

MESKHETIAN TURKS AND THE REGIME OF CITIZENSHIP IN RUSSIA¹



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An emerging regime of citizenship in Russia is analyzed with ethnographic data on people's responses to the census and by examination of the Russian political imagination manifested in public discourse on ethnic others. Such a framework allows presenting citizenship as a dialectical interplay between various state structures and the subjects of the state (its people). Doing so highlights the paradox of Russia as a country of "immigration and emigrants" and offers an agenda for the study of "social citizenship." (Russia, citizenship, state, Meskhetian Turks, minorities)

Shortly after the first results of the census were released, Russian newspapers proudly announced that Russia ranked third after the USA and Germany in the volume of migration, with 11 million people entering the country between 1989 and 2002. Yet, the census data also revealed an overall population decline that newspapers interpreted as "characteristic of population processes of all European countries" (Zorin 2003). Thus, according to this analysis, Russia was once again at par with the rest of the developed world. Its permanent population was decreasing while the number of immigrants increased.

When the initial euphoria about the census data had subsided, a more somber analysis of these results appeared. Yelizarov (Bazylyuk 2004) pointed out that a decline in fertility and a rise in mortality would eventually lead to a dramatic loss of the working age population—a decline that could only be relieved by labor migration. He also cautioned that the extremely high migration flow of the early 1990s, which compensated for upwards of 50 percent of the population increase, had decreased significantly and now counteracts only 5 percent of the population decline. Similarly, Vishnevsky estimated that given the current low fertility levels and the "horrifyingly high" mortality rates, the population of Russia will decline by 20 million by the year 2025, and that in 2050 there would be 98 million people in Russia (Naryshkina and Vishnevsky 2004). He concluded that only migration could counter the declining trend in population. To do so, Russia would need to accept 700,000–1,000,000 people annually. This also implies that by the year 2100, Russia would become a country of immigrants, and that a large portion of its population would consist of immigrants and their descendants. While Russian analysts portrayed Russia as a country of immigrants and projected further immigration, the European Council and the U.S. government defined it as a country of emigrants.

In January 2004, between 10,000 and 20,000 Meskhetian Turks who were residing in the Krasnodar region of Russia were granted political asylum in the U.S. as refugees. A borderland province of Russia, Krasnodar was one of the few regions in Russia that experienced population growth during the intercensal period (11 percent population increase) primarily due to migration. Meskhetian Turks arrived in Krasnodar

from Central Asia in the early 1990s after an interethnic uprising in Fergana Valley, Uzbekistan. Following the conflict, in the course of which 69 Meskhetians were killed, 1,200 wounded, and houses and other property destroyed (Aydingun 2002), many of the Meskhetians fled to Russia and some of them found their way to the Krasnodar region. During the first 13 years after the fall of the Soviet Union, a small community of the Meskhetian Turks (15,000–17,000) had been consistently denied Russian citizenship. As such, they were not allowed to pursue higher education, were denied retirement pensions and medical assistance, and were discriminated against by the police and state authorities. Their situation did not change despite persistent efforts by NGOs and human rights activists to attract attention to their problem. Escalation of ethnic discrimination in the region prompted international intervention as a result of which Meskhetian Turks were given an opportunity to emigrate to the United States.

On the grand scheme of population flows in and out of Russia, the case of the Meskhetian Turks and their emigration seem insignificant; however, it is nonetheless indicative of a changing socio-political and ideological climate in the country, and of a process closely intertwined with the emergence of a specific citizenship regime in Russia.

