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The Russian-German Exiles in Kazakhstan: 1940 & 1990 Migrations

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The Russian-German Exiles in Kazakhstan:

1940 & 1990 Migrations

by

Irina Rudenko

An undergraduate honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

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Introduction

Abstract

This thesis aims to review and contribute to the growing scholarship documenting the experience of the Russian-German exiles. Organized into two parts: the first half concentrates on the 1940 deportations and the second half on the 1990 migrations. The journey of the 1940 Soviet deportations is studied through parallels of the government's intentions juxtaposed with the realities on the ground. Then a literature review of work done by scholars in the Soviet archives discusses the common consensus in regards to claims of Soviet ethnic cleansing and genocide. An overview of the documented realities of exile confronted by the deportees supplements the academic literature. The second half of this thesis finds less information concerning the 1990 migrations. More than half of the known Germans in Kazakhstan left after the dissolution of the Soviet state. Scholars have legitimized these emigrations in various ways and a literature review of this period distills the common postulations. What in actuality occurred that motivated such a mass exodus of people in the 1990s? This thesis explores the responses to this in the conclusion of the later portion.

Introduction

The Soviet Union is known as one of history's most violent and repressive regimes under which tens of millions of innocent civilians were killed in the chaos of war, deported, executed or imprisoned in labor camps. Joseph Stalin ordered many of these atrocities upon Russians and ethnic minorities because of their perceived political, economic and ethnic orientations. The

exact number of Soviet Union victims from 1920's-1950 varies depending on the source. Many historians estimate totals of victims around 20 million. ¹

Amidst the madness of World War II the Soviet Union mobilized dozens of military units, hundreds of railway cars and hundreds of thousands of troops to carry out mass deportations. Entire ethnic groups were uprooted and scattered across the vast corners of the Soviet Empire. Approximately two million Germans, Kalmyks, Karachais, Balkars, Chechens, Ingush, Crimean Tatars, Poles, Armenians, Greeks, Finns and Bulgarians were subjected to wholesale or partial deportation, collectively uprooted and forced to live out their lives in 'special settlements' or labor camps. Kazakhstan was by far the most popular land of relocation and between 1941 and 1944— it absorbed close to a million people; roughly 462,694 Germans made up that total. One of those German exiles was a 15 year-old girl, my grandmother Emma

¹ See Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties*. New York: Macmillan (1968): xvii; Simon Sebag Montefiore. *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*. p. 649: "Perhaps 20 million had been killed; 28 million deported, of whom 18 million had slaved in the Gulags.". For further reading on Soviet history see also Conquest's other work. In regards to victim estimates: Alexander N. Yakovlev. *A Century of Violence in Soviet Russia*. Yale University Press (2002): 234: "My own many years and experience in the rehabilitation of victims of political terror allow me to assert that the number of people in the USSR who were killed for political motives or who died in prisons and camps during the entire period of Soviet power totaled 20 to 25 million. And unquestionably one must add those who died of famine – more than 5.5 million during the civil war and more than 5 million during the 1930s."; Robert Gellately *Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler: The Age of Social Catastrophe*. Knopf, (2007): 584: "More recent estimations of the Soviet-on-Soviet killing have been more 'modest' and range between ten and twenty million."; Stéphane Courtois. *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror Repression*. Harvard University Press (1999): 4: "U.S.S.R.: 20 million deaths."; Jonathan Brent *Inside the Stalin Archives: Discovering the New Russia*. Atlas & Co. (2008) (ISBN 0977743330) Introduction online (PDF file): "Estimations on the number of Stalin's victims over his twenty-five year reign, from 1928 to 1953, vary widely, but 20 million is now considered the minimum."; Steven Rosefielde, *Red Holocaust*. Routledge, (2009) ISBN 0-415-77757-7): 17: "We now know as well beyond a reasonable doubt that there were more than 13 million Red Holocaust victims 1929–53, and this figure could rise above 20 million."; Dmitri Volkogonov, *Autopsy for an Empire: The Seven Leaders Who Built the Soviet Regime*. (1999): 139: "Between 1929 and 1953 the state created by Lenin and set in motion by Stalin deprived 21.5 million Soviet citizens of their lives."

Lawrence. She began the journey from the German Colony in the Volga-Region of Russia and arrived in Dzambul Oblast, Kazakhstan. Her personal story, along with my family background is what encouraged my curiosity in Soviet history.

Scholars have studied the migrations within the Soviet Union from its inception. Arguments surrounding the accusations of genocide, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity committed by the Soviet state against its citizens have been enthusiastically debated within the scholarly communities of history, politics and social studies. This discourse warrants review for it has established the lens through which recent migrations have been studied. The timing of this discourse that focused on earlier Soviet Union politics arguably factors in with the oversight of later migrations. Between 1989 and 1999 over 1,852,250 people emigrated out of Kazakhstan resulting in one of the largest emigrations in history. Of these, 428,710 are known to be German.²

Every year following the late-1980's tens of thousands of Germans left everything they knew and built to start over, again. Many scholars have legitimized these later emigrations as ethnic populations now returning to their homelands.³ While many ethnic groups did believe there was a 'homeland' to return to, others knew there was no room for them on their forefather's land. The Russian Germans specifically were forbidden from returning to their homelands in Russia.⁴ Moreover, an entire generation has grown up within their new homeland of Kazakhstan.

² Peter Sinnot, "Population Politics in Kazakhstan." *Journal of International Affairs* 56, no. 2 (2003): 104.

³ See: Sinnot (2003); Darieva (2005); Diener (2006); Schatz (2000).

⁴ See, V.N. Zemskov, "K voprosu o repatriatsii sovetskikh grazhdan, 1944–1951 gody," *Istoriia SSSR*, vol. 4 (1990): 26–41; idem, "Prinuditel'nye migratsii iz Pribaltiki v 1940–1950-h godakh," *Otechestvennye arhivy*, vol. 1 (1993): 4–20; idem; "Repatriatsiia sovetskikh grazhdan i ikh sud'by," *Sotsis* (1995) 5–6; P.J. Polian, "OSTy – zhertvy dvykh diktatur," *Rodina*, Vol. 2 (1994): 51–57; T.S. Ilarionova, "Zhelaniia i vozmozhnosti: problema vyezda nemtsev iz SSSR v kontekste poslevoennykh sovetsko-

To collect entire livelihoods and start again requires a greater explanation than nostalgia for the ‘homeland’. What actually occurred that motivated such a mass exodus of people in the 1990s? This thesis explores the responses to this in regards to the Germans.

Russian-German is the identity given to citizens of German descent that historically came to live within the Russian Empire in an effort to escape religious persecution and economic hardship in central Europe and achieved political rights in Russia. Numerous German colonies emerged in different regions of the Russian Empire at various times and for different reasons. Therefore, while the fate of many Russian-Germans under Stalin was synonymous, their diverse backgrounds factored into their later struggle to unite. These various Germanic groups were not referred to as Russian-Germans until after the Revolutionary Wars.⁵ Due to the conditions of World War II and mass relocation, the various Germanic peoples’ identity was essentially combined into one: the Russian-Germans. The largest of this German migrant group is known as the Volga-Germans who make up over 25 percent of all ethnic Russian-Germans. The Volga-Germans come from the settlers and decedents who established and lived in German colonies in the Volga Region of Russia.⁶

This thesis aims to review and contribute to the growing scholarship documenting the experience of the German deportees. While much work has been done collecting the Soviet archives and piecing together the internal history of the Soviet Union, little has been done to document the experiences in exile that these minorities underwent and the conditions under which many left after the break-up of the Soviet Union. In his dissertation, “Nations in Exile:

zapadnogermanskih otnoshenii ,in Migratsionnye protsessy sredi rossiiskih nemtsev: istoricheskii aspekt,” (1955–1964): 367–384. in: Irina Mukhina, *The Germans of the Soviet Union*. New York: Routledge (2007): 192.

