FROM SÜRGÜN TO VATAN: ETHNIC IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND THE REPATRIATION PROCESSES OF THE CRIMEAN TATARS AND THE MESKHETIAN TURKS

by

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B.A. (Hon), Carleton University, 2003

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Political Science

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

December 2005

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Abstract

The Crimean Tatars and Meskhetian Turks are former-Soviet ethnic groups who were deported en masse by the Stalinist regime in 1944, from present-day Ukraine and Georgia to Central Asia. Even after Stalin's death and the official acknowledgement of the harm caused by their deportation, neither group was allowed to return to its homeland. Today, both groups are struggling to repatriate to regions of independent post-Soviet states, the Crimean Tatars to the Crimean peninsula in Ukraine, and the Meskhetian Turks to the Meskheti-Javakheti or Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia. Both regions contain a regional majority, a minority at the state level – Russians in the Crimea, and Armenians in Javakheti – which is hostile to the return of the deported group.

Despite remarkable parallels between the experiences of the two groups, the Crimean Tatars have been relatively successful in returning to their homeland, whereas the Meskhetian Turks' repatriation movement has largely failed. Using a constructivist (or social constructionist) approach, this paper examines the role played by ethnic identity construction in the repatriation movements of the two groups. Ethnic identity construction is examined with respect to the deported groups and the regional majorities, as well as the state-level identities of Ukraine and Georgia, and is shown to account for the differential results experienced by the Crimean Tatars and Meskhetian Turks. The nature of ethnic identity is revealed as a dialogue between internal and external factors, with the role of the state emerging as a significant external factor in both cases.
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List of Abbreviations

AO  Autonomous Region (Okrug)
ARF  Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutiun)
ASSR  Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
CIDP  Crimean Integration and Development Programme
CIS  Commonwealth of Independent States
CPSU  Communist Party of the Soviet Union
HW  Helsinki Watch
ICC  International Committee for Crimea
IDP  Internally displaced person
IOM  International Organisation for Migration
IWPR  Institute for War and Peace Reporting
MVD  Ministry of Internal Affairs (Ministerstvo Vnutrennikh Del)
NDKT  National Movement of the Crimean Tatars
NGO  Nongovernmental organisation
NKVD  People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del)
OKND  Organisation of the Crimean Tatar National Movement
OSCE  Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
RSFSR  Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
SSR  Soviet Socialist Republic
UNHCR  United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom for her guidance and encouragement. Additionally, I wish to acknowledge the contribution of my many colleagues in the UBC political science graduate program, who have both inspired me with their own achievements, and supported me in my work.

On a more personal note, I would especially like to thank my partner, Jordan McTavish, for his patience and support throughout this endeavour.
Introduction

In 1944, Josef Stalin ordered a wave of mass deportations from various border regions of the USSR. The groups were ethnically defined, and were deported en masse from their home territories to various destinations in Central Asia and Siberia. Most were accused of collaboration with the Nazis, but many were deported in what can only be described as a preemptive fashion, ostensibly with the assumption that collaboration was possible between the national group and a current or future enemy.

This paper examines the Crimean Tatars and the Meskhetian Turks, two of the deported peoples who, even after Stalin’s death and the official acknowledgement of their innocence of wrongdoing, were never allowed to return to their homes. Today, both groups are struggling to repatriate to regions of independent post-Soviet states, the Crimean Tatars to the Crimean peninsula in Ukraine, and the Meskhetian Turks to the Meskheti-Javakheti or Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia. The repatriation process is, in both cases, hampered by low-level ethnic conflict.¹ Both regions contain a regional majority, which is a minority at the state level – Russians in the Crimea, and Armenians in Javakheti – and which is hostile to the return of the deported group.

Both regional majorities have come into conflict, since independence, with their respective state governments, and both the Russians and Armenians have attempted, with varying success, to secure regional autonomy for themselves, based on their status as numerical majorities, without reference to the deported peoples and their claims. In this atmosphere, the central governments of Georgia and Ukraine have seen both the utility and risk of repatriating the deported groups. They present an opportunity to dilute the

¹ Low-level ethnic conflict refers to ethnic tensions and hostility short of intercommunal violence.
regional majorities and their power with a loyal, indebted regional minority, but also threaten to destabilize the regions by creating new ethnic conflict and internal and external security risks.

Despite the remarkable similarity of these two cases, over 250,000 Crimean Tatars have managed to resettle in the Crimea to date, approximately half of the total population of the group, while almost no Meskhetian Turks have successfully returned to the region from which they were deported. This outcome is puzzling given the current economic and geopolitical situation of both states today, the similar plights of both groups, and similar international concern regarding their repatriation.

The primary difference between the two cases lies in the way in which ethnic identities of the deported groups and the regional majorities, as well as the state-level identities of Ukraine and Georgia, have been constructed and reconstructed. First, while the Crimean Tatars' ethnogenesis is subject to little dispute, that of the Meskhetian Turks is frequently called into question, both by the group itself and others. Since ethnogenesis is highly politicized in the post-Soviet region, and greatly influences the arguments on both sides of the repatriation issue, the ambiguity that has resulted from the various reconstructions of the Meskhetians' ethnic identity has acted as a barrier to their return to their home region.

Second, Ukraine, with its substantial Russian minority, largely concentrated in the south and east of the country, has had to envision citizenship based on residence, rather than ethnicity. While Ukrainian language and culture have experienced a renaissance, especially in Western Ukraine, exactly what it means to be Ukrainian is still a matter of contention. In contrast, Georgians form a strong majority in Georgia. While there are
many ethnic and religious minorities in that state, none form a percentage comparable to that of the Russians in Ukraine. In addition, Georgia has seen multiple ethnic conflicts since its independence, most notably the violent secessions of de facto independent South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and the temporary loss of control over Muslim-Georgian Ajaria, under local strongman Aslan Abashidze. Georgia also contends with an Azerbaijani majority in the Merneuli region, near the border with Azerbaijan, and a majority Armenian population in the region of Javakheti, which borders Armenia.\(^2\) While these regions are largely peaceful, the central government retains little, if any, real control over them. Ethnic conflicts (with local Georgians) do simmer, and occasional calls for autonomy make the Georgian government wary of potential new secessionist movements. Regardless of the validity of their concerns, Georgians have come to feel that ‘their’ territory is being overrun by minorities. This sentiment was encouraged by the first president of the new republic, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, a Georgian nationalist known for his “hosts and guests” stance on minorities, indigenous or otherwise. Unlike Ukraine, official Georgia has not promoted an inclusive approach to citizenship, a stance which appears to resonate with the general population as well as the intelligentsia. Policies tend to reflect this outlook; minorities are still encouraged to ‘Georgianise’ their surnames, for example.

Third, the construction of the regional majority’s ethnic identity (by the regional majority itself) is similar in both cases (under siege by the oppressive majority, victimized by new state borders, and fully entitled to the lands they inhabit). Both Russians and Armenians fear the loss of their homes and land to the people from whom it

\(^2\) Large Armenian communities also exist in Abkhazia and in the capital city of Tbilisi, which once had an Armenian majority.
was originally confiscated. However, the animosity felt by Armenians toward the Meskhetian Turks is arguably exaggerated and encouraged by the Georgian government, and is no greater than the animosity felt by Georgians toward the potential returnees.

These identity (re)constructions, based largely on the selective use of history, have allowed opponents of the Meskhetian Turks’ repatriation to argue against the viability of the process, and have divided the Meskhetian Turks themselves. In short, the Meskhetians have had to contend with controversy regarding their ethnic identity by the Georgian majority, as well as questioning by the Meskhetian Turks themselves; a home state whose national identity is formulated largely around the primacy of the titular majority (and threats to its integrity by minorities), and a regional majority whose hostility is capitalised upon by the Georgian state.

In comparison, the Crimean Tatars, whose plight should not be understated, have nevertheless faced a home state whose concept of citizenship is necessarily broad, a largely uncontroversial ethnic identity, and a regional majority whose opposition to repatriation has not been exploited by the state.

While the repatriated Crimean Tatars face considerable difficulties, their presence on the territory they claim as their homeland has at least resulted in a degree of inclusion in the Ukrainian political process. The Meskhetian Turks, on the other hand, have virtually no political voice in Georgia, and remain politically fractured in their various temporary host states. The relative difficulties of the Meskhetian Turks in repatriating to their homeland can be largely attributed to the ethnic identity construction process, which ultimately casts sufficient doubt on their ‘right’ to return to the region.
This paper will address ethnic identity formation from a constructivist perspective, since constructivism best enables us to view identity formation as a dialogue, a conversation between dominant and subordinate groups, historians and politicians, the past and the present, material interests and deeply-held beliefs.

An examination of these case studies will suggest that the process of ethnic identity formation is a phenomenon in need of serious attention and study even when protracted ethnic conflict is not occurring or imminent. The repatriation of deported groups is an issue with relevance elsewhere in the post-Soviet space, and an understanding of how ethnic identity – and not just geopolitical and economic concerns – affect the prospects of return should provide interested international parties, home states and deported groups with insight into what might otherwise be an unexpected barrier to successful policy implementation.
Chapter 1: Ethnic Identity

The social scientific study of ethnicity has largely focused on possible explanations of ethnic conflict, due to its pervasiveness in world affairs. As Donald L. Horowitz colourfully suggests, “Ethnicity has fought and bled and burned its way into public and scholarly consciousness” (1985: xi). While ethnicity has often been mobilised in violent forms, it also manifests itself in the ethnic organisation of political parties and trade unions, demands for cultural or political autonomy, and ethnically based competition for scarce resources (Horowitz 1985: 3-4).

This chapter provides an overview of the nature of ethnic identity and its construction. It draws on scholars from disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, and political science, showing where these approaches converge and diverge with respect to identity construction, and addresses the unique nature of the exile experience and the Soviet and former Soviet political context.

Ethnic Group, Nation and Nationalism

Anthropologist Fredrik Barth suggests that the ‘ideal-type’ ethnic group is “largely biologically self-perpetuating” and shares “fundamental cultural values, realized in overt unity in cultural forms”. It “makes up a field of communication and interaction”, and its members are identified, both by themselves and others, “as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order” (1969: 10-11). From their inception, the terms ‘ethnicity’ and ‘nation’ have denoted a process of ‘othering,’ of drawing a boundary between one’s group and those beyond its purview.

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3 As Lars-Erik Cederman notes, “most of our knowledge of nationalism and ethnicity stems from academic writings located entirely outside political science.” (Cederman 2002: 409)
The word ‘ethnic’ is from the ancient Greek word *ethnikos*, meaning a pagan or a heathen... On the Roman side, the term *natio*, meaning a breed, a stock or race, usually referred to foreigners as opposed to citizens (of Rome) who were ‘civilised’ or organised people. Only later did ‘nation’ come to mean a distinct group of people characterized by a common descent, language or history. (McCrone 1998: 24)

From the mid-nineteenth century, a variety of derived words, such as ethnology and ethnography, have been used in the English-speaking scientific community, but these notions were “built around the discourse for ‘race’," for which ‘ethnos’ would have been no more than a redundant synonym” (Chapman 1993: 19). The word ‘ethnicity’ appeared in the social sciences relatively recently, with the first use of the term attributed either to Lloyd Warner in 1941 or David Riesman in 1953 (McCrone 1998: 23-24).

The word ‘nation’ has a much richer legacy in philosophy and the social sciences. E. H. Carr evoked the ‘natural’ and ‘universal’ quality of nations and national attachments (qtd. in Deutsch 1966: 27). Josef Stalin offered the following definition: “A nation is a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture” (qtd. in Hobsbawm 1992: 5n). Hobsbawm takes issue with the use of such ostensibly objective criteria to define nations, suggesting that

the criteria used for this purpose – language, ethnicity or whatever – are themselves fuzzy, shifting and ambiguous, and as useless for purposes of the traveler’s orientation as cloud-shapes are compared to landmarks. This, of course, makes them unusually convenient for propagandist and programmatic, as distinct from descriptive purposes. (Hobsbawm 1992: 6)

He suggests, however, that the alternative is equally dubious. “[D]efining a nation by its members’ consciousness of belonging to it is tautological and provides only an a posteriori guide to what a nation is” (Hobsbawm 1992: 6).

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4 Chapman notes the more recent “banishment of ‘race’ from the centre of the discourse”, and describes ‘ethnicity’ as “‘race’ after an attempt to take the biology out” (1993: 21).
The distinction between ethnic group and nation is far from clear in the literature. The two are sometimes seen as synonymous, and when they are viewed as separate concepts, various justifications are given. Vamik Volkan, for instance, suggests that institutions, such as borders or political status, separate nations from ethnic groups (1997: 23). ‘Nationalism’, however, is delineated from ethnicity by its political purpose. David Brown stresses the active/passive distinction between ethnic identity and nationalism.

Ethnic identity may in some circumstances be taken for granted by those concerned, and need not necessarily generate claims to political rights. But once it is actively and self-consciously mobilised in order to legitimate claims that the ethnic community has some rights of self-determination, then ethnicity has become transformed into nationalism. (Brown 2000: 6-7)

Nationalist ideologies, according to Anthony D. Smith, have clearly defined goals of self-rule, cultural preservation and territorial unification, and often a clear program for achieving these goals (2001: 21). Nationalist movements, however, do not always seek independent statehood. Often lesser goals are pursued, such as cultural autonomy within an existing state, or reform of discriminatory laws. Ultimately, however, even these lesser goals involve seizing more of the state’s power than was previously held.

To focus upon culture, ideology, identity, class or modernisation is to neglect the fundamental point that nationalism is, above and beyond all else, about politics and that politics is about power. Power, in the modern world, is principally about control of the state. The central task is to relate nationalism to the objectives of obtaining and using state power. (Breuilly 1993: 1)

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5 The confusion partly stems from the vernacular use, and social scientific misuse, of the word ‘nation’ to describe the state (e.g. United Nations).
6 This paper will use the terms ‘ethnic group’ and ‘nation’ interchangeably, specifying where a state-level process is being discussed.
7 Smith notes that the Catalan movement in Spain had as its goal partial autonomy, rather than independence (2001: 25).
Conceptual Languages of Ethnicity and Nationalism

Brown sees the literature on ethnicity and nationalism as divisible into three broad conceptual categories: primordialism, which sees ethnic affiliation as a "natural" instinct; instrumentalism (or situationalism), which considers it a "manifestation of rational interests"; and constructivism (or social constructionism), which deems it an ideology or a "politically constructed myth" (2000: 5). Few scholars, however, are easily pigeonholed into one or another category, and there is significant overlap between the approaches. While different schema have been offered (e.g. Smith 2001; Connor 1994), Brown's categories provide a starting point for an examination of the broad themes explored in ethnicity and nationalism scholarship.

Primordialism

Primordialist approaches to ethnicity depict the ethnic group as a natural, organic community, whose members' identities are defined by it, and who feel a deep emotional attachment to it. At the heart of this approach is the belief that humanity has evolved into distinct communities, each having developed its own language and culture. The primordialist perspective considers national claims to common ancestry to be essentially valid (Brown 2000: 6), and thus reads modern ethnic groups back into history.

While Clifford Geertz and Harold Isaacs might be classified as 'pure primordialists,' focusing largely on the ascriptive quality of ethnicity, few scholars today would fit that description. Rather, most accept that there is a profound lack of factual evidence to support genetic common descent or blood-based claims. Instead, they accept the formulation, posited by Walker Connor, that a nation is "a group of people who feel
that they are ancestrally related” (Connor 1994: 202, emphasis mine). Thus the belief in shared ancestry outweighs the supporting evidence. According to Max Weber,

We shall call ‘ethnic groups’ those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent...in such a way that this belief is important for the continuation of nonkinship communal relationships...regardless of whether an objective blood relationship exists or not. (Weber, qtd. in Royce 1982: 22)

Primordialists do suggest, however, that such beliefs are likely to be most deeply held when they are most ‘authentic,’ and that élite-articulated myths of common ancestry will only mobilise nationalist sentiment if they accord with ‘collective memories,’ and are substantially true. The proof of authenticity, then, is seen in the success of the mobilisation effort (Brown 2000: 7-8). Karl Deutsch demonstrates the extent to which primordialism downplays the mythmaking aspect of nationalism.

It may – and often does – misrepresent and distort existing facts, by leaving out some and overrepresenting others – or by producing combined symbols on the conscious level...Yet behind the distortions and weird combinations there must be materials on which they could be based, or from which their elements could be derived. (Deutsch 1966: 173)

The emotional power of authenticity implies that attempts by a dominant ethnic group to assimilate ethnic minorities through the promotion of objectively false kinship myths will be unsuccessful. Minority groups will also face barriers to assimilation, due to the emotional attachments held by the dominant group (Brown 2000: 11).

The role of élites, as seen by primordialists, is to perform a ‘historicist’ function, articulating ethnic consciousness by showing “the link between the present threats, the authentic past, and the future destiny” in order to harness “national pride, which can be mobilised for the defence of its right to autonomous development” (Brown 2000: 8).

The first and most obvious critique of primordialists is that they focus on the nature and characteristics of group identities, but do little to problematise these. They
also fail to show how or when these natures will lead to ethnic mobilisation or nationalism. As Brown suggests, “the core criticism is that it offers no explanation at all, merely taking such identities as (primordially) given” (2000: 12).

Second, this approach suggests that ethnic groups, and their membership, are very stable. However, as Horowitz notes, “Individual origins count, but exceptions are made. Ethnic identity is relatively difficult for an individual to change, but change sometimes occurs” (Horowitz 1985: 52). Primordialism provides no explanation for alterations in these categories, either at the individual or group level. As such, it accounts for ethnic continuity at the expense of ethnic change.

Finally, the fact that few scholars can be described as ‘pure’ primordialists suggests a general discomfort with the approach, as few are willing to claim that ethnic traits are the timeless, immutable constants that primordialism suggests.

**Instrumentalism**

The instrumentalist paradigm assumes that rational interests (including élite competition) underlie ethnic mobilization or ethnic identity adjustments, and that ethnic affiliation does not differ qualitatively from the many other sources of identity that individuals rationally choose, and choose between.

