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# The Crimean Tatar exile in Central Asia: a case study in group destruction and survival

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It has often been said that the history of Central Asia is the history of migrations, and this process has continued right up until the twentieth century. The latest wave of settlers in the region have been Slavic technocrats, workers and managers associated with the Russian empire and its Marxist incarnation, the USSR. Like all the great colonial empires, the Russian-Soviet empire has left its share of ethnic detritus dispersed across the vast lands it once dominated. This was especially true in the empire's Central Asian borderlands which have been called a 'dumping ground of nations'. Many of the non-Russian ethnic groups in Central Asia made their way to this region voluntarily. The Kazan Tatars and Armenians, for example, came to the oasis bazaars of Russia's Central Asian provinces to trade; Germans (such as the region's first governor general, Konstantine von Kaufman) came to work in the provincial administration; Dungans fled oppression in neighbouring Xingkiang, and so forth.

One of the most unusual waves of settlement in Central Asia, the deportations of entire national groups in the 1940s (and to a lesser extent during the 1930s), however, serves to remind one that empires are often built on the suffering of non-ruling groups. From the time of Tiglath Pileser of Assyria to the late twentieth century, states have brutally massacred, expelled and exiled rebellious tribes and ethnic groups as means of maintaining power and crushing real or perceived threats to the centre's monopoly on power. Rarely, however, has the forced expulsion of ethnic groups been so all encompassing (or so hidden) as was the deportation of whole nations during the Soviet period. The Soviet totalitarian regime used all the modern Orwellian resources at its disposal to transplant forcefully entire national groups from their homelands to Central Asia in a brutal process that would today be considered a terrifyingly efficient example of 'ethnic cleansing'. Among the small national groups deported to Central Asia en masse were the Chechens, Ingush, Karachai, Balkars, Kalymks, Volga Germans, Meskhetian Turks, and Crimean Tatars. In all, more than one and a half million people were wrested from their homelands and deposited in the vastness of the Soviet empire's Central Asian republics during Josef Stalin's rule.

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In the years following the deportations, which were carried out during the general conflagration of World War II, little news on the fate of these groups reached the West. Following the death of Soviet leader Josef Stalin in 1953, several of the 'punished nations' were allowed to return to their homelands. Three nationalities were, however, forced to remain in exile. These Soviet nations, the Volga Germans, Meskhetian Turks and Crimean Tatars were singled out and left to languish in exile for reasons that are still not fully understood. For half a century then, these groups have lived in Central Asia and whole generations from among them have grown up in this land far from their traditional hearths. Meskhetian Turks could be found as farmers and traders in Uzbekistan's rich Fergana valley, Crimean Tatars could be found working in factories and *sovkhozes* (state farms) of Eastern Uzbekistan, and the Volga Germans were active in the agricultural development of Kazakhstan's Hungry Steppe. The remaining exiled nations have in fact made real contributions to the development of Central Asia in both an economic and a cultural sense and have themselves been profoundly transformed in all respects by their 50 odd years of living in the region.

It is curious to note that, in spite of the dramatic impact these deportations have had (and continue to have) on so many people, few political scientists, historians or anthropologists in the West have made a serious effort to analyse this exile experience or to explore the considerable consequences of this tragedy on the affected populations. While there has been considerable analysis of the movements *out* of Central Asia by these nations in the post-Soviet era, there has been remarkably little coverage of these peoples' history after World War II in the Central Asian context. Although there is also a growing body of work dealing with the concepts of diaspora and exile, and tremendous attention has been paid to ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia and Central Africa, the case of these three exiled Soviet nations has gone virtually unnoticed in the West. This is in part due to the fact that foreigners were forbidden from gaining access to members of the deported nations during the Soviet period and no research was carried out in their places of exile in the Soviet hinterland. More recently, with the collapse of the USSR, the Meskhetian Turks have been largely forced out of Central Asia, a significant percentage of the Volga Germans have emigrated to Germany, and approximately half of the Crimean Tatar population has returned to its historic homeland. Many scholars have simply overlooked the Central Asian chapters in these peoples' histories in their analysis of the more dramatic (and certainly more newsworthy) movements by these peoples out of Central Asia.

In 1997, the author travelled to Uzbekistan and the Crimean peninsula to research this understudied aspect of Central Asian history from the perspective of one of the deported nations, the Crimean Tatars. Before this work could begin, a background understanding of who the Crimean Tatars were prior to the deportations was necessary as a gauge for evaluating the effects of the deportation on this people.

## The Tatars of the Crimea: the land and the people

In order to comprehend fully the nature of the Crimean Tatars' experience in Central Asia one must understand this people and the strong link which binds them to their homeland on the Ukraine's southern coast, the Crimean peninsula. The Crimean Tatars are a Hanafi, Sunni Muslim Turkic minority whose ethnogenesis as a distinct group was completed on the northern shores of the Black Sea during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It was at this time that Tatar tribes from the Golden Horde settled in the peninsula, began intermarrying with the indigenous Greek, Armenian and Kipchak Turkic tribes, and created an independent Muslim state known as the Crimean Khanate. From their bastion in the Crimea, the Crimean Khans conducted an active foreign policy that saw their armies burn Moscow in 1571, project their forces as far afield as Vienna in 1529 and 1683 (as allies of their powerful protector, the Ottoman sultan) and partake in numerous campaigns in the southern Caucasus against Shiite Persia.

The traditional notion of the Crimean Tatars as a barbaric race of raiding steppe nomads is, however, misleading for a number of reasons. Most Crimean Tatars were actually agriculturists or sedentary shepherds who lived in the mountains and on the shores of the southern Crimea. The greater portion of the Tatars, known in the Crimean Tatar dialect as *Tats* (mountain Tatars) or *Yaliboyus* (coastal Tatars), were distinct from the nomadic population which was known as the *Nogais*. The *Nogais* roamed the Crimea's northern steppe lands and adjoining plains of what is today the southern Ukraine and physically and linguistically resemble the more Mongoloid Turkic peoples of the East, such as the Kazakhs and Kirghiz. It was these natural-born warriors who provided the Khan with the hardy cavalrymen used in his annual plundering and slave raiding forays against the neighbouring Slavic lands, not the Tatar farmers and shepherds of the south.[1]

These three groups, with their distinctive customs, dialects, and physical appearance (the sedentary Tatars of the south often have blue eyes and Greek or Armenian appearances) were loosely organized on the basis of their shared Islamic faith and their nominal submission to the Crimean Khans of the royal Chingisid dynasty of the Giray family. There was among the Crimean Tatars of this period no over-arching sense of ethnonational identity with a politically articulated theory of 'fatherland' in the modern sense. There was, on the other hand, a less developed, traditional attachment to the Crimean peninsula as this people's native land. Crimean Tatar farmers in the south worked the lands of their fathers, produced Crimean wines on the peninsula's warm southern coast, raised tobacco in the foothills of the coastal mountains or herded sheep in the northern plains. In the fashion of peasants throughout the world, this agrarian people had a connection to the soil and a parochial identification with the native village or locale as the centre of communal life. The village and clan were in fact considered the *patrie* and nation by this Muslim people who also identified with the land in Islamic terms, considering it to be the *Dar-al Islam* (the Abode of Islam).

Over the centuries, the Crimean Tatar peasants developed specialized agricultural practices to exploit the Crimean peninsula's unique environment. For centuries, Tatar farmers in the southern *piedmont*, for example, made use of an elaborate irrigation system to bring water to their fields, and farmers on the coasts developed highly effective techniques for growing peaches, pears, apples and grapes in the Crimea's warm sun. The Crimea Tatars' customs were uniquely Crimean as well. Their Islamic traditions, for example, were strongly influenced by the Ottomans who directly ruled the peninsula's southern littoral and represented a blend of pre-Islamic nomadic traditions, Anatolian Turkish customs and local Christian holdovers that entered the religion when Armenians and Greeks converted to Islam and became 'Tatars'.

The Crimean Tatars' world was in many ways closer to that of the Turkish Muslims of Anatolia than that of the archetypal nomadic stereotype of the Tatar tribesmen. The Crimean Tatar dialect of the southern coast and mountains was also heavily influenced by Ottoman (*Oghuz*) Turkish and more closely resembled the language of Istanbul than that of the larger Volga Tatar population centred on Kazan.[2] The Russian stereotype of the dreaded Crimean Tatars' fanatical attachment to Islam also collapses under careful scrutiny.[3] The Crimean Tatars' attachment to their religion was strong, but it never reached the rigidity or intensity of devotion that one found among the Sarts and Tajiks of Central Asia who had a more conservative, reactionary and, in later years, inward looking brand of Islam.

The Crimean Tatars began to feel the powerful impact of Western cultural influence when the Russian empire conquered and annexed this last of the Chingisid Khanates in the year 1783. With the annexation of their lands, the Crimean Tatars felt the effects of Russian civilization on all levels. Crimean Tatars were, for instance, forced to use Russian in the courts of law, they were drafted into the Russian army (a powerful vehicle of Russification) and the Crimean Tatar indigenous aristocracy aped Russian ways and spoke in Russian. By the end of the nineteenth century the great Crimean Tatar cultural reformer and editor, Ismail Gaspirali, was able to write of his Muslim community:

> Now, in many Muslim homes there is Russian (or if you want, European) furniture, many Muslims wear Russian or partially Russian clothes, the number of those visiting cultural meetings, theatres, festivals and the number of those making acquaintances with Russian homes and families is growing.[4]

Much of the Crimean Tatars' introduction to Western culture came as a result of the above-mentioned Gaspirali's activities which were aimed at modernizing and Westernizing this atrophied community of oppressed peasants through his (*usul-i jadid*) 'new method' schools. Gaspirali and his cohorts successfully confronted the conservative clergy, fought for Tatar women's rights and patiently enlightened their countrymen in the pages of Gaspirali's modernist newspaper entitled *Tercuman/Perevodchik* (the Interpreter). In an article entitled '*Gde Koren Zla*' (Where is the Root of Evil), for example, this great reformist argued for the liberation of Muslim women as follows:

> The existing deplorable order, in fact I would go so far as to say evil order, should be changed. I ask the readers to understand that I propose to change not the *Shariat*, that is forbidden, but it is necessary to protect the position of women, to in fact protect her right to life given to her not by us but by the will of Allah. *This can be done*. But if we do not do this we will cling not to the Koranic but to the crude Asiatic view of women as an object without rights.[5]

