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‘Somehow, We Cannot Accept It’: Drivers of Internal Displacement from Crimea and the Forced/Voluntary Migration Binary

AUSTIN CHARRON

Abstract

Overshadowed by their far more numerous counterparts from Donbas, Crimean IDPs have been under-examined and misunderstood. Relying on interviews and focus groups conducted amongst Crimean IDPs, the essay traces the experiences and conditions of Russian occupation that have triggered the migration of Crimeans to mainland Ukraine since 2014. Pointing to how both structural forces and human agency are at play in the political, socio-economic and emotional factors driving their displacement, this essay argues that migration from occupied Crimea to mainland Ukraine—like all migrant flows—is neither exclusively forced nor entirely voluntary.

AS UKRAINE’S STRUGGLE WITH INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT CONTINUES, it can be easy to forget that this crisis began not in war-ravaged Donbas but with Russia’s annexation and occupation of the Crimean Peninsula. The steady trickle of internally displaced peoples (IDPs) from Crimea to mainland Ukraine, beginning in March 2014, was quickly surpassed by the massive influx of IDPs fleeing from Donbas as the region descended into violent conflict in May 2014. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that, by mid-June 2014, the number of IDPs from Donbas was already double that of Crimean IDPs—numbering 22,815 and 11,521 respectively—and had surpassed one million by early August, while the official number of IDPs from Crimea increased by only about 4,000 during the same period (UNHCR 2014). As of 5 March 2018, the total number of registered IDPs within Ukraine was 1,489,659—a decrease from previous years—the vast majority of whom are from Donbas.¹ Precisely how many of those IDPs have come from Crimea is difficult to determine, as reports on IDP registration do not indicate places of origin, and not all choose to register as IDPs.

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¹‘Oblikovano 1 489 659 Pereselentsiv—Minsotspolityky’, Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, 5 March 2018, available at: <http://www.msp.gov.ua/news/14908.html>, accessed 31 July 2019.

Estimates of the population of Crimean IDPs range from 20,000² to 100,000 (Blair 2016), but even if this highest estimate is assumed to be accurate, Crimeans would still account for less than 7% of Ukraine's entire IDP population.

The absence in Crimea of the same violently destructive military conflict seen in Donbas may explain the wide disparity in the number of IDPs originating from each territory. Consequently, it may be tempting to conclude that the internal displacement of Donbas residents was forced, by and large, under conditions of extreme violence, while Crimeans who relocated to mainland Ukraine in response to the Russian annexation generally did so voluntarily, as evinced by the lack of extreme violence and the much smaller number of IDPs from Crimea. The fact that only a small proportion of the Crimean population has fled since 2014, while an apparent majority of Crimeans continue to express support for the annexation (O'Loughlin & Toal 2019), may also create the impression that displacement from Crimea is principally voluntary—although such findings that rely on sociological surveys conducted in occupied Crimea should be approached cautiously, given the draconian restrictions imposed upon speech and expression there (Dukhnich 2015; Freedom House 2019).

A binary distinction between forced and voluntary forms of migration has long persisted in migration research and policy. Following the United Nation's 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which established a working definition of 'refugee' and helped enshrine the term's equivalency to 'forced migrant', governments and NGOs have, for better or for worse, relied upon a flawed categorical distinction between forced and voluntary migration in order to determine which migrants are deserving of and entitled to humanitarian assistance (Feller 2005; Betts 2013; Ottonelli & Torresi 2013). Formal approaches to the problems of internal displacement also conform to this essentialist binary by defining IDPs as inherently forced migrants; as codified by the UN Commission on Human Rights, the 1998 Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement defines IDPs as 'displaced persons or groups of persons who have been *forced* or *obliged* to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence' for reasons related to 'armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters' (Deng 1999, p. 484; emphasis added). Others have subsequently reaffirmed that internal displacement is inherently a form of forced migration (Cohen 2004; Mooney 2005; Weiss & Korn 2006).

In contrast to Donbas, the absence in Crimea of such overt forms of violence outlined in this definition may even bring into question the very IDP status of Crimeans in mainland Ukraine, an issue raised on somewhat different grounds by Zaverukha (2016); yet the reality that those who fled from occupied Crimea are indeed recognised as IDPs by both the Ukrainian state and NGOs assisting IDPs in Ukraine merely highlights the problem of deferring to categorical definitions of forced and voluntary migration (Brunova-Kalisetskaya 2014). However, perhaps due to the comparatively small numbers of Crimean IDPs and the absence of large-scale violence and destruction in the occupied

²'Ukraine IDP Figures Analysis', Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2015, available at: <http://www.internal-displacement.org/europe-the-caucasus-and-central-asia/ukraine/figures-analysis/>, accessed 13 March 2018.

peninsula, the experiences of internal displacement from Crimea remain relatively under-examined and poorly understood compared to those of IDPs from Donbas. Furthermore, looking to a population of displaced people whose migration may superficially appear ‘voluntary’—particularly in contrast to the ostensibly ‘forced’ migration of a parallel population—offers a unique opportunity to interrogate these problematic categorical distinctions.

Drawing from extensive fieldwork conducted amongst Crimeans displaced to mainland Ukraine, this essay pursues a twofold goal. Empirically, it aims to contribute to the growing body of literature concerning internal displacement in Ukraine since 2014 by helping fill the lacuna regarding motivations and experiences driving internal displacement from Crimea specifically. Theoretically, the essay seeks to contribute to the dismantling of an ontological binary of forced/voluntary migration by highlighting the roles and contested meanings of structure and agency underlying the internal displacement of this particular population. I argue, on the one hand, that internal displacement from Crimea may exemplify a process of ‘mixed migration’, comprised of groups and individuals who attribute their displacement, in varying degrees, both to structural changes resulting from the Russian annexation, and to their personal agency to seek more favourable political and socio-economic conditions in mainland Ukraine. I also draw from Bartram’s (2015) theory of ‘rejected alternatives’ in migrant decision-making to further disrupt the forced/voluntary binary, demonstrating how even seemingly volitional acts of migration from Crimea to mainland Ukraine are nonetheless initiated by the structural restriction of acceptable alternatives. Before proceeding to an empirical discussion of the motivations driving internal displacement from Crimea, I will first address the theoretical debates concerning categorical types of migration and the roles of structure and agency therein.

Unsettling the ontological binary of forced/voluntary migration

Following the establishment in 1951 of a working definition of ‘refugee’ and of national governments’ obligations to them, many scholars have upheld the necessity of recognising distinct categories of displaced or otherwise mobile populations on humanitarian grounds, thereby reifying an ontological binary between ‘forced’ and ‘voluntary’ migrants whereby the former category is generally synonymous with ‘refugee’ while the latter are typically presumed to migrate in pursuit of socio-economic opportunities (Kunz 1973; Zolberg *et al.* 1989). According to this view, distinguishing between forced and voluntary migrants is ‘essential to any liberal theory of migration’ (Ottonelli & Torresi 2013, p. 809), as such a determination is necessary for the fair allocation of humanitarian resources. However, authors including Feller (2005) and Hathaway (2007) argue that the label of ‘forced migrant’ is too general and problematically centres the process of forced migration rather than the autonomous figure of the migrant, promoting a categorical distinction between ‘refugees’ and ‘forced migrants’ to ensure that the former remain visible and that their humanitarian needs continue to be served. While parsing the characteristics that distinguish refugees from other types of forced migrants, this rubric nevertheless upholds the forced/voluntary ontology within migration studies.

