

## THE CRIMEAN TATARS: FROM TSARIST GENOCIDE (1853–1856) TO STALIN’S EXILE (MAY 1944). MEMOIRS FROM EXILE

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### ABSTRACT

This article describes some aspects of genocide, refuge of the 19th century, as well as the deportation, the exile of May 18, 1944 during Stalin’s regime to which the Crimean Tatars were subjected. The events experienced throughout the turbulent history of this people, about which history books say nothing, but on the contrary, they are presented as robbers and traitors both during the Crimean War (1853–1856) and also, during the Second World War. All the horrors caused by the wars, which in fact were not their wars, but took place on their homeland territory – Crimea being a theater of war for almost two centuries, leads us to classify damages done to the Crimean Tatars as events of genocide. For the aspects of refuge and forced displacement from their homeland after the Crimean War, for this work I relied on documents that I found at *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi* (The Ottoman Archives of the Prime Minister’s Office). The interview with *Kerim Ismail, Hasanoğlu*, Scientific Director at the Institute of Crimean-Tatar Language and Literature, Crimean Tatar from Crimea – a survivor of the deported Crimean Tatars, was the basis for testimonies regarding the presentation of the events experienced during the exile, in Uzbekistan. At the end of the paper, I emphasize the innocence of the Crimean Tatars, although at the deportation of May 18, 1944 they were accused of high treason, suggesting that today the Crimean Tatars, who are scattered in all corners of the world, from Central Asia to the western Atlantic coast, do not have thorough knowledge of their modern history (from the nineteenth century to the twentieth century).

**Keywords:** *Crimean Tatars, genocide, exile, oral history, memoirs.*

### INTRODUCTION

This study is designed from the perspective of a native Crimean Tatar whose ancestors survived refuge and genocide during and after the Crimean War. After the Crimean War (1853–1856), my great-grandfather, *Hacı İzzet İsmail*, together

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with his family, were forced to leave their hometown, Kerch, Crimea, and settle in what is now Dobruja. Today, my great-grandfather, *Hacı İzzet Ismail*, does not even have a grave, because the village of *Kanlıçükür* (Grăniceru) at the end of the communist regime was destroyed by depopulation, as states the Official Gazette of Constanta. The hearth of the village had been established in 1830 (Călugăreanu, 2000: p. 30), and at present they have not even left us the cemeteries, so that our dead can rest their eternal sleep. At the end of the communist regime, the hearth of the village was transformed into agricultural land (see **Figure 1**).



*Kanlıçükür* (Grăniceru) village, May, 2015

*Kanlıçükür* (Grăniceru) village, August, 2019

**Figure 1**

Source: Author's personal archive.

Today, communities of Crimean Tatars live not only in Romania but also in Bulgaria, Ukraine and Turkey. Crimean Tatars, who were deported to Central Asia during Stalin's Bolshevik regime, now live in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Some of them, very few took refuge in Europe and in the USA and only a few in Romania.

I am always honored to talk and write about the Crimean Tatars, focusing especially on the Crimean Tatars in Dobruja and their impressive history.

As for the denomination of the minority, currently in my studies, I use the denomination of Crimean Tatars, although over time I used other denominations as, Tatars and Turkish-Tatars. The textbooks of history and geography in Romania, use the denomination of Tatars, without specifying that the Crimean Tatar people have been formed and evolved completely differently from the other Tatars, because there are also Bashkir Tatars from Bashkortostan, Tatars from Kazakhstan, Tatars from Lithuania, Polish Tartars, etc.

### DOMAIN LITERATURE

Alan Fisher is the only historian who studied and wrote about Crimea and the Crimean Tatars *The Crimean Tatars* (1987). In many of his studies and books he wrote about the enormous flow of the Crimean Tatars caused by the interminable Russian-Ottoman wars of the 19th century. There are several books and studies by American researchers, such as Williams, Glyn Brian, *The Crimean Tatars. From Soviet Genocide to Putin's Conquest*, (2016), and Uehling, Lynn Greta, *Beyond Memory. The Crimean Tatars Deportation and Return* (2004), books about the diaspora of Crimean Tatars in the United States, a diaspora formed after the May 1944 deportation. In Romania and Turkey only 3 (three) books were published about the Crimean Tatars from Dobruja: Ülküsal, Müstecib, *Dobruca ve Türkler* (1966); Mehmet, Ekrem, Ali, 1994 *Din istoria turcilor dobrogeni*, (1994); Ismail, Nilghiun, *Balkan Turks The Crimean Tatars of Dobruja* (2017) and some studies.

