

The Implications of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878 on the Muslim Minorities in Bulgaria: Reports from the British Documents

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Abstract

The Russo-Ottoman war that broke out in 1877-1878 was aimed at solving the issue of Ottoman administration in the Balkans, especially regarding the alleged weakness of the Ottoman administration over the Christian people in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Ironically, the war had a more significant impact on Muslims in the Balkans, especially in Bulgaria, than the solution to the issue in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This article analyzes on how the war has had implications on the Muslim minority population in Bulgaria. This article uses a qualitative method approach which involves the content analysis of British official documents and records collected from the British National Archives and the University of London from the School of Slavonic and East European Studies. The findings proved that the Russo-Ottoman

War of 1877 was not intended to give justice to the Christian community under the Ottoman empire but was a strategy of the Russia and Bulgarian governments to carry out ethnic cleansing on the Muslim minority in Bulgaria. The implication of this war led to widespread oppression and mass expulsion of the Muslim population in Bulgaria, resulting in significant demographic changes and a prolonged humanitarian crisis. For future research, it is suggested that an in-depth examination be conducted on the roles and positions of other European powers in the Russo-Ottoman conflict of 1877, particularly regarding their attitudes and reactions towards the fate of the Muslim population in Bulgaria.

Keywords: Muslim; Bulgaria; Russo-Ottoman War; Ethnic Cleansing; Minority

Introduction

The Ottoman rule in the Balkans marked the entrance of Islam in Eastern Europe by the 14th century. Most of the countries in the Balkans accepted the arrival of Ottoman and accepted the teachings of Islam brought by Ottoman. Before the arrival of Ottoman in the Balkans, most societies in the Balkans consisted of Catholic, Orthodox and Bogomil Christians. Thus, Ottoman's entry into the Balkans has added another religion, which is Islam. Among the countries in the Balkans that have a majority Muslim population are Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo (Enh et al., 2022). This is because these two states were successfully conquered by Ottoman after defeating Serbia in the war in Kosovo around 1463.

Other countries under the Ottoman empire in the Balkans such as Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro have a majority population of Orthodox Christians, and a minority population of Muslims (Enh, 2014). The Muslim community in Bulgaria converted to Islam through their association with Ottoman officials serving in Bulgaria and the privileges granted to Muslims. Bulgaria gained semi-autonomous rule under the Orthodox Christian King Alex. The Muslim minority community in Bulgaria received protection from the Ottoman government to practice their religion without the interference of the Bulgarian King. Muslims in Bulgaria mostly live in the southern part of Bulgaria such as in the regions of the Rhodopes, Pazardzhik and Kardzhali. Islam is a minority religion in Bulgaria while the official religion is Christianity. The population of Bulgaria before the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877 was approximately 1,120,000 and Christians were totaled at 1,233,500 people. However, the number of Muslims in Bulgaria decreased during and after the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877, because of ethnic cleansing among the Russian and Bulgarian

troops against the Muslims there. According to Hupchick, he claimed that there were approximately 500,000 Muslim refugees at that time (Hupchik, 2004).

Sluglett & Yavuz (2011) combined different disciplinary perspectives namely theories and approaches of political science, sociology, history, and international relations in *War and Diplomacy*. They argue that the key events that marked the beginning of the end of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire were the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878 and the Treaty of Berlin. They analyze how the war and the treaty permanently changed the political landscape in the Balkans and in the Caucasus. The treaty marked the end of Ottoman hegemony in the Balkans by formally recognizing the independence or *de facto* sovereignty of Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro, and the autonomy of Bulgaria. By introducing the unitary nation-state as a new organizing concept, the treaty planted the seeds of future conflicts, from the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 and the First World War to the recent civil wars and ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia (Enh, 2010a). The magnitude of the defeat of the Ottoman Empire by Russia—and eventually by the other great powers—and the human, material, and territorial losses that followed proved fatal to the liberal Muslim reform and modernization project that the Ottoman state had launched in the mid-19th century. *War and Diplomacy* offers the first comparative examination of the treaty and its socio-political implications for the Balkans and the Caucasus using the theories and approaches of political science, sociology, history, and international relations.

According to Manasek (2017) the Ottoman Empire had a migration episode since the last years of the 18th century when Muslims and Turks lost their territories. Millions of people were forced to leave their lands

because of this migration, especially from Crimea, the Caucasus, and the Balkans. Being close to Istanbul, a temporary meeting point for migrants and being on the railway line, Adapazari became one of the places where migrants were relocated and resettled. Bosnians are one of the most resettled migrant groups in the region. Bosnians, especially after the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878 and after Bosnia-Herzegovina was invaded by Austria-Hungary, took refuge in the Ottoman Empire.