In recent decades, the notion that migrant populations and experiences may easily be siloed into discrete categories of ‘forced’ and ‘voluntary’ has undergone a critical

re-evaluation. Critiques of this ‘categorical fetishism’ (Crawley & Skleparis 2018) are often premised on the argument that adherence to policy-driven categories such as ‘refugee’ or ‘economic migrant’ both hinders the study of migration and frequently results in the denial of needed humanitarian assistance to displaced peoples who simply do not meet certain bureaucratically defined benchmarks (Bakewell 2008; Long 2013b; Erdal & Oeppen 2018). Zetter (1991, 2007, 2019) notes that the ‘refugee’ label merely flattens the complex diversity of migrant identities and experiences; Turton (2003) argues conversely that adverse experiences and outcomes of displacement—including landlessness and loss of social capital—may persist regardless of the categorical label applied to migrants at their point of destination. Koser and Martin (2011) further point to inconsistencies between categorical definitions and the complex realities of migration in what they refer to as the ‘migrant–displacement nexus’, including the mixed motivations propelling migration, the untenable aggregation of diverse individuals into homogenous migrant flows, temporal changes to migrants’ status, and the adoption of similar coping and adaptation strategies amongst ostensibly distinct types of migrants.

Rather than reify and perpetuate these false and ultimately harmful categorical dichotomies, many seek instead to theorise migration in more universalising ways that can account for both commonalities and disparities across migrant experiences. Each writing in response to Hathaway’s (2007) defence of the ‘refugee’ label, Adelman and McGrath (2007), Cohen (2007) and DeWind (2007) all point to the essentialism and biases inherent in the project of upholding such categorical boundaries, and to the common aspects that often transcend them. Some instead focus their critique on disciplinary segregation in the study of migration; Boswell (2008) argues that bridging the gap between economic and sociological perspectives on migration is required for more holistic theories thereof, while Castles (2010) similarly maintains that researchers must transcend disciplinary boundaries in order to link migration to other social processes. Others raise concerns that categorically framed approaches to migration research neglect the experiences of those rendered immobile where others are mobilised as migrants, and argue that theories of migration must also account for the ‘involuntary immobility’ of some that may correspond to the migration of others (Carling 2002; Lubkemann 2008). Several authors also criticise the tendency in migration research to focus solely on international migrants and thereby overlook internally displaced persons (Ager 1999; Adelman & McGrath 2007; Zetter 2019). Methodologically, a number of experts propose that ethnographic field methods are necessary for understanding and theorising migration from a ‘bottom-up’ perspective that will help advance migration studies beyond normative categorical and policy-driven frameworks (Fussell 2012; Vullnetari 2012; Mainwaring 2016).

Perhaps the greatest problem of upholding the binary between forced and voluntary migration is the attendant assumption that migration occurs either because of structural forces (forced migration) or through individual agency to pursue more favourable socio-economic living conditions (voluntary migration), when any robust or holistic theory of migration must account for the roles of both structure and agency (Massey *et al.* 1993; Erdal & Oeppen 2018; Van Hear *et al.* 2018). Castles and his colleagues (2013) point to a general shift in migration studies since the 1980s away from purely structural explanations for migration towards a stronger emphasis on human agency, while others advance theoretical frameworks that find balance between structure and agency in human

migration. Richmond (1988, 1993) proposes that migration is best understood as a process that is both proactive and reactive, undertaken both through individual or group initiative and in response to prevailing political, social or economic conditions (that is, structure), with any particular journey falling somewhere along a continuum between these two poles. Morawska (2001), on the other hand, looks to Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration to explain how human agency, recursively asserted within political and economic structural confines, propelled emigration from Poland after 1989. Bakewell (2010) rejects structuration as a reconciliation of structure and agency in migration, favouring instead a 'critical realist' approach that considers the 'emergent properties' of agency and their delayed effects on structural forces that may appear in the future. Fussell (2012) argues that 'volition'—along with space and time—is a fundamental dimensional component of migrants' experiences, and urges greater attention to the degree of volition exercised in processes of migration.

One useful solution for navigating the structure/agency problem in migration is the simple proposition that migrant flows are generally 'mixed'. A theory of 'mixed migration' accounts for the strong causal impact of structural forces such as violence, persecution, oppression or natural disaster upon the migration of some, while recognising that others migrate according to personal, professional, social or economic preferences, and that yet others fall somewhere between these extremes. Van Hear and his colleagues (2009) suggest that a theory of 'mixed migration' may adequately capture the complex, spectral assemblages of factors—both structural and agent-based—that propel and sustain patterns of human migration; other scholars have similarly endorsed a 'mixed migration' paradigm (Linde 2011; Vullnetari 2012; Zetter 2019).

Another crucial component of dismantling the forced/voluntary binary is an interrogation of what constitutes 'force' and 'voluntariness' and where they are exercised in processes of migration. Considering whether migrants between Nordic countries perceive their own movement as voluntary, Lundholm *et al.* (2004) show that the liminal divide between volition and force in migration is often subjective. Looking critically at the migration of African and Middle Eastern refugees across the Mediterranean region, Mainwaring (2016) reveals how ostensibly 'forced' migrants in fact wield a wide degree of agency at various stages of their journey, negotiating with border agents, smugglers and other intervening actors in order to navigate the perilous route to Europe and push back against structural barriers impeding their passage.

Adding critical nuance to the meaning of voluntariness in migration, a handful of authors look to Olsaretti's (1998) philosophical refutation of Nozick's (1974) 'rights-based' definition of voluntariness that sees no infringement of an individual's agency to make choices voluntarily so long as others who restrict their range of available choices act within their own rights to impose such restrictions. Olsaretti proposes a much lower threshold between voluntary and involuntary action, arguing that a choice is voluntary only when other 'acceptable alternatives' are available, or if the only available option is wholly ideal in spite of a lack of alternatives; in other words, Olsaretti asserts that a choice is not voluntary when it is simply deemed the least offensive amongst a range of non-ideal to unacceptable options. Long (2013a) sides with Olsaretti over Nozick in her exploration of voluntariness amongst repatriating refugees, while Collins (2018) finds general

agreement with Olsaretti but urges more thoughtful consideration of the meaning of ‘acceptable’ where migrants’ options are concerned.