⁵ Irina Mukhina, *The Germans of the Soviet Union*. New York: Routledge (2007): 7.

⁶ Alexander Diener, “Homeland as social construct: Territorialization among Kazakhstan’s Germans and Koreans,” *Nationalities Papers* 34, no 2 (2006): 202.

“The Punished Peoples” in Soviet Kazakhstan, 1941-1961,” Michael Herceg Westren identifies this void.

Individuals are lost in this flood of numbers and tables which characterize both monographs and document collections. The story is told entirely from the regime’s perspective through documents, which shuffle around populations like cattle. By relying entirely on documents from the central authorities, the story is suddenly stopped in exile, and started up again after rehabilitation, making complete the erasure of these peoples from memory.⁷

There are most certainly trailblazers in this field who’ve begun to fill this gap, Irina Mukhina along with Westren come to mind, and their work will be discussed in greater detail later on.⁸

This thesis will begin with a brief history of the Soviet Union, the Russian-Germans and the conditions surrounding World War II. The intentions of the Soviet authorities in Moscow and the realities on the ground will expose the inconsistencies that caused incredible loss. Following this is a narrowed-focus on the experience of the Russian-Germans’ deportation to Kazakhstan and the real conditions of their journey and resettlement. Historical, social and political scholarly communities emerged to grasp some understanding of these events, and this literature tends to characterize the first wave of deportations in the 1930’s to 1950’s as ethnic cleansing by the Soviet Union. Curiously, scholars have regarded the second wave of migrations from Kazakhstan, which followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union, as merely an inevitable condition of the chaos, and not another case of ethnic cleansing. This thesis will explore why. It will also examine why little evidence and information is available concerning the ethnic uprisings throughout Kazakhstan. In conclusion, the existing fieldwork that tells the tales of the

⁷ Michael H. Westren, “Nations in Exile: ‘The Punished Peoples’ in Soviet Kazakhstan, 1941-1961” *PHD Dissertation for the Department of History at University of Chicago*, June (2012): 25.

⁸ Westren’s dissertation proved to be a foundational resource of my thesis. He poured through the archives in Kazakhstan and Moscow and produced an in-depth investigation of the experiences of the various ethnic groups, careful to highlight distinctions in their experiences while appreciating common themes.

exiles and their interpretation of events, including the experiences of my mother's family, will be discussed.

The Origins of Germans in the Russian Empire

The consolidation of the European steppe under tsarist imperial control encouraged an influx of workers from the surrounding agricultural regions. Farmers, traders and artisans came in great numbers under promises of land and privileges such as military service exemption.⁹ Volga-Germans were initially invited to come to Russia in 1763 by a decree from the Bavarian tsarina Catherine the Great. Approximately 27,000 German settlers relocated to the Volga basin region. This region was previously conquered by Tsarist rule from the Tatars and other areas in Kazakhstan were conquered from the Ottoman Empire. German Catholics collected in the Black Sea regions of Ukraine and Volga-Germans formed predominantly Lutheran communities. These colonies continued to increase steadily and expand within the empire.¹⁰

Poor harvests contributed to the German migrant expansion within Russia. By 1897 approximately 7,049 Germans lived within the territory currently known as Kazakhstan.¹¹ Numbers continued to swell following the Russian revolution; by 1926 approximately 51,094 Germans gathered in this region.¹² The build-up prior to World War I put Russian and German states on opposing sides alienating the Germans living in Central Asia and within the Slavic empire. World War I led to a dramatic escalation in ethnic cleansing and established the German peasants as foreshadowed victims. During the same time that the Ottoman Empire deported its entire Armenian population under genocidal conditions, the Russian army deported

⁹ Mukhina, 8.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Diener, 202.

¹² Ibid.

approximately 800,000 ethnically Jewish and German citizens away from the front marking the beginning of enormous population shifts.¹³ From the 1920's to early 1950's over 6 million Soviet citizens were forcibly transferred to Central Asia, Siberia and the north.¹⁴

The 1940 Deportations

The underlying reasons for the deportations continue to be debated among scholars. Some argue for internal or even emotional factors – for example, perhaps Stalin reacted in an act of rage against Nazi Germany.¹⁵ Yet this fails to justify why many other nationalities were similarly deported. Some claim this was a logical continuation of the Terror of the 1930s, while other historians attribute this to economic considerations.¹⁶ Stalin had always wanted to populate the desolated territories of Siberia and many ethnic deportees were used for cheap labor in Central Asia. Many claim there were greater external political factors at work. Nazi Germany had partly justified its aggression in Czechoslovakia and Poland because they housed German minority communities. A Soviet fear of German collaboration with the historic homeland was unarguably a contributing factor, as was the case with the Japanese internment in the USA. Soviet historian Nikolai Bougai argues there were numerous reasons for the deportations, both internal and external. The official rationale was to prevent *potential* collaboration. The Council of People's Commissariats and Central Committee coauthored this decree on August 12th of 1941 for the deportation of Volga Germans.

¹³ See Terry Martin, "The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing". *Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 4 (December 1998): 818.

¹⁴ Andrew J. Brown, "The Germans of Germany and the Germans of Kazakhstan: A Eurasian Volk in the Twilight of Diaspora" *Europe-Asia Studies* 57, no 4 (2005): 627.

¹⁵ A. German, "Deportatsiia," *Noies Leben* 32, (September 1995): 5.

¹⁶ Most adamant of this view is Alexander Schwartz, "Rossiiskie Nemtsy v Sibiri," *Novosibirskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet*, Kandidatskaia Dissertatsiia (unpublished) in: Irina Mukhina *The Germans of the Soviet Union* (New York: Routledge, 2007): 189.

If any subversive activities ... were to take place in the Republic of Volga Germans or nearby areas and the blood were shed, the Soviet government in accordance with the wartime laws would be obliged to take punitive actions against the whole German population of the Volga region.

In order to avoid such undesirable punitive actions and prevent bloodshed, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet has found it necessary to relocate the entire German population living in the Volga region to other regions [raiony], with the provision that the relocated [Germans] have land allotted to them and state assistance to help them establish themselves in the new regions.

The purpose here isn't to determine the main trigger, but rather to understand the general reasoning behind these forced migrations. As is common with many of the deportations during this time, it is hard to pinpoint exactly when the decision was made to deport the Germans. Operations began a couple weeks after August 12th and later included the Germans living in the surrounding Stalingrad and Saratov oblasts.¹⁷ Throughout September the operations to deport Germans continued to expand and by November all the frontier regions across the Soviet Union had carried out the operations.¹⁸ The Volga region was to be repopulated by 17,400 Russians from local villages and 52,000 from the front lines.¹⁹

The Journey

The mass migration of German people was swift and efficient because every Soviet citizen of German descent was on record available to the 'Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del' (NKVD), known as the Peoples Commissariat for Internal Affairs²⁰. Thus almost after the

¹⁷ Westren, 43.

¹⁸ Ibid., 44.

¹⁹ Pavel J. Polian, "OSTy – zherty dvyh diktatur." *Rodina* vol. 2 (1994): 51–57 in: Irina Mukhina, *The Germans of the Soviet Union* (New York: Routledge, 2007): 132, ft. 137.

