

Migration Waves, Social Composition, And Distinctive Features of The Eastern Slavic Diaspora in Turkestan from 1918 To 1924

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Abstract: The article examines the formation of the East Slavic diaspora in Turkestan in 1918–1924. It identifies the main migration waves during the Civil War and early NEP, outlines the social composition of migrants and urban groups, and highlights key settlement areas linked to administrative centers and the railway network.

Keywords: Turkestan, East Slavs, diaspora, migration, settlement, 1918–1924.

Introduction: The formation of the East Slavic (mainly Russian) diaspora in the Turkestan region from 1918 to 1924 is closely tied to the socio-political instability of that period. This era is characterized primarily by the civil war and its aftermath (1918-1920) and the famine (1921-1922), followed by the NEP period (1923-1924). The years 1918-1924 were chosen as a specific timeframe for this reason: in 1918, the Turkestan ASSR was established, and the subsequent year saw the civil war and a change in power. The severe famine of 1921-22 then became a new factor driving the mass exodus of the East Slavic population from Turkestan. Ushbu xronologik kontekst diasporaning migratsiya to'liqlari, ijtimoiy tarkibi va mehnat bozoridagi roli o'zgarishini tahlil qilish uchun muhim zamin yaratadi.

This chronological context provides an important foundation for analyzing changes in migration waves, social composition, and the role of the diaspora in the labor market.

The relevance of the research and the scientific problem lie in the formation of the East Slavic diaspora and its interactions with other ethnic communities in the wake of socio-political changes occurring in the territory of Turkestan during 1918-1924, which manifest as a unique historical phenomenon. The historical trajectory of this diaspora is closely intertwined not only with inter-ethnic and intercultural relations but also with evolving political structures, economic distribution, and educational-

infrastructural processes, holding high scientific significance within the context of Turkestan's transformation during the Soviet period. It also serves as an important source for developing theoretical and practical analyses of the diaspora's territorial distribution, consequences of migration, processes of mutual integration with local communities, contemporary diaspora relations, intercultural connections, and policies of ethnic diversity.

The term "diaspora" derives from the Greek word meaning "dispersion," and in modern literature, it refers to ethnic groups living outside their historical homeland. For example, the waves of migration of Central Asian peoples following the 1917 revolution led to the emergence of diasporas in neighboring countries. Similarly, the migration of Russians and other East Slavic populations in Turkestan during 1918-1924 can be considered as their local diaspora. When studying diasporas, their temporary nature and aspiration for integration are taken into account, that is, the hope of either assimilating into the local community or returning to their homeland.

In terms of relevance, this topic is significant from the perspective of restoring historical and legal facts. Studying the socio-economic composition and geographical distribution of the East Slavic diaspora in Turkestan provides a deeper understanding of the region's history from 1917 to 1924. Information about social transitions, demographic changes, and national

movements of this period serves as a valuable source for historiography.

As for the range of sources, the research primarily analyzes archival documents, official statistical data, and contemporary historiographical works. In practice, the research methodology employs methods such as studying and analyzing scientific literature and archival materials, as well as statistical and historical analysis techniques. This approach helps to more accurately describe the factors influencing the formation of the East Slavic diaspora in Turkestan - including the civil war, internal migrations, changes in employment structures, and geographical distribution.

A number of factors contributed to the mass migration of East Slavs. The Soviet government felt a need for labor to ensure equality between individuals and social groups, to implement the agrarian revolution and establish the new socialist system [4,p.77-79].

In 1918-1920, political unrest intensified in Turkestan. As a result of the revolutions of 1917, the Bolsheviks established power in Tashkent, and in 1918 the Turkestan ASSR was formed. During this period, significant events occurred, including the overthrow of the Turkestan Autonomy government in Kokand, the defeat of Kolchak and other White Army forces, and the fall of the Bukhara and Khiva Emirates [1,p.63].

