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Ethnic Cleansing and Stalinism:

The Holodomor and Deportation Policies as Attempts to Russify the Soviet Union

In 1848, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels declared that “the Communists are... reproached with desiring to abolish countries.”¹ Their theoretical communism is opposed to nationalism fundamentally. How, then, to explain the various actions of the Soviet Union towards several national minorities, which might be described as ethnic cleansing? Should the Ukrainian hunger-famine of 1931-33 be considered a logical outcome of Marxist ideology, Stalinist paranoia, or simply an accident? Should the deportations of Crimean Tatars, Chechen-Ingushetians,² Volga Germans, and Meshketian Turks in 1944 be viewed as the result of Marxist thoughts on nationalism, or a war effort gone mad? Are these actions, in fact, even comparable?

Despite the differing nature of what actually occurred as a result of these policies, I contend that both of these policies were fundamentally similar, and were first and foremost examples of ethnic cleansing. In this paper, I am defining ethnic cleansing as

¹ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” (1848), *Marx and Engels Internet Archive*. Accessed Oct 25, 2010. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/index.htm>

² The Chechens and Ingush are technically two separate but related ethnic groups. Linguistically, they share similar but distinct languages.

actions taken with the intention of removing a people from a specific piece of land, or, in the words of Norman Naimark, “to get rid of the “alien” national, ethnic, or religious group and to seize control of the territory they formerly inhabited.”³ These actions may descend into killing, but the intent is to remove the group legally, or semi-legally, and usually without bloodshed. The territorial component is key to distinguishing ethnic cleansing from genocide.⁴ Naimark’s definition of ethnic cleansing best describes the actions taken by the Soviet state, which were meant essentially to remove a “nationality” from a specific piece of territory through whatever means, and essentially to either “Soviet-ize” or, perhaps more accurately, Russify these ethnic groups.

There are times when these actions bordered on genocide (particularly with the Ukrainian example), but because of the territorial connotations and the Soviet intent of basically eliminating national sentiment tied to territory, as opposed to outright murder, I posit that these policies were ones fundamentally based in ethnic cleansing. Furthermore, these policies were arguably put in place for various reasons: partially as a result of taking Marxist ideology to its logical extremes, partially as a reaction to perceived nationalist threats, and as an attempt to create a unified “Soviet” culture. These policies caused unparalleled levels of suffering and death, which had a profound effect on these groups of people.

As previously stated, Marxism (and therefore, theoretical communism) is opposed to nationalism. Marxists, prior to the Soviet Union, associated the nation (and therefore, nationalism) with capitalism. Capitalist modes of production caused the national unit to develop. As such, it was anathema to their doctrine. Marxism declared that class, not

³ Norman Naimark, *The Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

nationality, is the force by which people should be more driven.⁵ Furthermore, Marxism posited that the working class worldwide should unite in order to overthrow the bourgeois oppressor, rather than remaining divided by national boundaries. Essentially, Marxism is anti-nationalist by nature. The nation would be subsumed by the revolution. To be nationalist, then, was foolish at best and counter-revolutionary and bourgeois at worst.

Yet the Soviet Union was unable to work entirely within these theoretical boundaries, even under Vladimir Lenin (the party head who most closely worked within the Marxist paradigm). After World War I, nationalism grew in strength in the ashes of the Russian Empire. As such, Lenin and other early Bolsheviks made concessions to the power of nationalism among the various territories (which were, in fact, the composite parts of the Russian Empire) that the Soviet Union absorbed after the Civil War concluded. The Bolshevik's concessions were not the result of their own fondness for nationalism, but out of an understanding that many of the people in what was now the Soviet Union held loyalties to ethnic identity.⁶ Additionally, it was believed that ethnic tensions, which might hinder the Soviet Union in general, could be dealt with via the creation of nations.⁷ In theory, ethnic attachment would disappear with increased socialist enlightenment, and all would be unified as one proletariat people. In the meantime, unity and peace were more important, and so nations of various ethnicities survived. Essentially, this was a concession on the part of Lenin to the power of nationalism in the Soviet Union, and an attempt not to look like the tsarist Russian empire.

⁵ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

⁷ Terry Martin, "The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing", *The Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 4: 826, accessed October 25, 2010, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2990684>.

