

The Predicament of the Crimean Tatars, Past and Present

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Abstract

This article demonstrates how, with the rise of Russia as a major power in Caucasia and the Black Sea regions, the people of Crimea lost their independence and homeland. In the fifteenth century, two centuries after its conquest by a grandson of Genghis Khan, the Crimea came to house an independent Khanate. Inner struggles in the Khanate and its rivalry with the Genoese traders along the coast led to its vassaldom to the Ottomans. The rivalry that subsequently developed with Russia caused the contested regions to keep changing hands for the next two centuries. By the mid-seventeenth century, the Russians had gained considerable power throughout East Europe. The Russians' increasingly harsh policies and systematic dispossession encouraged the mass emigration of Tatars, who eventually found themselves a minority in their fatherland. The dispossession process ended with the deportation of the entire Tatar population from the Crimea in May 1944. Although the Tatars began returning to the Crimea in large numbers after the collapse of the Soviet Union, they met with a hostile reception and continued to be excluded from the ranks of government.

Keywords

Crimea, Tatars, Crimean Khanate, Russia, The Ottoman Empire

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In early 2014, Russian armed forces occupied the Crimea, and after a widely protested referendum, annexed it to the Russian Federation. This event evoked bitter memories for the Crimean Tatars, who had seen their homeland annexed by the same country 230 years earlier. The Russian occupation that began with that earlier invasion had resulted in a century-and-half of oppression and systematic attempts to eradicate their cultural and physical presence from the Crimean Peninsula. The oppressions had culminated in the mass deportation of the Crimean Tatar population in 1944, and resulted in the death of nearly half the deportees and a long exile for the survivors. It was only after the collapse of the Soviet Union that the Crimean Tatars were able to regain the land that provided them with their true national identity. Now that history appeared to be repeating itself, the Crimean Tatars were apprehensive about what the future would bring under renewed Russian domination. To better understand the current predicament of the Crimean Tatars and their reactions to it, as is the aim of this paper, it is necessary to review the long history of their relations with Russia, with an emphasis on the recent period after the annexation.

I

Batu Khan's Golden Horde first appeared in the Crimea in 1239. This group of around 30,000 troops was mostly Kipchak Turks (Bozkurt 2003: 66, Izmailov and Usmanov 2010: 94-5, Ishaqov 2010a: 18-20). During that time, the majority of the population in the Crimea consisted of Turks, who arrived there following the collapse of the Khazars (Bala 1952: 745). An independent Crimean Khanate was eventually founded in 1441 after the breakdown of the Empire of the Golden Horde. While the Crimean Khans strove to remain independent from the Golden Horde, they never gave up their claims to its heritage, including claims to the Russian principalities (İnalçık 1991: 1-2 and 2002: 450, Ishaqov 2010b: 121-23).

In an effort to take control of the Crimea, the Crimean Khans believed that they had to subdue the Genoese colonies on the Black Sea coast. The continuing conflict with the Genoese and the inner struggles for the throne caused some of the Crimean Tatars to ally with the Ottomans (İnalçık 1944: 192-93). The Ottomans captured Caffa and other Genoese colonies on the

coast in 1475, and as a consequence, the Khanate became part of the Ottoman Empire (İnalçık 1944: 204-07, 2002: 451 and 1991: 2, Fisher 1987: 9, 11). In the following centuries, the Khanate was a bulwark of the Ottoman Empire against Muscovy and Poland-Lithuania (Fisher 1987: 37-40).

II

The rivalry between the Ottomans and the Russians over the lands of Crimea still lay in the future, however. By the late fifteenth century, the Ottomans were continuing to give support to Russia and the Crimea against the faction of Poland-Lithuania and the Golden Horde, a policy that reversed the balance of power. The Crimean-Russian alliance gained the upper hand; as a result the Golden Horde collapsed (İnalçık 1991: 2-4, Ishaqov 2010b: 171-73).

It was the efforts of Muhammad Giray, Mengli Giray's successor, to dominate East Europe after the collapse of the Golden Horde that turned the Crimeans and Russians into rivals. He became involved in a protracted rivalry with Muscovy over the territories and patronage of the Golden Horde, including the Khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan. Muhammad Giray's early success ensured the enthronement of his brother Sahib Giray in Kazan in 1521. He also captured Astrakhan in 1522. Most importantly, he defeated the Muscovites and burnt the suburbs of their capital. But the Crimean successes came to an abrupt end when Muhammad Giray was killed by the Nogai tribesmen while returning from Astrakhan in 1523 (İnalçık 1948: 357 and 2002: 451, Fisher 1987: 40-4, Ishaqov 2010b: 173-75). Fortune did not turn again in the Crimeans' favor until Sahib Giray, accepted by the Ottomans as the new Khan, arrived in the peninsula in 1532. He captured Kazan and took Astrakhan with Ottoman assistance in 1549 (İnalçık 1993: 377-78).

This sudden growth in power aroused the suspicion of the Ottomans, however, and they prepared to replace Sahib Giray with Devlet Giray. Ivan IV, taking advantage of the resulting turmoil, moved against Kazan and, with masterful timing, captured it in 1552. Two years later he seized Astrakhan as well. Ivan IV could now proclaim himself to be the true heir of the Empire of the Golden Horde (İnalçık 1991: 5, 2002: 452, 1993: 378, Ishaqov 2010b: 176-77).

III

Halil İnalçık argues that these developments launched a new era in the history of East Europe. They signified the Crimeans' defeat in their rivalry with Muscovy for the control of the lands of the former Golden Horde and the steppes of East Europe (İnalçık 1948: 362-63). Despite this, after sabotaging an attempt to collaborate with the Ottomans to recapture Astrakhan (1569), Devlet Giray dared to launch a direct attack on Moscow in 1571 (İnalçık 1948: 372, 380-83 and 2002: 452, Fisher 1987: 44-5). He defeated the Russians and marched against Moscow, burning its outskirts, but failed in his main purpose: the recovery of Kazan and Astrakhan (İnalçık 1948: 388 and 2002: 452, Fisher 1987: 45).