Popek (2021) claimed that the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878 was traditionally called the “War of Liberation” by the Bulgarians. The conflict led to the gaining of independence from the “Ottoman Yoke” and started the process of creating the modern Bulgarian state. The Ottoman perspective on these events differs significantly. The 1877–1878 war is remembered through the lens of the tragic experiences of refugees (*muhajir*) and the suffering of Muslim civilians associated with emigration and exile. This paper focuses on the depiction of the fate of civilians during the conflict in contemporary Bulgarian and Ottoman historiography, where the topic is marked not only by the reliability of historical research, but also by the presence of stereotypes (such as the entire history of Christian-Muslim relations in Bulgaria in the 19th century).

Ore (2012) found that the political and diplomatic consequences of the 1877-78 Russo-Ottoman War had a significant impact on both the domestic politics of the Russian and Ottoman empires and subsequently European diplomacy. Putting aside its political results, the war had a major impact on the civilian population of the Balkan Peninsula. According to him, the War of 1877-1878 has been extensively studied from a diplomatic point of view,

however, more work is needed to explain its social impact. The war of 1877-8 forced thousands of civilians, mostly Muslims, to flee their homes. This migration has irreversibly changed the demographic structure of the region. Not only during the War but also in the following years. The war dealt a blow to the various parties, cultures and religions of the Balkan society and was reshaped in the demographic restructuring of the Balkans. A careful analysis of population movements following the 1877-1878 Russo-Ottoman War shows borderline ethnic instability in the Balkans. Unfortunately, this fluidity meant that ethnic homogeneity was only achieved through deportations, genocide, and discriminatory policies against minorities, a process that continued into the 21st century. After 1878, the desire to create a homogeneous Bulgarian nation led to the expulsion and emigration of both Muslims and non-Muslim minorities from Bulgaria; these minorities include Turks, Greeks, and Jews. The Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878 was a great blow to the non-Bulgarians in the region, especially the Muslims. After the war, Muslims immigrated from Bulgaria to Ottoman territory and developed into an ongoing trend that lasted into the 20th century.

Jagodic (1998) had carefully examined the number of Albanian emigrants. Everyone believed that 30,000 Albanians had fled Serbia. But the author estimates that 71,000 Muslims have emigrated from the Serbian state, including 49,000 Albanians. These numbers are derived from a detailed analysis of each region and city in the new Serbian nation. Emigrants were replaced by Serbs from the immediate regions of the Ottoman empire and from regions that had suffered because of the 1876 war. The migration of Muslims had a profound effect on the Serbian state and the Serbian people. However, at a certain point, it was a natural evolution in the process of building the

Serbian nation, which had started in the 19th century.

Popek (2018) presented the problem of migration of Bulgarians from Macedonia, Thrace, Russia, the Habsburg Monarchy, and Romania in 1878–1900. The biggest wave arrived in Bulgaria after the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878 – people had fled oppression in the Ottoman Empire after its defeat. Later, many of the settlers were driven by economic motives – they hoped the standard of living would be better in the new Bulgarian state. The scale of migration led to the introduction of two laws on the problem: in 1881 and 1890. This phenomenon not only had an important impact on the demographic structure of the Bulgarian state but also on its political, social, and cultural forms, among other things, on the transformation of the urban ethnic structure in those cities.

Lilova (2016) analyzed the local feelings of representatives of Bulgarian leaders as in Bulgarian newspapers from the 1840s to the end of the Ottoman rule (1878). Three main topics are outlined: local mediation through domestic news streams; quantification of local sense statistics through geographic description; local mobilization during the Russo-Ottoman War (1877–1878) that exceeded the expectations of national ideologues. The aim is not only to investigate the mechanism of the integration of the “small homeland” into the national project but to consider the slow and difficult process of internalizing the imagined Bulgarian homeland that takes place in local community areas. Therefore, the objective of this article is to analyze the implications of the Russo-Ottoman war of 1877-1878 on Bulgarian Muslims in the cities involved during the war.

Methodology

The methodology used in this study is qualitative, which is based on ‘content analyses’ of British documents as the primary source in this study. This involves the process of researching and interpreting primary sources used to help defend an argument. Research was conducted on primary sources consisting of *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Part 1: Series B: The Near and Middle East* (1984). It has been obtained from several major libraries in Britain namely at the University of Oxford, University of London which is from the School of Slavonic and East European Studies.