²⁰ Westren, 44.

start of WWII the local NKVD began to arrest these citizens from Leningrad to the Far East.²¹ Over the course of 1941 and 1942 a total of 1,209,430 Germans, over 400,000 from Volga, were deported to the Soviet east, and more than half of all Germans were sent to Kazakhstan.²² During the 1940's a common estimation is that 200,000 to 300,000 of the Russian-German exiles died.²³ In planning, 472,174 Germans were supposed to arrive in Kazakhstan during the first deportation, only 243,904 came. In January 1942 the numbers increased to 385,785.²⁴ Some argue this was because not everyone was rounded up; more say it was due to the high mortality rate. It was likely a combination of both.

Records for calculated deaths also vary because in many cases men were taken to the labor army or other areas for work and never accounted for. Those who were too slow packing up their things, didn't return onto the train car after a stop, or resisted were often shot on the spot.²⁵ Of the approximately 1.2 million Germans deported, by 1948 only about 928,000 remained, suggesting a 20 percent loss. Mukhina finds, "documents suggest that over the course of the first five to seven years after deportations, almost one-fifth of all ethnic Germans in the Soviet Union died, although many historians estimate the death rate at about 10 percent or even lower. Personal accounts confirm the high death ratios."²⁶

The massive human loss was in large part due to the conditions of the deportations, starvation and disease being the most common causes. While the elderly, the ill, and children were among those suffering the highest death rates, as is tragically common during hard times, at

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 88.

²³ Eric Schmaltz and Samuel Sinner. "'You will die under ruins and snow': The Soviet repression of Russian Germans as a case study of successful genocide." *Journal of Genocide Research* 4, no. 3 (2002): 332.

²⁴ Westren, 89 (endnote no.17).

²⁵ Mukhina, 43-46.

²⁶ Mukhina, 54.

times entire families died. The loss was more than of physical life. Many German deportees recall the trauma caused by the failure to bury the dead en route. My grandmother also remembers these horrors. Deportees were allowed to bury their dead during short stops, but lacked the proper tools or adequate time to complete burials properly; many bodies were simply thrown out of the wagons. A collection of memoirs about the deportations titled “Without a Trace” refers to those unburied, unidentified, or both. Historian Mukhina notes that among all the personal testimonies of deportations, every single story at least references the death of a child and grandparent in the family.²⁷

Besides the dramatic decline of the German population, accompanied by severe psychological trauma, ethnic Germans had to face abnormal gender imbalances. Gender imbalances are one of the problems that reemerge for ethnic Germans again and again.²⁸ This disparity is often a direct result of wartime and all of Soviet Union experienced this, but the situation was worse for ethnic Germans. In 1947 the ‘special settlements’ sent reports on population statistics as a result of the deportations, they stated a population of 905,184 ethnic Germans, of whom 199,522 were men, 351,008 women and 352,654 children.²⁹ The ratio of 1:2 males to females is found in many individual settlements. However, even this ratio and other statistics are misleading. Many of these ‘men’ were children during the deportation and only turned sixteen during or immediately after the deportation, others were over fifty-five years of age, and of the remaining men between the ages of eighteen and fifty-five, most were crippled or disabled. A secret order relating to the 1941 Volga-German deportation decree also ordered that

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Mukhina, 54.

²⁹ Ibid., 55.

men were to be separated from their families and banished into distant areas.³⁰ This is likely a reason for the separation of men and women in the cattle cars for the journey, and why many men disappeared.

“Trudarmee” is the unofficial word for labor army, or by official records “labor obligations”, “labor regulations” or “labor reserves”. Mainly Russian Germans used this term because, unlike other Soviets who worked for the war effort and were free to choose their workplace and move about freely, Germans could not. Many nationals served in the labor army, but Germans were the only ethnic group that was forced into labor mobilization almost in their entirety. On January 10, 1942 an official decree was issued that ordered all German men aged between seventeen and fifty to be mobilized for labor. Later that year, on October 7th, the Ministry of Defense issued another decree to include German men aged 15-16 and 51-55 and women aged 16-45. Pregnant women or those with children under the age of three were spared.³¹ The labor decrees spurred yet another flood of migration across the empire.

The Soviet government planned the journey and conditions of resettlement down to the finest detail. Deportees were supposed to have adequate time to collect their belongings; escorting officials were expected to receive six rubles per person per day to feed the deportees along the way; a minimum of one doctor and two nurses equipped with necessary medical instruments were to be assigned to each train and offer medical services. Upon arrival every district authority’s responsibilities were outlined, while food, fuel, and resources were all rationed out based on the anticipated number of arrivals.³² It was all on paper. But reality differed greatly. Few were given adequate time to collect their belongings, many only had a few

³⁰ Karl Stumpp, *Auslandsdeutschtum in Osteuropa*. Stuttgart: DAI, O.J.: 93. in: Irina Mukhina, *The Germans of the Soviet Union*. New York: Routledge (2007): 55.

³¹ Mukhina, 47.

³² Westren, 87.

minutes. Lacking time and information to plan, many ran out of food within days and starved for much of the journey.³³ When the mass numbers of exiles began arriving in Kazakhstan, officials were far from prepared. The deportations were conducted during wartime when resources were already scarce, and deprivation and famine ensued in the years to come. These exiles also carried the stigma of ‘Nazi collaboration’ or disloyalty to the state. This only worsened their situation.

Life in Exile

When deportees arrived, at times it would take days before they were picked up from the train stations and sent to the village. There are reports of how representatives of villages or economic enterprises would come to the station to only select the most able workers and leave the rest for someone else to deal with.³⁴ The ‘cherry-picking’ of laborers when they were expected to house the deportees occurred throughout the 1940s; locals wanted all the benefits of a temporary, forced labor workforce to which they hold not responsibilities.³⁵ In ‘special settlement’ documents, they do not always differentiate between ethnicities but rather as problems of deportees in general. This suggests that the German situation was often similar to others.

A report from Dzhabul notes that despite instructions there was no available housing material belonging to the resettlement administration, not an uncommon situation. This Dzhabul Oblast is where my grandmother arrived, and here administrators were expecting 10,000 deportees; 33,000 arrived. Numbers were often adjusted at the last minute and,

³³ Mukhina, 44.

³⁴ Westren, 89-92.

³⁵ Westren, 94.

fortunately for Oblast officials, more often numbers declined. “The “Special Settlements” were dispersed throughout the republic’s oblasts and isolated the deportees from regional centers.”³⁶ Often these settlers were sent to uninhabitable regions with severe climates and poor soil forcing them to rely on support from the “regional centers” which in their best conditions were limited. Officials frequently siphoned off resources and support contributing to and causing periods of extreme deprivation.³⁷ In accordance with the stigma of “enemies of the state” Germans were required to ‘check in’ with local commandants daily and their mobility was restricted to a roughly 20-mile radius.

Some local authorities were openly defiant despite strict instructions from the state. One instance notes that at a meeting of the Taldy-Kurgan oblast party, when discussing the issue of economic establishment of the exiles, the oblast executive chairman Sagintaev proclaimed he would not give the exiles anything because they were traitors of the motherland; they should all be shot and resources instead be given to the locals.³⁸ Many leaders of district party and executive committees were present during Sagintaev’s speech and followed suit. They no longer bothered to house and clothe the exiles, and instead embezzled those resources for themselves and other locals.³⁹

Constructing homes for the exiles was followed with the same insolence. In the same region of Taldy-Kurgan, 1480 homes were planned for construction, of which only 427 were completed, leaving 800 exile families in the cold without adequate housing for the winter.⁴⁰ In addition to the awful material conditions of the exiles, baths did not work and medical services

³⁶ Diener, 203.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Westren, 96.

