

# Migration as Social Movement: Voluntary Group Migration and the Crimean Tatar Repatriation

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DESPITE THE PROLIFERATION of theories explaining migration behavior, one significant form of migration cannot be adequately analyzed with existing theoretical perspectives: voluntary group migration. The definition of this type of migration rests on two analytical distinctions. First, group migration differs from individual or household migration in the unit of analysis: self-recognizable groups, rather than individuals (or households), decide to migrate and undertake the move *collectively*. Whereas the anticipated benefits of individual migrations accrue to individuals and, in some cases, their households, group migration is motivated by expected benefits for the broader collectivity. Second, voluntary migration, unlike forced migration, results from a freely made choice by the migrating party rather than from external compulsion by human or natural forces. Typical forms of voluntary group migration include the voluntary repatriation of refugees to their country of origin, settler movements, and the relocation of ethnic groups to specific territories to make claims for national self-determination.

We demonstrate the distinctive characteristics of voluntary group migration that elude current theories and develop a theory regarding the conditions that typically produce this type of population flow. Because the decisionmaking and mobilization leading to voluntary group migration are inherently collective, social movement theory offers analytical tools that, combined with concepts offered by classical migration theories, help construct a promising theoretical framework. To illustrate our ideas, we discuss the contemporary resettlement of Crimean Tatars to their original homeland. We conclude with suggestions for further empirical and theoretical work on voluntary group migration.

## A blind spot in migration theory and refugee studies

Theoretical explanations of migration behavior have abounded in the last several decades (see Massey et al. 2005). The original neoclassical perspective views the decision to migrate as an outcome of a cost/benefit analysis: individuals migrate when their future-discounted expected lifetime earnings after migration exceed the cost of migrating, calculated with some adjustment for the probability of finding employment in the destination (e.g., Todaro 1969). Dissatisfaction with this approach led proponents of the “new economics of migration” to expand the level of decisionmaking to the household and introduce relative deprivation and risk spreading as motivations (e.g., Stark and Bloom 1985; Taylor 1999). Theories emphasizing the segmentation of labor markets in developed countries (Piore 1979) and the dynamics of the world system (Sassen 1988) focus on how macro-level economic and political developments shape migration flows. Other scholars emphasize how migrant social networks, associations, and other migration-promoting institutions help generate migration (Massey et al. 2005; Garip 2008). Another prominent theoretical concern deals with the processes whereby sending and receiving countries facilitate or inhibit population flows across their borders (Massey 1999; Hollifield 2000).

Despite distinctive emphases and conflicting accounts, these theories conceive of migration as undertaken after rational deliberation by individuals in order to realize some objective—whether individual economic gain, reunification with relatives, or hedging household assets against market failure. This is manifestly the case for neoclassical theory, which interprets migration as the result of individual rational calculation: people migrate in order to maximize lifetime earnings. The new economics of migration expands the unit of analysis to the household, but not to larger groups defined by shared locality, ethnicity, religion, nationality, clan, or tribe. In their emphasis on macro-level forces, structural theories and political approaches implicitly treat migration as a mechanical response by aggregates of individuals to larger structural forces or government policies. The social network perspective embeds individual or household decisions to migrate within a larger social context, but the choice to relocate is nonetheless made at the individual or household level. In short, although migration theories appear to cover a broad spectrum of migration decisionmaking levels, running from the individual to the household to macro-level institutions and processes, they share a potentially important blind spot: migration flows undertaken collectively by a group as a result of a group-level decision.

Of course, any collective action can be broken down into an aggregation of individual actions, so the question arises whether the distinction between group and individual-level migrations is valid. We maintain that

group migration differs from individual-level migration because group interests rather than individual interests provide a shared motivation and can even constitute the group as such. Moreover, the decision to migrate is made by the collectivity—not by individuals or households—either as a seemingly spontaneous reaction to exogenous pressures or through explicit and visible collective decisionmaking.

The best-known example of collective migration is the flight of refugees from political violence or persecution. The 1951 UN Refugee Convention defines a refugee as anyone who, “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country” (UN Refugee Agency 1951). Because refugees generally arise when a particular group is persecuted, refugee flight is usually a collective phenomenon. It is undertaken at roughly the same time by many members of a group who are motivated by a similar goal of escaping a perilous situation in their current place of residence.

The refugee literature offers case studies, descriptions of particular refugee streams, and reports based on aggregate data. Attempts to provide theoretical generalizations tend to focus on the conditions that give rise to refugees, their impact on the host countries and on regional security, and the role of states and international organizations, especially the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in trying to protect them, regulate their treatment, and alleviate the pressures they put on their host societies (Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo 1989; Hakovirta 1993; Wood 1994; Keely 1996). Studies devote little attention to how refugee groups reach the decision to flee. Thus, this body of scholarship implicitly treats refugee flight as a “natural” reaction to external exigencies rather than a group decision.

In sum, migration theories have little to say about migrations that are undertaken by groups as a result of group-level decisionmaking. On the other hand, refugee studies recognize migration as a group-level undertaking, but they offer no analysis of the decisionmaking that leads to flight from peril because such migration is usually not voluntary. These studies offer various accounts of the factors that encourage refugee groups to repatriate voluntarily to their country of origin. But these accounts, to which we return below, devote insufficient attention to the group-level processes that contribute to the collective decision to repatriate.

### **Filling in the blanks: Voluntary group migration**

These observations suggest a typology of migration forms based on two criteria, as shown in Figure 1: the unit of analysis (type of actor and level of decisionmaking) and the degree of compulsion. We recognize that the “unit

**FIGURE 1** Typology of migration by unit of analysis (rows) and degree of compulsion (columns)

Unit of analysis	Voluntary	Forced
Individuals	1. Economic migration, family reunification	2. Slavery, exile
Groups	3. Settler movements, voluntary repatriation	4. Collective flight from persecution, violence, military conflict, or natural disasters (refugees); mass deportation; forced resettlement

of analysis" in migration studies is hardly a dichotomous category, yet for analytical purposes it is helpful to distinguish between two modal patterns: individuals (including households) and groups.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in terms of external pressure to migrate, population flows arguably fall on a continuum extending from completely voluntary decisions as, for example, in cases of skilled professionals who migrate to take more advantageous jobs, to forced relocations, such as coercive deportations and repatriations. We recognize some fluidity and ambiguity between these two extremes: for example, labor migration can be undertaken on a completely voluntary basis or under the perceived threat of starvation as the likely alternative. We maintain, however, that the distinction between voluntary and forced migration suffices for the task of conceptualization.

