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HISTORY, LAND AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY: CRIMEAN COSSACK AND CRIMEAN TATAR CONTESTATION ON PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL SPACE

This article is dedicated to the study of the Crimean Cossacks' impact on the way interethnic relations unfold in the Crimean Peninsula. Therefore, the study aims to discover if Cossacks' presence in the Peninsula has led to any conflictive consequences in the physical and social space. Moreover, the aim of the study is to examine if the Cossacks' presence in the Peninsula has impacted the way interethnic relations unfold and if this led to conflictive consequences in the social and physical space. In the study of the Cossack impact on the interethnic life, this work tests how such causes relate to the perception of the past, the land and the formation of collective memory and identity.

Cossacks in Ukraine re-emerged in the late Soviet era. Most of such Cossacks formed organizations and legally registered after the declaration of Ukraine's independence. Such revivalist movements usually tend to combine what is left in individual memories and their knowledge from written sources to formulate their collective memory and identity. They revive and reconstruct traditions and practice rituals in physical and social space. Such revivals and reconstructions often delineate ethnic lines and define communal interests.

Considering the historical image of Cossacks as warriors, who were attached to their kin, land and religion we might hypothesize that the Crimean Cossacks reconstructed their historical memory and identity with reflection to the main characteristics of the Cossack "forefathers". If this would be the case, we may expect that the collective memory and identity formulations of Crimean Cossacks would cause conflicts as Crimean Tatars are historical arch enemy to the Cossacks, and that Crimean

Tatars are of another religion, i.e., Muslim. The complication here is with the Crimean Cossacks' attachment to the land. The Crimean Peninsula is not a motherland for Cossacks. Therefore, Cossack legitimization of their current presence on the land and their claims on the space could either be found in mythologies or in the subversion of the case by references to the other past events in order to illegitimize the Crimean Tatar claims on the territory or refute the Crimean Tatar perception of the land as their motherland.

With such aspects hypothesized, this research is oriented to look at the impact of the perception of the past to build identities in the present, the attachment and legitimization of the land for the Crimean Cossacks and the Crimean Tatars, and the role of religion in the making of ethnic borders.

There are several arguments towards the validity of such an investigation agenda: the return of Crimean Tatars to the Peninsula and the subsequent complications have drawn scholarly attention, particularly in Ukrainian and, to a less extent, in Anglophone researches. However, in most cases, the research carried out so far on the complications created by the return of Crimean Tatars and on their relations to other ethnic groups in the Peninsula tend to take the Russian ethnos of the Peninsula as a homogeneous group. Most of such researches argue that the "homogenous" group, the Russians, was and is opposed and threatened by the return and claims of the Crimean Tatars. Taking the ethnic Russians of the Peninsula, in the analysis of interethnic relations, as a homogenous group is erroneous because it disregards and oversimplifies the diversity of interests and values among them. Nonetheless, such a view is also an overgeneralization of the case for the sake of avoiding intellectual complexities, a phenomenon largely caused by the priorities and values of compromised scholarship. This study, instead, in an attempt to avoid oversimplification and overgeneralization of the issues pertaining to the ethnic Crimean Russians, focuses on one particular group which is largely assumed as an organized part of Russian people in the Peninsula: Cossacks. By focusing on Cossacks as a subject of study, this article attempts to provide refined findings and results in understanding the interethnic conditions and conflicts in the peninsula.

Another aspect towards the validity of the research agenda offered here is the limited number of scholarly studies on Cossacks in Ukraine. Yet, the study of modern Cossacks in Ukraine in Anglophone and in Ukrainian scholarship is still a major gap. As much as I am concerned with the scholarship produced, major scholarly works have not been

conducted to understand and explain the modern Cossack phenomenon. My dissertation, which focused on the making of modern Cossacks collective identity and the revival of Cossackdom in Ukraine, stands as one of the few research so far conducted in the Anglophone scholarship. However, my dissertation did not contain the study of Cossackdom in the southern regions Ukraine. Therefore, this study stands as an expansion to the research which I have so far conducted. In this sense, the study of Crimean Cossacks in relation to Crimean Tatars from the perspective of construction of identities is a scholarly attempt in understanding the balances in the peninsula from a very fresh perspective.

One of the methods, to accomplish the tests proposed here and to accomplish the research agenda, is to conduct interviews with Crimean Cossacks. Such interviews would likely provide insights into the reconstruction of the past for the purposes and the needs of the present, the discursive methods of legitimizing the presence in the peninsula and legitimization of the ownership of the land, and the role of religion in drawing ethno-cultural borders and, furthermore, the role of religion in aggravating interethnic conflicts. Another method used in this research is reviewing the online material on the Crimean Cossacks. The review of such sources would likely provide more information towards how values, interests, and identities are constructed. The results of reviews of Cossacks' organizational (where available) and third party web sites, journals and online newspapers will also be used as complimentary sources. Finally, this research also refers to secondary sources.

With such research method employed, the structure of the paper will first include the history of Cossacks and Crimean Tatars from a perspective where the past is taken as a variable in the way identities are formulated in the present. Secondly, the analysis of data will be offered. Thirdly, the comparison of the interview data to the data acquired from journals, newspapers and Cossack websites will be provided. This section will be followed by the interpretation of the data and the discussion of the findings.

History as a Source of Identification and Conflict: Tatars as the Invasive, Alien "Other"

The historical events are largely invoked by ethnic communities to built identities through which they claim interests on land and draw ethnic lines in the social space. In our case, the history of Cossacks Tatar-Ottoman

interaction provides rich sources for identity building in the present time. Therefore, I will briefly touch upon certain aspects in the past, when the identities of the two are co-constructed by the interaction.

The nature of interaction between Cossacks and Tatars were largely identified as of conflictive nature, while present collective memories often tend to exclude the common cultural assets of both sides and periods characterized by friendly and cooperative relations. However, as narratives of past conflicts prove more lucrative for communities in the present, for identity building most emphasis is placed on how “the Tatar other” was uncivilized, invasive, destructive and uncooperative. The way the collective memory and, therefore, the collective identity are constructed on references to the past conflicts has largely to do with the competition for political power in the present. Therefore, the past exists in the present while being conditioned by the perceptions of the present. In this section, I will provide an insight towards the perception of the Tatar through a historical perspective, which tends to shape images of the Crimean Tatar in the Ukrainian social space.

The Crimean Tatar is often taken as an alien who came from the steppe to raid Ukraine, the invasive “other”. However, considering the major place reserved for the Cossacks in the historical perception of the Ukrainian past, one cannot make sense of the Cossacks’ emergence without the impact and existence of the Tatars. The Cossacks emerged, in the south of the Dnieper River, possibly due to unfavorable conditions caused by continuous Tatar raids and the abusive Polish feudal system. According to this reading of the past, Tatar raids costed lives and created material losses, which most likely provided an impetus for an armed defensive reaction on the part of local Slavic population. Simultaneously, in addition to the Tatar impact, the Polish feudal system was creating uneasy masses, which were taking refuge in the southeastern edge of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and along the lower Dnieper River bordering the Tatar realm. People of varied origins, including Turkic people from the steppe, gradually formed the distinctive group of people which later came to be known as the Cossacks of Zaporozhzhia. Therefore, all in all, it is necessary to consider the Tatars as a variable which caused the emergence of Cossacks as a distinctive community.

