8.

⁶⁷ Yerri Urban, “La longue genèse de la citoyenneté dans le Second Empire colonial 1798–1898,” *La Révolution française* 9 (2015).

⁶⁸ Salma Hargal, “De la sujétion française à la nationalité ottomane: le statut des Algériens à l'époque d'Abdulhamid II (1876–1908)” *Turcica, revue d'études turques et ottomanes* 55 (2025), 163–201.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Kayaoğlu, *Legal Imperialism*; Umut Özsü, “The Ottoman Empire, the Origins of Extraterritoriality, and International Legal Theory”, in Anne Orford and Florian Hoffman, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of the Theory of International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 123–37; Marglin, “Extraterritoriality and Legal Belonging.”

⁷¹ Bardin, *Algériens et Tunisiens*, 89–117, 146–61, and 210–20.

⁷² Buzpinar, “Suriye'ye Yerleşen Cezayirli.”

⁷³ On the 1869 law, see Cihan Osmanağaoğlu, *Tanzimat Dönemi İtibarıyla Osmanlı Tabiiyetinin (Vatandaşlığının) Gelişimi* (Istanbul: Legal yayınları, 2004); Will Hanley, “What Ottoman Nationality Was and Was Not,” *Journal of*

and the French ambassador, Algerian newcomers intending to remain for more than two years were required to formally renounce their French subjecthood and acquire Ottoman nationality.⁷⁴

A case involving a group of Algerians who arrived in 1891 illustrates the role of Ottoman naturalisation in the resettlement process. The newcomers petitioned the authorities for a daily subsidy (*yevmiye*), as stipulated in the legislation of 1878 and revised in 1889. Their request echoed earlier demands: “We obtained our Ottoman titles and thus became subjects of the august empire. It was decided by imperial order to grant us land and homes where we could live. However, nothing has been delivered to us yet.”⁷⁵ This Arabic-language petition was accompanied by at least two other formal appeals addressed to the governor of Beirut and the central Ottoman government, seeking financial support.⁷⁶ Two representatives of the community of 248 migrants signed the petition, alongside the *muhtar* (village mayor) of Shafa Amr in Tiberias (Palestine). These local leaders, as the most immediate representatives of the Porte’s authority, often supported the grievances of residents within their jurisdiction.

In this case, the council of the sub-governorate of Akka (Acre) appended a brief endorsement in Ottoman Turkish. Lacking sufficient funds, the governor forwarded the petition to the central government. After deliberation, the Ministry of the Interior received an official order to allocate funds from the imperial treasury to the Governorate of Beirut.⁷⁷ The chief of the province was notified to grant each family daily subsidies and allowances for their resettlement.⁷⁸ The provincial chief was instructed to provide each family with daily allowances and additional support for their resettlement. As was customary during the Tanzimat and post-Tanzimat periods, the request was also forwarded to the Advisory Council of State, which recommended the involvement of the *muhacir* commission and the implementation of the 1889 immigration law (*muhacirin nizamnamesi*).⁷⁹ The government accepted these recommendations and urged the commission to provide seeds and agricultural equipment locally as stipulated in this legal disposition.⁸⁰

Notably, the petitioners emphasized their newly acquired Ottoman nationality.⁸¹ In this context of imperial consolidation, access to state resources was increasingly reserved for legal imperial citizens who are considered Ottomans by virtue of the 1869 nationality law.⁸² Algerian migrants also benefited from the political influence of fellow nationals who had integrated into the upper echelons of the Ottoman state and advocated on their behalf.

Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association 3:2 (2016), 277–98; Hargal, “De la sujétion française à la nationalité.”; Ayşe Polat, “Paths Well Travelled: Imaginative Contours of the Juridical Ummah”, *History and Anthropology* 36:3 (2025), 459–76.

⁷⁴ Bardin, *Algériens et Tunisiens*; Buzpinar, “Suriye’ye Yerleşen Cezayirli”.

⁷⁵ The group who received lands in the districts of Tiberias and Haifa also got a daily allowance of 1.5 piasters per person. BOA, DH.MKT 1830/30, 20 ramazan 1308 (29 April 1891); BOA, ŞD.2279/15, 9 temmuz 1307 (21 July 1891).

⁷⁶ The form and paratextual conventions of these petitions conformed to the bureaucratic norms of the period: See Yuval Ben-Bassat, *Petitioning the Sultan: Protests and Justice in Late Ottoman Palestine* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 46–69.

⁷⁷ BOA, ŞD, 2279/15, 20 muharrem 1308 (26 August 1891).

⁷⁸ BOA, ŞD, 2279/15, 25 muharrem 1308 (31 August 1891).

⁷⁹ BOA, İ. ŞD, 112/6705, 6 rebiulevvel 1309 (10 October 1891); Ben-Bassat, *Petitioning the Sultan*, 31.

⁸⁰ BOA, ŞD.2279/15, 6 rebiulevvel 1309 (10 October 1891).

⁸¹ For another example from a group of Algerians settling in Safad district, see BOA, I. DH, 105/7830, 22 receb 1310 (8 February 1893).

⁸² This restrictive allocation of *muhacir* rights mirrors post-revolutionary practices in the Americas and Western Europe, where mass migration helped redefine concepts of citizenship and sovereignty. Jan Jansen, “Aliens in the Revolutionary World: Refugees, Migration Control and Subjecthood in the British Atlantic, 1790–1820s,” *Past and Present* 255 (2022), 189–231; Paul-André Rosenthal, “Migrations, souveraineté, droits sociaux: protéger et expulser les étrangers en Europe du XIX^e siècle à nos jours,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 66:2 (2011), 335–73.