As we noted, migration theory focuses overwhelmingly on voluntary individual migration, while refugee studies mainly examine forced group migration. Forced individual migration may take the form of individual slavery (for example, human trafficking for labor exploitation or sex trafficking) and individual exile. The study of these phenomena in the contemporary world takes us into the realm of international crime networks (Kyle and Koslowski 2001; Shelley 2010) and the political history of dissent and opposition in particular countries.

Our interest here is in cell three in Figure 1: voluntary group migrations. These have the following characteristics: 1) they are undertaken by a clearly defined, self-identified group, 2) they result from a collective decision in the absence of external compulsion, and 3) they are perceived by the migrants as benefiting the group as a whole. One historically prevalent form that voluntary group migrations have taken is collective settler movements, such as the migration of Calvinist communities from Europe to the New World, the westward migration of Mormons in the United States, or the "return" movement of freed American slaves to Liberia in the early-to-mid-nineteenth century. Today, the most common form is the voluntary repatriation of refugee communities. Voluntary repatriations are undertaken not by compulsion,

but as a result of the more or less freely taken decisions by refugee groups to return to their country of origin. Although individual members can decide to return to the homeland on their own (Stein and Cuny 1994), repatriations are often undertaken by organized groups of refugees with the active assistance of national and supranational authorities.

An often contentious literature on repatriation emerged within refugee studies during the 1980s and 1990s, partly in response to the emphasis of UNHCR at the time on repatriation as the most “durable” solution to the growing problem of refugees and the corresponding waves of mass repatriations in Africa, Asia, and eventually Latin America (Zetter 1988; Rogge and Akol 1989; Zeager and Bascom 1996; Whitaker 2002).<sup>2</sup> Initial studies examined the obstacles to successful repatriation and considered which policies enhanced the probability of successful outcomes. Advocates for repatriation, however, often took for granted that refugee communities wanted to return to their homelands (Allen and Morsink 1994): the interesting question was how best to bring about fulfillment of their wishes. Critics challenged the emphasis on “voluntary” repatriation because it often serves the interests of host societies and other geopolitical objectives rather than the interests of refugees themselves (Harrell-Bond 1989; Warner 1994; Pottier 1996; Hathaway 1997). As Bakewell (2002: 47) puts it: “Repatriation is often seen as the optimum outcome for refugee situations as if by definition and the ‘obvious’ thing for refugees to do. The fact of their wanting to return is taken for granted so their motivation for repatriating does not necessarily arise as a question.”

The recognition that the “myth of return” is not a natural and inevitable belief shared by all refugees spurred studies analyzing variation *within* such diverse groups as Hutus in Tanzania (Malkki 1992), Iraqis in London (Al-Rasheed 1994), Tigrayans in Sudan (Hammond 1999), Cypriots in Greece (Zetter 1999), Mozambicans in South Africa (Dolan 1999), and Bosnians throughout Europe (Black 2002) in adherence to this myth and in the related conceptions of “home.” As key sources of variations, this research points to differing experiences in the country of origin, family traditions and generational differences, variations in the extent of integration in the host society, and whether individuals are concentrated spatially in camps or physically dispersed. Differences in access to information about conditions in the home country also shape individual-level variation within refugee groups in decisions about repatriation (Koser 1997; Walsh, Black, and Koser 1999).

As important as these factors are in shaping attitudes toward and decisions about repatriation of individual migrants, this literature does not examine the potential role of collective mobilization in producing variations across different refugee groups. In some cases, there is little impetus for repatriation at the group level. Bakewell (2002), for instance, shows how in the 1960s many refugees from Angola quickly assimilated to their new vil-

lages in Zambia, with the help of supportive co-ethnic communities and local leaders. They exhibited diverse conceptions of national identity and degrees of emotional attachment to Angolan land: among the minority who desired to return to Angola, material rather than symbolic motives predominated. Rogge (1994: 31) observes that there are many examples of refugee groups who refuse to repatriate even though all conditions for doing so appear favorable. A key theoretical task should be to analyze the circumstances whereby *groups collectively decide* whether or not to undertake repatriation (or any other form of group migration). How do groups reach a decision that they wish to return to their country of origin? What factors facilitate a positive or negative decision?

Other case studies consider refugee repatriations where considerations of political identity motivated refugee groups to return to their homelands. For example, Hendrie (1991: 215) describes why some 200,000 Tigrayan refugees repatriated spontaneously to northern Ethiopia in the mid-1980s despite discouragement by UNHCR and continuing military conflict there: "The determination to recover their identity as self-governing participants in a popular revolution was a crucial underlying factor in the refugees' determination to leave relief camps in Sudan." Hendrie takes this identity of the refugees for granted, however, rather than examine how it was developed and sustained during exile.

In contrast, Makanya's (1994) account of the mass return of refugees to Zimbabwe following the Lancaster Agreement that allowed it emphasizes how the political and social efforts of resistance leaders in the camps in Mozambique helped sustain the refugees' motivation to return to help build a new society, once given the opportunity. Wilson (1994) analyzes the role of coordination through social networks that led to a rapid repatriation of Jehovah's Witnesses exiled from Mozambique in the late 1980s. Stepputat (1994) describes how the notion of communal attachment to "the land" was actively produced by an organization that emerged among Guatemalan refugees who had been exiled to Mexico for over a decade. The organization constructed an "imagined return community" of formerly unrelated individuals who not only insisted that their return take on a communal character but demanded, ultimately successfully, that the Guatemalan government meet certain conditions that would help reinforce this community once they returned. Analyzing the same repatriation case, Krznaric (1997) identifies the internal political struggles among the refugees that belie the impression that the returnees are a cohesive community with the shared interests and interpretations of their situation.