Devlet Giray's successors, aware that they no longer had a chance to claim the patrimony of the Golden Horde, began to concern themselves with the countries to the west and east instead: Hungary, the Danubian principalities, Iran and the Caucasus. This choice proved to be a defining moment in the Khanate's political-administrative history, one that contributed to the gradual increase of the Crimean dependence on the Ottomans (İnalçık 1948: 391, 393-95, Fisher 1987: 45-6).

IV

Another critical historical development in the history of East Europe was the Russians' domination of its western portion in the mid-seventeenth century. Initially, however, it was their rivals, the Crimeans, that seemed to be on the brink of this achievement. The Khan Islam Giray III then marched upon the Christian powers and secured the alliance of Bohdan Khmelnytsky, head of the Ukrainian Cossacks on the Dnieper. Khmelnytsky proposed to establish a Cossack state in the Ukraine and offered allegiance to the Ottomans as their vassal. The Ottomans were unable to provide adequate support to İslam Giray however, entangled as they were in a crisis in Transylvania and in the Cretan campaign against the Venetians (1645-1669). This failure of the Ottomans to assist the Khan at such a critical juncture led him to bid for peace. Khmelnytsky, in his turn, came to an agreement with Russia, signing the agreement of Pereiaslav in 1654. As Halil İnalçık points out, this was the most critical historical development after the Russian invasion of the Khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan. The entire territory between the Baltic and the

Black Sea was now available to Russia, which quickly came to threaten the Khanate (*İnalçık 1991: 7-8 and 2002: 453*).

In 1686, Russia joined the Holy League and, in an effort to reach its long-sought goal of the Black Sea, attempted to take advantage of the retreat of the Ottomans in East Europe (*İnalçık 1991: 8-9, 14*). The Russians twice attempted to invade the Crimea in this period, but were still too weak to succeed, and unable in particular to surmount the logistical problems of the vast steppe (*İnalçık 1991: 10-12 and 1993: 392, Fisher 1987: 50*). A new period in the power balance began with the Treaty of Constantinople (1700). At that time, the Khanate became vulnerable to Russian attacks. The Tsar was no longer a vassal of the Crimean Khan, but came to be considered equal in rank to that of the Sultan. Payment of tribute and all the other signs of Russian vassaldom to the Khanate were abolished with the Treaty of Constantinople (*İnalçık 1991: 13-14 and 1993: 392*).

V

The eighteenth century saw the Russians exert increasing pressure on the Crimea. Their political goal was to eliminate the last stronghold of an enemy that for centuries had made it suffer through armed attacks and political subjugation. The fact that this enemy was an “infidel” also undermined Russia’s self-representation as the “Third Rome” (*Fisher 1987: 51*). Accordingly, the Russians managed in 1736 to breach the defenses at Perekop and attack Bahçesaray. The Khan’s palace was reduced to ashes, as were approximately two thousand houses. They continued their depredations over the next two years and, in 1739, secured the Azov castle in the Treaty of Belgrade (*İnalçık 2002: 453, Fisher 1987: 50*). But it was the war of 1768-1774 that proved disastrous for the Khanate when it was invaded in 1771. The resulting Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (21 July 1774), ended the war and signaled the Ottomans’ loss of the Crimea. The Khanate became an independent state, controlling the Crimea as well as the steppe between the Bug and the Kuban rivers (*Fisher 1987: 52-6, İnalçık 1991: 14 and 2002: 453*).

Alan Fisher has observed that “the independence of the Crimea during this period was no more than a sham perpetrated and perpetuated by the force of Russian arms. It was a transitional period between Ottoman suzerainty and Russian suzerainty” (*Fisher 1987: 69*). Shahin Giray, the new Khan,

attempted to embark on modernizing reforms, but only ended up provoking a series of revolts that were suppressed with the help of Russian arms. Using the opportunity provided by the last, most violent of these, Empress Catherine II put an end to the independent Crimean State in 1783, annexing the peninsula to Russia. Shahin Giray himself died in exile a few years later. Although the Ottomans undertook a new war in 1787 to save the Crimea, they were defeated again. As a result, in the Treaty of Jassi (1792), they were compelled to relinquish their claims to the entire territory up to the Dniester (Özenbaşı 2004: 16-25, Bozkurt 2003: 115, Fisher 1987: 59-69, İnalçık 2002: 454).

VI

Not long after the annexation of the Crimea, a local Russian-style government was established with the express aim of turning the region into an integral part of the Russian Empire—administratively, geographically, socially and demographically (Kırımlı 2002: 458, Fisher 1987: 73). Both the local and the central governments pursued a systematic policy to remove the Tatar Muslim population from the Crimea. This was firstly owing to the historic Russian animosity towards the Tatars. Russians saw their annexation of Crimea as an “act of vengeance” against the Tatars for having enslaved Russia for centuries, and the memory of the “Tatar Yoke” was enough to disperse any misgivings they might have had on account of their treatment of the descendants of the Golden Horde (Kreindler 1986: 388).

Secondly, the Russians regarded Tatars as a hindrance to the full Russification of the peninsula. They calculated that once free of this unwanted element, the Crimea, with its unique climate and huge economic and commercial potential, would enable them to reach toward Istanbul and the Mediterranean (İnalçık 1991: 14-15, Kırımlı 1996: 4-5, Özenbaşı 2004: 45, 47, Fisher 1987: 83-4). The Russians pressured the Crimean Tatars in every way imaginable. The result was a mass exodus to the Ottoman Empire, beginning after the annexation and lasting for around 150 years. This exodus had seven waves of migration: 1812, 1828-1829, 1860-1861, 1874, 1890 and 1902. About 1,800,000 Tatars abandoned the Crimea between 1783 and 1922. By the end of this demographic movement, the Tatars were a decided minority in the Crimea (Kırımlı 2002: 458 and 1996: 6-12, Fisher 1987: 93). Russian authorities also proceeded to root out the cultural

heritage the Tatars had built over centuries. Most place names were changed to imply that the Crimea was originally Christian-Orthodox, later invaded by the Muslims. They demolished or damaged buildings and monuments of historical import (Kırımlı 2002: 458, Fisher 1987: 94).

