

Identity Politics in Crimea: Internal Borders in the USSR between the 1950s and the 1970s

In July 1976, the Soviet Ukrainian government assigned a recent graduate of the Kherson agricultural institute to his first job posting in Crimea. Keen to encourage the young engineer to stay on the peninsula, representatives of the local authorities met him as soon as he arrived in Simferopol. Although they first emphasised that educated specialists were badly needed in Crimea, local leaders suddenly claimed that all vacancies had been filled as it came to light that R.M. Kerimov was a Crimean Tatar. Kerimov refused to leave Crimea and travelled some thirty miles west to the coastal town of Saki. He arranged a meeting at the town council and got a job straight away because a young woman assigned to work in Saki had recently refused to move to Crimea from her native region in western Ukraine. Kerimov's first three weeks in Saki went by smoothly, but problems started again when he attempted to register as a permanent resident at the local workers' hostel. 'Are you a Crimean Tatar?' – the hostel manager was startled upon examining his documents – 'Leave right now, ... they might fire me, the man who issues passports has already got in trouble for something like this'. As news of Kerimov's ethnic background spread, his boss begged him to leave and even offered to cover the engineer's moving expenses. When Kerimov refused to resign from his job, he was quickly fired and the post he had occupied remained unfilled several months later.¹

Kerimov's story illuminates the dynamics of Soviet identity politics in Crimea after the wholesale deportations of Crimean Tatars and other non-Russian and non-Ukrainian minorities during the second world war.² Because the peninsula suffered from labour shortages, technical expertise was a marker of high social status. As a specialist in agriculture, Kerimov enjoyed access to the district and municipal authorities and had no problem finding a job on the peninsula. At the same time, over thirty years after the deportations, and despite Khrushchev's public condemnation of Stalin's xenophobic policies,³ ethnicity remained a key marker of belonging in the imagined Soviet community. Kerimov was not allowed to stay in Crimea

¹ Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Noveishei Istorii, Moscow (hereafter, RGANI), f.5, op.75, d243, ll. 48-59.

² The Soviet authorities deported some 263,000 people from Crimea between 1941 and 1945, including 191,088 Crimean Tatars and smaller numbers of Germans, Greeks, Bulgarians, Armenians, Turks, Italians, and Roma. Nearly 5000 members of deportees' families were also forced to leave Crimea between 1942 and 1952. Most deportees ended up in Central Asia, where they lived under a 'special settlement' regime administered by the NKVD. Haluzevyi Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Ministerstva Vnutrishnikh Sprav Ukrainy, Kyiv [hereafter, HDAMVS], f.15, o.1, s.172, ark.158-59 [published in O.G. Bazhan et al (eds), *Krym v umovakh suspil'no-politychnykh transformatsii (1940-2015): Zbirnyk dokumentiv i materialiv* (Kyiv, 2016), 838-40].

³ Nikita Khrushchev Reference Archive, 'Speech to the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU'. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/khrushchev/1956/02/24.htm> (accessed on 29 June 2018).

simply because of the ethnic identity written into his internal passport. Kerimov's experiences further illustrate how far xenophobia penetrated local society in Crimea. The authorities in Kyiv, Simferopol, and Saki were at first blind to Kerimov's ethnic identity and seemed not to communicate with each other once they discovered that he was a Crimean Tatar. While the state struggled to enforce its xenophobic policies, the establishment of a Tatar-free Crimea was contingent on the collaboration of local inhabitants. Fearful of repression and keen to preserve their social and professional status, Kerimov's Slavic acquaintances made sure that he left the peninsula.

Kerimov's story further points to the importance of internal borders between Soviet republics. Crimea was firmly integrated into Soviet Ukraine after the transfer from Soviet Russian to Soviet Ukrainian jurisdiction in 1954. Educated at one of Soviet Ukraine's institutions, Kerimov travelled to Crimea on instructions obtained from the republic's authorities. Kyiv thus drew on the republic's human capital to address Crimea's economic needs. It is also striking that the vacancy in Saki was supposed to be filled by a woman from western Ukraine. Keen to turn Crimea into a Slavic nation space, the authorities considered Slavs from the supposedly unstable borderlands annexed during the second world war to be more inherently loyal citizens and reliable experts than members of non-titular minorities.

Based on archival research in Ukraine and Russia, and a rich document collection published under the editorship of Oleh Bazhan in 2016,⁴ this article explains the twentieth-century roots of Crimea's modern-day Ukrainian, Russian, and Tatar identities. First of all, it argues that Crimea established strong administrative, economic, and human ties to Soviet Ukraine between the 1950s and the 1970s. The transfer of Crimea from Russian to Ukrainian jurisdiction in 1954 was part of an attempt to re-populate the peninsula with agricultural settlers from mainland Ukraine. This move was underpinned by Khrushchev's reliance on the Ukrainian republican-level government to invest in the development of Crimean infrastructure, especially in the countryside, as well as the hope that large families and even entire villages transplanted to the peninsula from nearby parts of Ukraine would provide for a more firmly grounded labour force than a mish-mash of individuals from far-flung parts of the USSR. Secondly, the article demonstrates that Communist Party officials never

⁴ O.G. Bazhan et al (eds), *Krym v umovakh suspil-no-politychnykh transformatsii (1940-2015): Zbirnyk dokumentiv i materialiv* (Kyiv, 2016). When citing from this edited volume, I provide the original archival reference along with page numbers in Bazhan's collection in square brackets.

established a Ukrainian cultural identity for Crimea.⁵ Instead, they promoted a composite ‘East Slavic’ identity which obscured differences between Russians and Ukrainians, as well as between Russia and Ukraine. They thus appealed to local residents’ sense of great power pride and drew on ethnocentric historical narratives which portrayed Crimea as an ancient Russian and Ukrainian land threatened by foreigners abroad and ethnic minorities at home. While both Russian and Ukrainian identities served as markers of loyalty on the peninsula, Ukrainianness was defined strictly through the prism of ‘eternal friendship’ with the Russian big brother. The rhetoric of ‘East Slavic’ unity is today evoked to justify Russian annexation of Crimea. Finally, the article shows that this xenophobic and ethnocentric East Slavic narrative reverberated on a popular level. Identifying friends and foes in ethnic terms, citizens protected their rights on the peninsula against the perceived threat posed by Crimean Tatars.⁶ This fuelled conflict with Crimean Tatars wishing to return to the peninsula after the death of Stalin, and continues to relegate Crimean Tatars to the status of second-class citizens today.

