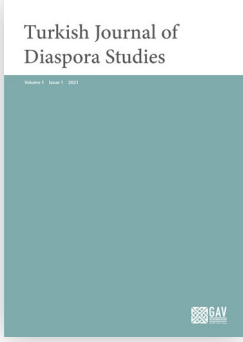TITLE: Robin Cohen and Nicholas Van Hear, Refugia: Radical Solutions to Mass Displacement,

Routledge, London and New York, 2019, 148 pp., $46.95, ISBN 9781138601567

AUTHORS: Haydar Haluk CEYLAN

PAGES: 161-164

ORIGINAL PDF URL: https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/1544307

Book Review

Haydar Haluk Ceylan

Submit your article to this journal ⬀

Book Review

Robin Cohen and Nicholas Van Hear, **Refugia: Radical Solutions to Mass Displacement**, Routledge, London and New York, 2019, 148 pp., $46.95, ISBN 9781138601567

Haydar Haluk Ceylan ID

Master Program for Migration Politics and Research, Yildirim Beyazit University, Ankara, Turkey

Migration is an ancient phenomenon intertwined with human history. Numerous factors such as war, famine, and climate changes, in addition to individual and sometimes social reasons, are factors that push people to migrate. Today, one of the most important factors that contribute to a large number of migrations is people who are forcibly displaced due to their ethnic identity, religion, or political stance. Robin Cohen and Nicholas Van Hear, in their book entitled *"Refugia: Radical Solutions to Mass Displacement,"* seek a different way of addressing the problems caused by mass displacement. In the book, an innovative social theory is put forward, as well as the known analytical studies of social sciences. Fictional aspects of the book allow the reader to associate it with the utopian literary genre. The concept of *Refugia* that gave the book its name is a transnational form of government organized by and for refugees and displaced persons (p. xi). The book, which consists of six different chapters, deals with the ideas of political and social theory presented in context in the first part. Here, the idea of *Refugia* is grounded by expressing the contradictory aspects of today's nation-state understanding in general. In other chapters, the idea of *Refugia* and its components are explained with definitions. The methodology that works here is generally in the form of explaining current situations and making future projections for the problems caused by these situations. For example, in the fourth part of the book, after explaining the current meaning of "transnational communities" and the communication between diasporas and their homelands, predictions about how to transform into a new form of transnational government are shared. The functioning of *Refugias* is mentioned in the fifth chapter of the book and summary and criticisms are given in the last chapter.

The idea of *Refugia*, as theorized by Cohen and Van Hear, is not based on ethnicity, nationalism, or religion (p. 4). From this point of view, the book presents a vision of the future where *Refugians* build a new form of government that is not based on identity politics, and that is democratic, self-sufficient, and forward-looking. The second part of the book points out why *Refugias* are needed in the current functioning of nation states. In this section, some criticism is directed toward the historical process of the formation of nation-states. Cohen and Van Hear suggest that nation-states should be viewed as a purely ideological and political project that has never been fully realized and has always been contested (p.15). Rather than arguing that

CONTACT *Haydar Haluk Ceylan*   ✉ *hhalukceylan@gmail.com*

nation-states should be abolished in general, they demonstrate that there are now different ways in which power is organized. In the same chapter of the book, they refer to identities, group identities, the state that identities come to the forefront in the construction processes and that nation-states are no longer assumed, unique, or a natural situation. Accordingly, identities have become individually selectable. Socially constructed group identities are formed by shared experiences, shared pains and successes, and ultimately by collective efforts for a future together. The elements that constitute social identity and forms of belonging exist less with national and ethnic loyalty, and more with the interaction that comes with the contact with each other in daily life. From this point of view, the formation processes of identities contain vitality and can be transformed. On the other hand, various ethnic groups among forcibly displaced people have built a collective social identity with the horrors of war, the trauma of displacement, the suffering of the journey, the struggle for survival, and the collective pains they experienced. This process is far from ethnically based identity construction (p. 22). Cohen and Van Hear define *Refugia* as one of the component units of *refugium*. Refugia is formed by refugium, archipelago, and ecotones. Accordingly, archipelago and common areas called ecotones are beyond the territorial state idea. From Here, *Refugians,* as a whole, can work to maximize their bargaining power with nation-states and international organizations (p. 59). According to Cohen and Van Hear, social identities are freed from the cage of national identities. Therefore, it is possible for individuals, who continue to preserve their roots in the diaspora and integrate into an existing nation-state, to declare themselves *Refugians* (p. 32).

The book mentions many transnational political and economic initiatives created by refugees that can be considered as a prelude to *Refugia*. Transnational money transfers, house building, and self-management initiatives, especially among refugees, make it likely that transnational forms of governance like *Refugia* will emerge. The authors pointed out that the idea of *Refugia*, which they describe throughout the book, may be limited due to the limited scope and success of initiatives of transnational governance experienced so far. However, the authors consider that even these limited efforts make gains for the forcibly displaced. In *Refugia*, presentation and representation styles are introduced, in addition to the management styles that exist in some ethnic-national groups and diasporas, which are valid for all refugees. The authors summarize the management approach they propose in the last part of the book. Also, criticisms and objections to *Refugia* are included in this section. Accordingly, Refugia embraces utopian thinking and undertakes individual or collective responsibilities that are in which nation-states are burdened by displaced people. The utilitarian utopianism mentioned here is the good society; in other words, it advocates the emergence of an ideal society that has characteristics such as horizontal democracy, tolerance, equality, and transparency. At this point, the book also emphasizes that a rational ground should be prepared on the way to *Refugia*, through taking into account the continuity of the nation-state, the number of displaced people, and the current international refugee regime.

The main aim of the *Refugia* idea is to create a new form of transnational government. In doing so, the authors consider how to resolve displacement. Accordingly, *Refugia* will be led by an international virtual assembly. *Refugians* will have the responsibility to pay taxes to both the nation-state they live in and *Refugia*. Also, this situation is expected to reveal a new identity. The authors admit that this is based on utopian ideals. According to the authors, utopian thinking

offers, at least, the opportunity to imagine such a management approach and a society that lives in this way. This idea outlined in the book may lead to further work in the future by nurturing initiatives on transnational governance that already exists. Today's changing conditions such as global epidemics and pandemics have brought nation-states and extreme security policies back to the agenda. At the same time, the international refugee regimes currently in place and the position of refugees raise questions about the applicability of the *Refugia* idea.

Orcid

Haydar Haluk Ceylan 🆔 *https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0310-6698*