This article examines the structural, attitudinal, and agentive aspects of this phenomenon. A citizenship regime is defined as “a political categorization of citizens by government agencies, even if such categorization is not set out in any document” (Humphrey 1999:25). The underlying premise of this article allows shifting focus away from in- and out-migration to the processes of migrant incorporation. The concept of citizenship regime is advantageous for this purpose as it refers to a practice rather than a charter. As such, it encompasses not only a normative definition outlined in legislation, but also the attitudinal aspects of the political imagination that provides the basis for a definition of a national community and actions undertaken by state officials and citizens to determine the boundaries of the community. The concept of citizenship facilitates studying such phenomena as individual and group belonging and integration. At the same time, it enables retaining an analytical focus on structures that allow or prohibit integration, and thereby offers the best framework for analyzing processes of social interaction (Heisler 1992). Thus, the concept of citizenship regime contributes to sociological and political science theory regarding conditions of social integration and social solidarity (Turner 1994:199).

The discussion that follows first outlines the political imagination of the regional state administration affecting federal legislation on citizenship. While administrative institutions are identical in various regions of Russia, their governments act differently with regard to the incorporation of immigrants due to the ideological constructions that determine their status. Second, it examines the agentive aspects of people’s relations with the state. Third, the discussion presents citizenship as a form of identity. This tripartite analysis enhances the understanding of citizenship regime, introduced by Andersen (1996), and presents it as interplay between structural and agentive aspects.

As of 2004, there were between 15,000 and 17,000 Meskhetian Turks (0.3 percent of the total population) residing in the Krasnodar region, a province bordering northeast Georgia. Originally from Georgia,² Meskhetian Turks were deported to Central Asia in

1944 after being accused as “enemies of the people.” In the 1970s and 1980s, over 2,000 Meskhetian Turks were invited by regional authorities to Krasnodar to establish tobacco farms and work at dairy farms and wood mills (Ossipov and Cherepova 1996:5). During the Soviet Period, Georgia resisted Meskhetian Turkish repatriation, alleging a lack of capacity to resettle and employ them. In the late 1960s, Georgian authorities allowed 100 families a year to resettle in Georgia (Conquest 1970:189); but since then, only 185 families moved to Georgia (in areas other than Meskheta-Dzhavakheti) and few remained. In 1989, only 35 families were there.

After a conflict in Uzbekistan in 1989, the Soviet Government assisted the Meskhetian Turks in relocating to areas of Central Russia. Some Meskhetians chose to move to the Krasnodar region to reunite with family members invited by local authorities. Others followed, justifying their choice by its proximity to Georgia, comfortable climate, and advantageous conditions for agriculture, a Meskhetian Turk’s traditional occupation (Ossipov 2002). As the Soviet Government promised to assist the Meskhetian Turks with repatriation to Georgia, the 15,000 Turks in Krasnodar perceived their stay there as temporary. But with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, this arrangement turned out to be permanent. Despite numerous negotiations on this matter between the Georgian and Russian governments, and the pledge on behalf of Georgia to resolve the Meskhetian dilemma within 20 years (one of the contingency clauses that defined Georgian membership in the Council of Europe), little has been achieved. The few Meskhetian Turks who succeeded in moving to Georgia faced discrimination and legal difficulties.

In 1999, upon joining the Council of Europe, Georgia pledged to resolve the deportation (Sumbadze 2007:294), and in 2007 a repatriation decree was passed. Few people, however, were able to use the right to repatriate due to procedural difficulties. Thus, even though legislation seemed to have resolved the problem, in practice it remained as it was. Those who remained in Krasnodar were denied citizenship and the basic rights associated with citizenship. (Elsewhere in Russia, the situation was resolved.) As of 2002, their legal status has been defined as stateless people and temporary residents.

CITIZENSHIP AND POLITICAL IMAGINATION

To understand the situation of Meskhetian Turks in Krasnodar, it is important to know the state administration’s attitudes towards migrants and the expectations that define relationships between migrants, the authorities, and the public. This section will examine the concept of political imagination, “the ways political life is being thought . . . and that create a greater arena within which ideologies exist” (Humphrey 2002:259). Political imagination is manifested in speeches, declarations, rituals, etc., and “is constitutive in the effects of a regional ‘sovereign state’, the daily practices of governing and appearing to govern” (Humphrey 2002:260). The “political imagining” of membership in a nation-state (i.e., citizenship) is often manifested as a strategy of cultural exclusion (Stolcke 1993) and/or as a way to define territorial integrity (Sack 1986).