These studies point to the active construction of a shared sense of group membership by social actors and institutions (networks), the symbolic connection of the group to a specific territory, internal political conflicts, and evolving, contradictory interests within the migrating group as centrally

important social processes that accompany and influence the collective goal of migration. They highlight the social process whereby a group collectively determines whether it prefers to migrate or stay in the new territory. Moreover, the collective decision to migrate is only the first step in the migration process: once a group reaches a collective decision, it may still have to overcome economic and/or political obstacles in order for the migration to take place. However, these studies usually limit their concern to explanations of the cases at hand.<sup>3</sup> Our goal, on the other hand, is to outline a theory of voluntary group migration by formulating these ideas more systematically and integrating them into a broader framework.

### Social movement theories

Because the decision to undertake a group migration and the migration itself are, by definition, group-level processes, they should be analyzed using the theories of collective action and social movements. We can reasonably posit that in most cases some members of the group will have an interest in migrating while others will have an interest in staying put: the success of one or the other faction at mobilizing the larger community behind its interests will determine whether the group ultimately decides to migrate. The articulation and contestation of the common goal, mobilization of movement constituents around it, and its translation into collective action lie at the core of social movements scholarship (della Porta and Diani 2006; Tarrow 2011). The notion of framing—or “the struggle over the production of mobilizing and countermobilizing ideas and meanings” (Benford and Snow 2000: 612)—relies on Goffman’s (1974) conception of the frame as a specific lens through which a given situation is interpreted. Social movement theorists examine how shared goals born of historical and political contexts crystallize, through negotiation between social actors within a movement, into forms that later get adopted by the majority of movement participants.

The notion of framing accentuates the diversity of interests and range of divisions within groups who are considering migration. Once a collective goal has been negotiated, the constituents of the movement are mobilized in a “call to arms.” Mobilization and collective action are shaped by the availability of resources and the political opportunity for action. Resource availability entails the presence of material resources for the spread of information, recruitment, and action, as well as nonmaterial resources, such as cohesive ties among members, potential symbolic rewards for followers, and strong, charismatic leadership (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Tilly 1978). The effectiveness, timing, and form of a social movement also depend on the political situation and the opportunities it provides for collective action: domestic political institutions, cultural factors, the role of key actors (allies and adversaries of the movement), and the international political context.

Changes in all of these can either create openings for collective action or close off emerging opportunities (Eisinger 1973; Guigni 2004; Kriesi 2004). In fact, a favorable political situation can lead to a successful outcome even if the level of mobilization of movement participants is relatively low, and vice versa (Kitschelt 1986).

To illustrate how these ideas can be incorporated into a theory of voluntary migration, we examine the case of the Crimean Tatars. The Tatars' return to Crimea in the 1990s after a nearly 50-year exile in Central Asia yields insight on within-group decisionmaking regarding migration, because unlike the case in many refugee repatriation situations, no external forces (such as UNHCR or host government authorities) were pressuring the group to return to its original homeland. The leaders of the movement to return to the Crimea cultivated social networks and, eventually, diaspora support as resources for promoting collective identity, and they took advantage of emerging domestic and international political opportunities to achieve their goal of mass return migration.

### The Crimean Tatars

Crimean Tatars are descendants of the Mongols of the Golden Horde, who swept across Eurasia in the fourteenth century, and of the native populations (Scythians, Sarmatians, Cimmerians, Alans, Greeks, Italians, Goths, Adyghe) who occupied Crimea before the arrival of Slavs.<sup>4</sup> In 1441 Tatars established the Crimean Khanate, a pre-feudal Muslim state that existed on the territory of the Crimea for over three centuries. While some scholars emphasize the Khanate's dependence on the Ottoman Empire that used it as an instrument of aggression against the Slavic populations of Poland, Ukraine, and Russia (Nadinsky 1951; Butkevych 1992), others argue that the Khanate's advanced governance and fiscal structures made it a fully developed pre-modern state (Vardys 1971; Fisher 1981; Uehling 2004: 32).

Crimean Tatars lost control over Crimea in 1783, when Catherine the Great annexed the peninsula and made it part of the Russian Empire. Crimean Tatar sources offer different estimates of the Khanate's population before annexation, ranging from 3.5 to 6 or even 7 million people (Williams 2001: 68–69). Following the annexation, Tatars coexisted with Russian and Ukrainian inhabitants of the peninsula for over a century, surviving revolutions, wars, and ideological upheavals alongside their Slavic neighbors. During the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the civil war that followed, Crimean Tatars supported the Bolsheviks. The early Soviet leadership rewarded this loyalty by granting them an autonomous ethnic republic on the territory of Crimea.

The favorable disposition of Soviet authorities was short-lived. After World War II Crimean Tatars became one of eight ethnic groups who were (at various points in time) forcibly deported en masse to the remote areas of

Central Asia (see Kreindler 1986).<sup>5</sup> Accused of cooperating with the German occupiers, almost immediately after the Crimea was retaken by the Soviet army the entire Crimean Tatar population, consisting of some 194,000 people, was deported in May 1944; by most accounts, more than half the deportees perished during the journey and the first months in exile. Some scholars call the deportation genocide (e.g., Pohl 2000).

With the weakening of the Soviet state in the late 1980s and its demise at the end of 1991, roughly 90 percent of Crimean Tatars moved back to southern Ukraine, after almost 50 years of exile in Central Asia. Thus, the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization estimates that between 1995 and 2005, some 260,000 Crimean Tatars returned to the Peninsula (Ponsonby 2005). To fully understand the nature of the repatriation to the Crimea, one needs to consider the circumstances that accompanied it. After a lengthy exile with no realistic prospect of return, the majority of Crimean Tatars could have been expected to consider Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tadzhikistan, and Kyrgyzstan their new homelands. By the mid-1980s about 60 percent of the eventual repatriates had been born in Central Asia and had never even visited Crimea.