Unfortunately, we know nothing about the Crimean Tatars in Bulgaria. The studies written in English do not specify very clearly the demographic statistics about the Turkish communities and the Bulgarian Turkish communities. I assume that this is the reason why the field studies on the Crimean Tatars of Romanian community is mentioned as the most numerous, which is a mistake because currently their demographic statistics in Romania states a decrease of the community.

### METHODOLOGY

Whithin this study I relied on the existing data at the *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi* (The Ottoman Archives of the Prime Minister's Office) **Sâdaret Defterlerifund**: *Sâdaret Mektûbî Kalemi Nezaret ve Devair Evrakı* (A.MKT.NZD.), *Sâdaret Mühimme* (A. MKT.MHM.), *Sâdaret Mektûbî Kalemi Umum Vilâyet Evrakı* (A.MKT.UM.), **Cevdet Belgelri fund**: *Cevdet Dahiliye* (C.DH.) and **Hariciye Nezareti Belgeri**: HR.İD., HR.TH., which provide information about Crimean Tatar refugees and their settlement in Dobruja, but also sources of oral history resulting from my field research.

From the documents with the *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi* it came out that the Crimean Tatars are named *Kırım ahalisi*, and the Nogays are named *Nogay kabilesi*. It is necessary to mention that along side with the Crimean Tatars, many Nogays left Crimea and settled in the Ottoman lands of Dobruja or Anatolia. Also, it is necessary to point out that in the documents from *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi* the terms used regarding the refugee people are: *muhacir* (refugee), in the documents up to 1900 and after 1900 *mülteci* (political refugee). The terms are used both for *Kırım ahalisi*, *Nogay kabilesi*, as for Jews, Germans and other refugees, such as Caucasians, Circassians, and by no means the term *göç* (migration).

In oral history, there are several types of activities that have different scientific status, including the collection of oral testimonies practiced by professional archivists. From an archival point of view, the recording being the material resulting from the original interview, it represents a primary source document<sup>1</sup>. The sources of oral history within this paper are based on face-to-face interviews conducted by me in Turkey, Istanbul, May 2015 and in Romania, Constanța during February, July and August 2016. This study is based on another field research conducted by me with a number of open-ended interviews between the end of July 2011 and the early August 2011 with the purpose to find out the state of the Tatar language spoken by the Crimean Tatars in Dobruja. The interviews were conducted with ten individuals, were fully recorded and the results were disseminated at various international symposia and published in the proceeding papers (2011–2014).

The purpose of these series of interviews (the end of February 2016 and the end of July–early August 2016) was to find out knowledge and information's level held by the community members regarding the mother tongue, history, culture and customs of the Crimean Tatars in Dobruja. The main topic of the research is “Study on education, language and culture of the Crimean Tatars in Dobruja”.

This exploratory research based on the qualitative method of the interview<sup>2</sup> was conducted with a small number of respondents (26 people, most of whom were family members), but with valuable and rich results obtained from each subject. Of these, sixteen interviews were recorded with community members residing in Constanța, eight with the Crimean Tatars residents of Amzacea village and two interviews with community members residents of Tătaru village. I do not claim that such a small number of people could represent the Crimean Tatar community, but the sample is fairly balanced regarding the total number of the community, 20, 282 in statistics with the *Institutul Național de Statistică, România*<sup>3</sup>. Both genders were equally represented and their ages ranged from twenty to eighty-seven. Some of them were trained professionals with college or university education with experience in their professions, 2 students but many of them retired.

