



**Diaspora Nationalism as a Social Movement:
The Case of Crimean Tatar Communities in the USSR**

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1. Introduction:

In this paper, I will try to answer the question why and how the Crimean Tatar(CT) diaspora community in the Soviet Union mobilized to “return to homeland” and achieved it. This is the core case-study of my research project because it inspired the CT national revival in the other diaspora settings in the world. The CTs initiated the first and one of the strongest dissident movements in the Soviet Union, demanding their return to the homeland they were deported from and the re-establishment of their national autonomy. And after 40 years in exile, they returned to their homeland collectively. The question I would like to explore in my paper is why and how this community who became a victim of ‘ethnocide’ and was reduced to a situation of complete powerlessness could organize such a resilient and successful struggle against one of the superpowers of the time. More specifically, I will seek answers for the following questions:

- *Why did the CT diaspora movement emerge?
- *What influenced the development of the CT diaspora movement?
- *Why did the CT diaspora movement become successful?

In this paper I try to elaborate the following explanations for these questions.

* It is hard to deny that grievances caused by deportation and the feelings of attachment to the

had become the master ‘frame’. Otherwise, even if the window of opportunity appeared, they might not have been able to take advantage of it. The emerging window of opportunity in the political context only determined the timing of the collective return, but it was not a major cause of it.

In the following sections, I would like to (i) provide a review of how the question of the mobilization of the CT diaspora in the former USSR was approached in the literature, (ii) elaborate on my own approach. My own approach involves an examination of the movement emergence, development, and success through application of the social movement approach emphasizing the “framing processes”. The movement emergence relates to the period of 1944-1964, the movement development is understood to have taken place in the period of 1964-1987, and it achieved its goal in the period of 1987-1994.

II. The literature review:

The diasporic nature of the CT identity in the Soviet Union, epitomized in the very strong emotional attachment to the homeland is sufficiently emphasized in the literature.

(Chervonnaia 1992; Williams, 2000; Uehling 2001) Williams suggests that the development of territorial identity for the CTs was the major cause of their claims for return. According to Uehling (2001), the strong social memory of the homeland transmitted from one generation to next was the reason for their wishes to return after fifty years passed over their deportation.

What is not explained is how the CTs turned the emotional attachment to their homeland into concrete political action. “Mobilization cannot emerge from the mere sense of group identity. Aside from the existence of multiple identities around which ethnic groups may be formed in

any given society, the relevant identities for political mobilization require a coalescence of group identity with political claims.” (Bertrand: 2004, 11)

The political ingenuity of the CTs is missed under these emphases on the ethno-symbolic aspects of their identity. The political organization of the CTs did not at

representative structure is still unique. Among the diaspora populations, they had one of the most developed political organization which substituted for the lack of a territorial state.

These facts of the CT diaspora movement escape the large net of structuralist theories explaining the rise of the national movements by the regime initiative, Soviet institutional structure (Brubaker 1996), and movement cycles (Beisinger 2002). To put it crudely, CT case epitomizes how human will can make a difference where basically are no opportunities or resources. Under a repressive regime, a dislocated, scattered, deprived nation was able to transform their emotional attachment to homeland and ethnic networks into a successful political organization. Suny(1998) and Brubaker (1996) argued that the institutional and territorial structures bestowed to the titular nationalities became the major cause for the nationalist mobilization. The CTs, however, were separated from its national territory and institutions. The CT movement formed a political organization, which substituted for the lack of territorial structures. They maintained their culture, and language, wrote their own history, compiled their own archive, developed their literature, organized self-census, formed representative and decision-making institutions, collected funds, and formed diplomatic relations all in the conditions of exile.

Beisinger (2002) argued that the political opportunity provided by glasnost' enabled movements in the Soviet Union to flourish but the CT movement emerged long before that.

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but did not hinge on how strong the regime was, how ripe conditions were, how available the resources were. The CT movement was rather shaped by its own forces.

III. The Conceptual Framework:

Diaspora is not a function of primordial traits of a community but it is an identity largely constructed in the modern period for political purposes. Borrowing the theoretical tools developed by the social movement theory, I claim that the diaspora identity emerges through the political movement of diasporas. Diaspora movements can be understood by examining the “framing processes” which translates the grievances associated with the dispersal of a community into a concrete political purpose.

