**“Watching History in the Re-making: Sterilizing place and rewriting**

**history through international events”**

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***ABSTRACT***

In a letter from a Russian officer to his commander regarding the situation within

just one of the concentration camps set up to house Circassian deportees in 1865 he

writes:

According to the information from the fortress Constantinovskoye,

around 110,000 natives were sent; those resettlers who arrived after

that point of time had to stay quite a long time in the barracks on the

north-eastern side of Constantinovskoye bay (modern Adler in the

Sochi district), where they were also burying their dead according to

their tradition. I have collected the information on the matter of how

high the death rate was among replacing people and how deep their

bodies were buried. This information is needed in order to prevent

possible spreading of epidemics in the spring time caused by shallowly

buried bodies.[1]

Fast forward 147 years to the Sochi World exhibit in Vancouver where a

spectacular hologram of Cossacks greets you at the entrance. Within this immense

exhibit showcasing Sochi, there is absolutely no mention of the indigenous

Circassians who populated that region for over 5000 years. Instead, the Cossacks,

who in fact where the primary instrument of genocide, are portrayed as the historic

dwellers of Sochi. The land of Circassian Genocide, Sochi, with mass graves and all,

is being cleansed, literally and figuratively on occasion of the 2014 Winter

Olympics. History is being re-written and ethnocide completed not in the shadows

of some secret government agency, but in the most public venue imaginable. This

paper will discuss the genocide, and continuing ethnocide, of Circassians in the

context of the 2014 Winter Olympiad in Sochi.

**The Historical Genocide**

The genocide against Circassians can be confirmed through three primary methods; the

current observable state of the victims, evidence of the willingness or explicit intent of

the perpetrators to commit genocide, and, finally, actions of the perpetrators that directly

constituted or caused genocide. Any one of these categories alone could provide a

compelling case for the Circassian genocide. When considered together, the case is

conclusive. That the Circassian genocide, and Circassians themselves for that matter, is

so unfamiliar, even to scholars, is a testament to how successful the genocide was and

continues to be.

Simple extrapolation from what the Circassian population was in the early nineteenth

century to what it should be today tells a profound story. 200 hundred years ago there

were at least 1.5 million Circassians. This is among the most conservative estimates,

with some exceeding 3 million. Today, there are between four and six million

Circassians around the world. Under normal conditions, this number would be closer to

30 million. Today, Circassians represent the largest Diaspora in the world in percentage

terms, with approximately 90% of the population living outside their homeland. It would

be difficult to attribute the scale of this depopulation and displacement to any means

other than genocide. It was, indeed, genocide and the terror of genocide that led to these

statistics.

In describing the actions that comprise a particular genocide, those making the claim are

often confronted with the ambiguous concept of intention. The purpose of adding this

feature to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide has been

thoroughly debated. The result has been a growing acceptance of the need for

recalibration of this term. That is, in the context of an ethnic cleansing, an explicit

statement by the perpetrator declaring the intention to physically destroy all or part of a

group is not necessary to classify certain actions as genocidal when the logical outcome

of those actions is such a physical destruction. While such direct statements can be found

in the Circassian case, the reckless or intentional disregard for the safety of the victims,

which ultimately leads to their death, is adequate.

Tsarist Russia’s goal was to conquer Circassia and eliminate the Circassians. As General

Yermolov admitted, “We need the Circassian lands, but we don’t have any need of the

Circassians themselves”. From that perspective a forcible eviction plan was strategized

to cleanse the Circassian lands by Russian General Miliutin in 1856. German

academician Irma Kreiten discusses that policy in detail in her work: “On the path to

genocide: Russia’s “final subjugation” of Northwestern Caucasus in a comparative

perspective”, as follows:

The dynamics of the so-called “cleansing“ and the eviction of the

Circassians were set off by a memorandum of Russian military officer

Dmitrii Miliutin in 1856. In this document Miliutin discusses the ways to

complete the Russian conquest of Northern Caucasus; he explains that:

The conquest of the region is to be achieved by one of the two [following]

means:

1) The subjugation of the local inhabitants by letting them remain on the

land occupied [by us], or

2) The taking away of the land from the native population and the settling

on it of the victor.