Even though there is a basis for discussion of the Cossacks’ emergence with reference to the Tatars, the mainstream theory on the emergence of Cossacks constructs the Tatar as the “alien other”. The mainstream theory in contemporary Ukraine is the one which is build on the concept

of “greater frontier”. As defined by the mainstream theorists, the “great frontier” is dividing the world of the “primitive” nomads from the world of the “civilized Christian”,¹ sedentary Europe. The foundations of the theory argued that the frontier was depopulated because of the Tatar invasion of the 13th century. This depopulated area, therefore, appeared to be advantageous for the runaway Slavic serfs. The region had rare steppe hideouts beyond the rapids of the lower Dnieper River and these steppe hideouts allowed the Slavic serfs to develop a distinctive way of life based on pursuits of warriors.²

The mainstream “civilizational” theory has a challenger. According to the counter-theory, the Tatars were not aliens to the region and the Cossacks emerged in the same social environment defined by the steppe culture. This theory challenges, in its fundamental point, the argument that there was a civilizational confrontation conditioned by the open steppe. Defenders of the theory maintained that the steppe was not a frontier, but a part of the Turkic world:

The borderline of the steppe zone, on which Cossacks formed, was not in between the “east and west”, but organic part of the east where Turkic people, for ages, lived and had their states, such as the Pecheneg Khanate, the Cumania, the Golden Horde, the Crimean Khanate, the Nogai Horde, and the Budzhak Horde.³

Therefore, the Cossacks emerged on the social environment of mixed Slavic and Turkic linguistic, traditional and religious traits.

While the mainstream theory is providing the basis for the argument that Tatars were the invasive “others”, the earliest documented references to Cossacks were made in 1492. The first record accounts an attack on a Crimean boat, by people from Kyiv and Cherkasy.⁴ The Tatar Khan Mengli Giray later wrote a letter to the Lithuanian Grand Duke Alexander and complained about the attack. The Duke, in his response letter, assured that they will investigate about the “Cossacks” who have potentially carried out the attack.⁵ In a later account, the Khan identified the aggressors as Cossacks, when the Ochakiv fortress, then an Ottoman fortress, was destroyed in 1493.⁶

Tatars continued to play a role in the events unfold for the Cossacks in the following centuries. In the mid-17th century, the Zaporozhian Cossacks have also taken an oath of loyalty to the Russian Tsar in 1654 and remained as a separate polity after the uprising and the formation of

the Hetmanate. Zaporozhians enjoyed Russian support in times of need and, starting from 1668, the Zaporozhians became more dependent on the tsars and preferred to remain loyal to the Russian Tsar, whom they assumed as the overlord.

Zaporozhians' attitude towards the Tsar changed in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. The underlying reason for the Zaporozhian's attitude was the news about the Tsar's plans to destroy Tatars once and for all. The destruction of the Tatars meant the annihilation of the Zaporozhian's *raison d'être*. The existence of Tatars was justifying the Zaporozhians' existence as a military structure set to function against Tatar raids.

The Zaporozhians, realizing the Tsar's future aims, decided to shift sides and allied with Ivan Mazepa when he turned against the Tsar. However, like Mazepa, they had to pay dearly for their decision. After the Battle of Poltava, the Zaporozhian headquarters (Sich) was destroyed and they had to take refuge in Crimea. The Zaporozhians, on the condition that they will serve for the Russian Army and subject to the orders of the Russian governor of Kyiv, were allowed to return to Zaporozhia. However, the Zaporozhian autonomy was largely breached. This paved the way for their destruction towards the end of the 18th century.

During the reign of Catherine II, Russia was gaining the upper hand against the Ottomans and the Tatars. However, the Zaporozhian autonomy remained a question for the Russian Empire. After the Battle of Poltava, the Zaporozhians escaped to the Crimean Khanate, where they established Oleshkiv's'ka Sich (1711-1734). Their return in 1734 to establish the New Sich (1734-1775) assured the Russian domination on the Zaporozhians, since the latter recognized the Russian ruler (Empress Anna Ivanovna) as their overlord. In return to their submission, the Zaporozhians regained the traditional Cossack rights and the autonomous control over their territories, which technically remained beyond Russia's control.

The Zaporozhian submission to the Empress re-confirmed the former's function as gathering point for the Russian armies at times of war and served as a defense line against the Ottoman and the Tatar incursions. Nevertheless, as soon as the Crimean Khanate was neutralized and the Ottoman influence was pushed back in the Balkans, the Zaporozhian Sich lost its *raison d'être* for the rulers of the Russian Empire. Thus, after the successful completion of the war against the Ottomans, the Russian army was given orders to destroy the last of the Zaporozhian Siches (the New Sich), in 1775. With the destruction, the Zaporozhian Cossacks lost their territory and liberties.

Some of the Zaporozhians were enserfed and some others joined the Russian army as carabinieri, while some others decided to take refuge in the Ottoman territories.⁷ The post-1775 flight of the Zaporozhian Cossacks could challenge the Russian interests because the Zaporozhians, joining the Ottoman war efforts, could threaten the Russian frontier. With the aim to stop the Cossack flight, Grigorii Potemkin, the governor-general of the New Russia and Azov Gubernias (regions)⁸ decided to reinstate the Zaporozhians as a military force.⁹ With the reestablishment of the Cossack armies, Russians would protect newly gained territories, and prepare themselves for a future war with the Ottomans.¹⁰ Therefore, the Russian rulers declared, in 1783, that they will form a volunteer army to attract Zaporozhian Cossacks to serve in the Russian army.¹¹ The new Cossack formation, then known as the Loyal Cossack Host, was declared in 1787, ahead of the Ottoman-Russian war of 1787-1791. To attract recruits and achieve better control of the new Host, former Cossack officers Zahar Chepiha and Sydir Bilyi were assigned as the Cossack commanders. A year later, when the Host gained better organizational scheme and prospects, the army was renamed as the Black Sea Cossack Host (1788). To draw more Cossacks to the Host, the Russian administration expanded the Cossacks privileges such as tax waivers, service under former Cossack officers, corrections in social status and payments.

The Host took part in a number of significant battles and played a critical role in the Ottoman-Russian war of 1787-1792. While some of the Black Sea Cossacks were settled in Kuban and renamed as Kuban Cossacks in 1864, some others remained in the territories which were once owned by the Ottomans and Tatars.

The section displayed that the major readings of the Ukrainian history scholarship takes the Crimean Tatars as aliens from the Asian steppe. The perception of the Tatars as the destructive element which had to be fought away remained as a major task for the Cossacks. However, as also shown here, through selected periods of history, the Zaporozhian Cossack and the Crimean Tatar identities were co-constructed by the interaction of the two. Therefore, the existence of the two, to a large extent, depended on the existence of the "other".

Since the 1980s to Present: The Fate of the Crimean Tatars and the Cossack Revival

In 1774, with the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca between the Ottoman and Russian Empires, Crimea was declared an independent entity. This marked the 299 years of Ottoman control over the Crimean Khanate. With the Treaty, the Khanate became open to Russian influence. Starting from 1783, the Khanate was incorporated by the Russians and the Russian colonization of Crimea begun. Since then, the Crimean Tatar and Ottoman territories in the north of the Black Sea were gradually transformed into a Russian imperial realm.

The Crimean Tatar fate has significantly changed during the Second World War. On the pretext of being collaborators of the Nazis, Crimean Tatars were deported *en masse* to various locations in Central Asia. It is largely argued that half of the deported Tatars lost their lives either on the way or in the following year. The Crimean Tatars who survived the deportation were banned to return to the Peninsula. Only in 1967, after daring Crimean Tatar demands, they were pardoned. However, this did not allow Tatars to return to their homeland. It was only after Crimean Tatar protests in the Red Square in 1987 that a Soviet commission examined the demands and agreed that after decades of demographic transformation, particularly due to Russian ethnic settlements on Crimean Tatar properties, there is no place for Tatars to return. However, the Supreme Soviet decided to allow Crimean Tatars to return to the Peninsula in July 1989. With this decision, Crimean Tatars started to return to the Peninsula. In 1991, they convened the Kurultai (first one in December 1917) and adopted the national flag, which carried the Giray Dynasty symbol. The Kurultai also adopted a national hymn. The Kurultai stood against the pro-Russian forces in the Peninsula, which demanded Crimea's return to Russia on the alleged reason that the fate of the Peninsula cannot be decided without the involvement of the native Crimean Tatars (not of those who came after the deportation). In the meantime, the Crimean Constitution of May 5, 1992 declared Crimea a sovereign state. The Verhovna Rada of Ukraine cancelled the declaration of independence and both sides agreed on the autonomous status of Ukraine. However, all such events, led Kurultai to form the representative body named Mejlis, and the Mejlis declared the right of self determination (1993).