Political Imagination of Culture

Allusions to the “immigrant infection” and “emigration bomb” diffuse popular fears by diverting attention from social problems (such as economic recession) to the presence of immigrants. Citizenship laws are often seen as an effective strategy to save the nation from “the imminent threat” immigrants pose to social cohesion (Stolcke 1993:2–3). This rhetoric is often presented in terms of “our culture” counterpoised with theirs. Thus, it is not the presence of the immigrants but that of their culture that is seen as detrimental to the well-being of a nation (Stolcke 1993).

References to the cultural incompatibility of outsiders played an important role in defining the status of the Meskhetian Turks in Krasnodar. The mass media often presented the Meskhetian Turks as favoring customary law and ethnic traditions over the civil laws of the Russian Federation (Markedonov 2004). The media focused on the Turkish “compact” settlements and their refusal to learn Russian (Turyalay 2004) as examples of a culture discordant with Russian traditions. The Meskhetian Turks were presented as unwilling to work in state organizations, despite the fact that migrants without permanent registration or Russian citizenship are prohibited from being employed in the state sector, jobs which offer some of the lowest salaries. The argument that migrants are not willing to work in this sector is meant to emphasize their greediness. Further, they are alleged to be involved in organized crime, or focused on activities that contribute little to the economic development of the region (Garmash 2002). In general, the co-existence of the Turks and the Slavic population in the region was presented as impossible due to “national, religious, moral, ethical [sic] and other reasons” (Legislative Assembly, 08/03/1999; #253–II).

Discussions of the immigrants’ adherence to their traditions and cultural practices frequently invoked references to their religion. Numerous appeals by the Krasnodar Legislative Assembly to President Putin connected the presence of the Meskhetian Turks with the threat of Islam.³ In one appeal, deputies pointed out that “the Turkish leaders make claims to the Krasnodar territory, consider it to be an indigenous Muslim land, and openly threaten the Slavic population of the region” (Deputies’ Appeal, 02/20/2002; #1362–II). This argument linked territory with cultural differences by introducing the category of a “Muslim land” that in turn suggested the idea of an “Orthodox land” and thereby strengthened the discussion of “civilizational” differences, a rhetoric that is fairly popular in Russia. In this discourse, religion was presented as a salient characteristic of cultural identity and played an important role in the “imagining” of the generalized “other” (Barrett and Buckley 2002:1). In this context, legal constraints employed by the regional administration not only limited access to regional membership but also aimed to defend Krasnodar against the new culture posed by the immigrants.

These attitudes regarding cultural differences were similar to the perception of “otherness” elsewhere in Russia. The Russian Federation is viewed by many Russians not as a multiethnic state, with equal rights to all ethnic groups, but primarily as a Russian state. In February 1995, the largest group of those polled (43 percent) favored the idea of giving Russians the legally recognized status of a dominant nation in the country (38 percent were against and 19 percent were undecided [Tolz 1998:291]). The

status of being Russian was thus conceptualized on the basis of culture and language rather than official citizenship. It is important to point out that the heightened attention to cultural differences instigates tensions not only between the Slavic and non-Slavic populations, but also between the permanent and migrant Slavic populations. Thus, Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians from Central Asia are often referred to as “Russbeks” and “Russ-zaks” (i.e., the Russian immigrants from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan). Differences in behavior, attitudes, speech, class standing, etc., are described in terms of ethnic differences (Koriouchkina 2002:10–11). Ethnic Russians also experience some of the same problems as immigrants of other nationalities from various regions of the former Soviet Union.