Early theorizing emphasized the psychological motivations, especially grievances of feelings of deprivation to explain the movements. According to Talcott Parsons, social movements were consequences of the unusual events. Big social changes affect individuals and they react to these changes. However, these relate to the pre-existing conditions for movements rather than the formation of the movement itself. As it was seen from the example of several deprived minorities (blacks, women, Native Americans etc.), grievances do not automatically create a political party or a social movement¹. The repression can paralyze people too. The transition from condition to action must not be readily assumed, it must be explained. (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 2001).² Blumer underlines that even “a grievance should be determines as a grievance for collective action to take place”³. Ralph Turner and Lewis

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Killian (1957) also stated that when people face an unusual occasion, they first form a shared interpretation of their situation and then decide what should be done. Despite the deportation as an experience that traumatized the CTs psychologically, framing processes were needed even identify the dimensions and meaning of it. Snow and Benford argue that the occurrence of mobilization might be due to the presence or absence of potent innovative frames, and frames cannot be assumed given the grievances. (Snow et al. 1986: 464). Frame means “schemata of interpretation” that organizes experiences and guide action. (Benford and Snow, 2000; Snow et al.1986; Snow and Benford, 2000; Snow and Mc Adam, 2000). Frames involve problem identification and attribution of blame (diagnosis) as well as delineation of solutions (prognosis) (Snow and Benford 1988) Severity, urgency, efficacy (your participation might matter), and propriety (your awareness might be needed) are other important aspects of frames. We can also add insights from resource mobilizations theory: feasibility (it is possible to do something) and timeliness (‘Now or never!’ -thinking).⁴

Although frames are formulated by the intellectual elite, the whole population participates in the continuous re-construction of the frame. The frames also are influential in the emergence of organizations as they include a “prognosis”, a goal to remedy the grievances. The development of frames are influenced by the organizational processes. The framing disputes of the diaspora political organizations and their opponents in the society or state organs explain the development and dynamics of the movements. In the end, movement success (or failure) is due to the effectiveness of diaspora organizations’ strategies and tactics to take advantage of domestic and transnational discursive openings, to gain the support of conscious adherents and bystanders in the domestic and transnational spheres and demobilize the

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manages to attain a discursive higher ground, and has its own way of framing the issue to take precedence over the alternatives, then it attains power to realize its goals.

IV. The emergence of the CT diaspora movement:

In this section, I will mainly argue that the emergence of the CT diaspora movement was largely attributable to the creation of a potent innovative 'frame', which gave meaning to their tragedy and proposed a solution. In the first stage, the injustice suffered as a consequence of the deportation created a reactive movement. It is not only the leaders but the whole population wrote letters and petitions to the authorities calling for the remedy of their situation. This required only the simplest form of organization, which came together for a short time for the purpose of writing the letters and collecting the signatures. In those letters, the CTs used a pleading language, assuming that their deportation was a bureaucratic mistake and would be easily corrected with the proper application of the communist principles. The authorities just ignored them. (Chervonnaia 1992) Movements of other deported peoples remained at this level. It took for fifteen years for the CTs to apprehend that what was done was not a bureaucratic mistake of small officials, but a planned crime of Stalin and high officials. As the successors of Stalin did not revoke what he did, it became obvious that the

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among the people gradually. Initially formulated by the leaders, the 'frame' became an anonymous intellectual property of the people in time being re-phrased thousands of times in the petitions and information newsletters, copied by hand. In each re-phrasing, the 'frame' was re-articulated: Some implications of it were changed, or modified, some aspects of it were taken out, and new emphases were added.

The movement 'frame' empowered the CTs to create a movement for sustained challenge of the regime. It gave meaning to what occurred to them and what should be done. It justified their engaging in certain acts which brought them in clash with the authorities. It empowered them not only going to Moscow to represent the population, organizing public protest, distributing *samizdat*, attempting to return to Crimea in defiance of the authorities, and but also for conducting extreme self-sacrifice acts for protest such as engaging in hunger strikes and self-immolation.