Instrumentalists suggest that many ethnic groups are novel, ahistorical creations (Horowitz 1985: 98). They view ethnic identities as “contingent and changing self-ascribed roles” (Roeder 1991: 228), “employed by groups of individuals for the pursuit of their common interests” (Brown 2000: 13). The politicisation of ethnicity is thus seen as socioeconomic goal-oriented behaviour (Roeder 1991: 228; Roosens 1989: 13).
At the heart of the instrumentalist approach is the liberal assumption that individuals seek to promote their particular interests, and that allying with others in 'functional aggregations' or 'interest groups' is a useful strategy for promoting common interests (Brown 2000: 13-14). While rational choice is assumed, instrumentalists acknowledge that the options available to individuals may be restricted by external structures. But the approach stresses both that such restrictions are malleable and that individual responses will vary (Brown 2000: 14). Deutsch suggests that ethnic identity will not resonate when interests do not require it.\footnote{As an example, Deutsch notes that Zionism was embarrassing to some Jews in Western Europe who saw assimilation as more conducive to their interests. (Deutsch 1966: 178)}

Only if nationality is valued; if it is seen as a winning card in the social game for prestige, wealth, or whatever else may be the things culturally valued at that time and place; or if it fulfills a need in the personality structure in which individuals have developed in that particular culture – or if it is at least valued for lack of any more promising opportunities – only then does it seem probable that consciousness of nationality will strengthen its development. (Deutsch 1966: 178)

Seen as a more structuralist variant of instrumentalism, the modernisation paradigm sees nations and nationalism as recent political responses to the rise of industrial capitalism, and subsequent changes in commerce and industry. Eric Hobsbawm’s focus on capitalism (1990), Karl Deutsch’s industrial and commercial growth (1966), Ernest Gellner’s industrialisation process (1983), Walker Connor’s improved transportation and communication (1994) and Benedict Anderson’s ‘print-capitalism’ (1991), each attribute the rise of nationalism to aspects of the modernising economy (Brown 2000: 17, 32). Alternately, Deutsch and Horowitz see the rise of nationalism partly as a product of the increased value placed on individuals and oppressed groups in Western civilization (Deutsch 1966: 179, Horowitz 1985: 5).
Breuilly, Hobsbawm and Horowitz also posit that the Westphalian state system has contributed to nationalism and ethnic conflict, since control of a state is often the primary goal of ethnic conflict (Breuilly 1993: 1; Hobsbawm 1992: 10; Horowitz 1985: 5).

Hobsbawm suggests that what is modern about nationalism is the implication that the duty of the individual to the nation “overrides all other public obligations, and in extreme cases (as in war) all other obligations of whatever kind” (1992: 9). As for the lineage claimed by nationalists, “the modernist considers this antiquity to be either an illusion or an irrelevance” (Gellner 1997: 92-93).

The strength of the instrumentalist approach (including its modernist variant) is its focus on the material interests which contribute to ethnic mobilisation. Nationalism is often rooted in dissatisfaction with the group’s living conditions, such as discrimination, economic underdevelopment, and human rights violations (Hannum 1996: 24).

There are numerous critiques of this approach. First, Brown notes the inherent tension in providing a rational-choice explanation for identity choices which “are not perceived as rational choices by those involved, which are emotionally powerful, and which clearly sometimes impel people to acts of irrational prejudice and hatred” (2000: 15). Second, the instrumentalist insistence on the ability to choose one’s ethnic identity promotes agency at the expense of structure. Choices (if these exist at all) are highly structured and limited. These limits range from obvious physiological markers to administrative barriers. As Joane Nagel suggests, “ethnic identity is both optional and mandatory,” as one’s choice in the matter is circumscribed by the categories available in a given situation. “[T]he extent to which ethnicity can be freely constructed by

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9As Horowitz notes, the terms used by ethnic groups themselves most often stress the “ascriptive element” of their group membership (Horowitz 1985: 52).
individuals or groups is quite narrow when compulsory ethnic categories are [officially or unofficially] imposed by others” (1994: 156). 10

Third, the behaviour of élites is ambiguous in much of the instrumentalist literature. In mobilising ethnic identity for material gain, are élites deceiving their followers, or do they also believe the misleading justifications they articulate?

If we were to accept that mobilising élites sometimes either deliberately or unwittingly act as inventors of lies rather than as communicators of the situation, and that followers sometimes accept these lies even in the face of countervailing evidence, then the core assumption of situationalism – that nationalist politics can be understood in terms of functional and rational responses to situational changes – would appear to be called into question. (Brown 2000: 19)

Fourth, instrumentalists fail to establish a causal link between aspects of modernity and ethnic mobilisation. According to Brown, “this functional fit between modernisation and nationalism does not itself explain, or ensure, their mutual development” (Brown 2000, 32). McCrone suggests that this connection seems to depend on the characterisation of ‘modern’ society as an integrated, self-contained and well-honed organism. He questions the appropriateness of this depiction “in a world of ‘globalisation’, which, even without taking an extreme view of this process, does seem to leave societies rather exposed and less autonomous than Gellner implied” (1998: 82-83).

McCrone also questions the modernity-nationalism link on empirical grounds, claiming that nationalism has often predated industrialisation (1998: 82-3).

Finally, while this paradigm allows for fluidity of ethnic affiliation (unlike primordialism which sees it as constant), it does not allow for the adjustment of ethnic identity in the absence of ‘interests’. Additionally, this approach offers little in the way

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10 An African American cannot simply ‘choose’ to be an Asian American, for example, due in part to undeniable physiological differences between the two groups. Likewise, an ethnic Chechen cannot suddenly ‘choose’ to be a Russian as his ethnic affiliation is recorded in his passport.
of explanation for the lack of change in ethnic identity where groups would clearly profit from assimilation into the dominant culture. Also, while a loose definition of ‘interests’ could be stretched to include emotional needs, this approach seems to focus on security and material interests as the primary basis for identity adjustment.

**Constructivism**

The constructivist approach views ethnic identity as a socially constructed, malleable phenomenon, which is molded by élites, as well as by external actors and events. The role of language and ‘speech acts’ are seen as central to the social construction of identity (Adler 2002: 103). Constructivists reject the notion that nations are real, substantive entities, and posit that the perception by members that they are real should be viewed as a reality-filtering form of ideological consciousness (Brown 2000: 20). They acknowledge, however, that ethnic identity is ‘real’ for those who hold it. In addition, construction does not imply outright invention; most constructivists agree that building materials are required which resonate with imagined group identities.

Motives for the social construction of ethnicity seem to vary in the literature, from serving élite interests to filling the void left by religion and monarchy (Smith 2001: 48). However, the focus throughout is on the ideological functions performed by these identities (Brown 2000: 21). McCrone stresses the degree to which nationhood is linked to ideological story-telling and mythmaking.

‘Unified’ cultures are those which have told themselves the right kind of story, and have the power to impose it on listeners. Identity becomes an effective story which people tell themselves but one which is written across differences. (McCrone, 1998: 35-36)

McCrone suggests that Max Weber, while an outspoken German nationalist, held constructivist views of nationhood. “His aim...was to show by what contingent means
national identity could aspire to the non-contingent status of *Gemeinschaft*” (McCrone 1998: 19). The most influential work using the constructivist approach, however, is undoubtedly Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983, 1991). Anderson defined the nation as an “imagined political community.”

It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members...yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion...The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them...has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations...It is imagined as *sovereign* because...nations dream of being free, and, if under God, directly so...Finally, it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. (Anderson 1991: 6-7)

Constructivist perspectives focus on psychological needs, and see ethnic identity as a coping mechanism. Milton J. Esman suggests that by linking the personal with the national, ethnic solidarity is a source of both physical and psychological security, enabling the mortal individual to identify with a larger and more permanent project than his own life (2004: 7). Brown adds that nationalism “translates the psychological needs of individuals into the public-rights claims of the authentic community, thus raising the insecure individual to the status of the proud nation” (2000: 25).

The “ethnic ‘past’” may be “a subjective reconstruction” (Roosens 1989: 17), but its ability to provide a sense of kinship, permanence and home to insecure or confused individuals makes it an extremely powerful one.\(^{11}\) In terms of political mobilisation, constructivism suggests that attitudes toward sovereignty, territory and ethnic identity (as well as norms such as human rights) evolve with changing practices and institutions (Adler 2002: 104). As such, nationalist goals are likely to be influenced by state and

\(^{11}\) The emotional power of the belief in common ancestry is seen by the psychoanalytic tradition as ‘regressive narcissism’, or a desire to return to the oneness experienced by the infant in the womb, and in early childhood dependence on his or her parents (Brown 2000: 24).
international systems, which shape the realm of the possible. In turn, however, institutions and practices are shaped by the actors who partake in them.

The strength of the constructivist approach is, first, that it suggests a dialogue between structure and agency in the production of identity, and second, that it combines the instrumentalist skepticism of ancient tradition with a concern for the deep social, emotional and psychological aspects of ethnicity that primordialists emphasise. Seen as an ideological formula, nationalism provides both legitimacy to elites and social cohesion to the masses (Brown 2000: 27).

Through a critical lens, while constructivists focus on the way language and 'speech acts' shape the social world, it is not clear whose speech acts count and when. Are elites responsible for shaping the discourse, or does this occur at the grassroots level? Is open debate about ethnic origins within a society indicative of an identity crisis, or simply a healthy dialogue? Likewise, is an ethnic group's seeming cohesion to be taken at face value, or questioned as evidence of stifled debate? Brown suggests that constructivism does little to explain intra-societal tension, when elites within a society offer "competing kinship and homeland visions of different societies, each marginalising or demonising the other" (2000: 28-29).

Second, it is unclear to what degree 'material reality' plays into the linguistic and social construction of identity (Adler 2002: 107), especially when a constructed identity suggests interests which conflict with a group's capabilities or available options.
Additionally, this approach stresses the construction of nationalism in response to insecurity. However, Brown notes that in many cases, the resulting construction creates or increases insecurity rather than dissipating it.\footnote{John M. Cotter has suggested that 'cultural security dilemmas' operate in much the same way as strategic ones, with efforts by one group to strengthen its identity (cultural security) usually seen as threatening by other groups, who respond with their own cultural identity-related efforts or demands. (Cotter 1999)}

If the constructivist view of nationalism is insightful in focusing attention on the use of visions of territorial certainty and common ancestry, to resolve the insecurities engendered by rapid change, then it seems to demand elaboration, since nationalisms frequently manifest themselves in new situations of conflict and rivalry, which threaten to generate new insecurities and uncertainties. (Brown 2000: 28-29)

**Common Ground**

Gellner notes that the primordialist-modernist debate has at times come to resemble the debate between 'Creationists' and 'Evolutionists' (Gellner 1997: 91). However, as McCrone suggests, the three paradigms are closer together than they seem.

The issue...seems to come down to how much invention; to matters of degree rather than of kind. To paraphrase, how little cultural straw does one need to make political bricks? If the answer is 'not much', then the modernists and the ethnicists are possibly closer together than they like to pretend. (McCrone, 1998: 16)

Relatedly, Edward A. Azar suggests that ethnic mobilisation and conflict stem from the drive to satisfy basic human needs, which include psychological, economic and relational needs, on both individual and group levels (1990: 146-150). Thus, focusing on either material or psychological needs may be limiting oneself to half of the picture. Likewise, Horowitz suggests that the ascription-volition dichotomy may be a false one.

We like to think of birth and choice as mutually exclusive principles of membership, but all institutions are infused with components of both...Both principles of membership – birth and choice – are capable of accommodating fictive elements. (Horowitz 1985: 55)
Finally, Gellner reminds us that “Cultures are both tenacious and volatile”, in other words, we must account for both continuity and change in theories of ethnonationalism (1997: 94).

The approaches also share a number of features, including their recognition of the vital role of élites in promoting ethnonationalist sentiment (Brown 2000: 31). The constructivist paradigm, however, appears to best capture the complex, nuanced and dialogic process of ethnic identity construction and reconstruction, the role of ideology and history, current material conditions and deep emotional attachments.

**Ethnic Identity Construction**

Eugene Roosens notes that individuals simultaneously belong to numerous social groupings, such as families, religious organisations, political parties and ethnic groups, each of which are sources of identity. Membership in these groups is acknowledged by both the individual and others.

Generally, the individual prefers one or the other identity, so that there is a hierarchy of identities for each person...this hierarchy can be inverted or changed in time, or one social identity can simply be more relevant than others in a given context: in a Flemish demonstration in Brussels, it makes little difference if I am a pilot, a veterinarian, or a baker. (Roosens 1989: 16)

Smith cautions, however, that collective identities are not necessarily reducible to their individual members. “There is so much more to these collective identities in terms of their shared values and norms, memories and symbols” (2001: 18-19). He notes that collective identities seem to be more persistent and binding where based primarily on cultural elements (e.g. caste, religion, ethnic group), whereas other collective identities, (e.g. class, region) are essentially interest groups and tend to dissolve more easily once they have attained their goal (Smith 2001: 19). What sets ethnic identity apart from other
identities, according to Barth, is that “it classifies a person in terms of his basic, most
general identity, presumptively determined by his origin and background” (1969: 13-14).

Ethnic identity is an outward reflection as well as an inward one; it requires
interlocutors and their feedback. It is also performative, and “requires the maintenance of
sufficiently consistent behaviour to enable others to place an individual or a group in
some given social category, thus permitting appropriate interactive behavior” (George De
Vos, qtd. in Royce 1982: 33). This, according to Anya Peterson Royce, involves a
lengthy socialisation process which provides a person with a minimal level of ethnic

In the literature, there is a marked tension between the obvious importance of
ethnic identity and its nebulous and unstable character. The latter is stressed by Elie
Kedourie.

[T]he historical record indicates that ethnic identity...has over the centuries
proved to be highly plastic and fluid, and subject to far-reaching changes and
revolutions. It is very much a matter of...one’s estimation of oneself and one’s
place in the world. Thus, for instance, the pagan Roman citizen of North Africa
becomes, through his biological descendant, the Christian subject of a Christian
emperor, then a member of the Muslim umma, and today perhaps a citizen of the
People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria or the Libyan Jamahiriya. (Kedourie
1993: 141)

The question of how to gauge ethnic identity is yet another puzzle. Hobsbawm
claims that official ideologies cannot be relied upon to represent the views of even their
most loyal followers. He also suggests that ethnic identity should not be assumed to be
the most highly prioritised identity in an individual’s social roster (1992: 11). To further
confuse the matter, individual ethnic behaviour is not always indicative of ethnic identity,
especially where material interests clash with social acceptance. As Timur Kuran
cautions, “Individuals engage in ethnic preference falsification when they come under
real or imagined social pressures to undertake, or to avoid, particular ethnic behaviors” (1998: 39).

Ethnic identity is, like most other social phenomena, subject to change. At the most benign level, Smith claims that the components of ethnonational identity undergo change “in every generation, as external events and internal realignments of groups and power encourage new understandings of collective traditions” (2001: 20). Identity changes also occur more consciously and rapidly in response to external stimuli.

Horowitz outlines four ways in which ethnic groups adjust their boundaries to become more or less inclusive: amalgamation, whereby two or more groups unite to form a new group; incorporation, whereby one group assumes the identity of another group; division, whereby one group disaggregates into at least two component groups; and proliferation, whereby one group (or more) produces a new group from within its ranks, without disappearing as a group. In such cases, members of new groups may not wholly relinquish their claims to membership in the previous group, and such changes may also be reversible (Horowitz 1985: 65).

Ethnic identity is most subject to reconstruction when the group is faced with a crisis. One example, offered by Brown, is the erosion (or implosion) of a pre-existing state or political configuration. In this scenario,

Such a sense of ethnic and regional community can develop among individuals who neither share significant common cultural attributes nor who are particularly distinctive from their neighbours; it can refer to recent commonalities of circumstance. Nevertheless, such groups can construct a national consciousness by combining myths of common ancestry, with claims to commitment to territorial institutions, so as to claim rights to an autonomous national destiny. (Brown 2000: 47)
Relatedly, Connor notes that new ethnic identities can be constructed by groups physically separated from a ‘parent group’ for a sufficient period of time (i.e. through exile or emigration). Connor refers to these new groups, who tend to retain an awareness of their original “stock”, as “offshoot nations” (Connor 1994: 80). Deutsch refers to this process as ‘ethnic learning’, whereby over a number of generations, a group of individuals learns to become “a people” (Deutsch 1966: 174).

Another crisis resulting in identity adjustment is ethnic conflict. Rather than the (re)construction of group boundaries occurring wholly prior to conflict emerging, Horowitz claims that “they take place partly in anticipation of conflict. Second, as ethnic conflict proceeds, it can influence the shape and firmness of the boundaries, by such means as heightened pressure for endogamy” (Horowitz 1985: 74).

Construction ‘Materials’

If ethnic identity is a construction, the metaphor requires that we specify its building blocks. Most of the building material consists of symbols which are selectively used or manipulated in response to changing conditions. The following attributes are most commonly used to construct ethnic identity.

Names

Royce suggests that ethnic group names, or ‘ethnonyms’, are “powerful symbols around which the negotiation of identity takes place” (Royce 1982: 26). She notes that groups looking to change their status or image often begin by changing their ethnonym, suggesting the degree of importance attached to it. Names also act as a short-hand for the many other ethnic traits that may not be instantly apparent.

Names of ethnic categories also provide individuals with something to invoke when they have no other immediate indicators of ethnic identity. A name serves
as a rallying point, and a tangible one, around which an identity can be rebuilt. (Royce 1982: 27)

** Territory**

Land is often a major axis around which ethnic identity is constructed. As Breuilly notes, “the national territory, becomes a shorthand term for a complex network of ideas concerning the nation” (1993: 6). Territorial attachments occur on a number of separate, albeit related levels.

First, the ‘homeland’ is an extension of the family home or hearth. Not only is it the land of ancestral kin, it is also their resting place. Second, the homeland acts as a stage on which the historical drama of the nation is carried out, “the arena and indispensable setting for the great men and women, and the turning points, in the nation’s history – battles and treaties, synods and assemblies, the exploits of heroes and the shrines and schools of saints and sages” (Smith 2001: 31-32). Third, the nation’s homeland is its source of sustenance. As Smith notes,

> The concept of homeland may also act as a title-deed, a political claim to a specified area of land and its resources, often in the teeth of opposition from rival claimants. From this perspective, the homeland is indispensable for economic well-being and physical security; and the exploitation of its agricultural and mineral resources becomes a prime nationalist consideration. (Smith 2001: 31)

Murphy reminds us, however, that the attachment of borders and political power to territory increases its significance for ethnic groups.

As power is consolidated in discrete, autonomous territories, networks of interaction and communication are built that can enhance the social significance of territorial units. At the same time, as rulers in different territories exercise power in different ways, the boundaries between territories can become increasingly meaningful dividers between social, economic, and cultural systems. (Murphy 1996: 90-91)
Anderson notes the power that cartography has had in the construction of national discourse, first by establishing boundaries that could be read back into history, legitimating current claims by suggesting a continuity of possession that may not have existed; and second, creating an instantly recognisable ‘logo’ representing the nation. The outline of a territory, represented by its borders, “entered an infinitely reproducible series, available for transfer to posters, official seals, letterheads, magazine and textbook covers, tablecloths, and hotel walls” (1991: 174-175).

Religion

Religion plays an ambivalent role in the formation of ethnicity. Religious adherence varies within some ethnic groups, while other groups view religion as a primary feature of their ethnicity. Horowitz suggests that modernity has altered Western conceptions of the nature of religion. “The modern Western notion is that religion is voluntary or affiliational, an act of faith...Outside the West religion [has] remained an ascriptive affiliation...religion and ethnicity are coterminous” (Horowitz 1985: 50-51).

Language

Smith notes that the nineteenth century German Romantics, such as Fichte, Schlegel and Müller, considered language to be the primary characteristic of nations, an organic, natural development seen as the most authentic way to express one’s emotions (Smith 2004: 237). In contrast, modernists argue that national languages are in fact a modern invention, made possible by administrative and technological innovations. “Most students today will agree that standard national languages, spoken or written, cannot emerge as such before printing, mass literacy and hence, mass schooling” (Hobsbawm 1992: 10). In any event, language is drawn upon heavily as a source of ethnic identity,
where a separate language exists. McCrone notes that Scottish nationalism, for example, has existed despite the lack of a modern Scottish language (1998: 53).