Despite all this ruthlessness, the Russians assumed a different attitude toward the Muslim *ulama*—the religious scholars. Since they knew that the *ulama* still had great influence over the Muslim Tatar population, they decided to use this group to maintain their control over the Tatars. As a result, the *ulama* was relatively unscathed during the Russian colonial administration (İnalçık 2002: 458, Fisher 1987: 77-8, 93, Kırımlı 1996: 14-17). Most of Tatar Muslim society, in contrast, suffered greatly from government policies. The *mirzas*, to begin with, were reduced in number because of emigration and Slavic colonization. They faced economic collapse when the appropriation of their lands, rights and privileges by the Russians cost them the major part of their wealth (Fisher 1987: 76, 84-5, 93, Kırımlı 1996: 12-13).

The prosperous Tatar urban class was also hard-hit by the Russian annexation. Their numbers were reduced, and they were found in important numbers only in Bahçesaray and Karasu Bazaar, now parochial towns in Russian Crimea. Slavs, Armenians and Greeks were settled in the other cities, leading to radical changes in their demography. The artisans and shopkeepers in the cities also found themselves unable to hold their ground in the new capitalist system, and were reduced to poverty. As the traditional life in Tatar cities disappeared, the Tatar urban classes found it increasingly hard to uphold their cultural heritage. After a hundred years of Russian hegemony, it was no longer possible to speak of the existence of a Tatar middle class or intellectuals on the peninsula. Although the end of the nineteenth century saw the reappearance of a Tatar urban class in Bahçesaray and Karasu Bazaar, it was not the same culturally as its predecessor (Fisher 1987: 89-90, Kırımlı 1996: 19-21 and 2002: 458-59, Kireççi and Tezcan 2014: 33).

The Tatar peasants also fled in large numbers from the difficulties they faced in the Crimea following the annexation, especially in the first two decades. An important source of these difficulties was that the Russians declared large patches of land, amounting to more than 10% of the peninsula, as state property and handed them to officials for free or very low prices. These new landlords, the *pomeschiks*, treated the Tatar peasants as squatters living

on their estates. Their consistent expropriation and exploitation forced the emigration of many peasants in the twenty years immediately following annexation. The Crimean War saw a further hardening in the attitudes of the Russian government, which made the Tatar peasants' situation even harder to bear. An anonymous chronicle written during the war recounts the cruelty of the Russians toward the Tatars; they were subjected to humiliations that had not been suffered by even the lowliest subjects of other states. As a result, the author notes, 30,000 Tatars had fled with all their livestock and grain to Gözleve (Keleş 2013: 72).

As if this were not enough, Tsar Alexander IV was led to believe that the Tatars treacherously served the British and the French who were Ottoman allies. In fact, as shown in detail by Russian scholar V. E. Vozgrin (1992: 322-24, 27, 29-30), the Tatars, owing to their isolation from their Turkish brethren elsewhere and to their spiritual lethargy (both the result of three quarters of a century of Russian domination), had fought against the foreign troops with loyalty to Russians. Nevertheless, this false intelligence, also spread by the newspapers in the capital, rendered the entire Tatar population suspect in the view of the Tsarist administration. In order to remove what he perceived as their threat, Alexander IV encouraged emigration at the end of the war. The general panic led to a much greater wave of migration than any before, with some 100,000 Tatars leaving the Crimea in 1860 and immediately after. The total population of the Crimean Peninsula was reduced by one third; by 1860, it was only 194,000. The Tatars were now a minority in their fatherland, making up only half of the population. As the damage to the peninsular economy and agriculture inflicted by this depopulation became clear to the *pomeschiks* and liberals, they persuaded the government to change course (Vozgrin 1992: 333-36, Kırımlı 1996: 5-6, 17-19 and 2002: 458, Özenbaşı 2004: 37-44, Fisher 1987: 88-91).

As a result, beginning from 1860, the Russian government required prospective emigrants to obtain expensive foreign-travel passports, and during periods of heavy emigration, stopped issuing passports altogether, prosecuting those caught trying to emigrate without valid documents. The Tsar also ordered the administration in the Crimea to accord the remaining Tatars good treatment, and a circular appeal was issued to address the Tatar population, requesting them to remain in Crimea and promising all kinds of

benefits in return. In the remaining decades of the 19th century, in order to prevent the considerable economic damage that would accrue from another mass migration like the one that followed the Crimean War, the authorities used various means to stop the emigration, ranging from persuasion to the use of force. One of these was to address the Tatar population through the regional Muslim spiritual assemblies, which complied with the government's request to proclaim that there was no reason to leave Russia. Another method was to appeal through newspapers printed in the Tatars' native language, which sought to convince readers of the dangers of emigration and the need to remain in Russia. Less peaceful methods included arresting and returning illegal emigrants, or even shooting them. These measures were far from soothing to the Tatars' apprehensions for the future, and given the presence of the welcoming Ottoman State nearby, with its promise of opportunities for lands and a new life, the flood of Tatar emigrants continued, reaching a peak in 1863 and continuing with waves in the tens of thousands in 1874, 1890 and 1902 (Meyer 2007: 16-20, 27-28).