³⁹ For specific instances of embezzlement see Westren, 97.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 99.

had not been organized, causing the growth of infectious diseases and deaths among exiles. Sagintaev's disobedience and lack of leadership did not go unpunished. The Council of Ministers reprimanded him and took a more hands-on approach. However by this time tensions were established and even more lives lost.

Not all exiles were treated as poorly; some Oblasts were better prepared and more welcoming than others and it would be unfair to paint all Oblasts with the same broad brush. Despite poor harvests and limited resources many Kazakhs housed and fed the exiles at best they could. Many instances of locals sharing their own food, shelter and clothing with the exiles are known. In January 1944 the locals in the Akmolinskii district alone donated over 4,000 items of warm clothing to over 26,000 settlers they had recently accepted.⁴¹

As suggested in the first half of this paper, the Soviet deportations surrounding World War II have attracted much attention and scholars have poured over the many archives to better understand this era. Considerable effort has gone into analyzing government records, verifying their authenticity, theorizing about the rationale behind various policies, and studying the ideology that drove the Soviets to force the migration of an unprecedented portion of the population. Historians to this day deliberate and disagree on various explanations for this era in what continues to be a lively discourse. An overview of this discourse is vital in understanding the more recent analysis of the 1990 emigrations, or rather a lack thereof.

In the wake of World War II, the Soviet Union emerged as an opposing power to the United States and garnered much speculation and study. Historians studied the Soviet empire and its motivations. Learning of the mass internal migrations in the shadow of the Holocaust, it was not long until questions of genocide, ethnic-cleansing and crimes against humanity came to the

⁴¹ Mukhina, 60.

forefront as major topics. The following literature review will outline the major historical interpretations surrounding the 1940's deportations of ethnic enclaves. Common consensus and disagreements between historians will be exposed and reveal the underpinning behind the most recent literature that focuses on the Russian German deportations in Kazakhstan.

Literature Review

Robert Conquest, a French historian who specializes in the Soviet Union, wrote numerous works on the Soviet Union and Russian history. *The Soviet Deportation of Nationalities* (1960), and *The Nation Killers: The Soviet Deportation of Nationalities* (1970) are his texts that focus on the matters of ethnic minorities in the Soviet Union. Conquest anticipated the recent scholarship on Stalin's ethnic cleansing and provided some of the first accounts of the deportations. At the time of the publications, the archives were still closed or limited and thus later publications have been able to build and portray a more precise and accurate depiction of the events. Some claim that the archives following the USSR's collapse challenge many of his arguments,⁴² but Conquest argued that the detailed information released in 1991 actually supported his conclusions. His literature is still widely used for research in the historical field of the Soviet Union and classrooms alike.

In regards to the deportations, Conquest concludes in his works that the Soviet Union did not commit genocide, but rather these mass relocations under Stalin were part of a prolonged attack on the national minorities of the Soviet Union, he asserts only ethnic cleansing took place.

⁴² See Gabor T. Rittersporn, Viktor N. Zemskov, and Getty J. Arch, "Victims of the Soviet Penal System in the Pre-War Years: A First Approach on the Basis of Archival Evidence" *American Historical Review* 98, no. 4 (1993).

Terry Martin, a leading Soviet Union historian from Harvard contributes to the discussion in his article, “The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing” and book *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union*. Both these publications referenced Conquest’s literature as representative works and within his other publications Martin references Conquest numerous times. Martin’s publications about the Soviet Union are also widely utilized by later scholars.

Within his article, “The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing” Martin provides a fundamental synopsis of the ethnic cleansing practices in the Soviet Union. He argues that despite the violent and repressive characteristics of the regime, it “devoted considerable resources to the promotion of the national self-consciousness of its non-Russian populations.”⁴³ The Soviet leadership was never committed to turning the USSR into a nation-state, because this was never the goal.⁴⁴ Martin’s analysis of the deportations is best summarized in his own words:

Soviet ethnic cleansing was not accompanied by overt intentional murder. However, the ethnic deportations always included many arrests that resulted in incarceration in high-mortality prison camps. Moreover, the deportations were carried out incredibly swiftly, which insured that large numbers of individuals would die of exposure, starvation, and disease both during and after the deportations, especially since the deported were placed in prison-like “special settlements.” Finally, and most importantly, under Soviet conditions all deported ethnic groups (and other population categories) were stigmatized and therefore extremely vulnerable during periodic terror campaigns. The diaspora nationalities deported in the period between 1935 and 1938 were singled out for disproportionate arrest and mass execution during the Great Terror of 1937–38 to a degree that, as I will show, verged on the genocidal. Therefore, as with most cases of ethnic cleansing, the Soviet practice included substantial levels of intentional murder.⁴⁵

The first and last sentences of the above paragraph verge on contradictory so in his citations

Martin clarifies:

⁴³ Martin, 1998, 816.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Martin, 1998, 822.

When murder itself becomes the primary goal, it is typically called genocide... Ethnic cleansing is probably best understood as occupying the central part of a continuum between genocide on one end and nonviolent pressured ethnic emigration on the other end. Given this continuum, there will always be ambiguity as to when ethnic cleansing shades into genocide, or pressured emigration into forced relocation.⁴⁶

Eric D. Weitz contributes to the scholarly dialogue and provides his assessment of previous publications in his article “Racial Politics without the Concept of Race: Reevaluating Soviet Ethnic and National Purges.” Weitz argues, it is because of national identification that some millions of people became victims of the Soviet state and he traces the history of racial politics in the Soviet system “precisely because one would least expect to find them here.”⁴⁷ What he found was “In its most exclusive and racialized articulation of the meaning of nationality the Soviet Union rounded up and deported every single member of targeted populations, bar none, stamping every purported member of the group with racial stigmas.”⁴⁸ This in no way is to say that the Soviet Union was a ‘racialized social system’ or an ‘overtly racial regime’ but he was particularly interested in locating the traces of racial politics in the Soviet system. He reasons, “the Soviet Union was particularly susceptible to the slide from open and tolerant to harshly exclusive concepts of nation because of the centrality of population politics to the state socialist project and because of the multinational, federal structure of the system.”⁴⁹ So when some populations groups were seen to be particularly noncompliant, the ideological belief of the flexibility of human beings fell apart, especially in the context of the huge social upheavals in 1930s and the German invasion of 1940s.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 822 Citation 43.

⁴⁷ Eric D. Weitz, “Racial Politics without the Concept of Race: Reevaluating Soviet Ethnic and National Purges” *Slavic Review* 61, no. 1 (2002): 4.

⁴⁸ Weitz, 6.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Weitz references historians Francine Hirsch, Peter Holquist, Terry Martin, Yuri Slezkine, and Amir Weiner, that have drawn upon more recent and sophisticated theoretical literature that the highly constructed nature of nations and nationalism lead to “the Soviets who created nations at least as much as they destroyed them.”⁵⁰ However Weitz notes the interesting conflict that arises in their literature:

Holquist, Martin, and Weiner, along with Slezkine and some others, recognize that the Soviet regime at times assigned immutable characteristics to particular ethnic and national groups and made nationality an inheritable, biological category. This recognition would seem immediately to open up a discussion of race. Yet although they raise the term race, they step around it gingerly and quickly retreat to the safer language of ethnicity and nationality. They raise comparisons with Nazi Germany only to reaffirm the fundamental distinctions between Nazi and Soviet policies. While their own work is deeply attentive to the ambivalences of Soviet policies, their ultimate formulations insist, not on ambivalence, but on the triumph of the “Marxian sociological paradigm,” as Weiner terms it. The matter, though, is rather messier.⁵¹

Weitz later continues that the term “Primordial nationalism,” one favored by Terry Martin and other historians, still fails to capture the full elements of Soviet nationality policies in regards to the extreme stage of total and complete national purges. “Each and every member of the population was identified as a carrier of the same suspect traits that he or she transmitted, necessarily, to the next generation. That is a racial logic at work; it is not just ‘extreme’ or ‘radical’ or ‘primordial nationalism’.”⁵² Weitz then addressed Courtois’ term “class genocide” in the *Black Book of Communism* and describes it as “...a travesty that serves political purposes but obfuscates far more than it explains.”⁵³ Yet again the question of the genocide definition is brought. Weitz determines,

⁵⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁵¹ Ibid., 11.

