

Loyalty and Citizenship

Ottoman Perspectives on its
Russian Border Region (1878-1914)





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Abstract

Taking as its subject the Russo-Ottoman borderland during the period between the Treaty of Berlin (1878) and the start of the First World War (1914), and making extensive use of Ottoman archival documents covering this period, this study focuses on the ways in which the Ottoman state attempted to establish two types of boundary in order to ensure sovereignty over its territory. Firstly, there was a new geo-political border, the line dividing the Russian and Ottoman Empires at the juncture of north-eastern Anatolia and the southern Caucasus, created by the Treaty of Berlin. Secondly, there was what can be called a citizenship boundary, shaped by various laws and regulations defining the Ottoman citizenry. The main issues examined in respect of the first boundary are various types of human movement across this border and their control by the Ottoman state. Primary concerns regarding the second boundary revolve around the inclusion in and exclusion from the Ottoman citizenship of ethno-religious groups as a result of the Ottoman state's enforcement of the border.

Our approach to studying how the citizenship boundary was established is two-fold, reflecting both local and state perspectives. The local perspective shows the actions of the inhabitants and travellers passing through this border region as shaped by their own day-to-day needs, livelihood patterns and pre-existing socio-economic relations; these resisted limitation by the logic of the sovereign state. The state perspective reflects the Ottoman view of Russia as the main threat to its border territories; this view led the Ottoman central authorities to perceive the entanglements and overlapping positions of its subjects in and with Russia as the cause of their ambiguous loyalties to the Ottoman state.

In focusing on the specific policies and practices that the Ottoman state applied in order to deal with this ambiguity, two groups of people, Muslims and Armenians, are singled out. Notwithstanding the all-embracing state laws and discourse of legal equality, Ottoman border policy in respect of its Muslim subjects is shown to have differed greatly from that designed for its Armenian subjects. Therefore, this research offers a nuanced framework with which to understand Ottoman citizenship in the Russo-Ottoman border context, by re-

vealing the normative and practical measures the Ottoman state employed to classify its Muslim and Armenian populations, thereby differentiating their status as subjects.

This study offers a range of original insights into this borderland in particular and related issues more generally. It unfolds the details of everyday life and represents the local people as active agents – active, moreover, in relation both to the changing nature and effectiveness of the state’s assertion of territorial authority and also to the differences between the two empires’ policies and practices. Overall, the book focuses on the end-of-empire border politics and the issue of Ottoman citizenship not only from the perspective of macro-level political developments and central state power but also in terms of the peripheral specificities of administration and the movements and subjecthood choices of villagers. Thus, this research presents a new type of multi-faceted account of borderland development in which ethno-religious considerations came to inform a somewhat messy production of sovereignty in the context of the modernizing transition between empire and nation-state.

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At last my long-standing interest in the Russo-Ottoman border encounter has born its first fruit! The origins of my interest in this topic date back to the re-opening of the Turkish-Georgian border in Sarp in 1988, when I was a little girl in Trabzon. I was fascinated by the sudden appearance and flourishing of ‘Eurasian’ (colloquially ‘Russian’) bazaars, and enthralled by the luggage-trade activities in this Eastern Black Sea area. I was particularly intrigued by how local people saw these newly arriving, ex-Soviet citizens. Then, over time, I found myself mulling the roots of the movements and meetings of cultures in the borderland region, until I finally came to formally study the subject.

I have experienced wanderings of my own during the course of my academic studies, but am very happy now to find myself stationed in Leipzig as a post-doctoral researcher with the Transottomanica research project. It is a privilege and honour to see my monograph published as part of the Transottomanica series. In this respect, I would like to thank Stefan Troebst, who acquainted me with the project, along with Stefan Rohdewald, Stephan Conermann and Albrecht Fuess, who supported the publication academically and financially. I am also grateful to Frank Hadler, head of the *Verflechtung und Globalisierung* Department at the GWZO (the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe), with which I am affiliated in Leipzig.