Considering these developments, it is not surprising that it was in the Crimea that the first journal for Muslim women in the Russian empire, Gaspirali's *Alem-i Nisvan* (Women's World), was published.[6]

In comparison, Gaspirali used a series of articles in his newspaper *al-Nahdah/ La Renaissance* (which was published in Egypt), to describe for his readers the 'backwater Islamic civilization' of Central Asia and critically compare the 'debilitation and utter ruin' of the Emirate of Bukhara with the modern, European aspect of the Russian section of the ancient caravan city of Samarkand.[7] Although Gaspirali attempted on one occasion to convince the Emir of Bukhara, Abdulahad (1885–1910), to support the establishment of his new method schools in the Emirate he was largely unsuccessful and Central Asia (both the province of Turkestan and the Russian protectorate states of Bukhara and Khiva) lapsed behind the Tatar lands in educational and cultural reform and modernization.[8] Interestingly enough, Gaspirali felt that the Russian conquest of Central Asia was a positive event and he did not consider Russian influence in the region to be a negative example of colonialism.[9] Gaspirali believed that Russian influence in Central Asia would facilitate the modernization of the region's peoples and allow them to enjoy many of the benefits that he felt his people had received in the form of European culture via the Russians.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the small Tatar community of the Crimea began to feel the influence of perhaps the most potent of Western political developments—nationalism. This process was facilitated in part by the Crimean Tatar community's geographic location. This Westernmost Islamic enclave of the Russian empire was exposed to trends and movements originating in both the Westernizing Ottoman empire and European Russia long before the Muslims of Central Asia came into contact with these processes. Crimean Tatar student nationalists, informally known as the Young Tatars (*Genc Tatarlari*), increasingly returned to their homeland from Paris, St Petersburg and Istanbul to disseminate the novel ideas of nationalism among their simple peasant countrymen after 1905. The rise of Crimean Tatar nationalism at this comparatively early stage meant that this small people began the process of breaking down their traditional Islamic and clan bases for identification long before their ethnic or religious kin in the secluded province of Turkestan were able to begin this transition. By gaining control of local power organs, Crimean Tatar nationalists and *Jadidists* (reformers) were in fact successful in contesting the *Kadimist* (reactionary) mullahs' hold over the common Tatars' hearts and minds at a comparatively early stage.

As the Russian empire tottered around them, the Crimean Tatar nationalists formed a national movement known simply as the *Milli Firka* (the

National Party) to promote their national objectives. With the collapse of the Russian empire in 1917, the Crimean Tatar nationalists were able to establish an independent government in the Crimea. In a move that would have been impossible in much of the Russian empire's Muslim lands, a secular nationalist, Numan Celebi Cihan, was even selected to be the *Mufti* (chief religious official) of the Crimea at this time. The reformist Crimean Tatar leadership also promulgated a variety of laws that were remarkably secular and modern in their content and far in advance of any developments to that stage in the greater Muslim world. The Crimean Tatar Republic *Kurultay*'s (Congress) guiding laws included the following decrees:

> The *Kurultay*, standing on the principle of equality, recognizes and affirms complete equality of women with men and commissions parliament to uphold this published law.
>
> The *Kurultay* considers as a necessity in public life: freedom of identity, word, press, conscience, meeting, dwelling, union, protest, and protection of life and work as practicable principles of self determination of peoples and rights of minorities. These laws which are accepted by the *Kurultay* may be guaranteed only in a democratic republic recognized and proclaimed as the Crimean democratic republic.[10]

Like their Central Asian equivalents who attempted to establish an independent state in Khokand while the Russian centre was weak, the Crimean Tatar national government, however, eventually succumbed to larger Bolshevik forces attempting to regain control of the peripheral lands and reconstitute the Russian empire. After a confused period of German, Bolshevik and White Army occupation, the Crimean peninsula was conquered by the Bolsheviks and included in the USSR as the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Crimean ASSR) in 1921. Although the Crimean Tatars were not officially recognized in the republic's title in the same fashion that the titular nationalities of Central Asia were, they were recognized in other ways as the Crimea's state-sponsored, unofficial eponymous nationality. This recognition came first and foremost in the policy of *korenizatsiia* or 'indigenization' (literally 'rooting' or positive discrimination for titular nations in their officially recognized homelands). Although the Crimean Tatars represented no more than 25 per cent of the Crimea's population at this time (largely as a result of massive out-migration to the Ottoman empire), their language was considered to be an official language of the republic.[11] In addition, Crimean Tatars were appointed in numbers greater than their actual percentage of the peninsula's population to top governmental slots in the Crimean Communist administration. Crimean Tatar culture, language, and history were also promoted and the Crimean Tatar masses were, for the first time, made to feel that the Crimea was 'their' national homeland-republic.

A whole generation of Crimean Tatars thus came to believe in their immutable link to a secularly defined, Crimean homeland and to identify with their officially recognized Soviet territory as the primary marker of their identity.[12] Shirin Akiner provides a description of the powerful effects of this policy of utilizing Marxist-Leninist history and science to instil a sense of identification with one's

'primordial', 'eternal' and 'natural' homeland-republic during the 1920s. According to Akiner:

> The histories of the titular national groups were framed as histories of their respective republics, thus emphasizing the symbiotic bond between the land and the people. Maps, geography, textbooks and photographic albums further strengthened this link, fostering a sense of personal identification with the contours of the republic, and at the same time, marking off this territory from that of other neighboring republics.[13]

The work of constructing a Soviet homeland for the Crimean Tatars and a related sense of modern national identification with their republic was, however, infinitely easier than the task of delimiting the Central Asian republics. The forging of modern identities for ethnic groups such as the Turkmens, who still identified themselves according to their tribal affiliation (Salor, Tekke, etc.) was an equally daunting task. This was also the case with the Uzbeks who had well entrenched parochial loyalties to city or region or tribal affiliations (the sub-ethnic Kipchak identification in Fergana for example) and often spoke a language other than Uzbek (usually Tajik).[14] The awkward, gerrymandered Uzbek Republic or the sprawling Kazakh Republic were also harder to identify with in the popular imagination and were rather artificially defined in comparison to the easily delimited and historically contiguous Crimean peninsula. The Soviet nation builders' task in the Crimea was also facilitated by the fact that they were building on a foundation of Crimean Tatar national development that had begun in the late nineteenth century, whereas the only effective ethnonational movement in Central Asia, the Kazakh *Alash Orda*, had not been organized until 1912.

During the 1920s and 1930s the Crimean Tatars had made greater strides in the development of a political national identity, with all of its requisite features (a well articulated political affiliation with a secular national fatherland in particular), than their Muslim counterparts in Central Asia or the northern tier of the Caucasus. In the process, the Islamic and sub-national (*Tat*, *Yaliboyu* and *Nogai*) components of their national identity became less and less important. Language and an all-encompassing sense of shared ethnicity gradually became the most important markers of secularly defined, personal and communal identification by the late 1930s. While one still had to be Muslim in order to be considered a Crimean Tatar (this outwardly socialist people still maintained some of their patriarchal, Islamic *cultural* traditions) the Soviet policies of forced atheism in the 1920s and 1930s effectively completed the earlier struggle against *kadimist*, reactionary Islam waged by the Crimean Tatar nationalists and modernists. In dealing with this small Muslim minority in a Slavic sea, the Bolsheviks obviously found it much easier to implement their social policies aimed at creating a new 'homo Sovieticus' than in the remote *kishlaks* (villages) of Central Asia and *auls* (settlements) of the rugged Caucasus mountains.

As in other regions in the Soviet empire, the Bolsheviks also attempted to industrialize the Crimea and to create a proletarian industrial worker class from among the Crimean Tatar peasants. While they did make some progress in this

endeavour, it is interesting to note that in the late 1930s a full 82 per cent of the Crimean Tatar population still lived in country villages.[15] By the start of World War II, the Crimean Tatars were still largely an agrarian people engaged in the traditional cultivation of the soil (although their farms had been collectivized) and only 18 per cent of their population were city inhabitants. As in Central Asia, it was the Russians, Ukrainians, Germans and other non-Muslims who worked in the Crimea's urban factories and made up the majority of workers in such industrial centres as Simferopol, Kerch and Sevastopol.

During this period, the Crimean Tatar native political elite's fate paralleled that of Central Asia's native Communist leadership as well. The Tatar Communist Veli Ibrahimov (Chairman of the Crimean Council of People's Commissars and Chairman of the Crimean Central Committee), promoted Crimean Tatar national interests in the Crimean ASSR until he, like Uzbekistan's Faizullah Khojaev and many other native Communists after him, was purged in 1928 for 'bourgeois nationalism'. His execution was followed by the forced deportation of thousands of members of the Crimean Tatar Communist leadership and intelligentsia. Actors, academicians, politicians, educators and others were arrested and exiled to the Ural region, Siberia or Central Asia in the following years.[16] They were joined a few years later by as many as 40,000 Crimean Tatar *kulaks* (wealthy peasants) who were deported in the following year. There was thus a small Crimean Tatar presence in Central Asia prior to the mass deportations during World War II.

As has been indicated, on the eve of World War II the situation of the Crimean Tatars could be summed as follows: (1) The Crimean Tatars were more Russified and Westernized than most of the USSR's other Muslim groups (excluding the Volga Tatars). (2) They were largely an agrarian people engaged in the ancient methods of specialized cultivation shaped by the Crimea's unique environment. (3) The Crimean Tatar population had been exposed to secular nationalism for a far longer period than most Soviet Muslim groups and, with the establishment of the Crimean ASSR, this nation had developed a strong political and emotional attachment to their officially recognized Soviet homeland. (4) The Islamic element of Crimean Tatar identity had ceased to function as the primary maker of their communal identity after a half century of reformism and later Soviet policies of enforced atheism. (5) The sub-national distinctions between the *Nogais*, *Yaliboyus* and *Tats* were gradually breaking down under the homogenizing influence of Soviet nation-building efforts aimed at creating a unified, secular nation.

This then was the nature and the history of this small Muslim nation which, like many ethnic groups in Eastern Europe, was to be caught up in the maelstrom of World War II and to face the harrowing prospect of group annihilation.