**History**

For nationalists, the nation is “a community of history and destiny, or better, a community in which history requires and produces destiny (Smith 2001: 30). While a shared history seems to underlie all ethnic claims, the content and use of that history is a source of much scholarly contention, as the primordialist-modernist debate illustrates.

Gellner claims that a critical examination of ethnic ‘history’ shows that “some nations possess genuine ancient ‘navels’, some have navels invented for them by their own nationalist propaganda, and some are altogether navel-less” (Gellner 1997: 96). What is more important than the existence of navels, for Gellner, is the perceived need for them, generated by modernity (Gellner 1997: 101).

However, it is the *selective* use of history which is most important to the construction of ethnic identity – forgetting as well as remembering. As Ernest Renan suggested, “Getting its history wrong is part of being a nation” (qtd. in Hobsbawm 1992: 12). Anderson echoes this sentiment, noting that changes in consciousness “bring with them characteristic amnesias” (Anderson 1991: 204).

**Political Status**

Like the political delineation of territory, political status, or lack thereof, is a strong factor in the construction of ethnic identity. The political recognition of an ethnic group not only affects its self-perception and organisation, but can also increase self-identification and mobilization among ethnic groups *without* official status, strengthening
or even creating ethnic identities through exclusion. This is most likely when official designations are perceived to favour or harm a group in some way (Nagel 1994: 157).

Within a state, formal ethnic categories, even when these are perceived as simple administrative categories, are ultimately political.

There are several ways that ethnicity is 'politically constructed,' i.e. the ways in which ethnic boundaries, identities, cultures, are negotiated, defined, and produced by political policies and institutions: by immigration policies, by ethnically-linked resource policies, and by political access that is structured along ethnic lines. (Nagel 1994: 156-157)

**Boundaries**

Barth suggests that 'shared culture' should be seen as “an implication or result, rather than a primary and definitional characteristic of ethnic group organization” (1969, 11). His view is that an ethnic group is an “organizational vessel that may be given varying amounts and forms of content in different socio-cultural systems.” Its continuity “depends on the maintenance of a boundary”, which ensures “continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders” (Barth 1969: 14).

It is important to recognize that although ethnic categories take cultural differences into account, we can assume no simple one-to-one relationship between ethnic units and cultural similarities and differences. The features that are taken into account are not the sum of ‘objective’ differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant...some cultural features are used by the actors as signals and emblems of differences, others are ignored, and in some relationships radical differences are played down and denied. (Barth 1969: 14)

Interaction occurs both within and across boundaries. However, interaction with those inside the boundary will be structured differently than interaction with outsiders (McCrone 1998: 28). Royce suggests that there are actually “double boundaries; that is, the boundary maintained from within, and the boundary imposed from the outside” (Royce 1982: 29).
Ethnicity does not emerge when there is no inter-group contact, since it implies a process of 'othering,' requiring at least one interlocutor against which to define one's own group. However, ethnic identity construction against this other is not wholly the prerogative of the group itself. Rather, it is a dialogic process, which involves views from both sides of the ethnic boundary. Nagel cites Barth as the first to suggest that ethnicity is a product of social ascriptions, and a composite of one's self-image and the images held by others about one's ethnicity. In daily life, ethnicity can and does shift to suit variations in the situations and audiences encountered (Nagel 1994: 154).

Ethnic identity, then, is the result of a dialectical process involving internal and external opinions and processes, as well as the individual’s self-identification and outsiders’ ethnic designations - i.e. what you think your ethnicity is, versus what they think your ethnicity is. Since ethnicity changes situationally, the individual carries a portfolio of ethnic identities that are more or less salient in various situations and vis-à-vis various audiences. (Nagel 1994: 154)

State-level Nationalism: Civic versus Ethnic

Distinctions are often made between civic and ethnic nationalisms. In 1944, Hans Kohn sought to differentiate between Western (benign) and Eastern (virulent) nationalism, with the Rhine as his dividing line.

Kohn argued that Western forms of nationalism were based on the idea that the nation was a rational association of citizens bound by common laws and a shared territory, whereas Eastern varieties were based on a belief in common culture and ethnic origins, and as such tended to regard the nation as an organic, organic, 13 One clear example of outside influence contributing to ethnic identity is to be found in European colonialism. By uniting previously separate regions under single administrations, or by classifying indigenous peoples according to physical traits (deemed salient to Europeans), colonial authorities "catalyzed the slow merger of related peoples into coherent ethnic identities." This process was reinforced through "incentives they established to consummate the amalgamation, recruiting soldiers or clerks, for example, from among the newly forged group" (Horowitz 1985: 66-67). 14 Obviously, this comparison can only be made regarding state-level nationalism, since civic identity implies reference to the state.
seamless whole, transcending the individual members, and stamping them from birth with an indelible national character. (Smith 2001: 39-40)

Many scholars have since problematised this Western-centric dichotomy. Smith, for example, critiques the classification scheme based on the similarity of policies pursued by both ‘types’ of nationalism (2001: 42), while Saroyan suggests that even ‘Western’ citizenship “has always had an ethnic component” (1997: 134). Nevertheless, it is possible to (cautiously) categorise states in terms of the groups they purport to represent.

Connor has proposed the following classification scheme for states, based on the nations and national configurations they contain. Nation-states, which are rare, are nearly homogenous. In essence, the nation has its own state (e.g., Iceland, Japan). Multination states, which are more common, are divisible into three sub-types: in Unihomeland states the state is a homeland to one ethnic group, with others arriving through immigration (e.g., Fiji). Multihomeland states contain two or more regions considered ethnic homelands (e.g. Nigeria, Georgia, Ukraine). Nonhomeland states are composed overwhelmingly of immigrants, and contain at least two significant ethnic groups (e.g., Guyana, Suriname, Trinidad-Tobago). Immigrant states are also nonhomeland, but have a more highly varied population and high levels of assimilation (e.g. United States) (Connor 1994: 76-79).

Scholars differ on how nation-statehood is to be determined. Breuilly, for example, argues for a more discourse-based classification, based on “the case the state itself makes in relation to nationalist opposition” (Breuilly 1993: 11).

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Identity in Exile: The Diaspora Experience

The word 'diaspora' evokes notions of victimisation, and has often referred to populations scattered against their will, due to exile or slavery. Robin Cohen suggests that diasporas combine an often idealised 'collective memory' of the homeland, and a strong ethnic identity, shaped by the experience of exile and a feeling of distinctiveness (1996: 515). He also suggests that the more coercion is involved in the group’s migration, the less likely it is that the group will socialise into the new environment (Cohen 1996: 518). At the same time, diasporas have often benefited, materially and culturally, from their new surroundings.

For all the victim diasporas, their experiences in modern nation-states have been enriching and creative as well as enervating and fearful. The Jews’ considerable intellectual and spiritual achievements simply could not have been possible in a narrow tribal society like that of ancient Judea. The Armenians and Irish thrived materially and politically in the ‘land of opportunity’, the United States. The Palestinians are characteristically more prosperous and better-educated than the locals in the countries of their exile, while those of African descent in the diaspora have made contributions of international significance in respect of the performing arts, music, painting, sculpture and literature. (Cohen 1996: 513)

The process of ethnic identity construction and the needs it fulfills are clearly magnified in the diaspora experience, which combines crisis, physical separation, new intergroup contact, economic change, boundary maintenance, and strained territorial ties.

Ethnicity in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Context

Sources of ethnic tension do not originate entirely in ethnic groups themselves, but rather, are “rooted in relationship-constructs that may be unique to the region and influenced by regional political history and competition” (Nagle et al 2000: 34). Ethnic

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16 The term ‘diaspora’, from the Greek, means ‘to sow widely’. The term has most often been used in reference to Jews, Armenians, Greeks and Africans living beyond their historic homelands. It is now used to denote a people dispersed from their original homeland to at least two foreign regions, who retain their ethnic identity, attachment to the idea of 'homeland', and desire to return. (Cohen 1996: 507, 515)
relations in the former Soviet Union are in large measure a result of Soviet-era nationalities policy. The USSR had an ambivalent relationship with ethnicity, both encouraging its cultural forms and ruthlessly suppressing its political manifestation.

Soviet federalism was based upon a hierarchy of national constituent units. The 15 union republics (SSR), possessed constitutions of their own and, theoretically, the right to secede from the Soviet Union. Under union republican jurisdiction, autonomous republics (ASSR) had constitutions but no right to secede, while lower ranking autonomous regions or oblasts (AO) only possessed limited cultural and linguistic rights. These various administrative units were given no real political power, but did control the cultural, social, and educational spheres, as well as economic access within their jurisdictions, powers they were able to lord over non-titular ethnic groups (Cornell 1999: 186-187). Mark Saroyan suggests that the union republic came to exist "solely as an instrument by which the given nation that dominates it seeks to extract political, economic, and social benefits from the system" (1997: 129). As a result, Francine Hirsch notes that national minorities were discriminated against by the titular majorities in every SSR (2005: 165). Autonomous regions and republics thus became minorities' only bulwark against the whims of the majority.

The Soviet state also codified ethnicity at the individual level. Citizens' nationality (as well as their union republic of residence) was inscribed in their propiskas,

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17 Hirsch notes that ethnographic data, and not self-definition or national consciousness, was used to carve the USSR into ethnic homelands. (Hirsch 2005: 154) Economic and foreign policy considerations also played a large role in the seemingly arbitrary carving of 'national' boundaries.
or internal passports, which were the primary document used to register for employment, residence, or services.\textsuperscript{18}

The early Soviet policy of korenizatsiia (‘rooting’) was intended to indigenise the new administrative territories through positive discrimination for ethnic groups designated as korennoi narod (rooted or native people). In practice, this led to their overrepresentation in bureaucratic, economic, and party structures, as well as an acknowledgement of their special claim to the territory, and the pursuit of ethnographic and historical data to back this claim. While there were undoubtedly cynical, divide-and-conquer motives behind korenizatsiia, Williams claims that it was at least partly a genuine attempt to modernise peoples perceived as ‘backward’, and to stave off ‘Great Russian chauvinism’ (2001: 354). The policies were to have a more profound effect, however, on the ethnic identity construction of groups throughout the USSR.

All of these policies of national identity construction (natsional’noe stroitelstvo in Soviet parlance) were to be territorially based and a Soviet citizen who left his ethno-territorial unit lost the prerogatives that would come from living in his titular [region]. This was to have the effect of territorializing identity in these constructs throughout the USSR... (Williams 2001: 353, emphasis mine)

Svante E. Cornell argues that while the Soviet Union functioned more as a unitary state than a federal one, the official homelands were an important source of symbols, institutional structures, and ethnic legitimation, and led to the creation of national elites (Cornell 2002: 256-257). Moscow, according to Brown,

created the institutions of national republics and national identity classifications in order to try and co-opt, contain, and emasculate the political expression of nationalism. By the late 1980s, it became clear that their impact had been the opposite one, of ensuring that individuals of minority nationalities identified

\textsuperscript{18} The individual’s ethnicity generally did not differ from that of his or her parents, and did not reflect individual national consciousness. In the case of mixed marriages, the child could choose one of the two ‘nationalities’ at age 16. This choice was permanent.
their own status with that of their nationality, and their own aspirations for freedom with the goal of national liberation. (Brown 2000: 21)

Brubaker suggests that it was the formalisation of ethnic and territorial status which ultimately lent credibility to ethnonational sentiment.

On the one hand, it carved up the Soviet state into more than fifty national territories, each expressly defined as the homeland of and for a particular ethnonational group...On the other hand, the regime divided the citizenry into a set of exhaustive and mutually exclusive ethnic nationalities, over a hundred in all. Thus codified, ethnic nationality served not only as a statistical category, a fundamental unit of social accounting, but also, and more distinctively, as an obligatory ascribed status. (Brubaker 1996: 17-18)

While the regime's policies were anti-nationalist, they were not anti-national. Brubaker claims, in fact, that the Soviet Union went further in institutionalising "territorial nationhood" and "ethnic nationality" than any other regime (1996: 17). Not only was ethnic group membership politicised, but the concept of ethnogenesis, the supposed origins of ethnic groups (as revealed by Soviet historians and ethnologists) was weighted heavily in terms of the assignment of indigenous status. As such, ethnogenesis became a source of territorial and cultural rights, and as such, a source of controversy when competing territorial claims arose. While korenizatsiia was abandoned by Stalin, who sought to suppress national expression, the early politicisation of ethnicity and ethnogenesis, and its association with entitlements, would continue throughout the Soviet era and beyond its demise, shaping ethnic politics in the region to this day.

Uprooted from their homelands during the Second World War, the Meskhetian Turks and Crimean Tatars combine the diaspora experience with the Soviet institutional context. The following chapters will examine how their experiences of ethnic identity construction and reconstruction (and that of the majorities in their home states and regions) have affected their respective repatriation processes.
Chapter 2: The Crimean Tatars - Ethnogenesis and Identity

This chapter will briefly outline the history of the Crimean Tatars, both before their deportation and in exile, as well as their repatriation movement and its results. In doing so, it will highlight the processes of ethnic identity construction and reconstruction throughout Crimean history that have enabled the Crimean Tatars to return to their ‘homeland’ against all political odds.

Ethnogenesis and Early Statehood

The Crimean Tatars adhere to the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam, and speak a Kipchak Turkic language. They are often considered to be the descendents of Batu Khan’s Golden Horde, an army of Turkic tribes that swept across Europe and down into the Crimean peninsula in the 13th century (Pohl 1999: 109).

Greta Uehling (2002), Brian Williams (2001) and others note, however, that their ethnogenesis is far more complex, and point to the heterogeneous, pre-Mongol roots of the Tatars, emphasising the emergence of the group on the territory of the Crimea as a result of contact between indigenous peoples, migrants and numerous conqueror groups.
over time (Williams 2001: 7-32). This narrative includes the ancient Scythians, Sarmatians, Greeks, Goths, Italians, Armenians, Circassians and Kipchaks, in the Crimean Tatars' ancestry, with the principal source of unity among them an eventual conversion to Islam and the adoption of the Crimean Tatar language (Williams 2001: 24-25). Claiming ethnogenesis on the territory of the Crimea, the Crimean Tatars "consider themselves one of the three indigenous peoples of the peninsula, along with the Karaim and Krymchaki" (Uehling 2002).

As arriving Mongols intermarried and assimilated with this varied local population, they developed into a 'Tatar' group that differed greatly from the Kazan, Volga, and Astrakhan Tatars. This group was eventually able to consolidate most of the peninsula into a "fully developed, pre-modern state", the Crimean Khanate, which existed from 1478-1772 (Uehling 2002).

The Crimean Khanate's economy was largely based on the slave trade, with frequent raids into the nearby Slavic regions. The Khanate also allied with the Ottoman Empire against Muscovy, two aspects of its history that would come to shape Russian views of the Crimean Tatars as an ethnic group (Pohl 1999: 110-111).

The image of the Crimean Tatar as a raider and slave trader has remained strong in the minds of many Slavs....This historical legacy made it easy for many Soviet citizens to believe the Stalinist charges against the Crimean Tatars that they collaborated with Nazi Germany to fight against the Red Army and enslave the Slavic population of the Crimean peninsula. (Pohl 110-111)

While the Crimean Khanate figures largely in Crimean Tatars' ethnic identity, it was a short-lived polity. The period of genuine Crimean independence (1452-1588), which began under Haji Giray Khan, was followed by nearly two centuries of vassalage

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19 The Karaims (or Karaites) and Krymchaks are both small Jewish ethnic groups who have lived in the Crimea since antiquity.
to the Ottoman Empire (1588-1774). The Khanate then became a Russian protectorate (1774-1783), and was finally annexed directly to the Russian Empire by Catherine the Great in 1783 (Pohl 1999: 110; Rorlich 1994: 62). In addition, while the Khanate may have united Crimeans politically and religiously, it would be misleading to infer a sense of ethnonational cohesion from the existence of this state.

The Crimea Under Tsarist Rule

Russian policy in the colonial period was assimilationist in nature. The Tatars were now regarded as ‘aliens’ (inorodtsy) in their own lands (Rorlich 1994: 63), and this period, “witnessed one of the most dramatic out-migrations in European history” (Uehling 2002). The Crimean Tatar population emigrated in a series of waves, having endured oppression and lost land to Russian appropriation. Most notably, after the Crimean War (1853-56), up to 200,000 of the 300,000 Tatars in Crimea left for the Muslim Ottoman Empire. Then, in 1874, faced with conscription, thousands more left in order to preserve their Muslim religious identity against the contamination of serving in a ‘Christian’ army (Uehling 2002; Williams 2001: 307).

Clearly, the identity of the Crimean Tatars in this period was more closely linked to religion than any ethnic or territorial source of cohesion. The Tatars saw themselves as members of the broader Muslim umma, or flock, and saw hijra (religiously motivated emigration) as a religious duty, even though it nearly resulted in the loss of a distinct Crimean culture (Williams 2001: 307).

Alan Fisher traces the emergence of a Crimean Tatar national movement to the last quarter of the 19th century, and the intersection of two separate, yet related conflicts:
between the Muslim population and the Tsarist regime; and between the traditional Muslim clergy and an emerging modernist Tatar intelligentsia (Fisher 1978: 94).

At the forefront of the modernisation (or *Jadid*) movement was Ismail Gasprinsky, or Ismail Bey Gaspirali (1851-1914), a Western-educated Crimean Tatar, who argued for “a renewal of Islamic and Tatar society through an acceptance of Western (Russian) forms enclosing an Islamic and Tatar content” (Fisher 1978: 100). Gasprinsky founded a new education system to replace the outdated Islamic *medrese* schools, as well as the first Crimean newspaper, *Tercüman* (the Translator), in which he promoted religious moderation, liberation of Muslim women, and peaceful coexistence and cultural exchange between Russians and the Empire’s Muslim population. He was criticised by Islamicists as a proponent of Russification, and by Turco-Muslim nationalists for his lack of revolutionary zeal (Rorlich 1994: 63; Williams 2001: 303-306).

Seyit Abdullah Özenbaşı, a contemporary of Gasprinsky’s, attacked the *hijra* using nationalistic language, signaling a “new world view which saw the abandonment of a people’s Fatherland as anathema.” (Williams 2001: 317) The broad acceptance of this view, evinced by the lack of exodus during conscription for World War I and the Russian Revolution, marked a profound change in Crimean Tatars’ ethnic identity, and especially its territorial link to the peninsula (Williams 2001: 318-319).

Abdureshid Mehdi, the Tatar mayor of Karasu Bazar, championed land reform (by 1877, approximately half the peninsula was owned by wealthy Russians) using “allegories of blood mixed with soil that evoke the language of classic German nationalism” (Williams 2001: 319-320). While his efforts were unsuccessful, Mehdi’s

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20 Gasprinsky is hailed as a Crimean Tatar nationalist figure, but Williams notes that a key difference between his thought and that of later nationalists was his focus on a ‘greater’ Turkic nation of all the Russian Empire’s Muslims, rather than a Crimea-based nation (Williams 2001: 311).
Young Tatars (*Genç Tatarları*), were instrumental in spreading nationalist identity among the Crimean peasantry (Williams 2001: 321).