Under the influence of the civil war, bloody conflicts and disorder erupted in Central Asia. As a result, evacuation and resettlement schemes emerged among various groups of the population - particularly among East Slavic (mainly Russian) communities. For example, after the defeat of Kolchak's army, his allies were forced to cross the Turkestan border into China - in 1920, nearly 20,000 Russian Cossacks and 50,000 Russian peasant migrants from the Semirechye region headed to the Xinjiang province of China. In general, this first wave of migration was associated with the establishment of Bolshevik power in Turkestan and the change of internal governments [1, p.63].

In 1921-1922, severe famine reigned in Turkestan and neighboring regions. Drought and food problems also arose in Central Asia. It is known that the famine associated with the collapse of the old imperial economic system between 1917-1923 claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people [2, p.63].

Regarding the food shortage that began in 1917 and some cases related to the diaspora, among the noted deficiencies in food supply, one can mention the unfair distribution of food. It should be noted that the work of providing food supplies to the population in Turkestan was not based on a unified management system. Instead, there were separate committees operating simultaneously: one for supplying food to the local

population and another for the Russian population. Existing archival sources indicate that the work carried out was not coordinated. In particular, this situation is evident in the disproportionate distribution of food products between the local and Russian populations. For example, in September 1917, it was planned to provide 13 wagons of grain for 24,000 residents of the city of Aulie-Ata. However, even after a month, nothing had been given to the local population. Moreover, from August 15 to October 17, 1917, the indigenous population of Aulie-Ata was not provided with any grain by the Food Committee. Yet during the same period, the Russian population, although in very small quantities, continued to receive food supplies [3, p.296]. It can be said that in the distribution of grain, more attention was paid to the Russians than to the local population. Because the Russians mainly played a decisive role in the distribution of goods. For example, according to data from October 1917, 3 wagons of flour, according to promises, were distributed to the Muslim population, but in reality, half of the flour was taken to the account of the Russian Food Committee, and despite the presence of the Russian population, that is, 1.5 wagons were taken from the hungry Russian population. According to the information provided, if the Food Committee had not acted this way, the members of this committee would have been "killed by the hungry Russian population," since not a single pound of flour remained at the disposal of the Aulie-Ata Russian Food Committee. Such a procedure, in turn, was perceived as "unfair distribution." The continuation of inequities in the distribution of food, in particular, the increased attention to the provision of the Russian population in relation to the provision of the local population, led to certain protests. In particular, the receipt by the Russian Food Committee of flour belonging to the local food committee in Avliyoota caused sharp discontent among the local population. As a result, the local population and members of the "food committee" went to the city head in full and demanded an explanation for this process [3, p.296].

However, the head of the city of Avliyoota could not "explain" this...

Based on the current situation, in the appeal of the head of the city of Avliyoota, it was stated that the indigenous population is still patient, such a situation... may ultimately lead to the population's exhaustion of patience, "patience may not be able to withstand the stomach's demand, because the Russian population is practically taking their sustenance from the mouths of the local population." Among these demands, members of the local food committee emphasized that the hungry population would not retreat from any

obstacles in their quest to feed themselves and their children. They reported, "The following threats are being heard from the local population: we need to attack the local food committee with knives. ...The execution of these threats by the local population is not far off, and simultaneously, famine riots by Russians are expected daily... In this situation, it is difficult to hope for the preservation of lives of Russians, members of the city food committee, and even members of the city administration" [3, p.296].

Avliyoata, as a locus of the food-supply crisis, exerted a discernible impact not only on the indigenous population but also on the Russian population represented within the food committees. The protracted disruption of provisioning mechanisms, coupled with repeated impasses in attempts to resolve supply discontinuities, ultimately precipitated a refusal—on the part of both indigenous groups and the Russian residents—to participate in the activities of the relevant food administrations and committees. As a consequence, the city head was compelled to appeal on a daily basis to members of the food administration for patience and continued engagement in this sphere, to the extent that, in a literal sense, it became necessary to keep these individuals in service by coercive means [3, p. 296].

Because the diaspora residing in Turkestan encountered this crisis in a manner comparable to the local population, the ensuing food deficit generated a wide range of risks. In particular, in 1921, forced resettlement operations were initiated against certain local Russian peasants under the pretext of "preserving equilibrium": for instance, drawing on events observed in the Semirechye region, the Soviet authorities attempted to expel several thousand Russian peasants from Turkestan, expropriating their seed plots and other property in the process [2, p. 63].