The 'frame' had an urgency element, as the CTs believed that they would lose their homeland forever if their return was prolonged. It was believed that time worked against the CTs and for the benefit of the regime.

The 'frame' also represented the CT movement to the outsiders. It aimed to attract support and neutralize the counter-frames of the regime. Re-defining the "truth" was the most significant aspect of the CT movement, as it was both the Soviet propaganda and the Soviet militia which became barriers for their return. This aspect will be explained further below. In this section, I described the CT movement 'frame', and its central role in the emergence of the movement, and how it was reproduced. In the next section, I would like to look at the political

factors that affected the process in which the CT 'frame' gradually outweighed the regime's counter-frames.

V. What influenced the development of the CT movement?

The course of the CT movement was shaped

The initiative groups had a simple decision-making structure and they distributed tasks among the members. The tasks included: preparing, copying petitions, information newsletters which involved the movement frame by typewriter, collecting signatures under petitions, distributing the information letters, selecting rotating representatives to Moscow, collecting money for the expenditures of those representatives, informing the community of the reports of the representatives at Moscow, organizing participation in the public demonstrations. Those who lost their jobs due to participation in the movement, and the families of the persecuted were taken care of by his/her local initiative group. The duties of the representatives in Moscow included systematizing and sending petitions to the government and informing the representatives of the Soviet “civil society” about the condition of the people. They were to report about their service and expenditures to their local community. The delegates continuously changed. According to Jemilev, these all necessitated an effective organization of people connected to each other for a continuous task. (Chervonnaia 1992). I was surprised by how easily people donated money, and the transparency of these organizations. Almost no rumors or corruption appeared in relation to those who took the money and went to Moscow to represent the people. I learned that the rule was that the representatives could not buy any presents other than a box of candies for their

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Several leaders emerged out of these grassroots structures. But, since top leaders were arrested, and spent most of their time in prison or camps, the base of the movement remained significant. Decentra

political organization in time formed a tradition towards which the CT people developed loyalty. The CT political organization substituted for the lack of territorial institutions providing many functions. The CTs maintained their culture, and language, wrote their own history, compiled their own archive, developed their literature, organized self-census, constituted representative and decision-making institutions, and formed diplomatic relations within the organizational structure. It embodied the political experience of the movement. After the 'collective return' to homeland, the CT political organization was easily transformed into a national congress and assembly. To understand the effect of the political organization exactly, we must further look at how it interacted with the authorities and allies in the political context, which strategies and tactics it used to defend the CT 'frame'.

V.2. The Framing Disputes with the Opponents:

Stalinism as a 'counter-frame':

With his secret speech on the 20th party congress, Khrushchev criticized certain policies of Stalin such as the mass terror and the deportation of nationalities.⁵ On 12 February 1957 *Izvestiya* published about the new law exculpating the deported peoples and permitting their return with the exclusion of the Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans, and Meskhetian Turks. (Shatz 1980) This means that Khrushchev's criticisms of the system did not reach to the level of full *de-stalinization*. The only good thing for the CTs was that they were released from *the special settlement camps*. The condemnation of Stalin's deportations without permitting the repatriation of the nation created an immense disappointment among them. This was th

the CTs from the history books related to Crimea. The regime “talked” in its documents as if the CTs never existed and Crimea was never their homeland. (Chervonnaia 1992) Clearly, *the regime did not just aim to repress the CTs physically, but it also aimed to repress their national identity*. The continuous calls of the CTs for the return to Lenin’s nationalities policy aimed to make the point that Stalinism still overshadowed the Soviet policy. Therefore, *the CTs built their major strategy on exposing the lies of the Soviet regime, subverting the ‘counter-frame’, and making their own ‘frame’ accepted*. I argue that these two opposing ‘frames’ provide the background for the interaction of the regime and the movement, which I will examine next.