## The deportation of the Crimean Tatar people

The German *blitzkrieg* on the Soviet Union's western marches which aimed to

exterminate Communism and topple the world's first 'workers' state' caught Soviet leader, Josef Stalin by complete surprise. Throughout the summer of 1941 the Red Army desperately mobilized millions of Soviet citizens from all nationalities to halt the progress of the seemingly invincible Nazi *Wehrmacht*. In this fashion, between 20,000 and 35,000 Crimean Tatars were mobilized and sent to fight the Germans in varying capacities (some fought in partisan brigades and others on the front). In the initial days of the war the losses among the poorly led Red Army were high and, as the Nazi army cut through Belorussia and the Ukraine towards the Crimean peninsula, whole Soviet armies were encircled by the fast moving German forces and captured. Although the Nazis had initially called for the murder of all 'Asiatic inferiors' (a classification which would have included the Tatars), in addition to that of the Jews and Communists, Hitler's generals in the field revised this hasty policy when the Red Army began to put up a more determined resistance before Moscow, Stalingrad and Leningrad.[17]

In a sharp reversal of Hitler's genocidal racial policies, the pragmatic German high command began recruiting from among the Soviet prisoners and, in this fashion, created several distinct support armies from the groups of captured soldiers. Following the Nazi capture of the Crimea, for example, between 8,000 and 20,000 Crimean Tatars were formed into anti-partisan village defence brigades which operated in Nazi controlled areas in the peninsula.[18] In January of 1942 the Germans also began recruiting Central Asians and Caucasian peoples from the prisoner of war camps in Germany for service in the so-called *Ost Legion* (Eastern Legion) which eventually included Crimean Tatars in its ranks. According to one source, these troops fought under the sign of the 'Grey Wolf', the emblem of Pan-Turkic nationalists who hoped to create a vast unified Turkic nation extending from Chinese Turkestan to the Crimea.[19] In his work on the role of Soviet nationalities in German wartime strategy, Alex Aliev claims that as many 180,000 Central Asians may have fought in the Eastern Legions against the Soviet *rodina* (homeland) during World War II.[20] The Muslim nationalities' collaboration with the Nazi invaders was not, however, unique, and hundreds of thousands of Slavic Russians, Ukrainians and Belorussians also fought against the Soviet motherland in the so-called 'Great Fatherland War'. According to Edige Kirimal, the Crimean Tatars who served with the Germans were evacuated by them during the Nazi retreat of April 1944. Those that retreated joined Azerbaijanis, 'Turkestanis' and Volga Tatars in the Eastern Turk Waffen SS Division which was formed in Hungary. That portion of the population that was guilty of collaboration had thus left the Crimea *prior* to the Red Army's liberation of this territory.[21]

With the retreat of the German army, none doubted that Stalin would seek to punish those who had previously betrayed the Soviet homeland, but few could guess at the sheer brutality and all-encompassing nature of his punitive actions. Beginning in 1943 Stalin launched a series of surprise operations which aimed to do nothing less than eradicate several *entire* national groups, men, women and

children, which were arbitrarily deemed to have been guilty of mass collaboration with the enemy. While the targeted nationalities have argued endlessly since this time about the injustice of punishing whole nations, including innocent civilians, for treason (especially when most of these ethnic groups had more soldiers fighting in the Red Army than with the invaders), the charges of mass national treason were in all probability simply a pretext for cleansing the Soviet Union's borderlands of non-Slavic, predominantly Islamic, populations. Regardless of the reasons, the results were a terrifying example of a totalitarian regime's capacity to use its tremendous resources to engage in total ethnic cleansing with a speed and all-encompassing nature seen only in the Third Reich.

Stalin had first experimented with communal deportation of whole communities during the 1930s when he exiled the comparatively small Korean population of the Soviet Far East to Central Asia. It was not until the early days of World War II, however, that the great *Vozhd'* (leader) contemplated the destruction of larger national groups. In the first move of what Soviet writer Aleksandr Nekrich has called 'Operation Deportation', Stalin deported the Volga German population from their republic to the steppes of Kazakhstan in 1941.[22] This move was explained as a pre-emptive measure designed to prevent collaboration between Soviet Germans and the invading Nazis. Following the German retreat, the NKVD (predecessor to the KGB) then commenced a 'cleaning up' of the Soviet southern borders that began in November of 1943 with the deportation of a small Muslim people from the northern Caucasus mountains, the Karachais. This was followed by the punitive deportation of the Buddhist Mongol Kalmyks in December 1943, the Chechens and related Muslim mountaineers, the Ingush, in February 1944, the Muslim Balkars later in 1944 and in May of 1944 the Crimean Tatars' turn came.

On the night of 18 May 1944, less than a week after the bloody Nazi retreat from the Crimea, NKVD motorized infantry units surrounded all the Crimean Tatar villages and suburbs in the Crimea and herded the startled inhabitants to several designated trans-shipment spots. The shocked Tatars were given less than five minutes to gather a few belongings and then they were transported at gun point to major rail centres. Tatar survivors of the deportation claim that many people assumed they were to be executed en masse in much the same way the Nazi *Einsatzgruppen* (task forces) had murdered the Crimea's Jewish population during the occupation. In a manner that was indeed reminiscent of Hitler's treatment of the Jews, all able-bodied Crimean Tatar men were separated from their families and herded on to cattle cars for shipment to unknown destinations in the north. The women, children, elderly and large number of Tatar war invalids were also herded onto sealed and guarded cars which made their way thousands of kilometres east in the following two weeks.

Survivors of the deportation remember the terrible weeks spent in the sweltering, guarded train wagons with a special horror. The deportees, who

were already numbed by the destruction wreaked on their villages by Nazi soldiers and Soviet partisan units during the war, speak of whole wagons arriving at their destination with their occupants dead. One Tatar deportee described the deportation in the following terms:

> The doors of the wagons were usually opened in stations where the train stopped for a few minutes. The panting people gulped fresh air, and they gave way to the sick who were unable to crawl to the exit to breathe it. But along the length of the wagon one officer in a blue hat hastily strolled with soldiers and, glancing into the wagon, asked the same question. 'Any bodies? Any bodies?' If this was the case, they pulled them out of the wagon; they were mainly children and the old. There and then, three meters from the rail embankment (the bodies) were thrown into hollows with dirt and refuse.[23]

The trains carrying the bulk of the Crimean Tatar population (civilians and the wounded) trundled across the hot plains of the northern Caucasus and Kazakhstan and, after several weeks, most made their way to Tashkent, the capital of the dry Central Asian republic of Uzbekistan. According to N. F. Bugai, a specialist on the deportations, 191,088 Crimean Tatars were deported from the Crimean autonomous republic in that May of 1944. Of these, 151,604 were sent to the Uzbek SSR and 8,597 to the Udmurt and Mari Autonomous Oblasts (Ural mountain region) and the rest scattered throughout Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.[24] Tashkent served as the main dispersion centre for the Crimean Tatars (other groups such as the Chechens and Ingush were sent to Alma Ata, the capital of Kazakhstan) who were then dispersed throughout Eastern Uzbekistan, from the Fergana valley in the north to Samarkand in the deserts of the south.[25] The Crimean Tatar men who were still fighting for the Soviet homeland on the front (and had thus avoided deportation) were demobilized and joined by the Tatar males deported from the Crimea in labour brigades in Siberia and the Urals region. Here they were forced to engage in labour in the harsh conditions of the lumber camps where the mortality rate from bitter climate and stressful work meant that thousands never again saw their families or their homeland on the Black Sea.

## The Crimean Tatar resettlement in Central Asia

There was considerable ambiguity in the West concerning the fate of the deported nations in the years following World War II. Little news of these peoples made its way out of the Soviet Union and Sovietoligists were forced to hypothesize when guessing as to their fate. In his work on Turkic languages, Nicholas Poppe, for example, wrote, 'No details with regard to the exact whereabouts or numbers of the Crimean Tatars are available'.[26] Most Western accounts simply made vague claims that the deported nations had been exiled to somewhere in 'Siberia' and very little effort was made to clear up the issue. It was only much later that news of the fate of the Crimean Tatars and other deported peoples made its way to those in the West and a picture of the Central Asian exile emerged.

Most deportees claim that those Crimean Tatars who were deposited in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were well treated by the indigenous populations, but these accounts stress the hostility of the Uzbeks in the first year or two in Uzbekistan. The NKVD had been active in the region prior to the deportations, spreading anti-Tatar propaganda against this 'nation of traitors' and it seems to have been particularly effective among the simple Uzbeks who had a deep distrust of outsiders. According to the testimony of a deportee, in some instances the Uzbeks stoned the already stricken Tatars when they arrived in the comparatively undeveloped countryside. The Crimean Tatar physicist and dissident, Rollan Kadiyev, claimed: 'I personally recall how we were met by the local inhabitants, who had been poisoned by Stalin's propaganda. One of the rocks hit me. I was still only a boy'.[27]

The Crimean Tatar dissident, Reshat Dzhemilev, wrote, 'People were dying in droves every day, from hunger, exhaustion, and the unaccustomed climate, but no one would help them bury their dead'. According to Dzhemilev, 'People died from the sharp changes in the climate and the unbearable work, from dystrophy and other illnesses, from cold and malnutrition in the absence of medical care, from nostalgia and from grief over the lost members of their family'.[28] All Crimean Tatar families have stories of lost family members that recall the horrible conditions this people encountered in their first two years in Central Asia. The following account given by one deportee is sadly typical:

> My niece, Menube Seyhislamova, with ten children, was deported with us. Her husband, who had been in the Soviet Army from the first day of the war, had been killed. And the family of this fallen soldier perished of hunger in exile in Uzbekistan. Only one little girl, Pera, remained alive, but she became a cripple as a result of the horror she had experienced and of hunger.
>
> Our men folk were at the front and there was no one to bury the dead. Corpses would lie for several days among the living. Adshigulsim Adzhimambetova's husband had been captured by the Fascists. Three children, a little girl and two boys, remained with her. This family was also starving just as we were. No one gave either material or moral help. As a result, first of all, the little girl died of hunger, then in one day, both the boys. Their mother could not move from starvation. Then the owner of the house threw the two children's' bodies onto the street, onto the side of the irrigation canal. Then some children, the Crimean Tatars, dug little graves and buried the poor little boys.
>
> Can one really tell it all? I have such a weight on my heart that it is difficult to remember all. Tell me why did they allow such horrors to happen?[29]