[…]In this regard it might be interesting to have a look at the

governmental commission set up to judge Miliutin’s memorandum and to

see how it reacted. The commission strongly objected to the plan:

The committee anticipates the consequences even of any attempts to

realize such a severe measure as highly dangerous. Bearing in mind the

mountaineers’ deep affection for their homeland [...], it is not to be

doubted that they would prefer death to the settlement on the steppes of

the Don region and one can definitely say, that not only whole tribes, but

also individual families would not make up their mind to submit under

these conditions, and that this would lead not to submission, but to their

extermination. […][2]

As the commission’s rejection openly states, either way the result of the plan will be the

extermination of indigenous Circassians. However, the commission could not convince

the Tsar. The eviction plan by General Miliutin was implemented by General Barjatinski

in 1856, and ultimately supported by the Ottoman Empire. In 1862 the plan was

“officially” approved by Alexander II. Therefore, one can see here that while the primary

goal was the conquering of Circassia, the logical result would be genocide. The Russian

goal was eviction of the Circassians, and the cost, which was acceptable to the Russian

leadership, was genocide. Here, intent is firmly established. While the intent was not to

exterminate the Circassians simply for extermination’s sake, the Russian leaders

understood that execution of their goal would absolutely require extermination of

Circassians. Knowing this, the highest authority in the land agreed to commence the plan

that it knew would ultimately lead to extermination.

Fadeyev confirms this acknowledgement of the necessity of extermination:

We could not give up the task [we had] begun and abandon the

subjugation of the Caucasus only because the mountaineers did not want

to submit. Therefore it was necessary to exterminate half of the

mountaineers in order to force the other half to lay down their arms.[3]

Even Grand Prince Michael, son of the Tsar, stated:

We wouldn’t leave our duties thinking that Mountaineers are not

surrendering. To wipe out the half, the other half needed to be destroyed. [4]

In studying Genocides, we find that intent and justification are two sides of the same

coin. In typical language of dehumanization so often associated with genocide, Russian

Prince Kochubei states: “ These Circassians are just like your American Indians – as

untamable and uncivilized…and, owing to their natural energy of character,

extermination only would keep them quiet.”[5] This genocidal mindset is reaffirmed by

Colonel Petre Chaikovskii:

[Being] true to their inherited physical and moral savagery, the belligerent

Caucasian mountaineers know no other needs than not to die of hunger

and cold. And therefore it is all the more difficult to conquer or subjugate

them. “Uncountable [...] examples of short-term submission and uprisings

[...] show that [...] to subjugate the eternal savage of Caucasian

mountaineer cannot have another meaning than to disarm; solely under

this condition he will not be dangerous in his mountains and one will not

have to watch them one by one; and to disarm again means only one thing,

to kill, because he will sooner kill himself than lay down his arms

voluntarily [...][6]

There mere consideration of employing extermination is important for another reason. To

this day, Russian genocide deniers have maintained that the Circassian exodus was

voluntary, and decided for religious reasons. If this was the case, there would have never

been any need for deliberations over the introduction of extermination as a means to clear

Circassia of its inhabitants. Professor Walter Richmond examines the case as follows:

The “option” of resettling in the lowlands was never serious. The Russian

High Command was aware that the Abadzekhs, Shapsugs and Ubykhs

would never accept this proposal and would fight until completely

defeated. Yevdokimov considered the few thousand Circassians who

remained in the North Caucasus a nuisance and actively worked to reduce

their numbers. The notion of over one million of the most anti-Russian

Circassians moving north of the Kuban River could not possibly have

been proposed in earnest. Furthermore, the tribes who had already

submitted to Russia were given no choice but simply driven to the coast

and sent to Turkey. [7]

In a letter from the Caucasian army commander Grand Prince Michael Nicolaevich to the

military minister in 1857, he states: ‘‘The required condition of this war’s ending should

be total releasing of the areas of the eastern Black sea coast and the mountaineers’

deportation to Turkey’’.[8] There are multiple sources that indicate that when Russian

troops attacked and burned Circassian villages, the Circassians either fled to the

mountains or were rounded up and sent to the shore. An eyewitness to the events,

Mikhail Venyukov wrote the following:

The war was conducted with implacable, merciless severity. We went

forward step by step, irrevocably cleansing the mountaineers to the last

man from any land the soldiers set foot on. The mountaineers’ villages

were burned by the hundreds, just as soon as the snow melted but before

the leaves returned to the trees . . . We trampled and destroyed their crops

with our horses. If we were able to capture the villagers by surprise we

immediately sent them via convoy to the shore of the Black Sea, and

farther, to Turkey. . . . Sometimes . . . there were atrocities bordering on

barbarity.[9]

Not only do Venyukov’s words affirm the plan to deport the Circassians, they also

demonstrate the brutality in carrying out this plan. The outright murder or genocidal

disregard for the safety of the Circassians can be seen in all three phases of the

deportation process ; the evacuation of Circassians from their homes and villages, their

march to and encampment at the shore, and the journey to and arrival in Ottoman Turkey.

As Venyukov attests above, the historical record provides ample evidence of the

atrocities that occurred in each of these phases.