VII

While this movement of mass migration continued, a new intellectual class emerged in the Crimea as a result of the new Russian schools that appeared in the reform period of 1861-77, spreading quickly thereafter. Before this, only the Muslim clergy emerged from the calamity of Russian occupation more or less intact; this group controlled the schools and madrasas. As secular subjects were excluded from their schools, the education they provided remained inadequate for holding one's own in the modern world (Kırımlı 1996: 21-6).

The most illustrious member of the rising Tatar educational intelligentsia was Ismail Gaspıralı (Gasprinsky 1851-1914). According to Gaspıralı, the entrenched conservatism and old-fashioned curriculum in the schools under the control of the Muslim clergy had to give way to the modern methods of education prevalent in Russian schools. He believed that the Crimean Tatars would be Russified unless new schools would impart them both their cultural heritage and the skills necessary for survival and success in the modern world (Kırımlı 2002: 469, Fisher 1987: 100-01). Accordingly, he encouraged the inclusion of Russian lessons and natural and social science courses in the curricula of Tatar schools. Not content with this, he carried his principles into practice, establishing his own school in Bahçesaray (1884), where

he presented a new method of education (*Usul-i Cedid*). Traditional Arabic courses in the Qur'an and Islamic law were accompanied in these schools by history, geography, and mathematics courses taught in Russian and Tatar. This novel approach met with resistance from the conservative sections of the Crimean Tatar society however, and it was a long time before it found general acceptance (Bozkurt 2004: 295-97, Fisher 1987: 101-03).

Gaspıralı also wanted to use his new method of education as an instrument to meld all the Turkic peoples in the Russian Empire into a single, modern Turkish nation. He was convinced that only this move would allow them to cope with the entangled social, economic and political issues they faced and to grow in power. A common ground for potential unity already existed in religion, language and culture. Only a modern, national system of education and a common form of literary Turkish was needed to realize it. Gaspıralı's new method was designed to respond to exactly such a need (Kırımlı 2002: 469, Saray 2001: 33-37, Devlet 2001: 59-62).

Despite his interest in educational reform, Gaspıralı discouraged his followers from putting up any political opposition to the Russian government, believing that there was little chance of success in such resistance. On the contrary, he emphasized and promoted the need for close collaboration between Russians and the Muslim peoples living in Russia. He refused to believe that there was any inconsistency between striving for reform and a common Tatar identity on the one hand, and getting along with the Russian government on the other (Lazzerini 1988: 157-66, Fischer 1987: 102-03).

Gaspıralı found a receptive audience for his ideas in the class of intellectuals who had received education in the new Russian-Tatar schools, primarily his own school and the Tatar Teachers' School in Akmescid. Although his ideas were not universally shared by these intellectuals, they gave importance to his views and he debated them heatedly (Fisher 1987: 103, Kırımlı 2002: 469). The new Russian-Tatar schools produced three successive generations of intellectuals. The first was comprised of supporters of Gaspıralı himself, those who wanted to remain within the Russian system and take part in the new political institutions together with the liberal section of the Russian society. The "Young Tatars" who followed this generation were of a more revolutionary bent, even though they accepted the necessity and general direction of Gaspıralı's reforms. They constituted the first modern political

Tatar movement until their dissolution as a group in 1910 by the Russian government (Fisher 1987: 104-07, Kıvrımlı 2002: 469 and 1996: 217-19). The third generation to emerge from the new schools, after 1907, came to be known as the Tatar nationalists. In 1908 they founded the “Crimean Student Society,” influenced by the example of the Young Turks. The following year they founded an offshoot, *Vatan*, promoting the establishment of an independent state in the Crimea (Fisher 1987: 104-07, Kıvrımlı 2002: 469 and 1996: 219-22, Kireççi and Tezcan 2014: 40).

The Tatar nationalists from these three groups took advantage of the upheavals following the two revolutions to establish an independent state, *Kırım Ahali Cumhuriyeti* (Crimean Democratic Republic), which successfully took control of much of the peninsula on 26 December 1917. The new state proved short-lived, however. Bolshevik marines in the port of Sebastopol quickly marched against Bahçesaray and Akmesjid and toppled the Crimean National Government, replacing it with a Bolshevik one in late January (Kıvrımlı 2002: 459-60).

VIII

The Bolshevik government, in turn, proved short-lived and was itself overthrown by the German army that entered the peninsula in accordance with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The new German-backed government had to resign five months later when Germany surrendered and withdrew its troops. In the years of civil war in Russia from January 1919 to late 1920 the Crimea kept changing hands between the Red and White Armies. Neither group tolerated the idea of Tatars ruling their own independent state (Kıvrımlı 2002: 460, Fisher 1997: 127-28). Finally, the Bolsheviks took control of the Crimea and the *Chekha* (Bolshevik secret police) proceeded to liquidate all their opponents in the peninsula. The six-month period from November 1920 to summer 1921 saw the purge of no fewer than 60,000 Tatars (Kıvrımlı 2002: 460, Fisher 1987: 132-33). The Tatars put up a staunch resistance, however, and neither side could score a decisive victory against the other. Their resistance caused the Bolshevik leadership of the Crimea to reverse its policies. The Tatars were cajoled by promises of national autonomy and representation in the government and the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) was founded on 18 October 1921 (Kıvrımlı 2002: 460, Fisher 1979: 187 and 1987: 133).

The period that followed under Veli İbrahim witnessed what was a “golden age” in hindsight for many Tatars. İbrahim initiated an energetic program of social, economic and cultural revival among the Tatars (Fisher 1987: 139-40). All this came to an abrupt end in 1928, when Moscow reacted harshly and, after charging İbrahim with “bourgeois nationalism,” executed him. His reform movement was discontinued after his death, and all his companions were dismissed from government positions (Kırımlı 2002: 459-60).