This process entailed the removal of certain Russian families from Turkestan. Concurrently, under the pressure of famine, internal population mobility intensified: rural-to-urban migration increased, and the flight of some households from Turkestan was observed (for example, certain Russian families began to make their way to neighboring states via steppe routes and informal border crossings). Although statistical data for this period remain limited, a range of sources record distinct waves of internal migration as well as out-migration beyond Turkestan.

Owing to evacuation measures and ongoing military operations, some Russian civilians were compelled to leave the territory of Turkestan, whereas others remained concentrated in railway nodes and administrative centers.

In 1921–1922, a severe famine escalated across Turkestan and adjacent regions. Drought, military conflict, and political uncertainty emanating from the Center generated labor-market contraction and acute food scarcity throughout the region. As a result, migration waves emerged primarily among Russian and other East Slavic rural communities. Under these combined pressures, Russian villagers in peripheral provinces sought, on a mass scale, to relocate to urban centers and to settlements aligned with railway corridors. For instance, sources note substantial inflows of migrants from outlying areas into Samarkand and Tashkent. In those years, local newspapers increasingly carried reports to the effect that "villages have been emptied; people are moving toward the city."

Another development of major significance for Turkestan was the inauguration, in 1921, of repression campaigns directed against so-called "kulak Russian" peasants. According to V. L. Genis, in 1921 thousands of Russian peasants suspected of opposing the revolutionary government in Turkestan were arrested and had their property confiscated (the "Safarov case")—an episode that constituted the first large-scale manifestation of mass displacement. As a consequence of these repressive measures, some Russian villages were virtually depopulated, and their inhabitants dispersed toward nearby railway junctions and population centers.

Emigration from the countryside to neighboring provinces was likewise observed. By 1922, fearing a literal shortage of consumable foodstuffs in Turkestan, thousands of people opted to relocate abroad or to other comparatively "better-supplied" cities. Small numbers of fugitives were also reported along routes toward Arabia and Iran; however, the predominant direction of movement was toward urban peripheries within what are now Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. According to street- and neighborhood-level registration data, by 1922 the East Slavic diaspora had become markedly concentrated around major centers such as Tashkent, Bukhara, Samarkand, Ashgabat, and Merv. In these years, migratory flows also intersected with policies of expulsion from agricultural resources: for example, in connection with certain disputes over cotton allocation between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, forced relocations were initiated against local Russian peasants.

The famine of 1921–1922 also affected the social structure of society. During this period, the diaspora population consisted predominantly of working-class strata, and displacement contributed to an increased share of railway workers and industrial laborers. The proportion of Russians employed in agriculture

declined; some were compelled to change occupations as a result of land and property confiscations. Conversely, in cities and across infrastructural sectors—railway divisions, factories, and mines—the diaspora's presence strengthened; for instance, according to 1922 data, diaspora representatives constituted approximately half of the technical personnel employed in the transport departments of Tashkent and Samarkand.

Thus, the famine of 1921–1922 and the concomitant political pressure propelled the migratory dynamics of the East Slavic diaspora in Turkestan into a new phase. In those years, internal migration intensified not only as a direct consequence of food scarcity; repressive measures likewise produced a marked transformation in the diaspora's geographical distribution and social composition.

For example, an analysis of archival materials from Turkestan and relevant scholarly studies indicates that in 1922 alone, tens of thousands of Russian peasants relocated from Samarkand oblast to urban centers. Subsequent research offers a broader account of the economic and political drivers of these movements and their repercussions for the local social environment.

In broader terms, the 1920s–1930s constituted a period of profound geopolitical and demographic reconfiguration for the Turkestan region; within this process, the migration of the Slavic diaspora—particularly Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Russian populations—acquired strategic significance. One of the issues raised at the 6th Regional Conference of the Communist Party of Turkestan (1922) concerned how the New Economic Policy (NEP) was perceived by the East Slavic population; it was emphasized at the conference that this policy was interpreted as the termination of land reforms [...].