For example, Amir Muhammad and Amir Muhyiddin, sons of Abd-al-Qadir, had served in the Ottoman army since the 1870s and attained the rank of general and aide-de-camp to the sultan.⁸³ Their younger brother, Amir Ali, residing in Damascus, was appointed district governor (*kaymakam*) of Qunaytira in 1896. He played a mediating role between Algerian migrants and the central authorities and transmitted their grievances to his elder brothers based in Istanbul.⁸⁴ In July 1895, he alerted them to the plight of a group of Algerian migrants who had been promised land by the then dismissed governor of Syria, Rauf Pasha. The generals translated his letter into Ottoman Turkish and submitted it to the sultan's cabinet, which initiated an official investigation.⁸⁵

In 1899, Abdulhamid II created a permanent body called the Islamic Commission for *Muhacir* (İslamiye Muhacirin Komisyonu).⁸⁶ The "Islamic" label aims to reinforce the Islamic identity of the Ottoman Empire and does not mean that the Hamidian regime excluded non-Muslims from all kinds of public aid. In fact, the *muhacir* status had already been reserved for Muslims prior to the 1850s, even if the empire did not deny aid to non-Muslim refugees.⁸⁷ As previously noted, Ottoman authorities continued to classify newcomers along religious lines, even as the category secularized in the wake of the 1856 rescript. Thus, the sultan's approach largely represented a continuation of earlier practices.

Moreover, his policies perpetuated earlier efforts to resettle peasant migrants in remote, underpopulated areas. In 1900, the Ottoman government encouraged the governor of Syria to send new Algerian arrivals in Damascus to the provinces of Baghdad and Aleppo, which were identified by government experts as sparsely inhabited.⁸⁸ Likewise, Muslim refugee families displaced by the Greco-Ottoman War of 1897 were resettled in the province of Benghazi (modern-day eastern Libya).⁸⁹ More than ever, the Porte viewed these migration flows from lost territories and colonial domains as an opportunity to fill demographic gaps, increase state revenues, and augment military conscription.

Conclusion

Similar to the modern designation of "refugee," the Ottoman category of *muhacir* conferred legal recognition and rights to Algerian exiles during the long nineteenth century. As this article has demonstrated, this status was the outcome of several decades of migration, administrative experimentation, and resettlement following successive territorial losses. Initially, Ottoman support for these exiles remained ad hoc, discretionary, and deeply shaped by social hierarchies and often framed as an extension of the sultan's personal charity. Over time, however, the increasing influx of Muslim refugees from Crimea, the Balkans, and the Caucasus compelled the state to stabilize its response by developing legal instruments into which Algerian migrants were progressively incorporated. Petitioning and bureaucratic engagement by the migrants themselves played a crucial role in shaping this legal category. The integration of their descendants into state service further solidified

⁸³ Yaveran-ı hazret-i şehriyarileri kulları: Ferik Mehmed Paşa kulları bin Emir Abdülkadir, II. Abdülhamid Han Fotoğraf Albümleri (Istanbul: Nadir Eseler Kütüphanesi, 1922).

⁸⁴ BOA, BEO. 987/7392, 3 rebiulevvel 1315 (2 August 1897).

⁸⁵ BOA, Y.PRK.MYD, 16/79, 29 zilhicce 1312 (23 June 1895).

⁸⁶ In 1893, the sultan dissolved the commissions of *muhacir* when finished dispatching 1877–8 war refugees (Ufuk, *Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Muhacir*, 137).

⁸⁷ Suraiya Faroqhi, "Refugees and Asylum Seekers on Ottoman Territory in the Early Modern Period," in *Le monde de l'itinérance: En Méditerranée de l'Antiquité à l'époque moderne*, ed. Claudia Moatti, Wolfgang Kaiser, and Christophe Pébarthe (Pessac: Ausonius Éditions, 2009), 643–66.

⁸⁸ BOA, DH.MKT, 2294/24, 5 ramazan 1317 (7 January 1900).

⁸⁹ Fredrick Walter Lorenz, "The 'Second Egypt': Cretan Refugees, Agricultural Development, and Frontier Expansion in Ottoman Cyrenaica, 1897–1904," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 53 (2021), 89–105.

their recognition. Moreover, the requirement that Algerians renounce French nationality in order to claim *muhacir* rights underscores the intersection of migration policy with sovereignty and legal jurisdiction. Ottoman naturalisation not only curtailed the privileges enjoyed by foreign nationals under capitulatory regimes but also redefined belonging in increasingly juridical terms. More broadly, the Algerian case calls for a reconsideration of the place of migrants in the late Ottoman period. This article has shown that Ottoman migration policy did not only operate as a technology of government through which the Porte sought to control mobility, populate marginal regions; it also served as a means to reconfigure legal boundaries of imperial belonging in a context of intensifying imperial pressure and colonial domination.

Acknowledgements. I warmly thank my colleagues Thomas Mareite and Nicolas Alejandro González Quintero for their careful reading of earlier versions of this paper, as well as the anonymous reviewers for their valuable insights. This article draws on proceedings from two conferences organized within the framework of the ERC project *AtlanticExiles*, directed by Prof. Jan Jansen, to whom I extend my gratitude, along with all members of the project team. I am also grateful to the editors of the journal for their support and guidance throughout the publication process.

Funding. This research was supported by a grant from Lumière Lyon 2 University.

Salma Hargal is an Associate Professor at Sciences Po Lyon, where she teaches the history of the Arab world and international relations. Her PhD dissertation (2022) examined Algerian migration in the Ottoman Empire. The book based on her doctoral research is forthcoming in 2026 in the *Turcica* series at Peeters Publishers.

Cite this article: Hargal, Salma, "Algerian Migration and the Formation of the *Muhacir* Status in the Ottoman Empire (1830–1908)," *Itinerario* (2026): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115326100424>