The sources in this document are a record that gathers all the events of the Russo-Ottoman War until this war was ended through the Treaty of San Stefano in 1878. The primary sources in this document are important to help understand how the war scene that involved the two major European powers in the Balkans began. In addition, these documents include important information obtained from informants who survived the war. This document from British sources is the strength of this article, because through the reports of British officers and the experiences of war victims who went through the war, it can help the process of interpretation and analysis as well as strengthen the argument in writing this article. In addition, to obtain additional information, references are also made to secondary sources, especially articles in journals and books.

Results and Discussion

The Impact of Conflicts between Russian and Ottoman Governments

The relations between Russia and the Ottoman governments became tense when the problem of the rebellion in Bosnia-Herzegovina that broke out in 1875 could not be resolved, when the Ottoman

government rejected a peace offer made by Russia to stop the Bosnian-Herzegovinian rebellion. At the same time, Russia's ally, Serbia, which fought by supporting the Bosnian-Herzegovinian rebels, was defeated by the Ottoman government. This prompted Russia to prepare to launch a war against the Ottoman government. Before declaring war, Russia had taken the prudent step of obtaining assurances from the Austria-Hungarian government that it would not ally itself with the Ottoman government in the war. Russia uses Italy as a 'check point' to Austria's commitment in this matter. (Letter of Lord A. Luftus to the Earl of Derby, Doc. 467, St. Petersburg, 11th January 1877).

The assurance given by the Austrian government is important in determining bright prospect for Russia in facing the Ottoman government in the Balkan Peninsula. However, what worried Russia was the action that Britain will take against it in the event of a war between Russia and the Ottoman government. This is because Britain, which is still defending its policy of isolation, has not expressed any position on Russia's decision (Letter of Lord A. Luftus to the Earl of Derby, Doc. 750, St. Petersburg, 25th December 1877). Russia will not succeed in fighting two great powers at the same time. However, with the confidence gained from his agreement with Austria in Reichard has caused Russia to continue its ambitions to declare war on the Ottoman government on 24th April 1877 (Gillard, 1984). Russia was supported by King Ferdinand in Bulgaria. Bulgaria was part of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans with a population of Orthodox Christians, Catholics, and Muslims (Enh, 2016).

Russia had many well-trained reservists like those in Armenia, Bulgaria, and Serbia. This contrasts with the Ottoman government which only relies on Muslims. On 10th December 1877, the Ottoman army

surrendered to the Russian army at Plevna (Letter of Colonel Wellesley to the Earl of Derby, Doc. 91, Poradim, 11th December 1877). The fall of Plevna marked victory for the Russians. Moreover, the situation in Sofia and in the Balkan Peninsula became increasingly critical. After the fall of Plevna, the Ottoman army moved many of its troops to Eastern Bulgaria, Sofia and Constantinople by land and sea. But most of the troops were unable to cross the Balkan Peninsula due to being trapped in a snowstorm. (Letter of Lieutenant Chermiside to Mr. Layard, Doc. 207, Varna, 30th December 1877). Therefore, the Ottoman armies could not move their troops to the Balkan territories immediately. Meanwhile, Russia is increasingly successful in conquering the whole of Bulgaria. On 9th January 1878, the Ottoman army surrendered at Shipka (Note by Lord Tenterden on the Treaty of San Stefano, Doc. 260, 7th June 1878). The Ottoman armies could not hold out any longer and on 31st January 1878, the Ottoman government was forced to sign an agreement for an armistice and as a basis for peace between the two in Kezanlik. The Ottoman government is worried that the Russian advance in the Balkan Peninsula will bring more disaster to the Muslims. Furthermore, the Ottoman government did not get help from Britain to resist the Russian advance.

On 21st September 1877, Russia successfully captured Kars from the Ottoman army. The fall of Kars has placed the whole territory of Armenia under Russian power (Letter of Mr. Layard to the Earl of Derby, Doc. 88, Constantinople, 23rd November 1877) This is because the road from Erzeroum to Trebizond will be opened, in accordance with the Russian plan. The port will be easily mastered without many obstacles. Russian ships will be sheltered in winter. Through Armenia, Russia could continue its plans to West Asia. Therefore, the conquest of Armenia

not only poses a danger to Ottoman but also threatens Britain's interests in West Asia. Although the Ottoman government has requested British intervention to help it, but Britain still maintains its 'isolated' policy (Enh, 2010b). The Ottoman government did not get the support of any major power to stop the war. Further to that, Russia wanted to offer peace to the Ottoman government on the condition that no major powers became mediators in the negotiations. The Ottoman government had to agree to Russia's demands and signed the Treaty of San Stefano on 3rd March 1878 to end the war and was ratified again with the Treaty of Berlin in July 1878.