The socio-demographic substance of the NEP and the ensuing “stabilization” was manifested in 1923–1924, when Turkestan (initially within the framework of the Turkestan ASSR) entered a phase of relative stabilization following the civil war and the famine. Under NEP conditions, the restoration of market elements, the reconstitution of monetary-financial and provisioning systems, and the revitalization of cooperatives and petty trade directly affected population mobility. At the same time, the national-territorial delimitation (administrative re-partition) initiated by the end of 1924 also complicated statistical administration, census-taking, and responses to questions such as “who lives where?”; accordingly, any analysis of the 1923–1924 indicators must necessarily take into account the redefinition of territorial units.

From the standpoint of demographic consequences,

this period was characterized by a contraction of the extraordinary evacuation movements typical of the war years, a decline in mass departures against the backdrop of famine, and the reconstitution of the labor market.

Migration of the East Slavic (primarily Russian) diaspora: a shift from emergency flows to “labor” motivations. Whereas in 1918–1922 the mobility of the Russian (as well as Ukrainian and Belarusian) population was largely determined by military-political contingencies and crisis factors, in 1923–1924 the determinants of migration began to change gradually. A portion of those who had relocated temporarily during the Civil War returned to their former places of employment and to cities; others, by contrast, preferred to remain in Turkestan in view of the relative economic opportunities created under the NEP.

As a result of the stabilization of the state apparatus and economic administration, the continued reliance within Soviet institutions, railway administrations, communications, finance, and provisioning systems on Russian-language bureaucratic practice sustained demand for East Slavic personnel. Specialist inflows increased as the need for skilled workers and technical cadres intensified in rail transport, energy, cotton ginning, irrigation, urban utilities, and construction. This, in turn, raised the proportion of migration driven by employment considerations relative to “ordinary resettlement.”

After national-territorial delimitation, renewed registration procedures, the relocation of administrative bodies, and cadre rotation shifted certain segments of the Russian diaspora toward new centers (or, conversely, from “centralized” institutions to more peripheral localities). Consequently, in 1923–1924 the migration dynamics of the Russian diaspora increasingly came to be explained less by “flight from crisis” than by economic adaptation and attachment to institutional labor niches.

In the course of analysis, changes are also evident in socio-occupational structure, i.e., in the redistribution of shares. During the NEP period, the diaspora's social composition displayed the following tendencies: alongside a relative stabilization in the overall share of industrial and transport workers, the proportion of East Slavs rose markedly in railway employment (locomotive brigades, depots, station staff), communications, and warehouse-logistics systems; in urban industry (cotton ginning, flour milling, oil-and-fat processing, repair workshops) the share of Russian and Ukrainian workers was typically recorded as high. At the same time, owing to кадровый deficit in the administrative apparatus, education, and health care,

representatives of the Russian diaspora more frequently occupied positions such as teachers, feldshers, accountants, secretarial staff, and technical inspectors. However, beginning in 1923–1924, as policies aimed at training local cadres intensified, the share of East Slavs in certain institutions began a gradual decline (a trend that became more clearly visible after 1925–1926) [3, p. 40].

The NEP's introduction of a "market breathing-space" also catalyzed transformations in trade and services, thereby fostering the emergence of new social strata. One can observe heightened activity among the Russian urban population in petty commerce, public catering, artisanal trades, and personal services (barbering, shoe repair, etc.). Within cooperative organizations and artels, too, a notable share of Russian/Ukrainian workers is recorded.

In the agricultural sphere, their proportional presence exhibited clear territorial differentiation. Within the rural segment, the Russian diaspora (especially in sedentary, non-nomadic farming zones) stands out in statistical reporting through discrete "Russian settlements" (*posyolki*). Nevertheless, in the overall configuration of 1923–1924, the diaspora's principal locus of residence remained concentrated around cities and transport corridors.

In examining the geography of settlement in 1923–1924, the railway factor and the role of administrative centers must be explicitly taken into account. The relative economic revival under the NEP rendered the diaspora's territorial distribution more "functionally coherent": concentration tended to occur where employment was available. Railway corridors—stations and the nearby small towns and *posyolki* associated with workshops and depots—continued to be points with comparatively high shares of Russian residents.