In his letter to General Yermolov, General Delpotso informs his superior that the task of

destroying the village of Tramov was completed successfully:

[…] At night, the troops surrounded the village from four sides and set it

on fire. They massacred most of its inhabitants seized their properties

herds of horses and cattle.[10]

In 17 March 1864 British Consul Dickson reports from Souhum Kale:

A Russian detachment having captured the village of Toobah on the

Soobashi river inhabited by about a hundred Abadzekh…. After they

surrendered …they were all massacred by the Russian troops. Among the

victims were two women in advance state of pregnancy and five

children.[11]

The use of starvation and epidemic was systematically used to hasten the evacuation of

the Circassians. On the process of evicting the Circassians, one of the principal

ideologists of the Circassian Genocide, General Veliameenov writes:

The enemy is absolutely dependent on his crops for the means of

sustaining life. Let the standing corn be destroyed each autumn as it

ripens, and in five years they would be starved into submission. In order to

carry out this plan six column must be formed consisting each of 6000

infantry, 1000 Cossacks...[12]

At the end of February 1864, General Evdokimov decided to renew military operations

on the southern slope, in order to force out the tribe that inhabited there. This was done

precisely in winter when, in the words of the chief of the main headquarters of the

Kavkazski Army; “… the destruction of the supplies and villages has a deadly effect; the

mountaineers are left absolutely without a shelter, with less means of defense and are

extremely constrained in food.”[13]

By intentional starving the Circassians and evicting them with absolutely no provisions at

the worst time of year, the Russians had knowingly and intentionally precipitated a full

blown humanitarian catastrophe by 1864. An eyewitness of the events, French advisor A.

Fonville recorded to his notes “The last year of the war for the independence of

Circassia” in 1864 as follows:

We had occasion to see close the staring destitution of this unfortunate

people; daily we met new parties of mountaineers, who were moving to

the lands still unoccupied by the armed forces; the last rains and floods

killed a great number of these migrants, and we meet corpses constantly

on our way. The famine was terrible; we were welcomed in the auls, but

we ran from there, afraid to be infected by the diseases, which were

destroying the entire populations of the auls. […] Public disaster grew, the

number of migrants increased constantly. From all the places Russians

occupied successively, the inhabitants fled from their auls and their

hungry parties crossed the country in different directions, scattering the

sick and the dying on their way; at times whole crowds of migrants froze,

or were covered with snow-storms, and we noticed frequently, passing by,

their bloody traces. Wolves and bears raked the snow away and dug out

human corpses.[14]

Another participant I. Drodzov reports in 1864:

In the end of February, Pshekhski Detachment set out for the Marta River

to supervise the eviction of the mountaineers, if necessary, to drive them

out with force. A startling sight presented itself to our eyes: scattered

corpses of children, women, old men, torn to pieces, half-eaten by dogs;

migrants emaciated by hunger and sicknesses, who could barely lift their

feet from weakness, who were falling down from exhaustion and who,

while still alive, were becoming the catch of the hungry dogs.[15]

Russian military records clearly show that the very top officials were very well informed

about the disastrous conditions of the deportation process of Circassians. According to

Circassian scholar R. Traho, in 1865 Russian General Fadayev notes in his letters about

Caucasus as follows; As Count Yevdokimov recounts:

I wrote to Count Sumarokov, why does he remind us in every report of the

frozen bodies covering the roads? Do the Great Prince and I really not

know this? But can anyone really turn back the calamity?[16]

As the remaining Circassians were hemmed in and driven to the shore, the effects of

famine and disease became exponentially more deadly. A. P. Berzhe, the official

historian of Tsarist Russia at that time, was another eyewitness to the horrendous

conditions that Circassians were facing. According to Stephen Sheinfied, Berzhe

summarizes the events as follows:

I shall never forget the overwhelming impression made on me by the

mountaineers in Novorossiisk [New-Russian] Bay, where about seventeen

thousand of them were gathered on the shore. The late, inclement and cold

time of year, the almost complete absence of means of subsistence and the

epidemic of typhus and smallpox raging among them made their situation

desperate. And indeed, whose heart would not be touched on seeing, for

example, the already stiff corpse of a young Circassian woman lying in

rags on the damp ground under the open sky with two infants, one

struggling in his death-throes while the other sought to assuage his hunger

at his dead mother’s breast? And I saw not a few such scenes.[17]

A Russian journalist Jacob Abramov in his book “Caucasian Mountaineers” published in

1884 gives an insight about the conditions as follows:

Mountaineers gathered partly in Anapa and Novorossiisk, partly in many

small bays on the coast of the Black Sea, without any property, as the

transport fleet was extremely insufficient for the transportation of nearly

half a million persons, a mass of mountaineers had to wait for their turn

for half a year, a year, and even more. All this time, they remained on the

seacoast under the open sky, without any means of life. They literally died

from starvation in thousands. In winter this was combined with cold. The

entire north-eastern coast of the Black Sea was strewn with corpses and

the dying, among which lay the remaining mass of the living, but

weakened to the extreme, waiting in vain to be sent to Turkey. Other

eyewitnesses are describing similar terrible scenes they saw.[18]