⁵² Ibid., 18.

⁵³ Ibid., 24.

But if one does use, with all its problems, the U.N. definition then one has to conclude that the Soviets engaged in some genocidal actions... The recent work on Soviet nationalities has rightly placed Soviet patterns more firmly within the general trends of western history- including its fixation on race and nation in the modern world and the all too common practice of ethnic cleansing and genocide.⁵⁴

There are various ways the definitions of ‘ethnic cleansing’ and ‘genocide’ have been phrased. Much of the scholarly work that followed was concerned with the literal definition of genocide coined by Raphael Lemkin. He was one of the sole reasons why the Convention of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, or commonly shortened as the Genocide Convention, had taken place in 1948. The Genocide Convention defines *genocide* as:

Any of the following acts committed with 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.⁵⁵

In a 1993 report to the Security Council, United Nations Commission of Experts defines ethnic cleansing as “rendering an area ethnically homogeneous by using force or intimidation to remove from a given area persons of another ethnic or religious group.” While ethnic cleansing has occurred since the beginning of history, the clarification of this term is surprisingly very recent.

Anton Weiss-Wendt summarizes Lemkin’s views of the term and exposes the politics behind the dilution of the original definition of genocide in his article “Hostage of politics: Raphael Lemkin on ‘Soviet genocide.’” Weiss-Wendt acknowledges that Lemkin’s original concept of genocide in his book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* covered Stalinist deportations by

⁵⁴ Ibid., 27.

⁵⁵ Text of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide by *The United Nations General Assembly* (1948) available at: <http://www.hrweb.org/legal/genocide.html>.

default and that this definition differs significantly from the wording in the UN Genocide Convention.

Lemkin identified several forms of genocide: political, social, cultural, economic, biological, physical, religious, and moral. He interpreted genocide as an intention to annihilate a group of the population by destroying essential foundations of life such as: social and political institutions, culture, language, national feelings, religion, economic means, personal security, liberty, health, dignity and, finally life itself.⁵⁶

However, Weiss-Wendt argues, “Such a broad interpretation of the crime would make just any instance of gross human rights violation genocide.”⁵⁷ Furthermore Weiss-Wendt states that because of the lack of viable information to the western world at the time, Lemkin could not have known the extent of the political purges and ethnic deportations carried out by the Stalin regime but according to Lemkin, genocide was taking place in almost all East Central European countries. Weiss-Wendt continues his article outlining the various incorrect facts that Lemkin believed.

Weiss-Wendt stresses that in order to make the Genocide Convention a binding treaty, it required at least 20 signatures and “Lemkin often resorted to political rhetoric... told his counterparts what they wanted to hear.” When the United States refused to ratify the treaty in the end after the Soviet Union had, Lemkin turned to ‘anti-communist’ rhetoric to try and gain their support. Thus, “the stronger the effort on behalf of the Genocide Convention, the more eroded the notion of genocide became... and like King Midas, whatever Lemkin touched turned into ‘genocide.’”⁵⁸ Weiss-Wendt concluded that regardless of what we call the Soviet deportations of whole nations, it is most accurately described as ethnic cleansing.

⁵⁶ Anton Weiss-Wendt, "Hostage of politics: Raphael Lemkin on "Soviet genocide" " *Journal of Genocide Research* 7, no. 4 (2005): 551.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 556.

Earlier historians were reluctant to label the mass deportations as genocide; they used names as ‘political genocide’ or ‘cultural genocide’ or ‘class genocide’ because those identifications are missing from the legal definition. Later works are more inclined to argue for the act of genocide arguably because the regime also confessed to acts of genocide in 1991(sparking a separate debate). The discussion is far from over, and there most likely will never be a conclusive answer, but most historians would agree with the following:

When examining the many details of the Soviet repression, scholars must be careful to account for the regime’s various overlapping and simultaneous political motives, as well as distinguish and clarify policy differences and similarities. Different political, ideological and class motives prompted the Soviet persecution of Russians (and even Communists), which of course coincided with the various ethnic prejudices, class antagonisms, and ideological beliefs that fueled Russia’s attacks on its minorities.⁵⁹

In the scholarly work presented thus far, every author expressed their concern over the validity and accuracy of the 1948 legal definition of genocide. Nearly all authors agree that the legal definition of genocide in the Genocide Convention of 1948 is flawed and most acknowledge a watered down version of the original definition by Lemkin. Moving forward, the differences between ethnic cleansing, mass murder, and genocide are discussed and major debates in this field arise. Whether the differences in ethnic groups and their treatment results in unique conclusions for each group is the next phase of scholarly interpretation. Undoubtedly there is a multitude of work surrounding the Soviet Union that cannot be addressed and endless questions can be posed that may never have answers. This paper continues to examine the discourse with attention to the Russian-Germans.

The following article introduced me to studying the repression of the Russian-Germans and exploring my family’s history further. Eric J. Schmaltz and Samuel D. Sinner published their

⁵⁹ Schmaltz and Sinner, 349.

article “‘You will die under ruins and snow’: The Soviet repression of Russian Germans as a case study of successful genocide” in 2002. Schmaltz and Sinner study the historical conditions and cultural developments that the Russian Germans experienced in both Soviet Union Russia and Kazakhstan. They argue that the conditions under which the Russian Germans suffered are genocidal, “... mass deportation and geographical dispersal accompanied mass death. The Soviet government intended to destroy the Russian Germans as a viable ethnic group through a combination of mass murder and national-cultural liquidation.”⁶⁰ “By the 1970s, for most Russian Germans the linguistic and cultural disintegration had advanced so far that [it] was irreversible. Then in 1991, the regime admitted to the crime of genocide.”⁶¹

They assert that “the ethnic group actually died from the deathblow of the 1940s deportations, where as many as 300,000 of the approximately one million Russian Germans at the time had literally perished “under ruins and snow””.⁶²

While early deportee experiences in exile are understandably not as well documented as Soviet government records, there has been effort to record their stories. There are only a few comprehensive accounts of the personal experiences of Russian-Germans, Berta Bachmann provides one of the most known in her book, *Memories of Kazakhstan: A Report on the Life Experiences of a German Woman in Russia*. Various memoirs and collections of stories are compiled in an effort to preserve a part of the past, to stop from forgetting entire generations. Families pass down oral histories and there are now even online resources for Volga-Germans to learn more about their history. But much of the story ends there. Scholarly focus remains on the earlier deportations of the 1940’s, Soviet Union intentions and tactics more often the focal point.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 350.

⁶² Ibid.

Personal stories relay the realities and hardship of everyday life on the 'special settlements' and justly refer to miracle of surviving. Conclusions rarely if ever mention what happened during and after the break up of the Soviet Union. Logically texts produced in the early 1990's and before can't be expected to discuss this period, however more modern works on the deportations also skim over the Russian German experience of the 1990's emigration.