The interviews were conducted by me in Constanța (sixteen), Tătaru village (two) and Amzacea village (eight). Most of the interviews were conducted at participants' homes, only two outdoors on the grounds of Tătaru village Mosque. Most people were interviewed as individuals on a face-to-face interviews, but eight

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<sup>1</sup> Nicoară, Toader, 2005, *Istorie locală și surse orale* (Local history and oral sources), p.42 [http://www.hiphi.ubbcluj.ro/studii/Public/File/cursuri/suporturi\\_conversie/Istorie\\_locala.pdf](http://www.hiphi.ubbcluj.ro/studii/Public/File/cursuri/suporturi_conversie/Istorie_locala.pdf), accessed on 28 October 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Șandor, Dan, Sorin, *Metode și tehnici de cercetare în științele sociale* (Research methods and techniques in the social sciences), p.128, <https://docplayer.net/21004557-Metode-si-tehnici-de-cercetare-in-stiintele-sociale-sorin-dan-sandor.html> accessed on, 24 October 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Institutul Național de Statistică, *Recensământul populației și al locuințelor* (National Institute of Statistics, Population and Housing Census) <http://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-2/> accessed on 28, October, 2020.

couples were interviewed together. The time length of the interviews ranged from 60 min to 2h 30 min, with an average length of one hour. In all cases, the language of interview was Romanian and from time to time in Tatar language especially with people over the age of seventy.

In accordance with the purpose of my study, all the participants were fourth-generation refugees from Crimea. By this term – refugee, I designate the Crimean Tatars who runaway from their homeland and settled in Dobruja after the Crimean War (1853–1856). Their length of residence in Romania ranging between one hundred and fifty years to almost two hundred years. Most of the interviews were conducted within the family, because many people refused to speak, or did not show up for the interview, as happened with members of the community in Bucharest, where I did not find anyone at the headquarters, and the door was locked.

The interviews started with identification questions, referring to socio-demographic characteristics such as: sex, age, occupation, education, we continued with factual questions: family income, if they attend union meetings, have ever held a leadership position within the union and I ended with the key questions: mother tongue, history of Crimean Tatars, culture and customs. The structured interviews were used for all the questions, semi-structured interviews according to the respondent's answer having the opportunity to explore in depth the basic topic and when a question was not understood to intervene, explain the question, and in turn the respondent felt obliged to be honest. During interviews so many times I used non-verbal language to encourage the respondent to speak, but also to assess respondent's sincerity degree.

In recounting recent history of the Crimean Tatars – from Crimea, I used oral sources obtained by interviewing those who lived and were victims of exile. I believe that these events should be traced back to the history of the Crimean people. The interview with Dr. *Kerim Ismail Hasanoğlu*, Scientific Director with the Institute of Tatar-Crimean Language and Literature, Simferopol (in Crimean Tatar *Aqmescit*) a Crimean Tatar – survivor of the exiled people from Crimea, is the big surprise of my research about Crimean Tatars. I met Dr. *Kerim Ismail Hasanoğlu* at the international conference held in Istanbul, May 15–16, 2015. The conference, *Devletlerarası Kırım, Sürgünüve İsmail Gaspıralı* was organized in the memory of the mourning day of the deportation on May 18, 1944. During the interview I was so impressed of the historical context related by the respondent that it often seemed impossible for me to finish the interview. The interview of Dr. *Kerim Ismail Hasanoğlu* is the basis for the testimonies about the deeds experienced by the Crimean Tatars during the forced deportation after the Second World War.

For my research field I did not receive any financial support from any association or political organization for my work in the field, and at the end of my activity I obtained a historical document as Dr. Martha Norkunas, from the

University of Middle Tennessee, Oral History Department<sup>4</sup> states “An oral history interview is something quite out of the ordinary because you are creating a historical document in those moments that you’re sitting together. No paper documents exist to create the world that we’ve now created through these narratives”.

#### REFUGEE AND FORCED MOVEMENT IN DOMAIN LITERATURE

As for the term emigration<sup>5</sup>, the Romanian language dictionary states: to leave the homeland and settle for a longer time or forever in another country, often forced by certain political circumstances. Displacement can be the result of wars or any threats. In forced displacement, refugees have no power to decide whether or not to leave their homeland. Even if they resist moving to a safer area, the alternative of not leaving their homeland may be terminal.

Edward Newman, in his book “Refugees, international security, and human vulnerability: Introduction and survey”, published in the volume *Refugees and forced displacement: International security, human vulnerability, and the state*, under the auspices of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), states

“Many conflicts have involved the displacement of population groups as a motive and weapon of conflict. Refugee flows and displacement are in turn central to “post-conflict” reconstruction and peace-building”(Newman, 2003:5).