Political Imagination of Territory

The territorial specificity of Krasnodar is significant in explanations that the regional administration provides regarding the Meskhetian Turks’ legal status. In an interview to a local newspaper, a governor of Krasnodar, Tkachev, argued that Krasnodar as a border region should be granted a special status (Panchenko 2004) because of latent sources of tension at the border. “Even legal migration [in this situation] becomes a cover-up for the messengers of the Wahhabi movement,” he stressed in another interview (Panchenko 2004). He even perceived a hunger strike of the Meskhetian Turks as a challenge to the territorial integrity and power of the local administration. In another interview, Tkachev placed emphasized that the Meskhetian Turks are not an “indigenous” population to the region. Hence, the administration could not bear responsibility for their decision to move, whether to Georgia or to the U.S. (Turyalay 2004). Furthermore, appeals of the Krasnodar deputies to President Putin pointed out that Georgia is the historical motherland of the Meskhetian Turks (Decision of the Krasnodar Legislative Assembly, 11/19/2003; #416–II) despite the fact that many Meskhetian Turks were born in Uzbekistan and have never been to Georgia. These examples are only a few of the many encountered in the Krasnodar mass media. It is significant that territory is presented as a basis for the interpretation and implementation of the federal law on citizenship. In the context of Krasnodar, this implies a correlation between the concept of an imagined community and the concept of a “border province” (Derlugian and Cipko, 1997) perceived as endangered by a flood of immigrants.

This analysis of the political imagination shows that discourses on cultural differences and territorial integrity are important in determining many aspects of immigrant integration. Humphrey (1999:45) regards legal aspects of the emergent citizenship regime as benign compared to the increased aggression suffered by immigrants in everyday life. Aggression in this case should be broadly defined to incorporate the territorial interpretation provided by regional administrations to the federal legislature. The political imagination of regional communities leaves little room for the inclusion of immigrants who, regardless of their ethnicity, are presented as the ultimate “other.” The analysis of political imagination also shows that the state is far from uniform, and that regional administration interests and objectives as well as the means of controlling

populations differ from those identified in the federal legislature (Arel and Kertzer 2002:6).

CITIZENSHIP AND THE SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

The analysis of the political imagination leaves some simple yet profound questions unanswered. How do people survive for 15 years without citizenship? Do they accept their fate as “stateless people” or do they try to find ways of accommodating to the newly independent Russia? How do they perceive themselves vis-à-vis the state? How does their status affect their strategies of survival? How do people’s choices and methods contribute to the emergent citizenship regime?⁴

Discussions of practical implications of citizenship follow the lines of theoretical debates. Political theorists in the 1970s and 80s primarily examined the normative and institutional aspects of citizenship, such as constitutional rights, political decision-making processes, and social institutions (Kymlicka and Norman 2000:6). However, analyses of de jure structural integration of individuals provide little insight on citizenship as practice; i.e., the relationship between the state and its subjects as carried out through actions and manifested in identities. As Ong (1996) points out, “seldom is attention focused on the everyday processes whereby people . . . are made into subjects of a particular nation-state” (Ong 1996:737). In the 1990s, the analytical focus in the study of citizenship shifted from rights and obligations to loyalties, responsibilities, and roles.

Given frequent changes of registration laws in the Krasnodar region in the 1990s, acquiring citizenship involved obtaining temporary registration permits issued for three to six months. Many Turks carry Soviet passports with the last pages covered in red registration stamps. But temporary registration was no solution. “They could kick you out after you obtained two registration stamps. Just like that—they would refuse to give you a registration,” one informant said. “What would we do after that? You just continue living without a registration.” After changes in the law on citizenship in 2002, it became nearly impossible to get registration, as this required leaving the region altogether.

In theory, upon crossing the Russian border, a migrant would receive a card to file with the local registration office (*passportniy stol*) in order to receive a residency permit. “There are no problems in getting immigrants registered today. All they have to do is leave and then re-enter a country,” a high-ranking administration official said in an interview. In reality, obtaining registration is nearly impossible. Immigrants without citizenship cannot leave the country because no other country would accept them with their expired Soviet passports. Mulkia, a 50-year-old woman, emphatically pointed out: “Because I do not have any legal documents, save for my old passport that is no longer valid, I have not seen my parents who live in Uzbekistan in more than six years!” Navruz, a 27-year-old man, asked, “Where would I go if I came to Krasnodar when I was 11? I grew up here, went to school here, but I have never had a proper passport. Where would I go?” The situation in which the Meskhetian Turks find themselves in Krasnodar is a “Catch-22” situation. The Turks cannot stay in the region because their registrations have expired, and they cannot leave because they do not have any other

documents. Thus, a majority of Turks remain unregistered and hence violate the registration requirement.