Bartram (2015) ambitiously expands Olsaretti’s framing of voluntariness to formulate a ‘rejected alternatives’ theory of forced migration; according to this view, migration is ‘forced’ not only by the imposition of insurmountable structural forces, but also when the option to remain in place hinges upon the acceptance of conditions that would violate an individual’s basic human rights. Such ‘subsistence options’ may include renouncing one’s religious beliefs, political convictions, or even citizenship as a prerequisite to safely remaining in place. According to Bartram, migration should be viewed as forced in cases where options are limited to migration or acceptance of such ‘unreasonable’ alternatives, even though a measure of agency is nevertheless asserted in the choice to migrate. Although Bartram still relies on a problematic distinction between forced and voluntary migration, his ‘rejected alternatives’ model nevertheless alerts us to the nuanced shades of force, oppression and coercion that may weigh upon groups and individuals who appear to migrate voluntarily yet choose to do so in the absence of acceptable alternatives.

The varied experiences and motivations driving internal displacement from Crimea

Several authors have examined the dire conditions contributing to processes of internal displacement from the Donbas conflict zone (Coupé & Obrizan 2016; Tzivaras 2018; Buckley *et al.* 2019; Mitchnik 2019), or have addressed the problems of internal displacement in Ukraine while focusing almost exclusively on Donbas IDPs (Bulakh 2017; Nidzvetska *et al.* 2017; Sasse & Lackner 2018). Conversely, much of the literature concerning the Russian occupation of Crimea has tended to focus on the (il)legal nature of the occupation itself (Olson 2014; Grant 2015a, 2015b; Azarova 2018) or on the alarming state of oppression imposed under the Kremlin’s occupying regime (Babin 2014; Blank 2015; Korostelina 2015; Uehling 2015a, 2015b; Coynash & Charron 2019) without explicitly linking these conditions to the internal displacement of Crimeans. The few sources that do account for the causes of internal displacement from Crimea indeed point to the curtailment of human rights and the persecution of vulnerable groups—namely the indigenous Crimean Tatars and those who express outwardly pro-Ukrainian views or identities—as fundamental drivers of displacement (OSCE 2016; Zaverukha 2016; Uehling 2017), yet generally neglect the role of other socio-economic consequences of the occupation.

My conclusions are drawn from a series of 86 semi-structured interviews and three focus groups conducted with Crimean IDPs in the cities of Kyiv and Lviv between September 2015 and June 2016. As Uehling notes (2017, p. 64), obtaining a representative sample of the Crimean IDP population is not possible given that neither their demographic makeup nor an accurate figure of their total population is known. My goal was therefore to seek out research participants who best represented a diversity of perspectives according to age, gender, ethnicity, occupation and education. I employed a variety of non-random sampling techniques, including snowball sampling with the assistance of a few key informants and others encountered through the course of fieldwork, opportunistic sampling at events and gatherings, and targeted sampling of some more prominent members of the Crimean IDP community.

Structural threats of persecution and violence

The arrival of Russian occupiers in Crimea in March 2014 signalled the beginning of an oppressive regime fraught with threats of violence and persecution against those who expressed opposition to the annexation, including the indigenous Crimean Tatar community and pro-Ukraine activists of all ethnic backgrounds. The introduction of punitive measures against political opponents of the annexation represented a sudden and drastic shift in the structuring of Crimea's socio-political and juridical systems, pointing to a wide degree of 'force' driving the internal displacement of many Crimeans. Those who openly supported Kyiv and the Euromaidan protests or who demonstrated disloyalty towards Crimea's new Russian authorities were amongst the first to face persecution. According to Refat Chubarov, Chairman of the *Mejlis* of the Crimean Tatar People:

Under the occupying regime, any person who is even mildly prominent—it can be a journalist, a small-time social activist, a teacher, a doctor, or even some person selling produce in the bazaar—must constantly affirm and demonstrate his loyalty [to the Russian state]. Lacking loyalty is a threat, lacking loyalty is grounds for the authorities to come after you sooner or later, or to call you in for interrogation, or to go after your children and so forth.³

In December 2013 the Russian Parliament introduced Article 280.1 to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. As it aimed at stifling separatism in the Russian regions, the law criminalised any calls for actions that would violate Russia's territorial integrity, which, according to Russian law, included Crimea by the time the law went into effect on 9 May 2014.⁴ The law empowered Russian authorities to label as separatism any assertion that Crimea is not or should not be a part of Russia, and to penalise any such 'separatists' with fines of up to 300,000 rubles or up to four years' imprisonment.⁵ Russian occupation effectively stigmatised and criminalised support for Ukraine and Crimea's place within it, leaving thousands vulnerable to harassment, violence, persecution and arrest for the expression of their political views. Prominent criminal cases against pro-Ukrainian Crimean filmmaker Oleg Sentsov and his associate Oleksandr Kolchenko have underscored the legal consequences of challenging the Russian occupation.⁶

Crimeans who actively supported the Euromaidan and spoke out publicly against the annexation were amongst the first to flee, including journalists working for news outlets sympathetic to the Euromaidan or critical of the occupation in its early days.⁷ Crafting a narrative of Ukrainian aggression towards Crimea's ethnic Russians and their need for

³Interview with Refat Chubarov, Chairman of the *Mejlis* of the Crimean Tatar People, Kyiv, 21 January 2016.

⁴'Kak v Rossii presleduyut za pryzvyv vernut' Krym Ukraine?', *Meduza*, 19 April 2016, available at: <https://meduza.io/cards/kak-v-rossii-presleduyut-za-pryzvyv-vernut-krym-ukraine>, accessed 13 March 2018.

⁵*Kodeksy RF*, 2014, available at: <https://coderf.ru/uk-rf/280.1>, accessed 13 March 2018.

⁶Russian Court Sentences Ukrainian Filmmaker to 20 Years on Terror Charges', *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 25 August 2015, available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-filmmaker-terrorism-trial-verdict-sentsov/27207681.html>, accessed 13 March 2018.

⁷Anonymous interview with journalist and ethnic Crimean Tatar woman, 20s, Kyiv, 30 September 2015.

protection was a key component of the Kremlin's successful seizure of Crimea,⁸ and so Russian authorities moved quickly to silence those who presented an alternative narrative of events surrounding the annexation. During the Euromaidan, activist Olga Skripnik had organised pro-Ukrainian demonstrations in her native Yalta, and her refusal to cease demonstrating after the occupation began made her and her colleagues open targets for retaliation:

Two of my colleagues were kidnapped on the eve of the referendum. They were abducted and held captive for two weeks; they were tortured. After this I received clear signals that I would be next because I was one of the organisers [of pro-Ukrainian demonstrations] in Yalta. We were added to the so-called 'black list', which included not only those people who would be persecuted, but all those people who were to be physically destroyed [*fizicheski unichtozheny*] or denied freedom. ... We had reasonable grounds to believe that they were going to come for us, and so we were compelled to leave on 16 March, the same day as the so-called referendum. Practically our whole organisation had to leave, because we were all actively involved in these events; we all participated in peaceful demonstrations, and we participated publicly.⁹