Accounts differ over the extent of material deprivation and local hostility Crimean Tatars experienced in exile. The first decade of exile was undoubtedly the hardest. Following the journey from Crimea, Tatars had great difficulty obtaining housing, securing employment, and restoring their documents. They were left moneyless and faced a lack of institutional infrastructure and local populations influenced by the charges spread by the Soviet regime of Tatars' cooperation with German occupiers.<sup>6</sup>

With time, however, the conditions of life in exile improved significantly. According to Allworth (1998b: 255), after Khrushchev's government exonerated the victims of Stalin's repressions in 1956, "many Crimean Tatars gradually gained sympathy and friendship from surrounding Kazakhs, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and others." Williams (2001: 392–400) finds evidence of close friendships, intermarriages, and adoption of Crimean Tatar children by the native Uzbeks, Kazakhs, and Tajiks. Although initially Crimean Tatars mainly held manual jobs in industry and agriculture, over time many moved into better-paid and professional positions. While ethnic tensions periodically flared throughout Central Asia in the 1970s and 1980s,<sup>7</sup> particularly in Uzbekistan, scholars generally agree that by the late 1980s, the condition of deportees was relatively improved (Allworth 1998b: 251–260). Consistent with this picture of generally acceptable conditions of life in exile, in 1996 the UNHCR identified only 4,500 Crimean Tatar repatriates (out of roughly 250,000) as "refugee-like" because they had fled violent conflict in Tajikistan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan, (Shevel 2011: 170).

In addition to leaving behind jobs, houses, and friends and moving into a foreign land without guarantees of future employment or access to hous-

ing, repatriated Crimean Tatars could also expect resentment among local authorities and the current population of the peninsula. Following the deportation of Tatars, Crimea had been repopulated by Russians and Ukrainians, who received plots of land from the state, built houses, and developed their community in the place that was now their lawful home. Crimean Tatars reasonably expected their claims on land would collide with the rights of this Slavic population.

Given the relative stability of life in exile and the predictable difficulty of relocation, what made over 250,000 people leave their jobs, homes, and acquaintances and move en masse to an unfamiliar territory without any security in regard to resettlement and employment? According to opinion polls conducted among the repatriates, the main motive for returning to Crimea was the popular desire to “return to the roots” and the shared conviction that the cultural and spiritual development of Crimean Tatars could only take place in what they considered their historic motherland on the Crimean peninsula. They viewed migration to Crimea as their natural right, or even obligation, and the slogan “Homeland or Death” was widely adopted by deportees (Payin 1992; Uehling 2004: 199–201).

A closer look at the history of the Crimean Tatar exile reveals that, like any other status claim, the assertion of a “primordial” territorial connection of Crimean Tatar people to the Crimean Peninsula has a specific time and context of genesis. Historians demonstrate that the formulation of the Tatars’ status as native people of the Crimean peninsula was directly associated with the foundation of the Crimean Tatar Nationalist Movement in 1956 (Allworth 1998b). In articulating the indigenous status of Crimean Tatars on the Crimean peninsula, the group’s leadership pursued two concrete goals: to mobilize Crimean Tatars around the idea of repatriation, and to harness material and symbolic support from domestic and international political actors. As Uehling (2004: 135) puts it, “by casting a particular glance on the past, and ‘speaking’ with the state, participants in the movement gradually created an atmosphere in which return seemed self-evident, even obligatory. In many ways, the remembering the movement endorsed became a form of collective action.”

### **The Crimean Tatar Nationalist Movement**

Although some scholars trace the roots of the Crimean Tatar Nationalist Movement to the period of the Crimean War (Altan 1997: 1–2), the movement’s present-day structure and goals date from 1956, when Nikita Khrushchev gave his famous “Secret Speech” to the Twentieth Party Congress debunking Stalin’s cult of personality and exonerating the victims of his policies. The open criticism of Stalin and the warming of the political climate within the Soviet Union provided a political opening for the emergence of a con-

solidated and politically self-conscious group of Crimean Tatar activists who used non-violent, legalistic means to advocate for ethnic unity and demand compensation for past injustices (Uehling 2004: 140).

From the Movement's inception in the 1950s, its leaders focused on uniting Crimean Tatars, who were dispersed throughout Central Asia. They purposefully mobilized the entire population of deportees around the ideas of unjust exile, their right to the Crimean homeland, and, eventually, the goals of returning to Crimea and gaining some degree of sovereignty on the peninsula. The centralized structure of the movement and the reliance of its leadership on lower-level groups created a basis for truly collective decision-making and, eventually, the voluntary group migration of Crimean Tatars.<sup>8</sup>

The Movement was based on initiative groups that operated in most Central Asian villages and towns with Tatar settlers. These groups consisted of active members in direct contact with the Movements' leaders who organized regular meetings of the Crimean Tatar community, during which they clarified the goals of the Movement, collected money to fund the Movement's delegates to Moscow in support of repatriation, and gathered signatures for petitions and letters to Soviet authorities.

Mustafa Jemilev, Ayse Seymuratova, Set-Amza, Marat Ymerov, and other Crimean Tatar activists conducted extensive research on the Crimean Tatars' ethnic origins, the era of the Khanate, Tatars' participation in World War II, and the deportation. They then shared their knowledge with the broader population through public lectures, cultural events, informal discussions during meetings of initiative groups, and written petitions (Fisher 1978; Uehling 2004: 142–143). Movement leaders did not limit their informational campaign to political speeches and legalistic arguments. They wrote songs and poetry about the lost motherland, organized memorial celebrations, staged performances about the events of 1944, and held public history readings to educate young Crimean Tatars about their origins and the sufferings of their ancestors.

The centralized organizational structure of the Nationalist Movement, whose leaders and elites relied on initiative groups that, in their, turn elicited support from individual households, gave women a special role in the Movement. According to Uehling (2004: 148–149), the nationalist project of Crimean Tatars was organized around neighborhood and kin-based networks, civic organizations, and schools—all of which were accessible to women. Williams (2001: 412–413) notes that family members, particularly mothers and grandmothers, played key roles in preserving the unique identity of deportees through systematic observation of customs and rituals honoring their Crimean Tatar cultural heritage.

Within Crimean Tatar families, the memory of the deportation became the "chosen drama" and the "communal grievance" that provided a basis for the politicization of the exiled community (Williams 2001: 414–415).

Although the active core of the Movement was not large, it had a wide base within the community that formed as a result of the education-based mobilization efforts of its leadership. Grass-roots mobilization took full advantage of the oral tradition of parental narration of history in Crimean Tatar families. This customary story-telling socialized the youngest Crimean Tatars, who had no first-hand memory of the deportation, thereby politicizing their understanding of recent history and instilling the vision of the Crimean peninsula as the only place where Crimean Tatars could fully realize their potential. By turning children and women into agents of political struggle, the Movement's activists ensured effective mobilization when the time for mass repatriation arrived in the early 1990s.