While Crimean Tatars were challenged by lack of homes, land and basic services, the pro-Russian and separatist sentiments were running high

in the Peninsula. The peak was reached in 1994, when the newly created office of the president of Crimea was accessed by the first and only Crimean president Yuriy Meshkov (elected in 1994). Meshkov's measures to annex to Russia led the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine to abolish the constitution of 1992 and the seat of the president (March 1995).

The return of the Cossacks to the Ukrainian realm followed a different path. As mentioned earlier, some Cossacks served in the Russian army and later settled in different locations in the Empire. Some, however, remained on the territory of contemporary Ukraine. While some of these Cossacks lived with certain Cossack privileges, some others were enserfed and lost their Cossack status. The fate of those remaining Cossacks was challenged further by the time the Empire started to fall apart. Cossacks both served in the Red and White armies and later were suppressed by the Soviet regime. Under the Soviets, Cossack privileges and identity could not be claimed.

In the Ukraine of the 1980s, the long suppressed nationalist circles started openly to criticize the Soviet system. They recalled the "great freedom-loving" Cossack forefathers to claim separate Ukrainian nationhood and moved the Cossacks to the center of ethnic identification for a future independent Ukraine.

In this period, the nostalgia attached to Cossacks became a tool to rediscover and reclaim the Cossack space. For example, a group of students in Donetsk aimed to create a Cossack consciousness through historical-ethnographical expeditions (in June 1987) to the territory of the former "Samars'ka Palanka", an administrative unit of the Zaporozhian Sich (of the *New Sich*, 1734-1775), in the 18th century. Further signs of politicization of the Cossack movement surfaced in 1989, when the Donetsk Cossack formation fostered close relations with "Rukh", the Ukrainian nationalist movement. The members of the early Cossack formation were mostly "Rukh" activists and the two formations collaborated at all levels.¹² In return, the elements of "Rukh" also took part, as members, in the development of the Cossack organizations.

After the Ukrainian independence, Cossacks unified (October 14, 1991). The "Ukrainian Cossacks" (Ukrain's'ke Kozatsvo, UK) was formed as the umbrella organization for all Cossack groups. This formation had a symbolic importance in the sense that it restored the post of Hetman for the first time since 1918. The Rada also restored the mythologized "father" (*bat'ko*) status, once attached to the Zaporozhian Cossack leaders, of the Hetman's post as it could manage to bring all Cossacks under the rule of Chornovil. Another symbolic significance was that the Cossacks used this

opportunity to revive their traditions, as they called the meeting of the Rada and used Cossack voting procedures, reinstated the Cossack officer class, and other Cossack military ranks. Again, to revive the old Cossack traditions, Patriarch Mstyslav (1898-1993) of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church consecrated the UK Cossacks and the Hetman.

The early members of the Cossack organizations, which later were unified under the UK, were largely Ukrainian nationalists. However, as much as the Cossack movement gained visibility and certain leverage in state bodies, and followed a political agenda it gained wider attention from people who had initially had no interest in the ideas which the founders of the movement fostered. In this process, the non-nationalist Cossack formations gained visibility among the Cossack ranks. Therefore, the UK became a platform for the clash of interests between the non-nationalist, rather pro-Russian Cossacks, and the nationalist and traditionalist Cossacks. As much as the core nationalist and liberal held on to the control of the UK divisions appeared inescapable.

The anti-nationalist wing began to form and eventually solidified under the "Union of Ukraine's Cossacks: Zaporozhian Army", which was then a branch of the UK. This group demanded from the UK core to recognize the Moscow Patriarch as the patron of Cossacks, respect the Russian language as the state language, and finally, collaborate and unify with the Russian Cossacks. It comes as no surprise that the nationalist UK core rejected these demands, and the Zaporozhians decided to quit the UK. They formed a new Cossack formation called the "Cossack Army of the Lower Dnipro" (KVZN).¹³ The new formation gathered its first Great Rada on Khortytsia Island (September 17, 1994). As a display of their Cossack identity and political preference, the clergy of the Moscow Patriarchate and the members of Russian Cossacks from Moscow, Urals, Kuban and Don participated in the Rada. In recognition of the identity formulation of his Cossack organization, the leader of the movement argued that their decision to walk away was an act against the UK's anti-church, anti-Orthodox policies of the "nationalist" administration of the UK.¹⁴

The Crimean Cossacks

In Crimea, in a similar fashion to what was going on in the mainland Ukraine, Cossack organizations were established. The development of such organizations, as in the rest of Ukraine, started from the late 1980s.

Gradually, few early formations transformed into matured organizations. Following the polarization of the pro-Ukrainian and anti-nationalist factions in the mainland, the Crimean Cossackdom, with a large impact of Russian ethnic population, remained on the pro-Russian faction. The Ukrainian nationalist Cossack faction considered the Crimean Cossacks as servants of Russian interests and separatists who were interested to integrate Crimea to the Russian Federation.

At present time, the number of Cossack formations in Crimea is quoted as around forty. A number of all-Ukrainian Cossack organizations also has branches in the Peninsula, however, with rather minimal representation. The number of Cossacks in Crimea, according to the members of such organizations, are tens of thousands. Some of such organizations functioning in Crimea are: The Crimean and Southern Garrison of Zaporozhian Army, the Union of Cossacks (Feodosia region), the Taurida Cossacks, the Crimean Palanka of Zaporozhian Cossacks, the Cossack Squadron "Sable", the Sevastopol Cossack Community "Patriots of Sevastopol", the Crimean Republic Union "Great Brotherhood of Cossack Army", and the Sevastopol Cossack Union "Rus". The Crimean Cossack Union and the Union of Crimean Cossacks are two major platforms where Crimean Cossack plan towards organized activities.

Data: Interview with the Ataman of the Sevastopol Cossack Union "Rus"¹⁵

The Sevastopol Cossack Union "Rus" is a Cossack organization which is based in Sevastopol. However, the organization is active in all the Crimean regions. Starting with 2010, the organization became a member of the "Council of Crimean Atamans" and the "Coordination Council for Sevastopol Blagochinije".¹⁶ With such memberships in umbrella organizations and active participation in community life, the "Rus" remains one of the active Cossack groups in Crimea.

The Ataman of the "Rus" Cossacks, Borys Viacheslav Bebnev, who has been in Crimea since the age of 12 and calls himself a thoroughbred Crimean, defines the basic aim of Cossack life in the modern times as the Cossacks' will to learn the traditions of the forefathers.

We learn our traditions, what was important for the lives of our forefathers, how our forefathers lived, we recall, we ask our fathers and grandfathers

how they lived, and continue to transmit this to our children and grandchildren. In this fashion [children and grandchildren] can live exactly how their ancestors and forefathers lived.

Therefore, the revival of the traditions and the claim to the heritage of the “forefathers” proves to be one of the priorities for Cossack groups.¹⁷

According to Bebnev, many in the Peninsula are interested in Cossacks and their activities. For him, this interest has to do with the “roots” of the people:

Cossacks are interesting for people. And this is about roots. Where are they coming from? Many of them do not know about their forefathers. Their Cossack genes call them; genetic code is freedom, that is freedom. For Cossacks [freedom] is the most important thing, and the Orthodoxy.

Therefore, while arguing that many people are not aware of their Cossack origins, Bebnev claims that the Cossack functions in the society are guided by the Cossack freedom and religious belief.