Elimination of Muslims and the Ottoman People

The Russo-Ottoman war brought a terrible disaster to the Ottoman government and the Muslims in Bulgaria (Table 1). The Russians had occupied Rushuk and were preparing to capture Plevna with 5,000 Russian troops (Letter of Lieutenant-General Sir C. Dickson to Mr. Layard, Doc. 78, Therapia, 31st October 1877). In the assault, many cities were bombed and destroyed by Russia such as Kars, Deveh, Boyun, Igdyr and others. The Ottoman government had to increase the number of troops to save other cities in Bulgaria. The Russian advance into Bulgaria has destroyed the future of the Ottoman empire and the innocent Muslims. More than 500,000 Muslims, mostly women and children, were forced to leave their homes without food, shelter, and clothing during the winter. "His Highness stated that according to the information received at the Porte more than 500,000 Mussulman inhabitants of Bulgaria and Roumelia chiefly women and children, had been driven from their homes, and were wandering almost without food and clothing over the country to the south of

the...; a great part of the Balkans of them would perish by winter cold."

Table 1: The Russo-Ottoman War (1875-1878) ethnic cleansing of muslims (Kia, 2011)

Event	Mass killings	Exile	Disappearance
Total	250,000-300,000	500,000	260,000

Muslims were victims of brutal killings by Russians and Bulgarian Christians supported by the Russian army. War took innocent lives like children. This is one of the ways of eliminating the Ottoman people in Europe. The Ottoman government could no longer survive due to the defeat of its armies. In addition, Russia has incited Christians to oppose the sovereignty of the Ottoman government. This situation makes it difficult for the Ottoman government to stand on its own. Furthermore, the Fall of Kars presented a bright prospect for Russia to demand peace from the Ottoman government. On the other hand, the struggle of Muslims never fades away. The Muslims still wanted to continue the war because they were confident that they would be able to fight Russia. This is no way to promote humanity and civility. Russia and Bulgaria attacked the defenseless Muslim population, with untold casualties because of their brutality and persecution. Muslims are aware that this is Russia's intention to destroy the Ottoman people and rule in Europe. According to the Minister of the Interior (Mr Layard to the Earl of Derby Doc.88 Constantinople, 23rd November 1877). "The Mohammedan population, terrified by the horrors and massacres committed by the Russians and Bulgarians, were flying on the approach of the Russian Army. The war was waged upon innocent and defenseless women and children. It was one, he repeated, for the extermination of the Ottoman race in Europe."

According to the Ottoman government, as many as 1,500,000 Muslims have died because of the Russo-Ottoman war. This does not include those who have migrated and fled because of Russian and Bulgarian military violence. This group is composed of Muslims who have died during the war in addition to those who have been imprisoned, brutally killed and those who have died from serious injuries because they could not receive treatment in hospitals. All those amounts have been lost because of the war. The loss of many Muslims in Bulgaria has left a huge impact on agriculture. Most of them leave the area where they live including agricultural land. This abandoned agricultural land caused no crops to be cultivated. Besides that, the agricultural lands of Muslims are also prevented from doing agricultural activities. Among them, the Bulgarian government blocked the waterways to the agricultural lands of the landlords. This caused a severe famine among Muslims in the affected areas due to the government's actions, especially in 1877, because of which no agricultural produce could be harvested for the food needs of Muslims. This is another issue facing the Ottoman government due to the war. This was the method by which Russia helped the Bulgarian government under Prince Alex to expel and eliminate the Muslims on Bulgarian soil.

Sacrilege against the Muslim Places of Worship

Russia has moved its army across the Balkan Peninsula with 70,000 of its finest and best trained troops (Lieutenant General Dickson to Mr Layard, 14th November 1877). The Russian army entered Kyzanlik, which is one of the Bulgarian provinces, on 17th July 1876. Their entry into Bulgaria was supported by the Bulgarian leaders and soldiers who also supported and fought on behalf of the Russian army. Bulgarian

Christians hold a grudge against the Ottoman government that ruled them all this time. Their purpose in helping Russia fight against Ottoman is to take revenge on Ottoman through atrocities to Muslims in Bulgaria. Thus, in line with the rule of the Ottoman government in Bulgaria, the government has built many mosques throughout Bulgaria. For example, in 1876, Bulgaria had 12 mosques in Kyzanlik alone (Consul Blant to Mr Layard p. 145, Adrianople, 30th December 1877). The Bulgarian army had information about the protection of Muslims in mosques. Therefore, the Bulgarian army attacked and killed women, children and the elderly who took refuge in the mosque. The war against Ottoman not only wants to expel the Ottoman empire in Bulgaria but also wants to eliminate and demean the holy religion of Muslims. They not only killed the helpless people but also damaged the mosques in Plevna, Kars and Shipka Pass.