Fears of reprisal also afflicted those who simply maintained an outwardly pro-Ukrainian position. Many who identify strongly as Ukrainian citizens grew rapidly alienated from their pro-Russian friends, neighbours and even family members who openly denounced them and, in some cases, alerted authorities to their views. One interviewee described the experiences that convinced him and his family to relocate to Kyiv:

Threats started coming because of my convictions, and we started keeping track of which of our pro-Ukrainian citizens were beaten, which were leaving [Crimea], and which had fallen under the influence of the enemy's propaganda. The worst was when our friends and relatives started to believe the things that the enemy was inventing about me. The separatists posted my photo online with provocative information; they sent denouncements of me to the police and to my place of work. I felt like a Jew in Berlin in 1939. They forced us to accept their citizenship under threat of violence.¹⁰

Although anybody in Crimea who opposes the annexation has reason to fear for their safety, the Crimean Tatar community is particularly vulnerable to threats. Many Crimean Tatars were active supporters of Euromaidan-aligned demonstrations held locally, and the *Mejlis*—the representative body of the Crimean Tatar people—declared a boycott of the referendum on Crimea's accession to the Russian Federation, making clear their intentions to resist efforts to wrench Crimea from Ukrainian control.¹¹ Crucially, Crimean Tatars also possess what is perhaps the most powerful weapon against Russia's efforts to impose its hegemony over Crimea: a deeply rooted national narrative inextricably tied to the Crimean

⁸Putin nazval prichinu prisoedineniya Kryma k Rossii', *lenta.ru*, 9 March 2015, available at: <https://lenta.ru/news/2015/03/09/putincrimea/>, accessed 13 March 2018.

⁹Interview with Olga Skripnik, activist, Kyiv, 14 January 2016.

¹⁰Anonymous interview with ethnic Ukrainian man, 20s, Kyiv, 18 November 2015.

¹¹'Khroniki krymskogo soprotivleniya: Medzhlis prizyvaet boikoyirovat' "referendum" (video)', *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 6 March 2014, available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/28353112.html>, accessed 22 October 2019.

Peninsula, which directly repudiates the Russian national narrative of Crimea used by the Kremlin to justify the annexation (Charron 2016). As one Crimean Tatar focus group participant stated, ‘Russia did not want any other groups besides Russians living in Crimea, because we destroy the myth of a Russian Crimea. Just one Crimean Tatar living in Crimea nullifies the assertion that it is 100% Russian’.¹² Following the annexation, the new authorities immediately began restricting Crimean Tatars’ right to assemble, banning their annual gathering on 18 May commemorating the anniversary of their 1944 deportation from Crimea (Koroleva 2014). They also moved to delegitimise and disempower the Crimean Tatar leadership, beginning with its most prominent leaders and vocal critics of the occupation. In the months following the annexation, authorities imposed five-year bans on entry to the Russian Federation (including Crimea) on Mustafa Dzhemilev and Refat Chubarov, the former and current leaders of the *Mejlis* respectively, and both members of the Ukrainian Parliament.¹³ The Russian authorities went on to declare the *Mejlis* itself an ‘extremist organisation’ in April 2016, essentially criminalising and dissolving the organisation under Russian law.¹⁴

Beyond the ranks of the Tatar leadership, the Russian authorities have also disproportionately targeted ordinary Crimean Tatars in dozens of home raids and arrests since the beginning of the occupation.¹⁵ Most have occurred in accordance with efforts to suppress religious extremism and curtail the spread of more conservative Islamic practices. In Crimea, these efforts have been aimed primarily at the pan-Islamist organisation *Hizb-ut-Tahrir*, which operates legally in Ukraine but is outlawed in Russia (Mokrushin 2018). With the annexation, Crimea’s *Hizb-ut-Tahrir* members were rendered extremists and criminals overnight, prompting many to flee for the Ukrainian mainland in a stark example of migration triggered by structural forces. Russian special forces have raided dozens of Crimean Tatar homes on suspicion of association with *Hizb-ut-Tahrir* or possession of certain banned ‘extremist’ texts, mostly targeting those who appear more devout in their practice of Islam. ‘Our fears were confirmed when those who left [Crimea] after us complained about the physical and moral pressure that was placed on them’, confided one devout Muslim interviewee, who explained that:

Some people’s homes have been raided, and others were essentially told, ‘Don’t worry, we’ll come for you sooner or later ...’. It’s such a completely stressful atmosphere that you can never let your guard down. Those who have left most recently say that the authorities raided their homes, and the raids are still happening. And now it’s not just the devout Muslims [*predstavitel’ i islama*] like us who are being targeted for raids, but average Tatars who never attracted anybody’s attention in the Ukrainian days.¹⁶

¹²Anonymous interview with Crimean Tatar man, 20s, Kyiv, 9 February 2016.

¹³‘Vlasti Kryma ugrozhayut zapretom medzhliisa krymskikh tatar’, *Radio Svoboda*, 24 September 2015, available at: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/27267651.html>, accessed 22 October 2019.

¹⁴‘Sud priznal medzhliis krymskikh tatar ekstremistskoi organizatsiei’, *BBC Russia*, 26 April 2016, available at: http://www.bbc.com/russian/news/2016/04/160426_mejlis_crimea_court, accessed 13 March 2018.

¹⁵‘Crimea: Persecution of Crimean Tatars Intensifies’, *Human Rights Watch*, 14 November 2017, available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/11/14/crimea-persecution-crimean-tatars-intensifies#>, accessed 22 October 2019.

¹⁶Anonymous interview with Muslim man, 30s, Lviv Oblast’, 22 May 2016.

Even more alarmingly, Crimean Tatars in occupied Crimea live with the looming threat of physical violence and murder. Dozens of men have gone missing since the beginning of the occupation, including six Crimean Tatar men who were later found dead with signs of torture.¹⁷ Many Crimean Tatars I spoke with tended not to distinguish between threats emanating from the Russian authorities and from hostile Crimean residents. One young Crimean Tatar man who had participated actively in Crimea's Euromaidan demonstrations recalled the threats and provocations he endured before leaving Crimea, and the dangers that might still await him if he were to return:

I don't even know if they would let me into Crimea now, but if I were to show up there, I might well be abducted. When I was still in Crimea, people had written graffiti on my house and posted fliers saying that I'm a fascist, that 'a fascist lives in this house, he's financed by America, and the blood of people who died on the Maidan are on his hands'. And there are a lot of people like this. I know many other Crimeans who had this happen to them. It's surprising that they didn't do it to every Crimean Tatar.¹⁸

Vocal opponents of the occupation thus face legal and/or violent repercussions for their activities regardless of ethnicity, while Crimean Tatars have been targeted collectively for their pro-Ukrainian stance and for the threat that their presence in Crimea poses to rhetorical justifications for the annexation. The implementation of policies aimed at silencing and persecuting the Kremlin's political and ideological opponents in Crimea, along with the pervasive threat of violence that these policies engender, amount to structural forces that play a determining role in the internal displacement of many Crimeans in ways consistent with examples of nominally 'forced' migration. Moreover, implicit in these examples of persecution is the message that peace and safety come with acquiescence to the new regime, leaving dissenters to choose essentially between renouncing their beliefs or principles, or fleeing from Crimea altogether—an ultimatum with no 'acceptable' options that effectively renders Crimean IDPs 'forced migrants' according to the 'rejected alternatives' model (Bartram 2015), although agency is nevertheless exercised in this decision-making process. However, structural forces of persecution and violence are only part of the picture; economic and pragmatic considerations also weigh heavily in the calculus behind many Crimeans' relocation to mainland Ukraine. Here we also see a dialectical entanglement of structure and agency that further confounds a simplistic explanation of their migration as either forced or voluntary.