Tatar survivors of the deportation claim that after the first year or two the local Uzbeks did eventually come to the aid of the outsiders who had been dumped in their midst. In interviews I conducted in Tashkent with elderly deportees, they stressed the fact that the Uzbeks accepted the Crimean Tatars when the latter made a point of stressing their shared Islamic beliefs and traditions. The exiled Tatars in fact made a point of emphasizing the Muslim aspects of their culture and identity to open a dialogue with the local Uzbeks who had maintained much of the traditional, conservative religious traditions lost by the less religious, Europeanized Crimean Tatar population. Islam in effect provided a common

language of idioms, symbols and shared cultural norms that bridged the differences between these two peoples. Most interviewees also spoke of the generosity they encountered once the Uzbek villagers realized that most of the deportees were passive women and children who spoke a Turkic language similar to their own (the Crimean Tatar language is a hybrid of the *Oghuz* and *Kipchak* Turkic languages while Uzbek is *Kipchak*). The situation of the Crimean Tatar women and children in Central Asia also improved significantly when the war ended and many (although not all) Tatar soldiers were allowed to search out their families in the various places of exile. With the arrival of many of their fathers, sons, and brothers in 1946, this defenceless population had thousands of hardened war veterans to protect them from the abuse of NKVD soldiers and help them rebuild their lives in their places of exile. One Crimean Tatar recalled:

> In the first months in Uzbekistan after arrival more than 40,000 Crimean Tatars perished. A primary role in this was played by the circumstance that the local population received the exiles as their personal enemies. Anti-Tatar propaganda was spread among the peoples of Central Asia and the Crimean Tatars were pictured as traitors who had betrayed Central Asian men who were fighting for the Soviet *Rodina* on the front.
>
> A short time passed then the local population began to understand. Dozens of disabled soldiers without arms or legs, with medals clinking on their chests returned from the front and searched for their mothers, wives, and children but they were no longer in this world.... And then the Uzbeks understood that a monstrous injustice had taken place and they began to share their last scrap of *lepishka* (scone), their last handful of *kishmisha* or nuts.[30]

The establishment of a rapport with the indigenous Uzbek population certainly eased the situation of the deported Crimean Tatars. According to first hand accounts, some Crimean Tatars widows initially married Uzbek men who were Muslims like themselves (the war and labour camps had decimated the Tatar male population) and Crimean Tatar orphans were adopted by the local Uzbeks. If one believes Soviet mythologizing, this tradition of adopting orphans was in fact an Uzbek national characteristic. One Uzbek of the period, Sham Akhmudov, was reputed to have adopted 15 war orphans, and a massive statue to this socialist hero still dominates the square in front of Tashkent's Palace of the Friendship of Peoples. Establishing good relations with the indigenous Central Asian populations was not, however, the deportees' only concern. Upon arrival in Central Asia, the Crimean Tatars, who were considered to be traitors to the homeland by the state and its officials, were forced to live under a punitive, special settlement regime, in the so-called *spetsposelenie* settlements. These informal camps, which were run by the NKVD, are remembered with particular revulsion by the Tatars who lived in them. In interviews held in Uzbekistan, Crimean Tatars told of being woken before dawn for 12 hour workdays in the fields and factories, of Tatars who were sentenced to the labour camps for 25 years for leaving their restricted areas and the cruelty of the hated camp commandants. Living conditions in the settlements were abysmal. Most deportees lived in barracks, dug outs or simple mud brick dwellings during the

*spetsposelenie* years. As 'enemies of the people', the Crimean Tatars had no rights during this period and their group aspirations were reduced to one basic objective—survival.

This simple task was made all the more difficult by the Crimean Tatars' difficulties in adjusting to their new environment. The natural environment of Uzbekistan, with its blistering, dry summers, droughts and desert oasis conditions (except in the Fergana valley) differed markedly from that of the coastal Black Sea home of the Crimean Tatars. The majority of the Crimean Tatars had previously lived in the green mountains and foothills of the peninsula's *Yaila* (southern coastal mountain chain). The Crimean Tatars had to make considerable socioeconomic changes in order to adapt to this new environment and survive in its unfamiliar conditions, especially those settled in southern Uzbekistan from Jizak to Samarkand. Tatar farmers who had worked for centuries maintaining the specialized mountain irrigation canals of their forefathers (which had watered their coastal orchards) were now forced to work 12 hour days under the hot sun in Uzbekistan's 'cotton Gulag'. Moscow had turned much of the deserts of Central Asia into a vast, artificially irrigated cotton field and a class of *helots* had been provided to develop this region.

On the other hand, Crimean Tatars who had been settled in the Tashkent vicinity in such towns as Chircik, Angren, Gulistan and Yangi Yul or in the Fergana valley towns of Marghilan, Andijan, Namangan, and Fergana were forced to labour as menial workers in the many factories that had been evacuated to this region from the western Soviet Union during the German invasion. In an edict of May 1941, Stalin clearly ordered Uzbek officials to settle the 'special settlers' from the Crimea in *sovkhozes* (state farms), *kolkhozes* (collective farms) and factory settlements for 'utilization' in village agriculture and industry.[31] According to one source, 'The Crimean Tatars, to a considerable degree, satisfied the need for the speedy development of industry in the republics of Central Asia'.[32] Many Tatars suffered subsequent health problems from working in the pesticide coated cotton fields or as menial labourers in the unhealthy conditions of Uzbekistan's factories.

In their work on the Crimean Tatars, M. Guboglo and S. Chervonnaia write:

> In the places of 'special settlement' the Crimean Tatars were subjected to a special regime, the aim of which was the destruction of the traditional modes of production, which had been forged over the centuries by systems of life security among the Crimean Tatars. Prior to the war, in the Crimea, they were primarily involved in village production and were especially famous for their skill in gardening, in wine producing, and tobacco growing. In their new regions of inhabitation they were settled in barracks, communal housing, hurriedly constructed temporary shelters, and annexes located by factories, the Crimean Tatars, regardless of their previous means of occupation, were transferred to heavy labour in various spheres of industry. The roots of national distinction were cut to the root, permanently.[33]

The Crimean Tatars suffered in this alien land for 12 long years under the

commandant regime before they were released from the special settlements. With the death of Josef Stalin in 1953 the Soviet Union experienced a political thaw which directly impacted the punished peoples who had been deported to Central Asia. In an effort to rectify some of Stalin's greater injustices, new Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, lifted the special settlement regime and allowed the Crimean Tatar survivors to begin the process of reintegrating themselves into Soviet society in 1956. Khrushchev even went so far as to allow several of the deported groups to return to their reconstituted home republics in the following year. These included the bellicose Chechen and Ingush highlanders (who had begun an uncontrollable surge to their Caucasian homelands after the feared Stalin's death) the Kalmyks, Karachai, and Balkars.

Three national groups were, however, completely ignored in Khrushchev's amnesty decree releasing the deported nations from exile. These were the Volga Germans, the Crimean Tatars and a little known ethnic conglomeration that had been deported a few months after the Crimean Tatars from the Georgian SSR (although they had never even been accused of collaborating with the Nazis), the Meskhetian Turks. For reasons that were probably related to the importance of their lands, these three groups were ignored by Khrushchev and condemned to remain in Central Asia ... their exile was to be permanent. All three groups were forced to witness the joyous repatriation of the other deported nations to their homelands and to begin the process of rebuilding their lives in lands of the Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and Tajiks. Aleksandr Nekrich, the first Soviet historian to expose facts about the deportations, claimed that, 'If the Crimean Tatars had done as the Caucasians then did, had flooded back to the Crimea by the thousands, it is likely that they too would have won the restoration of their autonomous republic in the framework of the Ukrainian SSR'.[34] This statement, however, overlooks the fact that the Crimean Tatars were not a numerous warlike people like the Chechens and Ingush; their peninsular homeland was harder to access (the narrow entrance to the Crimea was easily controlled), and the distance to the Russian dominated Crimea greater. It became obvious to the scattered Crimean Tatar exiles that they could not force their way back to their distant homeland and must work within the system to regain the chance to return to their ancestral lands.

It was at this time that the Crimean Tatars began the task of rebuilding their shattered society and assessing the damage to their devastated nation. Their stoic resilience and determination to rebuild their lives 'from zero' as they describe it was summed up by one exile: 'The people did not lose their presence of mind. As the saying goes "the living think of life". Thus the Crimean Tatars gradually overcame the crushing disaster and horror and, step by step, included themselves in the work process, adapted to their new place and took to their surrounding living environment'.[35] Among the Crimean Tatars' first tasks was the uniting of splintered families and discovering which neighbours, friends and family members had been lost in this communal disaster. Crimean Tatar activists and the remnants of the pre-deportation leadership travelled throughout the settlements in Central Asia and conducted a self-census to ascertain the magnitude of the

damage to the nation in demographic terms. As the results were correlated, the enormity of the tragedy became strikingly apparent. According to Crimean Tatar sources (which are not necessarily definitive), a full 46 per cent of the Crimean Tatar people had been killed off in mass executions in the Crimea prior to the deportation, in the actual deportation and in the harsh early years of resettlement. Ann Sheehy and Bogdan Nahylo estimate that somewhere between 200,000 and 250,000 Crimean Tatars were involved in the deportations (including the males sent to Siberia and the Urals) and, according to the Crimean Tatars, 110,000, of these died in the process.[36] The Kremlin disputes these sources and, in a vivid testimony to the viciousness of the times, claims in its defence that 'only' 22 per cent of this nation died in the deportations.[37]

While the lack of accurate statistics covering this hidden atrocity prevents a conclusive calculation of the precise number of deaths, no one disputes the fact that this small nation suffered staggering losses in this operation. This tremendous injustice was covered up both domestically and abroad by propaganda which stressed the voluntary nature of the Crimean Tatars' transfer to Central Asia. M. A. Vyltsan claims that during the operations, the NKVD used the term '*pereselenie*' (resettlement) for internal consumption rather than '*izgnanie*' (deportation) which came into usage at a later date.[38] In his 1977 work which was translated into English for consumption abroad, Soviet linguist, M. I. Isayev wrote, 'the Crimean Tatar language is the mother tongue of the Turkic population that inhabited the Crimean peninsula and most of whom have currently resettled in the Uzbek SSR'.[39] The Crimean Tatars were not unique in experiencing heavy losses during this 'voluntary resettlement'. In his work on genocide in the Soviet Union, R. J. Rummel estimates that of the 1,600,000 members of the eight Soviet nations deported during the war, almost one in three (approximately 530,000) died, vividly demonstrating that the war-time deportation of Soviet nationalities was one of the best-kept examples of genocide in the twentieth century.[40]

