

Finnin, Rory. *Blood of Others: Stalin's Crimean Atrocity and the Poetics of Solidarity*.

University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Buffalo and London, 2022, xii + 334 pp. Maps.

Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$80.00; \$80.00 (e-book).

THIS superb book is both innovative and traditionalist. Innovative, in that it places the unjustly neglected theme of Crimea and Crimean Tatars at the centre of a complex and fascinating study of connections and antagonisms between the cultures of Crimea itself, Ukraine, Russia and Turkey. Traditionalist, because it reaffirms with conviction, eloquence and force a proposition seldom articulated in a sceptical age: that literature and works of the imagination more generally can, and in special circumstances do, conceive, model and propel social and political change for the good.

The central theme of the book is the resonance in four of the cultures of the Black Sea littoral of one of the Soviet Union's genocidal acts: the deportation in 1944 of the Crimean Tatar people from their homeland and the attendant endeavour to extinguish Crimean Tatar identity. This theme also organizes the book's symmetrical tripartite structure, constituting as it does the main content of its second and longest part, 'Dispossession'. The first part of *Blood of Others*, 'Possession', scans the preceding cultural histories of Crimea and the Crimean Tatar presence there before and during the peninsula's incorporation into the Russian Empire and, thereafter, the USSR. The third part considers developments since 1989, when the self-repatriation of Crimean Tatars became possible. The title of this final part, 'Repossession', captures two processes opposite in cultural meaning and ethical justification: the return of many Crimean Tatars to their homeland, and the Russian Federation's illegal seizure of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014.

In each of the parts the evolution of four cultures' understandings and representations of Crimea and Crimean Tatars, as well as the ways in which these representations influenced

each other, are illuminated by Finnin's close readings of works of poetry and literary prose, but also of film, drama, music and the visual arts. Since the focus of the study is the capacity of works of the imagination to influence the sentiments and ethical dispositions of their recipients, Finnin explicitly affords works of 'high' and popular culture equal attention. The analyses themselves bear witness to Finnin's rare and admirable erudition in languages and cultural traditions seldom studied together. Such breadth of expertise enables revealing comparisons and observations of intertextual connection. Thus, for example, Crimean Tatar poetry of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Hasan Çergeyev and Üsein Samil Toktargazy is considered alongside the Crimean-themed works of, respectively, the Ukrainian writers Lesia Ukraïnka and Mykhailo Kotsiubyns'kyi; the role of Crimean Tatar subject matter in advocacy for various forms of pan-Turkism is demonstrated in discussions of Ottoman and Turkish texts – Namık Kemal's novel *Cezmi* (1880) and Cengiz Dağcı's popular prose of the 1950s and 1960s. Not unexpectedly, Crimea as refracted through Russian culture in its colonial as well as oppositional variants looms large in the overall picture. Pushkin's poem 'The Fountain of Bağçasaray' is examined as the most familiar and historically generative formulation of the idea of a Crimea alienated from its Crimean Tatar history and stripped down to its alluring landscape, a place open for imperial appropriation. At various points in the book Finnin observes intertextual – generally polemical – rejoinders to Pushkin's poem from each of the cultures under discussion. The unavoidable omnipresence of Pushkin in the book serves as a reminder of the aporia of scholarly engagement with cultural colonialism: even as one deconstructs the metropolitan text, one inevitably reinforces its visibility and canonicity.

A similarly poignant irony attends Finnin's leitmotivic invocation of the poet Boris Chichibabin and his poem 'Crimean Strolls'. The book begins with an account of the poet's awe-inducing reading of the poem in Kharkiv in 1963. The poem not only named what was

then unnameable – the Soviet crime of the deportation of the Crimean Tatars; it not only condemned the atrocity and expressed empathy with its victims; even more shockingly, it confessed to guilt on behalf, as Finnin puts it, ‘of the Soviet “we”, the civic collective that abets the state or, at best, stands aside as fellow citizens are slandered and dispossessed’ (p. 118). The book’s most detailed close reading is dedicated to this poem; it is the key exhibit that illustrates Finnin’s discussion of literature’s capacity to involve readers in the psychologically difficult, but ethically reparative process of agreeing to share in collective guilt. The very title, *Blood of Others*, is a quotation from ‘Crimean Strolls’. The poem is an act of solidarity with Crimean Tatars by a poet who was born in Kremenchuk and lived in Kharkiv, both in Ukraine. Yet the poem, like the rest of Chichibabin’s oeuvre, is in Russian, and no doubt the fact that ‘Crimean Strolls’ was in the language of empire enabled its condemnation of that very empire to resonate as no Crimean Tatar or Ukrainian text of equivalent content and aesthetic force could have done.