As a result of Lenin and the Bolshevik's concessions, national territories were formed to service the many national minorities in the Soviet Union. These took the form of larger national republics and oblasts, as well as smaller (population-wise) national regions and national townships.⁸ It is worth noting that some of these national territories were created on lands that had previously been unrelated to various minorities. Therefore, the Soviet state encouraged for the voluntary resettlement of minorities (which, as shall become clear, set a precedent for later policy).⁹ These republics had varying degrees of actual autonomy throughout their lifespan, but remained part of the Soviet Union and were therefore subject to Soviet policy. Ukraine was a Soviet Republic for the entirety of the Soviet Union, and consequently had a greater deal of autonomy. This autonomy was most acute in the 1920s, which shall be discussed in more depth later. Crimean Tatars and Volga Germans were organized into less powerful autonomous republics from the 1920s until 1944, while the Chechen-Ingushetians and Meshketian Turks were organized into the further less powerful autonomous oblasts around the same period of time.¹⁰ Nevertheless, all of these groups knew some degree of autonomy.

The Stalinist era was to see an even more complex relationship between the Soviet government and national minorities emerge. At times during Iosif Stalin's tenure in power, national minorities were respected, both territorially and to a lesser extent culturally. At other times, Stalinist policy essentially dictated that the autonomy of these republics be severely restricted. The issue of nationality was seen as a problem, for various reasons, which led to the potential for ethnic cleansing. This potential for ethnic

⁸ Ibid., 825.

⁹ Ibid., 828-829.

¹⁰ It is worth noting that, at the time, all of the less autonomous regions were located in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic; furthermore, the Chechens and Ingushetians have autonomous oblasts in the modern day Russian Federation.

cleansing was realized, and consequently resulted in the hunger-famine in Ukraine and the deportations of 1944, which will now be explained and analyzed.

The Holodomor

The roots of the hunger-famine, or the Holodomor as it is called in Ukrainian, are complex.¹¹ In essence, though, there are two roots of the famine, if it is to be understood as ethnic cleansing. The first is as a policy directly related to the agricultural collectivization drive of the late 20s and early 30s. The Holodomor is, at its base level, part of this collectivization drive, but in the Ukrainian context and with more ethnic overtones. The second is as a strong Ukrainian nationalism and cultural/political autonomy during the relatively moderate Soviet economic period when New Economic Policy (NEP) was implemented. These two roots are interrelated, and thus resulted in the ethnic cleansing of the 1930s.

Collectivization was part of Stalin's first Five Year Plan, added in 1929. In essence, collectivization attempted to make agriculture more socialist in character, emphasizing massive factory farms as the primary model of production. Supposedly, these farms would erase smaller farms controlled by "kulaks" and other peasants, and would allow for an ostensibly more stable, socialist collection and distribution of grain.¹²

¹¹ For purposes of this paper, Holodomor and terror-famine will be used interchangeably. The Holodomor as a term literally means, "death by hunger", and as a term seems to have originated among the Ukrainian diaspora after the Stalinist period to refer to the famine as a man-made hunger. For more information on the historiography of the famine, see Liudmyla Grynevych, "The Present State of Ukrainian Historiography on the Holodomor and Prospects for Its Development", *The Harriman Review* vol. 16, no. 2 (2008).

¹² Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 135.

In practice, these farms did erase smaller farms, but only with the use of force and at the expense of the peasantry. This would acutely affect Ukraine, due to the emphasis of agriculture in the Ukrainian economy. Collectivization caused wide-spread chaos everywhere in which it occurred, and was arguably a war in the countryside against the peasantry. As such, Ukraine was very harshly affected, due to its highly agricultural peasant-based population. It is worth noting that the collectivization drive was more complete in Ukraine than in Russia by the end of the First Five Year Plan in 1933 due to the added force used there, certainly contributing to its role as ethnic cleansing.

The collectivization drive, in Ukraine most notably, was related to nationalism. Stalin himself stated that, “The nationality problem is, in its very essence, a problem of the peasantry.”¹³ Additionally, one of the stated goals of collectivization in an official party newspaper was, “the destruction of Ukrainian nationalism’s social base – the individual land holdings.”¹⁴ Therefore, if one considers collectivization a policy directed against the peasantry, then one must consider the role of nationality throughout the Soviet Union – in this case, Ukrainian nationality – as directly related.

As previously discussed, nationalism was a viable force in many of the different Soviet national units during the 1920’s. The power of nationalism in the Soviet Union was perhaps at its strongest and clearest in the Soviet Ukrainian Republic. Ukraine experienced a cultural flowering during the 1920s, after the civil war ended and the Soviet Union was formed. This cultural flowering resulted in increased nationalism, even in the Ukrainian Communist party. While Ukrainian nationalism had existed prior to this time, several factors in the NEP period heightened and amplified this nationalism.

¹³ Iosif Stalin, *Works* volume 7 (Moscow: 1953-5), 7, quoted in Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 219.

¹⁴ *Proleterska Pravda* (1930), quoted in Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, 219.