I. Post-war demographic crisis

The transfer of Crimea from Russian to Ukrainian jurisdiction was part of an attempt to repopulate and to rebuild the peninsula after wartime destruction. By the late 1950s, although the number of Crimean inhabitants had just about exceeded what it had been before the war, the rural population was still significantly smaller than in 1939.⁷ The loss of life during the

⁵ Ethnicity became an important administrative category at least partly because Soviet leaders sought to eliminate national inequalities in the 1920s and the 1930s. Yuri Slezkine, ‘The USSR as communal apartment, or how a socialist state promoted ethnic particularism’, *Slavic Review* 53:2 (1994), 414-52.

⁶ Xenophobia shaped social and political dynamics in the USSR more broadly. As fears of foreign intervention dominated public rhetoric during the late 1930s, certain ethnic groups were destined for wholesale deportations during the 1930s and the 1940s. Meanwhile, although Stalinist terror targeted all Soviet citizens irrespective of ethnic background, the authorities looked primarily towards Russians and other East Slavs in their search for reliable and deserving citizens. Even when Moscow still condemned Russian dominance in the multi-ethnic regions of the USSR as a colonial overhang, local activists sometimes guaranteed Slavs preferential access to jobs and welfare – this was evident, for example, on the Turksib railway construction site in Kazakhstan. Moscow significantly scaled down affirmative action towards non-Russians and rehabilitated certain aspects of Russian history and culture in an attempt to propagate Soviet patriotism after the mid-1930s. For example, extending control over newly acquired territories in western Ukraine at the end of World War II, they promoted Russians and Ukrainians to positions of responsibility and removed non-East Slavic cultures and people from the borderlands. In non-Russian republics such as Azerbaijan, the titular nationality enjoyed privileges, while the authorities looked at ethnic minorities with suspicion. See, for example, T. Marin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, 2001); M. Pohl, ‘It cannot be that our graves will be here: The survival of Chechen and Ingush deportees in Kazakhstan, 1944-57’, *Journal of Genocide Research* 4:3 (2002), 401-30; M. Payne, ‘The Forge of the Kazakh Proletariat? The Turksib, Nativisation, and Industrialisation during Stalin’s first Five Year Plan’ in R. Suny and T. Martin (eds), *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford, 2001), 223-52; S. Frunchak, ‘Commemorating the Future in Postwar Chernivtsi’, *East European Politics and Societies* 24:3 (2010), 435-63.

⁷ Tsentral’nyi Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Hromads’kykh Ob’ednan’ Ukrainy, Kyiv (hereafter, TsDAHO), f.1, op.6, s.3001, ark. 118-20 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 575-77]; Tsentral’nyi Arkhiv Vyshchykh Orhaniv Vlady ta Upravlinnia

Second World War and outmigration to cities resulted in labour shortages across the Soviet countryside.⁸ The problem was further exacerbated as Soviet leaders sought to increase agricultural production by expanding sown areas.⁹ Along with the Virgin Lands and parts of north Caucasus, the shortage of agricultural labour was especially burning in Crimea because the peninsula had lost a quarter of its population during the ethnic deportations of the 1940s.¹⁰ Although the resettlement of peasants from overpopulated to underpopulated parts of the USSR generally fell within the remit of the central resettlement commission in Moscow,¹¹ the Ukrainian authorities in Kyiv played a leading role in solving Crimea's demographic crisis. This is because Ukraine had a comparatively large excess of agricultural labour, its inhabitants volunteered to move to Crimea and, in contrast to their Russian counterparts, republican-level authorities in Ukraine were willing to fund the development of rural infrastructure.

Crimea established strong demographic ties to Ukraine during the 1950s. The majority of families arriving in Crimea in 1950 and 1951 hailed from the RSFSR, but Ukraine's central regions turned into the most important source of new labour for the peninsula in 1952, when the local authorities welcomed 1576 families from Ukraine and 1311 families from Russia. Crimea relied on Ukraine's labour reserves even more after the transfer from Russian to Ukrainian jurisdiction. In the first nine months of 1954, the Crimean authorities registered 392 new families from Russia and 905 new families from Ukraine. Between 1955 and 1959, 17,000 families from Ukraine settled in Crimea, half of them from the Ukrainian-speaking western parts of the republic.¹² Although Russians still outnumbered Ukrainians on the peninsula, and new arrivals from Ukraine no doubt included people identified as Russian in

Ukrainy, Kyiv (hereafter, TsDAVO), f.582, op.20, s.93, ark. 305-20 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 585-617]; TsDAVO, f.2, op.13, s.865, ark.49-51 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 693].

⁸ O.M. Verbitskaia, *Rossiiskoe krestianstvo ot Stalina k Khrushchevu: seredina 40kh – nachalo 60kh godov* (Moscow, 1992), 59-60, 80-83, 85, 92; A. Berg, 'Reform in the time of Stalin: Nikita Khrushchev and the fate of the Russian peasantry' (Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, 2012), 129.

⁹ At the same time, various administrative measures were taken to improve the performance of the agricultural sector. See Verbitskaia, *Rossiiskoe krestianstvo*, 18-36; Michaela Pohl, 'The Virgin Lands Between Memory and Forgetting: People and Transformation in the Soviet Union, 1954-60' (Doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, 1999), 117-18.

¹⁰ Resettlement began very soon after the Crimean Tatars were expelled. Verbitskaia, *Rossiiskoe krestianstvo*, 90.

¹¹ Pohl, 'The Virgin Lands', 171-72.