After 1907, Tatars studying in Istanbul, inspired by the Young Turk movement, founded *Vatan Cemiyeti* (Fatherland Society), led by Noman Çelebi Cihan and Cafer Seidahmet. Its explicit goal was the creation of an independent Crimean state, and the replacement of pan-Turkism with Tatarism (Fisher 1978: 106-107; Rorlich 1994: 64).

By the end of the 19th century, Gasprinsky’s school system had raised the literacy rate of Crimean Tatars to a higher level than that of the Russian population, who had far fewer schools per capita. This made the schools a perfect vehicle for social mobilisation, as conceptions of nationalism shifted from organic, cultural nationality to political notions of self-determination and sovereignty (Rorlich 1994: 64-65).

In spring 1917, as the Russian Revolution cast doubt on the future of all the empire’s peoples, a popularly elected All Crimean Muslim Congress was convened in Simferopol to discuss the nation’s fate. It was decided that a more permanent ruling council was necessary, and the name *Kurultay* (originally a gathering of tribal leaders to elect the new Khan) was chosen for this institution. In summer 1917, a Crimean nationalist political party, *Millî Firka*, was established, which marginalised the conservative clergy, and whose members were elected to the *Kurultay* in large numbers. The first *Kurultay*, led by Çelebi Cihan, was convened at the nationally symbolic Khans’ Palace, and a Crimean constitution was drawn up, which notably guaranteed women’s equality, as well as “freedom of identity, word, press, conscience…self-determination of peoples and rights of minorities” (Williams 2001: 341). With a force of 3,000 soldiers to

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21 Williams notes that for the December 1917 election of *Kurultay* delegates, suffrage was extended to women, marking the first time in the Muslim world that women were given right to vote, and preceding universal suffrage in many Western countries. (Williams 2001: 339-341)
back its authority, the Kurultay soon established control over the otherwise anarchic Crimea (Williams 2001: 342-343).

The birth of this Crimean ‘state’, however, occurred at a politically volatile moment. In January 1918, Sevastopol’s Bolshevik forces stormed the Kurultay headquarters, defeated the Crimean forces, and captured and killed Çelebi Cihan, elevating him to martyr status among the Crimean Tatars (Williams 2001: 342-343). With the German recapture of the Crimea in 1918, the Bolsheviks fled into the hands of the Crimean Tatars in the mountains, where their leadership was executed in reprisal for the killing of Çelebi Cihan. The German occupation was short-lived, and General Denikin’s White Russian forces soon overran the peninsula. Repression at the hands of the Whites drove Milli Firkists to ally with their Bolshevik former enemies, and soon Crimean Tatar guerilla bands dotted the mountains, with socialist Veli Ibrahimov emerging as an influential leader (Williams 2001: 345-348).

By October 1920, the Bolsheviks had defeated the Whites and established control over the peninsula. The Crimean Tatars expected to benefit from their cooperation with the Bolsheviks, but instead, Milli Firka was outlawed as a counter-revolutionary party. The Crimea was carved into sovkhozes (state farms), and a famine in 1921, exacerbated by the sovkhoz system, decimated the Tatars. Additionally, the Cheka (Bolshevik secret police) killed up to 60,000 Crimean Tatars in purges of ‘nationalists’ and ‘reactionaries’. When these measures led to a renewed guerilla campaign, Lenin sent Mir Said Sultan Galiev, a prominent Volga Tatar, to the Crimea, and he recommended the creation of a Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) (Williams 2001: 348-350).

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22 The executed Bolsheviks were subsequently ‘deified’ as ‘socialist heroes’ of the struggle against ‘counter-revolutionary bands of Milli Firkists.’ (Williams 2001: 346)
Soviet Vatan: The Crimean ASSR

Established by decree on October 18, 1921, the Crimean ASSR was an integral part of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR).

Short of political independence, this decree formalized the emergence of a Crimean ‘nation-state’; it was the de jure affirmation of the political existence of the Crimean Tatars. The de facto realization of that state within the framework of a centralized (albeit federative) Soviet state was a much more difficult task. It fell to the generation...led by Veli Ibrahimov to channel the unspent energies of independent nationhood into the cultural nationalism and quest for political autonomy of the 1920s that came to be known as ‘national communism.’ (Rorlich 1994: 66)

Despite constituting only 25% of the population of the Crimean ASSR, Crimean Tatars were to play a prominent role in its administration due to the policy of korenizatsiia. Veli Ibrahimov (now a Bolshevik) was named Chairman of the Crimean Central Committee, and Crimean Tatars were overrepresented in political and economic leadership positions (Pohl 1999: 110; Williams 2001: 350-352).

In the Crimea, korenizatsiia brought restored Tatar names to many Crimean cities and towns, universal education in the Crimean Tatar language, the founding of a university in Simferopol, ethnographic museums, libraries, theatres, and Crimean historical and archaeological research. The Crimean Tatar language was standardised and elevated to a state language alongside Russian, and books, journals and newspapers were published in Tatar (Pohl 1999: 111; Williams 2001: 355-357).

Despite the flourishing of Crimean Tatar culture, there were contradictory forces at work in the Crimean ASSR. First, as Doris Wydra notes, a large wave of Russian migration to the peninsula at this time further skewed the population balance and diminished the political power of the Tatars (Wydra 2004: 113). Second, the Crimean leadership’s understanding of autonomy was often at odds with Moscow’s. This tension
culminated in the late 1920s, when “having stretched the scope of their nationalist ideals and plans to limits which were incompatible with Stalin’s centralizing goals...Veli Ibrahimov, and all those who adhered to [his] ideals were purged and then physically eliminated” (Rorlich 1994: 67).

Nevertheless, the Crimean ASSR as an institution solidified the territorial basis of Crimean Tatar ethnic identity, so that by the 1930s an entire generation of Crimean Tatars had come to view the Crimean ASSR as their ethnic group’s socialist vatan (Williams 2001: 370).

**The Stalin Era and World War II**

In the 1930s, the Soviet authorities continued to purge the Crimean intelligentsia, and deported up to 40,000 Crimean Tatars who ostensibly resisted farm collectivisation.

Successive Tatar Presidents of the Crimean Republic were purged: Mehmed Kubay for protesting during the famine of 1931-4 that ‘Moscow destroys the Republic of Crimea, carries away all its natural riches without giving bread to the starving population of the peninsula’; Ilias Tarakhan, his successor, and the Chairman of the Crimean Council of People’s Commissars, Ibrahim Samedin, both of whom fell to the Yezhov mass terror of 1936-1938, and were followed by a particularly large number of victims... (Conquest 1970: 99)

In the mid-1930s, Moscow began to dismantle Crimean Tatar cultural institutions as well, eliminating 14 of the 23 Crimean Tatar publications by 1938 (Pohl, 1999: 111-112).

This repression contributed to two contradictory processes by the onset of World War II. On one hand, Crimean Tatars joined the war effort in large numbers, with at least 20,000 serving in the Red Army and others joining Soviet partisan groups (Uehling 2002). On the other hand, many Crimean Tatars, whose population and institutions had been decimated by Stalinism, initially saw the invading Germans as liberators. “Once the

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23 Conquest notes that “reports continued to come out about Tatar bravery in anti-German partisan units and in the ranks of the Red Army” (Conquest 1970: 58-59), and eight Crimean Tatars received the USSR’s highest military honour, Hero of the Soviet Union (Uehling 2002).
Germans established their administration in Crimea, however, it became apparent that...the Nazis could be as oppressive in their rule as the Soviets” (Uehling 2002).

**Accusation and Deportation**

The German occupation of the Crimea relied partially on local Tatar ‘self-defence units’ (*Selbschutze*), which fought against the Soviet partisans. When the Red Army reoccupied the peninsula, a ruthless retribution was exacted against the entire Crimean Tatar ethnic group (Pohl, 1999: 109). From May 18-20, 1944, approximately 220,000 Crimean Tatars were deported from the peninsula to remote areas of Central Asia (Kiniklioglu 1998: 326). While most were shipped to various destinations in Uzbekistan SSR, some were taken to Siberia, the Urals, and Kazakhstan (Conquest 1970: 105).

The tarring of all Crimean Tatars with the same brush was partially the result of the spread of misinformation. Nekrich notes that to some of the ignorant Russian party members, “All non-Russians looked alike”. ‘Tatar collaborators’ thus included Caucasians, Central Asians, and any other dark-haired *inorodtsy* (Nekrich 1978: 26).

Yet the facts of the deportation decry any notion that the Tatars were deported ‘by mistake’. First, the fact that the Slavic population was not punished, despite the many Russian and Ukrainian Nazi collaborators, suggests a racially-motivated treason charge (Nekrich 1978: 32). Second, the majority of deportees were women, children, and the elderly, while young men loyally serving in the Red Army were sent into exile immediately after the war. Third, the majority of the Crimean Tatar collaborators had already been evacuated by the retreating Germans to Germany or Hungary. Soviet sources claimed that 20,000 Tatars had been evacuated, and this corresponded to the
alleged number of Nazi collaborators, such that those still on the peninsula were for all intents and purposes, loyal Soviet citizens (Williams 2001: 382).

Most scholars agree that foreign policy motives were behind the deportation of the Crimean Tatars (and other Muslim groups in the Soviet border regions). Fisher notes that Soviet designs on the Turkish Straits, and potentially a future attack on Turkey, were “related closely” to the removal of their coreligionists from strategically vital border areas, and their replacement with Russians and Ukrainians (Fisher 1978: 169). The Crimean Tatars’ indigenous territory was “the USSR’s main naval bastion facing Turkey across the Black Sea” (Williams 2001: 385).

Whatever the motives, the results were tragic for the Crimean Tatars. Conquest notes that the deportation “seems to have been carried out with an accompaniment of much killing and brutality” (Conquest 1970: 105). There is significant dispute regarding the number of deaths in transit and during the first year in exile. Kiniklioglu suggests a figure of 42%, while Williams suggests 30% as a more probable figure (Kiniklioglu 1998: 326; Williams 2001: 401). ‘Official’ figures are, of course, much lower. NKVD documents suggest an 18-22% death rate during the deportation and first year in exile. However, these figures omit casualties during the pre-deportation round-up at which time many Tatars were simply shot (Conquest 1970: 161-162).

Erasing the Evidence

With the Crimean Tatars removed from the peninsula, all traces of their political and cultural legacy were targeted, beginning with an October 20, 1944 resolution providing for “the renaming of settlements, rivers, and hills whose names reflect Tatar, Greek, or German origins” (Nekrich 1978: 34). Place names were invariably replaced
with Slavic alternatives, "[a]rchitectural monuments were destroyed; everything written and printed in Crimean (including Marxist literature) was burned" (Rorlich 1994: 68).

The Crimean ASSR as a political entity was legally abolished by decree on June 30, 1945, and the peninsula was made an ordinary administrative oblast' of the RSFSR (Rorlich 1994: 68). Meanwhile, a resettlement process began, in which Russians (and some Ukrainians) were moved into the empty villages and towns of the Crimea. According to Nekrich,

After the war an attempt was made to lure new settlers to the depopulated Crimea from the Ukraine. But from the start, things went badly. Meanwhile, the vineyards, the orchards, the gardens – everything that had been the glory of the Crimea for centuries – fell into ruin. It took many years and considerable resources before the Crimean economy was restored. (Nekrich 1978: 35)

The history of the peninsula was rewritten by a new generation of revisionist historians. In the new account, the Crimean Tatars were portrayed as "relatively late, Mongol-era ‘occupiers’ of the Crimea," an otherwise Slavic peninsula (Williams 2001: 8). In ethnographic museum exhibits, the Tatars were depicted as barbarians, and "primordial enemies of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples”. In Crimean World War II accounts, they were described as traitors and fascists (Khazanov 1995: 193). As a result,

Slavic Ukrainians and Russians who moved into the lands left by the deported Crimean Tatars in the 1940s and 1950s learned that the Crimean Peninsula had in fact been Slavic since antiquity not Tatar. (Williams 2001: 32)

In 1954, to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the Treaty of Pereyaslav (a contentious treaty between Russia and Ukraine) the peninsula was ‘given’ to the Ukrainian SSR. Wydra notes that by this date “already 90 per cent of the Crimean population were Russians…a population which massively resisted the moving in of the Ukrainian population” (Wydra 2004: 113).
While the ethnic mosaic account of Crimean Tatar history, written by early Soviet historians, was refuted and suppressed, it provided fodder for Crimean dissidents in exile, and ultimately contributed to the identity formation which conceived of the Crimea as vatan, to which they sought to return (Williams 2001: 33). Moreover, Williams suggests that the work of these historians helped to solidify the ethnic identity of the Crimean Tatars who, at the founding of the Soviet Union, still held largely to sub-ethnic geographic identities and did not conceive of themselves as a nation. While the foundations of an overarching group identity (Islam) had existed since the 15th century, “[t]he process of breaking down the ancient sub-ethnic identities among the Crimean Tatars had not yet in fact been completed when the Crimean Tatars were torn from their homeland in 1944…” (Williams 2001: 29-30).

**Sürgün**\(^{24}\): Life in the Special Settlements

While the Crimea was being ‘cleansed’ of all remnants of their existence, the Crimean Tatars who survived the deportation were adapting to life in ‘special settlements’ (spetsposeleniye). Nekrich describes these as “places of penal exile” where residents lived “under a special system governed by harsh regulations and instructions confirmed by the USSR Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD)” (Nekrich 1978: 90). Mostly located in Uzbekistan’s deserts, their unhygienic conditions and overcrowding led to massive typhus outbreaks (Pohl 1999: 115).

To make matters worse, the anti-Tatar propaganda which preceded the deportees’ arrival had increased the xenophobia of the agrarian Uzbeks who, according to one deportee, “stoned the already stricken Tatars when they arrived in the comparatively

\(^{24}\) Sürgün, the Crimean Tatar word for ‘exile’, is used specifically to denote the post-deportation era.
backward countryside" (Williams 2001: 391-392). Eventually, the Uzbeks discovered not only that the deportees were fellow Muslims, but that over 80% were “women and children who hardly looked like hardened Nazi collaborators” (Williams 2001: 393).

According to M. Guboglo and S. Chervonnaya, the special settlement regime was designed to destroy the economic dimension of the Crimean Tatars’ identity.

Prior to the war...they were primarily involved in village production...in gardening, in wine producing, and tobacco growing. In their new regions of habitation they were settled into barracks [and] regardless of their previous occupation, were transferred to heavy labor in various spheres of industry. (Guboglu, Chervonnaya, qtd. in Williams 2001: 397)

The death of Stalin and the dismantling of his ‘personality cult’ brought limited change to the Crimean Tatars. In 1956, Nikita Khrushchev’s famous speech to the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU acknowledged that there had been no military necessity behind Stalin’s ethnic deportations. All the deported groups, except for the Crimean Tatars, Meskhetian Turks and Volga Germans, were rehabilitated at this time and allowed to return to their homelands. The same year, the special settlement system was dismantled and many of the Crimean Tatars relocated to be closer to their families. However, without the awaited rehabilitation, they were neither absolved of their ‘crimes’ nor allowed to return to the Crimea (Nekrich 1978: 93-94; Uehling 2002).

Protest in Exile and the Return Movement

Uehling suggests that from the first public announcement of the Crimean Tatars’ deportation, the label of ‘traitors’ became an integral “part of the ascribed identity of the group” and a “representation against which ethnic self-consciousness and identity formed” (Uehling 2002). While political activism did not begin until the 1960s, Williams
insists that the ethnic identity of the Crimean Tatars survived the era of special settlements due to their singular focus on “communal survival” (2001: 96).^{25}

[C]ultural assertiveness has been the main measure of the resilience of the Crimeans as a nation. It is directed toward rescuing from extinction and passing on to the generations born in exile the core symbols of national identity that Crimean Tatars share: their language, literature, and music; their national culture and traditions; the keen awareness of the historicity of their nation. (Rorlich 1994: 69)

With de-Stalinisation, the Crimean Tatars in Uzbekistan were assisted in this task by Crimean Tatar language broadcasts on Radio Tashkent beginning in 1956, a folk music and danced troupe, and in 1957, a Crimean Tatar newspaper, Lenin Bayraghî (Lenin’s Banner), which acted as a vehicle for Tatar language preservation, and under the guise of literary criticism, revived the writings of earlier Crimean political figures that had fallen victim to Soviet purges (Rorlich 1994: 69-70).

Overt political activism began in 1963, when the first Crimean delegation was sent to Moscow to lobby for rehabilitation and repatriation (Rorlich 1994: 69). After 1965, the stream of delegates was virtually uninterrupted and accompanied by the production of *samizdat* (underground publications) literature (Uehling 2002).

One of [the movement’s] most important characteristics was that it was decentralized, composed of "initiative groups" with activists willing to go to Moscow, and supporters who participated more quietly from home....While the leadership role in formulating the movement's position was taken primarily by activists, they drew on sentiment pools that were already in existence: the Crimean Tatars actively remembered the homeland and dreamed of return. (Uehling 2002)

In response to repeated protests, the 1967 Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR ‘On Citizens of Tatar Nationality Formerly Resident in the Crimea’ annulled the charges of treason leveled against the Crimean Tatars, but it did not mention

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^{25} Williams stresses the role of the family, and especially Crimean Tatar women, in keeping traditional culture alive and instilling a sense of separateness from other Muslim peoples. (2001: 412-413)
a right to return. On the contrary, it stressed the permanence of their exile, stating that they had “taken root in the territory of the Uzbek and other Union Republics”. Also, a subtle shift – from Crimean Tatars to “Tatars formerly resident in the Crimea” – revoked the distinct nationality of the group, which was now officially no different than the Volga or other Tatars, and whose identity no longer implied a necessary connection to the peninsula (Conquest 1970: 186).

However the Crimean Tatars, like many diaspora communities, had not ‘taken root’ in their places of exile. Rather, the memory of the deportation was passed down from generation to generation, along with idealistic representations of the homeland. As Williams suggests,

the communal memory of this chosen trauma has served to mobilize and politicize a previously latent national identity. This strong sense of injustice also prevented the Crimean Tatars in Central Asia, like the Palestine refugees in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon or Tutsis living in diaspora, from accepting their condition as permanent. (Williams 2001: 412)

In fact, the 1967 decree triggered a more concerted effort to return to their homeland - a petition campaign, protests, letters to the United Nations, and ‘illegal’ repatriations (Conquest 1970: 205; Rorlich 1994: 69). The Soviet authorities responded with repressive measures, including the arrests of numerous dissidents and the violent suppression of peaceful protests (Conquest 1970: 203). The official justifications provided during this period for the refusal to allow repatriation were Soviet raison d'état in the Crimea, and the supposed overpopulation of the peninsula (Conquest 1970: 202). According to Khazanov, however, active measures were undertaken at this time to attract Slavic settlers to the Crimea. He suggests, rather, that since the Crimea had become a
resort for Russians, and the location of party officials’ summer homes, there was a reluctance to allow ‘alien’ elements to move there (Khazanov 1995: 192-193).