IX

Not content with toppling the İbrahim government, the Russians launched a campaign of brutal repression. The purges under Stalin in 1933 and 1939 involved wholesale liquidation of the Tatar *ulama* and intelligentsia (Fisher 1987: 145, Kırımlı 1994: 28-31). However, they represented only one part of the victimized Tatar population. About 40,000 Crimean Tatar peasants were banished to the Urals or Siberia during the time of collectivization, and they were also afflicted heavily by the famine of 1931-1933 that was triggered deliberately by Stalin’s policies (Kırımlı 2002: 461). By the end of the first twenty years of Bolshevik rule in the Crimea (1921-1941) about 170,000 Tatars—half the Tatar population in 1917—had been killed or exiled (Kırımlı 1994: 33). The attack on the Tatar community in general and Tatar intellectuals in particular was accompanied by an attack on Tatar Muslim culture, religion and customs, involving the conversion of the alphabet into Latin and Cyrillic, the destruction of Tatar historic monuments and books, and the demolition or repurposing of mosques (Fisher 1987: 144, 147, Kırımlı 2002: 461).

All these repressive measures were overshadowed, however, by those instituted after 1944: The Soviet army, arriving on the heels of the German troops, launched a regime of state terror against all Tatars remaining on the peninsula (Kırımlı 1994: 37, Fisher 1987: 162). Then, on the night of 17-18 May, one week after the issue of a decree of deportation signed by Stalin, the *Kara Gün* (Black Day), still commemorated by the Crimean Tatars, began. Villages and settlements were surrounded by mechanized infantry units. Wakened by the Soviet soldiers, the Tatars were granted only fifteen minutes to gather together whatever possessions they could carry with them. Thousands were beaten or shot on the spot in the process, and tight-knit families were divided, with all men sent to labor camps in Siberia, never to

see their families again. The terrified Crimean Tatars, around 190,000 in number, were transported at gunpoint to railway stations and loaded into cattle cars. The surviving deportees later recalled with horror the three or four weeks they spent on the trains on their way to Central Asia (especially Uzbekistan), the Urals or Siberia. In a ruthless “efficiency” closely resembling that of the deportation of Jews to Nazi concentration camps, the cars were crammed chock full. No regular supplies of water, food, or medical help were provided by the authorities, and the dismal conditions in the packed cars led to outbreaks of typhus and other deadly diseases. As a result, nearly eight thousand Tatars died of disease, hunger, thirst and fatigue in transit, mostly the very young and the very old. Particularly horrendous among the deportees’ memoirs were the accounts of sealed cars that could not be opened, and remained closed for the full duration of the journey. When the doors were forced open at the destinations, their occupants were all found dead from lack of food and water, and their bodies were simply dumped into ditches. Nor did the end of the journey mean the end of suffering. The main destination point was Tashkent, from which most of the Crimean Tatars were dispersed throughout Uzbekistan, ranging from the Fergana Valley in the north to the deserts of the barren Kashga Darya oblast in the south. Others were transported from the Crimea to the Sverdlovsk region in the Urals. In their new environment the deportees were deprived of most basic needs and forced to toil under a very heavy workload. Consequently, the subsequent few years saw the death of almost half of the deported Tatars (46%, 112,180), again nearly half of them (60,000) children. This high rate of mortality gives credence to the Crimean Tatars’ use of the term *jenosit* (genocide) to describe their mass deportation (Atmaca 2009: 226-31, 236, Dagdzhı 2008: 20-25, Kırımli 2002: 462, Fisher 1987: 170, Williams 2002: 332-335).

As a pretext for this crime against humanity, the Soviet government and academia alleged that the Crimean Tatars had made common cause with the German occupation forces. The German High Command, with the pragmatic aim of liberating a large part of the German troops stationed in the Crimea for action elsewhere, began to recruit troops among the Crimean Tatars. Some were won over by the cordial relations with the Crimean population that General Mandelstein established for this purpose. Many others had been captured while serving in the Red Army and were kept in prisoner-

of-war camps where disease and starvation caused soaring rates of mortality. They had little option when they were simply handed out German uniforms and told to join the army. Even the Karaim, a Turkic-Jewish group in the peninsula, served in the SS units, which evidences the use of compulsion in recruitment. As a result of these policies, a legion of Crimean Tatars was established, comprising eight battalions and 20,000 troops. This did not constitute a great number in comparison to the Volga Tatars (35,000) and other Caucasian peoples (110,000). In fact, it was the Slavs in the Crimea who had collaborated with the Germans in greatest numbers (Fisher 1987: 155-156, 158, Williams 2002: 327-328, 330-331).

In order to understand why a limited section of the Crimean population initially welcomed and collaborated with the German army, it should be considered that by 1941, when the Germans arrived, almost all Tatar politicians, officials and intellectuals had been banished or liquidated, and tens of thousands of Tatar peasants dispossessed, starved to death or deported. In all, nearly half of the Crimean Tatar population was killed or exiled, leaving them little ground to deplore the defeat of the Soviets. Their grievances were exacerbated by the wide-scale atrocities and massacres perpetrated by the retreating NKVD forces (the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) on the eve of the German occupation, indicating what would happen should the Bolsheviks return. Thus the Germans appeared as liberators to many Crimean Tatars when they entered the peninsula, not least because in World War I Germans had supported the political aspirations of the Tatars and other non-Russian peoples of the Soviet Union. This left a positive impression that lingered into the time of World War II (Kırımal 1994: 34-36, Fisher 1987: 149, 153, Williams 2002: 328).