The author emphasizes

“Mass displacement owing to generalized violence and conflict or civil war, or war-related conditions such as famine and homelessness, has strained the application of this definition. So has the visibility in developed countries of people not ideologically or racially welcome. Economic migrants further blur the definitions; there are often not clear distinctions. The legal rights of refugees – as refugees and also as humans with human rights – are often demonstrably unfulfilled or violated” (Newman, 2003:6).

Alan Fisher, in his study *Emigration of Muslims From the Russian Empire in the Years After the Crimean War*, stresses the political and historical conditions in which Crimean Tatars were forced to leave their homeland

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<sup>4</sup> Dr. Martha Norkunas, University of Middle Tennessee – MTSU, Oral History, <https://www.mtsu.edu/faculty/martha-norkunas>, accessed on 28 November, 2020

<sup>5</sup> emigra, *emigrez*, vb. A pleca din patrie și a se stabili pentru un timp mai îndelungat sau pentru totdeauna în altă țară, adesea forțat de anumite împrejurări politice, economice etc.; a se expatria (emigrate, I emigrate, vb., to leave the homeland and settle for a longer time in another country, often forced by certain political, economic circumstances, etc; to expatriate). <https://dexonline.ro/definitie/emigrare> (definition/emigration) accessed on 18 October 2020

“Count Kiselev, Minister of State Domans, including those in the Crimea, since 1837, secretly informed (May, 22, 1856) officials in the Crimea that Tsar Alexander II was interested in cleansing (the term *osiscat* is often translated as purge) the Crimea of as many Tatars as possible, and that no obstacles of any sort should be placed in the way of the Tatars' leaving. The Tatars leadership was easily convinced that immediate flight was necessary for survival” (Fisher, 199: p.175)

The analysis of those presented above points out that the Crimean Tatars' refuge falls within the definition of forced displacement. The Crimean Tatars forced displacement is one of the least studied processes in the field of the forced displacement of masses of people during the period of modern history of the nineteenth century.

### CRIMEAN TATARS' EXILE

As if their history had not been sufficiently provoked by wars and refuge, the Crimean Tatars who did not leave Crimea, during Stalin's regime were deported, forcibly removed from their own homes and households on the grounds that they were traitors. They were unjustly accused of collaborating with the Germans and deported *en masse* in May 1944.

For the Crimean Tatars around the world, and also for the whole Turkic world, May 18, 1944 is a day of national mourning, when the *sürgün* began. For the history of the Crimean Tatars, the deportation of May 1944 was the highest of tragedies to which they were forced over time. They were transported in wagons used to transport animals to several countries of Central Asia, being subject to a special administrative supervision during their *sürgün*. Forced displacement and harsh living conditions during the exile resulted in a large number of deaths, estimated to be between 15 – 46% of the deportees (Aydin, 2014: 83).

The Romanian language dictionary for deportation term<sup>6</sup> gives synonyms such as exile and *sürgün*.

The Crimean Tatars' deportation is not the same with the exile of politically exiled people, who voluntarily leave their homeland (see Ovidius, Emil Cioran, Mircea Eliade). In Romanian language (*surghiun*) exile, originally *sürgün*, is a Turkish origin term<sup>7</sup> used to refer to the Crimean Tatars, Ahıska Türkleri (Meskhetian Turks) and other forcibly displaced peoples. At the end of World War

<sup>6</sup> Deportare – ‘– Trimitere forțată a unei persoane într-o regiune îndepărtată ca măsură represivă și: deportat, deportațiune, exil, surghiun (Forced deportation of a person to a remote region as a repressive measure and: deportee, deportation, exile). <https://dexonline.ro/definitie/deportare>, accessed on 19.10.2020

<sup>7</sup> *Sürgün- Ceza olarak belli bir yerin dışında veya belli bir yerde oturulan kimse* (A person residing outside or in a certain place as punishment). <https://sozluk.gov.tr>, accessed on 25 March 2021

II, following accusations of collaborating with the Nazis, Crimean Tatars were deported on May 18, 1944, and by the end of the 1989, they were not allowed to return to Crimea, their homeland. They were deported in various Soviet republics, including Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrkyzstan, Siberia, and Ukraine. A small number of Crimean Tatars took refuge in Romania, where the communist regime had begun.