The Crimean Tatars' letter-writing campaign was one of the most extensive of its kind among Soviet-era dissident movements. Initiative group leaders encouraged Tatars to write down the stories of their families and send their letters to Communist Party headquarters in Moscow, requesting recognition of injustices experienced by their relatives. According to underground (*samizdat*) press estimates, over 4 million individual and collective letters were posted by Crimean Tatars in the two decades after the campaign started in the mid-1950s (Uehling 2004: 140–141).

Another element of the written appeal strategy of the Movement, which had the added benefit of activating the population of deportees, involved signing petitions requesting acknowledgment that the deportation had been unjust. The entire population of deportees was mobilized to participate in this aspect of the campaign. For instance, a 1966 petition to the Twenty-Third Party Congress was signed by over 120,000 Crimean Tatars, almost the entire adult population in Central Asia at the time (Sheehy 1971). According to a Nationalist Movement activist (Aydin 2007: 10), "they began writing petitions mostly for their own people, not for the authorities." Encouraging community members to read and copy these petitions by hand and with typewriters, Movement leaders reinforced grievances and sentiments of entitlement to compensation for past injustices among the deportees.

More than 3 million signatures were collected in support of petitions for restitution sent to the Soviet authorities: on average, 15 signed letters for every person of Crimean Tatar descent living in Central Asia. By engaging the entire population from the beginning, the Crimean Tatar leadership legitimized the Tatars' demands for the return to their homeland in the eyes of the Movement's constituents.

Subsequently, these collectively experienced grievances and feelings of entitlement for compensation and retribution were reinforced through protests and demonstrations. Crimean Tatars regularly marched in the capitals of Central Asian republics and in Moscow to show their determination to stand behind their claims and their readiness to act on them when presented with a political opportunity. Annually, on the anniversary of the deportation, the

Movement organized large demonstrations assembling the vast majority of Crimean Tatars in exile.

### The collective decision to return to Crimea

While the Nationalist Movement focused during its early years on raising Crimean Tatars' awareness of their bargaining power vis-à-vis the Soviet government, in the late 1960s the idea of actual return became central. This development was brought about by a change in the political opportunity structure. In the fall of 1967 the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union granted Crimean Tatars the right to leave their places of exile and resettle anywhere in the Soviet Union except Crimea. Nationalist Movement activists recognized that this decree could lead to further territorial dispersal of Tatars. As the Crimean Tatars spread throughout Central Asian countries, where their assimilation into the native populations would be eventually unavoidable, it was feared that they would lose their distinctive ethnic and national identity. Movement leaders concluded that a collective return to the Crimean homeland was essential to preserve the group's unity and identity.

The feelings of shared grievances developed by the Movement over several decades were channeled by the leadership in such a way that group migration to the Crimea appeared as the natural solution to their frustrations. Now that modes of mobilization were well established and grievances were internalized by the Crimean Tatar community, it was easy to frame return as the "natural" expression of the collective will of the Crimean Tatar people. We interpret the decision to return to Crimea as a truly collective one, felt as a shared obligation and perceived as a "call of blood" for everyone of Crimean Tatar descent residing in Central Asia.

While the desire to return to Crimea was understood in primordial and naturalistic terms by most Crimean Tatars, the leadership of the movement often employed nationalistic claims to harness external support for the repatriates. Preservation of the group's integrity was a necessary condition not only for the survival of Crimean Tatar people; it was also the basis for future opportunities for their leaders to acquire power. The resettlement in Crimea and establishment of some degree of formal political autonomy of Crimean Tatars on the peninsula promised significant political and material benefits to the Movement's leaders.

By the late 1960s the Crimean Tatar leadership had constructed an elaborate argument, with various archeological, historical, and legal components, for the restoration of ethnic-national rights on the territory of the peninsula. Movement activities expanded to mass demonstrations and cooperation with other Soviet dissident groups. While these actions provoked repressive reaction by the authorities, they also strengthened and legitimized the shared myth of the Crimean Tatars' primordial connection to the penin-

sula. A statement by Mustafa Jemilev, long-time leader of the Crimean Tatar Nationalist Movement, illustrates how political elites articulated the primacy of repatriation in terms of ethnic survival:

Political, economic, spiritual and cultural rebirth of the Crimean Tatar people is only possible on the Crimean land. This land is a cradle of our beliefs, traditions and rich cultural heritage. Separated from the Land we are nothing but a bunch of homeless misers. The Land is a source of our power—let us not allow Stalin's followers to deprive us of what is rightfully ours! (*Avdet* 1992).

Until the advent of Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* in the mid-1980s and the eventual demise of the Soviet Union, the Movement's activists sought to convince the government of their rights and entitlements. Movement leaders also actively established contacts with human rights organizations throughout the world and drew support from overseas diasporas. The Crimean Tatar diaspora in the United States, for instance, became involved around 1969, when transcripts of the Tashkent Trial of Crimean Tatar Dissidents were smuggled to the West. The National Center for Crimean Tatars, also known as the Crimea Foundation, was established by Crimean Tatars in Brooklyn, New York to disseminate information about atrocities attributed to the Soviet government and the deportees' struggle for repatriation through informational events, publications, demonstrations, and letter-writing campaigns to US Congressmen, Senators, and even Presidents (Altan 2001). The extradition of Ayse Seymuratova to the United States further enlivened the efforts of the diaspora with an influx of new information about Crimean Tatars' desire for repatriation (Altan 1996).

The New York diaspora was joined by expatriates in Turkey and West Germany in symbolic support of the Movement through demonstrations, petitions, and dissemination of information. The Movement also received financial support from the diaspora, particularly during the actual repatriation in the 1990s. In an interview Mustafa Jemilev said he had established a close rapport during his forced exile with Crimean Tatars in Turkey and that they provided significant material support to the Movement in the final years of the Soviet regime (interview we conducted with M. Jemilev, summer 2005).

The Movement also appealed to various representatives of civil society, media, and the intellectual elite in the Soviet Union, aligning themselves with All-Union Human Rights members and other dissident groups (Chervonnaia 1992: 108). Pyotr Grigorenko and Sergey Kosterin, prominent Soviet-era human rights activists, became strong supporters of the Movement (Aydin 2007: 26).