The unrelenting suffering of those Circassians who had survived thus far only continued

during their passage and arrival to Turkey. So bad was the outbreak of disease at this

point that entire ships, including crews, were wiped out before they could reach their

destination. The combination of famine, disease and overloaded ships caused an

astounding number of deaths. So dangerous was it that after a time, Russian ships would

no longer agree to transport the Circassians.[19]

Drozdov writes:

Almost half of the mountaineers lost their lives during the journey

between two coasts. Such disastrous tragedies are very rarely seen or

experienced in the world, but savagery and dread was the only way to pull

the fierce Mountaineers out from the inaccessible and unapproachable

mountains.[20]

The death rates on these voyages is confirmed by Fonville:

Sailors were acquisitive. They were letting 200-300 people in to the ships

that have a capacity of 50-60. The people left with a little bread and water.

In 5-6 days these were all consumed and then they caught epidemic

illnesses from starvation, they were dying in the way to Ottoman Empire,

and those who die were dumped into the sea. The ship that started the trip

with 600 people ended up with only 370 people alive.[21]

Stephen Shenfield summarizes the voyage and the arrival of Circassian Genocide

survivors in Ottoman Empire shores as follows:

Those who had survived this ordeal thus far were now herded by the

Russian soldiers en masse on to barges and small Turkish and Greek ships,

loaded with several times as many passengers as they could carry. Many

of these sank and their passengers drowned in the open sea. For those who

survived the voyage, conditions on arrival in Turkey were no less horrific.

Arrangements that had been made by the Turkish government for

receiving and resettling the migrants were grossly inadequate.[22]

According to “The Circassian Exodus” published by “The Times” in June 13, 1864; Dr.

Barozzi, the Sanitory Inspector, reported to the Ottoman Board of Health Empire from

Samsun as follows:

No words are adequate to describe the situation in which I found the town

and unfortunate immigrants. […] Everywhere you meet with the sick, the

dying, and the dead… Every dwelling, every corner of the streets, every

spot occupied by the immigrants, has become a hotbed of infection.

Dr. Barozzi was trying to urge the Ottoman Empire officials to help the suffering

Circassian Genocide survivors. He continues as follows:

There is no one take care of the immigrants, no service organized for the

burial of the dead […] Not any less a terrible sight presents the camp

situation. Up to 40-50 thousand people in utmost destitution, worn out

from hunger and stricken by death, are remaining there without bread,

without shelter, and without burial. […] there are here between 70,000 and

80,000 immigrants. In a few days this number will be doubled.[23]

In Varna, another eyewitness described a similar situation:

They brought 80,000 Circassian emigrants, infected with typhus and

malaria, to the port city of Varna. To fight against the diseases, there were

no physicians, no medicine, not the most elementary means of hygiene or

sanitation. Quarantine was introduced, but it made no sense anymore: the

diseases had already seized all the people brought in. The coast of the

Black Sea was filled with corpses of the deceased. At first the Turks were

burying the dead, but when they could not keep up with it, convicts were

brought in to assist them. Even that, however, did not help the situation.

Then, they began to throw the corpses into the sea. After sunset, soldiers

chased Circassians out of the city, but every morning they could be seen

again on the streets, trying to find in the garbage something necessary.

Only after a long time the survivors learned how to obtain some bread.[24]

It can be argued that these final events, where Circassians were dying en masse on the

shore, in ships and on arriving in Turkey, are in fact the purest, most egregious form of

genocide; that is, extermination for the sake of extermination. At this point the

Circassians mentioned were defeated, totally helpless and posed absolutely no threat.

Russia had essentially achieved its goal and these Circassians were on their way out of

the country. The starvation and deprivation of the means of subsistence that was used to

subjugate the Circassians was no longer required. Under those circumstances, their deaths

would have served no strategic purpose for Russia. Circassians were dying rapidly due to

lack of food, shelter and medical attention. At that point, the withholding of these

essentials served absolutely no point other than to allow those Circassians to die. Yet the

Russians watched as hundreds of thousands of them perished. Ultimately, the final death

toll of Circassians is estimated to range between 650,000 in the last two years of the

campaign alone to over two million throughout the entire course of the campaign.

In 1864, British Consul Dickson attests to the success of the cleansing campaign, writing:

Their former homeland was depopulated, later to be filled with immigrants

from Slavic Russia. It was reported that one could walk a whole day in

formerly inhabited parts of the Caucasus and not meet a living person.[25]

In March of 1864 the Grand Prince Michael Nicolaevich informed the military minister:

The whole space of the northern mountainside to the west from Laba river as well as the

southern mountainside – from the mouth of Kuban up to Tuapse – are released from the

foe population”.[26] On May 21, 1864 a military parade was conducted through Sochi to

celebrate the final subjugation and cleansing of the Circassians.