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I am deeply indebted to my father, Ertan Yazıcı, who always emboldened me to cross borders and go beyond, to pursue what I really want in life. I can only visualize his happiness seeing the completion of this book, and positioning it delightfully in the best place in his library. I dedicate it to his memory.

Map



Map showing the Russo-Ottoman border region

Green line: 1856 border.

Blue line: Treaty of San Stefano (3rd March, 1878, proposed).

Red line: Treaty of Berlin (13th July, 1878, settled).

Source: Hertslet (1891).

Introduction

This book looks at the Russo-Ottoman border region in the period following the Treaty of Berlin in 1878 and prior to the start of World War I. The period after this is not within the scope of my research, since it was shaped by the dynamics of World War I, and specifically by the Russo-Ottoman War that broke out at the end of October 1914, and the Russian occupation of the Eastern Anatolia in 1915. Since the line of the Russo-Ottoman border as researched here was removed during this war, the changing border dynamics need to be addressed in a separate research.

The main concern of this study is with Ottoman efforts to establish sovereignty on its side of the repositioned border, focusing on issues of state and citizenship. How was the Ottoman citizenry defined here? Through which policies and practices was the sovereign territory (re)constructed during this period? How were people, communities and their lands included and excluded and how did this impact on the daily lives and citizenship status of those in the borderland region?

In Ottoman-Turkish historiography, there has been a focus on the idea of Ottomanism or Ottoman citizenship as a supra national-religious identity, especially as this was expressed in the legal and institutional transformation of the Ottoman state. Although more subtle definitions of Ottomanism have been developed in the existing scholarship, that enable disparate understandings and show how the idea shifted on an *ad hoc* basis until the end of the Empire, there remains a need to scrutinize Ottomanism in order to analyse how the confessional identity of the Ottoman state appeared on the margins and shaped state membership.¹ In this work, two such groups, Muslims and Armenians, are sin-

1 In general terms, Ottomanism can be defined as 'a dynastic patriotism to which all religious and ethnic communities could owe allegiance without sacrificing their own narrower aims and aspirations.' Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 34. However, this broad definition is not enough to understand the variety of interpretations required by 'the very nature of Ottomanism'. For an explanation of reasons behind the various interpretations see: Alexander Vezenkov, 'Formulating and Reformulating

gled out in an examination of central regulations, regional developments and local border practices to better understand the dynamics through time behind a particular delimitation of Ottoman citizenry. Central, here, is the issue of ambiguity in respect to the different loyalties and belongings of Muslims and of Armenians in the eyes of Ottoman officials. From the state perspective, this ambiguity was sited in a historically and inherently uncertain borderland area made further problematic by the practical complexities of the sudden, rather arbitrary border repositioning; it was emphasized by the massive population movements across Russian and Ottoman territory as a result of that change imposed by the Treaty of Berlin; and it was made a matter of some urgency by the development of the 'Armenian issue', or the 'Armenian Question', in the context of the difficult and uncertain relationship between the two empires.

The idea of Ottomanism is conventionally regarded as an attempt at a radical break from traditional Ottoman state practice that emerged in the context of the nineteenth century centralizing reform movements. Instead of pre-modern forms of politics, in which society was stratified by religious identification, Ottomanism promoted a universalist pluralism, a modern form of political understanding based on citizenship and legal equality following the pattern of change in Europe after the French Revolution.² The development of this idea is pinned to the *Gülhane* Rescript of 1839, which launched the *Tanzimat* Reforms; the new status of Muslims and non-Muslims as citizens, undistinguished by the state, was expressed in the 1856 Reform Edict, through its declaration of the legal equality of all people of the Ottoman Empire; and this was confirmed with the First Constitution (*Kanun-i Esasi*, 1876), in which equal rights and obligations were articulated. According to this narrative, the subsequent period of the Hamidian regime (1876–1909) involved a growing emphasis on Islamism reversing the previous development although the *Tanzimat* approach of an authoritarian and centralizing Ottomanism was not actually ignored in practice; and then the last, ephemeral, period of hope for Ottomanism came with the Constitutional Revolution of 1908, under the slogan 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity and Justice'