¹² TsDAVO, f.4626, op.1, s.273, ark.93-95 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 384-7]; TsDAHO, f.1, op.6, s.3001, ark.118-120 (published in Bazhan, *Krym*, 575-7).

their internal passports, the number of Ukrainians in Crimea increased at a considerably faster rate than the number of Russians during the 1950s.¹³

Crimea's growing dependence on Ukraine's labour resulted from Nikita Khrushchev's attempts to reform Soviet agriculture. In contrast to the Russian republic, where Khrushchev's plans to amalgamate collective farms into larger agricultural settlements all but ground to a halt, the authorities liquidated a much greater number of small and supposedly unviable villages in central parts of Ukraine and, especially, in the western borderlands.¹⁴ They thus uprooted peasant communities and effectively freed up agricultural labour. Between 1950 and 1953, most of the collective farmers who successfully settled in Crimea came to the peninsula with their entire agricultural brigades or collective farms which were dissolved elsewhere, especially in the regions of Sumy and Chernivtsi. Meanwhile, settlers who moved to Crimea as individual family units were far less likely to stay long-term.¹⁵

As Khrushchev favoured positive incentives over coercion to increase labour efficiency in the countryside,¹⁶ the authorities in Kyiv emphasised that Ukraine provided the most reliable source of collective farmers who would volunteer to resettle in Crimea. Before the death of Stalin, Kyiv had sent peasants from overpopulated parts of the republic to such far-flung provinces of the USSR as Karelia, Sakhalin, and Khabarovsk.¹⁷ Although party agitators were not always successful in encouraging Ukraine's peasants to voluntarily move to Crimea,¹⁸ the republic's leadership nevertheless emphasised that Ukraine's peasants were more willing to move to nearby Crimea as compared to other parts of the USSR. They thus called on Moscow to revise previous resettlement plans for 1954 which called for thousands of Ukraine's farmers to move to Chita and, as it came to light that RSFSR authorities

¹³ Before the Second World War and the expulsion of Crimean Tatars, Soviet citizens identified as 'Russian' in their internal passports had constituted 49% of Soviet citizens in Crimea; Ukrainians made up less than 14% of the local population. In absolute numbers, more ethnic Russians than Ukrainians arrived on the peninsula during the 1940s and the 1950s. By 1959, citizens identified as 'Russian' and 'Ukrainian' made up 71% and 22% of Crimean population respectively, and most settlements on the peninsula had a clear Russian majority. Still, Ukraine was key to Crimea's demographic growth. Between 1939 and 1959, the number of Ukrainians in Crimea increased by 74% from 153,500 to 267,700, while the number of Russians grew by 54% from 557,500 to 858,300. TsDAHO, f.1, op.6, s.3001, ark.118-120 [published in Bazhan, *Krym*, 575-7]; f.582, op.20, s.93, ark. 305-20 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 585-617]; TsDAVO, f.2, op.13, s.865, ark.49-51 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 693].

¹⁴ Verbitskaia, *Rossiiskoe krestianstvo*, 96-97, 159; Berg, 'Reform', 3-4, 39.

¹⁵ TsDAVO, f.2, op.8, s.8862, ark.139-40 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 154-55]

¹⁶ This entailed lowering taxes, raising procurement prices, and increasing the presence of communist party activists in the countryside. Pohl, 'Virgin Lands', 116. For the most part, these tactics did not work. Reducing the number of collective farms through the 1950s without actually amalgamating peasant settlements meant that the political and social life of collective farms increasingly concentrated in the farm centre, with outlying villages belonging to the same collective farm sidelined. Berg, 'Reform', 186.

¹⁷ TsDAVO, f.2, op.8, s.8862, ark. 139-40 [Bazhan, *Krym*, pp. 150-51]

¹⁸ TsDAVO, f.2, op.8, s.1483, ark. 6-7 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 103]

struggled to mobilise Russia's peasants for resettlement in Crimea, to replace Russian with Ukrainian settlers.¹⁹

Ukraine's role in Crimea was primarily economic. For old residents, the legitimacy of Ukrainian administration was grounded in the promises to fix local agriculture. Immediately after the transfer from Russia to Ukraine, local inhabitants attended special agitation meetings where some participants publicly expressed the expectation that Ukraine would improve agricultural supplies.²⁰ For new settlers, the establishment of Soviet Ukrainian administration in Crimea promised improved welfare. Through the 1950s and the early 1960s, the authorities relied on local community leaders to encourage Ukraine's rural inhabitants to move to the peninsula. These opinion leaders travelled to Crimea and then organised special agitation meetings back at their collective farms or wrote letters to friends and relatives back home in which they praised the supposedly high quality of life in their new villages. As late as 1965, for example, a Crimean farmer originally from the western Ukrainian region of Volhynia portrayed the peninsula as a land of welfare and educational opportunities:

I moved to Crimea with my wife and two children in 1960... They gave us a house, helped us obtain a cow and assigned us work which is in line with our professional preparation... We earn good money... We bought a television set. We have a garden in which we grow our own fruit and grapes. Our daughter Svetlana studies at the Yalta agricultural school, and our son works on developing rice paddies. My fellow Volhynians, I pass the sunny greetings from all the resettlers at our state farm [sovkhoz]. Join us, you will not regret it!²¹

Regional identities and community bonds from mainland Ukraine were thus mobilised to encourage collective farmers to dream of a better Soviet future in Crimea.

Collective farmers who took seriously Soviet promises of welfare in Crimea relied heavily on republican-level authorities in Kyiv. After decision making on collective farm investment was devolved to the republic level in 1946, Kyiv invested in developing new, larger collective farms, while the Russian authorities, largely under the influence of Khrushchev's chief rival Malenkov, resisted attempts to increase state funding for

¹⁹ TsDAVO, f.2, op.8, s.10935, ark. 10-20 [Bazhan, *Krym*, Part II, Documents 40 and 42]

²⁰ TsDAHO, f.1, op.46, s.6910, ark.3-5 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 173-4]

²¹ TsDAVO, f.4626, op.3, s.262, ark.3-26 [Bazhan, *Krym*, Part II, Document 167].

infrastructure in the countryside.²² Unsurprisingly, therefore, Crimean agriculture saw little improvement in the years before the transfer from Russia to Ukraine. According to the authorities in Kyiv, few houses were built in rural Crimea before 1954, and new arrivals often found themselves homeless. To remedy the situation, the Kyiv Central Committee drew up ambitious plans to build new houses at collective farms between 1954 and 1958, to offer loans that would allow collective farms to refurbish existing infrastructure, and to extend tax waivers for new agricultural settlers in Crimea from two to four years.²³ Kyiv would likewise be responsible for organising and partly funding the building of new schools and kindergartens, predominantly in rural parts of Crimea.²⁴ Apart from these improvements to the quality of life in the countryside, Kyiv was also responsible for raising agricultural output. In the mid-1950s, republican-level authorities saw orchards, vineyards, and tobacco plantations as the most important part of the local economy, predicting that new irrigation systems would make it possible to increase orchards alone from 17.1 thousand hectares in 1954 to 30.6 thousand hectares in 1958, but also bemoaning the fact that the actual area of orchards under cultivation was twelve percent lower than before the Second World War.²⁵ Accordingly, the Ukrainian republican institutions would plan and build a new canal to expand irrigated areas in northern steppe regions of Crimea.²⁶