German scholar Irma Kreiten’s conclusion about “the final subjugation” of Circassia is as

follows:

While normally the intention of exterminating the indigenous population

was counterweighed by the objective of exploiting local work force,

Russian officials saw in Northern Caucasians a never-do-good population

which was of no use to the empire and therefore could be dispensed with.

So if we ask how far the Russians went on the scale of genocidal violence,

the answer could be that they reached the maximum being possible under

the conditions of the time. In this sense the “final subjugation“ of

Northwestern Caucasus can be seen as equivalent to a genocidal “final

solution”.[27]

**The Contemporary Genocide**

While the Circassian genocide occurred nearly 150 years ago, it is unique among other

older genocides in that the same policy and mindset that led to the Circassian genocide is

still quite pervasive among the perpetrators, in this case, the current Russian leadership.

In Russia today there is no contrition over the genocide, as there is no recognition of

genocide. While the outright killing of Circassians on a mass scale is now a historical

relic, today there is an effective policy of cultural genocide or ethnocide, which can be

argued are an extension or form of genocide.

As Raphael Lemkin wrote:

Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate

destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killings. It is

intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aimed at

the destruction of the essential foundations of the life of national groups,

with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such

a plan would be a disintegration of political and social institutions of

culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence

of national groups, and the destruction of personal security, liberty, health,

dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups.

Genocide is directed at the national group as an entity, and the actions

involved are directed at individuals, not in their individual capacity, but as

members of the national group.

Since the end of the Russo-Circassian war, this process of ethnocide has been occurring

at various paces and degrees of aggressiveness. The primary mechanisms of this

ethnocide in the Circassians' case can generally be categorized within geographic,

cultural, demographic, economic, historical and more recently environmental spheres.

While even in the best of times there was at least one of these mechanisms being

employed, recent years have witnessed a renewed increase, aggressiveness and

sophistication in the employment of these mechanisms of ethnocide.

Among the most damaging of these ethnocidal policies have been those associated with

culture and history. The importance of language to the maintenance and survival of a

culture is unquestionable to most. The state of the Circassian language today is

precarious. It is estimated that currently less than 20% of Circassians in the Diaspora can

speak their mother tongue. This ratio is expected to drop to single digits in the next

generation, and altogether disappear within two generations. As such, the maintenance of

robust resources for language education in the homeland are of utmost importance.

Unfortunately, the opposite has been occurring.

Standard instruction using the Circassian language has been eliminated. Circassian

language instruction is no longer compulsory in grade school or university. Elective

language instruction of Circassian has been reduced to between two and four hours per

week. In some schools, it has been eliminated altogether. This combination of

disappearing language instruction, continued separation of Circassian population centers

and severe restrictions on repatriation is a time bomb for the Circassian language.

Circassian history is not taught at school in the Circassian republics. When Circassians

are mentioned, it is in the context of cultivating and preserving the narrative that Russia

was a civilizing force and in no way responsible for the displacement or suffering

of Circassians. In fact, there is virtually no mention of Circassians as the indigenous

people of the region, as well as no mention of the Russo-Circassian war. In essence, a set

of myths were created to remove any culpability from Tsarist Russia for its crimes

against Circassians. These myths have become institutionalized to such a degree that

even some Circassians themselves still believe them, despite conclusive evidence in the

historical record that categorically disproves them. These myths include the voluntary

emigration of Circassians, the voluntary union between Kabarda and Russia in the 16th

century and the instigation of Circassian rebellion by British spies in the mid 18th

century. These myths are the primary instruments of genocide denial. As such, setting

the record straight and reclaiming our true history is treated by the Russian authorities not

as a scholarly or social duty but as an act of subversion against the Russian state.

The altering of maps, or the official geographic space of a people, has been an effective

tool to first eliminate any sense of shared nationhood and then to enable a faster and more

complete assimilation of the Circassians who remained in their homeland. On the map,

Circassia itself was eliminated. The Western portion of Circassia including the entire

coast, which had witnessed one of the most thorough ethnic cleansings in history, became

Krasnodar Krai. This is a region that was nearly 100% Circassian up until the early

nineteenth century, and is now less than 1%. In the 1950's, the Circassian Shapsugia

region was liquidated by being merged into Krasnodar Krai. An attempt to merge the last

singularly titular Circassian republic, Adygea, occurred in 2006, but was stopped by

strong opposition from Circassians around the world. Adygea is completely surrounded

by Krasnodar Krai and cut off from the rest of historical Circassia. The rest of Circassia

was split into Stavrapol Krai, Karachai-Cherkessk and Kabardino-Balkaria. The

latter two reflect the intentional separation and recombination of two different ethnicities,

the ethnically related Karachai and Balkar people, and the Circassians now designated as

Cherkess and Karbardin, to intentionally prevent any sense of national identity. This is a

classic use of the colonial divide and rule policy.