Navruz, quoted above, summed up the surrealism of this situation in describing his encounter with a militia man:

Well, this militia guy comes to our house to check documents. He was a very young guy—must have just started at the militia. So, I give him my passport. He looked at it and asked “what is it?” I told him that this was my expired Soviet passport. He could not understand at first. So, I had to explain to him that this is a passport I have been issued in 1994, and that even though it is no longer valid I cannot obtain any other form of ID. Also, I had to explain to him that even though my family had been living and owning this house for 15 years, none of us are registered in it. He really did not know what to do about it. So, he just left.

Unfortunately, Navruz’s story is not unique in Krasnodar. Unregistered marriages, children who grow up with only a certificate of birth as a primary form of ID, and multiple fines for violating registration rules are examples of the complex interaction between the Turks and the state. Most of the time, the stories were emotionally charged. Aybek said, “My father . . . was a WWII veteran. He was wounded many times during the war. He had medals for bravery. Throughout all his life he worked for this state [USSR]. And yet, he never received a retirement pension. How is this possible?” While there was no answer to Aybek’s question, the Turks managed to come up with some compensatory mechanisms for lack of official citizenship, a status that has denied them political, civil, and social rights for the past 16 years.

One strategy is to purchase citizenship. There is no “citizenship market”; rather, the commerce stems from a bureaucratized apparatus that mastered the art of bribery during the Soviet period and applies it to the new conditions of a market economy. It is difficult to speculate about the extent to which the “citizenship market” exists in Krasnodar. There remains a clear demand for buying citizenship, but local registration procedures make it difficult to carry out. Many Turks were able to obtain citizenship in other regions of Russia (primarily in the Kalmyk republic and Rostov) where registration laws were more lax during the 1990s. Acquiring citizenship in other regions was difficult, as it involved considerable expenses in relocating, spending time in those regions, and bribing the passportny stol officials (ranging anywhere from \$50 to \$500).

Obtaining a passport did not guarantee that it would be effective. Below is a woman’s story of her pursuit of proper status:

I went to Rostov to get a passport. I had everything done, only to be contacted later by the militia. Apparently, a woman who issued my passport was under investigation for passport fraud. So, they confiscated my passport. I was without any papers for few months. Then, I went back there and asked for my passport. I showed the militia inspector my Soviet passport that expired in 1999. I think he took pity on me because he released my passport but warned me that it is no longer valid. So, since then, I have been living with a “fraudulent” document. I don’t know what would happen if I were to apply for an external passport that I need to go to the [United] States.

Even when a passport was obtained and one’s status clarified, the civil and social rights of its bearer were constrained by registration procedures in the region and the political imagination discussed above. Frequent passport checks by the militia and negative

attitudes towards the “Kavkaztsi” (people of ethnic origin from the Caucasus region) pervade the area. But in this case, the Turks face the same discrimination as the Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Georgians, and members of other ethnic groups that reside in the region and hold Russian citizenship.

An alternative strategy to resolve statelessness was to seek citizenship in other countries. Given that the Turks were forced to flee Uzbekistan after the massacre in the Ferghana valley, few of them considered returning there. Still, some chose to obtain Uzbek citizenship in order to visit their relatives and to settle their current situation in Krasnodar. The choice to apply for Ukrainian citizenship was most frequently motivated by a desire to receive retirement pensions.⁵ Respondents say they would like to receive Russian citizenship, as their lives are concentrated in this region. But for lack of choice, they must find other survival strategies. Thus, in this context citizenship is seen as a necessary tool that assists its bearers in getting through passport control and obtaining retirement support.