The Soviet government, particularly the local Communist party, emphasized mass education and policies of Ukrainization in the republic. Some Ukrainian communists, however, believed that Ukrainization was not decisive enough. Oleksandr Shumskyi, a prominent party member, criticized Ukraine's first party secretary Lazar Kaganovich on the grounds of not being strong enough on the Ukrainization front, particularly with regards to Ukrainians in Poland. Other Ukrainian communists agreed with Shumskyi, and further characterized Kaganovich as a great Russian chauvinist. Stalin, it is worth noting, supported Kaganovich, and had Shumskyi denounced as a nationalist and transferred to Russia.¹⁵ This affair may have portended attitudes during the Holodomor towards nationalism. Nevertheless, literacy in Ukrainian became increasingly common, with 50 percent of rural dwellers and 70 percent of urban dwellers having the ability to read by 1927, up from 28 percent in 1897.

The increase in general literacy combined with the Ukrainization of higher learning, as knowledge of the Ukrainian language became mandatory for admission to and graduating from college in 1927. These two factors consequently resulted in a significant amount of nationalistic writing and art to emerge during this period, and more critically, more writing in Ukrainian in general.¹⁶ The Soviet government tolerated these cultural forms, so long as they did not openly contradict socialist ideology. The central Soviet government did attempt to push non-nationalist forms of culture and strengthen "Soviet" culture in the form of the All-Union Association of Proletarian Writers, but nevertheless did not ban nationalistic culture during NEP.¹⁷ All of these changes were

¹⁵ Martin, "The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing," 843.

¹⁶ Serhy Yekelchuk, *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 94-99.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 99-100.

assaulted during the Stalinist period, in a way that can and should be classed as ethnic cleansing.

What exactly happened during the Holodomor, then, that it should be classed as ethnic cleansing? Essentially, what happened was a famine that was orchestrated by the state through the mechanics of collectivization and achieved through the use of terror and force. Theoretically, the famine occurred in the name of advancing the Soviet system in general; at the same time, it suppressed Ukrainian peasant culture and the burgeoning literate nationalism of NEP. While there were certainly other famines occurring at the same time in the Soviet Union as a result of collectivization, there are elements to the famine in Ukraine which earn it the title of ethnic cleansing, even genocide in some circles, and cause it to be a distinct entity from collectivization as a whole.

The Holodomor, to an extent, began with executions and deportations of elements of the nationalist intelligentsia and the “kulak”. From 1929 to 1931, there were several denunciations, arrests, and attacks on leading Ukrainian intellectuals. These intellectuals were primarily associated with nationalism, particularly with regards to the Ukrainian language. This led to the decline of many schools of higher learning in Ukraine, and indeed, many students were also deported to prison camps. These figures were all supposed to have been associated with, whether in reality or not, an extreme form of nationalism that was believed to be dangerous to the Soviet Union.¹⁸

The kulak, or rich peasant, was a constructed class seen as an element in Ukraine, as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, which prevented the rise of true socialism due to their selfishness. This class supposedly hoarded grain and operated their farms for personal benefit, as opposed to the benefit of the entire proletariat. As such, this supposed class

¹⁸ Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow*, 218-219.

was to be denounced and removed from society. It is additionally worth noting that the kulak was, in Ukraine, associated with nationalism.¹⁹ Of course, it is undeniable that the kulak was a constructed class that suffered persecution elsewhere in the Soviet Union at the time of collectivization. However, in Ukraine, the kulak was more associated with nationalism and thus took on a more ethnic element.

With the kulak and intelligentsia theoretically removed from Ukrainian society (although by no means gone as ideological enemies in propaganda and in the minds of Soviet officials), the average peasant experienced what was to form the bulk of the terror-famine in 1932. This was not, strictly speaking, related to collectivization. Collectivization was fairly complete in Ukraine by 1932, especially compared to the RSFSR.²⁰ 1932, then, represents the beginning of organized famine orchestrated by the state in order to cleanse Ukraine of its national identity, in the form of the peasantry.

In 1932, Stalin ordered that a quota of 7.7 million tons of grain be collected in Ukraine. Given the conditions of that year, this would have almost invariably caused a significant shortage of food for the Ukrainian peasantry. This was made clear to Soviet authorities in Moscow by the Ukrainian communist party, but nevertheless, the decree was enforced. What this entailed was the forced gathering of grain on collective farms. The grain was now considered “socialist property”, along with other sources of food on the farms, such as cattle. Watchtowers were built on the collective farms and operated by soldiers, ostensibly to protect “socialist property”, in order that the grain collection could actually be enforced. Attempting to bypass this policy, whether through theft or other means, was punishable with prison sentences or even death. Once this grain was

¹⁹ Ibid., 219.