Ukrainian authorities in Kyiv were also charged with rebuilding urban Crimea. Despite widespread wartime destruction, no new hospitals were constructed after 1945; the number of schools in 1954 was still lower than in 1940; and inefficient water supply and sewage systems meant that excrement lined Crimean beaches.²⁷ The Ukrainian government planned large investment projects.²⁸ Developing Crimean towns required further resettlement from mainland Ukraine and other parts of the USSR. As vacation travel grew, the population of Crimean coastal resort towns of Yalta, Alushta, Alupka, and Simeiz would have to rise from 46,000 to 68,000 in the second half of the 1950s.²⁹ Some urban development projects required substantial financial commitments from the Ukrainian republican budget. For example, Kyiv would cover over sixty per cent of the costs of building new hospitals and

²² Berg, 'Reform', 58-9, 94-6, 114-15.

²³ TsDAHO, f.1, op.24, s.3672, ark.5-29; TsDAVO, f.2, op.8, s.10935, ark.10-20 [Bazhan, *Krym*, Part II, Document 42]

²⁴ TsDAHO, f.1, op.24, s.3672, ark.5-29.

²⁵ TsDAHO, f.1, op.24, s.3672, ark.5-29.

²⁶ TsDAHO, f.1, op.6, s.2051, ark.7-8 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 176-8].

²⁷ TsDAHO, f.1, op.30, s.3590, ark.93-104, 120-36; TsDAHO, f.1, op.24, s.3672, ark. 1-3, 4-29, 31-32, 231-32; TsDAHO, f.1, op.24, s.3895, ark.177-80.

²⁸ TsDAHO, f.1, op.6, s.2110, ark.121-5.

²⁹ TsDAHO, f.1, op.24, s.4078, ark. 269-270.

other medical infrastructure.³⁰ In other cases, such as the rebuilding of the town of Sevastopol between 1955 and 1958, most of the funds would come from the central Soviet budget.³¹ Yet money was not the greatest challenge in rebuilding Crimea. Financial resources devoted to reconstruction projects on the peninsula went unused from year to year because the authorities failed to secure both the building materials and the workforce necessary to actually spend them. It would now fall on Ukrainian ministries and republican-level enterprises to organise construction work and to provide engineers and other professionals to ensure the development of housing, sanatoria, and cultural institutions to serve both locals and tourists.³²

II. Ukraine's crisis of legitimacy

As Crimea underwent large-scale demographic and administrative changes, the authorities Kyiv faced a crisis of legitimacy. In the 1950s and the 1960s, they sought to legitimise their power on the peninsula by mobilising a sense of great power pride and xenophobic sentiment which united old Slavic residents and new settlers in Crimea. Promoting a composite 'East Slavic' identity for Crimea in education, in the press, and in various public venues such as museums, the authorities obliterated memories of Tatar past and downplayed linguistic and cultural differences among Russians and Ukrainians. Soviet-made identities which emerged in Ukrainian Crimea during the second half of the twentieth century were founded on the notion that the Russian-dominated Slavic community was constantly under threat from external enemies and ethnic minorities at home.

Old residents of Crimea were not enthusiastic about the transfer from Russian to Ukrainian jurisdiction in 1954. At public meetings, they expressed concerns over how the move would affect local salaries and supplies.³³ Meanwhile, new settlers' hopes for a better future in Ukraine set them up for bitter disappointments. Well into the 1960s, Kyiv bemoaned the fact that many settlers only stayed in Crimea for several months because collective farms were still desperately short of housing, while new buildings were of poor quality (some did not have toilets, forcing new settlers to use the facilities at their neighbours' homes). There were visible rifts between old residents and new settlers on the peninsula. In the assessment

³⁰ TsDAHO, f.1, op.24, s.3672, ark.5-29.

³¹ TsDAHO, f.1, op.24, s.3668, ark. 26, 30.

³² TsDAHO, f.1, op.6, s.2110, ark121-5; TsDAHO, f.1, op.24, s.3672, ark5-29; TsDAHO, op.1, op.24, s.4078, ark.267-8.

³³ TsDAHO, f.1, op.46, s.6910, ark.3-5; TsDAHO, op.1, op.46, s.6910, ark.3-5 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 173-4]

of the republican-level authorities, problems with housing continued because local leaders in Simferopol were indifferent or even hostile to settlers. Regional authorities sent settler families with children to collective farms with no schools. For their part, collective farm chairmen assigned new houses to old residents of Crimea and refused to share basic equipment or supplies with newcomers, even in cases where they were in plentiful supply.³⁴

For Kyiv, increasing Ukrainian institutions' influence over Crimea was tantamount to overcoming local resistance to overlapping demographic and administrative change. As Crimea was transferred from Russian to Ukrainian jurisdiction, the limits of administrative reform were unclear and local officials were not even certain whether Crimea would remain a separate oblast.³⁵ In the mid-1950s, local cadres feared that they would be replaced by new appointees from Ukraine. The influx of new settlers made personnel changes in Crimea all the more likely. Kyiv hoped that Ukraine would provide a source of new, better-educated party workers for the peninsula, at least some of whom would be able to communicate with new settlers not only in Russian, but also in Ukrainian and Belarusian.³⁶ To be sure, these fears were not unique to Crimea, as uncertainty about the future penetrated communist party cells throughout the USSR after the death of Stalin in 1953. Rank and file Party members across the country were encouraged to engage in discussion at primary party cell meetings and to criticise abuses at the local level.³⁷ While these attempts to breathe a new life into the Communist Party were directed from Moscow, for Crimean party apparatchiks the instability of the mid-1950s was closely associated with the transfer of power from Moscow to Kyiv. The Communist Party of Ukraine did Khrushchev's dirty work on the peninsula as they singled out local party bureaucrats deemed particularly unresponsive to the needs and voices of ordinary communists and, most importantly, collective farmers.³⁸ There were few competent communists who worked in the Crimean countryside, claimed senior Party apparatchiks in Kyiv, and local leaders could not even collect basic statistical information about rural parts of the peninsula.³⁹

³⁴ TsDAVO, f.2, op.8, s.10944, ark.61-70 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 231-5]; TsDAVO, f.4626, op.3, s.262, ark.3-26 [Bazhan, *Krym*, Part II, Document 167]; TsDAVO, f.2, op.9, s.2589, ark.159-62 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 617-19].