*Sürgün*'s topic before 1989 was taboo, like all topics on refugees, deportees. In my research field only one person talked to me about *sürgün*, namely, Ms. Ayten Denisleam<sup>8</sup>. During the interview conducted by me in February 2016, at the question "What do you know about Crimean Tatars history? Do you know anything about their recent history?" she talked to me about the Crimean refugees from Crimea and how they were sheltered by their relatives in Dobruja. From her interview, it came out that:

"The villagers had been threatened with imprisonment by the Romanian gendarmes if they sheltered Crimean refugees. Villagers were told that they are not allowed to host or help Crimean Tatars fleeing the Soviet Union. But despite all the threats, some people from our village, including my father (*Akkı Denisleam*), sheltered some relatives fleeing from persecution in Crimea"<sup>9</sup>.

As a result, Akkı Denisleam lost his freedom, being detained in communist prisons. A. D., with bitterness in her soul and voice, with tears in her eyes, told me what happened:

"My father was arrested and then my mother was also arrested. We were left alone in the house, we were 5 brothers, and the thieves vandalized our house. We lost everything, my family's lifetime savings: agricultural land and our house in Constanța"<sup>10</sup>.

Although many decades passed since the events, still very painful memories interrupted her and she refused to discuss on this topic even though the year was 2016. Throughout the interview I carefully listened, and from time to time I tried to create a stable atmosphere in the room so as not to influence the respondent and calm her down.

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<sup>8</sup> *Ayten Denisleam* born in 1947, Grăniceru village, Darabani commune, Dobruja, Romania.

<sup>9</sup> Interview conducted with *Ayten Denisleam*, in 2016, February, Constanța, România "The villagers had been warned by the Romanian gendarmes of the threat of imprisonment if they would host Crimean Tatars. They were told that they were not allowed to host and help Crimean Tatars who had fled the Soviet Union. Despite all the threats, some villagers, including my father (*Akkı Denisleam*) sheltered the fugitives".

<sup>10</sup> *Idem*, A. D., 2016, February, Constanța, "My father was arrested and then my mother also, was arrested. We were left alone at home, we were 5 brothers, and the thieves vandalized our house. We lost all our wealth for a lifetime: the land, the house in Constanța".

### GENOCIDE IN THE INTERNATIONAL LAW

Genocide's definition used in this study is based on the definition given by Lemkin (Ismail, 2020: 41) but also on the definition for genocide provided by *United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect When to Refer to a Situation as "Genocide"*<sup>11</sup>.

As regarding "historical" cases of genocide, for this paper I relied on Martin Mennecke's *The Crime of Genocide and International Law*, where the author states:

"Genocide is not a new phenomenon. Even classical writings recount instances of mass killings, and the colonial era witnessed numerous cases of genocidal violence both in North and Latin America as well as in Africa. The Holocaust was neither the first nor the last genocide. Many instances of such crimes of genocide have occurred when racial, religious, and other groups have been destroyed, entirely, or in part." (Mennecke, 2012: 145).

The author moves on and explains

"Thus, it can be concluded that the Convention recognises that genocide is not a new phenomenon and that events that occurred before the Genocide Convention was adopted may have fit the definition of genocide as set out in the Convention" (Mennecke, 2012: 145).

As regarding genocide's definition, the author stresses:

"In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.)" (Mennecke, 2012: 150).

Martin Mennecke refers to the negotiation and drafting of the treaty under the protection of the United Nations, emphasizing that:

As with all international treaties, the Genocide Convention only became a binding legal instrument once a sufficient number of states had formally agreed to be bound by this new treaty. This was the case on 12 January 1951 and since then, the Genocide Convention has been in force and applies to its member states" (Mennecke, 2012: 148).

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<sup>11</sup> For more details see <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/publications-and-resources/GuidanceNote-When%20to%20refer%20to%20a%20situation%20as%20genocide.pdf>, accessed on, 4, November, 2020

Regarding the cases of genocide committed before the signing of the treaty, the author notes

“This means that crimes committed prior to 1951 cannot be legally prosecuted under the Genocide Convention. This is true, for example, for both the Armenian mass killings, the murderous persecution of the Sinti and Roma and the Holocaust. That being said, one can of course still apply the label ‘genocide’ to these and other crimes outside the courtroom” (Mennecke, 2012: 148).