²⁰ Ibid., 220.

collected, the grain was either to be placed in warehouses, where it would theoretically be of use later, or left to rot.²¹

As a result of this policy, people began to starve in mass numbers, as finding food became extremely difficult. While this varied from area to area (with the most agricultural regions being hit the hardest), food was generally hard to come by. Available food was usually of a very low quality. Primary accounts note the horrors that occurred in order to eat.²² A report noted that, “[Ukrainians] ate anything at all. They caught mice, rats, sparrows, ants, earthworms. They ground up bones into flour, and did the same with leather and shoe soles.”²³ Whatever food could be eaten was eaten, whether it was of significant nutritional value or not. Even then, food was not always available.

Consequently, the health of Ukrainians was significantly affected. A survivor of the famine noted that, “The body withers. The skin assumes a dust-grey tinge and folds into many creases. The person ages visibly. Even small children and infants have an old look.”²⁴ Mental health, too, was visibly affected. Many families were torn apart by hoarding whatever food was available, and neighbors turned against neighbor through denunciations. Suicides were fairly common, and additionally, cannibalism was a known practice, as is noted by several observers, Ukrainian and Russian.²⁵

More significant than the disease, malnutrition, and horror, however, was the sheer death toll of the Holodomor. Robert Conquest estimates that about 7 million people died as a result of the famine itself, with another 6.5 million dying as a result of

²¹ Ibid., 222-236.

²² Primary accounts seem to focus on the horror of day to day life and do tend to have an anti-Soviet bias, but for purposes of this paper are to be taken at face value, as close a picture to the events as is readily available.

²³ Vasily Grossman, *Forever Flowing* (New York: 1972), 157, quoted in Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow*, 244.

²⁴ S.O. Pidhainy, ed. *The Black Deeds of the Kremlin v. 2* (Detroit: 1955), 68, quoted in Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow*, 253.

²⁵ Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow*, 256-257.

dekulakization, for a rough total of nearly 13.5 million.²⁶ It is worth noting that other estimates of the death toll are somewhat lower, but still range in the millions. Regardless of the actual numbers, the death toll should be taken at the very least as a record of the sheer magnitude of what happened in 1932 and 33.

These starving people were only Ukrainians, never Russian or other ethnicities, who by and large enforced the policy. Ukrainian party heads and party activists were also seemingly immune, so long as they worked with Russian and other Soviet officials to implement the policy – essentially, ridding themselves of their national identity and sentiment. A Ukrainian woman wrote to her husband in that, “almost all the people in our village are swollen with hunger except for the head of the collective, the brigadiers, and the activists.”²⁷ Officials had no difficulty in finding food, but they simply tended towards not giving it up (although it was known to happen). Indeed, the food that these officials had was of high quality.²⁸ As such, the ethnic and planned elements of the Holodomor should not be underestimated.

In 1933, after the famine itself was mostly over, the “Sovietization” or Russification began in a more visible form. This was accomplished through the resettlement of Russians into parts of Ukraine and by increased attacks on Ukrainian cultural heritage, language, and supposed nationalism that remained. Resettlement of Russians began in the middle of 1933, apparently with the impetus for this move coming from above (Vyacheslav Molotov in particular). These Russians moved into villages that had suffered particularly hard during the famine, including those that had entire populations wiped out. This move was largely permanent, and caused some tension with

²⁶ Ibid., 306.

²⁷ Pidhainy, *Black Deeds*, 205, quoted in Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow*, 230.

²⁸ Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow*, 230-231.

Ukrainians who had to deal with the new populations.²⁹ Because of this, the Holodomor more clearly takes on an element of ethnic cleansing – that is, the idea of transferring populations based on ethnicity. While the policy was partially based in the practical matter of attempting to have more hands available to harvest grain, in conjunction with the other elements of the Holodomor, the ethnic element becomes more prominent.

With regards to national heritage, several key attacks on Ukrainian identity occurred in 1933. First, more cultural institutions were attacked. For example, the Kobzars, a group of traveling blind bards that told stories both popular and patriotic for centuries, were mostly rounded up and shot. Simultaneously, campaigns were conducted in the city against defenders of Ukrainization. *Pravda* attacked the Ukrainian Language Institute in late April, and several leading philologists were arrested soon afterward. Even the theater, which had largely been untouched throughout the Holodomor, was under siege, as some leading directors were put into labor camps for being nationalist. The goal of all these actions was to make everything fit into Soviet paradigms. Ukrainian as a language was not eliminated. The intent of central Soviet authorities was to instead Russify it, as this was more acceptable.³⁰ Because of this further attempt to Russify Ukraine, ethnic cleansing as a definition for this policy becomes more clear, because this was an attempt to eliminate the idea of Ukrainian distinctions with Russians, linguistic, cultural, or otherwise.