³⁵ TsDAHO, f.1, op.46, s.46, ark.3-5; TsDAHO, f.1, op.30, s.3889, ark.17-18.

³⁶ TsDAHO, f.1, op.30, s.3590, ark.120-36.

³⁷ For example, see P. Jones, "From the Secret Speech to the Burial of Stalin: Real and Ideal Responses to De-Stalinisation," in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinisation: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era*, ed. Polly Jones (London, 2006), 42-51.

³⁸ TsDAHO, f.1, op.24, s.3538, ark.14-19.

³⁹ TsDAHO, f.1, op.30, s.3590, ark.82-90.

During the 1950s, Kyiv saw the promotion of Ukrainian language and culture as a means to win over Crimean inhabitants to the new Ukrainian administration. Apart from symbolic gestures such as the renaming of local sanatoria in honour of Ukrainian literary and historical heroes,⁴⁰ the CPU Central Committee sought to incorporate local inhabitants in Soviet Ukraine's cultural and educational institutions. They focused in particular on the intelligentsia. Kyiv thus promised that the publishing house Radyans'kyi Pysmennyk would publish Ukrainian translations of books by Crimean writers.⁴¹ Although the vast majority of Crimean schools continued to teach all subjects in Russian, several hours of Ukrainian language instruction were gradually introduced in most schools during the second half of the 1950s. The Central Committee in Kyiv emphasised that this would allow Crimean school graduates to study at Ukraine's universities.⁴² On another level, republican-level authorities made very cautious attempts to cultivate a distinct Soviet Ukrainian identity among recent arrivals to Crimea. Kyiv suggested that Ukrainian translations of Russian-language newspapers be published, albeit only in parts of the peninsula with compact Ukrainian communities.⁴³ Under pressure from the republican authorities, regional leaders in Simferopol also vowed to open schools where Ukrainian would be the main language of instruction. They were supposed to serve the nearly 10,000 children of Ukrainian settlers who had arrived in Crimea in the early to mid-1950s, most of whom had studied in Ukrainian before resettlement.⁴⁴

State-sponsored Ukrainian culture in Crimea was inevitably refracted through the prism of 'eternal friendship' with Russia. The transfer of the peninsula from Russia to Ukraine was itself part of broader public celebrations of the 300th anniversary of Russo-Ukrainian union at Pereiaslav, which Crimean residents marked in various public forums including open-air concerts, special agitation meetings, and exhibitions.⁴⁵ At school, Ukraine's Ministry of Education expected instructors of Ukrainian language to highlight ties between 'progressive' Russian and Ukrainian writers before and after the revolution of 1917, as well as to promote the idea that Russians and Ukrainians built socialism together in the face of external threats: in oral classes, for example, students were supposed to learn such phrases as 'our friendship is stronger than steel', 'extraordinary congress of the Communist Party', and 'the cruel

⁴⁰ Derzhavnyi Arkhiv v Avtonomnii Respublitsi Krym, Simferopol (hereafter, DAARK), f.P1, op.1, s.3852.

⁴¹ TsDAHO, f.1, op.30, s.3648, ark. 223-226.

⁴² TsDAHO, f.1, op.6, s.2309, ark. 1 [Bazhan, Krym, 356-7]

⁴³ TsDAHO, f.1, op.30, s.3648, ark. 114-117.

⁴⁴ DAARK, f.P1, op.1, s.3951; TsDAHO, f.1, op.30, s.3648, ark.227.

⁴⁵ TsDAHO, f.1, op.30, s.3600, ark. 75-78.

invader will perish'.⁴⁶ At the same time, despite efforts made in Kyiv, clear hierarchies emerged between Russian and Ukrainian culture in Crimea. For instance, Kyiv insisted that a Ukrainian drama theatre be opened in the industrial town of Kerch to showcase how Ukrainian playwrights tackled contemporary social problems, thereby proving that Ukrainian culture was not confined to folk dance and music. However, under pressure from the Crimean obkom, the repertoire of the Ukrainian theatre which was eventually established in Crimea consisted of musicals, probably because the genre was easier to understand for the predominantly Russophone local audiences.⁴⁷ Crimean authorities thus effectively relegated Ukrainian-language theatre to the sphere of entertainment.

Even cautious attempts to promote Ukrainian language and culture in Crimea proved controversial. Old inhabitants of Crimea saw the promotion of Ukrainian-language culture to benefit new arrivals. For instance, plans to establish a Ukrainian theatre on the peninsula raised alarm among local Russian-speaking actors who feared that they would now be forced to move elsewhere. In 1954, Mykola Pidhornyi (Nikolai Podgornyi) had to reassure party activists concerned about the Ukrainianisation of public life. In a speech delivered at the regional communist party conference, he emphasised that Kyiv had no track record of forcing the republic's residents to use Ukrainian language in public.⁴⁸

Attempts to promote Ukrainian language and culture in Crimea lost impetus by the end of the 1950s. In particular, the teaching of and in Ukrainian was no longer a priority. Despite ambitious plans to open schools with Ukrainian language of instruction, there were only three such institutions in Crimea in the 1959/60 school year, catering for less than half of one percent of local children.⁴⁹ Moreover, although Ukrainian language was supposed to be taught in all Russian-medium schools from grade two upwards, classes were only offered for certain year groups. Some schools (including all schools in Sevastopol, which mostly catered to the children of military personnel from across the USSR) offered no Ukrainian classes at all. No doubt, the limited spread of Ukrainian in Crimean schools was partly due to major staff shortages. In September 1954, Kyiv estimated that only 94 out of 2193 teachers in Crimea spoke Ukrainian, most of whom had no experience of actually teaching the

⁴⁶ TsDAVO, f.166, op.15, s.3205, ark.89-101 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 630-5]; TsDAVO, f.166, op.15, s.3542, ark.52-55, [Bazhan, *Krym*, 660-3]

⁴⁷ TsDAHO, f.1, op.24, s.3528, ark.133-4 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 390-1]; TsDAHO, f.1, op.31, s.19, ark.137 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 414]; TsDAVO, f.2, op.9, s.2481, ark.116-19 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 529-31]

⁴⁸ TsDAHO, f.1, op.46, s.6910, ark.3-5; TsDAHO, f.1, op.52, s.4990, ark.183-4 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 175-6]