The 1990 Migrations

Rafis Abazov studied the crisis zones of Central Asia surrounding the breakup of the Soviet Union and finds:

Politically, the CARs [Central Asian Republics] were the most unstable republics of the former Soviet Union throughout the 1980s and especially on the eve of their independence. The bloody interethnic conflicts of 1986-91 shook the very foundation of stability in CAR society and claimed hundreds of lives in every republic of the region.⁶³

Fortunately only Tajikistan erupted into a civil war. The other republics, Kazakhstan included, had ethnic tensions and outbursts of violence but they did not escalate into full civil war. First an overview of what is known about the violent outbursts in Kazakhstan will be reviewed. Then the statistics of the mass emigrations and the scholarly interpretation of their causes and effects will follow. A brief assessment of scholarly discourse concerning the ethnic tensions in the Central Asian Republics will find if any connection between the emigrations and the ethnic tensions is found, and whether the question of ethnic cleansing arises. Due to the few sources that focus on the German experience alone, wider interpretations are made and the scholarship acknowledges that the main tensions were between indigenous Kazakhs and Russians and Europeans.

⁶³ Abazov, 64.

1986 Jeltoqsan Riots

Jeltoqsan means December in the Kazakh language. In December of 1986 riots broke out in the streets of Almaty, Kazakhstan. The leader of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) was removed from office as part of Mikhail Gorbachev's anticorruption campaign. Gennady Kolbin, an ethnic Russian with no previous connection to Kazakhstan, was to replace Dinmuhammet Kunaev. This change was so unpopular that it ignited protests in the capital. Fueled by young students seeking autonomy for their land, initial reports from Moscow said that roughly 200 people were involved in the riots. Later reports from Kazakh SSR authorities estimated the riots drew closer to 3,000 people,⁶⁴ other estimates state at least 30,000 to 40,000 protestors, and some Jeltoqsan leaders claim over 60,000 Kazakhs participated in protests nationwide.⁶⁵ This incredible difference in numbers is likely because some calculate only the initial instance, while others incorporate the nationwide protests that followed in the later weeks.

Jeltoqsan has never been fully investigated; many view this as further indication of the involvement of officials who are still in office. The great variations in numbers and cursory reporting are only the first clues to what may have occurred in reality. Contrary to the Soviet government's new policy of 'glasnost', known as transparency, the government immediately closed Almaty to foreign journalists. The official Soviet press reports emphasized that young Kazakh nationalists who hold extremist views are fueled by drugs and alcohol hold responsibility for the 'December events.' Almaty remained in isolation for two months following December 1986 and by the time outside reporters were allowed to enter most of the protest participants had already been locked up. In May of 1990 the secrecy and unavailability of reliable information

⁶⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle*, "Soviet Riots Worse Than First Reported" (February 19, 1987): 22.

⁶⁵ Bruce Pannier, "Kazakhstan: Zheltoqsan Protest Marked 20 Years Later," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*. (December, 2006) available at: <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1073453.html>.

spurred Helsinki Watch— a branch of Human Rights Watch— to send two staff members to conduct independent fact-finding investigations of what occurred in Kazakhstan. The following is a summary of their findings.

The continuing secrecy of both the Kazakh and Soviet governments proved to be a barrier for the authors of this report. The “Shakhanov Commission” which is the parliamentary group responsible for investigating the Almaty disorders was twice prevented from publishing its findings and despite being promised, has been denied access to official archives on casualties. The Soviet government continued to deny journalists and Westerners timely access to areas of conflict in Central Asia.⁶⁶ The Helsinki Watch Report (HWR) journalists were mainly focused on the capital of Almaty and Karaganda, information about the rest of Kazakhstan was only periodically provided.

They determined it was in fact the replacement of the Kazakh leader with an ethnic Russian who had no prior experience in the region that ignited the protests and additionally, there were other tensions with Moscow. Leaders said Kazakhstan only received about seven percent back from what they produced and the high unemployment rate among the youth was a contributing factor to the protests.⁶⁷ HWR learned that the protests in Almaty began peacefully, but who initiated the violence remains unclear. The protestors were unarmed, but the government used force. Militia and military cadets were first on the scene, later joined by Army and Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) troops. Estimates of protestors range from 10,000 to 30,000,⁶⁸ other

⁶⁶ HWR, 1.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 5.

sources site up to 60,000 nationwide. The official death toll was three, but many assert there were more.⁶⁹

The HWR report continues with a detailed analysis of the nights of student protests in Almaty through eyewitness testimonies, press-coverage and investigations of the aftermath. The report only cursory mentions the social tension and violence in other parts of Kazakhstan, addressing it as a new period of “violent local unrest, motivated by a mixture of political, economic and nationalist grievances.”⁷⁰ In fact, a samizdat report dated December 1989... states that instances of social unrest occurred in an even larger number of cities: “The events widened to include Almaty, Karaganda, as well as Dzezkgan Aktyubinks, Mangyshlak, East Kazakhstan, Taldy-Kurgan, Tselingrad and other oblasts.”⁷¹ HWR identified a Soviet interview with Procurator General Aleksandr Sukharev who acknowledged over 900 deaths due to interethnic clashes.⁷² As has previously been the case, this number is likely underestimated.

1989 Novyi Uzen Unrests

The next widely known ethnic clash in Kazakhstan occurred in a small provincial town in the western region. Sporadic clashes began between local people and representatives of ethnic minorities who were employed in the local oil processing and refinery factories in the town of Novyi Uzen. The immediate cause of unrest remains unknown but the degradation of social conditions and growth of unemployment is believed to have angered the local community. Although Kazakhs made up the majority of the population of this region, only four to twelve percent were employed in the local industrial production. The vast majority of the workforces

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 7.

⁷¹ Ibid., 16.

⁷² Ibid., 7.

were temporary workers transported from other regions of the Soviet Union.⁷³ Locals scapegoated the newcomers of ethnic minorities who had jobs, accommodation and social benefits at what they viewed was at their expense.⁷⁴ Reports claim 200-500 rioters participated, five were shot and wounded, and likely more were wounded.⁷⁵ Little is known about riots in other remote regions of Kazakhstan, but ethnosocial tensions in Novyi Uzen and in the surrounding regions have been increasing since 1987.

1989-1999 Emigrations of the Russian-Germans from Kazakhstan

During the 1980's Kazakhs were in the minority, consisting of less than forty percent of the population, while Russians, Europeans and others combined made up the majority.⁷⁶ By 1999 Kazakh people regained a majority of 53 percent of the population, the rest composed of Russian, and other. Germans made up 5.8 percent of the 'other' population in 1989 and then 2.4 percent of the population in 1999.⁷⁷ Population data shows this shift was largely due to a mass emigration of Slavs and Germans and not because of an increase of Kazakhs.⁷⁸ Over a million Slavs and more than half of the ethnic Germans fled the country by 1999.⁷⁹ The first formal consensus was done in 1989, Jeltoqsan occurred in 1986, between these dates it is known that many Slavs and Germans began leaving Kazakhstan but specific numbers are unavailable. This major demographic change had many ramifications for the Kazakh society, government and

⁷³ Kendirbaeva, 748.

⁷⁴ Abazov, 71.

⁷⁵ Kendirbaeva, 748.

⁷⁶ Edward Schatz, "The Politics of Multiple Identities: Lineage and Ethnicity in Kazakhstan," *Europe-Asia Studies* 53, no 3 (2000): 489.