Ottomanism', in Roumen Daskalov and Tchavdar Marinov (eds.), *Entangled Histories of the Balkans (Volume One: National Ideologies and Language Policies)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), pp. 241–271. For the reasons why Ottomanism was not a firmly fixed ideology and even not an ideology, see: Howard Eissenstat, 'Modernization, Imperial Nationalism, and the Ethnicization of Confessional Identity in the Late Ottoman Empire', in Stefan Berger and Alexei Miller (eds.), *Nationalizing Empires* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2015), pp. 429–459.

2 Selçuk Akşin Somel, 'Osmanlı Reform Çağında Osmanlılık Düşüncesi (1839–1913)', in Tanıl Bora and Murat Gültekinil (eds.), *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce. Cumhuriyet'e Devreden Düşünce Mirası. Tanzimat ve Meşrutiyet'in Birikimi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2009), pp. 88–89.

although this final flourishing of Ottomanism did not last long, and it was completely abandoned with war in the Balkans (1912–13).³

This narrative recounts the basic turning points of the chronological transformation of state-subject relations in the Ottoman Empire in respect of the idea of Ottomanism and Ottoman citizenship. It is, however, limited as an analysis of Ottoman citizenship, insofar as it takes an institutionalist approach, focusing exclusively on high politics at the expense of state discourses and practices at a local and everyday level. It thus fails to broach issues around the inclusion/exclusion or membership/non-membership of Ottoman subjects as negotiated and contested through the actual operation of officialdom 'on the ground' and the everyday encounters of ordinary people with the state. Indeed, if we remain content with the analysis of laws, constitutions and official documents, with a perspective based on macro-level political dynamics and developments, we become trapped in the all-embracing language of state and its formally composed texts that only allows recognition of distinction and discrimination when this reaches the point of political violence, such as, in the case of Armenians, massacre.

This study thus aims at providing a more nuanced account of Ottoman citizenship, through the analysis of cross-border movements of Muslims and Armenians in north-eastern Anatolia and the varying levels of permeability of the border there. Rather than limiting its analysis of Ottoman citizenship to those moments when the Ottoman state granted or withheld rights to and from various ethno-religious groups (both through internal processes and under foreign pressure), the present work will focus on the evolution of the administrative practice of state citizenship and the actions of Ottoman subjects. It will focus on 'how distinct groups articulated themselves' in the context of the Ottoman citizenship regime and how the boundaries of Ottoman citizenship drawn by the Ottoman state were managed and contested by distinct groups and individuals.⁴ In this regard, the Russo-Ottoman border provides us with a tangible ground, a geographically specified siting for discussion of the practice of Ottoman citizenship not only from the perspective of the Ottoman state but also from the point of view of Ottoman subjects who lived near the border and/or travelled across it.

This introductory chapter continues with a historical overview of the Russian expansion into the Caucasus, aiming to give an idea about the shifting frontiers

3 Somel, 2009: 107; Vezenkov, 2013: 265; Uğur Ümit Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey. Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 26–27.

4 Engin F. Işın, 'Citizenship after orientalism. Ottoman citizenship', in E. Fuat Keyman and Ahmet İçduygu (eds.), *Citizenship in a Global World: European Questions and Turkish Experiences* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 42.