When it comes to the land and interethnic relations, Bebnev argues that “the Cossack relates to all others with tolerance. [Tolerance] to all religions and confessions. There is no extremism [among Cossacks]”. He underlines that “ [they] are not dealing with land occupation like the Mejlis.” With regard to the Crimean Tatars, he talks about extremism: “With extremist Muslim organizations we do not need to deal. The state apparatus has to deal with them on legal grounds... They want caliphate, they want to impose their belief, traditions and religion on all others... This should not happen. Christians, Orthodox and Jews should live their lives and nobody should stay higher on others... there is no other way. This is the democratic principle which corresponds to a world without war and violence”. On the question if the Cossacks are involved in conflicts with the Crimean Tatars, Bebnev argues that:

No, there are no conflicts. It does not make sense. Because if a conflict takes place between Cossacks and Tatars, this is interethnic enmity. But this should not happen. However, in the everyday life something can happen. If it will be on an interethnic level, this will mean war. We want to live, we want to raise children, and they also want to raise children. For that, the Mejlis should not exist. There should not be parallel rule... they create their own government, which is ready to take on anytime ruling powers... If law enforcement agencies deal with this all, it will be fine in Crimea.

However, these agencies are afraid to handle the situation. The situation will explode if we touch Tatars. All has to be equal. Tatars should not occupy lands, they should acquire the land as other Crimean people. But they occupy lands. Then there will be peace... we need to see who is more tolerant and more civilized. If the Mejlis is not a civilized organization, they are not even registered as an organization. We are registered as an organization through the Ministry of Justice, with documents. The Mejlis does not have such documents. The Mejlis seems as if does not exist, but it is everywhere. However, the situation being this, that they [the Mejlis] yelps that they are the owners [of the land]. If we are to measure swords with them, then this means that we should be uncivilized. If they are uncivilized, then why do we need to measure swords with them?

Bebnev further elaborates on the Cossackdom in relation to states, borders and land:

The Cossacks are brothers. Cossacks have such a tradition of brotherhood. The Cossacks are divided by borders. We can talk about Cossacks of Belarus, Cossacks of Russia and Cossacks of Ukraine. However, there are no Ukrainian Cossacks, no Russian Cossacks but Cossacks... Cossacks are brothers. There is such a tradition of brotherhood. The Cossacks are divided by borders. There are no Ukrainian Cossacks, no Russian Cossacks, there are only Cossacks and Cossackdom. There are Cossacks who live in Ukraine and Russia... This is a nationality... We do not relate to governments. We just live our Cossack life. We do not run after rebuilding Cossack lands in Don or Kuban. We just live within the borders of the country... We cannot call this land as Cossack land, because Tatars say that this is a Tatar land... If there is a document for the land, this is my land. If there is no document, this means you occupied that land and this land is not yours.

The Web Data

The official website of the Sevastopol Cossack Union "Rus" also provides insights into definitions of the Cossack self, the Cossack functions, the land, and the "other".¹⁸ In terms of the definition of the Cossack self, the website underlines that:

The Cossacks are a people with its own culture, history and memory. The glorious past of Cossacks, deeds and ancestors' covenants give us the right to proudly say: "Thank you, Lord, that we are Cossacks." In general, Cossacks have always been beyond the personal [interests]. The

Cossacks have always served their native land: Holy Russia, its people and their government. Cossacks: We are the descendants and the heirs of the pioneers, who had created Russia.

In terms of defining the grounds for the Cossack functions in the society, the website makes an emphasis on the service to the Russian state. However, as much as the service is directed towards the Russian state and its people, it is described within the religious framework:

Cossacks see their main mission in the service of the people of Russia and for the sake of their welfare, and not for their own gain and glory. The service is framed in the words of church fathers such as that of the Metropolitan of St. Petersburg and Ladozhskogo Ionna (Snychev): "Fatherland is a sacred notion because it is given to every people by the Lord God." The gift of God should be kept as an apple of the eye. To protect the strong Fatherland... is the sacred duty of every Orthodox citizen. Take a look at the history of your homeland: everywhere we see signs of military prowess and civil courage left by our ancestors from generation to generation, mightily building the Russian state.

Again by reference to another Church father, the Metropolitan Filaret of Moscow, the website defines the Cossack values in action: "Love your enemies, crush the enemies of the Fatherland, and abhor the enemies of God." The website article further elaborates that the church looks on

patriotism as a religious duty, as a spiritual virtue for a pious Christian... until the return of joy to the motherland, the peaceful existence, and the return of the lost sovereign power - we [Cossacks] have no right to be called the heirs of the great Russian victories... Without the past there is no future for the people. Healthy historical memory is the key to the viability of the nation and the strength of the Russian State. Forgetting the feats of ancestors is a grave sin ... Looking at the history of the Russian state, we see that for centuries the Cossacks were the defenders of orthodoxy and Mother Russia. And in our shameful time, our Russian people dies morally and physically in front of our eyes. The turn has come to the modern generations to defend the Fatherland and the Russian nation. We do not need to look hard for what methods to be performed to undertake the sacred duty of a Christian: a patriot should protect the homeland. More than 300 years Russian Cossacks undertook such tasks. We just need to revive all the traditions and customs of the Russian Cossacks.

External web sources provide deeper perception of the self, the land, and the “other” according to the Cossacks of the Sevastopol Cossack Union “Rus”. The first excerpt is from the day when “Rus” Cossacks were accepted to the “Council of Crimean Atamans”.¹⁹

Today, we [the Sevastopol Cossack Union “Rus”] were accepted to the Council of Crimean Atamans. This is a significant event for the Sevastopol Cossacks Union “Rus”. As you have seen, the police tried to stop our event [to celebrate the occasion]. However, the Cossacks did not allow the Police to do so. I would also like to note that for us there is no separation among Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. For us, there is only a single state. In the near future, we will continue our patriotic and educational work.

While the Cossacks’ leader declares that they perceive Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus as one and united country, he also supports this ideal through his personal involvement in politics. Ataman Bebnev was actively involved in the all-Ukrainian political party “Russkiy Blok” (RB), which was known by its pan-slavist political discourse.²⁰ Bebnev’s political involvement with the RB could be examined in several perspectives and with numerous examples. However, I will refer to one occasion when Bebnev was indicted for a violation of a criminal code and the RB members involved in the case. In April 2009, Bebnev, who served as a deputy of the RB in Inkerman local administration, was indicted by the Sevastopol’s prosecutor for unauthorized occupation of a land. According to the police report, Bebnev illegally occupied a land (of 0,23 hectares) and started a construction on the land. When the police arrived at the sight, upon a complaint placed by a local, they were subjected to the verbal abuse of Bebnev. The district court placed Bebnev under 15 days of detention. While Bebnev was under arrest, the activists of the RB started a picket and demanded Bebnev’s release.²¹

Bebnev also took part in pro-Russian activities such as that of the “defense of the Grafskaya Pristan’”, a historical quay which was named after a commander of the Black Sea Fleet of Russia (1786-1790). The events broke out when the Ukrainian government decided to install a memorial plaque on Grafskaya Pristan’, a memorial representing the Russian glory, to mark the 90th anniversary of the establishment of the Ukrainian Navy (July 5, 2008). Bebnev was one of those who remained at the Pristan to not to allow such a plaque to be installed and to impede the Ukrainian flag to be raised on the Pristan. Eventually, the defenders did not allow the

plaque to be installed. With this, Bebnev gained the name of defender of the Grafskaya Pristan and for his action he was granted an order.²² During the 5th anniversary of the “defense”, Bebnev was invited to address the crowd gathered on the quay. Then he said “If such an attempt would take place for a second time, we will react in a similar fashion.”²³

Bebnev’s involvement in social life could also be observed on other occasions. For example, in February 28, 2013, Cossacks of “Rus” took part in a protest named “Crimea in Exchange for Gas”. The event was organized in front of the Administrative Court of Appeal by a separatist NGO active in Crimea (“Sevastopol-Crimea-Russia”). According to news agencies, the protesters carried posters of the first and only Crimean president Yuri Meshkov and banners reading “No to the Annexation of Crimea [annexation by Ukraine]”, “We do not like Ukraine”, “Do you want Gas? Return Crimea to Russia”. The members of “Rus” also supported ideas which defended the illegality of Ukraine’s control over Crimea and the illegality of the abolition of the Crimean constitution of 1992.²⁴ In a similar fashion, Cossacks of the “Rus” took part in the events of the “Constitutional Day of the Crimean Republic”, which were carried, in Simferapol, under the slogan of “Grant Federalization”. Participants to the event carried flags of the Russian Federation and the Russian Empire. The Cossacks of the “Rus”, besides a Russian flag, carried posters reading “Sevastopol is a Russian Shrine; the loss of it is a national disgrace”.²⁵ In addition to the pro-Russian activities of the “Rus”, the external web sources show monarchist tendencies of the Cossack organization. The “Rus” Cossacks have taken part in placement of a plaque dedicated to Nicholas II of Russia.²⁶

Interview with the Ataman of the Belhorod Cossack Society of Sviator - Crimean Palanka of the Zaporozhian Army of the Lower Dnipro²⁷

Viktor Sidenko is the Ataman of the Belohorskoï Cossack Society of “Sviyator” – Crimean Palanka of the Zaporozhian Army. The Crimean Palanka is a sub-branch of the “Cossack Army of the Lower Dnipro” (KVZN), which was mentioned above.