Another option was to use a legal route, appealing to the state authorities with requests for a solution and filing petitions in court. Human rights activists in close collaboration with the Turkish leaders tried to bring the problem of their legal status to media and administrative attention. The Novorossiysk NGO *Shkola Mira* (“School of Peace”) headed by Korostelev was most instrumental in this endeavor. In the early 1990s, several cases were successfully defended in court. A few Turks were able to secure citizenship and resolve disputes about land and property ownership. But shortly thereafter, all legal procedures initiated by Turks were brought to a halt. “Once they saw a Turkish name on a court file, they would automatically reject the petition. We could not do anything,” said Sarvar Tedorov, a leader of a Turkish community in Varenikovskaya Stanitsa.

Disagreements among political leaders of the Meskhetian Turks as to whether the group should reside in Georgia, Turkey, Russia, or elsewhere, and how they should interact with state officials, affected the process of citizenship acquisition. According to Sarvar Tedorov:

There was a period of time when it was still possible to obtain citizenship. It seemed that authorities were going to “close their eyes” on this process. But we would have had to do so covertly—a few cases from one settlement, a few cases from another settlement, etc. And other leaders . . . wanted everything done at once; they did not want to wait. So, they filed a lot of requests. And that’s when authorities became concerned. They raised a “red flag” on our cases. Mass media began a huge campaign of telling people that the Turks are taking over the region.

The political disputes within the Turkish communities point out the multiplicity of strategies immigrants might pursue in their attempts to establish a new life where they settle. Also, while the state, mass media, and some of the academic discourse on the subject create a nearly homogenous portrait of the Meskhetian Turks, the reality is otherwise. They are differentiated by urban and rural background, education, social class, and migration history, as well as age, gender, and marital status. But while a population is heterogeneous, it is important that legislation and its implementation be uniform and stable in order to talk about efficient structures of governance and democratic development. In the case of the Krasnodar region, where political, civil,

and social rights of citizens are ethnically differentiated, such a discussion is nearly impossible.

CITIZENSHIP AND IDENTITY

Data related to strategies of daily survival of stateless people and their sense of identity were gathered from the Russian 2002 census. Participation of the Meskhetian Turks in the census is particularly interesting, as they could have chosen different options with regard to their participation. Demographic literature shows that recent immigrants and people of lower socio-economic and educational background are less likely to be included in surveys and censuses (Fein 1990, Iversen et al. 1999, Jones 1979). As recent immigrants, Meskhetian Turks could have chosen to not participate in the census or compromise and register themselves as Russians or some other ethnic minority. They also could have chosen to manipulate the format of the census or protest against their discrimination. As the Russian national census can be viewed as a plebiscite (Arel 2002) that allows citizens of the state to voice their trust or mistrust, to challenge or to accept the state imposed categorization, the Turks' responses to participating in the national census clarify aspects of their identification vis-à-vis the state.

Those interviewed reported that even though they did not have any citizenship save for that of the Soviet Union, they indicated Russian citizenship during the census. Fatima, a woman in her mid-40s, explained: "I said that I am a Russian citizen. I've spent 13 years here. . . . When they give us a place to go, then we'll leave. But for now, we are Russian citizens. Even though we do not have permanent registration, we live here. We have nowhere else to go to." Another respondent elaborated: "What else could I answer about citizenship? We've lived here, we are living here now, and we will be living here. Where else can we go? We are the same law abiding citizens as everybody else. We pay all the taxes. We are doing everything that is required."

For the census, the question of citizenship is directly related to matters of legal status, employment opportunity, medical assistance, education, and retirement pensions, which was one of the most important conditions for the Meskhetian Turks. As citizens of a country that disappeared over a decade ago, they were trying to argue that they should be recognized by the state. However, despite their leaders' efforts to define their status in this regard, people often were uncertain about the correct answer to the question on citizenship. Thus, some replied that they do not have citizenship or have Uzbek citizenship (although, in reality they only hold citizenship of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic).