In accordance with the above-mentioned definition the Crimean Tatars’ genocide falls into “... racial, religious and other groups were destroyed, in whole or in part”. It is still one of the least studied genocide phenomena in modern and recent history, of the mid twentieth century. The Crimean Tatars’ genocide falls within the author’s definition. For the *d* and *e* alignments, we have no accounts, although we know less about the atrocities to which the population was subjected during the Crimean War (1853–1856), the previous war 1828–1829 or the Ottoman-Russian War 1877–1878. However, I remember the followings *Khazaghlargeldi* (t.n. Cossacks came), which my grandmother often told me in her stories about refuge during my childhood. Although her mother, or most likely maternal grandmother’s grandmother, was the one who had left Crimea and experienced the atrocities of the war, but she still remembered the fear, the horror she had gone through and passed on these horrors, fears of her children, so to never forget the events her generation had gone through.

#### MEMOIRES FROM CRIMEAN TATARS’ EXILE

History books never talk about the Crimean Tatars’ exile – May 18, 1944, nor the atrocities to which they were subjected. In brief, we know nothing about the painful recent history of them.

The most valuable information about exile, and especially about the suffering of the Crimean Tatars, were those related by from Dr. *Kerim Ismail Hasanoğlu*<sup>12</sup> – Crimean Tatar born during exile, in Uzbekistan. During the interview, recorded on May 16, 2015, in Istanbul while the International Conference “*Devletlerarası Kırım, Sürgünü ve İsmail Gaspıralı*”, Dr. *Kerim Ismail Hasanoğlu* told me about the restrictions imposed on Crimean Tatars during deportation.

This interview was conducted by me in Turkey, Istanbul on the grounds of Haliç Kongre Merkezi. It was an individual on a face-to-face interview, the time length of the interview is one hour. The interview’s language was Crimean Tatar.

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<sup>12</sup> Interview conducted with Dr. *Kerim Ismail, Hasanoğlu*, registred in Crimean Tatar language and transliterated in Romanian.

The questions of the interview were not prepared in advance. Both Dr. *Kerim Ismail Hasanoğlu* and the author of this study speak the same language, but in Crimea there is a literary language with Cyrillic alphabet, while in Romania there is no literary language. In Romania we are not trained and do not train our children in mother tongue, and there are no teachers trained for the Crimean Tatar language and literature in Romania. All these being said, the transcript of the interview, in the footnotes, is rendered in Romanian.

Dr. *Kerim Ismail Hasanoğlu* introduced himself:

“I am *Kerim Ismail Hasanoğlu*, Scientific Director at the Institute of Crimean-Tatar Language and Literature. I was born in 1954, in Uzbekistan, in Semerkent and spent my childhood in the campus, a special area settled for us<sup>13</sup>”



**Figure 2.** *Ismail Kerim Hasanoğlu* (from the left to right, the third one), 16.05.2015, Istanbul, Turkey.

Source: Personal archive.

At the author’s questions “During the exile in Uzbekistan: What was the official language in school? Did you have textbooks in the Crimean-Tatar language? Did you have constraints on using your mother tongue in public? Did you have Tv or Radio programs in your mother tongue?”

*Kerim Ismail Hasanoğlu*, with sadness in his voice said:

We were not allowed to speak publicly in our mother tongue. There were no textbooks in the Crimean-Tatar language, although there was a newspaper named *Leninin Bayrağı* (Lenin’s Flag). We had a radio program in the Crimean-Tatar language that was broadcast only for 3 hours during a week, and the television

<sup>13</sup> *Idem, Kerim Ismail, Hasanoğlu* “I am *Kerim Ismail Hasanoğlu*, Scientific Director at the Institute of Crimean–Tatar Language and Literature. I was born in 1954, in Uzbekistan, in Semerkent and spent my childhood in the campus, a special area settled for us”.

program was only for one hour and was broadcast only once a month. Oh well, you know school.... we were trained in Russian<sup>14</sup>.