Movement-regime interaction: The Fight of Words

The interaction between the movement and the regime could be best understood as dialectical. The strategies of the movement and the regime mutually shape each other. State repression caused tactical innovation of the movement. Each new tactic created new forms of repression by the state. The major strategy of the CTs was the massive public opinion campaign to pressure the government. All these acts were informed by the movement ‘frame’, and aimed to convince the ‘bystanders’ and subvert the Stalinist ‘counter-frame’. In accordance with this strategy, they appealed to older tactics of mass petitioning, group lobbying, public protests, appeals to media and civil society more forcefully. They organized a bigger protest in Moscow in 1968. (Chervonnaia 112) But they also applied newer tactics of underground struggle, (*samizhdats*, *tamizhdats*, collaboration with the dissidents, and sending the information about human rights violations to the West), show trials, hunger strikes, and self-immolations.

bureaucratic resistance and arbitrariness, as well as police harassment and brutality. Many Tatars lost their jobs, or right to go to the university due to their participation in the movement. Ayse Seytmuratova was impeded to pursue her doctoral studies, and in the end she was expatriated due to her “extraordinary talent for organization” as stated in the KGB reports. A law permitting easier to evict and deport Tatars from Crimea emerged in 1978. On the application of that law in June 1978, a CT of 46 years old, Musa Mamut immolated himself as a protest for his inability to get

repertoire of the CT movement. The new participants used this repertoire when choosing tactics and sometimes improved them.

As to the judicial methods of repression, the first arrests took place in 1961. The arrest of the activists consistently increased after 1965. Between 1965 and 1969, 200 activists were sent to courts. After 1970s, the arrest of the forefront activists took place. The political trials were organized for a certain number of them. (Chervonnaia 1992:d d o4ao4a

The authorities who were initially overwhelmed by the tactical innovation of the movement learned over time and became more effective in instituting social control. The newer tactics involved attempts to maneuver by the intrusion of intelligence services. In the 1970s, KGB

organization, it was deeply ingrained in the dispositions of the community. Once certain sacrifices were made in a movement, it was not possible to turn back or stop. Actions within the movement have feedback effects. These heroic acts strengthened the determination of the CTs despite the repression. The national movement became the major reference point for the CT identity. Such acts of self-sacrifice increased the legitimacy of the movement in the eyes of ‘bystanders’. Therefore the graphic of the movement continued to rise in the 1970s although it met with more severe repressions.

IV. 3. ‘Frame-bridging’ as a way of making alliances

To increase their power in pressuring the authorities and resisting their repression, the CTs chose the strategy of appealing to outsiders in the Soviet society. They first appealed to the neighboring communities, members of the Soviet administration, Moscow government representatives of “civil society”, media, universities, intellectual organizations, authors’ and artists’ unions. They also gained the support of other nationalist movements, and All-Union Human Rights movement, establishing institutional links with the latter. Alliance with the human rights movement enlarged the horizons of the CT movement. (Chervonnaia 1992: 108) As organizations operating in the same multi-organizational field (the field composed of organizations working for the same purpose), the CT movement engaged in ‘frame-bridging’. (Snow et al.1986: 467). ‘Frame- bridging’ refers to “the linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue” (Snow et al. 1986: 467). It added a second front to the CT struggle against the regime, the fight against discrimination and basic human rights. The CTs and other dissident movements ‘learned’ from each other various forms of resistance. The CTs provided them many concrete examples of the human rights abuses in the Soviet Union, which the human rights defenders then

published in their major *samizdat*, the *Chronicle of Current Affairs*. It was otherwise impossible to learn about these as there was no free media in the Soviets. (Chervonnaia 1992: 108)

about the situation of their co-ethnics and their struggle. (Altan, 2005; Aydin, 2000) The Soviet Union indeed made a big mistake extraditing Ayse Seytmuratova. It is hard to ignore the transnational aspect of the diaspora movements. Repression does not end them as the center of action can always move to another diaspora setting. This provided a space for the propagation of its 'frame' outside the Soviets.

Alliance with the human rights and democracy movement opened the ways for the transnationalization of the CT movement. Soviet dissidents helped the CTs to cross the border and reach the Western progressive audience. The representatives of the human rights movement in the USSR sent a petition to the UN for the return of the CTs, and appealed several times to the international bodies in their name. In 1968, the CTs met former General Pyotr Grigorenko, a prominent dissident through Sergey Kosterin, the head of the Human Rights movement at the time. Grigorenko became the most fierce supporters of the CT claims for return. The increasing possibilities of publishing *samizdat* and *tamizdat* with the help of the networks of dissidents made CT 'frame' known domestically and internationally.