Economic and pragmatic considerations

Crimea's post-annexation physical and economic isolation has had a profoundly negative impact on the livelihoods and wellbeing of thousands of Crimeans, indeed, playing a crucial role in propelling internal displacement from the region. Migration in response to

¹⁷'Propavshie i pogibshie lyudi za period okkupatsii Kryma', Crimean Tatar Resource Centre, 2016, available at: https://mip.gov.ua/files/pdf/missing_died_ru.pdf, accessed 31 July 2019.

¹⁸Anonymous interview with Crimean Tatar man, 20s, Kyiv, 9 February 2016.

socio-economic conditions generally implies a wide degree of agency and is thus frequently viewed as ‘voluntary’, yet the deterioration of the Crimean economy is a direct consequence of the annexation in structural ways beyond the control of the region’s residents, thereby undermining a purely volitional explanation of economic migration.

Crimea’s vital economic and infrastructural linkages to the Ukrainian mainland were amongst the first casualties of the occupation. Declaring Crimea its sovereign territory, Russian authorities transformed the few points of contact between the peninsula and the Ukrainian mainland into *de facto* borderlands. Initially, the flow of people and goods across the new border was not fully prohibited but newly imposed regulations, customs regimes and border-crossing procedures have since made travel between Crimea and mainland Ukraine more difficult, time-consuming and unpredictable (Skrypnik 2015). Transportation options between Crimea and the Ukrainian mainland grew increasingly limited and regulated in the months following the annexation, culminating with the closure of all rail routes to and from Crimea in December 2014 (Dostim 2014). In September 2015, Crimean Tatar activists on the Ukrainian side of the border established a ‘civic blockade’ of commercial goods at all entry points into Crimea, pressuring the Ukrainian government to follow suit and declare an official embargo on trade with occupied Crimea in December that year (Putilov 2015). Jobs in manufacturing, construction, retail and other industries relying on deliveries from the Ukrainian mainland began to suffer from the restriction and eventual prohibition of trade across the newly established border (Goryunova 2017). The supply of water and electricity to Crimea also began to taper off after the annexation; citing outstanding payments for the delivery of water, Ukrainian authorities restricted the flow from the Dnipro River into the Northern Crimean Canal,¹⁹ while activists imposed an ‘energy blockade’ of Crimea by destroying pylons carrying Ukrainian electricity to the peninsula, causing widespread blackouts beginning in late 2015.²⁰ Russia has become Crimea’s sole lifeline, the only source from which all goods and services can legally originate. Before the completion of the Kerch Strait Bridge connecting Crimea to Russia in 2018, all goods had to be imported at higher cost *via* ferry or plane, contributing to a gradual increase in prices (Veselova 2016). With limited water available *via* the North Crimean Canal, agriculture in Crimea has also suffered tremendously, contributing to the rising cost of produce (Mokrushin 2017).

As physical and economic linkages between Crimea and the rest of Ukraine began to atrophy, the actions of Western states and organisations further isolated Crimea. Concerned about the safety of airspace over occupied Crimea, the International Civil Aviation Organisation and European Organisation for the Safety of Air Navigation closed air travel routes over Crimea, effectively prohibiting all non-Russian air travel to or from the peninsula.²¹ Adding to sanctions against Russian businesses and individuals for their roles in the annexation and further aggression against Ukraine, in December 2014 several

¹⁹‘Russia Fears Crimea Water Shortage as Supply Drops’, *BBC News*, 25 April 2014, available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27155885>, accessed 14 March 2018.

²⁰‘Energoblokada Kryma nachalas’—uchastniki “krymskogo maidana”’, *Krym.Realii*, 11 October 2015, available at: <https://ru.krymr.com/a/27300525.html>, accessed 14 March 2018.

²¹‘European Air Traffic Regulator Suspends Flights to Crimea’, *TASS*, 2 April 2014, available at: <http://tass.com/russia/726248>, accessed 14 March 2018.

Western states imposed further sanctions affecting Crimea directly, restricting investment in Crimea-based companies and prohibiting the importation or exportation of any goods, services or technologies to or from the peninsula (Rettman 2014).

The difficulties and inconveniences of travelling to Crimea have also caused a large drop in tourism, one of the region's most important industries. Ukrainians were a substantial contingent of Crimea's annual tourists before the annexation; however, deterred by the difficulties of reaching the region, the lack of financial services because of sanctions and pervasive Russian chauvinism, most chose to avoid the region beginning in the summer of 2014 (Liev 2014). For Russian tourists, options for travelling to Crimea before 2018 were limited to flights or the ferry, which together could not accommodate the millions of annual tourists who once arrived by car, train or bus. For the thousands of Crimeans working in the tourism industry or whose businesses rely on tourist spending, the severe drop in tourism after 2014 brought great financial hardship. In one example, a young couple now living in Lviv once managed a business renting cottages in the popular tourist destination of Alushta, but lost nearly all of their business once the flow of traffic from the Ukrainian mainland had ceased.²²

Restrictions imposed through international sanctions also meant that particular industries could no longer function in Crimea, forcing thousands out of work. For example, with all international flights prohibited, airlines offering services between Simferopol and any non-Russian destinations were forced to close and let their employees go, as was the case for one interviewee who lost her job at an airline operating flights between Simferopol and Istanbul.²³ Also suffering a tremendous blow was Crimea's burgeoning IT industry, which was completely paralysed by international sanctions and the disruption of financial services from Ukrainian banks. Thousands of well-paid jobs in the IT sector vanished overnight with the imposition of sanctions in December 2014, leaving many young, well-educated Crimeans—predominantly men—without work. Several of the Crimean IDPs I spoke with were employed in the IT sector, and one programmer from Sevastopol estimates that half of the city's 2,000 IT specialists had left Crimea by 2015 (Donchenko 2015).