Finnin invites Karl Jaspers onto the pages of *Blood of Others* to help shape his discussion of guilt, as he does Wolfgang Iser when he reflects on the appellative capability of the literary text, or Edward Said and Frantz Fanon when the classics of postcolonial theory offer relevant insights or felicitous formulations. The coercive and discursive practises of colonialism are the stuff of every page of the book, yet Finnin is not beholden to the vocabulary of postcolonial studies. He does, however, introduce a conceptual distinction that is useful for comprehending the experience of dispossessed Crimean Tatars, but potentially of all subaltern communities that think of themselves as linked by a special bond to a territory they consider their own: ‘place’ and ‘personality’. ‘Place’ Finnin defines as ‘space endowed with affect and cast as a “center of felt value”’ (the quoted phrase he attributes to the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan) (p. 27); ‘personality’ is the ‘cultural colouring perceived to fix to a space, conducting “felt value”’ (p. 28). In colonial discourse, Finnin observes, the tight bond

of the two – of the ‘native’ and the seized colonial territory – is at first, paradoxically, emphatically asserted, but only as a prelude to that bond’s destruction in the course of the imposition of the power of the new possessors. Discursive ‘de-Tatarisation’, modelled as a process in Pushkin’s ‘Fountain’, is already complete in the Crimean-themed works of Tolstoy and Chekhov, from which Crimean Tatars are entirely absent. Erasure of the bond between Crimean place and Tatar personality, Finnin observes, was an objective not only of Russian colonialism, the deportation of 1944, or the annexation of 2014, but of both Turkish and Crimean Tatar pan-Turkism. A yearning to restore that bond was shared by advocates of Crimean Tatar identity at the turn of the twentieth century, Crimean activists of Soviet *korenizatsiia* (nativization) in the 1920s, members of Crimean Tatar, Ukrainian and Russian dissident movements, and the descendants of expellees who returned to the peninsula in the 1990s. The chief virtue that Finnin sees reflected in the words and actions of these friends of the unity of place and personality is solidarity, which he defines as ‘an active convergence of interests and fellow feeling between groups that bridges a distance. It is achieved, not given – a dynamic physics of human connection that can turn outsiders into insiders’ (p. 20).

Solidarity manifests itself, Finnin observes, especially profoundly between leading figures in the Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian national movements. Their affinity, which rests on the similar fates of their nations as objects of colonialism, moves Finnin to see them as ‘bound ... tightly in metaphorical relation’ (p. 209); as Ukraine’s most resonant contemporary author Serhiy Zhadan puts it, ‘The plight of Crimean Tatars is the plight of Ukrainians’ (p. 236), or, as the Crimean Tatar singer Jamala even more succinctly states, ‘Crimea is Ukraine’ (p. 227).

In *Blood of Others* Rory Finnin has given us a book that tells us much that we should have known long ago, but did not, for the most part because of the efficiency of empire in amplifying its own narratives while suffocating those of its victims; a book that honours the courage of righteous speech and behaviour, calls perfidy and injustice by their proper names

and itself thereby becomes a powerful moral statement. And it is a book whose eloquence is commensurate with its high purpose. It would be remiss of this reviewer to conclude without sharing at least a sample of Finnin's potent formulations: 'Crimea may have been anointed in neoclassical fashion as the new Greece, but it was consumed with Romantic ardour as the conquered land of the Crimean Tatars' (p. 27); 'After 1927, Stalin's geopolitical paranoia slowly perverted what had been a policy of ethnophilia into a program of ethnocide' (p. 76); and finally, 'In identifying as a member of the nation, in claiming proprietary access to its constellation of symbols, traditions, and achievements, the individual abnegates the stance of the moral individualist and takes on obligations arising from national identification – including those related to historical wrongs committed against Others' (p. 157).

*School of Languages, Literatures, Cultures and Linguistics*

Marko Pavlyshyn

*Monash University*