Apart from that, they also burned mosques in Kyzanlik as reported in areas inhabited by Muslim majority such as Shekerelli, Satiklar, Bayazidli, Bitchareli, Doimoushlar, Yaikanli and Ketchidere. According to reports, in Shekerelli, from 122 buildings including houses and mosques, as many as 52 buildings including mosques have been burned down. The report states that: "Shekerelli – An Ottoman village situated in a wood, about an hour from Kyzanlik and half an hour from Shipka. Out of 122 houses, 52 were burnt, as well as the mosque and school by Bulgarians and Cossacks after the evacuation of Kyzanlik by the bulk of the Russian army."

Likewise, in Satiklar, several mosques were also the target of the atrocity of the Bulgarian troops who set fire to the mosques as reported: "Saltiklar - Out of 120 houses, 33 were burnt, together with the two mosques and two schools, by the Bulgarian

of the neighbor villages.” In addition, there was an incident of burning mosques in the territory of the Ottoman village of Doimoushlar. The incident began a day after Russian troops entered Kyzanlik. The Russian army has ordered all Muslims to surrender their weapons. The village chief had collected all the weapons as instructed and handed them over to the Russian army. However, the weapons were later distributed to the Bulgarians. Immediately after that, a group of Bulgarians from another village came and pretended to intimidate the residents of the region on the grounds that not all Muslims had surrendered their weapons. The situation became tense when the Bulgarians learned that the Ottoman army was advancing on the territory of Doimoushlar. They immediately acted to burn a total of 250 houses including three mosques in the Ottoman village in the region “Doimoushlar - An Ottoman village of 250 houses, about 5 hours from Kyzanlik and one and a half hour from Calofer...the doors and windows of the mosques were however, demolished”.

Based on information obtained by the British government, it is estimated that out of a total of 5,305 Ottoman residents who have 54 mosques and 49 schools in the villages of the region, the number of buildings that were destroyed is as follows, namely 1,577 houses, 24 mosques and 18 schools were destroyed by fire: “As regards the information furnished on this head, I am satisfied that it is correct, having visited and made inquiries in all the villages. Of the 5,305 Ottoman dwellings, 54 mosques, and 49 school houses in the village of the district, 1,577 houses, 24 mosques and 18 schools have been burned.”

As for the mosques that were not destroyed, the storage of medicines for the use of Muslims was damaged and destroyed. The mosque was turned into a place of festivity

for the Bulgarian army. Mosques were used as storage places for liquor, weapons storage, and immoral activities of the Bulgarian army. Meanwhile, the Muslim army that helped the Ottoman government in Bulgaria only got food supplies through the cooperation of the Muslim population in the villages brought through children and women. In addition, after the destruction of the mosques, cities like Erzeroum most of the population did not have shelter and food (Captain Creagh to Major General Sir A. Kemball. Erzeroum, 8th December 1877). Most families worked as artisans and self-employed are unable to survive because they are self-sustaining and barely makes ends meet. Therefore, this group is greatly affected when there is no protection and food obtained. They do not keep food and money in preparation for war. That is why they are in a state of poverty and hopelessness. After being homeless, they used the remains of the existing quarters as shelter. However, most of the quarters did not have bonfires and food. To get food, they have sold their clothes and blankets. This caused them to sleep shivering on the floor and most of them died. This is because the war that took place was in the winter.

In addition, the mosque was used as a place to gather all the Muslim men before they were taken to be executed. For example, in the Middle Issova district, the Russian army together with the Bulgarian army has given orders for residents to gather in the mosque. For their instructions to be obeyed, they informed the villagers not to worry, because these were only instructions and they would be allowed to return home afterwards to continue the harvesting process. This is the report from one of the survivors: “One day the Bulgarian came, ordering all the people of Middle Issova to assemble at the mosque. They told us at the same time not to be afraid, as it was in order that we should get leave to go and gather in our harvests. I

went to the mosque near which I found all the men of the village collected.”