The Holodomor, then, was essentially several policies in Ukraine that were all aimed at eliminating Ukrainian nationalism and ties to the Ukrainian land. This was most visibly achieved through the famine of 1932 to 1933, which is typically considered the

²⁹ Ibid., 263.

³⁰ Ibid., 266-270.

Holodomor proper. The rest of the Holodomor, as I am characterizing it, included attacks on Ukrainian cultural institutions, particularly language, in order to establish a more Russified Soviet Ukraine. Because of this ethnic component, in conjunction with the territorial connotation, the Holodomor should be characterized as ethnic cleansing by the Soviet state.

The Deportation of National Minorities

The deportations of 1944 were, as previously stated, a series of deportations of several ethnic minorities. For the sake of brevity I will primarily discuss the deportations of Crimean Tatars and the Chechen-Ingush, although the policy's effects on the Volga Germans and Meshketian Turks were quite similar and should be seen in the same light. Even though the experiences of these ethnic groups were similar, the roots of the deportation policy are somewhat varied by the differences between these ethnicities. Nevertheless, there are several factors in the history of these ethnicities that bind the roots of the policy together. These roots are somewhat related to the existing national consciousnesses and national autonomies among these groups, in conjunction with the great divides between Russia and these minorities from an ethnic and cultural standpoint (the Chechen-Ingush and Tatars are both Muslim minorities). Perhaps more crucially, however, the deportations are heavily rooted in World War II and attempts to crush "enemy groups" by the Soviet state in this period of time.

As previously stated, each of the deported ethnic minorities knew some degree of autonomy within Russia. They were organized into autonomous units and had some degree over their ethnic territory. The Crimean Tatars were organized into an autonomous republic, while the Chechen-Ingushetians were organized into an

autonomous oblast in the RSFSR. This autonomy was granted, as previously stated, primarily to establish socialism among these groups. However, what resulted from this policy was inflaming nationalism and national consciousness among these groups, which had already existed among them during the Imperial Russian period.

These national identities came into conflict with the Soviet state (particularly the Russian majority) over issues of autonomy. During the Civil War, the Chechen-Ingush had fought primarily to maintain their cultural autonomy; they did not fight on the side of socialism, but on the side of their own nationality. As such, the Soviet state did not fully integrate the Chechen-Ingush until 1925 due to extreme resistance. While the Chechen-Ingush did integrate and receive political autonomy in the ultimate form of an autonomous oblast after 1925, they continued to resist full cultural integration (that is, Sovietization). In particular, Chechens and Ingush alike preserved many of their cultural traditions, some of which were particularly anti-Soviet (or simply deemed to be). When Soviet authorities attempted to implement collectivization, some people in the oblast engaged in pitched battles with the Red Army, although they were eventually collectivized.³¹ In essence, the national identity and cultural autonomy of the Chechen-Ingush resulted in resistance to Sovietization.

It is worth noting this rebelliousness had quite an impact on Soviet authorities. On September 5th, 1944 (just prior to the deportation policy was put into effect), Laverentii Beria, head of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), issued a report regarding the eventual resettlement policy. When discussing the Chechen-Ingush, he noted that, "In the early 1930s in [the oblast] was an actual threat that significant masses

³¹ Naimark, *The Fires of Hatred*, 93.

of people would become involved in a rebel adventure.”³² Interestingly, this report comes years after the actual resistance. As such, Chechen nationalism and rebelliousness was viewed as a very real threat high in the chain of Soviet command.

The Crimean-Tatars also had some clashes with the Soviet state prior to the enforcement of the deportation policy, likely due to latent nationalist tendencies. The Crimean Autonomous Republic was established in 1921, ostensibly with Crimean Tatars at the head of power. Prior to its wartime dissolution in 1941 due to the German invasion, the republic worked fairly well with the Soviet state, in a way that the Chechen-Ingush oblast really did not. However, there were clashes between the Tatars and Soviet authorities during this period. Although there was considerable support for the Soviet Union among the Tatar intelligentsia, not every Tatar agreed with this view. Some Tatars fought against the Bolshevik revolution, and there were some minor clashes when certain Soviet policies were put into practice, particularly collectivization. As a result of these clashes and policies, nearly 500,000 Tatars were killed (about half the pre-World War I population). By the 1930s, tensions still existed, but this rarely burst into open conflict.³³ By and large, nationalist sentiment and pride existed among Tatars, and this resulted in some tension between the Russian central government and the Tatars.

World War II, however, was the catalyst for the deportation policy. Several members of the central government, including Stalin, believed that all of these ethnic groups had been complicit with the Nazis after the beginning of Operation Barbarossa in 1941. As such, these groups became relabeled enemy ethnicities, groups that were destroying the war effort. The war effort, it should be added, was usually seen as a

³² Laverentii Beria, “From the Report of the NKVD Department of Special Settlements. September 5, 1944,” *Seventeen Moments in Soviet History*, <http://www.soviethistory.org>

³³ Naimark, *The Fires of Hatred*, 101.