Like other human rights movements within oppressive regimes, the Crimean Tatar Nationalist Movement repeatedly evoked international law in its quest for recognition and compensation for past injustices. The Movement's leaders and supporters sent numerous letters and petitions to the United Na-

tions, to human rights organizations outside the Soviet Union, and to the governments of Western democracies. As argued by Aydin (2007), the mid-1970s marked the beginning of the “transnationalization” of the Crimean Tatar Nationalist Movement. This stage culminated in 1986, during the Reykjavik Summit, when Ronald Reagan personally asked Mikhail Gorbachev to release Mustafa Jemilev and three other detained dissidents from prison.

As the Movement grew stronger and the Soviet regime started to falter, arrests and trials were highly publicized, and hunger strikes and other forms of nonviolent protest became common tactics in the struggle for international recognition. The leaders of the Movement were cast as martyr figures who endured personal deprivation for the sake of the group’s well-being. The trials and hunger strikes endured by Jemilev made him a legendary leader and a role model for the Crimean Tatar repatriates. In 1998 he was awarded a Nansen Medal by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and he was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 (Busdachin 2011). The results of the transnationalization of the Crimean Tatar Nationalist Movement became evident during the 1990s. By 1999, 13 foreign-funded nongovernmental organizations had opened offices in Crimea dedicated to working on Crimean Tatar resettlement and reintegration, including the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, the Council of Europe, UNHCR, and the Open Society Institute.

The long-term efforts of grass-roots mobilization, persistent encouragement, legitimacy-building, and solicitation of support for the Crimean Tatar Nationalist Movement paved the way for the mass relocation of the Crimean Tatars once the opportunity arose. Repatriation began in 1989. Nearly 200,000 Crimean Tatars moved to Crimea within the next seven years. Although the opening created by Gorbachev’s political liberalization was the proximate cause of the migration, its mass character would have been inconceivable without decades of prior efforts on the part of the Movement’s leaders (Izmirlı and Ozcelik 2012).

### Repatriation

After the initial mass entry of repatriates into Crimea in the first half of the 1990s, the intensity of the migrant flow subsided. By 2000, another 60,000 exiled Crimean Tatars had returned to the peninsula, with a population of Tatar ethnicity of approximately the same size (from 200,000 to 300,000 people) still living outside it (Parliamentary Assembly 2000). The repatriates arrived to a mixed reception from local populations, a large proportion of which originated from post-1945 Russian and Ukrainian settlers, and from the Ukrainian government and from local governments. The ethnic Russians and Ukrainians living in Ukraine feared losing their property to the claims of Tatars, leading to reports of hostile reactions and discrimination (UNHCR 1998; Ponsonby 2005; Prytula 2007). In many Crimean settlements, however,

Tatars integrated quickly into the life of the local communities. Local Crimean government authorities adopted uniformly antagonistic policies toward the repatriates, while the national Ukrainian government's policies were initially ambivalent and later became supportive (Shevel 2001). The Ukrainian government devoted the equivalent of tens of millions of US dollars to the relocation and reintegration of repatriates, eventually in close cooperation with UNHCR. For instance, UNHCR's Program of Resettlement and Accommodation of the Deported Crimean Tatars, begun in 2002, allocated funds to provide temporary and permanent housing and social infrastructure and to offer legal assistance to the repatriates. The Ukrainian government continues to support the resettlement of deportees with programs like Social Support and Adaptation of Crimean Tatar Youth. In 2008 estimated government spending on the social needs of Crimean Tatars exceeded the equivalent of US\$8 million (Korsynsky 2009).

The political and socioeconomic integration of Tatars in Crimea was hampered by the fact that the standard of living was lower in Central Asia than in Ukraine: for example, proceeds from the sale of the Tatars' homes in Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan were inadequate to obtain comparable housing in Crimea (UNHCR 1998). According to official Ukrainian sources cited by Shevel (2011: 168), in 1999 over half the Tatar repatriates had no permanent housing, 60 percent were unemployed, and 73 percent of their settlements lacked running water, 97 percent gas, and 90 percent paved roads. In addition, because of complications related to their status and Ukraine's citizenship laws, by 1997 about 108,000 of the repatriates lacked Ukrainian citizenship, limiting their access to health care, education, jobs, and political representation. This problem was largely resolved by 2001, however, with a change in Ukraine's citizenship law, prompted in part by a campaign undertaken by UNHCR. These challenging economic and political conditions show that economic motives were not the impetus for Crimean Tatars to return. Although Crimean Tatars in Ukraine continue to report cases of discrimination, they have made significant progress in claiming their national and cultural rights on the Crimean Peninsula (Uehling 2004: 199–231; Milli Firka 2010). By 2009, Crimean Tatars constituted some 15 percent of the population of Crimea. They have their own governing bodies and representation in the Parliament of Ukraine that is roughly proportional to their population size (Korsynsky 2009). Twenty years after repatriation began, Crimean Tatars have several newspapers, an independent television channel, and over 15 schools with instruction in their native language.

### **Toward a theory of voluntary group migration as a social movement**

Social movement theory provides insights into how the movement for Crimean Tatar repatriation resulted in a massive voluntary group migration of

Tatars in the early post-Soviet period. The decision to migrate was made on a collective level, even though the costs of relocation were borne by individual households and supported by outside aid. The repatriation campaign satisfies Diani's (2003, 2004) criteria defining a social movement: it involves conflict with clearly identified opponents, and the collectivity is characterized by a shared identity and strong informal ties. Based on the Crimean Tatar case, we can outline a theory consisting of four sets of factors that facilitate voluntary group migration.

1) *Powerful social actors—usually an elite segment of the migrating group—with a strong interest in migration.* In the Crimean Tatar case, the dedicated work of the leadership was indispensable for the successful outcome of repatriation. For decades, Crimean Tatar activists engaged in framing the movement's goal in terms of a mass return to the Crimean homeland. Starting with diagnostic framing, the leadership created grievances among the relatively content population of Crimean Tatars, and, once an opportunity arose, offered a prognostic framing of repatriation as a solution to popular discontent. Furthermore, Crimean Tatar leaders engaged in the active mobilization of resources that made the relocation feasible through motivational framing within the Crimean Tatar population and by attracting political support in the domestic and international arenas.