Despite all this, there were more Crimean Tatars who joined the Partisans or remained in the Red Army than there were German collaborators. Thus, while 15-20,000 of the 95,000 Tatar combatants served the Germans, as many as 65,000 joined the Russians to fight, 12,000 in the resistance and the rest in the army. In fact, after the Russians it was the Crimean Tatars, rather than the much more populous Ukrainians, who constituted the largest proportion of partisans fighting against the Germans in the Crimea, making up 20 per cent of the local guerilla forces. Their numbers increased especially after the Germans started shipping thousands of Crimean Ta-

tars to work in Germany as forced laborers. Among the 65,000 Tatars who had remained loyal to the Russians almost half perished. Nearly 40% were granted orders and medals, including eight who earned the title of Hero of the Soviet Union and one, the pilot Ahmet Khan Sultam, who earned it twice. But even those who fought at the front or with the partisans or joined the communist underground were deported as soon as they returned to the Crimea (Fisher 1987: 160-62, Williams 2002: 329-331, Kreindler 1986: 391).

All this implies that the real motivations behind the deportation were different from those claimed initially. At first, Stalin intended to take advantage of the wartime confusion to purge the peninsula of its Tatar population. In doing this, he hoped to permanently Slavicize a region he deemed strategically indispensable on account of its climate, resources and location. In fact Stalin's actions in the Crimea were part of a more general policy launched in 1943, which entailed taking advantage of the wartime chaos to eliminate all the small national groups considered historical enemies of Russia or the Soviet Union. The general mistrust felt toward the Tatars and other Muslim nationalities of the Soviet Union enabled Stalin and his functionaries to magnify any pro-German act they undertook to accuse them of "mass national treason." A white stallion sent to Hitler by the people of Balkaria, for example, was misreported by zealous Soviet functionaries as being herds of Caucasian racers. Consequently a series of surprise operations was undertaken from 1943 to "cleanse" (a word actually used by Stalin in his orders) all non-Slavic, predominantly Islamic, nationalities in the Soviet Union's borderlands, all of whom were deported including elderly, women and children. The deportation of the Crimean Tatars themselves was the continuation of this series. Another motivation for Stalin's removal of all the Turkic peoples on the borders with Turkey was preparation for war. He planned to take over the Turkish Straits, to bolster Russian influence in Turkey, and to increase the Soviet military presence on the borders with Turkey to regain the provinces of Kars and Ardahan lost during World War I. Accordingly, he considered as potential obstacles all the Muslim groups living along the main military routes leading through the Caucasus to the Turkish frontier as well as those living on the Crimean Peninsula, the USSR's main naval bastion on the Black Sea (Kırımlı 2002: 462, Kırımlı 1994: 41-42, Fisher 1987: 168-70, Williams 2002: 331, Kreindler 1986: 391).

Once the Crimea was purged of its Tatar population, the Russian policies of the last century and a half culminated in the systemic destruction of all the remaining cultural and historic heritage. The very words “Crimean Tatar” remained forbidden as late as the second half of the 1980s. Brian Glyn Williams (2002: 336) speaks of this policy of “ethnocide” against the survivors, meaning “the eradication of an ethno-national group’s communal identity, spirit, collective memory, language, customs and history.” The Crimean Tatars were not only scattered across thousands of miles and throughout five Soviet republics, with no homeland to help preserve their national identity, but they were also deliberately deprived of the institutions granted to other Soviet ethnic groups to sustain their identity, like newspapers and schooling in their own language, and unlike other nationalities, denied positive discrimination in local management positions. All efforts of the Soviet bureaucracy were dedicated to annihilating the national identity of Crimean Tatars and to estrange them permanently from their homeland. Under these conditions, they were not expected to maintain their national identity or links to the Crimea for long (Williams 2002: 342).

Moreover, a systematic policy of “de-Tatarization” was pursued in the Crimea itself, targeting the eradication of all traces of the Tatar past on the peninsula. Nearly all the remaining buildings, monuments, and works of art were obliterated, down to village mosques and marble fountains, as were houses, vines, gardens, and cemeteries with their turban-capped tombstones. Written works met the same fate: All publications in the Crimean Tatar language, including those dating from the Soviet period, were collected from libraries in the Crimea and throughout the Soviet Union, and destroyed. Typographies were broken, and the Crimean Tatars, like the other deported nationalities, found themselves in the position of a non-literate society, although Crimean Tatar had been the language of a people who had already founded institutions of higher learning by the sixteenth century. The Tatar names of the cities, towns and villages on the peninsula were also replaced by new ones in Russian. The only exceptions were Bahçesaray and Canköy. Hundreds of thousands of Russians and Ukrainians were settled in the farms, houses and villages of the deportees; no less than 90 per cent of the Slavic population of the Crimea is estimated to have moved to the peninsula after the war. The Crimean ASSR ceased to exist, becoming an *oblast* in 1946, and eight years later it was granted as a “present” by Khrushchev to

the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (Kırımlı 2002: 462, Kırımlı 1994: 41-42, Fisher 1987: 168-74, Atmaca 2009: 231-35, Kreindler 1986: 393, Williams 2002: 342-343).

X

The exiled Tatars endured very hard living conditions in the twelve years following the 1944 deportation. They were forced to reside in special settlements surrounded by barbed wire, and subjected to severe restrictions of movement. Anybody who left his or her assigned region, even to visit family members in other camps, was immediately arrested and sentenced to five years of hard labor. In the settlements themselves they were woken before dawn for 12-hour workdays in fields and factories, under the supervision of hated camp commandants. Living conditions in these settlements were also dismal, most deportees living in barracks, dug-outs or simple brick huts. Added to this was the unaccustomed climate of Uzbekistan, with its dry summers and desert oasis conditions, so different from that of the Crimean Peninsula. Many Crimean Tatars also suffered and died from local diseases such as malaria, dysentery and other intestinal diseases, to which they had no resistance. Women and children were especially affected. Moreover, Crimean Tatar farmers found they were unable to continue their traditional craft on account of the dearth of cultivable soil in the arid lands of Uzbekistan, and were compelled to find work in mines, factories or cotton gulags. This period of compulsory residence in special settlements lasted at least until the death of Stalin in 1953, which brought a relative political thaw. His successor Nikita Khrushchev, in an effort to make up for some of the injustices perpetrated against the deported peoples in Central Asia, abolished the special settlement regime in 1956, removing the ban on travel and enabling the Crimean Tatars to begin reintegrating into society. Nevertheless, the effect of these concessions remained limited as the Crimean Tatars were excluded from Khrushchev's speech of rehabilitation in 1956 that covered most of the other peoples in exile. Consequently, they continued to be prevented from returning to their fatherland (Williams 2002: 338-340, Kırımlı 2002: 462, Fisher 1987: 174-75).