Russian, or at best Slavic, nationalist effort publicly, despite the participation of all the people in the Soviet Union.³⁴ As such, other groups suffered in the face of Russian wartime nationalism, and their efforts at saving the Soviet Union hid behind the label of enemy. However, there was genuine collaboration with Nazis, both on the Crimean Tatar and Chechen-Ingush side, which should not be ignored.

During the war, the tensions between the Soviet state and the Chechen-Ingush continued. The NKVD claimed that there was constant fighting between their units and the Chechens. Furthermore, the NKVD reported in its archive that there was the development of a supposed national socialist party which would rise against the Soviet state in conjunction with an attack by the Nazi Germans. While Chechen historians have disputed the prominence of anti-Soviet Chechens, it is worth noting that when the Nazis dropped parachutists into the oblast, they found some support among local groups. In contrast to this, many Chechens and Ingushetians joined the Red Army. Overall, however, many Chechen-Ingush resisted joining the military, and as such, the state suspended mandatory military service in the oblast by the end of 1942.³⁵ In conjunction with all previous tension with the Soviet state, this reaction to the war led to the imagining of the Chechen-Ingush as an enemy of the Soviet Union.

Crimea, on the other hand, had more direct contact with the Nazis. In October of 1941, the Nazis set up an occupation regime in Crimea. There is a good deal of evidence that there was some Tatar collaboration with this regime, including Nazi-supported Tatar “self-defense” units, which saw action against Russian partisans. This was likely the result of the tensions from the 1930s. Their collaboration was not unique, as Russians and

³⁴ Ibid., 89.

³⁵ Ibid., 94.

Ukrainians in the region were known to collaborate with Nazis as well. Nevertheless, the NKVD did not take the Tatar collaboration lightly. This is likely due to Russian domination of the Soviet Union, as well as the testaments of Russian partisans against Tatar collaborators to the NKVD. These reports of collaboration reached Beria, who then forwarded the information to Stalin.³⁶

Stalin certainly believed that the Crimean Tatars had in general betrayed the Soviet Union, likely due to the NKVD reports. He stated his views quite clearly just prior to the deportation in a top-secret (but declassified) decree to the State Defense Committee, in which Stalin both justifies and orders the deportation. Stalin begins his order by stating that the Crimean Tatars had betrayed the Soviet Union throughout the war. He proclaims that, “[t]he Crimean Tatars actively collaborated with the German occupation authorities, participating in so-called ‘Tatar national committees’... and were often used by the Germans to infiltrate the rear of the Red Army with spies and saboteurs.”³⁷ Stalin viewed the entire Crimean Tatar ethnicity as traitorous nationalists, who must atone for their actions against the Soviet Union. Ethnic cleansing, then, was viewed by Stalin as a viable tool for the safety of the Soviet Union and as a way of exacting a sort of revenge. This would have dramatic implications.

In 1944, the NKVD, with the help of the Red Army, deported both the Chechen-Ingush and the Crimean Tatars. The manner in which the deportation happened was overall similar for both minorities, although with some differences. In the case of the Chechen-Ingush, Beria ordered that their deportation operation begin on the 23rd to 24th of February. Local party leaders were first informed that the oblast was being dissolved,

³⁶ Ibid., 101-102.

³⁷ Iosif Stalin, “On the Crimean Tatars. May 11, 1944,” *Seventeen Moments in Soviet History*, <http://www.soviethistory.org/>

and that their people were to be transported to Kazakhstan and Kirghizia, in Central Asia. NKVD and Red Army troops then went from house to house and informed people that they were being moved and had half an hour to prepare. These people were then placed into railcars and transported to their new destinations. While the entire population was not entirely removed, due to resistance, 496,460 people were deported from the oblast, with other Chechens and Ingush living in other areas deported as well. Soon after the deportation itself, new settlers from neighboring regions resettled the region, sponsored by the state.³⁸ Due to the very nature of this sort of policy, the Chechens and Ingush were ethnically cleansed from their homeland in the course of several days, due to the fact that they would not Sovietize (and therefore, they would not Russify).

The deportation of the Crimean Tatars on the 17th and 18th of May played out similarly to that of the Chechen-Ingushetians, particularly in the initial phase. When describing the deportation, senior NKVD officer Grigorii Burlitskii reported that their methods were, “the same that had been applied in the Chechen Ingush Republic... that is to say, all of the Turkic people... were all of a sudden and at the same moment arrested by the NKVD detachments.”³⁹ People were informed that they were being deported, had a few minutes to collect their belongings, and were placed on trains. They were subsequently taken to Central Asia, primarily to Uzbekistan. Furthermore, after the Tatars were deported, other minorities in Crimea were deported, leaving a Russian population exclusively.⁴⁰ Therefore, the policy was about asserting Russian supremacy within the Soviet Union in general, and in Crimea particularly.