New national figures emerged during this period as symbols of the Crimean Tatar struggle. Among the dissidents, Mustafa Dzhemilev\textsuperscript{26} emerged as the most notable, for his 30 year struggle to repatriate the Crimean Tatars, 16 of which were spent in prison and labour camps (Williams 2001: 427). Musa Mamut, an ‘illegal’ repatriate who, in 1978, set himself on fire to avoid arrest and redeportation, became a new Crimean martyr, and inspired a number of subsequent self-immolations (Uehling 2000: 317).

With \textit{glasnost} and \textit{perestroika}, Crimean Tatar political activists formalized their existing political movement into the National Movement of Crimean Tatars (NDKT), created in 1987. Not all activists endorsed the NDKT’s conservative approach, and in 1989, the more popular Organization of the Crimean Tatar National Movement (OKND), led by Mustafa Dzhemilev, formed to pursue a more aggressive platform (Uehling 2002).

The late 1980s also saw an increase in political protest, with the Crimean Tatars demonstrating in Red Square in 1987 (Khazanov 1995: 26). Beginning in 1989, large numbers of Crimean Tatars began to move to the Crimea without papers or permission, to the chagrin of local authorities.

In the changing political climate, it became more and more difficult to inhibit their return, as before, by administrative and police methods. However, the Moscow center, tending toward the opinion that it had no other option than to allow the Crimean Tatars to return to their homeland, met with opposition from the local population and authorities of the Crimea. Despite this opposition, by summer 1993, about 230,000 persons, almost a half of the Crimean Tatars, had

\textsuperscript{26} Mustafa Dzhemilev was given the honourary title of ‘Kirimoglu’ (Son of Crimea) for his leadership and sacrifices at the Second \textit{Kurultay} in June 1991. He has been called “a Moses leading his people back to the Promised Land” and is the leading symbol of today’s Crimean Tatar movement. Dzhemilev is currently an elected member of the \textit{Verkhovna Rada}, (Ukraine’s parliament) and is affiliated with the Ukrainian nationalist party, \textit{Rukh}, which has been supportive of the Crimean Tatar cause. (Williams 2001: 428, 428n)
returned to the Crimea...however, to date, their continuing return aggravates interethnic tension on the peninsula. (Khazanov 1995: 193-194)

**Post-Soviet Era**

In the post-Soviet era, the Crimean Tatars’ desire to return and reestablish themselves in their homeland (now a part of independent Ukraine) has conflicted with the peninsula’s majority Russian population and its own desire for autonomy in the Crimea. The entrenched position of Crimea’s Russians has given them the upper hand in securing their hegemony over the peninsula. In September 1990, the Supreme Soviet of Crimea asked for, and received, the reinstatement of autonomous status for the Crimea. The Autonomous Republic of Crimea was established within the territory of independent Ukraine, with no mention of, nor allowance for, the Crimean Tatars, their language, culture, indigenous status, or right to return (Wydra 2004: 113-114).

Rather than wait for the relevant legislation to be passed, however, the Crimean Tatars continued to move to the peninsula in the 1990s. As of 2002, the population of Crimean Tatars in Crimea had reached 270,000, with between 30,000 and 100,000 still living in Central Asia (Uehling 2002). Those that have returned have faced considerable difficulty, given that all their former property was confiscated and redistributed. Faced with the inability to return to their former homes and the unwillingness of local authorities to assist with housing, most Tatars have squatted on vacant land on the fringes of cities and towns. These settlements were repeatedly destroyed by local officials, then rebuilt by the Tatars, until they were finally recognised by law (Uehling 2002).

Tatar activists have conjured images from the Crimean past, institutions such as the Kurultay and the Crimean ASSR, and national martyrs such as Çelebi Cihan, Veli
Ibrahimov, and Musa Mamut, in constructing the post-Soviet Crimea as their homeland, both in the diaspora and on the peninsula.

A well known portrait of Numan Çelebi Cihan, with his Nogai features and youthful appearance, for example, hung above Mustafa Dzhemilev during the historic second Kurultay held by the returning Crimean Tatars in Simferopol... (Williams 2001: 345)

Ukraine: Nation and State Identity Construction

The construction of a post-Soviet Ukraine has been described by Myhul as a state-to-nation mutation, the search for a nation to fit the new Ukrainian state (Myhul 2002: 61). Ukrainians, who suffered disproportionately among Soviet titular nationalities, are ambivalent with regard to their own ethnic identity (Recktenwald 2000: 61).

Ukrainian nationalism was seen as a serious threat to the Soviet Union, for a number of reasons.27 Ukrainians and Russians share considerable portions of their history, and their languages and customs, while different, are similar. From the earliest moments of Soviet history, this ethnic difference was downplayed by Russians, with Ukrainians demoted to the status of inferior Russians. The Ukrainian people also suffered disproportionately from Stalin’s ‘kulak’ purges28, and then lost millions to the artificial famine of the 1932-1933, in which all crops were seized from Ukrainian villagers and they were left to starve.

In Ukraine specifically, Stalin’s deadly policies, combined with the demographic havoc wreaked by World War II, left an amorphous society, linguistically fragmented and characterized by political apathy and absence of a civic culture. (Recktenwald 2000: 59)

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27 While a thorough treatment of the history of Soviet Ukraine is beyond the scope of this paper, Ukraine’s expansive, fertile land mass and large population was seen a vital to the Soviet economy, while Ukraine was the birthplace of the proto-Slavic culture, and thus had emotional significance for Russians.

28 ‘Kulaks’ were ostensibly wealthy peasants who resisted agricultural collectivization. It is important to note, however, that in essence, the Kulak purges became witch hunts, with arbitrary and shifting criteria used to distinguish wealthy from poor peasants. (Polian 2004: 76)
While the majority of the population of the Ukrainian SSR voted for independence, most did so not as an affirmation of Ukrainian national identity, but rather for economic reasons (Myhul 2002: 60). In addition, there is little in Ukrainian history to justify the current borders of Ukraine as the rightful inheritance of a Ukrainian ethnonation (Smith et al 1998: 36).

Ukrainian nation-builders now face “the challenge of accommodating over 100 ethnic minorities living in Ukraine while consolidating Ukrainian national identity” (Shevel 2000). While most of these minority groups are comparatively small, Ukraine’s Russian ‘minority’ poses a more serious challenge to Ukrainian statehood. According to Wydra, 29% of today’s Ukrainian citizens are ethnic Russians, most of whom were born in Ukraine (Wydra 2004: 115n). However, the ‘Russian-speaking minority’, also includes “those non-Russians influenced by Russian and Soviet social engineering efforts” (Recktenwald 2000: 57), and is a politically and economically powerful force.

These factors have produced a Ukrainian political elite which generally distances itself from ethnic appeals. In fact, many politicians are explicitly non-ethnic or pan-ethnic in their political platforms. Ethnic moderates are over-represented in the Verkhovna Rada (Ukraine’s Parliament), whereas ethnic entrepreneurs are relegated to the fringe (Smith et al 1998: 135-136).

Under these circumstances, [the] Ukrainian government's inability to formulate a consistent approach towards the Crimean Tatar political demands mirrors Ukraine's larger challenges: a task of a multi-ethnic democratizing state that has not yet developed a clear sense of national identity to combine individual and group rights, and to balancing conflicting political and ideological demands of groups in a divided society. (Shevel 2000)

29 Some Ukrainian historians reach back to ancient pre-Ukrainian peoples, such as the Scythians and the Sarmatians, to make a case for Ukrainian ethnic ties with southern and eastern Ukraine. (Smith et al 1998: 36)
The Ukrainian government initially supported Crimean Tatar claims, seeing them as a counterweight to Russian Crimean secessionist movements. Since these were effectively quelled in 1994, however, the Tatars have become a low priority for the government, and Kyiv’s interests seem to have been aimed at preserving calm and preventing unpleasant Tatar protests, but not at addressing their root causes (Kiniklioglu 1998: 327; Williams 2001: 441).30

Crimea’s Russians: Regional Majority Identity Construction

Despite Kyiv’s liberal policy toward ethnic minorities, its tolerance of generous regional autonomy, and its limited ‘Ukrainianisation’ of political and cultural institutions, the previously privileged Russian-speaking minority has experienced psychological difficulties adapting to life in a new state imbued with symbols of the Ukrainian titular nation (Reckenwald 2000: 60-61). Yet Crimea’s Russians have tended to rely less on ethnic mobilisation strategies than on regional identities (i.e. narod Kryma, the people of Crimea) (Smith et al 1998: 136). This may, however, be seen as a rhetorical luxury in light of their overwhelming numerical majority on the peninsula.

The Russians of the Crimea see themselves as under siege, threatened from above (the Ukrainian state) and below (the returning Crimean Tatars). The positions of both ‘contenders’ are denigrated as nationalistic by Crimean (Russian) politicians, eager to preserve power over the peninsula. Ukrainian nationalists (loosely defined) are seen as puzzling and petty to Russians, for whom the Ukrainians are considered kin, their ‘little brothers’ (‘Little Russians’, though the ‘Great Russians’ do not seem to see the

30 It is difficult to assess the willingness of the new Ukrainian administration, under Viktor Yushchenko, to tackle the Crimean Tatar issue, given its recent rise to power and the significant political hurdles it has faced, especially with respect to Ukraine’s Russian-speaking minority. Yushchenko has, at least rhetorically, expressed support for the Tatars, but to date this has resulted in little tangible change.
chauvinism in this). As for the Crimean Tatars, Russians tend to draw on post-war revisionist history for their stereotypes, seeing them as “a rootless, violent, uncivilized people” while the Crimean Tatars, for their part, depict the Russians as “oppressors, and immigrants, with no rights of abode in their homeland” (Andrew Wilson 1994, qtd. in Kiniklioglu 1998: 328).

The Crimean Russians have been able to use Kyiv’s fears of their secession to politically marginalise the Tatars. The Crimean Constitution, approved by the Verkhovna Rada in December 1998, has calmed fears of a Russian separatist movement, but also completely disregards the interests of the roughly 270,000 Crimean Tatars who now make up approximately 12% of the Crimea’s population (Shevel 2000). Russian domination of Crimean political institutions has meant that anti-Tatar feelings have translated into exclusionary practices, such as the refusal to issue permits to settle on Crimea’s southern coast, from where most Tatars were deported (Kiniklioglu 1998: 330).

Crimea’s Russians have also managed to show their proverbial colours with respect to the Russian Federation. In September 1992, the Crimean Parliament chose a flag whose colours matched those of the Russian flag, raising fears of Russian interference in Kyiv-Simferopol relations (Wydra 2004: 117).

International Dimension

To date, no country other than Ukraine has contributed to the material costs of Crimean Tatar repatriation. Russia and Uzbekistan, the two states which had a hand in, or profited economically from, the deportation, have been reluctant to donate to the

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31 Incidentally, the flag of the Crimean Tatars shares the colours of Ukraine’s flag – even the exact shades of yellow and light blue – clearly, if not deliberately, indicating allegiances within the state.

32 While some funds have come from Turkey, these have mainly been from the Crimean diaspora in that country. (Kiniklioglu, 1998: 335)
cause, lest it be interpreted as an admission of liability (Kinikoglu 1998: 335). This demonstrates the inefficacy of the 1992 Bishkek Agreement “On Questions of the Restoration of Rights of Deported Individuals, National Minorities, and Peoples” signed by 10 CIS states, which provided for the sharing of costs among participant countries (Shevel 2002).

International organisations have been influential in a number of broad ways. The OSCE, for example, has pressured Ukraine and its neighbours to avoid ethnocentric policies (Smith et al 1998: 135-136). More specifically, in 1994, the United Nations Crimean Integration and Development Programme (CIDP) was set in motion to assist with the repatriation process (Kinikoglu 1998: 336), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees also advocates on behalf of the Tatars. The Council of Europe “Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities” (2000), to which Ukraine is a signatory, obliges Ukraine to implement minimal standards with respect to Crimean Tatar political representation (which it has not, to date).

Most important with respect to Crimean issues has been the Russian Federation’s influence on the ‘near abroad’ and its perceived duty to protect new Russian minorities in former-Soviet states. According to Wydra, upon the dissolution of the USSR,

Russia immediately interfered in the relations between Simferopol and Kiev. Already in January 1992 the question about the legitimacy of the donation of the peninsula to Ukraine in 1954 was on the agenda of the Russian Duma [and] in April Alexander Ruzkoj, the Vice-President of the Russian Federation openly favoured the secession of Crimea (Wydra 2004: 115).

In spite of Russia’s economic and military influence, however, Ukraine has shown (most recently during the Orange Revolution) the ability to craft domestic policy irrespective of
Russia’s preferences, and in any event, the Crimean Tatars have not been an issue of much concern for Russia\textsuperscript{33}, whose interests in the Crimea are largely strategic.

**The Crimean Tatars Today**

The Crimean Tatars’ struggle for repatriation and restoration of their rights continues. The Tatars suffer from political under-representation in the Crimean Parliament\textsuperscript{34} (although Mustafa Dzhemilev and Refat Chubarov have been elected to the Verkhovna Rada), and suffrage and citizenship issues remain contentious (Uehling 2002). The Kurultay and Mejlis are still not recognized by the Crimean authorities as legitimate representative bodies, although the new Crimean Prime Minister, Anatoly Burdyuhov, has suggested the possibility of doing so (Varfolomeyev 2005), and inter-ethnic relations remain tense on the peninsula (Kiniklioglu 1998: 327). Crimea’s economic situation has generally been worse than that of Ukraine as a whole, and the Crimean Tatars suffer a far higher rate of unemployment than the peninsula’s Slavic population (Kiniklioglu 1998: 331-332). Crimean Tatar settlements largely lack electricity, gas, water, paved roads, and sewers (Shevel 2000), and their population is increasing, with 2,662 Crimean Tatars resettling in the Crimea in 2004 (ICC 2005). The romanticised tales of Crimea passed down by their parents and grandparents stand in stark contrast to the harsh reality of today’s Crimea, as experienced by repatriates.

\textsuperscript{33} Some Crimean Tatars currently live in the Krasnodar region of the northern Caucasus, where ethnic tensions have recently reached an uncomfortable level. However, the Crimean Tatars are only one of a number of groups there, including large numbers of Meskhetian Turks, which are a greater Russian concern.

\textsuperscript{34} “From 1994 to 1998, the Crimean Tatars had a quota of 14 seats in Crimea’s 98-member legislature. It was a temporary provision for one electoral period only, and was abolished before March 1998 parliamentary elections to the Crimean parliament which were to take place under the majoritarian system of ‘one person, one vote.’ This effectively precluded Crimean Tatars, who are scattered throughout Crimea and do not form a majority in any electoral district, to elect their representatives to Crimea’s parliament. Crimean Tatars severe under-representation in the Crimean organs of power is illustrated by the fact that they constitute only 1% of employees in Crimea’s government bodies, with only 0.1% in police and security forces in Crimea.” (Shevel 2000)
Yet despite the serious problems facing the Crimean Tatars, their presence in large numbers on the territory they consider their homeland makes them a political force to be reckoned with. Clearly, their ability to influence these outcomes is greater than it would be were it not for this presence in the Crimea. The fact that so many of them have been successful in returning to their land is largely a function of their ethnic identity, and especially the territorial nature of its construction.

Even the disillusionment accompanying the return process is being harnessed by Crimean Tatars as a building block of national identity. Today, the dismal state of the Crimean economy and especially its ecology (due to years of Soviet industrialisation) is used to further construct the Crimean Tatars’ claim to the land, since the degradation occurred in the absence of their ‘expert’ indigenous knowledge (Williams 2001: 444).

Territoriality and the notion of vatan have remained central to the Crimean Tatars’ ethnic identity, and it is these notions which have successfully led over half the group back to the Crimea.
Chapter 3: The Meskhetian Turks—Ethnogenesis and Identity

Ethnogenesis and Early History

The Meskhetian Turks are Hanafi-school Sunni Muslims who speak an Oghuz Turkic language (Kars dialect), and lived in southwestern Georgia’s Meskheti-Javakheti region until their deportation in 1944. The ethnogenesis of the Meskhetian Turks is far from clear, with the main debate concerning whether they are Islamicised ethnic Georgians or ethnic Turks who arrived in the region as a result of the Ottoman Empire’s expansion (Brennan 2003; Khazanov 1995: 195; Pentikäinen, Trier 2004: 9).

35 The name of this ethnic group is disputed, with Georgians referring to them as ‘Meskhetians’, ‘Meskhetian Muslims’, ‘Meskhs’ or ‘Meskhi’ (with the word ‘Turk’ deliberately removed, and Turks (in Turkey) using the term ‘Ahiska Turks’ (which refers to the town of Akhaltsikhe, where they lived). Most members of this ethnic group refer to themselves as Meskhetian Turks, and this is reflected in the NGO and (scant) scholarly literature about them. (IOM 1998: 2-4; Pentikäinen, Trier 2004: 9, 32)
The ‘ethnic Georgian’ argument claims that the indigenous population of Meskhetia are the ethnically Georgian Meskhi tribes, and that when the region fell under Ottoman Turkish rule in the 16th century, they were subjected to an intensive enculturation process, resulting in mass conversion to Islam and the adoption of the Turkish language, surnames, and self-identification (Polian 2004: 155; Sheehy, Nahaylo 1980: 24). This view, popular with Georgians, sees today’s Meskhetians as a mixture of (predominantly) Islamicised Georgians with ethnic Turks, Kurds, Khemshins36, and other Muslim groups such as Karapapakhs, Turkmen, and Azerbaijanis, and considers the term Meskhetian ‘Turks’ to be erroneous (IOM 1998: 4).37

Proponents of this narrative suggest that Islam and Turkish cultural influence separated today’s Meskhetian Turks from their Christian ethnic kin, the Georgians (Pentikäinen, Trier 2004: 9). A. M. Khazanov suggests, however, that this should be viewed as an oversimplification, in light of the experience of another Muslim Georgian group, the Ajarians, who in spite of their conversion to Islam have retained not only the Georgian language, but to some extent also the Georgian traditional culture and self-identification” (1995: 195).

Those who see the Meskhetian Turks’ origins as Turkic claim that they descended from Turkic tribes who settled in the region known as Meskheti between the fifth and seventh centuries.38 When Meskheti was under Ottoman rule (11th-12th, and 16th-18th centuries), these tribes consolidated, forging a new Meskhetian Turkish identity (IOM

36The Khemshins (also Khemshils, Hamshens, Hemshins) are ethnic Armenians who converted to Islam under the Ottoman Empire. While most of the Khemshins live in modern-day Turkey, the Treaty of Adrianople left a few thousand on the Georgian side of the border. (Pohl 1999: 130)
37Georgians note that the ethnonym ‘Meskhetian Turk’ was invented in the 1940s, and that in the 1930s, Meskhetians were deemed to be ‘Azerbaijanis’ rather than ‘Turks’. (IOM 1998: 4)
38Some claim that this settlement occurred up to 2,500 years ago. (IOM 1998: 4; HW 1991: 54)
This view is supported by the cultural closeness of Meskhetian Turks to Anatolian Turks and their shared language (Pentikäinen, Trier 2004: 10). It is important to note, however, that the Turkish identity of the Meskhetian Turks, while connected with the Ottoman Empire, had no ties to the Turkish state which emerged after World War I. According to Chervonnaya, In no way did they perceive themselves as citizens of the new Turkey that was build [sic] on the ruins of the Osmannic Empire, they were never influenced by the "Young-Turkish" movement and ideology. They did not participate in the annihilation of the Armenians in 1915. In every way, they were and felt rather distant to the Turkey of the 20th Century. (Chervonnaya 1998)

Khazanov notes, however, that a view of the Meskhetian Turks with no ethnic Georgian component is difficult to accept, due to the frontier nature of the region, beginning in the Seljuk period (11th-13th century), “where Christians and Muslims, Georgians and Turks, lived side by side for many centuries while competing for political power over this territory” (1995: 196).