Political, bureaucratic and technological complications associated with the transition from a Ukrainian to a Russian system of governance placed further financial strains upon many Crimeans. Ukrainian banks ceased to operate in Crimea shortly after the occupation began, leaving thousands without access to their accounts or savings (Batalov 2015). International sanctions prohibited most credit card companies from operating in Crimea, making it impossible for ordinary Crimeans to access their lines of credit.²⁴ The gradual restructuring and liquidation of various Ukrainian state-run agencies also left many unemployed in the wake of the annexation. One interviewee was let go from her job at a state-owned television and radio broadcasting agency once it was transferred to Russian state control. As she explained: 'a lot of people lost their jobs, not because they didn't

²² Anonymous interview with ethnic Russian man and woman, 30s, Lviv, 16 April 2016.

²³ Anonymous interview with Crimean Tatar woman, 20s, Kyiv, 1 October 2015.

²⁴ 'Visa i MasterCard bol'she ne rabotayut v Krymu', *BBC Russia*, 26 December 2014, available at: http://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2014/12/141226_vis_a_mastercard_crimea, accessed 14 March 2018.

support the annexation, but because everything was consolidated and reconfigured when the new authorities arrived'.²⁵

While severed connections to Ukraine and burdensome international sanctions spelled economic ruin for many Crimeans working in the private sector, state employees and pensioners actually saw an immediate increase in salaries and pensions once Russia took control of the region's economic and bureaucratic levers. In the words of one interviewee, 'Russia tried to buy the loyalty' of the Crimean populace.²⁶ However, as a result of Crimea's growing isolation, its reliance on costly imports from Russia, and the rapid devaluation of the ruble due mainly to sanctions and plunging oil prices, the cost of goods and services began skyrocketing towards the end of 2014, nullifying any financial advantages (Yavorskaya 2014). One interviewee noted, '2014 marked a moment when, immediately after the ruble was introduced, pensions and state salaries really increased, by a factor of three, so people started earning more, but hiding behind the increased salaries was the increase in prices. It all just evened out'.²⁷ Even for government employees and pensioners receiving inflated payments, the honeymoon did not last long. After an initial transition period, in January 2015 public sector payments were unexpectedly reduced to align with Russian-wide standards, surprising many who had grown accustomed to the occupiers' financial largesse.²⁸ Thus, by the beginning of 2015, the economic outlook had grown dim for many Crimeans; with no signs of an improved economic relationship with Ukraine or the lifting of sanctions, and with a promised bridge to Russia still years away, mounting financial pressures motivated many to consider relocating to the Ukrainian mainland. Put bluntly by one interviewee, 'life in Crimea is not very good now. The prices are really high, and the salaries are really low. It's dying little by little'.²⁹

Between economic isolation, sanctions that have hamstrung industry, the increasing price of goods, and stagnating salaries and pensions, Crimea's deteriorating economic situation is a determining factor behind internal displacement from the region. These adverse conditions are clearly the result of structural changes caused by the actions of a variety of external actors; yet the vast majority of Crimeans have remained despite these economic pressures, making it untenable to argue that such structural changes have triggered a pattern of 'forced' migration. Indeed, even IDPs suggest that Crimea's economic hardships were at least manageable, and that the decision to leave on economic grounds ultimately came down to a voluntary response. As one interviewee noted, 'I could have stayed in Crimea, because my salary was ok. I wouldn't say that I couldn't live in Crimea, though the prices, oh my god, they, I don't know, doubled or tripled, I guess. But I could survive'.³⁰ Hence, to varying degrees, structures of political violence and economic limitation are both causal factors in the internal displacement of Crimeans, yet the exercise of agency in choosing to migrate is also undeniable. This reality points to a complex imbrication of force and volition driving internal displacement from Crimea in patterns that may

²⁵ Anonymous interview with ethnic Russian woman, 50s, Lviv, 31 March 2016.

²⁶ Anonymous interview with Crimean Tatar man, 40s, Kyiv, 3 February 2016.

²⁷ Anonymous interview with ethnic Ukrainian woman, 40s, Kyiv, 24 February 2016.

²⁸ Anonymous interview with ethnic Russian man, 50s, Kyiv, 31 July 2017.

²⁹ Anonymous interview with ethnic Russian woman, 20s, Kyiv, 3 February 2016.

³⁰ Anonymous interview with Crimean Greek woman, 20s, Kyiv, 5 October 2015.

accurately be characterised as ‘mixed’ or falling along a continuum from ‘reactive’ to ‘proactive’ responses to structural changes following the annexation (Richmond 1988, 1993). However, these ambiguities appear most starkly in the way many Crimean IDPs express a general sense of discomfort, alienation and emotional distress as a result of the occupation and their opposition to it. As the same interviewee quoted above continued, ‘the question was not actually money, the question was mental and emotional. It’s more difficult than finances, for me personally’.³¹

Principled and emotional responses to the occupation

Stated frankly, life in Crimea has become taxing and uncomfortable for those who remain opposed to the occupying regime, and many of the IDPs I spoke with cited a general sense of uneasiness and unhappiness as the primary reason for their displacement—a cause untenably attributable to either force or voluntariness. ‘I didn’t feel unsafe’, one interviewee confided, ‘because you never know what will happen tomorrow. Maybe they will try to win you over or something, or maybe a war will start. But I wasn’t afraid that a war might start, because it was just... unpleasant [*nepriyatno*]’.³² Descriptions of this general ‘unpleasantness’ permeated many of my conversations with IDPs, albeit in different manifestations. I repeatedly encountered the trope that opposing the annexation or supporting Ukraine invited feelings of alienation, or a sense that one was no longer welcome in Crimea. ‘I supported the Euromaidan, and when all the events [of the annexation] began, it suddenly became clear to me that there is no place for me [in Crimea]’, recalled one interviewee, adding, ‘when they announced the results of the referendum, I understood that everything immediately became alien to me’.³³ As the rhetoric of Ukrainian aggression and Russia’s righteousness calcified into the accepted narrative of Crimea’s ‘reunification’ with Russia, those holding an alternative view were made to feel as though their perceptions were skewed and their opinions deviant. ‘You feel like you are the one who is not right in this region’, stated one interviewee in frustration. ‘If you have a different point of view, that means that you have a problem, you are the one who doesn’t understand something or who has the wrong position. It’s very difficult, because you can’t express your opinion.’³⁴

While some framed their feelings of alienation as resulting from their refusal or inability to accept the Kremlin’s narrative of events in Crimea, others attributed these feelings to the changes taking place around them. Many interviewees described a dark and ominous feeling in the air, an eerie shift in the mood that grew increasingly hostile. For some, simply moving through public spaces became a taxing emotional experience because of the constant visual reminders of Crimea’s new political reality, as symbols of Ukrainian sovereignty were replaced with the ubiquitous imagery of Russian hegemony. ‘It was so difficult to walk down the street and see portraits of Putin, for example, or Russian flags’,

³¹ Anonymous interview with Crimean Greek woman, 20s, Kyiv, 5 October 2015.

³² Anonymous interview with Crimean Tatar woman, 20s, Kyiv, 1 October 2015.

³³ Anonymous interview with ethnic Russian woman, 30s, Lviv, 25 March 2016.