And he continued:

“As homeland, we had to recognize Kazan. We were told: Go and live in Kazan. That is your homeland. We were forbidden to use the words *yeşil* (green) and *mavi* (blue), because these words were synonymous with Crimea. Throughout this period, the resistance movement of the Crimean Tatars protested against the injustices. Following the protests, demonstrations and rallies organized by the resistance, we were given the right for our own territory, but we were not allowed to return to the Crimea. The territory was in the Daherestan region and they called it Mübarek (blessed) in the plain area<sup>15</sup>”.

Full of sadness *Kerim Ismail Hasanoğlu* said:

“In that area, the Russians named the streets after Crimean cities: Bahcesaray, Yalta, etc., and several communists and KGB members among the Crimean Tatars were appointed to lead the organization. They forced us to take the students to visit *Mübarek* region, telling them that this is Crimea<sup>16</sup>”.

According to his reports the most painful fact was the lack of documents about the Crimean Tatars, as they were not recorded, practically they did not exist.

“When I was 1 year old, I got sick, and my father was not allowed to hospitalize me because we were forbidden to leave the area where we lived. Even though there were deaths in deported families<sup>17</sup> to other areas, we were still not allowed to leave the area”<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> *Idem*, “In that area, the Russians named the streets after Crimean cities: Bahcesaray, Yalta, etc., and several communists and KGB members among the Crimean Tatars were appointed to lead the organization. They forced us to take the students to visit *Mübarek* region, telling them that this is Crimea”.

<sup>17</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuri\\_Andropov](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuri_Andropov), accessed on 29 October 2020.

During his doctoral studies, *Kerim Ismail Hasanoğlu* noticed many irregularities in documents about the Crimean Tatars.

“They were registred as Tatars in Russian documents, and there was no mention about Crimean Tatars and nothing about Crimean-Tatar language<sup>19</sup>”

And proudly he continued:

“Understanding all the injustices in documents led me to correspondence with the Russian authorities: Leonid Brezhnev (the effective leader of the Soviet Union from 1964 to 1982<sup>20</sup>) and Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov (Soviet politician, head of the KGB, secretary general of the CPSU from November 12, 1982 until his death for only sixteen months) between 1982 and 1983<sup>21</sup>”.

He continued and said:

“In 1984, I started to work on my doctoral dissertation about the language and literature of the Crimean Tatars. I hardly managed to defend my thesis in October 1998, in Alma-Ata, in Kazakhstan, where I was accepted, although my official documents proved my Ukrainian citizenship. I was born in Uzbekistan, but registered as Ukrainian citizen<sup>22</sup>”.

In his stories, *Kerim Ismail Hasanoğlu* used the term genocide to refer to deportation and the consequences to which Crimean Tatars were forced. With grief in his voice, he talked about the victims and their numbers:

„In just a few hours, children, women and the elderly .... all young men were on the front, ..... they were put in wagons used for to transport animals. Due to unbearable and inhumane conditions and how they were transported, the whole action was a genocide against the Crimean Tatars. The population halved along the way. In one

<sup>18</sup> *Idem*, “When I was 1 year old, I got sick, and my father was not allowed to hospitalize me because we were forbidden to leave the area where we lived. Even though there were deaths in deported families<sup>18</sup> to other areas, we were still not allowed to leave the area”.

<sup>19</sup> *Idem*, “They were registred as Tatars in Russian documents, and there was no mention about Crimean Tatars and nothing about Crimean-Tatar language”.

<sup>20</sup> [https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonid\\_Brejnev](https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonid_Brejnev), accessed on 28 September 2020

<sup>21</sup> *Idem*, “Understanding all the injustices in documents led me to correspondence with the Russian authorities: Leonid Brezhnev (the effective leader of the Soviet Union from 1964 to 1982<sup>21</sup>) and Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov (Soviet politician, head of the KGB, secretary general of the CPSU from November 12, 1982 until his death for only sixteen months) between 1982 and 1983”.

<sup>22</sup> *Idem*, “In 1984, I started to work on my doctoral dissertation about the language and literature of the Crimean Tatars. I hardly managed to defend my thesis in October 1998, in Alma-Ata, in Kazakhstan, where I was accepted, although my official documents proved my Ukrainian citizenship. I was borne in Uzbekistan, but registerd as Ukrainian citizen”.

year 66% of them starved to death, and those over the age of 55–60 died in the first year of exile<sup>23</sup>”.