For the surviving Crimean Tatars, Guboglo and Chervonnaia claim, 'It is apparent that the authorities planned on the Crimean Tatars being assimilated by the population of the Central Asian republics'.[41] Most scholars familiar with the Crimean Tatars' plight predicted that this scattered people, who had been deprived of their identity and homeland, would, in a generation, be assimilated in the Central Asian ethnic cauldron like many ethnic groups before them. The process of assimilation would, in theory, be facilitated by the fact that the language, customs and Islamic cultural identity of the indigenous Turco-Muslim population were closely related to that of the Crimean Tatars. In her excellent 1968 survey of the Crimean Tatars' history, Lemercier Quelquejay, for example, wrote "the Crimean Tatars are doomed to be assimilated by the peoples among whom they are now living. Thus a people with a long glorious and tragic past will disappear from history'.[42]

## The maintenance of group identity: the post-Stalin era

As is widely known, the Crimean Tatars did not of course lose their unique national identity in Central Asia and have maintained much of the characteristics of a distinct national group to this day in spite of the odds against them. This unique group phenomenon (which has been overlooked by the majority of works dealing with the durability and tenacity of national identities) is all the more impressive when one takes into consideration the fact that the Soviet Union put its considerable state resources to the task of destroying the very aspects of this people's communal identity that distinguished them as a national group. In the Crimean Tatars' homeland, for example, most traces of Tatar culture (village mosques, Muslim cemeteries, ancient Tatar place names, etc.) were eradicated. In Central Asia this dispersed people were not recognized as a distinct national group (they had no schooling, books or newspapers in their native language, for example) and Soviet censuses did not include the Crimean Tatars as a national group. In fact, without a homeland (the most basic of prerequisites for recognition as a distinct national group in the union of Soviet nations according to Stalin) the Crimean Tatars had been, for all intents and purposes, erased from the USSR's ethnic map.[43] An analysis of the ways in which the Crimean Tatar people sustained their national identity in the most unpropitious of circumstances is an interesting case study of the durability of the political phenomenon of nationalism. Such an analysis can also provide considerable insight into the ways in which national identity can unite and politically mobilize even small, fragmented ethnic groups.

In seeking to answer the question of how this exiled micro-nation preserved its national identity in Central Asia, many of the answers the author received pointed to the tremendous role of family in keeping a sense of 'Crimean Tatarness' alive.[44] It was the parents and grandparents who taught young Tatars who grew up in Central Asia how to make *cigborek* (half moon shaped meat pastries) and other examples of Tatar cuisine, kept traditional songs from the Crimea alive and instilled in succeeding generations a sense of identification with the Crimean Tatar people ... and a related sense of separateness from the surrounding peoples. The older generations kept the memory of 'The Deportation' alive as well and, in this fashion, perpetuated the communal memory of this great injustice to the Crimean Tatar people. Just as the post-Holocaust Jews kept the memory of this unparalleled atrocity alive as a primary marker of their identity, all Crimean Tatars could cite the 46 per cent deportation mortality statistic and retell stories of the deportation as if they had themselves experienced it. This sense of communal grievance played the same role in the eventual political mobilization of the Crimean Tatars that the Palestinians refugees' sense of injustice after their expulsion from their homeland in 1948 served in politicizing this previously unmobilized peasant population.

Ritualized narratives which expressed communal grievances and kept alive the memory of the injustices levelled on the people were passed on from generation to generation among the Crimean Tatars. In this fashion memories of 'The

Deportation' and the lost homeland (often described as the '*Yeshil Ada*' or Green Island) were kept alive in the minds of children and grandchildren of the deportees. The narratives of the deportation usually begin with an idealistic portrayal of the Crimea and home village prior to the deportations. The Crimean countryside is glorified and the political rights of the Crimean Tatars in 'their' republic described. The Crimean Tatars' loyalty during the war is stressed and the role of Nazi collaborators downplayed or completely ignored in the family stories. The narratives describe the horror of removal from the 'Eden' of the Crimea and seek to bring to life the true nature of the tragedy. All families have personal losses which are commemorated at this time. A grandmother who died of a heart attack on the trains, an uncle who was shot for refusing to leave a slow-moving relative, etc. The narratives provide graphic details of the hostility of the indigenous populations of Central Asia upon arrival and then speak of the shame which these populations felt when they realized that they had fallen for unjustified, anti-Tatar propaganda.

The deportation narratives stressed the loyalty the Crimean Tatars continued to feel towards the Soviet government in spite of the unfair treatment they received in the camps and afterwards. In proclaiming this loyalty, the archetypal hero of the deportation narrative was a young Tatar soldier who is wounded while heroically defending the Soviet homeland. After demobilization from the front, the decorated soldier searches for his young wife and children and finally finds their unmarked graves in a village inhabited by native Uzbeks. In the narratives, the local villagers are ashamed to convey this defender of the homeland to graves of his loved ones who they might have saved. The local population, however, compensates for their previous mistreatment of the deported Tatars by sharing their bread with the exiles and reaffirming the two peoples' shared sense of Islamic identity. The story ends with a reaffirmation of the Crimean Tatars' determination to regain the land which was unjustly taken from them and a vow to reclaim their ancestral homes in the 'Green Island' of the Crimea.

Most Crimean Tatars remember growing up in Central Asia with stories of the homeland and many recall having detailed mental images and imaginary 'maps' of a homeland most had never seen. In my visits to Crimean Tatar houses in Uzbekistan I noticed that Crimean Tatars often had pictures of the Crimea prominently displayed on their walls in an effort to provide a more tangible image of the cherished homeland. One Crimean Tatar who was born in Central Asia claimed, 'Around the family table, every day we talked about coming back here (to the Crimea). We were raised on the idea of motherland' and there is no doubt that the family played the primary role in preserving an imaginary territorial link to the Crimean *vatan* (Tatar, homeland).[45] Another source claimed, '... among the Crimean Tatars not a single action, great or small, took place during visits to houses among friends and acquaintances, during the entire deportation period, without recollections of the Crimea, of the land on which our parents, grandfathers and great grandfathers lived and worked'.[46]

There were also external factors that kept the Crimean Tatar national

identity alive during the half century of Central Asian exile and prevented this people from completely assimilating into the surrounding populations. Perhaps one of the most interesting reasons for the lack of assimilation involves overlooked differences between the Crimean Tatars and Central Asians. As stated earlier, the Crimean Tatars were among the Russian and Soviet empire's most Europeanized and nationally developed Muslim groups. While many Uzbek and Tajik men, for example, continued to don Muslim skull caps, wear *khalats* (the traditional robes of Central Asia), shave their heads, and grow beards (a traditional form of expressing Muslim identity) the Russified Crimean Tatars dressed much as the Russians did and, in many subtle ways, behaved much as the Russians.

In my interviews with Crimean Tatars who survived the deportation, most stress the relative backwardness of the Uzbeks and other Central Asians and, to many exiles, the deportation from the Crimea was more than a deportation from one continent to another, it was a trip back in time. Gavin Hambly described Soviet Central Asia as 'the most backward of all Muslim regions in the empire' and, to the Crimean Tatars who were settled among the suspicious Uzbeks, this was a truly alien land.[47] While veils, *kalems* (bride prices), polygamy, Muslim attire and many other patriarchal aspects of traditional Crimean life had long ago fallen into disuse among the Crimean Tatars, the old traditions of conservative Central Asian Islam continued in the *kishlaks* of Uzbekistan (especially in the Fergana valley) throughout the Soviet period. In her description of the social conditions of Uzbekistan during the 1960s Elizabeth Bacon wrote,

> Such Uzbek regions as Samarkand, Surkhan Darya, and Khiva appear to be as conservative as Tajikistan. In these regions polygamy is widespread, women cover their faces in the presence of men, and husbands often refuse to allow their wives to be treated by a male doctor. Even in Tashkent some *paranjas* (veils) are seen on the streets, while in Fergana, according to reports, active Party members often go into seclusion after marriage.[48]

These seemingly trivial societal differences between the Crimean Tatars and their new neighbours (whose cultural differences reflected many of the ancient traditions of the land in much the same as the Crimean Tatars' did) certainly contributed to their lack of assimilation once the exiles had been released from the special settlement regime. Similarly, while the hospitality of the Central Asians to guests is legendary, they and the Crimean Tatars also tend towards endogamy and this also contributed to the maintenance of Crimean Tatar national identity in Central Asia. After the initial years of the deportation, there was very little intermarriage between Uzbeks, Tajiks, Kazakhs and Kirghiz on the one hand and Crimean Tatars on the other, and this appears to have been a result of mutual traditions. As many threatened peoples do, the Crimean Tatars had an instinctive communal desire to preserve their community and prevent their sons and daughters from losing their identity through intermarriage with the indigenous peoples. For their part, the Tajiks and Uzbeks of the *mahallas* (traditional neighbourhood organizations) and villages of Central Asia also frowned on marriage with outsiders.