The Crimean Palanka appears as one of the most active and effective Cossack organizations. The leader of the Palanka, Sergey Yurchenko, also acts as the Head of the Coordination Council of the Crimean Atamans since

the very beginning of the Council.²⁸ Yurchenko is as well a Bakhchisarai deputy of the city council for the political party "Russkoye Yedinstvo"²⁹ and one of his Cossacks with whom I conducted an interview, Viktor Sidenko, is an Ataman of one of the local branches of the Zaporozhian Cossacks. Sidenko introduces himself as a former Communist and a Soviet military officer, historian, economist, warrior and lawyer:

I am Ukrainian by nationality, I am a Ukrainian Cossack of Zaporozhian ancestry... Cossacks have no borders. We are Cossack brothers, Cossacks from America, from Poland, and Africa are all Cossack brothers. For us there are no borders. How Orthodox believers have no borders, we are likewise... Cossacks, in their time, united all Russia and Ukraine 500-600 years ago... These were all Cossack lands. This is a people that has no national identity. In our blood there are Turkish, Tatar, Kalmyk blood... Why not love others such as Tatars, or others while these nations relate to my people?... I am Ukrainian, but I consider myself Russian. I speak only in Russian and I see dreams in Russian language. I am ethnically Ukrainian, Zaporozhian Cossack... We are free people. People of Honor and Orthodoxy... For me it does not matter if it's cold or hot, if we are all Russians and we are Slavs, Russians. Western Ukrainians were under Poles and Austrians for more than 300 years... They are not Slavs... I do not consider that there is a Ukrainian state. Simply, it was created for formality. They are clowns functioning as presidents...

Sidenko seems to have a rather warm approach to the "other", as he recognizes that Cossacks carry heritage from different ethnic groups. But his anti-Jewish discourse provide clues to his perception of the "others" as oriented rather towards ethnic and religious hatred:

Men have to be warriors, that is a must... Nothing has changed in the world. Because the war goes on until the present time, not with swords, however... Zionists, this people, I call them the garbage of the world, the planet lives through all horrible things coming from this people [Jews]. Our civilization passed through Rothschild and other thrashers and stinkers, They want to create their order in the world, they created the European Union, made people gay, at present time there is this gay movement, lesbians, freedom and liberty, without religion, without God... all are sinners ...

Sidenko's worldview tends to see others from the duality of good and evil and in this competition of the good and evil he defines his Cossack identity:

In my opinion, they worship the devil. The Israelites, they are Satanists, they call it their God, however, among others, our God is Jesus Christ ..., all the messiahs, the saints - they teach the good. On the other hand, the case is different with the Jews. They want the devil [diablo] to be the winner through their personality [manifest through the individual self]. Nothing good will come from the devil. There is a war between the good and the evil and I am the warrior of the good. I protest against the evil of the world. I understand very well that this mission occurred with me. I am ready to give my life for my own people, and for all the people who live here and understand correctly that we fulfill God's cycle – to give birth to children, continue life, and give further life as nature..., but we cannot live like this, this can only happen in heaven. But on earth, if you want to live in good [wellbeing], somebody wants to take this away. [If somebody wants to take something from you] for such a purpose the Cossacks exist. Cossacks understand that they are warriors of the good... If somebody sees Jews steal something, there should be a law to shoot them for this.

While Sidenko's remarks about Jews were so sharp, his discourse about the Crimean Tatars justified the deportation of the Crimean Tatars. He recognizes that the land is not a historical Cossack land, but also denies Crimean Tatar claim to be indigenous people of the Peninsula and interestingly defines the Peninsula as being historically Turkish:

Crimea was not a Cossack land. Many groups of people lived here... The Turks were the owners of this land... And Turks had to hand Crimea to the Russians... In the period before the war, the Tatars were not deported, but resettled and in this way they saved Tatar [lives]. Because they could be slaughtered by Germans. They returned [to the Peninsula] and revive their society. [Thanks to] money from Great Britain and Saudi Arabia, they have the possibility to develop. With this [aid], the Tatar separatism grows. And, of course, we are against this. However, there is no difference between Tatars, Russians, Cossacks and we can live together. If you are sold for dollars and if you start hisbi [Hizb-ut-Tahrir?] wahhabism here, events against the peace do happen. In this case, I am sorry, f... you, you will not be able to do this. They are saying "this is our [Tatar] Crimea". How is this your Crimea? What is your juridical status? Crimea was Turkish and with all the peoples who lived here, not only Tatars, it was transferred to Russia. Russia accepted all the peoples, including Tatars, equally... And Tatars tell that they are indigenous people, [and that they] want to live here, and [tell that] "you [Russians] go to your Russia". Who are you? You are the same people as me, and the Greek, and the others. You are not different than the others. Only Turks can claim something, because Crimea was

Turkish. And you are no one... Turks were the landlords, you were no one. We are not separatist, we observe the situation and consider... We want to live in peace... we are peaceful people. If you are not peaceful, the war comes to you...

The Web Data

As mentioned earlier, Belohorskoi Cossack Society of “Sviyator” functions as a sub-branch of the Crimean Palanka of the Zaporozhian Army. The latter is a regional organization for the “Cossack Army of the Lower Dnipro” (KVZN), led by the Union of Ukrainian Cossacks “The Zaporozhian Army”. Therefore, both Yurchenko and Sidenko are local leaders of Alexander Panchenko. As indicated earlier, Panchenko puts his Cossack identity in contrast to the Ukrainian nationalist wing of Cossacks. He attracted retired Soviet military personnel to the ranks of his organization. He also received support from oligarchs. With such a background, the nationalist wing of the Ukrainian Cossacks tagged him as “pro-Russian” and “pro-imperial chauvinist”.

Ataman Panchenko is politically involved. He worked for Leonid Kuchma’s presidential bid in 1999. However, he was imprisoned for corruption charges related to the election campaign money. He served three years and a half in jail. After Panchenko’s release from jail, efforts were paid to expand the area of organizational influence on Poltava, Kharkiv, Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, and most particularly on Crimean *palanky*. With this enlargement, the KVZN transformed itself into the “Union of Ukrainian Cossacks” (UUK).³⁰ Panchenko became the Hetman of the UUK and continued its political agenda as he supported Kuchma’s party *Za ledynu Ukrainu* in the 2002 elections. As soon as Kuchma fell from grace, he started to support Viktor Yanukovich in the 2004 presidential elections. After the Orange Revolution, fearing political persecution, he escaped to Russia, to Cossacks. During the presidential elections of 2010, being a good ally of the Party of Regions, Panchenko gave full support to the Yanukovich’s campaign. The collaboration was marked with an agreement signed before the elections which assured the KVZN Yanukovich’s full support in case he was elected.

Looking at the political background and the anti-nationalist discourse of the organization and its leader, we can assume that the Cossacks of this organization were rather friendly to Russia and unfriendly to the rising influence of the Crimean Tatars. In this framework, when web sources

are reviewed, certain patterns emerge about the Crimean operations and discourse of this group of Cossacks.