³⁸ Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 96-97.

³⁹ Grigorii Burlitskii, quoted in Alan Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1987), 166.

⁴⁰ Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 102-103.

The conditions of the deportations were terrible. Ayshe Seytmuratova, a Crimean Tatar deported at the age of seven, recalled the conditions quite vividly. She noted that, “[w]e Crimean Tatars all these Soviet railcars ‘crematoria on wheels’... we were transported for weeks without proper food or medical attention. There was not even any fresh air, for the doors and windows were bolted shut... corpses lay alongside the living.”⁴¹ Naimark estimates that about 10,000 Chechens died during the transport alone, with comparable losses among the Tatars relative to population⁴². The NKVD guards and soldiers who transported both of these groups did, in fact, have access to food, water, and the like during the transport, so this cannot and should not be viewed as an issue of scarcity. Instead, the conditions of the transport should be viewed as a sort of retributive violence against the Chechen-Ingush and Crimean Tatars. Arguably, then, this was a further attempt to thin these ethnicities and to attempt to break down any spirit of nationalism that remained among these groups, although without necessarily wiping these groups out entirely.

Conditions were not much better upon arrival in the new regions for the Chechen-Ingush and Crimean Tatars. Movement was severely limited, and people were effectively trapped on reservations. Seytmuratova noted that no Crimean Tatar could travel further than five kilometers from the areas designated as their settlement.⁴³ Furthermore, the physical conditions on these settlements were deplorable for some time. The Chechens and Ingush could not find work for several years after the deportation, and finding food was quite difficult. Additionally, ethnicities native to the settled regions and NKVD

⁴¹ Ayshe Seytmuratova, “The Elders of the New National Movement: Recollections,” in *The Tatars of Crimea: Return to the Homeland, Studies and Documents*, ed. Edward Allworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 155.

⁴² Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 97.

⁴³ Seytmuratova, “Elders of the New National Movement,” 156.

guards were hostile to the Chechen-Ingush. As a result, roughly 100,000 Chechens and Ingush died within the first three years of being on the new settlements, according to NKVD statistics.⁴⁴ Conditions were very similar for the Crimean Tatars.

It is additionally worth noting that, while confined to these areas, both of these ethnicities were subjected to further attacks on their national identity by way of education. The state mandated that education be conducted in Russian. Seytmuratova, when discussing her education beginning in 1946, stated that, “at that time there was not even a mention of... instruction in the Crimean Tatar language. All children of deported peoples were coerced into attending Russian schools.”⁴⁵ At these schools, history teachers slandered Crimean Tatars, calling them traitors and barbarians. Teachers likely slandered the Chechen-Ingush as well. What was ultimately under attack in this education was the idea of ethnicity and nationalism. Both the Crimean Tatars and the Chechen-Ingush were expected to forget about their national identity and, in effect, submit to Russification. This comprises ethnic cleansing, in conjunction with the physical deportation.

There was little acknowledgement of the deportations, particularly by the state. In the case of Chechnya, the new settlers had no records of the former inhabitants of the region. Additionally, in many cases the new settlers demolished Chechen and Ingush monuments and graveyards and renamed towns and villages.⁴⁶ Crimean Tatar monuments were also destroyed. Additionally, history books were rewritten to suggest that the Tatars had been little more than traitorous bandits throughout Russian history.⁴⁷ In effect, both

⁴⁴ Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 97.

⁴⁵ Seytmuratova, “Elders of the New National Movement,” 156-157.

⁴⁶ Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 98.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 104.

of these ethnicities were erased from their homelands, for a time. As such, both were ethnically cleansed, due to their removal from the physical and psychological landscape of their homeland, in conjunction with attacks on national identity.

In the end, the state allowed both the Chechen-Ingush and the Crimean Tatars to return to their homelands, although they never reached the same level of prestige and autonomy that had existed prior to the deportations. By the end of 1957, the Chechen-Ingush were deemed Sovietized and allowed to return to the former site of the Chechen and Ingush Autonomous Republic, which was reestablished. Nevertheless, there was still quite a great deal of tension with Moscow, which still continues to this day, as Chechnya and Ingushetia remain autonomous regions in the Russian Republic despite an intense war with Russia and an ultranationalist terrorist campaign on the part of Chechens and Ingushetians.⁴⁸ Although the Crimean Tatars were officially exonerated of being traitorous by a 1967 decree, they were never officially allowed to return to their homes (although many began to move and seek legal rights during *perestroika* in the 1980s).⁴⁹ As such, the deportations were ultimately unsuccessful in preventing nationalism among these groups, Russifying them, and preventing them from living in their territory (although this was successful for some time).