2) *Symbolic push and pull factors for migration.* The idea and appeal of a collective relocation is predicated on a confluence of events that have a mobilizing effect on the group. Just as economic interests can both push individuals to migrate in order to escape deprivation (unemployment, low wages, crisis conditions) and pull migrants to particular destinations (job opportunities, higher wages), so symbolic considerations can provide potential incentives to migrate. The implications of these push and pull factors may differ for the elites and for the ordinary constituents of a migrating group: in fact, elites must strive to define both the threat and the opportunity in symbolic terms that are strong enough to spur large numbers of the relevant community to action.

In the case of the Crimean Tatars, movement leadership posed the prospect of assimilation in Central Asian countries as a cultural threat to ethnic identity, traditions, language, and primordial connections for the masses and a political threat of losing a potentially governable body politic for the elites themselves. Individual economic interests were never part of the argument for repatriation, and in fact it would have been evident to the majority of repatriates that they were likely to suffer economically, at least in the short and medium term, as a result of the move.

In order for the leadership of a movement to invest time and effort into the organization of a migration flow, they need to foresee explicit future rewards. The elites then frame the move in diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational terms. The prospect of returning to the historical motherland is a clear example of an effective voluntary group migration pull factor. The supposedly

primordial basis of the connection that an ethnic group has to a specific territory allows for easy manipulation of this migration incentive by political elites. This connection is closely linked to the emotionally laden issues of honor and self-esteem and, therefore, has a significant potential for group mobilization. It is also consistent with the causes promoted by various human rights groups and therefore allows movement activists to garner international recognition and support. It is hardly surprising, then, that many of the voluntary group migrations since the 1950s, such as population flows of Africans, Cambodians, Chileans, Guatemalans, and Palestinians, were guided by the desire of specific ethnic groups to resettle in their native land (Warner 1994).

3) *Mobilization of resources and support, both within the movement and from external actors.* The success of a social movement largely depends on recruiting adherents and mobilizing external support. Resources can be relational, symbolic, and material. The first kind entails the close informal networks and cohesive structure of the group that make the spread of information easy and the framing of the goal in terms of shared interests feasible. In the Crimean Tatar case, group cohesion derived from a common religion (Islam), the shared history of nationhood and deportation, the unique Crimean Tatar language, and the extensive familial hierarchies that form the basis of Crimean Tatar communities. Networks linking families of Tatar descent who had been deported to distant locations in Central Asia were actively cultivated and sustained by the Movement's leaders.

Symbolic resources consist of non-material tools that facilitate mobilization around and action toward a certain goal. Crimean Tatar leaders, for instance, invoked primordial claims of connection to the Crimean homeland, the legacy of statehood, and the preservation of a unique ethnic and linguistic identity to achieve mobilization around the idea of repatriation. Once repatriation was achieved, the self-appointed Crimean Tatar Parliament (*Mejlis*) passed and publicized several symbolic laws related to education and language, whose primary function was to maintain the high levels of mobilization within the community of repatriates.

In addition to organizing group members around the idea of migration, in the case of the Tatars with the goal of return to a homeland from which they were forcibly expelled, ethno-territorial claims are likely to evoke the empathy and support of some actors in the receiving country, as well as the support of independent international organizations. Large-scale decolonization and dissolution of multinational states in the twentieth century established nationalism as a guiding principle for reorganizing the geopolitical map (Kaiser 1994).

The widely acknowledged legitimacy of the nation-state as the basis for world order underlies UNHCR's emphasis on voluntary repatriation as the most desirable solution for the dislocation of refugees worldwide. UNHCR supported the Crimean Tatars' claims to the Crimean territory, as did the

International Committee for Crimea, the Open Society Institute, and the Foundation on Inter-Ethnic Relations in the Hague (see, e.g., Parliamentary Assembly 2000; International Committee for Crimea 2011). Given the international attention to the Crimean Tatar case, the Ukrainian government felt pressure to support the repatriates. By formulating their demands for assistance in terms of mending the wrongdoings of Stalin's regime, Crimean Tatar politicians left the Ukrainian government little choice but to yield to their demands.

Finally, the Crimean Tatars also obtained material resources in their struggle for relocation, including the financial support of foreign diasporas, successful political bargains with the Ukrainian government, and the support of international human rights activists and organizations.

4) *A window of political opportunity for migration.* An opportunity for action emerges in the socio-political circumstances within which a migration movement operates. A host of variables characterizing political opportunity structures either enables or constrains collective action by movement participants (Tilly 1995; Kriesi 2004). The case of Crimean Tatars shows how contextual "windows" affect the flow of voluntary group migrations. The early framing initiatives—diagnostic framing—of movement leaders were associated with the first denunciations of Stalin's regime in 1956. These initiatives evolved into the prognostic framing with an articulated goal of repatriation around 1966, when the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union formally condemned Stalin's ethnic cleansing policies and allowed Crimean Tatars to resettle in Soviet territories of their choice except the Crimea itself. The actual move back to the Crimean peninsula, however, was not an option until the collapse of the Soviet Union, the chaos and deregulation resulting from which finally created a window of opportunity for the desired action.

## Conclusion

We have introduced the notion of voluntary group migration and offered some theoretical ideas for explaining when and how it takes place. The example of Crimean Tatar repatriation to the Crimea reveals that this type of migration is best analyzed with concepts from social movement theories that yield insight into the formation of the collective goal of migration, interactions between the leadership and the masses, mobilization processes, and the specific timing and form of mass relocation. An account of voluntary group migration should describe how elites actively construct, through narrative, ritual, and memory, a symbolic connection between a group and a territory; mobilize members of the group behind the goal of moving to that territory; obtain internal and external resources to support further mobilization and the achievement of the movement's goal; and prepare to exploit emerging political opportunities.

The most common form of voluntary group migration in the contemporary world is refugee repatriation. At the end of 2010 there were an estimated 43 million forcibly displaced people around the world (UNHCR 2010). Our analysis implies that an important determinant of which groups of displaced persons will eventually return to their places of origin is whether effective social movements emerge to promote repatriation. Although the literature on refugee repatriation recognizes the salience of the “myth of return” and attachment to “home” within and across refugee groups, prior studies have not specified the social processes that explain which groups decide collectively to return when the opportunity arises. Furthermore, in some cases the original flight of refugee groups might be appropriately seen as an instance of voluntary (as opposed to forced) group migration. Although refugee flight is generally treated as a response to immediate threats to a group’s survival, at times the severity of the threat is a matter of collective judgment rather than being self-evident. In such cases a group decision enters into the equation, and the types of mobilizing efforts we propose as decisive for voluntary group migration may well come into play.