First of all, the definition of the Cossack self overlaps with other examples examined in this article. Sergey Yurchenko, as the primary figure of the Zaporozhian Cossacks of the Crimean Peninsula, argues that the major tasks of the Cossacks is the protection of the Orthodox shrines, the protection of the social order and the state borders, and the military-patriotic upbringing of the youth. In a larger sense of identity, Yurchenko defends that “people of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine are temporarily separated by borders” and that emphasizes that he and his Cossacks remember those who spent efforts to unify these people.³¹

Yurchenko’s and his Cossacks’ relations with the Crimean Tatars show signs of conflict. For example, in 2011, in Feodosia, the Cossacks wanted to erect a cross. Upon Tatar reaction, the cross was removed. However, the Cossacks tried to restore the cross. During the attempts to restore the cross, the Cossacks and the security forces clashed. Yurchenko appears to be part of the events that took place and supported the erection of a cross at the cost of the Tatars’ disturbance.³² It appears that Yurchenko was unhappy with the security forces’ intervention, which left some Cossacks injured. However, according to web sources, Yurchenko was pleased with the security forces’ sharp intervention on Ukrainian nationalists, who wanted to conduct protest on the anniversary of the Second World War.³³ On another occasion, the Cossacks of the Union led by Yurchenko blocked roads in order to impede the Ukrainian nationalist political leader Oleh Tiahnybok to take part in a TV discussion.³⁴

Interview the Ataman of Taurida Squadron of the Terek Cossack Army³⁵ and the Founder of the Cossack Squadron “Sobol”³⁶

Vadym Ilovchenko claims Ukrainian origins; however, he has no Cossack origins. He argues that he came across Cossacks in his daily life, in their Cossack uniforms, and has grown interest in Cossacks. He decided to create his own organization in 2004 and named it Sobol (Sable). The organization has drawn two hundred members in its initial period.

Ilovchenko narrates with excitement how initial reactions of the members were as they started to say “With two hundred Cossacks we go through all Crimea. We can do this and we can do that... and people started to ask [Sobol Cossacks] for help ...” However, Ilovchenko’s

narration points to a rather immediate marginalization of the group, its reflection to the interethnic relations, and the way the organization has developed:

We started to have conflicts with the Tatars, and we were saying we are such Cossacks. Then we were becoming more of a hooligan band rather than a Cossack society. Problems with the police and the public prosecutor's office emerged because of the conflicts which started off with Tatars. And with the development of a conflictive situation and the police and the procurator growing an interest on us, all who worked for money started to track us. After this [developments] most [Cossack members] have left.

As it was the case with the other Cossack groups, Ilovchenko refers to the religion in defining his perception of the Cossack identity:

Cossacks are Christian warriors. I am Christian and all Cossacks should be Christians as well. Without Christianity, one cannot be Cossack... A Cossack is the protector of the Orthodox belief, primary among others he is defender of his own land. This is about feelings of fairness to self and others... To each person who comes to me [with an interest to become Cossack] I tell him that Cossackdom is not a hobby club [but a society of values]... and every Sunday we started to go to Church with Cossacks.

In Ilovchenko's narrations, his perception of the land and of the "other" occupies a major place. The following is rather illustrative of the way how he perceives the "other":

I tell to my Cossacks that it is necessary to fight if there is a need, if there is an aggressor, if there is a possibility of harm to you, and your children, and your land. Only then it is necessary to fight. When a politician yells that "there, the Tatars are killing us, Cossacks let's go to help [those being attacked]", stop friends! I treat Tatars with indifference. I have many friends and acquaintance among Tatars with which I meet in various conditions for varied reasons... When there is some problem, if there are serious people on the other side, we discuss and the conflict resolves by itself.

However, while Ilovchenko argues that he has no predisposition against the Crimean Tatars, he is rather conservative with regard to the land. "Tavrída [Taurida]. Why not Crimea? Because Crimea is a Tatar word. We do not like to call [the land] with Tatar words." While he later

emphasizes that: “Tatars, they are my fellow countryman. They do not represent my ethnic nation. I do not have anything against them. They have their culture, and we have ours.”

At some point in his Cossack career, Ilovcheko decides to take a different turn and creates a new Cossack organization: the Terek Cossacks were particularly known for their participation to Peter I’s conquest of Dagestan as the Terek Cossack host was located near the Terek River:

When we came together as the gang, I call it gang in a figurative way, the group, the society; yes, Sobol, Sobol was a bandit [organization], our bandit precedent has passed. Now there is a society based in Sevastopol... They have taken this name Sobol... Now we are named Terek Cossacks. Why Tereks? When we got together, we had a well respected person, Terek, Vitaly Petrovich [Khramov]³⁷... go to Tereks and talk to them. And I said “let’s go Vitaly Petrovich”, and we went... We discussed that calling ourselves the Terek Army would not be so bad. [Vitaly Petrovich] to prove his roots he has no documents, but he says that he has Cossack blood.

Going back to the discussion of the land and identity, Ilovchenko argued that he is Ukrainian, however, this was an identity rather politically imposed on him. He considers that Russians and Ukrainians are one people and regards the Cossacks as a national group.

The Web Data

According the data collected through online sources, the “bandit past” of Ilovchenko is quite complicated and includes illegal acts. Understanding Ilovchenko’s Cossack functions, his definitions of Cossackdom, land, religion, and relations with Tatars, one needs to work not only with interviews but also online data. To start with, I will suffice to note that Vitaly Khramov, who inspired Ilovchenko’s constructed Terek Cossack identity and Vadym Ilovchenko were, and still are, brother-in-arms from the very beginning of the brigand period.

According to accounts based on online data, Khramov has long been involved, since 1998, in raiding and occupying enterprises, including state-held ones. Khramov owned a Joint Stock company called “Aspect” (est. 1994). According to the Crimean Prosecutor, this company was engaged in hostile takeovers through illegal methods.³⁸ For example, in 2004, the sanatorium Gornoe Solntse, in the Crimean city of Alupka,

was seized by armed men. They were identified as the Cossacks of the Sobol, reported to be based in the service yard of the Simferopol Central Bus Station.³⁹ From 2004 to 2006, seven court cases were started in relation to the activities of the Aspect and in a similar fashion the Aspect and the Sobol acquired ownership of the territory near the Simferopol Central Bus Station. The gas station in the area was apparently catching the attention of the group. To fast forward events in relation to the gas station, Ilovchenko was sentenced to five years of probation. The reason for the sentence was his violation of the criminal code through abuse of power, while Ilovchenko and his man obstructed the work of the gas station and caused more than 6.2 million dollars of loss. The court cases which started in 2005 have been closely followed by the Cossacks of the Sobol, who often protested in front of the courthouse.⁴⁰

In 2007, the leaders of the Sobol have grown an interest in politics and decided to join the ranks of the political movement "Ruskoe Yedinstvo". "Observing the political attempts of the group, Mikhail Baharev, then the deputy chairman of the Supreme Council of Crimea, urged the political community against the move of the Sobol leaders when he confirmed illegal acts of the Sobol and Khramov."⁴¹

It appears that Ilovchenko's conditional sentence for five years convinced him to give up his Ataman post at the Sobol Cossack Society, already notoriously accused of criminal acts, and to create Terek Cossacks.⁴² While creating the new organization, Ilovchenko left the leadership position of the Sobol to Khramov (Khramov carries the title of Elder). However, his close connection with the Khramov continued as the two appeared together in public events, protests and conflicts. Though, in September 2011, Khramov, who holds Russian citizenship, was expelled from Ukraine and banned to return for five years. The reason was related to the decision of the Court of Simferopol, which found Khramov guilty of inciting ethnic and religious hatred.⁴³ Khramov's actions were committed against Crimean Tatars, Muslims, and Ukrainians.