Other phenomena which contributed to the maintenance of Crimean Tatar identity included the regime's discrimination against the Crimean Tatars. Had the Crimean Tatars been given full political rights and recognition of their identity they might not have been so vigilant in actively defending their nationality. As in many areas of the world, Walker Connor points out that state sponsored attempts to suppress or eradicate national identities usually have the opposite effect and result in a defensive heightening of a people's sense of national identity. While it was possible to assimilate ethnic groups *prior* to the advent of the political phenomenon of nationalism, Connor claims, 'No examples of significant assimilation are offered which have taken place since the advent of the age of nationalism'.[49] In their places of exile, Crimean Tatar leaders actively encouraged their compatriots to maintain their identity according to Azade-Ayshe Rorlich. In Crimean Tatar journals and newspapers which began to be published in the 1960s, this author claims,

> Any signs of acculturation detrimental to the preservation of Crimean identity and culture are criticized and readers are warned in *Lenin Bayraghi* and *Yildiz* (Tatar periodicals) that national songs, instead of *meshchanskie* (petit bourgeois) [Russian] songs such as *Aravai* and *Limonchiki*, should grace happy occasions such as weddings'.[50]

## The long struggle to return home, 1967–87

While the Crimean Tatars did integrate themselves with surprising success into the socioeconomic environment in Central Asia, most did not come to consider this region to be their own homeland and a growing proportion of this nation began a determined struggle to return to the Crimea almost as soon as they were released from the special settlement regime. In spite of the fact that the Crimean Tatars appear to have learned the local Turkic languages within a relatively short time in their places of exile (those exiles who lived in Samarkand and Tajikistan also learned Tajik) and were able to rise above the surrounding host population in educational and economic terms, it soon became obvious that the vast majority of this nation refused to accept the central Asian republics as their permanent home.[51]

Beginning in 1956, the Crimean Tatars began a loyal petition drive in an effort to convince the central authorities to allow the Crimean Tatars to return to their reconstituted home republic (the Crimean ASSR had, in the Tatars' absence, been demoted to an *oblast* or district and transferred to the Ukrainian SSR in 1954). At one time or another it is estimated that practically all adult Crimean Tatars signed their names to petitions which were sent to Moscow during the 1950s and 1960s requesting the correction of the 'anti-Leninist' policies which forbade them from returning to their homeland. Although the 1956 amnesty had released the Crimean Tatars from the special settlement camps they were still forbidden to resettle in the Crimean *oblast* which had gradually been settled by Russians since the end of World War II and was now considered a valuable All-Union resort. While the Crimean Tatars had been granted token cultural

rights designed to mollify them, such as the right to publish a Crimean Tatar language newspaper known as *Lenin Bayragi* (Lenin's Banner), this hardly satisfied this people's desire to fully express their ethnonational identity or to live in their homeland once again.

As the years passed and the Soviet authorities continued to ignore the Crimean Tatars' requests for exculpation on the false charges of mass treason or allow the exiles to return to the Crimea, the Crimean Tatar youth of Uzbekistan in particular became radicalized and began to contemplate the unprecedented step of actively opposing the Soviet regime. The first step in this direction took place in Tashkent in 1962 when a group of Tatar youth organized an underground movement known as the 'Union of Crimean Tatar Youth'. The Uzbek authorities, however, reacted decisively to this development and broke up the group and arrested its leaders. In an interview with Izzet Khairov, one of the founding members of this group in Tashkent, this early activist bemusedly reminisced about these first attempts to politically organize the Tatars and claimed, 'We were young and enthusiastic ... but we soon discovered the real power of the KGB'.[52] The Crimean Tatars learned from this event and determined to never again officially organize themselves and thus offer the local Uzbek authorities an easy target for KGB arrests.

By the mid-1960s the Crimean Tatar 'Return to the Homeland' movement had grown into a mass-based, grass roots movement with a rotating membership that prevented the authorities from pin-pointing obvious leaders as targets for arrest. The petition drives continued with greater intensity and hundreds of Crimean Tatars were sent to Moscow to permanently lobby for the Crimean Tatars' rights. Crimean Tatar activist went throughout the tight-knit Tatar communities of Uzbekistan collecting donations from their countrymen to support their compatriots in their activities in Moscow. Although the Uzbek SSR authorities continued to arrest dozens of Crimean Tatars on charges of 'anti-Soviet hooliganism' it became increasingly obvious to Moscow that 'the Crimean Tatar problem' could not be solved by token measures.

In July of 1967, the Kremlin finally agreed to the unprecedented measure of meeting with a group of Crimean Tatar activists to discuss the Crimean Tatars' demands and, on September 1967, a decree was published in *Pravda Vostoka* (Truth of the East) and other Central Asia newspapers (but was kept out of the All-Union papers such as *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*) partially rehabilitating the Crimean Tatars. The decree exonerated the Crimean Tatars of the charges of mass collaboration with the Nazis over 20 years earlier but a careful reading of decree shows that it was a cynical, stop-gap measure designed to defuse the Crimean Tatar movement but not seriously address this long-suffering people's demands. The decree never used the word 'Crimean' Tatar, referring to them instead as 'the Tatars formerly living in the Crimea' and claimed that these Tatars (supposedly a sub-branch of the larger Tatar population on the Volga) had 'taken root' in the Uzbek and other Soviet republics.[53]

With the stroke of a pen, the Soviet authorities had skillfully eradicated the distinct territorial basis of the Crimean Tatars' ethnonym and had

delegitimized this people's unique geographic link to their home republic.[54] The Soviet authorities (many of whom were dedicated Communist 'internationalists' who believed that the Soviet nations were well on their way to merging and forming a united Soviet nation) certainly underestimated the Crimean Tatars' intense emotional bonds towards their more narrowly defined, 'primordial' homeland. The Kremlin was caught off guard when thousands of Crimean Tatars attempted to return to the Crimea in 1968 and local authorities in the Crimea were forced to (re)deport Tatar returnees from this area that was now considered too valuable to be returned to the Tatars. According to one account, the central authorities "may have calculated that, when it came to the point, few would be willing to give up their comfortable existence and good jobs in Central Asia to make the long journey back to the Crimea at their own expense'.[55]

Robert Kaiser claims 'National territory was for Stalin an empty container within which nations were created or destroyed through development or disappearance of their objective cultural features', and many Soviet planners, from Stalin to Gorbachev, seem to have similarly underestimated the strength of national identities and the links which 'root' these identities to an emotionally defined territory.[56] An in-depth understanding of the Crimean Tatar identity would have shown the Kremlin that its policies of nation building during the *korenizatsiia* ('rooting' or positive discrimination period of the 1920s) had been tremendously successful in completing the development of this people's national identity. Once a sense of national self-consciousness and related sense of attachment to the Crimea as this people's unique *vatan* (homeland) had emerged it was all but impossible to destroy it. An Uzbek official summed up the authorities' frustration with the Crimean Tatars' unwillingness to simply accept their places of exile as follows, 'Why cannot Uzbekistan be a homeland for representatives of all nationalities living here? Why do they consider that only the Crimean Peninsula is their homeland, and that it belongs only to them? The Soviet Union is the homeland of all Soviet nations and national groups. National boundaries within this common homeland are relative, and with the development of productive forces these boundaries can and should change'.[57]

In light of this intense feeling of national unity and continued identification with the Crimean peninsula as this people's only homeland, it is not surprising that the Crimean Tatars reacted to the deceptive 1967 decree with greater agitation and growing examples of civil disobedience and outright opposition to Soviet policies. The tension among the Crimean Tatar community of Central Asia came to a head in the year 1968, in the Uzbek city of Chirchik, located 30 kilometres to the north-east of Tashkent in the foot of the Chaktal mountains. Chirchik, a dreary industrial town in which a large Crimean Tatar population had been settled during the deportations, was typical of many of the Uzbek factory towns in which the Tatars found themselves after 1944.

According to witnesses, hundreds of Crimean Tatars from the neighbouring communities met in the central park of Chirchik to celebrate Lenin's 98th birthday on April 21 1968 (Lenin was seen as a supporter of Crimean Tatar nationhood and was adopted as a national hero by the exiled Tatars) and to

protest against continued attempts to prevent them from returning to the Crimea. Police forces reacted by attacking the protesters with poisonous spray, batons, high pressure hoses, and arresting more than 300 Crimean Tatars.[58] Crimean Tatar activists smuggled news of the attack to the West and, in this fashion, many in the West heard word of the Crimean Tatars for the first time in decades. The whole event was in fact a public relations coup for the Crimean Tatars and the first major post-World War II ethnic disturbance in the normally quiescent Central Asian republics (the next major national disturbance occurred 18 years later during the Alma Ata riots of 1986).

Similar outbreaks of violence also occurred among restive Tatar populations in the Uzbek cities of Bekabad, Andizhan, Fergana and in Tashkent proper during this period and there seemed to be no end in sight to the Crimean Tatars' agitation. The growing intensity of the Crimean Tatars' movement may have had to do with the government's increasing emphasis on calls for *slianiie* (the assimilation of ethnic groups) and *sblizheniie* (the merging of peoples into one 'Soviet' nation). As a people without a state-sanctioned homeland-republic, the Crimean Tatars felt themselves to be particularly vulnerable to losing their ethnonational identity through Sovietization (Russification in practice). Crimean Tatar activists became increasingly outspoken in their calls for a return to their Crimean homeland in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1969 during a May Day parade in Tashkent, for example, a group of bold Crimean Tatars unfurled a banner which read, 'The Crimean Tatars have been in exile for twenty five years—Communists! Return our people to their Homeland' and hundreds of Crimean Tatars began protesting at the trials of well known activists.[59] Writing at the time, Ronald Wixman and Enders Wimbush claimed, '... the Soviet leadership cannot help but fear that larger and politically more significant Muslim minorities, above all the Uzbeks, Azerbaidzhanis and Volga Tatars, may be affected by the example of the Crimean Tatars' and the Kremlin decided to act decisively against the most well known Crimean Tatar national activists.[60] Mustafa Dzhemilev, a young Tatar from the city of Yangi Yul (Tashkent vicinity) appeared as the most outspoken informal leader at this time and was sentenced to jail for several terms (in total 16 years). Dzhemilev's refusal to recant his demands for the Crimean Tatars' to return to their homeland despite several long sentences in the harsh Gulag won him the admiration of his community who gradually came to see him as a national symbol.

While the Soviet authorities did manage to decapitate the Crimean Tatar national movement through a series of arrests beginning in 1969, they realized that this people's aspirations could not be permanently muted by force. It was at this time that the Kremlin hit upon another solution that once again demonstrated its true lack of understanding of the real emotional link between a sacred home territory and a nation that considered itself to have been forged upon it. Beginning in the early 1980s, Soviet authorities began a project to create an ersatz homeland for the Crimean Tatars in two sparsely inhabited *raions* (administrative regions) in the dry steppe lands south of Samarkand. The undeveloped Mubarek and Baharistan *raions* located in the Qashdarya *oblast*

were selected as a region of special settlement for the Crimean Tatars in an attempt to divert their drive to return to the forbidden Crimea. According to Mustafa Dzhemilev, the Crimean Tatars who settled in the region were to receive schooling in their native tongue, were to be given prime administrative posts, would obtain preferential work treatment and would, in general, receive many of the benefits of state sponsored, positive discrimination (i.e. *korenizatsiia*) so long deprived them.[61] Uzbek authorities argued that much of the Crimean Tatars' national aspirations could in fact be filled in a new homeland to be known as the 'Mubarek republic'.