Once in the mosque, this group of men was separated according to their age. Men aged between 10 and 60 years old were separated and ordered to line up in a line (Captain Creagh to Major General Sir A. Kemball. Erzeroum, 8th December 1877). Meanwhile, boys and men aged 60 and over are segregated in other areas. Immediately after the isolation process was completed, the Bulgarian army acted harshly and violated the rights of Muslims when they pulled out and removed all their turbans and hats. They were handcuffed and ordered to walk towards the forest area in Lower Issova. The Russian official explained that this group of men would be taken to work on the construction of the fortifications and sent to a new village. They were pressured to obey orders from Russian officials and the Bulgarian army. Finally, they were taken to a forest area in Ketchidereh district. They have been divided into three or four groups. They were asked to kneel before the Russian and Bulgarian soldiers. Their money was robbed and then on the orders of Russian officials, the group was killed by the Bulgarian army. Therefore, the promises made by Russian officials that they will not abuse the population is a trap for Muslims. On the other hand, they had planned to commit genocide, making the mosque a gathering place for the population.

The same incident also happened in the Ottoman village of Sarhanli-Bala which is one of the districts in Kyzanlik. Some Bulgarian soldiers were ready with weapons and entered the village and ordered everyone to gather in the mosque. A total of 100 Muslim men have gathered in the mosque. They were then taken to a forest area and brutally killed (Edmund Calvert, Kyzanlik, Doc. 150. 11th October 1877). In addition, to prohibit religious

activities, the Bulgarian army acted to lock mosques used by Muslims for worship. They drove all Muslims out of the mosque and did not allow them to worship. For those who refuse to follow the instructions, they will be beaten and their throats will be cut as a warning to others. Immediately after that, the group will be tied by their hands and taken to a place before they are killed en masse. This is the tactic used by the Russian army, assisted by the Bulgarians, to kill Muslims. The mosque has been misused as a field for them to commit violence and taint the function of the mosque which should be a place of worship for Muslims.

Sexual Violence, Abuse and Torture against Women and Children

Women and children affected by armed conflict are exposed to increased levels of traumatic experiences, including direct exposure to violence, disruption of family structure and social fragmentation (Alosman & Omar, 2022). Many people are affected by displacement, including prolonged confinement to refugee camps. The biggest risk faced is war violence against women. Women and girls are exposed to levels of sexual violence, abuse, and torture unseen before the war. Conflict makes women and girls seen as weapons of war (Ab Ghani et al., 2020). The reason given is not because of sex and lust but more about the control and dominance of the party who did it. War leaves the greatest suffering on women. In the era of the Russo-Ottoman war, many Muslim women were killed, abused and they were discriminated against and denied their rights as Muslim women. During the attack of the Russian army in Kyzanlik on 17th July 1877 on the villages in the region of Issova Bala, Issova Orta and Issova Zir in Muslim settlements, their houses were burned (Consul Blunt to Mr Layard, December 30th, 1877). Out of 170 houses,

the fire in Issova destroyed a total of 96 houses including a few schools. While in Issova Orta, out of a total of 73 houses were there, 57 of them burned down, including 2 mosques. In addition, in Issova Zir, out of 84 houses, a total of 64 houses were burnt along with schools and mosques.

Before the Russian army started the fire, they had taken all the inhabitants of the villages as prisoners. These residents were locked up for two days, before they were allowed to return to their homes that had been destroyed by fire. After they returned to the village, immediately, they were informed that the Russian army was coming to kill them all. This caused family heads to hide their wives and daughters in the forests and mountainous areas (Consul Blunt to Mr Layard, December 30th, 1877). Thus, here begins the suffering of the women because they were left with nothing to eat while waiting for help from the Ottoman army to come to their rescue. Nevertheless, for some villages in Issova Bala such as Mufllis village, there are still women and girls who did not have time to be released immediately and have become victims of the atrocities of the Bulgarian army. On the same day they returned to the village, the Bulgarian army had come to attack and rob the residents and burn the remaining houses to ashes. A total of 130 women including children who could not be saved were dragged by the Bulgarian army like sheep to the Balkan area known as Kopak, which is 5 hours away from their village. Upon reaching the area, they were brutally assaulted which culminated in the massacre of 130 defenseless women and children. In fact, their bodies were left lying around without being buried. As reported by British officials (Consul Blunt to Mr Layard, 30th December 1877). "I was told here that more than 130 Ottoman women and children had been carried out off by Bulgarians from the village of Mufllis and driven like sheep to a place in the Balkan called Kopak, some five

hours off, and there were massacred, after having been brutally outraged. I was informed that the dead bodies of these poor people still lay unburied."