⁷⁷ Peter Sinnot "Population Politics in Kazakhstan," *Journal of International Affairs* 56, no 2 (2003): 105.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

economy. The focus in much of the literature remains on the nation building attempts of the Kazakh government and its affects on politics, the economy and local power relations between leaders and elites. This mass flight of people has attracted little scholarly attention beyond the statistical, economical and political implications.

Literature Review

The following is a review of the studies done on post-Soviet nation building in Central Asia. As will be demonstrated, focus remains on statistics of migration patterns, governmental records and policies, and the politics of nation building. This is not to imply that scholars have ignored the ethnicity question, or the importance of the ethnic tensions in Central Asian Republics (CARS), certainly not. There is a strong dialogue in academia on the study of the ethnic tensions and the CAR leaders methods of dealing with them.⁸⁰ Rather, the connection between the ethnic tensions and the reasons for German mass migration is not discussed or even identified. The emigrations are not blatantly ignored, but little is done to uncover the realities of these movements on the ground. The narrative of the Russian-German emigration is summarized with all the other ethnic enclaves as a returning to the 'homeland'. Others attribute, and rightly so, economic conditions and the seeking of a better life, while only cursory mentioning that local tensions were a contributing factor.

⁸⁰ See John McGarry and Brendon O'Leary, *The Politics of Ethnic Conflict: Case-studies of Protracted Ethnic Conflicts*. London: Routledge (1993): 4.; Shirin Akiner, 'Post-Soviet Central Asia: Past is Prologue', in: Peter Ferdinand, *The New Central Asia and Its Neighbors*. London: Pinter Publishers (1994): 16; For historical background to the interethnic conflicts see Bohdan Nahaylo and Victor Swoboda, *Soviet Disunion: A History of the Nationalities Problem in the USSR*. London: Harnish, Hamilton (1990).

Peter Sinnot's work on the population shifts in Kazakhstan has already been referenced several times in this paper.⁸¹ His article utilizes raw data from the census he organizes it in ways that best demonstrate the drastic changes. His reduction of the data acts as the determinate to his hypothesis. He finds that Nazarbayev's attempt at creating a Kazakh homeland and achieving a Kazakh majority was successful not because of his politics but due to the desperate economic conditions which caused Slavs and other ethnic minorities to leave the country, including many Kazakhs. He concludes, "The Kazakh majority, if it exists, may thus only be a sign of Kazakhstan's decline."⁸² However, the neighboring states of Russia and Uzbekistan must first hold their census to verify the validity of Kazakhstan's census.

Edward Schatz's findings in "The Politics of Multiple Identities Lineage and Ethnicity in Kazakhstan" are best summarized here:

The argument is that the weak post-Soviet Kazakhstani state, bent on strategies of ethnicity-based compensation, lacked the resources to implement its programs to promote ethnic Kazakhs. Instead, it created a broad discourse of ethnic redress that was left to individual actors in individual locales to translate into political practice. In doing so, many such actors used knowledge of genealogical lineage, which undergirded sub-ethnic identities, as a marker of Kazakhness. A virtual bidding war among locales ensued over these ethnic markers that served to construct lineage identities as politically salient.⁸³

Schatz focuses on the reaction of the policy makers to the rising of ethnic tensions and their attempts at harnessing power in the vacuum left by the Soviet state. Essentially, the Soviet Union failed at fully integrating an 'internationalist' identity of a 'Sovetski Narod' - known as the Soviet people- and at the collapse of the USSR, ethnic identity and pride was reawakened. Due to the vast diversity of people in Kazakhstan, the elites attempt at ethnic nation building in Kazakhstan also required placing sub-ethnic identities in the center of public life.

⁸¹ See Sinnot, 2003.

⁸² Ibid., 115.

⁸³ Schatz, 489.

While this article doesn't address the German experience specifically, it was promising in uncovering the underlying ethnic relations and their effects on politics. Its focus remained on the failures of Soviet attempts at cultural engineering and the resulting emphasis on ethnic titularity. Schatz found that if 'internationalism' had a Russian face during the Soviet period, and privilege was given to Russians, then the post-Soviet Kazakh state "turned Soviet-style internationalism on its head." By using appealing discourse and an ill-defined set of privileges to titular Kazakhs, "...post-Soviet Kazakhstani state ideology had a Kazakh face, singing out Kazakhs for linguistic, demographic, political and cultural redress."⁸⁴ Consequently, this secularized the many minorities in Kazakhstan. It cannot go without saying; the Kazakh ideology of nation building is not inherent with views of superiority, however nationalistic patriotism and pride are undoubtedly natural products.

This is at the core of Rafis Abazov's question; he examines the main causes for the rising of tensions and analyzes the interethnic conflicts, nationality policies and how relative stability in post-Soviet Central Asian Republics (CARs) was achieved.⁸⁵ Abazov offers greater focus to the ethnic tensions on the ground and uncovering their triggers, the reactions of the leaders and the ramifications of the violence. Again, the focus here isn't the affect of these ethnic tensions on the German population or even solely Kazakhstan, but nonetheless Abazov's findings are useful in gathering an understanding of the political development of Kazakhstan and the local situation for minorities. He credits post-independence stability in the region to the "ability of the CAR's leaders to keep stability 'at any cost.'"⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Ibid., 492.

⁸⁵ Rafis, Abazov. "Central Asia's Conflicting Legacy and Ethnic Policies: Revisiting a Crisis Zone of the former USSR", *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 5, no 2 (1999): 62.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

CAR leaders are credited with holding off eruptions of civil war by balancing political representation for the various ethnicities all the while encouraging nationalist pride. They saw the hard lessons experienced in Tajikistan and learned how to share power among all fractions of society and the ruling elite. The leaders were willing to maintain the *status quo* within their republics and in inter-republic relations by suppressing ethnic conflicts, not necessarily resolving them.⁸⁷ These underlying tensions remain and continue to underpin the lives of many minorities still living in the CARs.

Titled “Homeland as a Social Construct: Territorialization among Kazakhstan’s Germans and Koreans” Alexander Diener’s work studies the views and homeland conceptions of Germans and Koreans still living in Kazakhstan after 2002.⁸⁸ He begins by providing historical sketches of the communities, and then outlines the nationalizing policies in Kazakhstan and the rise of transnationalism among these communities as a way of examining the view of homeland as a social construct.⁸⁹ Both Koreans and Germans were forcibly exiled into Kazakhstan and Diener explores the negotiation of identity and homeland between the kin-states (Germany and South Korea) and their host-state (Republic of Kazakhstan). Furthermore the socio-spatial networks that have sheltered and sustained their ‘original’ ethnic identities he labels as ‘Areas of Compact Living’ and he studies the interactions within them. Diener accomplishes this through analyzing data gathered from “fieldwork conducted in 2000-2002 pertaining to homeland conceptions, migration decisions, and identity politics of Germans and Koreans as representatives of this component of Kazakhstan’s population.”⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Ibid., 88.

⁸⁸ See Diener, 2006.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 202

⁹⁰ Ibid., 201-202.