Turkish leader Sarvar Tederov hoped that the census would help define the Meskhetian Turks' statuses by clarifying the actual number of Meskhetian Turks in the region. While the Turkish community is small, the mass media frequently presents it as one of the fastest growing communities and exaggerates its size, thereby providing local authorities an additional argument to deny Turkish claims to Russian citizenship. The Meskhetian Turks could gain power only through participation in the census, when the validity of their citizenship became a fact expressed in "hard" numbers. Tederov viewed the significance of the census results as two-fold. First, the census would provide a

reliable estimate for the Turkish community. Second, people's responses would be received by the federal authorities thereby overriding the regional level administration.

During the interviews in Varennikovka, several people appeared to be offended by the question of why people decided to participate in the census. "We've spent almost 14 years here. What, are we not people or something? Why should we not?" One woman who was asked the question even turned away to hide her feelings. Another woman tried to correct what she thought was my misunderstanding: "Why are you saying that we don't want to participate in the census? No, we want to participate in it. It is important for Russia to enumerate us as well. We want to participate in the census." A defensive attitude in these answers reflects an uncertainty of these people's position vis-à-vis the permanent population of the region. Even the slightest suspicion that their behavior, such as their census participation, might be different from that of Russian citizens raises strong emotional protests. In this regard, the Meskhetian Turks perceived the census as one of the ways to confirm their inherent similarity with the rest of the country and its people.

When asked whether they were concerned with how the results of the census would be used, many informants expressed hopes that the census would bring a change for the better. Several other women joined our conversation at that point: "I know that some people were even staying at home waiting for the census takers to come over to their house. They wanted to make sure that they were included in the census." "Everybody should participate and everything will be fine." "It should be good. We'll write our names down in the history of Russia. Nothing bad can come out of it." "We'll be considered local after that [and] that's good. We have nowhere else to go." The rhetoric about the statewide importance of the census is clearly present in these responses. However, it is interesting to note that this discourse is combined with the expectation that such a significant event in the life of the state will have direct positive consequences for the people, even if it simply is local recognition ("We'll be considered local") or the official legitimization of their status.

This overview of strategies for dealing with statelessness shows that citizenship is very important. As a legal category that governs their access to state resources, citizenship status affects the extent to which the Meskhetian Turks can integrate into the structures of the state. As a membership category that plays an important role in their group and individual identity, lack of citizenship constrains their participation in the social life of the state. To compensate for restrictions imposed by citizenship regulations, people are forced to violate state laws. But, as the discussion about their identity shows, they do so reluctantly.

Further research is needed to examine how the greater public perceives and reacts towards stateless peoples and immigrants. There seem to be two tendencies in this regard. The first is to use immigrants as a source of cheap labor. Labor-intensive construction work and market trade attract large numbers of illegal, unregistered immigrants. Companies exploit the predicaments of the citizenship regime in Russia and profit from immigrants' labor. Recent restrictions on the employment of immigrants without a work permit aim to limit the scale at which such exploitations take place. But

the effects of these restrictions are limited and do not affect the immigrants' exclusion from social and economic resources of the state.

On the other hand, driven by discourses in the mass media that link the presence of immigrants with social instability, the greater public harbors negative feelings towards the newcomers and blames them for job shortages. It is not clear how negative attitudes towards abstract categories like "illegal immigrants" and "stateless people" translate into interaction between people of the host society and immigrants. The characteristics of individual immigrants may influence perceptions about immigrants as a societal group. As a Russian informant remarked: "I know Akhmed. He is a very nice guy. He does not drink, he is very reliable. I am very sad that he is leaving for the [United] States. We would all miss him. I don't know other Meskhetian Turks; I don't know what kind of people they are. So, I cannot say whether it is good or bad that they are leaving."