With respect to settlement in administrative centers, the major governance cities of the Turkestan ASSR, and—after the 1924 delimitation—territories that became new republican and oblast capitals, attracted segments of the East Slavic diaspora through cadre migration.

The relocation of the East Slavic diaspora into Turkestan substantially altered the region's demographic composition. Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, and other Slavs were settled in the major cities and industrial zones of Turkestan [7, p. 287]. These shifts complicated the demographic situation within the local population, because although Slavic groups sought to preserve their national and social structures, their socio-economic interests frequently conflicted with those of the indigenous inhabitants.

While the Soviet government advanced the idea of

"internationalism" within its nationalities policy, this norm in practice was converted into a consistent, albeit covert, implementation of Russification. Through organizational, cultural, and educational policies, stringent restrictions were imposed on local languages and national traditions. The East Slavic diaspora's overarching orientation was thereby channeled toward Russifying trajectories and, moreover, it was compelled to integrate into Soviet society [5, p.].

This study examines the formation of the East Slavic diaspora in Turkestan in 1918–1924 across phases of socio-political instability, with the aim of identifying three principal migration waves and their social composition. Population movements arising during the Civil War, under the period's characteristic adverse conditions (1918–1920), and under famine conditions (1921–1922) became a source of asymmetric provisioning and structural tensions shaping the diaspora's territorial distribution, the labor market, and processes of integration with local communities. In sum, the emergence of the diaspora was inseparably linked to socio-economic conditions, political crises, and imbalances in the allocation of resources.

Socio-economic composition and territorial mobility. The East Slavic diaspora's composition was frequently dominated by relatively young migrants and was differentiated into strata aligned with labor-market demand, finding niches in agriculture, artisanal production, and other branches of economic activity. This process generated varied patterns of territorial settlement and produced significant shifts in interactions with local governance systems.

Its impact on cultural and educational life was likewise substantial. The cultural integration of ethnic communities, the operation of educational institutions, and establishments such as "houses of culture" occupied a central place in the formation of the diaspora's cultural identity. From this perspective, the diaspora's political activism and participation in local administration shaped early opportunities for integration, yet in some cases also underscored the perceived imperative of preserving national-cultural distinctiveness.

The political transformations of 1918–1924—including the consolidation of Bolshevik power, internal turnovers of authority, and the disappearance of Kolchak-aligned forces—reconfigured the diaspora's routes of movement and, in certain areas, generated temporally bounded "migration streams." During periods of food shortage, instances of preferential attention to the Russian population—contrasted with comparatively excessive constraints imposed on the local population—openly reveal the vectors of socio-

ethical change, grievances, and emerging fissures vis-à-vis local institutions.

The history of the East Slavic diaspora in 1918–1924 constitutes a significant object of inquiry for historiography, ethnography, and migration theory. Analysis of this period with respect to territorial distribution, socio-economic conditions, educational systems, and cultural linkages is tripartite in its analytical yield: first, it elucidates the diaspora's modes of self-organization and its incorporation into local society; second, it provides insight into inter-ethnic relations among diverse groups; and third, it serves as an important evidentiary basis for examining policies toward ethnic diversity in Turkestan within the broader context of Soviet-era transformative processes.

In the present study, because the information drawn from available archival materials is temporally delimited, it is recommended that future research draw more extensively on additional sources in order to represent the diaspora's full scope—particularly local labor-market statistics, records on school operations, archives of agricultural cooperatives, and documents produced by local religious and socio-public organizations. Comparative work would also be valuable with respect to the diaspora's long-term pathways of integration, its interactions within an Uzbek cultural context, and the episode's interconnections with international and other regional dynamics.

The overall conclusion is that the formation of the East Slavic diaspora in Turkestan during 1918–1924 is a complex problem requiring an integrated analytical approach that links historical-educational, political-social, and economic dimensions. Its study facilitates a better understanding of ethnic-diversity policy, migration mechanisms, and Soviet-era economic and structural transformations within the Turkestan region. These conclusions can serve as a foundation for enriching future scholarly articles, theses, and dissertation chapters.

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