The questions provide valuable insight into the mindset of the Germans that were left after the mass exodus and juxtaposed along the Korean experience it offered a kind of reference with which to measure the responses. The results were organized in tables throughout the article. The first table asked, ‘What is your homeland?’ 37.9 percent of Koreans answered Kazakhstan, only 13.5 percent of Germans said the same.⁹¹ Of those Germans left, only 29 percent felt themselves to be citizens of Kazakhstan, while 56.7 percent of Koreans did.⁹² The sixth table asked ‘Have relationships between nations changed since Soviet times?’ 61.1 percent of Germans answered, ‘They have worsened’, 41.5 percent of Koreans agreed.⁹³ Table eight was particularly revealing, it asked if their economic status has changed since Soviet times, 73.1 percent of Germans answered, ‘They have worsened’ whereas 48.1 percent of Koreans answered the same.⁹⁴ This data reveals that even the Germans who were born and raised in Kazakhstan, struggle to assimilate and truly feel at home. Diener discerns this as their “deep-seated belief that the stigma of being a ‘punished people’ will never fully abate”.⁹⁵

Conclusions

Personal Family Experiences Leaving Kazakhstan

The literature concerning the 1940’s deportations parallels closely with the experiences of my grandmother: the details of the journey in cattle cars, the harsh winters, poor harvests, grueling labor camps and high mortality rates. Even the conditions in exile, while varying throughout Kazakhstan, accounted for the mixed reception of the deportees. My grandmother’s

⁹¹ Ibid., 207.

⁹² Ibid., 208.

⁹³ Ibid., 210.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 211.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 215.

experience while unique has still been accounted for. Encouraged by the consistency of my grandmother's stories with other memoirs and the scholarly literature that I came across during the 1940-1960's, I pursued the literature surrounding the 1990's with similar enthusiasm. But instead, I came across a significant void. Certainly the experiences of my family cannot be generalized for the entire ethnic German population leaving Kazakhstan, but they are likely to represent a greater number than who've been paid notice. Especially due to the secrecy surrounding and following the 1986 December riots, combined with missing information concerning the uprisings around the rest of the country, the full story of this mass exodus remains untold. The trauma, chaos and fog of information become even less clear with the passing of time, therefore all detailed accounts are impossible to gather. A short summation of what I've been able to gather from my family's experiences and the occasional report follows.

During the diminishing period of the Soviet Union, Moscow loosened strong control of its satellite states. Questions of Moscow's authority were raised and the buried ethnic tensions in the peripheries began to resurface. Local leaders that had maintained control of these various ethnicities were unable to explain the worsening economic conditions. The natives soon pointed the blame towards the non-nationals. In the Dzambul Oblast just west of Almaty, ethnic tensions began to rise in my aunts' small village Kokterek. My mother Anna is the second oldest of four girls. Nina is the oldest then my mom Anna, Olga and the youngest was Lily. Life had taken all four sisters along different paths, but hardship paved every one. Nina and Olga still lived in Kokterek when tensions were heightening. Nina's husband Andrey recalls his own neighbors throwing stones at him when he would return from taking my aunt to work on his motorcycle. One evening Nina returned home from work to find her home stoned, windows shattered and door damaged. This was a turning point. My grandmother, painfully familiar with the

dangerousness of the situation insisted they leave town before the situation worsened. Nina and Andrey were able to secure documents through Andrey's family connections and left for Germany in 1989. The German government provided them with resources and support for their assimilation and resettlement. Today they live in a small town in western Germany. My grandmother, aunt Lily and Olga were not so quickly fortunate.

Grandma Emma had left for Kyrgyzstan with Lily in the 80's to help care for Emma's sister Selma. Selma had lived in Kyrgyzstan with her husband and after he tragically passed away she needed help. Around this time ethnic tensions had escalated all throughout the CARs, and Kyrgyzstan was no exception. Emma, Lily, and Selma fled for Kaliningrad, Russia after tensions heightened. They no longer were able to provide for themselves and feel safe, so they left everything and everyone they knew to start over, again. Lily had married her husband Kostya in Kyrgyzstan and together they were able to secure a destroyed home from the Kolkhoz, known as collective farming communities in Soviet Russian. They were able to live there under the conditions that they would work for the community and repair the home. Kostya was a shepherd and Lily watched after the village baby calves. They lived in Kaliningrad until 1995 when they finally secured papers for Germany. Today my grandma Emma and great-aunt Selma live with Kostya and Lily in Germany.

My aunt Olga was the last to leave Kokterek. She had settled in and started a family with her husband Vova, but they too were soon denied food and basic necessities. At the local store, when she begged and pleaded the Kazakh owners simply answered, look at your face and look at mine, do you see a difference? Olga and Vova lacked the necessary family connections to secure documents and leave for Germany immediately, but they felt they had no other choice but to leave Kazakhstan. Their children had already stopped going to school out of fear, and then they

felt that they couldn't even leave their homes safely. Vova and Olga followed my grandmother and fled for Kaliningrad. In Kaliningrad they found shelter in a deteriorating apartment, the windows and doors were long gone and a pile of debris was left waiting for them. Under similar agreements with the local Kolkhoz, Olga and Vova worked hard for their scarce accommodations. In the meantime, Nina and Lily were working to help them gather paperwork and join them in Germany. After a couple years, Olga was able to join her sisters in Germany.

My own mother left Kokterek in 1984 after she met my Russian father. They married in Krasnodar Oblast, USSR located in the northern reaches of the Caucasus and lived in villages not far from the city where my sisters and I were eventually born. My father's brother was the first to move to the United States and called for the rest of his family to join them. At the same time my mother's sisters were calling for us to join them in Germany. My parents were torn but they knew they had to leave Krasnodar. Russia was a hard place for my mother to live, she hid her German identity as best she could for fear of discrimination. My father would not fare any better in Germany, deciding instead to opt for the neutral land of United States where life would be equally difficult for all. And as they say, the rest is history.

Conclusion

A friend once said, the more Swiss cheese you have, the more holes you have; therefore, the more Swiss cheese you have, the less Swiss cheese you have.⁹⁶ This is ironically pertinent to the study of history. To argue that there is a gap in the record of history is no new or revolutionary concept. It is as old as the sharing of stories. The quality and craft of developing

⁹⁶ For reference see, http://uncyclopedia.wikia.com/wiki/Swiss_cheese.

histories has improved dramatically over the centuries, and this thesis only aims to nominally contribute to this field by calling attention to one of these spaces in the time of our history.

The discussion pertaining to the 1940's deportations is lively and only a fraction was reviewed in this thesis. Scholars continue to explore and debate Stalin's intentions— were the mass casualties a purposeful mechanism of control or did he lose control and unintentionally create times of severe scarcity? The overwhelming academic consensus finds that at the very least the Soviet Union committed ethnic cleansing against its minority communities and in its aim of creating a 'Sovetski Narod' attempted cultural genocide. Most scholars—despite the regime's own confession— do not attribute the mass deportations of the 1940's as intentional acts of genocide. The records of vast resources allocated for these populations' survival dispel the notion of overt and intentional mass extermination. The mass emigrations of the 1990's also indicate no evidence of intentional mass murder, and no scholar argues such. However, the question of ethnic cleansing can and should be asked, yet it isn't. There was no governmental decree ordering the relocating of people, but the nation-building policies of Kazakhstan did influence the ethnic rivalries and mass migration was a product of the same period.

The attempt here is to illuminate this vacancy in the historical discourse on the Soviet Union, its surrounding republics, and to encourage further exploration of the 1990's migrations. Due to the lack of available and verifiable information, the claim that ethnic cleansing was the undercurrent of the mass exodus from Kazakhstan is for now too far of a reach, however it deserves greater attention and debate. Scholars had flocked to the Soviet archives following its dissolution to uncover the realities on the ground and compare them with the written policies in Moscow. Many poured over thousands of documents and others recorded personal narratives in search of the full story of World War II and the deportations. This generous and thorough

research is desperately missing in the republics of Central Asia surrounding the dissolution of the Soviet Empire. These people deserve to have their stories told.

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