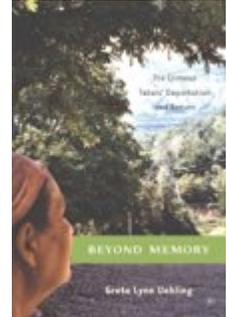




**Greta Lynn Uehling.** *Beyond Memory: The Crimean Tatars' Deportation and Return.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. xii + 294 pp. \$26.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-4039-6265-2.



**Reviewed by** Robert Krikorian

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Greta Lynn Uehling's new study on the Crimean Tatars is an innovative ethnographic study of the power of historical memory and the shaping of national identity. Uehling explores how historical experiences have been constructed and reconstructed, and how these images have contributed to the transformation of Crimean Tatar national identity and influenced the thought processes of various strata of Tatar society in the decades since the exile from their homeland. This study, while focusing on the Crimean Tatars, has broader applicability for those interested in the study of national identity as well as the impact of mass trauma on cognitive processes.

It is a complicated and complex story that Uehling sets out to tell her readers. After the Third Reich attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, the entire Soviet population was mobilized to confront the invaders. That so many people remained loyal to the Soviet motherland, despite the tremendous hardships that their own government had inflicted on them during collectivization and the Stalinist Purges, is indeed more remarkable than the instances of collaboration with the occu-

pying powers. But in the twisted logic of Stalinism, even the slightest perceived waiver in loyalty was enough to condemn entire peoples to deportation and exile. Beginning in 1944, whole nationalities on the periphery of the Soviet Union were forcibly uprooted from their homelands and sent into the vast hinterlands of Siberia and Central Asia. Among these "punished peoples" were the Crimean Tatars.

Even though thousands of Crimean Tatars fought in the ranks of the Red Army against the Nazi invaders during World War II, Stalin ordered the deportation of the entire Crimean Tatar civilian population in May 1944. Although exact mortality figures are unavailable, it has been variously estimated that between a quarter and a half of the total population perished as a result of this brutal operation. But more important than the number of fatalities is the human toll this tragedy took on the small native population of Crimea, and, for the purposes of the study under review, how these memories were constructed and integrated into the worldview of the Crimean Tatars.

Although the Crimean Tatars were officially rehabilitated by Nikita Khrushchev in 1956, they nonetheless were not allowed to return to their ancestral homeland. Unlike most of the other deported nationalities from the neighboring North Caucasus region, Crimean Tatars were prevented from repatriating and their autonomous political unit within the Soviet Union was not re-established. In fact, Khrushchev even transferred the Crimean Peninsula from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1954 to celebrate the three-hundredth anniversary of the supposed voluntary "union" of Ukraine with Russia. Those Crimean Tatars who attempted repatriation on their own faced, and continue to face, numerous bureaucratic, social, and cultural obstacles to their return and ultimate integration into Ukrainian society.

While the general history of the deportation of the Soviet nationalities has been known for some time, it is only recently that serious scholarship has begun to appear regarding the impact of these traumatic events on the victim group. More than fifteen years have passed since the dismantling of the Soviet Empire in Eastern Europe and almost fifteen years since the dissolution of the Soviet Union itself. Prior to these momentous events, very few people would have been able to identify places like Crimea or Uzbekistan on a map, or knew much about the histories of the peoples who inhabited these lands. This situation was, in part, the result of a narrow state-centric, and by extension Russo-centric, approach to the history of Russia and the Soviet Union. In other words, the national experiences of the non-Russian peoples of the Russian Empire and its successor, the United Soviet Socialist Republic, were not incorporated into the mainstream historiography and thus the complexity of the Eurasian landmass was largely reduced to its Russian core. With the easing of travel restrictions and the partial opening of archives, a much more sophisticated and nuanced picture emerges of inter-ethnic relations in both the Soviet Union and its successor states. A

new generation of specialists has been able to engage in sustained fieldwork in the far corners of previously inaccessible lands. This new trend in research on the non-Russian peoples of Eurasia has provided unique opportunities to expand our knowledge and fill in many gaps in our understanding.

Based on her doctoral dissertation at the University of Michigan, Greta Uehling's *Beyond Memory* is one such example of the new scholarship that is changing the way we look at the lands and peoples of the former Soviet Union. The author presents a sensitive and insightful exploration of the complex social and cultural dynamics associated with the Crimean Tatars' deportation in 1944 and their ongoing repatriation. It is also an important contribution to our understanding of the ways in which historical memories are constructed and eventually assimilated into a dominant discourse on the nation in Eurasia. The author opens the book with an interesting discussion of the latest theoretical works on collective memory, which helps place her research in a broader context. She then moves on to a historical overview before exploring the various ways that 1944 is remembered by the survivors and then integrated by subsequent generations. Having conducted extensive fieldwork among Crimean Tatars, both in Crimea and Central Asia, Uehling demonstrates how the experiences of 1944 were remembered and then transmitted across time and space to new generations of Crimean Tatars. The new generation then assimilated these narratives and constructed a paradigm based on their people's suffering and a longing to return to their homeland, a homeland many had never actually seen. Thus the territorial component of Crimean Tatar collective memory is emphasized, in part, as a response to the Soviet practice of territorializing ethnicity and assigning every ethnic group their own territory.

In any society, historical memory serves several important functions. History is an indispens-

able means of inculcating a sense of national identity and acts as a bond, which holds together the disparate elements of the nation. History also acts as an anchor for the nation, giving its members a collective past to call upon for moral strength as it confronts obstacles in the present. This is particularly important in the case of displaced populations, such as the Crimean Tatars. An understanding of precise historical events is often less important than the ways in which these events are interpreted and remembered by intellectuals and the society at large. For those interested in the psychological impact of mass trauma on national collectivities, the experience of the Crimean Tatars is instructive.

On a final note, from a production standpoint, the book is well done. It is enhanced by a map, numerous illustrations, and a bibliography, which many publishers are unfortunately dispensing with altogether. Uehling's work would make a good graduate-level text for those teaching courses not only on Eurasia, but also on responses to mass trauma, such as ethnic cleansing, deportation, and exile.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-genocide>

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