Crimean Tatar students graduating from Tashkent's Nizami Pedagogical Institute were in fact ordered to move to the region so as to receive their diplomas, and some Crimean Tatars who had been redeported from the Crimea were also settled in this region. An all-out effort was made to attract Crimean Tatars from throughout Central Asia to settle in the Mubarek, Baharistan region. Abdulla Balich, Vice Rector of the Nizami Institute, told the author that he, for example, was flown to the region and shown fully furnished houses, schools, administrative buildings, etc. waiting for Tatar settlement in the city of Mubarek. He was then ordered to convince Crimean Tatar graduates to move to this ghost town and fulfil their 'socialist duty' in developing this region.[62] This source claimed that he was, however, sceptical, for in his words, 'This was the Uzbeks' homeland, and they would certainly be displeased to see their lands carved up for the creation of a homeland for another people'.

The majority of the Crimean Tatars appear to have agreed with Balich and the Crimean Tatars began a series of protests, sit-ins at the Nizami and other institutes and marches designed to show their displeasure at the state's attempts to provide an unsatisfactory solution to their national problem. One Crimean Tatar *samizdat* (underground publication) source summed up the Crimean Tatars' scepticism claiming, 'They (the authorities) probably propose that Crimean Tatars, tempted by this "carrot", would throng to the Qarshi steppes having forgotten about their native land, where institutions of higher learning in the native land existed many centuries before they appeared in Russia'.[63] Dissident leader Mustafa Dzhemilev and other Tatar nationalists considered settlement in this region to be a betrayal of this people's desire to return to their native homeland and the few Tatars who moved to the Mubarek republic were criticized as traitors to the nation's cause. Dzhemilev summed up his people's disposition saying '... it was completely clear to all Crimean Tatars that they had the prospect to revive their national culture in their Homeland, and that only there could they survive as a distinct people'. 'For the Crimean Tatars, there was no Homeland other that the Crimea'.[64] Interestingly enough, when all was said and done, most Crimean Tatars considered the whole Mubarek republic project to have been nothing more than another scheme by the crafty Uzbekistan party boss, Sharaf Rashidov, to fleece Moscow of money for the development of a backward Uzbek region!

One can only speculate on the problems that would have arisen between the Uzbeks and Crimean Tatars in post-Soviet Uzbekistan if this exiled people had

indeed accepted some sort of autonomy on Uzbek soil. For the most part relations were in fact cordial between the common Uzbeks and Crimean Tatars, and the Mubarek scheme did not have the chance to damage this relationship. In my interviews in Uzbekistan, I found the Uzbeks to be sympathetic to the Crimean Tatars' plight and to have respected this people who were usually described as *trudoliubivy* (hard working). Although Uzbek party officials were known for clamping down on the Crimean Tatars' nationalist agitators some members of the Uzbek intelligentsia supported them. Uzbek writer, Temir Pulatov, for example, showed his support for the Crimean Tatars when writing:

> They (the Tatars) were able to survive with the understanding and sympathy of the native Uzbek and Kazakh populations which, in spite of the scorn and severity of the Stalinist officials, did not once in word or deed hurt the settlers, but made room for them not only at their hearths but on their land and territory. In spite of the total Stalinesque propaganda about the 'enemy of the people' and the 'nation of traitors', (our people) understood that the Crimean Tatars were first of all hard workers, honourable and that they, like the Uzbeks, work for their daily bread with the sweat of their brow.[65]

This *modus vivendi* with the native Uzbek population was, however, threatened by the Fergana valley events of 1989. In June of 1989, Uzbeks in the Fergana valley cities of Kuvasai, Margilan, Fergana and Kokand went on a rampage of violence which targeted another of the deported peoples forced to remain in exile, the Meskhetian Turks.[66] Scores of Meskhetians were killed in the violence, their homes were burnt and as many as 40,000 Meskhetians were hurriedly evacuated from the republic by the Soviet government with a tremendous loss of property. While relations between the Meskhetians and Uzbeks had not been as cordial as those between the Crimean Tatars and Uzbeks (the Meskhetians were often stereotyped as 'Caucasian mafiosi', for example) few expected such a savage outbreak of violence and a wave of panic swept over all non-Uzbek minorities in Uzbekistan. Although the Crimean Tatars were not directly targeted in the violence, Mustafa Dzhemilev told the author that a few members of his nation were killed by the Uzbek mobs and many Crimean Tatars fled the Fergana valley to escape the violence.[67] Another source on the Crimean Tatars claims that hundreds of Crimean Tatars' houses were set ablaze or robbed in the violence.[68]

Rumours were rife in Uzbekistan at this time that dates had been set for attacks on other outsiders including the Crimean Tatars, according to local newspapers.[69] While there had always been 'pull' operating in the Crimean Tatar community's desire to return to the Crimea, the Fergana valley events certainly provided a new 'push' factor in compelling many Crimean Tatars to consider leaving Uzbekistan. When asked what proportion of the Crimean Tatars wished to return to the Crimea in the aftermath of the Fergana valley events, Crimean Tatar representative Aider Kurkchi, for example, claimed, 'It used to be about three-quarters, but now it's practically all of them. After the events in Fergana, people don't believe that the authorities in Uzbekistan are capable of protecting them from possible pogroms'.[70] The newly established National Movement of

the Crimean Tatars and the equally recent Uzbek movement, Birlik (Unity), issued a joint appeal to the people of Uzbekistan appealing for calm in the aftermath of the tragic events; but this did not assuage many people's fears.[71] Several Crimean Tatar interviewees remember the rhyming chant that was heard in many parts of the Uzbek republic at this time, '*Russkii doloi, Tatarskii domoi, Koreetsii Hanoi*!' (Down with the Russians, home with the Tatars, and to Hanoi with the Koreans). For a people that had already experienced one mass displacement in the twentieth century, the prospects of another were indeed frightening.

Fortunately for the Crimean Tatars, Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) gave the Crimean Tatars a chance to openly express their desire to return to the Crimea. After a series of extraordinary demonstrations in Moscow's Red Square in 1987, in the Crimea and in the Krasnodar Krai (region) adjacent to the Crimean peninsula, the Kremlin finally granted the Crimean Tatars the right to return in a planned fashion to their cherished Crimean homeland. The permission to return to the Crimea came in a small article published on the front page of the Soviet Union's two major newspapers *Izvestiia* and *Pravda* on 24 November 1989. The article called the expulsion of the Crimean Tatars and other punished peoples from their homelands 'a barbaric act on the part of the Stalinist regime' and declared 'The USSR Supreme Soviet considers it necessary to take the relevant legislative steps for the unconditional restoration of the rights of all Soviet citizens subjected to persecution'.[72] The way was now paved for tens of thousands of Crimean Tatars to return to a distant homeland on the Black Sea that most had only heard about from a disappearing generation that had been uprooted from their homes 45 years earlier.

## The return to the homeland

Many of the Soviet Union's estimated 500,000 Crimean Tatars saw this moment as a historic window of opportunity that their parents had missed after the release from the special settlement camps in 1956 and quickly made preparations to return to the Crimea. Crimean Tatar activists went throughout the Crimean Tatar communities of Central Asia encouraging their compatriots to take advantage of the opportunity to return to the land of their fathers. Although officials were sent by the Crimean authorities to discourage repatriation to the largely Russified Crimea, these efforts could not dispel the euphoria that swept through the Crimean Tatar settlements in 1989 and 1990. The 'return' to the Crimean peninsula by tens of thousands of Crimean Tatars who had spent their entire lives in Central Asia offered a fascinating spectacle for political scientists, historians and anthropologists studying the phenomenon of mass nationalism.

While it is easy to interpret this event as an obvious manifestation of late twentieth century nationalism, I found it to be a more complex process. Many of those returning to the Crimea from Central Asia (a full 62.1 per cent) were city dwellers and the majority of this previously agrarian people appear to have

become urbanized during the exile period.[73] To many of those Crimean Tatars migrating to the Crimea, the 'Return to the Homeland' meant a move from life in an often dreary industrial, urban setting to the smaller cities of the often romanticized Crimean countryside which was also glamorized as the Soviet Union's premier resort. Many of those returning to the Crimea also intended to 'return' to the village or region of the Crimea from whence their parents or grandparents had been deported in 1944. To a certain extent this impulse was a holdover from this people's pre-nationalist, agrarian ties to the land which were passed down to new generations in stories of the fields of one's home village, the mountains of one's specific region, and so on. This desire to return to the *kucuk vatan* (little homeland), which had been described in detail as a paradise by the older generations, enforced this people's already powerful sense of linkage to their larger homeland which was defined in typically modern, nationalistic terms.

While one can debate the Crimean Tatars' motives for leaving a land where most had finally prospered and become socially integrated, few can argue as to the results. In the spring of 1987 there were a mere 17,400 Crimean Tatars in the Crimea. By June of 1991 the number had risen to 135,000, and by May of 1992, more than 173,000 had left Central Asia for the Crimean peninsula. By the end of 1993, between 240,000 and 250,000, or almost half of the Crimean Tatar nation, had returned to Crimea.[74] If it was NKVD transport trains, described as 'crematoria on wheels', that brought the Crimean Tatars to Central Asia, it was the trusty Soviet *Lada*, the automotive badge of success for most exiles, that carried the Crimean Tatars back to their homelands. Whole villages and extended families formed convoys of cars and returned to the Crimea on either the southern route (Turkmenistan-Caspian Sea ferry-Baku-Caucasus-Crimea) or the northern alternative across the plains of Kazakhstan and the northern Caucasus. The stories of cars being attacked by bandits in Kazakhstan, of heavy 'fines' being levied on Tatars by GAI (auto police) officials in Turkmenistan and of the general risks in moving across a crumbling empire with all one's possessions, demonstrate the courage and determination of the Tatar migrants to reach their homeland.