⁴⁹ TsDAHO, f.1, op.6, s.3001, ark.118-20 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 575-7]

language.⁵⁰ More importantly, political pressures from Moscow curbed Kyiv's enthusiasm. Starting in April 1959, in line with all-Soviet education reforms, Crimean parents could choose for their children in schools with Russian language of instruction not to study Ukrainian (meanwhile, all children in Ukrainian-medium schools took Russian classes). Some jumped at the opportunity, concerned that Ukrainian instruction took time away from what they deemed more important and practical subjects, as well as by the poor marks which Ukrainian language teachers reportedly gave out left and right.⁵¹ Moreover, as Khrushchev's reforms undermined the status of non-Russian languages in education and pushed teachers to focus more on the development of practical skills and less on the preparation of students for further study, the point that proficiency in Ukrainian would enable local children to study at Ukraine's universities became almost moot.⁵² Although only 117 parents decided to withdraw their children from Ukrainian language classes by the end of 1959, proponents of teaching Ukrainian in Crimea were on the defensive.⁵³ The CPSU Central Committee sent Kyiv unambiguous signals in the autumn of 1959, responding to complaints from a group of parents in Simferopol who claimed that one school director ignored their requests to switch the curriculum from the Ukrainian to the RSFSR programme and refused to replace Ukrainian language classes with other subjects. The authorities considered the case serious enough for heads to roll both at the school in question and in Crimea's regional administration. The Ukrainian Ministry of Education received a stern reminder that they must now develop a new curriculum for students who opted out of studying Ukrainian language in the republic.⁵⁴ Ultimately, the CPU Central Committee decided to approve special educational plans for Crimea, different from other parts of Ukraine, raising the number Russian at the expense of Ukrainian classes.⁵⁵

While attempts to promote a distinct Ukrainian identity in Crimea proved controversial, the republican leadership found common ground with central Soviet decision makers and

⁵⁰ TsDAHO, f.1, op.30, s.3648, ark.227; TsDAHO, s.1, op.6, s.2309, ark.1 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 356-7]; TsDAVO, f.2, op.9, s.38, ark.1-5 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 482-4]; TsDAVO, f.166, op.15, s.2591, ark.71-76 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 577-80]

⁵¹ TsDAVO, f.2, op.9, s.38, ark.1-5 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 482-4]; TsDAHO, f.1, op.6, s.3001, ark.118-20 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 575-77].

⁵² Y. Bilinsky, 'The Soviet education laws of 1958-9 and Soviet nationality policy', *Soviet Studies* 14:2 (1962), 138-57.

⁵³ Members of the CPU Central Committee in Kyiv also stressed that calls to cut Ukrainian language classes from the curriculum were few and far between, and sometimes resulted from intrigues by a narrow group of particularly hostile parents and teachers. TsDAVO, f.166, op.15, s.3205, ark.89-101 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 630-35]; TsDAHO, f.1, op.6, s.3001, ark.118-20 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 575-77].

⁵⁴ TsDAHO, f.1, op.24, s.4925, ark.102-104 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 572-4]

⁵⁵ TsDAHO, f.1, op.6, s.3001, ark.118-20 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 575-77]

regional authorities by employing the rhetoric of great power pride in Crimean public culture. Drawing on anti-Western sentiments, they encouraged residents of Crimea to celebrate the peninsula's role in Russian imperial history. The Ukrainian republican and the all-Soviet ministries of culture even suggested the Nazi occupation of Crimea was part of age-old conflicts between Russia and the West: they thus agreed to sponsor a movie celebrating the heroism of soldiers who defended the peninsula during both the Crimean War in the 1850s and the Second World War.⁵⁶ Unlike the cautious attempts at linguistic and cultural Ukrainianisation, the Crimean regional leadership felt at ease with the celebration of Russian and Soviet imperial history, lobbying Kyiv (with only partial success) to devote more money to anniversary celebrations and a new museum devoted to the defence of Sevastopol in the 1855.⁵⁷ Such state-centric narratives helped legitimise Ukrainian administration in Crimea insofar as they downplayed distinctions between Russians and Ukrainians and, by extension, between old Slavic residents of the peninsula and new settlers.

Blurring the lines between Tsarist and Soviet history, the authorities portrayed Crimea not as a Soviet socialist land under attack by ideological enemies, but rather as an ancient Slavic soil under threat from foreigners abroad and ethnic minorities at home. In 1954, a special exhibit devoted to the incorporation of Crimea in Ukraine celebrated Russians and Ukrainians fighting against Turks and Tatars.⁵⁸ Even the Crimean Tatar khans' palace in Bakhchisarai was meant to become a Slavic landmark. Before the expulsion of Crimean Tatars, the palace had contained an exhibit about the Crimean Khanate, but it stood empty during the 1950s. Officials at the propaganda department of the CPU Central Committee were nevertheless concerned that the tens of thousands of tourists who braved the uncomfortable road from Crimea's south coast to Bakhchisarai every year were overly impressed with the 'power of the khans' exemplified by the building. They therefore suggested that a new exhibit showcasing restoration works at the palace conducted by 'Russian masters' in the nineteenth century be prepared. Warning that the museum should not focus on the art and architecture of Soviet period which 'would look primitive compared to the old palace', Central Committee officials in Kyiv stressed that the exhibit would showcase the close economic and cultural links between Crimea and Ukraine, as well as between Ukrainians and Russians. At heart, this was an unabashedly xenophobic narrative which portrayed entire ethnic groups in black-and-

⁵⁶ TsDAHO, f.1, op.24, s.3503, ark. 54-56.

⁵⁷ TsDAHO, f.1, op.30, s.3655, ark. 223-6; TsDAHO, f.1, op.24, s.3503, ark. 63-7, 71-76.