Sheehy and Nahaylo suggest a definition which avoids the murky issue of ethnogenesis:

Those who describe themselves today as Meskhetians are ethnically a heterogenous group. They have in common that they are all either Turkic or Turkicized; that they previously inhabited Meskhetia, a mountainous region on the Soviet-Turkish frontier in south-west Georgian SSR; and that they were all deported to Central Asia and Kazakhstan on 15 November 1944. (Sheehy, Nahaylo 1980: 24)

In fact, it is arguable that the Meskhetian Turk identity arose as a product of their deportation, and fused various previously-separate groups under a new shared identity. However, the contentious ethnogenesis of this new group would have important political ramifications in their attempts to return to Meskhetia.

**Meskhetia Under Tsarist Rule**
Meskheti-Javakheti fell under Tsarist Russian control as a result of the 1829 Treaty of Adrianople. However, the following period is considered by Ayşegül Aydingün to be a ‘transition period’, since the region was claimed by both the Russian and Ottoman Empires, especially during the 1853-1854 Russo-Turkish War, the First World War, and the Bolshevik Revolution (2002b: 187-188).

Aydingün notes that before this period religion served as the primary source of identification for the region’s Muslims, as well as village, class and kin identities. However, during this era, ethnic identity began to emerge. The Meskhetians expressed their ‘Turkishness’ politically, siding with the Ottomans during the Russo-Turkish war, and again during World War I, after which they demanded to be included in the Ottoman Empire (at the Batoum Conference in 1918). Finally, however, the region was incorporated into Soviet Georgia. Having sided with the Ottomans, the Meskhetian Turks were treated as a security risk by the Soviet authorities (Aydingün 2002b: 188).

**Soviet Georgia**

While other regions of the Georgian SSR were given autonomous status (Abkhazian ASSR, Ajarian ASSR, and South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast) Meskheti-Javakheti was not recognized as the homeland of any particular ethnic group, and as such, received no special autonomous status. Thus, the policy of korenizatsia, which rooted the titular nationality of a given territory, benefited the Georgian ethnic group at the expense of other nationalities in the region.

Demographically, Meskheti-Javakheti was one of the most ethnically diverse regions in Georgia. A 1926 census of the region listed Georgians, Armenians, Turks,

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39 The southern portion of Meskhetia remained an Ottoman Turkish region. (Sheehy, Nahaylo 1980: 24)
Kurds, Russians, Ukrainians, Greeks, Jews, Poles, and numerous other ethnic groups (Bougai 1996: 134). While the Muslims of Meskhetia maintained a degree of distance from Christians, Svetlana Chervonnaya notes that the region was relatively free of ethnic strife. From 1829 to 1944, “no conflicts took place in this region between Meshket-Turks and other ethnic groups due to ethnic or religious reasons” (Chervonnaya 1998). A Meskhetian Turk ethnic identity was still difficult to discern, and no specific ethnonym existed to denote it (Khazanov 1992: 2). Instead, Meskhetian Muslims referred to themselves as ‘ierli’ (locals), a term without ethnic connotations (Khazanov 1992: 3).

Beginning in the late 1920s, the Meskhetian Turks began to suffer repressive cultural policies. From 1928-1939, many were forced to adopt Georgian or Russian surnames (Khazanov 1992: 3; Polian 2004: 155). Ironically, a parallel effort was made to ‘Azerbaijanise’ the Meskhetian Turks, as well as ethnically Turkic groups throughout the Soviet Union. Bougai suggests that this policy was part of a general appeasement of Turkey, who patronised Azerbaijan (Bougai 1996: 135). While 137,921 ‘Turks’ were listed in the 1926 Soviet census (5.2% of the Georgian SSR’s population), and schools were initially provided for them in Turkish, by 1936 all of these had switched to Azerbaijani as the language of instruction (Sheehy, Nahaylo 1980: 24).

Meskheti-Javakheti refers to two related regions in south western Georgia. Meskhetia includes the Adigensky, Aspindzinsky and Akhalsikhsky districts, while Javakheti includes the Akhalkalaki and Bogdanovsky (now Ninotsminda) districts. The current administrative region, known as Samtske-Javakheti, includes both of these regions, as well as the Borzomi region. (See Fig. 3.1) In the interests of brevity and clarity, this paper will use the term ‘Meskhetian Turks’ to refer to the peoples in the pre-deportation era who would later constitute this ethnic group. However, this terminology is not intended to denote a pre-deportation ethnic consciousness.

‘Azerbaijanisation’ extended to Azerbaijan as well, where no such ethnic identity existed. Muslims in the Azerbaijan SSR, who had previously described themselves as ‘Azerbaijani Turks’ or simply ‘Turks’, were ordered to adopt the ethnonym ‘Azerbaijani’. (Khazanov 1992: 3)

In the 1920s, while many Meskhetian Turks were bilingual, very few were literate (Sheehy, Nahaylo 1980: 24).
Despite this Soviet ethnic engineering, by the time of the deportation, the Meskhetians had been redesignated as ‘Turks’ (Turki), and were, at least in part, deported as such (HW 1991: 53).

World War II and Deportation

During World War II, the Meskheti-Javakheti region was never occupied by German forces. Like all Soviet citizens, however, the people of this region felt the impact of the war. Roughly 40,000 Meskhetian Turks served in the Red Army, and of those, 27,000 died fighting Nazi forces (Bougai 1996: 132; Brennan 2003).

On 20 September 1944, a decree issued by Lavrentii Beria ordered the deportation of the Turks, Kurds, and Khemshins from the border regions of the Georgian SSR to Central Asia, commencing on 15 November (Bougai 1996: 138). While only three groups were mentioned, a number of other Muslim groups had been listed in the census as Turks, and were therefore also deported (Bougai 1996: 140-141).

Accounts vary as to the number of people deported, from the low official total of 95,000 to some 120,000. Similarly, numbers of deaths due to the deportation range from 15,000 persons to one third of all deportees, the vast majority of whom were women and children (Bougai 1996: 142-143; Brennan 2003). Red Army veterans were not spared, and by 1949, 4,075 veterans were counted among the exiles (Pohl 1999: 132).

Unlike the Crimean Tatars, there was never a pretense of punishment for disloyal behaviour in the deportation of the Meskhetian Turks, since there was no opportunity for the groups mentioned in the decree to have collaborated with Nazi forces. In fact, they were never accused of any crime. Rather, the deportation “stemmed from Stalin’s desire
to remove potentially pro-Turkish peoples from the frontier area at a time when he had ambitions in north-eastern Turkey” (Sheehy, Nahaylo 1980: 24). 44

It is important to note that the deported peoples were not targeted as Muslims, but as members of specific ethnic groups with ties to Turkey. This is evinced by the fact that the ethnically Georgian Muslim population of the Ajarian ASSR was not targeted with deportation, despite the region’s long border with Turkey. In addition, a number of ethnic Laz (a Muslim Georgian subgroup) were deported from the region by mistake, and were allowed to return once this error had been brought to the attention of the authorities (Pentikäinen, Trier 2004: 11n).

‘Georgianisation’ of Meskhetia

The majority of the Meskhetian Turks were deported from the Meskhetia (now Samtskhe) portion of Meskheti-Javakheti, while only 8,000 of the deportees were from predominantly ethnic Armenian Javakheti. The deportation decree also ordered the resettlement of 7,000 specifically ethnic Georgian households (over 30,000 individuals) in the recently vacated villages. 45 These Georgians were forcibly moved from the Ajaria, Zemo, Imereti and Racha regions of western Georgia, significantly ‘Georgianising’ the region (IOM 1998: 5; Pentikäinen, Trier 2004: 18; Pohl 1999: 131).

After the war, Georgian authorities insisted upon the declaration of the Meskheti-Javakheti region as a ‘frontier zone’, subject to special regulations. This 85 km wide zone was in effect closed to the Meskhetian Turks, who were not even granted permits to visit as guests or tourists, or to tend the graves of their ancestors (Khazanov 1992: 4-5).

44 Proof of these designs came on 20 May 1945, when Stalin demanded that Turkey cede its Kars and Ardahan provinces, and allow a Soviet naval base in the Dardanelles Straits. (Pohl 1999: 130)
45 Some dispute exists as to the ethnicity of the settlers. Aydingün suggests an “encouraged” resettlement by both Georgians and Armenians. (Aydingün 2002a: 49, 53) This issue would come to be politically significant in the official Georgian resistance to the Meskhetian Turks’ repatriation.
Sürgün: Life in Exile

The deported groups were shipped to the Kazakh SSR (approx. 30,000 persons), Kyrgyz SSR (9,000), and Uzbek SSR (43,000) (Khazanov 1992: 4). The special settlement regime was not immediately imposed upon them, probably because no charges had been laid (HW 1991: 53). Six months later, however, they were subjected to the spetsposeleniye and suffered from epidemics, lack of food and medicine, dismal living quarters, and harsh conditions imposed by their guards, resulting in the death of one in five Meskhetian Turks. Most of the deportees were employed on farms, developing the so-called Hungry Steppe of Central Asia (Pohl 1999: 133, 143).

After the lifting of the special settlement regime, the Meskhetian Turks were subjected to assimilationist policies. Many were forced to register as ethnic Uzbeks, Tatars, or Azerbaijanis (Khazanov 1995: 99), they were denied schooling in Turkish, and there were no newspapers or other publications in their native language (Pohl 1999: 133).

Meskhetian Turks managed to resist assimilation by remaining in closed, tight-knit communities, which kept in contact with one another despite their dispersion throughout Central Asia, and reduced contact with local nationalities to a minimum. They also retained a feeling of distinctness through a process of ‘othering’ which Khazanov refers to as a “superiority complex”.

Considering themselves as more advanced, they tended to look down upon the indigenous population of Central Asia, particularly because, denied avenues of social advancement, they had concentrated their efforts on the economic sphere, and soon became more prosperous than their Uzbek, or Kazakh neighbors. (Khazanov 1992: 7-8)

The Meskhetian Turk ethnic identity emerged as a product of the deportation from Meskhetia and the experience of exile. Groups who previously did not identify with one
another were united by a common tragedy and the foundation of certain shared cultural traits: ethnic Turks, Kurds, Khemshins, Karapapakhs (or Teraklines), Turkmen, Azerbaijanis, and ethnic Georgian Muslims. These groups shared a language (Turkish), a history as part of the Ottoman Empire, and now, the same fate. According to Khazanov, "the Meskhetians in exile more than ever before, and perhaps for the first time in their history, began to conceive of themselves as a separate people" (1992: 7).

The threat of assimilation, and the Soviet Union’s denial of their symbolic resources, ironically strengthened the Meskhetian Turks’ ethnic identity and nationalism. In the absence of official recognition, they developed informal channels of resistance, including the domestic preservation of language, rituals and religious practices, and the passing on of shared histories. Ethnic roots were more necessary to assert in their host societies, where they were surrounded by other Muslims (Aydingün 2002b: 192).

Aydingün notes that the ethnic differences between the Meskhetian subgroups did not disappear entirely. While rarely declared openly, and not usually an obstacle for intermarriage, the distinctions between the subgroups, and their membership, was and is known by all members of any Meskhetian Turk community (Aydingün 2002b: 193).

Repatatriation Movement

In 1956, as soon as the special settlement regime was lifted, political mobilisation began, with numerous Meskhetian Turk delegations visiting both Moscow and Tbilisi. (Polian 2004: 216). Their request to repatriate was met with denial of their ethnic identity: they were told that they were Azerbaijanis, and that they would be welcome to ‘return’ to Azerbaijan (Sheehy, Nahaylo 1980: 25).

46 Scholars differ as to which groups to include. The Turkmen, Azerbaijanis, Khemshins and Karapapakhs are variously excluded, as are ethnic Georgians.
Small groups of Meskhetian Turks also repeatedly attempted to return to Meskhetia, either being stopped at the Georgian border or arrested later and re-deported (HW 1991: 53). The Soviet Georgian authorities were deeply suspicious of the Meskhetian Turks, and this translated into various social, economic and demographic arguments against their repatriation, as well as administrative obstacles (Pentikäinen, Trier 2004: 12), intimidation, interrogations and arrests (Khazanov 1992: 5).

In 1964, the repatriation campaign entered a new phase with the creation of the ‘Turkish Society for the Defence of the National Rights of the Turkish People in Exile’ and a Provisional Organizing Committee for the Return of the People to the Homeland (known as Vatan) under the chairmanship of history teacher and war veteran Enver Odabashev (Sheehy, Nahaylo 1980: 25).

Around the same time, in the early 1960s, the issue of the Meskhetian Turks’ ethnicity arose within the exile community, with a split into two factions: pro-Georgian and pro-Turkish. It is unclear whether the pro-Georgian ethnic identity was adopted as a strategy to return to Meskhetia or as a genuine belief in Georgian origins.

In response to repeated delegations, on 30 May 1968, the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet issued an Order stating that

Turks, Kurds, Khemshils and Azerbaydzhanis, formerly resident in...districts of the Georgian SSR, and members of their families enjoy the right, like all citizens of the Soviet Union, to reside on the whole territory of the USSR in accordance with the existing legislation... (Sheehy, Nahaylo 1980: 25)

The Order also noted, however, that these peoples had ‘taken root’ in other union republics, implicitly declaring the permanence of their exile (Sheehy, Nahaylo 1980: 25).

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47 Helsinki Watch suggests that the Meskhetian Turks were inspired by similar Crimean Tatar efforts. (HW 1991: 53)
48 Vatan is Turkish for ‘homeland’.
Increasing protests by the Meskhetian Turks led to a series of false promises. In July 1968, for example, Soviet Georgian officials verbally agreed to allow 100 families per year to resettle in Georgia, although not in Meskhetia. When Meskhetian Turk families attempted to return, however, they faced obstacles in obtaining permits, and the few families who managed to settle in Georgia were rounded up in June 1969, boarded on trains, and expelled from the republic (Sheehy, Nahaylo 1980: 25). Activism also prompted further repression, with frequent arrests of Meskhetian Turk leaders. Vatan’s president, Odabashev, was jailed three times between 1969 and 1971 (HW 1991: 54).

In April 1970, desperation at the lack of progress in returning to Georgia prompted a group of Meskhetian Turks to appeal to the Turkish Embassy in Moscow for permission to immigrate to Turkey, along with lists of Meskhetian Turks willing to move there. According to Polian, this caused another rift to form among the Meskhetian Turks, the majority of which continued to seek repatriation to Georgia (2004: 218).

The pro-Georgian Meskhetian Turks were no more successful than their pro-Turkish counterparts in swaying official Georgian opinion. While representatives of this faction were warmly received in Tbilisi in spring 1976, no progress was made in the repatriation effort (Polian 2004: 218). Soon after this visit, however, Georgian officials declared “as an unofficial but fundamental repatriation condition...that Meskhetian Turks recognize their Georgian descent and change their names correspondingly” (Polian 2004: 218). This official Georgian pronouncement caused a further division in the Meskhetian Turk movement, among ‘conformists’ who were prepared to accept the Georgian

49 A similar situation occurred again in 1977, while two other planned repatriations – in 1982 and 1987 – were never implemented. (Aydinoglu 2002a: 54-55)
government’s conditions out of desperation, and the ‘uncompromising’ who were not willing to deny their ‘Turkishness’ for any reason (Polian 2004: 218).

In August 1988, as national awareness was on the rise in the Soviet Union, an All-Union Congress of Meskhetian Turks put a temporary end to the factional struggle.

In the following discussion the partisans of Georgian identification were defeated and publicly admitted that their political line was erroneous....They elected the chief leader of their movement and decided to press for the return to their homeland and for the official recognition of the existence of separate Meskhetian Turkish ethnicity. (Khazanov 1992: 8-9)

The discourse of those who claimed Turkish origin, who argued that “they were deported as ‘Turks’ and therefore should be able to return to Georgia as ‘Turks’” was by 1988 the dominant discourse of the Meskhetian Turk repatriation movement (IOM 1998: 4).

**Ferghana Massacre**

*Glasnost* and *perestroika* also consolidated the Meskhetian Turks’ desire to return to south western Georgia. One community member told Helsinki Watch, “We’re not interested in Turkey now; we want to go back to our 2,400-year homeland” (HW 1991: 54). However, the newly liberal policies also encouraged other nationalist awakenings across the Soviet Union, and in Uzbekistan’s Ferghana Valley, this translated into a pogrom against the Meskhetian Turk community.

In June 1989, an ostensibly ‘spontaneous’ marketplace quarrel erupted into a well organised campaign of violence against the Meskhetian Turk community. After two weeks and 100 deaths, Soviet troops airlifted 74,000 Meskhetian Turks from Uzbekistan. While most of the evacuees were relocated in Azerbaijan, many were sent to Ukraine, southern Russia, and other republics (IOM 1998: 5; Matveeva 2002: 20). The
Meskhetian Turks consider themselves to be doubly victimized, having undergone ‘two deportations’ (HW 1991: 51).

While conspiracy theories abound regarding the Ferghana events, relations between Uzbeks and Meskhetian Turks had been deteriorating in previous years, due to rising unemployment and the Meskhetian Turks’ economic success (Khazanov 1992: 9).

The evacuated Meskhetian Turks often faced new difficulties in their new republics. In Azerbaijan, which received the largest number of refugees, most were welcomed and settled on allotted lands on the Jeyran-Choy Steppe (Polian 2004: 221). However, some were relocated in or near Nagorno-Karabakh, an ethnic Armenian enclave in which ethnic tensions with Azerbaijanis were quickly escalating into war. When the Armenians established control over the area the Meskhetian Turks, as Muslims, were forced to flee along with the Azerbaijanis (Cornell 2001: 183).

In Russia, the Meskhetian Turks found themselves particularly unwelcome, especially in the Krasnodar and Stavropol regions, with local residents questioning why they hadn’t been sent to their native region in Georgia. Local officials have enacted discriminatory policies that have effectively rendered the Meskhetian Turks stateless, and have sponsored Russian nationalist “Cossack” groups who engage in organised thuggery against the Meskhetian Turks (Polian 2004: 220-221).

Post-Soviet Era

The repatriation movement in the post-Soviet era has remained bleak, characterised by an inhospitable environment in the Republic of Georgia, and a fractured Meskhetian Turk community scattered throughout the former Soviet Union and Turkey.