³⁴ Anonymous interview with Crimean Greek woman, 20s, Kyiv, 5 October 2015.

recalled one interviewee. ‘It brought me to tears, really.’³⁵ In other cases, interviewees equated feelings of alienation with the substantive loss of freedoms accompanying Crimea’s transition to Russian control:

I felt free in Crimea, but when the new authorities arrived, I no longer had the feeling that Crimea is mine. I no longer felt free, I felt like a stranger, a stranger amongst my own people Before all of this I had been in my homeland, but when all this conflict started, I saw all these changes, how the people changed, and I just told myself that I can’t stay here. Crimea became alien to me.³⁶

The experience of sudden alienation without ever leaving one’s home was a common thread running through many interviews and conversations, but thousands of Crimeans who refused Russian citizenship on principle became literal aliens in the early months of the occupation. Following a well-documented trend of extraterritorial Russian ‘passportisation’ (Artman 2013), all Crimean residents were automatically issued Russian citizenship unless they filed a formal refusal during a short, one-month window of time.³⁷ Those who successfully refused and retained only their Ukrainian passports became foreigners in their own home, losing the basic rights and privileges that Ukrainian citizenship once guaranteed them. For Crimean IDPs, the condition of accepting Russian citizenship as a guarantor of basic rights clearly exemplifies an unacceptable ‘subsistence option’ for remaining in place under Bartram’s (2015) rubric of ‘rejected alternatives’, underscoring that a certain measure of force has helped push them towards a decision to leave. ‘To live in Crimea now without a Russian passport is to live in complete isolation from the world’, said one interviewee:

The consequences are real, because you can’t receive medical treatment without this passport, you will even be denied urgent care without a Russian passport. You can’t receive any government services. You can’t register as an individual business owner, so engaging in business is forbidden. You cannot reregister your apartment, you cannot sell or buy a home. Nothing is possible unless you have a Russian passport.³⁸

Whether or not they were legally considered aliens, the feeling of alienation in occupied Crimea was nearly universal amongst the IDPs with whom I spoke. For most IDPs under the age of 25 or so, this feeling followed from the perception that Crimea had become an altogether different and unfamiliar place after the annexation; for older generations, the new Crimea seemed dreadfully familiar, as though it had been dragged back into the Soviet era. ‘It’s the Soviet Union, in the worst possible way that that can be construed’, said one interviewee.³⁹ This ‘re-Sovietisation’ of Crimea has manifested culturally with the revival of Soviet-era symbols and slogans, and the celebration of the Soviet Union’s

³⁵Anonymous interview with ethnic Russian woman, 30s, Lviv, 30 March 2016.

³⁶Anonymous interview with Crimean Tatar woman, 30s, Drohobych, 6 April 2016.

³⁷Anonymous interview with ethnic Ukrainian woman, 40s, Kyiv, 24 February 2016.

³⁸Anonymous interview with ethnic Ukrainian woman, 40s, Kyiv, 24 February 2016.

³⁹Anonymous interview with ethnic Russian woman, 30s, Lviv, 25 March 2016.

most reviled figures and ideologies, including the cult of Stalin.⁴⁰ However, the nostalgic revival of Soviet culture and attitudes that seemingly delighted many Crimeans only repulsed and alienated others who eventually abandoned the region. One interviewee spoke of the anxiety she felt watching Crimea's apparent backslide into the dark days of the Soviet Union:

It was a great year for me in 1991 when the Soviet Union broke up. It was such an improvement. At last, it had all fallen apart, and we became free! ... For me, things were great and absolutely comfortable in Crimea, but then I understood that 'this' had once again returned. I started panicking from the very beginning; here's this empire again, and now it's sweeping over me.⁴¹

Comparisons between occupied Crimea and the Soviet Union extended beyond the superficial rehabilitation of Soviet-era symbols, slogans and personalities. Interviewees described how Russian officials in Crimea have constructed an alternative reality using tactics of misdirection and obfuscation drawn straight from the Soviet propaganda playbooks but updated for the twenty-first century (Darczewska 2014, p. 34; Snegovaya 2015). 'In general, the Soviet Union was not even founded on such propaganda', contended Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Dzhemilev during our interview, arguing further that, 'sure, the Soviet authorities also lied, but at least there was some value placed on truth. They just distorted the truth, but now they just make up [*vysasyvayut iz pal'tsa*] some facts to try to show that everything is fine. The level of deceit probably exceeds even Goebbels' propaganda'.⁴² The gaping disparities between observable reality and the Russian media's presentation of events in Crimea were maddening and demoralising, causing a certain mental and emotional anguish for some:

I had never encountered such a torrent of audacious lies, and I simply cannot tolerate such things. ... Here's an example: the Ukrainian television channels were shut down immediately, so only the Russian channels were available everywhere. All the Russian channels were saying that there are no Russian soldiers [in Crimea], that there are only Crimean self-defence forces, that military units are voluntarily taking down all the [Ukrainian] flags and swapping them [for Russian ones], but I personally saw [the Russian soldiers] with my own eyes, I saw them standing five metres away from me. ... This has a very strong impact on your psyche, so it was all very emotional for me.⁴³

I repeatedly encountered reference to the absence of 'air to breathe' [*net vozdukha*] as a metaphor for the lack of free speech in occupied Crimea. Here again, interviewees drew a direct comparison between Russian-occupied Crimea and the Soviet Union, contrasting the freedoms they enjoyed in independent Ukraine with the suffocating political atmosphere they associated with the Soviet and Russian regimes. 'A person who has breathed the air

⁴⁰For the performance of a well-received song glorifying the memory of Stalin in Sevastopol in August 2015, see 'Vernite Stalina Pesnia Sergeya Kurochkina Avgust 2015', You Tube, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BjHlcUuP-c0>, accessed 14 March 2018.

⁴¹Anonymous interview with ethnic Russian woman, 40s, Lviv, 30 March 2016.

⁴²Interview with Mustafa Dzhemilev, Kyiv, 26 October 2015.

⁴³Anonymous interview with ethnic Russian man, 40s, Kyiv, 28 October 2015.

of freedom falls into a strange condition: he has no desire to return to a totalitarian regime', one interviewee joked before stating more sternly that, 'for me, present-day Russia is the worst continuation of the Soviet Union, so I would not want to live there'.⁴⁴ When describing the measures necessary to protect one's self from prying eyes and ears in occupied Crimea, interviewees frequently referred to 'speaking in the kitchen', an old Soviet trope about the home as a private space and the last bastion of safe and free expression (Rethmann 1997, p. 773). One interviewee invoked this trope while explaining his family's decision to relocate to Lviv:

If we had pondered [our decision to leave Crimea] for too long, we probably would have just decided that we'd wear gasmasks and keep on living there, having conversations only 'in the kitchen' like before. That's the reality there. I went to meet with my neighbours, and we closed the window in the kitchen so the [other] neighbours couldn't hear what we were talking about. It's like all of this has returned again.⁴⁵