Nevertheless, the deportation policy should first and foremost be seen as a policy of ethnic cleansing. By aiming to crush Crimean Tatar and Chechen-Ingush ethnic identity and nationalism and hoping to replace this with a Russified identity, Stalin and the rest of the central Soviet state were essentially participating in genocide. These groups, though vilified, were never entirely killed off in the manner of genocide. Rather,

⁴⁸ Ibid., 99.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 104.

the state attempted to “cleanse” them of their ethnic identity. They did this first and foremost through literally moving them from their homelands and purging their effects on the landscape – as such, it was inherently tied. They attempted to further do this by forcing socialism and the Russian language on these people, in order to get rid of nationalism. In essence, then, the deportation is a classic example of ethnic cleansing.

Comparisons and Conclusions

The Holodomor and the deportations have quite a number of similarities, primarily because they were examples of ethnic cleansing in the Soviet Union during the Stalinist period. While these two policies were separated by about twelve years, Stalin (or people working under Stalin, like the NKVD) organized both of them. Furthermore, while these were first and foremost policies concerned with “erasing ethnicity,” there was a great deal of suffering inflicted upon all of these ethnic groups. Many Ukrainians, Chechen-Ingush, Crimean-Tatar, Volga German, and Meshketian Turks died as a result of these policies; the actual percentage of the populations killed was quite comparable. Additionally, the manner in which the state killed these people was similar – through preventing access to food (although for different reasons and on different scales between the Holodomor and the deportations).

Perhaps most crucially, both the Holodomor and the deportations were enacted as a result of perceived nationalist threats to the Soviet Union. Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars, and the Chechen-Ingush alike were viewed as having extreme nationalist sentiment or attachment to their ethnic identity, which would theoretically result in separatism. This was viewed by the central Soviet state as a threat, both to socialism on a theoretical level

and to the Russian majority on a practical level. This was achieved through “cleansing” ethnicities of their nationalism, through starvation, movement, and re-education. Ultimately, this policy allowed for these Russian majorities to take land. As such, these policies were meant to counteract these perceived nationalist threats by erasing ethnicity, and thusly resulted in ethnic cleansing.

There were some crucial differences between the two policies, nevertheless. The deportation policy was fundamentally tied into the displacement and movement of ethnic groups, whereas the Holodomor involved no forced movement of Ukrainians (and indeed, movement was generally blocked). Furthermore, both of these policies should be seen within the context of their respective times. The Holodomor was inherently tied in with the collectivization drive. The deportations were inherently related to World War II and the German invasion. Therefore, while both were Stalinist policies of ethnic cleansing, they were essentially rooted in the time they occurred and in the specifics of what occurred.

Additionally, and perhaps most crucially, the acceptance of these groups into the Soviet framework after the policies were enacted varied wildly. After the Holodomor, Ukrainians in general were seen as a Sovietized, and no longer as an enemy group, and actually maintained their autonomous status. The Chechen-Ingush and Crimean Tatars found themselves harder pressed to remove this sort of status in the Soviet Union, even after the state restated their position on these ethnicities, and did not have their autonomy restored for quite some time. This could likely be explained due to the cultural and linguistic similarities between Ukrainians and Russians, and in fact, many Russians had for some time viewed the two ethnicities as essentially the same thing. The Chechen-

Ingush and Crimean Tatars were culturally, religiously, and ethnically quite different from Russians. As such, the place of these ethnicities in the Soviet context was quite different.

Despite these differences, both of these policies should be seen first and foremost as examples of ethnic cleansing inherently tied to the Stalinist period, as Stalin himself advocated that they be enacted. They were the result of extreme paranoia over the intention of groups, in conjunction with the common Stalinist theme of purging groups of people. Additionally, these policies represented an attempt by a Russian majority, fostered by Stalin, to assert its own supremacy within a multinational state. Furthermore, these policies were the representation of Soviet, and particularly Stalin's own, interpretations of Marxism. Nationalism was, in theory, not to be allowed in the ideal socialist state, and as such, nationalist sentiment should be removed. Ethnic cleansing was the ultimate endpoint of this interpretation of Marxist thought, because it combined with both Russifying tendencies, Stalinist paranoia over the intentions of ethnic groups, and simple desires for land and control. The ethnic cleansing of the Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans, and the Meshketian Turks was an attempt to create a hegemonic Soviet Union, with Russia as the central power. These policies ultimately were unsuccessful at ridding the Soviet Union of nationalism and creating a unified Soviet culture. All that the Soviet state had to show for this attempt was sorrow, anger, and death.

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