and borderlands between the Russian and Ottoman Empire until 1878. Then, it looks at the Treaty of Berlin, for two reasons. Firstly, as mentioned, the Treaty redrew the border and thus made the territorial change to the borderland region where the Russian Caucasus meets Eastern Anatolia that precipitated mass migrations and then counter migrations; secondly, it became a turning point in the history of Ottoman Armenians, especially for those who inhabited this region. In the next section, we focus on the Ottoman state, especially from the perspective of developments related to the reform process required at Berlin for the Armenians. This consideration is divided into three subsections, looking first at the Hamidian regime and Islamism (Ottoman state identity and construction), then at the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) at the end of the period studied and finally at the specific issue of Armenian reform. Thereafter, we present the theoretical framework. Contextualized as a reading of the relevant literature, this introduces, among others, the idea of ambiguity created by the very stipulation of a borderline designed to clarify status; the idea of ‘strangeness’ as an object of distrust and prompting legislation in respect of the imperial borderlands; and the conceptualization of ‘citizenship boundary’ to deal with the strangers, taking into account its effects on the cross-border movement of local people and the special case of the Armenians in contradistinction to Muslims. Concluding this Introduction, an outline of the four main chapters is given.

Russia’s Southern Expansion in the Caucasus until 1878

The Russian Empire had already had more than three hundred years of experience in ruling its ever expanding and transforming south-eastern border before the (re)formation of the Russo-Ottoman border in 1878. Prior to that, the Caucasus had mainly been an area of contention between the Ottoman Empire and the Safavid dynasty of Persia.⁵ It was in the late sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries that the foundation of Fort Terk on the north-eastern corner of the North Caucasus and the establishment of the Cossack settlements along the Terek and Kuban rivers initiated the Muscovite state’s incremental expansion into the Caucasus.⁶ Then, during the reign of Peter the Great (1689–1725), Russians motivated by the long-cherished goal of controlling the all-water

5 For the entangled relations between these two empires before the 19th century, see Fariba Zarinebaf, ‘Rebels and Renegades on Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands: Porous Frontiers and Hybrid Identities’, in Abbas Amanat and Farzin Vejdani (eds.), *Iran Facing Others. Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 79–97.

6 Carl Max Kortepeter, ‘Complex goals of the Ottomans, Persians, and the Muscovites in the Caucasus, 1578–1640’, in Colin P. Mitchell (ed.), *New Perspectives on Safavid Iran. Empire and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 59–83.

route from the Baltic to the Caspian inevitably encountered the Ottomans on the Black Sea coast as well as the Safavids on the Caspian.⁷ Although later forced to retreat behind their borders established during Peter the Great's reign, Russians had nevertheless gained a taste for expansion from this adventure in the south and started to play an increasing role in upping the imperial rivalries in the region. Under Catherine the Great (1762–96), they followed a prudent and cautious policy aimed at gradually extending Russia's scope of authority throughout the Caucasus. And by the end of the late eighteenth century, the North Caucasus was turned into a Russian imperial borderland as a result of the 'deliberate and consistent' colonial policies of the Russian government.⁸

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Russian Empire not only strengthened its position at the northern part of the Caucasus mountain range but also annexed the Georgian kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti in the south, deposing the ancient Bagratid dynasty. It further consolidated its power against its Ottoman and Safavid Islamic rivals in the struggle over the Caucasian region with the treaties of Bucharest (1812), Gulistan (1813), Turkmanchai (1828) and Adrianople (1829).⁹ The Russian state smoothly integrated the Georgians into the empire.¹⁰ While it eliminated the threat of 'a common Islamic front' in the south, however, consolidation of its rule was not so easy in the north, which was mostly populated by highly militarized Muslims. The Russian state had managed to suppress the Murid revolt by 1860, but similar, albeit unorganized uprisings

7 Thus did the three empires clash (there were several other points of contact and areas of contention, of course; here, we focus only on the Caucasus). 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: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 378.

8 Michael Khodarkovsky, 'Of Christianity, Enlightenment, and Colonialism: Russia in the North Caucasus, 1550–1800', *The Journal of Modern History*, 71 (June, 1999), 394–430, p. 395; Thomas M. Barrett, 'Lines of Uncertainty: The Frontiers of the North Caucasus', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (Autumn, 1995), pp. 578–601.