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the political imagination of the Russian state authorities shows that over the past 18 years a restrictive and exclusionary citizenship regime has emerged in Russia. Immigrants have few chances of being legally integrated into Russian society. While at the level of legislature, citizenship remains neutral with regard to ethnicity, political imagination at the regional level ethnicizes citizenship and turns it into a means of classification. Thus, one's legal status appears to be closely linked with one's ethnicity and place of origin. People's practices with regard to citizenship indicate that it is possible to find loopholes in formal restrictions or to circumnavigate constraints, but frequently at the expense of one's well-being.

The concept of citizenship regime offers a perspective on the specifics of immigrants' relationship with the structures of the Russian state. The analysis of legislation alone would not explain all the complexities involved. Only an investigation of both the legal aspects of citizenship and the political imagining of the state can provide a perspective on the specifics of people's actions vis-à-vis the state and account for their choices and identities. All of this explains why, while the state aims to portray itself as a country of immigration, it quite frequently becomes a country of emigrants.

On a theoretical level, the concept of citizenship regime is advantageous because it allows taking a broad frame of analysis. A discussion of citizenship need not be limited to a discussion of migration and immigrants' statuses. Today, the population of Russia is differentiated by the degree of social support offered by the state. Migrant status in itself does not presuppose exclusion from benefits offered by the state (Bommes 2004: 164). If the support offered to socially and politically weak groups is insignificant, then their members find themselves competing for the same social niches as legal and illegal immigrants. This can further aggravate conflicts between citizens and immigrants. Given the existing tendency of the political imagination to ethnicize social phenomena, ethnicity-centered conflicts might be more likely to arise. A broad frame of analysis that focuses on processes of social and political integration of immigrant citizens offers a perspective on the complex interplay between ethnicized and social citizenships. This would help to better understand the process of transformation of Russia from a country

of immigrants into a country of emigrants where those who leave are not only marginal ethnic groups but ethnic Russians as well.

Following the 2004 U.S. decision to accept Meskhetian Turks as refugees of special humanitarian concern (Koriouchkina and Swerdlow 2007:377–80), the majority of them left the Krasnodar region. Thus, the predicament of the last Soviet citizens without Russian citizenship was resolved. But exclusionary notions of political imagination are not limited to the Krasnodar state authorities. Elsewhere in Russia, other people—immigrants and guest workers—experience similar treatment. Thus, while Meskhetian Turks might have left, the problem of social incorporation and intolerance in Russia remains.

NOTES

1. I am grateful to David Kertzer, Nicholas Townsend, and Dominique Arel for intellectual guidance with this research. I thank Igor Kuznetsov and Vladimir Kolesov (Kuban State University) for their help in my fieldwork. The Population Studies and Training Center (Brown University) funded this research. I thank the anonymous reviewers of *Ethnology* whose comments helped fine-tune this paper, and I thank my informants who supported me through the thick and thin of fieldwork.
2. One view considers Meskhetian Turks to be Turkicized Georgians who converted to Islam when the Meskheta-Dzhavakheti region was under Ottoman control (between the sixteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries) (Khazanov 1995:195). An alternative view puts their origin closer to Turkish culture (Panesh and Ermolov 1990:20).
3. Another reason why the Legislative Assembly emphasized religion was the Meskhetian Turks' connections with the Wahhabi movement. The 1995 formulation of the law on citizenship denied citizenship to people involved in activities incompatible with the constitutional principles of the Russian Federation or who would use force to change them (Ginsburgs 2000:210). The Wahhabi movement falls under this category. The 2002 formulation of the law removed this restriction.
4. Data for this discussion come from the 2002 census in Krasnodar and fieldwork conducted from September 2004 to October 2005. Interviews with Meskhetian Turks and state officials were supplemented with archival research and mass-media monitoring. Throughout this time, residence with a family of Meskhetian Turks provided insight on many sensitive issues.
5. This presents one of the biggest predicaments for the Turks because it is not uncommon that members of a family would have different citizenship statuses. Parents might have Ukrainian citizenship while their children would have either Russian or no citizenship. Although children are eligible to seek asylum in the United States, their parents are not. Children are devoted to their parents and would not abandon them; thus, they remain in Russia to take care of their parents.

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