Even though he was expelled, Khramov continued to return to Crimea on various occasions and continued his sharp discourse against Crimean Tatars. For example, in April 2013, he wanted to place a billboard message to congratulate Crimean Tatars for their survival in the Second World War. The billboard message he wanted to place, "Congratulations Pechenegs of Taurida for the day of the fifth miraculous rescue", was rejected by billboard companies after they consulted with prosecutors with regard to the message's offensive nature. Defending his billboard message, he said

that "Tatars should be grateful to the Stalinist regime for their relocation from Crimea to Central Asia because this saved them from the vengeance of the soldiers whose families have suffered at the hands of collaborators during the occupation of the Peninsula."⁴⁴ In another case, Khramov argued that Crimean Tatars cannot qualify as the native people of Crimea for the fact that Tatars cannot get Europeans, cannot claim the rights of archaic ethnic groups and because of their forefathers' "slave trade, widespread looting, mass killings..., illegal trade in unsuitable places, and *shawarma*, and *chebureks* made from dead cats".⁴⁵ Khramov argues that on the foregoing basis, Tatars cannot be recognized as indigenous people.

Conclusions

The interview with the Ataman of the Sevastopol Cossack Union "Rus" reveal that the Cossacks of the "Rus" are constructing their present identities with a reference to the traditions of their forefathers. This reference points to the forefathers' imagined freedom-loving character and their dedication to the Orthodox belief.

In terms of interethnic relations and with regard to the question if the Cossacks play a role in this, the interview data show that the Cossacks are an active part of interethnic life in the Peninsula. Bebnev underlines that they are tolerant to the other religions. However, he adds that they are uneasy about the newly emerging religious Tatar groups. As to the right of the Tatar "other" to get organized to defend the communal interest, Bebnev is critical of the Mejlis while it calls it illegitimate and possibly of an uncivilized character. He argues that it should not exist. When it comes to the ownership of land, Bebnev argues that the land is owned by the one who has documents for it. Therefore, Tatars who return from exile are seen as occupants and they cannot claim indigenous rights. No doubt, Bebnev avoids touching the issue of how Tatars were deported and how their properties were appropriated. Instead, Bebnev argues that the Cossacks are a nation and their living space is cut through state borders.

On the other hand, the official web site, discussing the identity and functions of Cossacks argues that the Cossacks have always served their native land: Russia. The service to Russia is reasoned with religious context, in which pious Cossacks are argued to be serving their native lands. However, the discourse of the online text is rather aggressive, as it teaches to crush the enemies of the Fatherland and to abhor the enemies of God.

In practice, the activities of the “Rus” Cossacks shed light to how such teachings are practiced. The first excerpt displays that for Bebnév there is no separation between Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, and that there is a single state. Therefore, looking at the ideas expressed on the official website, I can argue that for the “Rus” Cossacks, Crimea is Russia and thus, the Fatherland. With this logic, the enemies of the Fatherland and the enemies of God should be those who would not accept Russia as their Fatherland and those who would not accept the Orthodox God.

Bebnev’s cooperation with a pan-Slavic party and a separatist movement shows that actually Bebnév and his Cossacks are taking on the task of the forefathers: that is, to defend the Fatherland and the religion. The task taken prepares the grounds for conflictive relations between the Cossacks and Tatars, since the attitude does not allow Crimean Tatars to claim the land as their Fatherland. It is rather ironic that while Bebnév proposed Tatars to get legal documents to revindicate the land, which is unlikely in a place where most Tatars live in poor conditions with low income, he was taken to court for illicitly occupying land.

Sidenko, like Bebnév, argues that all Cossacks are brothers and, in a similar fashion, he puts emphasis on the idea that Cossacks have no borders. Like Bebnév, he argues that Cossacks are free people and Orthodox. He defines himself as Ukrainian of Zaporozhian ancestry, with no attachment to the Ukrainian government, as he sees the Ukrainian government as a formality. On the other hand, he stresses on the Russian language and makes no differentiation between being Slav and being Russian. Therefore, for him, the two concepts overlap.

He tends to recognize the mixed ethnic background of the Cossacks and, therefore, argues that he would love Tatars and others who have contributed to the Cossack ethnicity. However, on the other hand, he has a clear hatred towards Jews. This compromises his claim that he has warm feelings to Tatars and others. In the meantime of narrating his intolerance to Jews, he goes into the definition of his Cossack self in reference to religion. By referring to his belief, he builds up his argument towards the idea that he is a warrior of the good, fighting evil and, moreover, Cossacks are ready to take on the fight. What is striking here is his sharp remarks about destroying the evil. He incites that Jews be killed on the spot, shot without any judicial process. Looking at these remarks we can conclude that such an identity definition allows and fosters hatred towards others on the basis of religious difference.

In this sense, the identity formulation can anytime construct the Tatar “other” as a representative of the evil. Such an attitude to Crimean Tatars emerges in the interview when the discussion comes to Crimean Tatar claims on the land. Sidenko, while recognizing that the land is not Cossack, argues that it was not Tatar either. Instead, he maintains that the land historically belonged to Turks (Ottomans) and only they could claim the land. He obviously is disturbed by the growing Crimean Tatar influence organized around religious groups funded by other countries. At this point, his wording gets as sharp as his discourse on Jews.

The data from the web show that the Crimean Zaporozhian Cossacks are part of a larger Zaporozhian Cossack movement, which is notorious among Cossacks by its pro-Russian, pro-Orthodox (leaning towards the Moscow patriarchate), and anti-Ukrainian nationalist. The data also show that the group runs for political interests and the leader has a criminal past. The leader of the Crimean organization has a leading role among all Cossacks of Crimea and takes active part in support of ethnic Russian organizations and the Orthodox Church. A major example of Yurchenko’s role in the Feodosia events shows that Cossacks do not hesitate to incite ethnic and religious conflict in the Peninsula.

The interview with Vadym Ilovchenko produced a rather different line of Cossack identity. He had no notion of Cossackdom until the age of 35. According to the interview data, at one point in his life, Ilovchenko decides to become a Cossack and gathers people around him. Ilovchenko defines their motivations and activities as of being brigands. The interview data also suggest that he and his Cossacks immediately involved in conflicts with Tatars.

In terms of how he constructed his Cossack identity, Ilovchenko refers to religion and argues that without Christianity one cannot become Cossack. With the religious perspective, the Cossack is also a defender of his land. In this sense, he argues that in case of need it is necessary to fight. However, he also stresses on peaceful resolution of the conflicts with Tatars. Ilovchenko is against imposed Ukrainian identity and considers that Russians and Ukrainians are one people and Cossacks are a nation.

As it is the case with other interviewees, he denies the connection of the Crimean Tatars to the Peninsula by calling the Peninsula “Taurida”, instead of “Crimea”, a Tatar word.

The data on the web turn out completely other sources for his Cossack identity. According to the data, verified through multiple online sources, Ilovchenko and his brother-in-arms Khramov are notorious with their

illicit activities, particularly in forced occupations of land and enterprises. Therefore, Ilovchenko, sentenced for land occupation, and Khramov, sentenced for inciting ethnic hatred, are Cossacks who are interested to increase personal wealth through methods of organized crime.

The leaders of these Cossacks participate to almost all the events and activities which mark the Russian and Soviet victories in and around the Peninsula and their discourse is offensive against Crimean Tatars. With such activities and their open public statements, these Cossacks place emphasis on the fact that they own the land and deny the Crimean Tatars claim to be recognized as indigenous people.

In an overall look at the data, we may conclude that the Cossacks have a significant impact on the way interethnic relations between Russians and Crimean Tatars unfold. The data show that Cossacks are active both in the physical realm through defending the Churches and religious spaces and marking the space with Christian crosses. They are also active in the social space through events such as festivals, commemorations and youth camps. With such activities in the physical and social realm, the Cossacks define and redefine their interests, construct their values and negotiate their political priorities. Such priorities, as the present research shows, are often in conflict with the interests, values and political priorities of the Crimean Tatars. As the data provided here have pointed out, the identity definitions of the Cossacks provide the grounds for conflict. The contemporary Cossack identity is built around the historical image of the Cossack forefathers, which is often promoted around the idealistic perception of freedom, service to the Fatherland and service to the Church. The data show that the Cossacks of Crimea, as sampled in this article, define the land as the Russian land and with that it should be protected as a Fatherland. This notion leaves no grounds for Crimean Tatar definition of the land as a Fatherland. The fact that Crimean Tatars were perceived as the alien from the steppe, occupying, stealing and raping, has a coupling impact with the Crimean Tatar land occupations which occurred in the post-1990s.