(Chervonnaia 1992:108)

This represented the phase of "transnationalization" of the CT movement. New discursive opportunity structures appeared by the emergence of the Third Basket of the Helsinki Final Act (1975) as it became possible to put pressure on the human rights issues on the Soviet leadership, especially on the high days of *détente*. However when *détente* falls from the agenda, the regime focused on disrupting the communication of the CTs with the leaders of the democratic movement in the Soviet Union and the world community. For the letter sent to Saudi King about the death of Musa Mamut, Resat Jemilev was charged for three years of hard labour. But the gene was once out of the bottle. (Chervonnaia 1992: 108) The CT

movement enjoyed larger support in this period both in the Soviet Union and in the outside world. It successfully propagated its 'frame' and attracted the international public opinion its own side. It was mainly successful in neutralizing the regime's 'frame' at least outside the Soviet Union.

VI. Conclusion: What explains "success"?

Between 1965 and 1986, thousands of CTs had settled in Crimea, despite the efforts of authorities. When glasnost' was announced in 1986, tens of thousands joined them, mostly settling in the barren land of northern Crimea. In the period of glasnost', the regime continued not conforming the demands of the CTs, but it increasingly lost the initiative. In 1987, the CTs created a centralized structure with nine chapters in Crimea and adjacent Krasnodar. They carried out the biggest meeting in the Red Square in the Soviet history. This was handled with surprising indulgence. The Gromyko Commission, the first official body to discuss minority demands convened. The CTs increased their pressure in these circumstances. They proclaimed 26 July as a deadline for the Commission to take a positive decision and organized demonstrations in numerous locations including Moscow throughout the month. They organized twenty-four hour sit-in on 25 July until Gromyko agreed to meet them. Nevertheless, the Gromyko Commission denied the problem once more, and discredited the CT movement in the eyes of the Soviet people. Regime was afraid that granting the CT demands would produce undesirable effects in other ethnically contested areas. It could also cause problems within Crimea itself. CT demands for return and national autonomy were denied as unreasonable and impossible to grant. (Lazzerini 1990)

However, the regime felt the need to provide more partial recognition of the CT identity. Courses teaching the Crimean Tatar language were instituted in addition to schools in Uzbekistan and Ukraine, including the Crimea itself. Teacher-training programs were designed. A Department of Cr

overall structural changes. After all, not any of the other deported peoples (Volga Germans, Meskhetian Turks, Germans, Greeks, Armenians of Crimea) were able to return. We must remember that the CT movement began long before the glasnost'. My analysis brings forward three reasons for the movement success:

1. The CTs returned because their political organization undertook systematic actions over the decades for its own way of framing the issue to take precedence. CT way of framing the issue is that **“the CTs are indigenous community of Crimea. Soviet regime committed a crime by the deportation of the CTs for the CTs did not betray the Soviets in the war. The deportation of the CTs constitute another attempt in the historical purpose of de-Tatarization of Crimea by the Russians. Therefore it is the moral right of the CTs to return.”** This ‘frame’, which was highly resonant among the CT people as it was based on their grievances and collective identity (memory and attachment to the homeland) motivated them for struggle. The CTs by every means struggled to have their ‘frame’ to be accepted and the Soviet ‘counter-frame’ was rejected. *For, the discursive foundation of the regime lied behind their deportation and its continuing consequences.* The CTs in every opportunity tried to expose the inconsistencies in the regime ‘frame’ and erode its credibility. They appealed to the ‘conscious adherents’ in the domestic and transnational spheres for support. This was perceived as an utmost threat by the authorities as the Soviet state is based on the ideology to continue its grasp of power and was severely opposed.

The movement’s ‘success’ in its goal of the ‘collective return’ came when it became obvious that the CT movement attained a discursive higher ground against the regime. Eventually the authorities also had to concur. It became impossible to challenge the CT’s return on the discursive level. It became the “truth,” the master ‘frame’. Nobody dared to question how

come it was their moral right to return to “homeland” after 50 years, why the CTs ought to

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