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50 For example, many Georgians believe that these events were orchestrated by Moscow to put pressure on Georgia, where in 1989 a national liberation movement posed a threat to Soviet control. (IOM 1998: 5-6)
In independent Georgia, the Meskhetian Turks face both official opposition to repatriation (and thus a range of technical obstacles to the process) as well as hostile popular attitudes, both among ethnic Georgians and the Armenians who are concentrated in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region (Pentikäinen, Trier 2004: 17).

Among the Meskhetian Turks themselves, official Georgian hostility has caused the factions of the Soviet era to resurface, dividing the community in terms of identities and interests. Aydingün suggests that there are four different orientations: (1) those who wish to repatriate to Meskhetia as Turks (represented by Vatan), (2) those who believe they are ethnic Georgians and should repatriate as such, (3) those who wish to immigrate to Turkey, and finally, (4) a small group of young Meskhetian Turks “who defend the idea of living where they are born” (Aydingün 2002a: 57).

Since 1992, the second, pro-Georgian group has been represented by Hsna, an NGO created and partly funded by the Georgian government. Hsna’s membership requirements are seen by pro-Turkish Meskhetian Turks as blatantly assimilationist.

All those registered as members of ‘Hsna’ are required to fill in an application form which states among other things that ‘I want to restore the Georgian nationality and surname for all members of my family and my children will be taught in their native Georgian language.’ They are also required to indicate their historical Georgian family surname. (IOM 1998: 12)

Despite official Georgian support for Hsna, the post-Soviet era has not seen any progress with respect to repatriation of even Georgian-identified Meskhetians. In 1998, IOM found only 412 Meskhetians in Georgia, of whom 87 were university students living in Tbilisi (IOM 1998: 15). On paper, the Georgian government has made many official concessions to the Meskhetian Turks. On 9 December 1996, a decree indicated that Georgia would accept up to 5,000 Meskhetian Turks by the year 2000, although it was

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51 Hsna is Georgian for 'salvation'.

stipulated that these would be pro-Georgian Hsna members, and would not be allowed to move to Meskhetia (IOM 1998: 16). Most notably, in 1999 Georgia was accepted as a member of the Council of Europe on the condition that it repatriate the Meskhetian Turks over a 12 year period (Brennan 2003). This constituted a serious international statement of intent, especially in light of Georgia’s European aspirations.

Both Hsna and Vatan have undergone changes in recent years. In 1999, Hsna was succeeded by the Union of Georgian Repatriates. Based in Tbilisi, this group advocates for repatriation and for the rights of the few repatriates already in Georgia. Vatan was dealt a serious blow with the loss of Yusuf Sarvarov, its founder and director, in 2003 (Pentikäinen, Trier 2004: 27-28). While both organisations continue to advocate repatriation,

the dispute over the origins of the Meskhetian Turks as well as the disagreement over the ethnopolitical status of the returnees have estranged the organizations and therefore, considerably weakened their common cause. The lack of consensus on these key issues has also effectively deprived Meskhetian Turk communities of a united and effective vanguard to promote claims of repatriation and human rights. (Pentikäinen, Trier 2004: 28)

Georgia: Nation and State Identity Construction

Georgia’s Soviet history was marked by strong ethnonationalism, and a refusal to acknowledge the separate ethnic identity of minority groups on Georgian territory. From the earliest ethnographic censuses, Georgians argued that the Laz, Mingrelians, Svans, and Ajars were all part of the ‘greater’ Georgian nation, irrespective of religious and linguistic differences, not to mention the self-identification of these groups. While the Muslim Ajars were eventually given their own autonomous territory, they were still listed as an ethnic Georgian subgroup, in response to the protests of such eminent Georgians as Lavrentii Beria (Hirsch 2005: 136, 289).
Notwithstanding this controversially broad understanding of ‘Georgianness’, at the collapse of the USSR Georgia was still very multinational, with ethnic Georgians constituting 69% of the population in 1989. “The internal divisions among Georgians, and the presence of large ethnic minorities, has meant that the issue of defining a Georgian nation is a continuing preoccupation” (Matveeva 2002: 9).

Georgia’s early independence period was characterised by intense Georgian nationalism, which translated into campaigns against ethnic minorities. With the rise to power of ethnic entrepreneur Zviad Gamsakhurdia and his radical Round Table-Free Georgia bloc in 1990-1, minorities were demoted to the status of unwelcome ‘guests’ on Georgian territory and this stance soon led to ethnic unrest and provoked ethnic separatist conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Matveeva 2002: 9).

The Meskhetian Turks were targeted by this official jingoism as well, with repatriates rounded up and dropped off at the Turkish border, and slogans such as “Not a single Turk on Georgian territory” becoming increasingly popular in the press and among citizens (Baazov 2001). While Gamsakhurdia’s successor, Eduard Shevardnadze, adjusted official Georgian policy toward the Meskhetian Turks, in practical terms very little changed during his tenure (Pentikäinen, Trier 2004: 16).

Current Georgian opposition to repatriation includes logistical arguments: the dismal state of the Georgian economy, the burden of 300,000 existing IDPs from South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and the supposed lack of space in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region (Baazov 2001; Brennan 2003). In addition, there is opposition on ethnic grounds:

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52 A Gamsakhurdia-era newspaper claimed, “There is no such thing as ‘Meskhetian Turks’ anymore than there are ‘Chinese Burgundians’. Meskhetia is a corner of Georgia, not of Turkey” (HW 1991: 55).
suspicion that the Meskhetian Turks will try to separate the region from Georgia, the likelihood of a negative reaction to “an influx of Muslims in an essentially Christian society”, and the possibility of conflict between the Armenian population of Javakheti and the Meskhetian Turks (IOM 1998: 15-16).

Meskhetian Turks dispute these arguments noting that “there are at least 80 villages in Meskhetia that remain empty to this day”, that the influx will not be as large as expected (Arif Yunusov, qtd. in Brennan 2003), and that most of the public opposition stems from the government’s own scare tactics. Bekir Mamoyev, head of Vatan, stresses the loyalty of the Meskhetian Turks to Georgia. “All we want to do is return to Georgia and live peacefully with our neighbors. We will defend Georgia like loyal citizens. We have no desire to break away and join Turkey, as certain Georgian ‘nationalists’ suggest” (qtd. in Brennan 2003).

An underlying current of ‘Turkophobia’ seems to pervade the repatriation issue. Even Georgian supporters of the Meskhetian Turks’ cause, such as the League for Defence of the Rights of Muslim Georgians, insist that returnees be considered ethnic Georgians, not Turks (HW 1991, 55). Unresolved Georgian identity issues drive the debate “as to whether minorities can constitute a legitimate part of a Georgian nation” (Matveeva 2002: 10), or rather a Georgian state that is clearly seen as the exclusive homeland of a single nation.

The official Georgian support for the proposition that the Meskhetian Turks are ethnically Georgian is puzzling, given their obvious reluctance to repatriate the group.

53 This argument hardly seems credible. There are in fact numerous Muslims in Georgia, most notably the Ajarians, Laz, and up to half of the Abkhazians, as well as a large Azerbaijani minority, and religion does not generally seem to be a source of tension.
54 Ironically, Georgia has cooperative and friendly relations with both Turkey and Turkic Azerbaijan.
On the one hand, the Meskhetian Turks are vilified on the grounds that they are Turkish and therefore have no place in Georgia. On the other hand, they are accused of being in denial about the ‘fact’ that they are ethnic Georgians. Their motives are questioned as Turks, and ethnic conflict is expected because of their Turkishness. Meanwhile, Meskhetian Turks who identify as Georgian have not been welcomed into Georgia, and the few who have are kept away from Meskhetia as though their Turkishness is more of a factor in Meskhetia than elsewhere. The most obvious explanation for this behaviour is that ethnic identity is being used by opponents of repatriation as a wedge to divide the community and obscure the primarily human rights issue of repatriation (Brennan 2003).

Since Mikheil Saakashvili’s rise to power in January 2004, there has been little change. While it may be premature to judge the Saakashvili administration’s record on the Meskhetian Turk issue, it is significant that in January 2005, the Council of Europe noted that nothing at all had been done to meet the membership requirements imposed on Georgia: the repatriation of the Meskhetian Turks (Peuch 2005).  

**Javakheti Armenians: Regional Majority Identity Construction**

Armenians are the largest ethnic minority in Georgia, numbering 437,200 (8.1%) in 1989. Ethnic Armenians were once highly concentrated in Tbilisi, but today the majority of Georgia’s Armenian community (approximately 160,000 persons) resides in Javakheti, comprising 95% of the region’s population. While Armenians have a long history in the region, which was part of the Armenian kingdom until 387 AD, the current Armenian population of Javakheti consists mostly of more recent arrivals who emigrated from the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries fleeing persecution and

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55 The Council of Europe has given Georgia an extension until 2011, by which time the repatriation must be complete. (Peuch 2005)

56 Javakheti is known as Javakhk in the Armenian language.
genocide (Ishkhanyan 2004: 18). In addition to Javakheti, a significant number of Armenians live in the neighbouring Samtskhe (Meskheti) region, especially in the town of Akhaltsikhe, however this region has a Georgian majority.

Georgian-Armenian ethnic relations have been characterised by tension despite the cultural and religious similarity of the two nations. Modern tensions primarily stem from the once powerful economic status of the Armenians of Tbilisi.

[The Armenian minority in Georgia in the nineteenth century formed a new bourgeoisie which became a backbone of urban life and gained great economic leverage. Russia, fearing increased power of ethnic Armenians in Georgia, asserted direct control over their religious and political institutions. The legacy of these tensions between Georgians and Armenians persists to this day. (Matveeva 2002: 7)]

Mutual suspicions are exacerbated by the remoteness of the region, as well as poor transportation and communication links with Tbilisi. Most Armenians in the region speak no Georgian, and maintain primary socio-economic ties with the Republic of Armenia to the south (Matveeva 2002: 18).

In 1994, Georgia introduced new administrative territorial divisions which no longer corresponded to Georgia’s historical regions. Under this new system, the Samtskhe-Javakheti region was created, encompassing both the Meskheti lowlands and Javakheti highlands, as well as the Borzhomi region to the north (Guretski 1998). Since Armenians constitute an overwhelming majority in Javakheti, but the other regions have larger Georgian populations, the Javakheti Armenians see this as a scheme to reduce their political influence, by creating a region in which Armenians would be a minority

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57 Guretski insists that this new administrative arrangement is actually unconstitutional, contravening Article 2, Paragraph 3 of the Georgian Constitution, which stipulates that “the administrative-territorial arrangement of the country based on the principle of the separation of powers shall be determined after the full restoration of Georgian jurisdiction on the entire territory of the state.” (Guretski 1998)
Armenian insecurity is heightened by xenophobic attitudes in Georgia, pressure on Armenians to leave ethnically mixed regions, ethnic discrimination in political and economic spheres, the lack of infrastructural development in Javakheti (where the only electricity comes from Armenia), and military cooperation between Georgia and Turkey (Matveeva 2002: 18).

As a result, Armenian political organisations have formed in Javakheti, the most notable being Javakhk and Virk. While neither group seems to explicitly advocate separatism, demands include the administrative separation of Samtskhe and Javakheti and autonomous status for Javakheti within Georgia. This status is seen as “a security guarantee rather than a means of change”, but is regarded with alarm by the Georgian authorities, who view autonomy as a precursor to separation (Matveeva 2002: 18).

Javakheti is a source of concern for the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian diaspora as well. Most notably, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutiun) vociferously promotes autonomy (and often outright separation) for Javakheti, although the party’s views are not shared by most Javakheti Armenians. Artur Yeremian, the governor of Akhalkalaki, complains that “Every other day they are making statements on behalf of Javakhk, unaware of the problems of Akhalkalaki and where it is” (Ishkhanyan 2004: 21).

The Javakheti Armenians are generally described as hostile to the return of the Meskhetian Turks (Matveeva 2002: 18). According to Melik Raisian, an ethnic Armenian political figure in Javakheti, the Meskhetian Turks’ return would be a “catalyst

58 Matveeva notes that territorial reforms have caused tension in other, more ethnically Georgian regions of the state as well. (Matveeva 2002:18)
59 The ARF is a powerful organisation that enjoys support both in Armenia and among the Armenian diaspora. Its explicit goal is irredentist: to reunite all the lands of ‘Greater Armenia’, including territory in Eastern Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan. Its views are not representative of the majority of Armenians.
for confrontation" (Baazov 2001). The hostility is partly due to the fear of further dilution of the Armenian presence in Javakheti (Cornell 2001: 183), and partly due to ethnic animosity.

Armenians, especially those who fled the 1915-1918 genocide perpetrated by the Ottoman Turks, are profoundly suspicious of all things Turkish. This fear has been heightened by the Nagorno-Karabakh war with the Turkic Azerbaijanis. The Turkish identity of the deported Meskhetians is thus seen as threatening. This animosity has been inflated, however, by a history of supposed ethnic clashes between the Meskhetian Turks and their Christian neighbours before the deportation, none of which seem to be historically substantive (Matveeva 2002: 20). It is noteworthy that Georgian academics seem to be the primary proponents of such ‘historical’ animosity, which is disputed by Meskhetian Turkish academics.

Merab Beridze, professor of the Meskhetian Branch of Tbilisi State University in Akhaltsikhe...told IWPR that, prior to the 1944 deportation, there had been a history of ethnic strife between Meskhetians and local Armenians and Georgians. Another Georgian academic from the area, the ethnographer Tina Ivelashvili, says she has been recording the oral history of the region. "Muslim Georgians persecuted their Christian compatriots. I have thousands of stories and facts on file to prove it," she said. (Inasaridze 2003)

Furthermore, much of the information regarding attitudes in the region is anecdotal and self-perpetuating, and cannot be substantiated by social scientific data.

Very little is known about the in-depth attitudes in the region, as most accounts rely on the widely circulated propositions on the high likelihood of tension, or conflict, should a wide-scale repatriation take place...extensive reproduction of assumptions and ‘threats’ holds the danger of creating the very same predicament it claims to avert in the first place. (Pentikäinen, Trier 2004: 53-54)

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60 Many Javakheti Armenians volunteered to fight in the Nagorno-Karabakh war, forming their own ‘Javakhk’ division.
Since the majority of the Meskhetian Turks were deported from modern-day Samtskhe (only 8,000 were deported from Javakheti) and would likely wish to return to their original region (Pentikäinen, Trier 2004: 18), the ‘threat’ to Armenians could be easily addressed by the administrative separation of the two regions.

**International Dimension**

There has been broad, if not deep, international interest in the Meskhetian Turk issue. Since the community is scattered across so many countries, and the region in question borders on Armenia and Turkey and contains a contentious Russian military base, potential repatriation has important implications for many states.

The Armenian government has been a supporter of the status quo, on one hand officially discouraging Armenian separatism in Javakheti, but on the other, indicating its grave concern about the repatriation of Meskhetian Turks to currently ethnic Armenian areas (Aydingün 2002a: 53; IOM 1998: 16).

The Russian Federation, beyond general declarations of intent, has not contributed to or facilitated the return of the Meskhetian Turks (IOM 1998: 10), despite the unrest caused by their presence in Russia’s Krasnodar and Stavropol regions. Russia does, however, support the cause of the Javakheti Armenians, who are employed in large numbers by the Russian military base in Akhalkalaki, and protest the Georgian government’s attempts to force the closure of the base.

Azerbaijan, which hosts the largest and most integrated Meskhetian Turk community, has been supportive of their right to return, but careful not to upset its good relations with Georgia, has made this support conditional on Georgia’s acceptance of returnees (Matveeva 2002: 20).
Turkey, which sponsored the resettlement of 5,000 Meskhetian Turks in the early 1990s, discourages further immigration, instead pressing Georgia to repatriate those who wish to return, and advocating for the rights of Meskhetian Turks living elsewhere (IOM 1998: 11; Matveeva 2002: 21). In the meantime, however, Turkey does not prosecute illegal Meskhetian Turk migrants.

Recently, the United States has emerged as a new destination for Meskhetian Turk refugees. The country is granting asylum to Meskhetian Turks who fled Uzbekistan and now live in Russia’s Krasnodar region (Pentikäinen, Trier 2004: 40). There is, however no evidence of direct US involvement in the repatriation issue.

The Council of Europe has been the international organisation most involved with the repatriation issue. Pentikäinen and Trier suggest that the limited enthusiasm shown by Georgian officials toward the Meskhetian Turk issue since 1999 has “had more to do with Georgia’s aspirations to join the Council of Europe than a desire to effectively solve the issue of repatriation.” However, they also note that Georgia’s failure to deliver on its promise has lowered international interest and involvement in the issue (2004: 33-34).

**The Meskhetian Turks Today**

Current estimates suggest that the Meskhetian Turk population numbers between 270,000 and 320,000 (Matveeva 2002: 20). Of these, an estimated 1,00061 had repatriated to Georgia by 2004, and only eight families had resettled in Meskhetia (Pentikäinen, Trier 2004: 16-17). By all accounts, the Meskhetian Turks’ repatriation movement to date has failed.

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61 The UNHCR counted 644 repatriates in 2001, but there are no data indicating the number of illegal repatriates. (Pentikäinen, Trier 2004: 16)
At this time, the legal status of Meskhetian Turks varies considerably, from refugees to IDPs, citizens to stateless persons, depending on their current host states and the circumstances of their arrival (IOM 1998: 21). The desire to return to Meskhetia remains high among those in the Krasnodar and Stavropol regions of Russia, where discrimination against them is high. However, in Central Asia, and even in Ukraine and Azerbaijan, where their living conditions are better and civil rights are respected, most Meskhetian Turks still want the right to return to their vatan, regardless of whether they would actually consider repatriating (IOM 1998: 9).

Many Meskhetian Turks fear that becoming settled elsewhere will result in their “gradual, non-violent assimilation and disappearance as a separate ethnic identity” (Belitser, qtd. in IOM 1998: 11). Indeed, this has been the case with those who have moved to Turkey. Of the over 25,000 Meskhetian Turks currently residing in Turkey, Pentikäinen and Trier note that the first ‘wave’ of immigrants is “rather indistinguishable as a group and has largely assimilated into society” (2004: 25). Moreover, the decision to move to Turkey has triggered the beginnings of an ethnic disaggregation or deconstruction process, with only those Meskhetian Turks of ethnic Turkish origin (i.e. no Kurds, Khemshins, or Karapapaks) moving to Turkey (Aydingün 2002b: 195).

In Azerbaijan, where due to linguistic and cultural similarities, Meskhetian Turks have integrated well with the locals, Polian predicts that a similar process will occur.

[T]he most likely development of the Meskhetian Turk situation – taking into account the radicalization of Krasnodar Kray authorities’ discriminatory policies targeting the migrants – may involve their gradual moving to and consolidation in Azerbaijan, with prospective piecemeal assimilation into and absorption by the Azerbaijani ethnic environment. (Polian 2004: 222)
Even in Georgia, the conditions placed on repatriates – that they self-identify as Georgian, change their last names, educate their children in the Georgian language, and settle in regions outside Meskhetia – if accepted, would ultimately “amount to agreeing to the disappearance of the Meskhetian Turks as a distinct ethnic group through assimilation” (Pohl 1999: 136).