With satisfaction in his voice he reports on the resistance movement, as well as on the riots and demonstrations of the Crimean Tatars.

“In 1987, they had the courage and 2500 of them (Crimean Tatars) gathered in the Red Square in Moscow and resisted for 4 days. It was not until the fourth day that the newspapers began to write about the Crimean Tatars’ demonstration. That had never happened in the Red Square before. Only after these events the other nations of the Baltic countries, *Gruzia* (Georgia), etc., went out in the streets. Yeah, it was the Crimean Tatars who unbalanced the Soviet power. After these events, the mass return of the Crimean Tatars started and they began to resettle in Crimea, in increasing numbers and spontaneously<sup>24</sup>”.

Studies in the field states that by March 1988, the local authorities in Crimea registered 17,250 returnees, while by January 1992 their number had increased to 157,862 and later on early 1994, their number reached about 245,200 (Aydin, 2014: 83). According to *Kerim Ismail Hasanoğlu*, today (the interview was registered in May 2015), out of a total population of 2.3 million, more than 600,000 Crimean Tatars live in Crimea.

To my question “Why at the Referendum they said that only 5% of the total population went to the polls?”. He answered me bitterly:

“Russian army patrolled the streets, passed by people’s homes and threatened to kill them if they went to the polls<sup>25</sup>”

*Kerim Ismail Hasanoğlu*’s accounts, as well as the way in which Soviet officials implemented the deportation order, it is obvious that the purpose of the Soviet regime was not only to evacuate, but to completely uproot the Crimean Tatars.

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<sup>23</sup> *Idem*, “In just a few hours, children, women and the elderly ... all young men were on the front, ...they were put in wagons used for animals transport. Due to unbearable and inhumane conditions and how they were transported, the whole action was a genocide against the Crimean Tatars. The population halved along the way. In one year 66% of them starved to death, and those over the age of 55–60 died in the first year of exile”.

<sup>24</sup> *Idem*, “In 1987, they had the courage and 2500 of them (Crimean Tatars) gathered in the Red Square in Moscow and resisted for 4 days. It was not until the fourth day that the newspapers began to write about the Crimean Tatars’ demonstration. That had never happened in the Red Square before. Only after these events the other nations of the Baltic countries, *Gruzia* (Georgia), etc., went out in the streets. Yeah, it was the Crimean Tatars who unbalanced the Soviet power. After these events, the mass return of the Crimean Tatars started and they began to resettle in Crimea, in increasing numbers and spontaneously”.

<sup>25</sup> *Idem*, “Russian army patrolled the streets, passed by people’s homes and threatened to kill them if they went to the polls”.

### INSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS

Today, when we talk about Crimea and the Crimean Tatars, we only talk about the events of 2014, but nevertheless it is increasingly difficult to ignore the Crimean Tatars' history. Today, they are an ethnic minority living in different parts of the world. This short presentation is about the modern and recent history of the Crimean Tatars, the one absent in the history books. Today, as a result of many and terrible political and social events that the Crimean Tatars have been subjected to, they became an endangered ethnic minority, a stateless nation as the Organization of Unrepresented Nations and Peoples (Organization of Unrepresented Nations and Peoples) states. The Organization of Unrepresented Nations and Peoples (UNPO) is an international membership-based organization created to give voice to unrepresented and marginalized peoples around the world and to protect their fundamental human rights<sup>26</sup>.

At the end of the 19th century, when Hacı İzzet İsmail joined the wave of Crimean refugees, it was probably not the best time for the Ottoman state, and it was probably one of the most tragic times for Crimea. His case highlights that both Kerch and Crimea (homeland), as his place of origin help to explain the Crimean refugees' history, but their personalities, the refugees' identities are much more complicated and incomprehensible than I managed to suggest within this paper. Refugee identities and personalities cannot be uniformed and invariably presented, and the political, economic and social parameters used by researchers to explain the reasons for refuge (migration, as they present it) cannot explain every refugee case.

Future research could include studies of individual cases such as that of my great-grandfather, *Hacı İzzet İsmail*. These studies will help us better understand that the Crimean Tatars refugee to the Ottoman lands was much more complicated than the one we exposed it, and that the forced displacements, refuge and refugee histories took place over the years and debates on border changes and nationalist movements in the Balkans.

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## b. Oral history – Interviews

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