It is impossible to overestimate the sacrifices this people have made in returning to the Crimea to fulfill their dreams of once again living in their Crimean homeland. Most Crimean Tatars were forced to sell their houses in Central Asia at deflated prices and build primitive brick houses covered with corrugated roofs (usually on unwanted land in the Crimean countryside) in order to live in the peninsula. The following interview with a Crimean Tatar returnee is typical: 'Saniye, now 65, and her husband, Seidjalil Asanov, 71, left behind a six-room house in Tajikistan. "There was a garden, an orchard with grapes and figs, an aisle of flowers—it was so beautiful" she recalled. Now they live in a flimsy shack made of sheet metal, burlap and wood, surrounded by dust, mud and weeds; they couldn't be happier. "We're living in the homeland" she beamed'.[75]

By 1994 the pace of the migration had, however, tapered off for a number of

reasons, the most obvious being problems with integrating this large population into the Crimea. With a population of over two and a half million largely unwelcoming Russians and Ukrainians, there were very few jobs, almost no health care, constant anti-Tatar discrimination and poor living conditions in the Crimea. For many Crimean Tatar repatriates the idealized image of the Crimean homeland was dispelled by the harsh realities of attempting to find work in one's profession and trying to build a niche for one's family in a land where they were largely unwanted by the local Slavic population. Few Crimean Tatars have been able to settle in the Crimea's cities and most live in settlements built in the Crimea's countryside or in the outskirts of larger cities. The problems associated with de-urbanization have been particularly acute as the large number of Crimean Tatar white collar workers and intelligentsia (doctors, engineers, professors, teachers) are forced to sell goods in the market, grow their own food and build their own houses in the primitive squatter settlements surrounding the Crimea's cities. The Crimean Tatars' traditional agricultural skills had of course been lost when their roots to the Crimea were sundered and most have encountered problems readapting to the rural conditions in the land of their grandparents. While Crimean Tatar leaders were able to claim in 1989 that '99% of the Crimean Tatars were ready to move to the Crimea' most now admit that the poor social, political and material conditions in the Crimea have halted the return-migrations to the Crimea for the foreseeable future.[76]

The slowing pace of return to the Crimea was in part due to events surrounding the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The Soviet state initially intended to organize the repatriation of the Crimean Tatars in a planned fashion and intended to assist in the construction of housing, finding of employment and development of social and cultural infrastructures.[77] Financial and material resources were also promised to the Crimean Tatar repatriates from the Uzbek SSR, Tajik SSR, Russian Federation and the Ukrainian SSR. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the very state that had ironically done so much to destroy this people, the Crimean Tatars lost an important source of funding and many Crimean Tatars could not afford to return to the Crimea when hyper-inflation swept the post-Soviet republics in the early 1990s. When combined with first-hand reports of the dismal conditions awaiting Crimean Tatars in the Crimean peninsula, the depletion of people's life savings convinced approximately half of this nation to remain in their places of exile.

Those who have returned to the Crimea are still closely linked to their former places of exile and many aspects of Crimean Tatar society and culture have been drastically affected by this nation's half-century sojourn in Central Asia. At the time of the deportation, for example, the Crimean Tatar people had made great strides in coalescing around a distinct Crimean Tatar national identity but local sub-national regional, linguistic, identities were still present and important. A *Yaliboyu* Tatar was less likely to marry a *Nogai* than another Tatar from the coast, *Tats* still considered their dialect and culture to be superior to that of the *Nogais*, etc. These differences have been subsumed since the deportation and return. While Crimean Tatars are still aware of their original tribal-geographic

background and all can tell whether they are a *Tat*, *Yaliboyu* or *Nogai*, their contemporary identities are more shaped by their exile experience. Crimean Tatars who lived in Tashkent consider themselves to be cosmopolitan and talk of this great Central Asian city's restaurants, efficient subway system, museums and so forth. Those from Samarkand have a certain nostalgia for that city's *chaikhanas* (traditional tea shops), and longing for the soil which grew 'Uzbekistan's best grapes', etc. The Crimean Tatars who were settled in the Fergana valley speak of the mountains and rich piedmont soil, and those Crimean Tatars from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan have completely different geographic and cultural points of reference. Geographically based identities which were forged during the exile years are now more salient than the previous sub-ethnic identities which were forged over hundreds of years in the Crimea. A Tatar from Tashkent is, for example, more likely to hire a fellow *Tashkentli* (Tashkenter) on the basis of this shared background than a fellow *Tat* whose family lived in Dushanbe (Frunze), Tajikistan.

Talk in the primitive Crimean Tatar settlements is also laced with nostalgia for life in Uzbekistan. Crimean Tatars from the large 'Soviet' city of Tashkent (which has a Russified population that is roughly equal to that of the entire Crimea) miss its urban culture and amenities. Many Tatars from Tashkent were white collar workers who shopped in the city's massive stores such as *Detskii Mir* (Children's World), *GUM* (the State Universal Shopping Mall), or the colourful Charsou bazaar. These Sovietized Tatars spoke to their Russian, Uzbek and other colleagues in the *lingua Sovietica* of Russian and enjoyed the ballets at the Navoi theatre and have found that they miss life in a large city. It is also interesting to note that, while in the Crimea in the Fall of 1997, I ate at several Tatar restaurants with names like 'the *Markanda*' (the Samarkand) which served *laghman* (noodles), Uzbek-style *plov* (rice), *manty* (meat 'raviolis') and other examples of Uzbek cuisine which have now become a part of the Crimean Tatar diet.

Much of this nostalgia is certainly a reflection on the general post-Soviet longing for the financial and political security and stability that marked the Soviet Union from the 1960s to early 1980s, but it is also based on the truly stark position many of them find themselves in today. For most Crimean Tatars in the Crimea, the quality of housing, schooling and medical attention has declined and the repatriates have been socially, economically and politically marginalized in their own 'Zion'. Health standards have deteriorated dramatically and many Crimean Tatars live in small unfinished houses in settlements that lack electricity and water. Tatar men (the traditional providers in Muslim societies) frequently cannot find work; and divorce, which was previously unheard of in this culturally Muslim society, has begun to rise among the Crimean Tatars. Life is so harsh in the Crimea that some Crimean Tatars have actually been forced to return to Central Asia. Others have built crude houses in the Crimea (as a means for staking a claim to plots seized from the government) but continue to live in Central Asia and the Krasnodar Krai until conditions improve in the Crimea. The Tatar settlements are in fact filled with half finished houses that belong to Tatars who continue to live and work in Central Asia and elsewhere.

The position of those Crimean Tatars remaining in Central Asia is not much better than that of their kin in the Crimea according to Izzet Khairov, the representative of the Crimean Tatar *Mejlis* (parliament)which was created in the Crimea in 1991. According to Khairov, the wealthy Crimean Tatars have left for the Crimea and many of those who have remained in Central Asia suffer from the general post-Soviet economic collapse:

> Today (1995) in the Central Asia region there are close to 200,000 Crimean Tatars, among whom 140–160,000 continue to live in Uzbekistan, for the most part concentrated in the industrial regions of the republic. 70–80% of families are incomplete and divided (between Central Asia and the Crimea), the level of life among the average Crimean Tatar family in Uzbekistan is significantly lower (by 1.5 to 2 times) than in the Crimea. The level of those without work is however greater there (in the Crimea). In relation to the Crimean Tatars, the government institutions and organizations of Uzbekistan consider them to be minions (*vremenshchiky*), or at best, potential non-citizens of Uzbekistan. For this reason they are unable to better their living conditions or rise up the work ladder. Their poor financial position does not allow them to return to the homeland with their compatriots.[78]

The Crimean Tatar *Mejlis* fears that this half of their nation which remains scattered in its places of exile will not benefit from the national renaissance which is taking place among the compactly settled Tatar population of the Crimea. A 1995 declaration by the Crimean Tatar *Mejlis* in the Crimea warned of the threat of the 'complete degradation of the people' who remained in Central Asia without a Crimean Tatar press, schools or radio to help them sustain their identity.[79]

While in Uzbekistan I found this to be a very real threat as some urban Tatars in Tashkent (the largest centre of Crimean Tatar inhabitation) considered themselves to be 'internationalist' in the Soviet sense and unwilling to make the sacrifices necessary to maintain their national identity (most notably selling their apartments and moving to the Crimea). The Crimean Tatars have opened a cultural centre in Tashkent but it is difficult to imagine this having a considerable impact on the Tatars who are scattered in settlements throughout Central Asia. In addition, exiles who are forced to remain in Central Asia find themselves politically marginalized by the Crimean Tatar *Milli Mejlis* (People's Parliament) which focuses its activities on those Tatars who have returned to the Crimea. According to Chervonaia:

> ... the growing separation between the *Mejlis* of the Crimean Tatar people and that section of the Crimean Tatars which was unable to return to the Crimea prior to 1996 is reflected in its composition. Of the 33 members of the newly formed *Mejlis*, chosen by the third *Kurultay* (Congress) in 1996, only two live beyond the borders of the Crimea (Zevri Kurtbedinov from Tajikistan and Izzet Khairov from Uzbekistan). This in no way reflects the real proportion between the Crimean Tatar population in the Crimea and that beyond her borders.[80]

While it is difficult to make assumptions concerning the fate of this nation which now sees itself divided between the Central Asian diaspora and the Crimean

homeland, it is safe to make a few cautious predictions. That portion of the Crimean Tatar population compactly settled in the Crimean homeland will, for instance, certainly maintain and rebuild a much more dynamic and active national identity than the segment of the nation scattered throughout Central Asia. It is also safe to argue that, barring any reoccurrence of events similar to the 1989 Fergana valley pogroms, a sizeable portion of the Crimean Tatar nation will (by circumstance or by choice) remain in Central Asia, perhaps permanently. The most nationally active and energetic portion of the nation has of course migrated to its homeland, but many Crimean Tatars in Central Asia continue to identify with the Crimea and this may help them sustain a distinct national identity even if this population does lose its native language and many of its distinctive national traits. If history is any indication, that portion of the Crimean Tatar nation which does not migrate to the Crimea will, however, maintain at least some aspects of its communal identity and a sense of separateness from the surrounding Central Asian population. The Central Asian Crimean Tatar diaspora will also continue to maintain strong emotional, cultural and familial links to their ancestors' homeland on the distant coasts of the Black Sea even as they adapt to life in post-Soviet Central Asia.

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