⁵⁸ TsDAHO, f.1, op.30, s.3655, ark. 76-78.

white terms. The Crimean Tatar palace was now supposed to expose the 'parasitic nature of the so-called Crimean state, which existed thanks to bandit raids on Russian and Ukrainian lands', as well as 'the heroic struggle of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples against the Tatar-Turkish occupiers'.⁵⁹

Soviet identity politics in Crimea was xenophobic not only because it vilified old Turkic inhabitants who had been subjected to wholesale deportations, but also because it 'discursively cleansed' Tatars from the local public sphere.⁶⁰ The Crimean regional leadership put pressure on Moscow and, after 1954, on Kyiv to change place names 'in light of the changed composition of the population after the Second World War' (this odd phrasing suggests that the history of Tatars and their deportations was sometimes even cleansed from internal party documents). Although farms and train stations had changed from Turkic to Slavic-sounding names in 1948 and 1952, local leaders complained that rivers, mountains, and lakes still carried the 'old, Tatar names, which are not understandable for most of the population of Crimea'. Their recommendations were not always taken into account, yet it is striking that the authorities tried very hard to forget the Tatar past in Crimea, just as their counterparts in western Ukraine obliterated memories of a multifaceted German, Hungarian, Jewish, Polish, and Ukrainian histories of the borderlands.⁶¹

III. Interethnic confrontations

How to deal with Crimean Tatars was not just a historical question. Although the deportees from Crimea were not allowed to return even as they were freed from 'special settlement' in Central Asia in 1955 and 1956, other ethnic groups such as the Chechens and the Ingush moved back to their homelands during the second half of the 1950s,⁶² and de-Stalinisation held out the promise that the tide would turn for the Crimean Tatars, too.⁶³ In September 1967, in response to mounting from Crimean Tatar activists, the authorities allowed very small groups of Crimean Tatars to return to Crimea. This modest concession,

⁵⁹ TsDAHO, f.1, op.30, s.3655, ark. 74-75, 82-88.

⁶⁰ R. Finnin, 'Forgetting Nothing, Forgetting No One: Boris Chichibabin, Viktor Nekipelov, and the Deportation of the Crimean Tatars', *The Modern Language Review* 106:4 (2011), 1093, 1095.

⁶¹ TsDAHO, f.1, op.6, s.2143, ark. 27-28; TsDAHO, f.1, op.24, s.3672, ark.1-3, 4-29, 31-2, 231-2. On the western borderlands, see T. Amar, *The Paradox of Ukrainian Lviv: A Borderland City between Stalinists, Nazis, and Nationalists* (Ithaca, 2015).

⁶² Pohl, 'It cannot be', 401-30.

⁶³ RGANI, f.5, op.31, d.56, ll. 180-205.

combined with the continuing promotion of an East Slavic identity in Crimea, intensified interethnic tensions.

Regional apparatchiks in Crimea and the republican authorities in Kyiv pursued an overtly xenophobic policy during the 1950s. In 1954, some 2,500 deportees from Crimea were released from special settlement (they belonged to ethnic minorities other than the Crimean Tatars). While the deportees sought to convince the local authorities that they could mobilise all members of their ethnic communities to return to Crimea and thus help resolve the problem of agricultural labour shortages, the head of Crimean executive council M. Kuzmenko raised alarm among the republican-level leadership. As a few dozen Greeks, Bulgarians, Armenians and Germans returned to Crimea in the first five months of 1954, Kuzmenko made no secret that the Party and state authorities primarily concerned themselves with satisfying the interests of Slavs:

Taking into account that Crimea is a borderland zone and a region inhabited by recently resettled populations, and that the arrival of deportees with their pretensions for homes and property causes unease among the population and discourages them from staying in Crimea, we suggest that you prevent the deportees from arriving.

Clearly prejudiced against the deportees, Kuzmenko highlighted the case of a drunken Greek man who tried to force people out from his house in the village of Zavodskoe.⁶⁴ Kyiv listened to the warning signals from Simferopol, with Alexei Kyrychenko informing Khrushchev that deportees' demands for housing put off Slavic residents of the peninsula.⁶⁵

Groups of Crimean Tatars began to arrive in Crimea in 1957 and 1958. Officials at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine were alarmed by their interventions in local identity politics. Mykola Pidhornyi underlined that a 'significant number' of Crimean Tatar intelligentsia used trips to Crimea to collect archival materials and other historical evidence to prove that Crimea was a Tatar land and thus to justify their demands for return – an obstacle, in his view, to the 'cultural and economic development' of Crimea by Slavic settlers.⁶⁶ Through the 1960s, Crimean Tatar visitors to the peninsula confronted communist party authorities about public portrayals of local history. In July 1967, for example, Crimean

⁶⁴ TsDAVO, f.1, op.17, s.59, ark.159-62 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 783-5]

⁶⁵ TsDAHO, f.1, op.24, s.3614, ark.1-2 [Bazhan, *Krym*, Part III, Document 1].

⁶⁶ TsDAHO, f.1, op.24, s.4740, ark.71-72 [Bazhan, *Krym*, Part III, Document 9].

Tatar tourists took part in an excursion from Yalta to Sevastopol, during which the guide described Crimean Tatars as traitors during the Second World War. A group of seventeen outraged Tatars (most of whom refused to introduce themselves) visited the authorities in Yalta to stress that Crimean Tatars had recently been fully rehabilitated by the Politburo of the Communist Party in Moscow.⁶⁷

These localised confrontations were enmeshed in a broader conflict between Crimean Tatars and the Soviet authorities. Activists who lobbied for the right to return to Crimea created the earliest and most organised independent social movement in post-Stalinist USSR. During the late 1950s and the early 1960s, they evoked promises of ethnic equality and hovered on the margins of what the authorities considered 'legal'. In 1956, widely publicised calls for citizens to resettle in Crimea, though targeted at ethnic Russians and Ukrainians, sparked off a letter writing campaign among Crimean Tatar war veterans and party members who underlined their loyalty to the Soviet state and the Communist Party, stressing in particular that they had the necessary expertise in agriculture. The limited cultural openings of Khrushchev's Thaw convinced some Crimean Tatar activists that they could now overturn Stalinist-era portrayals of all Crimean Tatars as 'traitors' during the Second World War. 'Why should the Ukrainian people oppose the return to Crimea of its indigenous inhabitants?', asked the authors of one letter, clearly aware that ethnicity was a marker of loyalty in the Soviet community. 'The Tatars liberated the Ukrainians from German occupation'.⁶⁸ Activists also travelled to Moscow to lobby top Party leaders and, to the alarm of the KGB, collected signatures under petitions to restore the Crimean ASSR among the deportees in Central Asia.⁶⁹ Just as the Tatar past was often cleansed from the public sphere in Crimea, these complaints were swept under the carpet among the senior leadership in Moscow. In internal correspondence within the CPSU Central Committee, apparatchiks reassured each other that most Crimean Tatars were perfectly happy in Uzbekistan, and only the most obstinate members of the intelligentsia and former party apparatchiks, who had lost the most after the abolition of the Crimean autonomy, insisted on returning.⁷⁰ Crimean Tatar ideas reverberated

⁶⁷ Haluzevyi Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Sluzhby Bezpeky Ukrainy, Kyiv (hereafter, HDASBU), f.16/5A, por.5, ark.43-44 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 800-801].