The controversy over whether they are ethnic Turks or Georgians has divided the Meskhetian Turk community, and crucially, it has also divided the organisational capacity of the group into various factions. No unifying leadership has thus emerged to represent the demands of the Meskhetian Turks with a single voice. As Pentikäinen and Trier note, “Well organized, a group of 270-335,000 people could potentially wield significant influence as an advocacy group” (2004: 30).

While ethnogenesis does not affect the right of an unjustly deported group to return to its historic homeland, the debate has served to sideline the human rights aspect of the Meskhetian Turk return movement. By exploiting divisions within the group, and encouraging the proliferation of those divisions, opponents to repatriation, namely the Georgian authorities, have been able to weaken solidarity among the Meskhetian Turks, and thus undermine their efforts to return. The Meskhetian Turks, whose ethnic identity was constructed in response to the tragedy of exile, are now undergoing a re-, or de-construction of that identity. This process, in turn, is impeding efforts to resolve the tragedy that solidified their ethnicity in the first place.
Chapter 4: Case Study Comparison

The Crimean Tatars and the Meskhetian Turks share many characteristics. They are similar in size (approx. 500,000 Crimean Tatars and 300,000 Meskhetian Turks), and are both Muslim groups of at least partially Turkic origin, formerly living compactly in specific Soviet border regions. Neither group comprised a regional majority at the time of their deportation. Both groups were deported in 1944 to various destinations in Central Asia and subjected to the special settlement regime, were rehabilitated without being repatriated by the Soviet government, and engaged in simultaneous processes of resistance, protest, and ‘illegal’ return attempts. Both groups’ historic homelands are currently dominated by a regional majority - Russians in the Crimea, and Armenians in Javakheti\(^2\) - each of whom have sought their own autonomy in these territories.

History

There are important differences in the recent history of the Meskhetian Turks and the Crimean Tatars, such as the Ferghana Valley pogroms in 1989 that further dispersed the Meskhetian Turks. More substantially, however, in terms of the construction of ethnic identity, are the historical political manifestations of the two groups.

The Crimean Tatars historically formed an independent state, and prior to their deportation, enjoyed autonomous political status in the form of the Crimean ASSR, which ensured that they benefited from *korenizatsiia*. Their language was protected, their culture promoted, and their indigenousness acknowledged. Historians and archaeologists buttressed this acknowledgement with linkages between the current Crimean Tatar nation and its previous manifestations.

\(^2\) While Armenians do not dominate the Samtskhe (Meskheti) region per se, the closeness of the two regions and the large minority Armenian population in Akhaltsikhe blurs these boundaries somewhat, while the new Georgian administrative territorial boundaries have blurred them further.
In contrast, the Meskhetian Turks never had a separate state, and in the Soviet Union they were never granted political or indigenous status, and no steps were taken to preserve their language or culture. Korenizatsiiia instead benefited the Georgians, and privileged their language and culture. As an unrecognized group (or rather, groups at that time), the Meskhetian Turks never grew accustomed to special entitlements, and no attempt was made to document their history before deportation, although later historians would seek to ‘prove’ that the Meskhetian Turks were ethnically Georgian.

One notable difference between the experiences of the two groups in exile has been the lack of leaders among the Meskhetian Turks. While figures like Musa Mamut and Mustafa Dzhemilev have served as unifying symbols for the Crimean Tatars, this has not been the case with the Meskhetian Turks. Even the well-known Enver Odabashev was never seen to represent the group as a whole, and no martyrs are evoked within the community. While this is most certainly a factor in the failure of the return movement, the lack of group cohesion arguably hindered the emergence of unifying leaders. In other words, without a singular vision to represent, no figure could command the loyalty of all Meskhetian Turks. In addition, the existence of unifying national figures in Crimean Tatar history (e.g. Haji Giray, Ismail Gasprinsky) provided a template onto which new ‘heroes’ could be grafted. With no recorded history, the Meskhetian Turks had no model heroes for new leaders to emulate.

Territory

While korenizatsiiia was instrumental in territorialisng the Crimean Tatars’ ethnic identity, to a lesser extent, the geography of their region also contributed to this construction. The Crimean peninsula, a geographically distinct region, was easily

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63 While such documents may exist, they are neither widely available nor cited by scholars.
constructed as a ‘separate’ and ‘unique’ homeland, and continued to exist on maps and in literature. Meskhetia, in contrast, was geographically coterminous with the regions around it. It’s ‘frontier’ character was entirely due to the shifting of the Russian-Turkish border, with no clear boundary between Meskhetia and the rest of Georgia. In addition, the word ‘Meskhetia’ was eventually removed from maps, as the administrative region became known as Samtskhe-Javakheti, such that a clearly defined region bearing the ethnonym of the Meskhetian Turks no longer officially existed.

Even the boundary with Turkey was problematic, with a portion of the historic Meskheti region remaining on the Turkish side of the border. This feature, and the ethnonym ‘Turks’, would lead some Meskhetian Turks to construct a dual homeland: their actual homes in Meskhetia, and the Turkish Republic, inhabited by their ethnic kin. In the case of the Volga Germans, another deported Soviet minority, the ‘German’ ethnicity of this group led them to ‘return’ to Germany in the post-Soviet era, instead of seeking to repatriate to the Volga region of Russia (Pentikäinen, Trier 2004: 6).

**Boundaries: External Challenges**

Both groups have faced external challenges to their ethnic identity. These have differed, however, in that neither of the competing Crimean Tatar paradigms – the ethnic mosaic or the Mongol invader account – questions the ethnic *boundaries* of the Crimean Tatars. In contrast, the pro-Georgian view of the Meskhetian Turks attempts to *negate* the differences between the Meskhetian Turks and the Georgian majority. Thus, the debate in this case is between acknowledgement and denial of ethnic boundaries.

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64 Only the ‘Turkish’ subgroup of Meskhetian Turks seem to have constructed Turkey as an alternate homeland.

65 While the Mongol invaders account suggested a more menacing threat to Slavs, there was never a suggestion that the Crimean Tatars were themselves Slavs.
Internally, both groups clearly contain persistent ethnic subgroups with the potential to compete with their overarching group identity. However, none of the Crimean Tatar subgroups (i.e. Tats, Nogais) has ties to communities beyond the Crimea, and as such, none of these sub-ethnic identities threatens the larger group’s boundaries. The Meskhetian Turk subgroups, however, differ in their political salience. Ethnic Turks can equate their ethnicity with the Turkish Republic in a way that Karapapakhs, Khemshins and Kurds cannot, while those who self-identify as Georgians may likewise claim ties (and entitlements) to the Georgian state. There is thus an internal challenge to the Meskhetian Turks’ boundaries.

State Identity: Georgia v. Ukraine

The newly independent states of Georgia and Ukraine differ in terms of their state identity construction. While it would be misleading to label one state as civic and another as national, it is apparent that Ukraine’s conception of citizenship is more civic, while Georgia’s is more national. This is partly a function of demography, the power of Ukraine’s enormous Russian-speaking minority and the Armenians’ relative lack of numerical and economic clout in Georgia.

It is also, however, a reflection of the way in which the Soviet state treated the Ukrainians and the Georgians. While other titular nationalities were encouraged to express their national identity (albeit in linguistic and folk cultural forms only), Ukrainian ethnic identity was attacked as bourgeois and repressed. As a result, by the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukrainian national consciousness was in tatters.

The Georgians benefited from korenizatsiia and a Georgian state which gave them control over both ethnically Georgian and substantial minority territories. The
eventual demotion of Abkhazia from a union republic to an ASSR under Georgian jurisdiction, and the creation of autonomous areas for the South Ossetians and Ajarians, created a dual culture of entitlement and resentment among Georgians. As the titular majority, Georgians saw their republic as a single entity, a homeland to which they were entitled as a nation. Minority control over the autonomous territories was seen as an affront to this sovereignty and was especially resented by Georgians living in these regions (and sometimes constituting the majority of their populations). Georgian nationalism was strengthened during the USSR’s tenure, and this nationalism increasingly took defensive and exclusive forms.

According to Connor’s typology, both Ukraine and Georgia are multination-multihomeland states (Connor 1994: 76-79). Following Breuilly, however, I argue that official and popular rhetoric suggest a belief that Georgia either is or should be a multination-unihomeland state\textsuperscript{66}, or even a nation-state (Breuilly 1993: 11).

**Alternate Explanations**

A number of variables exist which may be seen to explain the relative success of the Crimean Tatars’ repatriation efforts \textit{vis à vis} those of the Meskhetian Turks.

**Economic situation**

The dismal state of the Georgian economy is often cited as an impediment to the repatriation of the Meskhetian Turks. Georgia, like all former Soviet states, has undergone severe economic hardship as a consequence of the transition from a centralised to a market economy. However, economic difficulty alone holds little water in terms of a barrier to repatriation, since many Meskhetian Turk families have the

\textsuperscript{66} The discourse of ‘hospitality’ toward ethnic ‘guests’ in Georgia illustrates this point.
resources to move to their former region without government assistance. In addition, while the Samtskhe-Javakheti region suffers from high unemployment, it is arguable that the return of large numbers of migrants could have a stimulating effect on the local economy, especially given the potential influx of international donor funds should the Georgian government seriously embrace the return project.

The Ukrainian economy has suffered similar economic shocks, and unemployment rates are higher in the Crimea than in Ukraine as a whole. While there is more economic potential in the Crimea (due to its viability as a tourist destination), this economic potential has arguably acted as a deterrent to the repatriation of the Crimean Tatars, since ethnic Russians were reluctant to allow the Crimean Tatars to 'overrun' their favourite resort, and still restrict their access to the lucrative coastal regions.

**Strategic considerations**

While the Russian military base in Javakheti has made it a region of strategic concern, it is no more so than the far more important Black Sea Fleet headquarters in Sevastopol, Crimea. Both regions were and are frontier zones, and in Soviet times, access to both was restricted. As such, strategic explanations cannot account for the failure of the Meskhetian Turk return movement.

**Regional Majority Differences**

Differences between the two regional majorities – the Crimean Russians and Javakheti Armenians – cannot account for the differential repatriation results. Both were and are hostile to the returning populations, both have external support and ties to their ‘home’ states, both have sought autonomy (if not outright independence) for themselves
without regard for the deportees, and have mobilized politically to protect what they perceive are their rights in the regions they inhabit.

The major difference hinges, rather, on the way in which each state has addressed the repatriation issue vis à vis the regional majority. Kyiv has seen the Crimean Tatars as a counterweight to Russian separatism in the Crimea, and as such, has viewed the Crimean Tatars as an ally (although official support for the Tatars has been variable). In contrast, Tbilisi sees the Meskhetian Turks not only as a challenge to the Armenian regional majority, but also to ethnic Georgians themselves. Thus, instead of assisting the Meskhetian Turks to resettle in majority Armenian regions, or assuring their repatriation to non-Armenian regions, it has used the (arguably overblown) threat of Armenian hostility to prevent the repatriation of the Meskhetian Turks. The official stance of each state has been echoed in the social sciences, with Ukrainian historians stressing ancient links between the Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians, and Georgian historians ‘discovering’ animosity between Meskhetian Turks and Christians in the pre-deportation era.

International involvement

International interest in the repatriation effort has been similar in both cases. Turkey has supported the repatriation process of both groups, but has been cautious in its dealings with both states. Russian influence, while important in both cases, has been largely limited to the maintenance of its control over strategic concerns – the Black Sea Fleet in the Crimea and the Russian army base in Javakheti. While Russia’s domination of the CIS region is troubling to both Kyiv and Tbilisi, it is clear that the repatriation of these groups has not been a policy priority for Moscow. Furthermore, since ethnic Russians’ interests were and are at stake in the Crimean case, one would expect that
Russian influence would be *more* of a hindrance to the repatriation of the Crimean Tatars. Given the Crimean Tatars' relative success, Russian influence does not seem to have had a negative effect. Finally, Armenia's involvement has been largely ambivalent.

In terms of NGO involvement, Pentikäinen and Trier note that due to the geopolitical, economic and strategic importance of the Crimea, "The scope of international involvement and financial support for the Crimean Tatars has, beyond any doubt, exceeded the international help for any other groups of people with a similar fate" (2004: 53). I would add two caveats to this position: first, that Crimean Tatars themselves effectively raised awareness among international actors, who *then* involved themselves with the repatriation issue (the Meskhetian Turks' lack of unity has made their appeals less successful), and second, that in recent years global attention to Georgia has markedly increased, due to U.S. anti-terrorist activity in the Pankisi Gorge, and the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, which passes through Samtske-Javakheti. If there were a greater likelihood of success – either a credible demonstration of commitment by the Georgian government or a mass movement of Meskhetian Turks to the region – international interest and funding would likely increase.

**Ethnic Group Preferences**

Pentikäinen and Trier suggest that the Meskhetian Turks' preference for repatriation should not be assumed, and that an assertion of a right to 'their land' does not necessarily imply Meskhetia (2004: 50-51). While it may be valid to suggest that not *all* Meskhetians wish to repatriate to Meskhetia, this can also be said of the Crimean Tatars, of whom only about 50% have returned to the Crimea. In other words, the desire for the *right* to return and the *intent* to return must be examined separately. It is certainly the
case that many Meskhetian Turks do want to return to southern Georgia, although they may be disillusioned by their failure thus far to achieve this goal. The idea that a lack of will is behind the failure to repatriate seems dangerously reductionist.

Ethnic Wars in Georgia

The existence of other unresolved ethnic conflicts in Georgia is often cited by Georgians as an argument against repatriation of yet another ethnic group. The separatist conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia have created two de facto states on officially Georgian territory, and produced hundreds of thousands of ethnic Georgian IDPs who fled from these regions. In addition, Georgian sovereignty over the Ajarian autonomous region has been disputed, and separatist leanings in Javakheti and the majority-Azerbaijani Merneuli region have raised tensions between ethnic Georgians and minorities. However, the direct bearing of these conflicts on the Meskhetian Turk repatriation issue is questionable. First, the existence of IDPs itself does not affect the Meskhetian issue, since none of the IDPs are being resettled in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region. Second, the inflammatory rhetoric of the Gamsakhurdia era is largely responsible for the escalation of these tensions into separatist wars, and Tbilisi’s current efforts to undermine the repatriation effort by stoking Armenian and Georgian fears of an influx of hostile Turks threatens to increase ethnic conflict in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region. In other words, the Georgian government is not simply at the mercy of inherently separatist ethnic groups, but can choose to adjust its own inflammatory policies.

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67 It is unlikely that Georgians from the sub-tropical Abkhazian seaside would choose to move to the harsh climate of the mountainous Javakheti region, even if this were officially encouraged.
Identity Construction

Ultimately, while the aforementioned factors have certainly complicated the repatriation processes of the Crimean Tatars and the Meskhetian Turks, they cannot sufficiently account for the differential results experienced by the two groups. The primary difference is instead the way in which their identities, and those of their ‘home’ states, have been constructed and re-constructed, both before the deportation and in exile.

The Crimean Tatars’ ethnic identity was constructed in terms of a specific, geographically bounded territory, and their entitlement to it, based on the political status they once enjoyed as its recognised indigenous people. While the experience of exile led to the solidification of this identity, the existence, in recent memory, of a political entity coinciding with their indigenous territory, and which fostered and promoted their history and culture, provided immediate resources for the reconstruction of this identity in exile.

The Meskhetian Turks’ identity emerged as a process of the exile experience, but did not have a political status, a specifically demarcated territory, or a written history to draw on. Without the reinforcement of such a foundation, their constructed ethnic identity was vulnerable to shifting political fortunes, and has ultimately been undermined by the arguably tangential ethnogenesis debate.

Simply put, the Crimean Tatars in exile possessed more ‘building blocks’ with which to solidify their ethnic identity and its territorial basis. The Meskhetian Turks, lacking in such deep resources, were less able to maintain a solid external boundary, and as such, have succumbed to various identity and interest factions that have fractured their vision of vatan, and thus their attempts to return to it.
Conclusion

The Meskhetian Turks' experience illustrates the degree to which ethnic identity construction is a dialogic process, involving both internal and external factors in a feedback loop. The role of the state emerges as a significant external factor in both cases, with Soviet nationalities policy helping to solidify and territorialise Crimean Tatar identity, and hindering the same process with respect to the Meskhetian Turks. While it would appear that the Meskhetian Turks began to debate their ethnic origins internally, the Soviet Georgian government soon exploited and furthered this disunity by dictating terms for repatriation which required a pledge of ethnic Georgian identity. It was this external influence that led to further divisions in the community, over identity, interests, and tactics. Also, the availability of Turkey as a viable ‘second homeland’ has elicited a partial deconstruction of the Meskhetian Turk identity into its constituent sub-identities.

The Meskhetian Turk identity calls into question the explanatory power of both the primordial and instrumental paradigms. The primordialist view cannot account for the fusion of previously separate groups into a larger unit, nor can it explain the decision of certain Meskhetian Turks to identify as ethnically Georgian in order to facilitate their return to Georgia. The instrumentalist paradigm, on the other hand, cannot account for the limited nature of this pro-Georgian orientation, or the vehement opposition of the majority of Meskhetian Turks to pragmatic identity reconstruction. The constructivist paradigm stresses that identity is neither a timeless ‘truth’ nor a simple response to material interests. Instead, it appropriately sees the construction and reconstruction of Meskhetian Turk ethnic identity as an ideological product of dialogue between external

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68 There is a general lack of evidence regarding the initial emergence of the ethnicity debate.
and internal factors, and as a response to emotional and psychological as well as strategic or material needs.

As Pentikäinen and Trier suggest “the successful identity retention and experiences of return of the Crimean Tatars can provide the international community with a valuable example to draw lessons in searching for a durable solution to the problems of the Meskhetian Turks” (2004: 53). Yet it is unclear how the international community can influence ‘successful identity retention’ at this stage. Clearly, however, more research is needed in order to determine the actual intentions of Meskhetian Turks, Javakheti Armenians and Samtskhe Georgians, should the possibility of return be made available.

An understanding of the effect of identity construction on deported groups’ return processes may, at first glance, seem a project with little broader applicability. However, Polian lists 53 instances of Soviet deportation between 1920 and 1952, with a total of about 12 million deportees (2004: 307-313). Even for groups which were eventually repatriated (such as the Chechens), an understanding of the deportation experience may provide insight into current political processes. Since the collapse of the USSR, new deportations have accompanied ethnic conflict, for example in Armenia and Azerbaijan. In the future, it is entirely possible that repatriation movements might emerge in these regions, with similar ethnic identity dynamics.

With respect to groups in exile beyond the former Soviet Union, such as the Palestinians, I would suggest caution in the applicability of this paper’s findings, since the Soviet reification of ethnogenesis and politicisation of ethnicity have arguably not been replicated elsewhere. However, an insight into identity construction in the face of collective trauma may illuminate the emergence of seemingly ‘new’ ethnic groups, while
an understanding of the role of the state in the identity dialogue may help to explain the solidification or disintegration of ethnic identities generally.

More broadly, however, the experience of these two groups suggests that ethnic solidarity and nationalism, which are much maligned, can at times be tools for positive change, especially at the sub-state level, and may not always lead to intractable conflict. As McCrone notes, “The subordination of less powerful cultures is often explained in terms of their internal differences, and becomes an important weapon for the powerful to disparage other cultures” (1998: 35-36).
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