One result of all of these administrative geographical manipulations is that the singular

Circassian people are now broken up into literally dozens of identities for census

purposes. None of these is the accurate ethnonym of "Circassian". As such, according to

the Russian census, there are no Circassians in historical Circassia. Such a system of

categorization not only seeks to diminish any sense of shared nationhood among

Circassians, it reduces any political influence that an ethnic group of over 700,000 could

have within a constitutional federation. This decades-old strategy of demographic

manipulation, while effective, is rather inconspicuous compared to more recent policies

concerning Circassians.

In early 2010, Moscow split the North West Caucasus into two "administrative regions"-

Southern Federal District and North Caucasian Federal District. Krasnodar and Adyghea

belong to the first, while Karachay- Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria are grouped with

insurgent hotspots like Chechnya, Ingushetia, Ossetia and Dagestan. This federal redistricting

was an effective measure for Russia to solidify its holdings on

Sochi and the Black Sea coast and further separate the Circassian autonomous republics.

While this change was officially justified as an attempt to create administrative

efficiencies and facilitate economic development in the region, practically speaking it

was also a more flagrant demonstration of the intent to further separate the Circassian

people.

Perhaps the most blatant policy to use the demographic tool in order to further erode the

Circassian nation is the scheme to move ethnic Russians to the North Caucasus

and relocate ethnic North Caucasians to other parts of Russia. The official intent of such

a program is to promote economic development in the North Caucasus. However, when

one considers the situation in Russia generally and the North Caucasus and

Circassians specifically, the real intent of this scheme becomes apparent.

For the past two decades Russia had experienced an alarming decline in its population.

So important is this issue that in 2011 Vlademir Putin pledged to spend 1.5 trillion rubles

($54 billion) over the next four years to address this problem. Meanwhile, over this same

period since the fall of the Soviet Union, the Circassian Diaspora has been increasingly

attempting to gain access to their homeland. This vast pool of educated and experienced

Circassians who seek Russian citizenship and want to help develop their homeland have

not only been ignored, but discouraged from doing so. Strict quotas limit the number of

Circassians that may repatriate in any given year.

It appears traditional strategies of economic development such as capacity-building,

improved education and investment in infrastructure are not suitable for Circassia. For,

such strategies could lead to the Circassian republics no longer being totally isolated

and economically dependent on Moscow. Any economic development strategies for

Circassia must accommodate the higher priority of continuing the ethnocide of

Circassians, which the aforementioned population transfer scheme fits perfectly. If there

was any doubt of the true intention of this scheme, the statements of the newly appointed

envoy to the Northern Caucasus Federal District, Alexander Kholoponin,

should eliminate them. Shortly after his appointment, Mr. Khloponin stated that his first

task must be to support the Cossack revival as part of Moscow's effort to return

ethnic Russians to the North Caucasus. Since the ascension of Vlademir Putin, this

policy of Russification of the Caucasus has become blatant and public, and the pace of

ethnocide in general has been accelerating.

Such policies are acceptable in Russia due in large part to another phenomenon that so

often accompanies genocide; the dehumanization of a specific group. The Caucasians,

along with Central Asian migrant workers, have become Russia's "other". Many North

Caucasians are forced to move to Moscow and St. Petersburg to seek economic

opportunity, which is so lacking in the North Caucasus. An environment of extreme

hostility to these people has been growing in recent years. As a result, North Caucasians

now find themselves in a cruel dilemma: as subjects of the Russian Federation, they are

unable to determine their destinies in their homeland or build their economies freely and

in the manner they best see fit, yet they are treated as foreigners if they venture into

ethnic Russian population centers and are very often the object of brutal hate crimes.

According to Sova, a Moscow-based organization that monitors such crimes, extremists

have already killed 57 people and wounded another 117 this year in Russia. Only six

months into the year, hate-crime figures already look set to exceed those of 2007, when a

total of 80 people were murdered. Sova estimates that the real number of such crimes is

probably much higher, considering these crimes are rarely reported in the media and lawenforcement

is very reticent about disclosing this information. There are rarely any

convictions in these cases. This climate of impunity only feeds the perception of North

Caucasians as "other", or even worse, a threat to the safety and way of life of ethnic

Russians.