9 For the period between the first and second Russo-Iranian wars (1813–26) and the later change of perception of Iranians on the military superiority of Russians in the region see Maziar Behrooz, 'From confidence to apprehension: Early Iranian interaction with Russia', in Stephen Cronin (ed.), *Iranian-Russian Encounters. Empires and Revolutions since 1800* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 49–68, and Rudi Matthee, 'Facing a Rude and Barbarous Neighbour: Iranian Perceptions of Russia and the Russians from the Safavids to the Qajars', in *Iran Facing Others*, pp. 99–123.

10 Austin Jersild argues that Georgians integrated into the imperial system without much resistance due to their Christian identity. While this caused the transformation of the Georgian self-image vis-à-vis the Muslim mountaineers, it also helped members of Georgian educated society (*sazogadoeba*) to seek their own place and mission within the empire. Austin Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845–1917* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002).

persisted until the beginning of the Russo-Ottoman War in 1877.¹¹ Nevertheless, by the late 1870s, Russia had established its supremacy in the region and succeeded in maintaining a considerable amount of influence not only on the peoples of the Caucasus but beyond, to Eastern Anatolia.¹²

One of the main ethnic groups to be directly affected by the fluctuating Ottoman, Iranian and Russian frontiers in the Caucasus and Eastern Anatolia from the mid-sixteenth century were the Armenians. Indeed, 'historic Armenia' was one of the primary sites of this imperial competition. As a result of the Ottoman-Persian Treaty of Zuhab (1639), this territory became divided into Eastern and Western Armenia.¹³ Eastern Armenia, including the khanates of Erevan and Nakhichevan, was later ceded to Russia by the Russian-Persian Treaty of Turkmanchai (1828), which concluded a brief (two-year) Russo-Persian War. Russian rule in Eastern Armenia was finally confirmed by the Treaty of Adrianople (1829), concluding the one-year Russo-Ottoman War, and the region began to be regarded as Russian Armenia, and labelled thus.

When Eastern Armenia came under Russian control, the majority of the population there was Muslim.¹⁴ The Russian march into the region and the Caucasus in general, however, led to major population movements of Armenians and Muslims. An estimated 57,000 Armenians left Persia and Anatolia for Eastern Armenia following the Russian annexation, while some 35,000 Muslims counter-migrated (i.e. moved in the reverse direction).¹⁵ By the end of the Cri-

11 For a brief explanation of the conquest of Transcaucasia and a detailed work on the militarized Muslim frontier society of North Caucasus, see Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan* (Portland: Frank Cass, 1994).

12 Rieber, 2014: 371–394; for the consolidation of Russian power among various religious and ethnic groups in the North and South Caucasus, see: Dominik Gutmeyr, *Borderlands Orientalism or How the Savage Lost his Nobility* (Vienna: LIT, 2017), pp. 25–61.

13 Despite the ('Eastern' and 'Western') labels, there was no fixed boundary line dividing them, and they were generally named rather according to the imperial state holding that part of Armenia (so Persian dominion determining the 'Eastern' name and Ottoman the 'Western'). Rouben Paul Adalian, *Historical Dictionary of Armenia* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), pp. 335–337.

14 Until the mid-fourteenth century, despite the devastation of previous wars, the majority of the population of Eastern Armenia remained Armenian, so Christian. However, according to the survey carried out by the Russian government between 1829 and 1832, Muslims had come to form 80 percent or more of the population. In the Russian province of Armenia, the Armenians only formed half of the total population in 1832. George A. Bournoutian, 'The Ethnic Composition and the Socio-Economic Condition of Eastern Armenia in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century', in Ronald Grigor Suny (ed.), *Transcaucasia, Nationalism and Social Change. Essays in the History of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1983), pp. 69, 77–80.

15 Hovannisian claims that more than 14,000 families (over 100,000 Armenians) had left the regions of Erzurum, Kars and Bayezid by the end of 1830. Richard G. Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence 1918* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 9 and 260; See also Ronald Grigor Suny, 'Eastern Armenians Under Tsarist Rule', in