The rhetoric pushed by Russian authorities and the media regarding fabricated threats of Ukrainian 'fascism' and Crimean Tatar 'extremism' has helped whip up chauvinistic attitudes amongst some pro-Russian Crimeans, and many interviewees spoke of the discomfort they felt as their fellow Crimeans descended into aggressive ethno-nationalism. 'We decided to leave because the people were acting so aggressively', explained one interviewee who had remained vocally pro-Ukrainian as the occupation got underway:

I had never seen such aggression. I'm 28 years old, and I have lived 27 years of my life in Crimea, but I didn't recognise these people. They changed completely; they took such an aggressive position. I said to them, 'You all have some kind of virus, it's not going away'.⁴⁶

For others, such chauvinism was alarming not because they felt personally threatened, but because these attitudes ensnared their friends, family members, and people they once trusted and respected. Several interviewees conveyed a sense of shock, disbelief and disappointment in the vigour with which so many heralded Russia's subversive actions in Crimea, and in how suddenly the people close to them had transformed into Russian chauvinists. Crimea was already well-known for its pro-Russian streak (Kuzio 2007; Sasse 2007) but the eagerness with which some embraced even the most cynical aspects of Russian nationalism took others by surprise. Virtually all IDPs I spoke to had stories of falling out with friends or family members who were swept up in the hysteria, and many remained resentful. 'I absolutely love my Crimea, but at the same time I really don't like the people who live there', complained one interviewee:

I saw these people for 20 years and I see them now. Let's just say I was really disappointed. I have practically no friends left there; some of them left, and those who stayed I can't really call my friends

⁴⁴Anonymous interview with Crimean Tatar man, 50s, Kyiv, 4 February 2016.

⁴⁵Anonymous interview with ethnic Russian man, 40s, Lviv, 30 March 2016.

⁴⁶Anonymous interview with ethnic Ukrainian woman, 20s, Kyiv, 3 November 2015.

anymore. It's one thing to accept the Russian annexation of Crimea as inescapable, but it's another to turn into a Russian chauvinist. That's just sick.⁴⁷

As Crimea's social and political orders were being forcibly restructured around them with much of the general public's jubilant approval, those opposed to the annexation were left feeling as though their world had given way beneath their feet. Not only had they been alienated from Ukraine, to which tens of thousands of Crimeans remained loyal, but they felt increasingly alienated from their own communities within Crimea. Many felt as though they no longer belonged in a Crimea that had been so fundamentally altered, where social conventions had been thrown so far out of alignment with their own values and convictions. As one interviewee described, it felt as though Crimea had been converted into a 'madhouse', to which he and his like-minded compatriots were wrongfully committed.⁴⁸

Yet for all the stresses, anxieties and inconveniences of the occupation, it remains wholly possible to stay put, accept Russian citizenship and live a quiet life of resignation. 'In principle, if you just ignore all the political inconveniences, then yes, of course you can live there; there's air to breathe, the clouds keep passing overhead, people are still people. You can just get your new documents and keep on living', pondered one interviewee, reversing the oft-used metaphor regarding the breathability of Crimean air to underscore that literal oxygen, like other basic necessities, is of course still available in occupied Crimea. However, he continued:

But somehow, we cannot accept it. We don't want to just resign ourselves to this... Democracy disappears as soon as people show up with guns, because you can no longer speak up or discuss anything. The fact is, they just showed up with their guns, and that's it. You only have a few options; either you respond with your own weapons, you resign yourself to it, or you leave... We didn't want to stay and resign ourselves to the new reality, and this was a family decision that my wife and I made together. So, the only thing left to do was to leave.⁴⁹

'Not being able to accept' the occupation and the changes it heralded is an elegant and succinct summation of the motivations driving most internal displacement from Crimea. In one way or another, virtually all Crimean IDPs interviewed for this research found life under Russian occupation intolerable despite the fact that—except in some extreme cases—it was possible to stay put. However, to remain required accepting certain unfavourable 'subsistence options', which Crimean IDPs had rejected in favour of migration to mainland Ukraine in a process resembling 'forced' migration according to a 'rejected alternatives' theory; yet the very act of 'accepting' or 'rejecting' such options are inherently volitional, necessitating agency in response to structural changes and thereby obfuscating any distinction between Crimeans' internal displacement as either forced or voluntary.

⁴⁷ Anonymous interview with ethnic Ukrainian man, 30s, Kyiv, 4 February 2016.

⁴⁸ Anonymous interview with ethnic Russian man, 40s, Lviv, 30 March 2016.

⁴⁹ Anonymous interview with ethnic Ukrainian man, 40s, Kyiv, 6 November 2016.

Conclusion

While they make up only a small portion of Ukraine's total IDP population, it is important not to lose sight of Crimean IDPs and the conditions that have catalysed their internal displacement. Some are motivated by fear and safety concerns due to the rampant political, ethnic and religious persecution that has left hundreds arrested, beaten, murdered or disappeared without a trace in occupied Crimea. Others cite pragmatic financial considerations for their departure, as sanctions and severed connections to the outside world have had serious detrimental effects on Crimea's economy. However, the majority of Crimean IDPs report leaving because their opposition to the occupation has left them feeling uncomfortable, disillusioned or alienated from Crimea and its people. The cumulative effect of these developments is an environment wholly intolerable for tens of thousands of Crimeans who have fled from the occupied region.

Viewed in contrast to IDPs from Donbas, where displacement has mostly been compelled by structural forces of violent conflict and environmental destruction, Crimean IDPs present an opportune case study for critically interrogating the ontological binary of forced and voluntary migration frequently upheld in migration research and policy. While it lies beyond the scope of this essay to trace the more nebulous role of agency driving internal displacement from Donbas, both agency and structure are clearly discernible as drivers of internal displacement from Crimea. Russia's annexation and occupation of Crimea have ushered in drastic changes to the region's political, economic and social structures in ways that have pressured many to leave; yet with the exception of extreme cases where imminent threats of murder, torture or imprisonment constitute structural threats compelling the urgent departure of certain persecuted peoples, Crimean IDPs have wielded a wide degree of agency in responding to these structural changes, and many of those I interviewed maintained that leaving Crimea ultimately came down to a personal decision. The relative weight of structural forces or personal agency behind the calculus employed in reaching the decision to leave Crimea may vary greatly from person to person, bolstering the assessment that such migrant flows are characteristically 'mixed' (Van Hear *et al.* 2009) or composed of individual journeys falling along a continuum between 'reactive' and 'proactive' migration (Richmond 1988, 1993). A theory of 'rejected alternatives' (Bartram 2015) is also useful for understanding how the limitation of acceptable alternatives to migration may constitute a form of forceful displacement, and this paradigm is clearly present in occupied Crimea where peace, safety and prosperity hinge upon acquiescence to Russian authority and acceptance of Russian citizenship. Agency is nevertheless required in order to accept or reject such conditions and choose migration as a response to structural changes. The case of Crimean IDPs alerts us to the need to recognise the dialectical relationship between force and agency in how we understand the causes of migration.

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