This sentiment is actually perpetuated at the highest levels of authority. After the murder

of a prominent member of a football fan group by a North Caucasian during a brawl,

massive riots swept through several major Russian cities. Rather than attempting to

protect minority groups who were being attacked at random, four of whom were killed,

Prime Minister Putin laid flowers at the victim's grave and Moscow's chief of police

publicly attributed up to 70% of crimes to minorities, with no mention of the two murders

per week of this same group. If we go back to Lemkin's description of genocide as a

coordinated plan of different actions aimed at the destruction of the essential foundations

of the life of national groups, then the genocide against the Circassians that commenced

150 years ago is still ongoing. Importantly, the public sentiment often required to accept

such actions (distrust, fear and dehumanization of the target group) is also being

effectively cultivated by the perpetrators.

Crimes against humanity involve everyone. That is to say, everyone plays a role in an

ongoing genocide or ethnocide. The Circassian case offers an opportunity to analyze the

various roles of all actors during an ethnocide in real time, hopefully towards an

understanding of how such an event can occur in this day and age and how it may be

stopped and prevented from occurring in the future. Generally speaking, we can

categorize the various actors along a spectrum: from the actual perpetrators, to

accomplices, enablers, observers, antagonists and victims. It can be argued that

the "observers" category should not actually exist. In the face of crimes against

humanity, if an individual, group, organization, corporation or country does not become

an antagonist against the crime, especially if they are aware of it, they are, in essence, an

enabler at the least.

For a number of reasons, this may not be a totally fair and accurate

assessment. Sometimes the cost of moving into the antagonist category and

attempting stop the perpetrator from committing the crime carries too high a cost. Often

times an equilibrium is reached whereby some action is taken and some cost is borne, but

not enough to affect meaningful change or to create unacceptable problems for the

antagonist. This is often the case with nation-states. In the case of Russia, it has been

censured numerous times by various international bodies, but with very little real

enforcement. Energy security concerns for a large number of nations are a main reason

for this phenomenon in the case of Russia. Therefore, for the sake of this discussion, we

will retain the "observer" category, and reserve the "enabler" and "accomplice" categories

for those who knowingly and willingly facilitate the execution of ethnocide.

We have seen one organization in particular fill this role perhaps more than any other in

the world. In fact, it has migrated even further along the spectrum from "enabler" to,

especially in the case of Circassians, "accomplice". This organization is the International

Olympic Committee (IOC). Among the litany of criticisms of the Olympic games are the

transfer of wealth from tax payers to developers, the displacement of residents in

development zones, environmental and ecological devastation and the whitewashing of

serious human rights violations.

When the Olympics were held in Germany in 1936, the Nazis had the same goal as China

in 2008 and Russia in 2014-to extract credibility from the world community and distract

them from the very serious human rights violations they were committing. The 1936

Berlin Olympic Games were used by the Nazis to paint a picture of Germany as a

peaceful and tolerant nation, even though the persecution of Jews, Romas and others

deemed undesirable by the state in Germany had already started. The first permanent

Nazi concentration camp had opened in Dachau in 1933 - three years prior to the

Olympics - and Jews were not allowed to participate in the Games. [28]

In more recent times, China used the Olympics to present a new and different picture of

the country, as modern, open and friendly. The lack of freedom, serious human rights

violations, support for the Sudanese regime that was conducting genocide in Darfur and

the occupation and cultural genocide in Tibet that were associated with China were

overshadowed by admiration of the remarkable achievements of this emerging economic

superpower. This is a testament to the enormous influence the IOC carries. When an

organization can allow a nation or corporation to showcase only its very best aspects to

billions of people, legitimized under the banner of peace and brotherhood that

international sport provides, this organization understandably becomes the most effective

public relations firm on Earth. When it provides this service to a nation carrying out

human rights violations it only delays the resolution of said violations, and therefore

becomes an enabler for the perpetrator. When this organization actually helps, or

facilitates, the committing of a crime, such as the case of the Circassian ethnocide, it

becomes an accomplice to the crime.

In 2007, Circassian NGOs sent letters to the IOC notifying them that Sochi, the last

capital of Circassia and location of the final battle against Tsarist Russia, was the site of a

genocide, that Russia's environmental record almost assures unprecedented devastation of

the area, and that Russia continues to enforce policies that are leading to the annihilation

of Circassians as a people. The IOC responded in part; "Our philosophy is that hosting

the Olympic Games is above all a force for good which engenders debate on important

topics. The IOC believes that organized sport can help bring positive developments from

within Olympic Games host countries". This response begs the question; what positive

developments? Which authoritarian regime became freer after hosting the Olympics?

What debate can occur within a nation where the government controls virtually all media

outlets and has one of the highest rates of journalist murders in the world?