Seeing that they were still deprived of their basic rights, the Crimean Tatars proceeded to exploit the partial rescinding of the limitations imposed on their movement and publishing activities. They embarked on various activi-

ties to gain the right of rehabilitation and return to their homeland. They launched a newspaper in Crimean Tatar language in 1957 (*Lenin Bayraghy*) and a socio-literary review (*Yıldyz*) in 1980, while a special section dedicated to publications in Crimean Tatar was established in a publishing house in Tashkent. Despite this, the effects of the cultural destruction in the decade following 1944 were still evident, a situation not helped by the fact that Crimean Tatar failed to be restored as a medium of instruction. While in 1947 218 books had been published in Crimean Tatar, between 1944 and 1966 this number remained at 10. Eventually there was some recovery, with more than 60 books published between 1975 and 1980. In parallel to this cultural revitalization, a national movement emerged among the Crimean Tatars, which grew despite all obstacles and which secured popular support (Kırımlı 2002: 462-63, Fisher 1987: 175-77, Kreindler 1986: 398).

Edward Allworth sees in the Crimean Tatar case “some of the principal methods by which an ethnic group beleaguered and even persecuted may restore itself to vitality” (Allworth 1988: 7). He draws attention to the fact that only the Crimean Tatars themselves should be credited for their determination to survive and their resurrection as a nationality after they had almost been eradicated as a result of the nearly lethal Russian government policies targeting them. The interaction between these policies and the nationality’s collective reaction, Allworth states,

demonstrates strikingly the importance of both aggregate and individual determination to restore the group. This development provides the unusual spectacle of modern ethnic leadership undertaken without personal political ambition, of cultural and social institutions resourcefully adapted or created to replace those destroyed or withdrawn by politicians, and a persistent, open drive to communicate the group’s yearning for its civil and ethnic rights to the Soviet system’s power centers (1988: 7-8)

Isabelle Kreindler also makes reference to the unusual strength of the national identity of the Crimean Tatars in the former Soviet Union, despite the fact that they had been estranged from the Crimean peninsula, the only place that could provide that identity. She points out how, in a population estimated to be 500,000 at most, numerous petitions with 20,000, 60,000 and even 120,000 or more signatures could be gathered, demanding the right of return to the Crimea. Although professionally successful, socially

mobile and materially better-off than the surrounding population in their new abodes in Central Asia, the Crimean Tatars never gave up their aspirations to return to their homeland and kept pressuring the Soviet authorities to grant them that permission (Kreindler 1986: 398-399).

As a result of this well-organized pressure exerted by the Crimean Tatar National Movement on the Soviet power centers, a decree was issued on 9 September 1967, and the Crimean Tatars were rehabilitated partially (Dagdzhı 2008: 139-40). The rehabilitation fell short of Tatar hopes, however. What they had wanted was a public official statement declaring that they were completely rehabilitated, with the concomitant restoration of all their property and their right to return to their homeland, and the re-establishment of the Crimean ASSR. The decree denied the last two demands explicitly if secretly, as it did the existence of Crimean Tatar, as something distinct from Tatar nationality (Fisher 1987: 178-180, Kırımlı 2002: 463).

Seeing that their demands were only partially met, the Crimean Tatars persisted in their efforts to place pressure on the Soviet administration. Deceived by the vague expressions in the decree and not quite aware of the Russian state's reluctance to allow them entry, some Tatars attempted to return to the Crimea. They ended up being expelled by force, and the Tatar population in the Crimea remained below 10,000 until the latter half of the nineteen-eighties (Kırımlı 2002: 463, Fisher 1987: 180-81). Even the dead could not return, as illustrated by the fact that in June 1983 the funeral cortege of the great Tatar leader Mustafa Dzhemilev faced extraordinary resistance from the Soviet authorities to prevent it from reaching the Crimea (Kreindler 1986, 396).

XI

Things changed only after the policies of the Russian state were liberalized in the late 1980s through Gorbachev's *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*. By this time, the Tatars themselves were ready to take advantage of the opportunity at hand, thanks to decades of popular mobilization, legitimacy-building and rallying of support for the Crimean Tatar Nationalist Cause. They drew the attention of the world to their plight by organizing a four-day occupation of Red Square in July 1987, and then undertook a new mass exodus back to their homeland. Their decision was firm: to stay in the Crimea in the face of

staunch resistance from the authorities, despite all odds. Repatriation began in 1989, and as many as 200,000 Crimean Tatars moved to the peninsula within seven years. By the year 2000, the number of Tatars in the Crimea had risen to 260,000, roughly half of the total Crimean Tatar population living within the boundaries of the former Soviet Union (Kırım 2002: 464, Atmaca 2009: 243-44, Zaloznaya and Gerber 2012: 273).