The religious difference is also a matter of how identities and interests are defined. As Cossacks built their identities around the service to the Church, servants of God, therefore servants of the good versus the evil, Cossacks are marking the space as an Orthodox space. The very conservative nature of the Cossacks also leaves not much ground for the Crimean Tatar religious belief. The recent upsurge of religious sects among Crimean Tatars shows signs of marginalization which might have

been motivated by the Cossacks' protective and conservative attitude to the religion and the land. Recently growing Crimean Tatar religious sects, mostly of Arabic line, threatens the Cossacks and challenges the Cossack primacy in the physical and social space. If the nature of events unfold in this direction a larger scale ethnic and religious conflict in the Peninsula is unavoidable.

NOTES

- 1 Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi. *A History of Ukraine*. Archon Books, 1970, p. 151.
- 2 Dmytro Doroshenko. *A Survey of Ukrainian History*. Trident Press Limited, Winnipeg, 1975, p. 131.
- 3 Iakovenko, 2005, p.182.
- 4 Quoted from Litovska Metrika in, B. V. Cherkas. "Ukrainian Cossacks in late 15th and early 16th centuries". In Samolii *et al. History of Ukrainian Cossacks: Essays in Two Volumes*, Kyiv-Mohyla Academia Publishing House, Kyiv, 2006, p. 57.
- 5 Hrushevs'kyi. Vol 7, p. 61.
- 6 Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi. *A History of Ukraine*. Archon Books, 1970, p. 154. See also, O. B. Holovko. "Problema Doslidzhennia istorichnykh poperednykiv ukraïns'koho kozatstva" (The Research Problem of the Historical Predecessors of Ukrainian Cossacks).
- 7 Hrushevsky, p. 456.
- 8 New Russia gubernia (Novorosiis'ka gubernia) was an administrative structure formed to rule regions to the north of the Crimean Khanate. It was first formed in 1764 to include parts of Zaporozhian territories. As Russian Empire expanded southward, the gubernia covered former Zaporozhian, Tatar, and Ottoman territories to the north of the Black Sea.
- 9 Hrushevsky, p. 457.
- 10 Volodymyr Mil'chev. *Zaporozhtsi na Viis'komu Kordoni Avstriis'koï imperii\ 1785-1790 rr.* (Zaporozhians on the Military Border of Austrian Empire, 1785-1790). Tandem-U Publishers, Zaporozhzhia, 2007, p. 27. Other author favoring the argument is Roman Shyian. *Kozatstvo Pivdennoi Ukraïny v Ostannii Chverti XVIII st.* Tandem Publishers, Zaporozhzhia, 1998, p. 4.
- 11 Roman Syhian. "Chornomors'ke Kozats'ke Viis'ko". In O.A. Bachyns'ka *et al. Kozatstvo na Pivdni Ukraïny. Kinets XVIII-XIX st.* Odesa, 2000, p. 94.
- 12 Vadym Zadunais'kyi, "Ukraïns'ke kozatske vidrozhennia ta Narodnyi Rukh Ukraïny: kinets 80-kh – pochatok 90-kh rr." *Skhid 6:97 (2009)*.
http://www.experts.in.ua/baza/analitic/index.php?ELEMENT_ID=44626
- 13 Kozats'ke viis'ko zaporoz'ke nyzove (KVZN).
- 14 <http://kvzn.zp.ua/?go=katalog&catid=129&podcatid=674>
- 15 Borys Bebnev. Personal interview. June 11, 2013. File access number A0070101, Oylupinar archive.
- 16 Sevastopol Blagochynieje is an ecclesiastical district of Simferopol and Crimean Eparchy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The Coordination Council was established in December 26, 2012 at the Saint Vladimir's Cathedral near Khersonnes. The Council aims at regulating cooperation between the Church and the Cossack organizations. At present time seven Crimean Cossack organizations take part in this Council. See <http://yug-front.info/main/3645-new-3645.html>

- 17 See, Oylupinar's dissertation.
18 <http://sevastopolkazaki.ru>
19 <http://yug-front.info/main/757-new-757.html>
20 Starting from February 2013, the leadership of the Russkiy Blok decided to
liquidate the party. [http://911sevastopol.org/articles/Sevastopolskij_ataman_
postroit_sebe_torgovyj_centra_na_Kosareva/](http://911sevastopol.org/articles/Sevastopolskij_ataman_postroit_sebe_torgovyj_centra_na_Kosareva/)
21 <http://www.leus.sebastopol.ua/1016/>
22 The order was established by the Russian Community of Sevastopol. [http://
www.nr2.ru/221559.html/print/](http://www.nr2.ru/221559.html/print/)
23 <http://sevastopol.su/news.php?id=50282>
24 <http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1630789.html>
25 [http://www.liveinternet.ru/showjournal.php?journalid=3809708&tag
id=204415](http://www.liveinternet.ru/showjournal.php?journalid=3809708&tagid=204415)
26 <http://www.sotnia.ru/forum/viewtopic.php?f=9&t=15315>
<http://iks2010.org/?p=11771>
27 Viktor Sidenko. Personal interview. June 13, 2013. File access number
A0060000, Oylupinar archive.
28 The Coordination Council was established in May 2005, in Bakhchisarai.
Ataman Yurchenko was elected the Ataman of the Council.
29 A political movement which defends the rights of the Russian population
in Crimea. It was registered as a political party in September 2010. In
October 2010 elections, the party achieved the 3 percent barrier and gained
three chairs in the Crimean parliament. The party gained most votes in
Bakhchisarai and therefore, the mayor's seat.
30 Soiuz kozakiv Ukraïny. The UKK was not registered formally. Therefore,
this organization uses KVZN for formal purposes while using the UKK for
public access.
31 <http://odnarodyna.com.ua/node/11718>
32 <http://www.edrus.org/content/view/23267/53/>
33 [http://anvictory.org/blog/2011/07/04/izbienie-kazakov-v-krymu-o-krestax-
i-krasnyx-tryapkax/](http://anvictory.org/blog/2011/07/04/izbienie-kazakov-v-krymu-o-krestax-i-krasnyx-tryapkax/)
34 <http://russ-edin.org/component/k2/item/43-russkie-kryma-ob-edinilis>
35 Tavrisheskoy sotni Terskogo voyskogo kazachego obchestva.
36 Vadym Ilovchenko. Personal interview. June 8, 2013. File access number
A0040000, Oylupinar archive.
37 The current leader of Sobol. He is usually titled as the Elder of the Sobol.
38 Sergey Mal'nev, "Professiya - reyder", *Krymskaya Pravda*.
[http://kp-old.crimea.com/news_details.php?news_type_id=3&news_
id=1867](http://kp-old.crimea.com/news_details.php?news_type_id=3&news_id=1867)
See also, <http://1k.com.ua/187/details/5/5>, [http://maidanua.org/static/
krymmai/1302691084.html](http://maidanua.org/static/krymmai/1302691084.html)

- 39 The author of this article conducted his interview with V. Ilovchenko at the
location indicated in the reports.
- 40 <http://novoross.info/4255-sud-prigovoril-atamana-ilovchenko-k-5-godam-lisheniya-svobody-uslovno.html>
- 41 <http://yug-front.info/main/498-new-498.html>
- 42 The web sources refer him as Ataman of the Sobol Cossacks until 2011.
- 43 http://www.religion.in.ua/news/ukrainian_news/11951-ataman-vitalij-xramov-vinovnyj-v-razzhiganii-mezhnacionalnoj-i-mezhreligioznoj-vrazhdy-vydvoren-s-territorii-ukrainy.html
- 44 <http://www.nr2.ru/crimea/432756.html>
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