In addition, in the Shekerelli region, the Bulgarian army also burned 52 houses out of 122 houses. Most of the residents had to flee with few possessions and many were seriously injured. However, as many as 30 women were successfully captured by the Russian army and taken to the Russian camp (Consul Blunt to Mr Layard, 30th December 1877). All of them were held for four days without food and finally slaughtered by the Bulgarian army. Only two girls survived because they were separated from the group of women earlier. When the village chief came to try to get information about the safety of the escaped woman, the next day his village was attacked. According to him, they have received mistreatment from the Bulgarian army, especially from the Bulgarians of Shipka district who were also helped by their women. These women along with the men have also participated in acts of violence and robbery in the village. As reported as follows (Consul Blunt to Mr Layard, 30th December, 1877). "The head men bitterly complained of the treatment they suffer from the Cossacks and Bulgarians, particularly Bulgarians of Shipka who assisted by their women, pillaged the village completely."

The villagers were all unarmed to protect themselves and their wives and children. When they tried to get help from the Russian army to prevent this violence from the Bulgarian army but their request was ignored. The men had to witness the brutality of the Bulgarian army against their wives and children or the head of the family with his wife and children would be killed if they resisted. Many villagers including women and children were killed by the Bulgarian army after a few days of their

capture of Eski-Zaghra. A total of 20 people including women and children were arrested and killed en masse (Consul Blunt to Mr Layard, 30th December 1877).

Muslim women also experience oppression and persecution because of their appearance in hijab. While attacking and robbing the houses of Muslims, they also violated Muslim women by pulling off the hijabs that cover women's heads and removing women's and girls' clothes. They insulted Muslim women and girls by degrading their dignity and leaving the women and girls in their underwear only. This army shows a completely uncivilized personality when dealing with Muslim families that have female residents and girls. After committing profanities against the Muslim families, they will then burn the houses they trespassed on (Edmund Calvert Assistant to Consul Blunt Special Mission to the vilayet of Adrianople, 27th November 1877). "On contrary, they gave us friendly advice and taught us the words we ought to use to put off the Cossacks who came for plunder. The Cossacks used always to pluck off the veils from our women when they entered a house, giving us to understand by signs that they ought now to go with their faces uncovered and to wear petticoats"....They urged the Bulgarians of our village to set fire to our houses."

According to a witness in another incident in the village of Sarhanli-Zir, the act was very heartbreaking for Muslims. "I learn from the females of my family that "many veils were then torn." These are wounds of the heart, and you will not ask me to say further on the subject" (Kyzanlik, 13rd October, 1877).

One thing that cannot be denied in any war in human history is the sexual abuse of women. In all forms of abuse committed in war, rape is specifically committed against women. In one incident in the territory of

the Muslim village of Ketchidereh, the Bulgarian army gathered all the women in the village regardless of age, whether old, young or girls. All of them were locked in a house. They were promised to be transferred to the safer village of Travna. But that was just their trick to sexually abuse the women. At certain times, they took the young girls out to their camp in Shipka. The Muslim girls were forced to drink alcohol before they were raped (Edmund Calvert Assistant to Consul Blunt Special Mission to the vilayet of Adrianople, 2nd December, 1877). The father of these girls was killed so as not to cause them any trouble. This is not only done to girls, but married women also suffer the same fate.

Muslim women and children affected by war conflicts, especially rape cases, have been exposed to increased levels of traumatic experiences that cause disruption of family structures and social divisions in their communities (Aydin, 2011). For example, many of them did not get support from family members. This is because most of their family members including husbands and fathers were killed by the Bulgarian army when they were sent back to their respective villages. The acts of the Russian and Bulgarian soldiers who committed atrocities and oppressed women were motivated by the arbitrary use of force. This is because most of the soldiers, especially those from Bulgaria, are less disciplined, making them a threat to women. Feelings of revenge and lust give them the idea that all cruelty to women is justified.