We acknowledge several limitations to our argument. First, although the collective decisionmaking that led the Crimean Tatars to repatriate is central to our argument, we do not have direct evidence that it was a truly collective process. It is difficult to imagine what such evidence might look like in the absence of a formal vote by group members on whether to return. In a literal sense all decisions to migrate are made by individuals and households, not by collectivities. We characterize the decision of the Tatars (and other groups) as collective on the presumption that the primary motives for migrating were identity-based and collective in nature rather than material and individual; we argue that the preponderance of such motives is implausible in the absence of group-level processes that produce and reinforce them. Thus, the absence of direct evidence that the actual decision to migrate was made collectively does not invalidate our argument.

Second, we rely on a single “successful” case to illustrate our theoretical framework. A rigorous test of our claims would require extensive analyses of additional cases, including some in which migrations did not occur. According to our reasoning, displaced groups who lack an active social movement to repatriate will be less likely to do so when given the opportunity, particularly when they are physically dispersed, rather than concentrated in camps. In fact, the Soviet record offers two other cases that are instructive in this regard.

Ray (2000) describes the example of the Meskhetian Turks (so named after their original location in the region of Meskheta in Georgia), another group forcibly deported to Central Asia by Stalin’s regime after World War II. As in the case of the Crimean Tatars, a formal organization (the Vatan society) was formed to promote Meskhetian Turks’ national identity and link it to the

idea of a return “home” during the Khrushchev era. However, in contrast to the Crimean Tatar Movement, the organization was apparently very small (consisting of four members in 1962) and weak until the 1990s; only then did it begin the task of “producing a nationalist past through the collection of historical ‘evidence’ to support the argument for the return” (Ray 2000: 404). Based on interviews with Meskhetian Turks in Azerbaijan, Ray concluded that only a minority (particularly the elderly) sympathized with the nationalist ideals promoted by Vatan; instead, most were more concerned with economic and physical security in their current place of residence. In the absence of a long-term and effective mobilization of national identity linked to the concept of return, there was little impetus for Meskhetian Turks to repatriate to Georgia, and few have done so since Georgia opened the door for them in the mid-1990s. In the late 1980s many of them fled ethnic-based attacks in Uzbekistan’s Fergana Valley, but they went mainly to Azerbaijan and to places in Russia instead of Georgia. According to our framework, only the evolution of Vatan into an effective organized movement would be able to spur a substantial group migration of Meskhetian Turks back to their “homeland” in Georgia, and it remains to be seen whether such a change will materialize.

Another case is even more clearcut. Soviet Koreans, most of whom fled from Japanese rule in Korea to the Russian Far East early in the twentieth century, were also collectively persecuted by the Stalin regime. Koreans differ phenotypically from the local populations where they are concentrated. Nonetheless, rather than maintain a distinctive ethnic identity, they assimilated in the course of a single generation and adopted a “greater Russian” identity (Peisakhin 2010). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, they showed no inclination to return to Korea. While the reasons for their thorough-going assimilation are complex, the absence of any organization that promoted distinctive Korean identity no doubt played a role. These two counter-examples share many similarities with the Crimean Tatar case: the main difference is the strength of the Crimean Tatar Movement and its success in both reinforcing Crimean Tatar ethnic identity and linking it explicitly with a return to the Crimea.

Finally, migration movements may differ in certain respects from typical social movements. For example, they do not face the challenge of overcoming the free-rider problem of constituents who would gladly benefit from the movement accomplishing its goals without taking any action to support the movement. They may be more focused on a single outcome (return migration) than typical movements. In our view, these differences should not be overstated. Crimean Tatar activists did seek to mobilize as many members of their geographically dispersed base as possible in the petition, letter-writing, and protest campaigns—all risky activities under Soviet conditions. A major strand of social movement research examines identity-based movements that seek to cultivate and preserve distinctive group identities, and this identity-

building is as central to the movement for group migration as the goal of migration *per se*. But in any case, analyzing voluntary group migrations as movements does not require that they be construed as “typical” social movements, and we have not done so. We simply claim that social, cultural, and institutional processes identified by social movement theorists offer promising theoretical tools for understanding voluntary group migrations.

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## Notes

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1 We acknowledge that individuals and households represent two different levels of decisionmaking, so in principle a tripartite distinction of units of analysis (individual/household/group) might be warranted. But the individual vs. household distinction is already well-explored in the “new economics of migration” tradition (Stark and Bloom 1985; Taylor 1999), while scant attention has been paid to group-level processes. Also, although the theoretically specified economic rationales vary for individuals and households, in neither case do the political and “identity” factors that we posit at the group level figure centrally. For the sake of simplicity, we treat the distinction between individual and household migration as less salient than their common distinction from group migration.

2 The other two durable solutions are integration into the host society or resettlement.

3 A notable exception is Rogge (1994: 32), who identifies four variables that shape whether a refugee group desires to return home: duration of exile, extent of integration in the host environment, pressures by

authorities to return, and changes in the conditions in the home country that precipitated the original flight. In our view, this list overlooks a crucial factor: the social mobilization of group identity linked to return.

4 Our account of Crimean Tatars’ history and their return migration draws on Fischer (1987); Altan (1996); Allworth (1998a, b); Dawson (1997); and Uehling (2004).

5 According to the Library of Congress Archives (2010), as many as 15 ethnic groups were affected by Stalin’s ethnic cleansing policies. Eight were deported in their entirety: the Volga Germans, Crimean Tatars, Kalmyks, Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Karachai, and Meskhetian Turks.

6 Local hostility was particularly pronounced in Uzbekistan (in comparison to Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Mari Republic) because of an earlier propaganda campaign there by the NKVD, the Soviet secret police agency of the era (Williams 2001: 392–400).

7 For instance, riots in Uzbekistan in 1989 led to ethnic conflict (Allworth 1998b: 254).

8 Here and below our discussion of the history of the Crimean Tatar Nationalist Movement draws on Altan (1992); Allworth (1998b: 226–249); and Uehling (2004: 135–167).

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