Rather than improving the situation for Circassians, the Olympics are actually

accelerating the pace of ethnocide. This is being done primarily through historical and

environmental mechanisms. Even though Circassians had lived in and around Sochi for

thousands of years, Russian officials have been very careful to make absolutely no

mention of them in any promotional materials. In fact, during his speech after Sochi was

awarded the 2014 Winter Olympiad, Vladimir Putin stated that Greeks were the ancient

inhabitants of Sochi. At the massive Sochi World exhibit in Vancouver, it was a

hologram of Cossacks, the shock troops who helped perpetrate the Circassian

genocide and resettled the land, that greeted you at the door. Unfortunately, this

depiction of Sochi without Circassians is consistent with present day facts on the ground.

In his book "Let Our Fame Be Great", author and journalist Oliver Bullough describes

Sochi as the place where "the Circassian heritage has been erased more thoroughly than

anywhere". In fact, Bullough describes the entire Circassian coast as having virtually no

trace of Circassians. The only memorials are for Russian commanders or soldiers, and

make no mention of who was defeated. [29] Tellingly, several of these memorials were

erected since the 1990's, often for the most brutal and hated commanders of Tsarist

Russia’s colonial army, reflecting the renewed vigor to permanently write the Circassians

out of their own history, and further humiliate them. The Olympics, like these

memorials, allow Russia to tell the history that suits them, rather than the actual history.

The difference being that rather than a few hundred tourists reading an inscription, a few

billion television viewers will be exposed to this rewriting of history. A history that has

erased even the memory of a people. Even more egregious, newly released archives

point to a large number of mass graves in and around Sochi. Under the pretext of

Olympic construction, these graves are being excavated and destroyed. In this case, the

Olympics are unambiguously facilitating the destruction of physical evidence of

genocide.

For indigenous peoples, the relationship with nature is a fundamental component of their

identity. For decades, Circassians have been the victims of ecological and environmental

destruction of their homeland. There are now vast swaths of land in Circassia that are

completely barren due to pollution caused by nearby nuclear facilities. While the

government has done little to research the health effects of this pollution, there is a

growing amount of anecdotal evidence of sharply increasing cancer rates in the region.

The incidence of blood diseases in the North Caucasus, including leukemia, has been

reported to be at least thirty times that in Moscow. According to the World Health

Organization, the female sterility rate is 25% higher than the Russian Federation as a

whole. [30]

The level of environmental and ecological devastation associated with the Sochi

Olympics is unprecedented. Parts of protected UNESCO World Heritage Sites are being

destroyed by Olympics-related construction. Legally protected land is being transferred

to private corporations for development. The World Heritage director at Greenpeace

Russia stated "This is the kind of thing that is utterly unacceptable in a normal

country....Laws are being changed overnight to suit somebody's interests." So poor

is environmental compliance that World Wildlife Fund and Greenpeace, the two

organizations charged with monitoring the situation, have cut off cooperation with

Olympic organizers and are appealing directly to the UN. [31][32]

The IOC's motto is "Olympism is a philosophy of life, which places sport at the service of

humankind". The Olympic charter proclaims its commitment to ensuring human

dignity, serving humanity and protecting the environment. If the IOC was truly

committed to these ideals, one would expect them to take meaningful action over the

Sochi issue. If the Olympics provide an opportunity to debate and resolve serious

problems, we should expect to see some evidence of this.

In a letter to the IOC, Human Rights Watch (HRW) expressed its concern of the

continued deteriorating human rights situation since Russia's selection to host the 2014

Olympics. HRW listed the recent murders of journalists and rights activists and wrote:

As we have repeatedly asserted in meetings and correspondence, we

believe successful Olympic Games cannot be staged in an environment

where serious human rights abuses are occurring...the IOC has been silent

on these killings, some of which have occurred within a few hundred

miles of Sochi...the International Olympic Committee is uniquely

positioned to send a strong message to the Russian authorities condemning

these killings and should call on President Dmitry Medvedev to publicly

state that there will be zero tolerance for such crimes. [33]

The IOC has not publicly expressed any concerns on this issue. It expressed no concern

on the environmental issues raised by WWF and Greenpeace. Massive protests and

written appeals by Circassian Diaspora groups were ignored. The IOC had no comment

on the assaults and murders of Circassian activists and cultural preservationists. The IOC

did, however, take severe action on allegations of individuals selling Olympics tickets on

the black market, by temporarily suspending Sochi 2014 ticket sales.

The evidence, especially regarding Sochi and the Circassians, should compel the public

to dispel the myth of IOC benevolence. The Olympics is not an absolute good. It is very

often devastatingly destructive. There is no greater good being served by the laundering

of sordid reputations, especially of genocidal regimes. In order to eradicate genocide

from our planet it is not enough to condemn the perpetrators. Genocide does not occur in

a vacuum. It is nourished from the outside as well as within. We all accept that apathy in

the face of genocide is a tragedy. We must also accept that modern forms of genocide

enablement and complicity, regardless of their noble public veneer, are a crime, and must

be treated accordingly.