Refugees

The incursion of the Bulgarian army and the Cossacks into the Muslim village was not only to rob and capture the Muslim men but also to capture the women and children. Many villages were inhabited by Muslims,

one of which in the region of Rumelia was plundered by these troops when the Russians crossed the Danube. Approximately 10 to 15 women were arrested and gathered in a house in each district they invaded. These women are forced to walk to arrive at the detention area which usually takes no less than 2 hours to 5 hours to travel. These women were not provided with any food and drink. When the soldiers stopped to rest and eat, these women were asked to find their own food in the nearby area. Children are also hungry and cold in cold weather. Thus, the old women and children went to get some food from the Bulgarian women and put the Muslim children with the Bulgarian children who were warming themselves, but they were all chased away by the Bulgarian military officers. (Kyzanlik, October 26th October, 1877. Statement of Zeineb, age 25, of the Lower quarter of the village, widow of Karagiozoglou Ibrahim). “Whilst they had a plenty of provisions and covering, we were without food or even water or fire, and had nothing but bare ground to lie upon. Some of our old women went to the Tchorbadjis, whom they found eating and drinking by their fires and implored them to relieve us, and to let us know what was going to be done with us. They answered roughly: that we must look out and find out for ourselves.” As it was cold, some of us sent our children to warm themselves at the fires where the Bulgarian women and children were. They drove them away.”

During the journey, there were among the women, who tried to escape when the night came and it was dark. For those who did not manage to escape, they risked their safety who if caught would be killed by the army. While for the women who managed to escape, they had to face the difficulties of living in hiding. This is because they fled in a state of dispossession without having adequate clothing and food protection. This hardship became more difficult when the

woman ran away with her young children. There are among those who did not get food for several days and lived without hunger by chewing leaves from trees before they managed to reach the Muslim village (Kyzanlik, 26th October, 1877. Statement of Zeineb, age 25, of the Lower quarter of the village, widow of Karagiozoglou Ibrahim): “We have been told that we are to be taken to the fortifications. I determine to escape with my two children. Another woman, Khadidje decided to do the same, with her three children, namely two girls aged 12 and 7 and infant in arms. We slipped off unobserved by the guard, though the women saw us, and we got away safely into the woods. We wandered over the mountains for two days and two nights, the children perishing from swollen feet and from hunger and thirst, which there was no means of relieving but by chewing leaves of the beech-tree.”

The killing of women and children is also done in a very heartbreaking and inhumane manner. Among them was the massacre committed in Copak, which is a district in Shipka which is in the middle of the Balkan Peninsula. A total of 122 bodies were found on the road in a state that had been destroyed. To find out the actual number of people killed is to look at the number of skulls found. Most of them were the bodies of young children. In addition, the bodies of women found were confirmed to be the bodies of Muslim women. This is based on the clothes worn by the women and children (Major Campbell to Consul Blunt. Shipka Camp, 30th October 1877). “...*the remains of 122 human beings; they were lying about in every conceivable attitude, so huddled together and decomposed, that the only way of arriving at their number was by counting the skulls. Of these they were many of very small children. The articles of clothing lying about were all those such as are worn by Turkish women and children., and many of the bodies bore evidence of having been shockingly mutilated.*”

The Russo-Ottoman war in the Balkan Peninsula and the Caucasus caused many Muslims to migrate to the lands of the Ottoman empire that were still under its control. It is estimated that 500,000 people fled the war zones to seek refuge under the Ottoman empire in Asia Minor. Most of them are in a state of poverty and poverty. Between 1878 and 1881, a total of 82,000 Muslims migrated to other Ottoman Empires, most of them from the Caucasus when the region was ceded to Russia when Ottoman lost the war.

Conclusion

The Russo-Ottoman war that started because of Russian dissatisfaction with the defeat of Serbia at the hands of Ottoman caused Russia to intervene on the grounds of freeing Serbia and the Christian Slav population from the Ottoman government. This Russian action received full support from Bulgaria because Russia promised to free Bulgaria from Ottoman occupation if they won the war. Bulgaria has long held a grudge against the Ottoman government and aspired to be independent from Ottoman rule. Therefore, this war allows the Bulgarian army to use the opportunity to take revenge on the Muslim minority in Bulgaria. The Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878 has proven the elimination of the Muslim ethnic majority from the Ottoman people in the Balkan Peninsula. It is estimated that between 250,000 to 300,000 Muslims, which is about seventeen percent of those who died in Bulgaria because of the war were caused by murder, starvation and disease. This war became worse because women were also victims of brutality of the Russian and Bulgarian troops. They did not follow the laws of war of not attacking the defenseless. For these soldiers, war is about dominance and power. The implication of this war led to widespread oppression and mass expulsion of the Muslim population in Bulgaria, resulting in significant demographic changes and a prolonged

humanitarian crisis. For future research, it is suggested that an in-depth examination be conducted on the roles and positions of other European powers in the Russo-Ottoman conflict of 1877, particularly regarding their attitudes and reactions towards the fate of the Muslim population in Bulgaria. This research will help uncover the broader dynamics of international diplomacy and its implications for the humanitarian crisis that occurred.

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