The return of the Tatars caused great concern among the ethnic Russians and Ukrainians who had settled in the Crimean Peninsula after 1945 and who now feared being deprived of their properties. They reacted with hostility and discrimination—not least because they continued to believe in the false accusations of treachery levelled in the era of Stalin. The two monuments erected in Simferopol to commemorate the deportation, for example, were covered with spray-painted swastikas and anti-Tatar graffiti; this is only one example of the wide spread anti-Tatar vandalism in the Crimea targeting Crimean Tatar monuments, mosques and cemeteries. In an effort to anticipate any attempt on the part of the Tatars to gain autonomy, the Russian majority in the Crimea proceeded to found an Autonomous Republic of Crimea in 1991. The new local Crimean government adopted consistently antagonistic policies toward the Tatars and continued to try to prevent their repatriation, without success. By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, 20 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, nearly 300,000 Tatars had returned to the Crimea, where they make up around 12% of the population of the peninsula (2,200,000). They had to face many obstacles designed to prevent them from recovering their position in economic, social, educational, and cultural respects. The Soviet-era bureaucratic elite, who had deported back the Crimean Tatars returning illegally to the peninsula between 1960 and 1990, now ordered the destruction of the self-seized settlements of the repatriates, denied them the right to settle on the gracious southern coast, and did all they could to marginalize them in cultural, political and economic terms. Moreover, different standards of living between Central Asia and Ukraine meant that Tatars who sold their houses in the latter to return to the former were unable to acquire comparable housing in the peninsula. This discrepancy, coupled with the early post-Soviet inflation that wiped out the life savings of many Crimean Tatars, meant that by 2000 half of the Crimean Tatar population of the former Soviet Union found themselves unable to return to their homeland;

they continued to live in what they called “continuing exile,” while more than half of the Crimean Tatars who did return lacked permanent housing. They were compelled to live in squatter settlements that surrounded Crimean cities, made-up of simple brick houses covered by corrugated tin roofs. Seventy-two percent of these settlements had no running water, 97 percent had no gas, and 90 percent had no paved roads. Sixty percent of the repatriates were also unemployed. These difficulties did not deter the Crimean Tatars from staying, however, since they were motivated to return, not for economic reasons but for the sake of their national identity. Accordingly, they adapted quickly to the life of the local communities in many Crimean settlements, and made considerable headway in claiming their cultural and national rights. By 2010, they had their own governing bodies, and were represented in the Parliament of Ukraine in proportion to their population size. They also boasted several newspapers, a television channel and almost 20 schools providing instruction in the Crimean Tatar language (Kırımlı 2002: 464, Williams 2002: 345-347, Zaloznaya and Gerber 2012: 273-274, Speri 2014).

As Ukraine was immersed in turmoil at the beginning of 2014, the Russians invaded the Crimea. Subsequently, they organized a referendum in which most Crimean Tatars declined to take part. By the majority of votes the Crimea was annexed to the Russian Federation, while Ukraine rejected the *fait accompli*. The Tatars also refused to acknowledge the annexation, as they had still all-too-vivid memories of centuries of Russian repression. Vladimir Putin, the Russian President, responded by promises of rehabilitation and improvement of their conditions. He also declared Tatar Turkish, together with Russian and Ukrainian, as the official languages of the Crimea. The local authorities on the peninsula also promised to help preserve Tatar culture and religion, declaring that they would have a quota of 20% percent in government positions. Nevertheless, they made it known that that the Tatars would have to give up some of their lands in return for lands in other locations in the Crimea (Dyomkin 2014). Whether the authorities will indeed keep these promises or prevaricate as they did after 1783 remains an open question.

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Kırım Tatarlarının Geçmişteki ve Günümüzdeki Çıkmazları

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Öz

Bu makale, Kafkasya ve Karadeniz bölgelerinde Rusya'nın önemli bir güç olarak yükselmesiyle birlikte, Kırımlıların nasıl bağımsızlıklarını ve vatanlarını yitirdiklerini ortaya koymaktadır. Cengiz Han'ın bir torunu tarafından 13. yüzyılda fethedilmesinden sonra, Kırım bağımsız bir Hanlık oldu. Yarımada yerleşik Cenevizli tacirlerle çatışmalar ve iç çekişmeler sonucunda Hanlık Osmanlı tabiiyetine girdi. Rusya ile girilen rekabet, iki yüzyıl boyunca iniş çıkışlarla devam etti. 17. yüzyılın başlarında, Ruslar Doğu Avrupa'da hatırı sayılır bir güç haline gelmişlerdi. Hanlığı 18. yüzyılın sonlarına kadar sıkıştırdıktan sonra Kırım'ı ilhak ederek varlığına son verdiler. Giderek daha sertleşen politikalar ve sistematik mülksüzleştirme sonucunda Tatarlar kitleler halinde göç etmek zorunda kaldılar ve zamanla kendi memleketlerinde azınlık durumuna düştüler. Bu durum 1944'te yarımada'daki tüm Tatarların tehciriyle sonuçlandı. Her ne kadar Tatarlar Sovyetler Birliği'nin çöküşünden sonra büyük sayılarla Kırım'a dönmeye başladılarsa da iyi karşılanmadılar ve idari pozisyonlardan dışlanmaya devam ettiler.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Kırım, Tatarlar, Kırım Hanlığı, Rusya, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu

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Прошлое и настоящее состояние Крымских татар

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Аннотация

В данной статье рассматривается как Крымцы потеряли свою независимость и Родину, и развития России как основная движущая сила, в регионах Кавказа и Черного моря. После завоевания Чингисхана в 13-м веке внуком, Крым стал независимым ханством. В результате конфликтов с генуэзских купцов, поселившие на полуострове, внутренних раздоров Крымское ханство вошло в состав Османской Империи. Конкуренция с Россией продолжалась в течение двух столетий, с ростом и падением. В начале 17-го века, русские стали значительной силой в Восточной Европе. До конце 18-го века завоевывая ханство положили конец существованию. В результате упроченной политики и экспроприации Татары были вынуждены мигрировать в массовом порядке, и со временем они становились меньшинством в своей собственной стране. Это привело к депортацию всех татар полуостра в 1944 году. Хотя татары, после распада Советского Союза, стали возвращаться в Крым в больших количествах, их не встречали с теплотой, и даже стали исключить из административных должностей.

Ключевые слова

Крым, татары, Крымское ханство, Россия, Османская Империя

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