⁶⁸ RGANI, f. 5, op.31, d.56, ll.180-205.

⁶⁹ HDASBU, f.16/3, por.4, ark.93, 170-2 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 792-4], HDASBU, f.16/5A, por.5, ark.271-80 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 807-811].

⁷⁰ Another response to the rising wave of complaints was to place emphasising on improving Crimean Tatars' living conditions in Uzbekistan. RGANI, f.5, op.31, d.56, ll. 151-154.

among some members of the Ukrainian and Russian intelligentsia.⁷¹ By the second half of the 1960s and the 1970s, Crimean Tatar activists crossed over into the sphere of dissent. Illegal publications such as *Khronika Tekushchikh Sobyti* publicised their plight and appealed to communist parties abroad to exert pressure on the Kremlin. Crimean Tatars maintained contacts with dissidents in Ukraine, including Leonid Pliushch, and passed documents concerning their activities to the West with the help of Andrei Sakharov.⁷²

In response to mounting Crimean Tatar pressures, the KGB lifted the wholesale ban on Crimean Tatar return to Crimea on 5 September 1967. The head of the Ukrainian KGB Nikitchenko insisted that this would help take the wind out of the sails of the Crimean Tatar movement for the right to return.⁷³ In his view, the change was little more than a symbolic gesture: to stop a massive influx of Crimean Tatars, Nikitchenko still suggested that the authorities quickly fill vacancies on the peninsula with ethnic Ukrainians from the western borderlands.⁷⁴ Five years later, arguing that legal channels to return should remain open, he emphasised that Crimean Tatars would not move *en masse* because they found it difficult to sell their houses in Uzbekistan or to make ends meet in Crimea.⁷⁵ Lifting the ban on return did not mean that Crimean Tatars could move freely – they still needed to obtain an official permit and local *propiska* (registration). While the Uzbek party authorities selected families for resettlement, apparatchiks in Crimea did not always approve their candidates, as they were only interested in agricultural labourers. The Crimean regional authorities further sought to limit the impact of Crimean Tatar settlement by insisting that new arrivals be spread across the peninsula in Slavic-majority collective farms.⁷⁶ Ultimately, opening opportunities for legal return to Crimea had little impact.⁷⁷ Between September 1967 and July 1972, 3177 Crimean Tatars returned to Crimea through the legal channels.⁷⁸

Raising hopes for return, the law of September 1967 heightened tensions on the peninsula. The experience of applying for legal return turned some Crimean Tatars against

⁷¹ During his performances in early 1960s Kharkiv, for example, the poet Chichibabin not only hinted at the colonial nature of Soviet rule in Crimea, but also encouraged his audiences to ponder their own complicity in the repression of Crimean Tatars. Finnin, 'Forgetting Nothing', 1103, 1111.

⁷² *Khronika Tekushchikh Sobyti*, April 1968; HDASBU, f.16/3, por.11, ark.124-8 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 841-3]; HDASBU, f.16/7, por.8, ark.354-60 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 852-5]

⁷³ HDASBU, f.16/1, opr.5, ark.231-5 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 820-22]

⁷⁴ HDASBU, f.16/1, por.2, ark.215-20 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 815-17]

⁷⁵ HDASBU, f.16/1, por.4, ark.78-81 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 833-4]

⁷⁶ TsDAHO, f.1, op.25, s.72, ark.22-9 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 827-30]

⁷⁷ TsDAHO, f.1, op.25, s.72, ark.15-16 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 824-5]

⁷⁸ HDAMVS, f.15, op.1, s.172, ark.158-9 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 838-40]

the authorities. When a Crimean Tatar hairdresser was told that he and his wife would not be allowed to return because they were not collective farmers, he reportedly told a group of officials in Uzbekistan:

You will not impose your jobs on us. Our people will live and work where they want... When our people return to Crimea, you Russians and Ukrainians will have nothing to do there, we will take your place, you will only serve us... And if you don't do that, we will chase you out of Crimea, just like you chased us out.⁷⁹

The limited reach of the law evoked anger among Crimean Tatars. Already in the autumn of 1967, the KGB reported the views of Crimean Tatar activists who saw the law as a token gesture intended to destroy the movement for the right to return. Suleiman Asanov, Bekir Umerov, Timur Dakchzhi and others travelled in the region to gather evidence that the authorities continued to prevent Crimean Tatars from settling on the peninsula: they planned to present this evidence during street protests in Yalta, where they hoped to attract the attention of international tourists and, through them, the international press.⁸⁰ Some Crimean Tatars whose opinions were registered by the KGB suggested that the official rhetoric of ethnic equality was used to mask the reality of everyday xenophobia. L.A. Zatulayev who visited Simferopol in October 1967 reportedly claimed that 'if you find a house to buy, they do not refuse to register you, but they will pressure the current owner until he says he has changed his mind and refuse to sell'.⁸¹ In a similar vein, a prominent Crimean Tatar activist Iu. B. Osmanov criticised the law which which overtly lifted the ban on return for ignoring the national dimension of Soviet discriminatory policies. Crimean Tatars were ostensibly given all the rights of Soviet citizens, he underlined, but dispersed returnees to Crimea would not be able to access schooling in their own language or to cultivate community bonds unless the Crimean Tatar autonomy were restored. In his view, the new law was merely a means to cover up the anti-Leninist policy towards the Crimean Tatars which relegated them to the status of second-class citizens during the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution.⁸²

⁷⁹ TsDAHO, f.1, op.25, s.72, ark.22-9 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 827-30]

⁸⁰ HDASBU, f.16/5A, por.5, ark.271-80 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 807-11]

⁸¹ HDASBU, f.16/1, por.2, ark.215-20 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 815-17]

⁸² HDASBU, f.16/5A, por.5, ark.271-80 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 807-811].

In the aftermath of 1967, the KGB struggled to control Crimean Tatar behaviour. Activists for the right to return staged public meetings for young Crimean Tatars in Crimea and neighbouring Ukrainian regions where they discussed news obtained from foreign radio stations and taught the history of the Crimean Tatar khanate. They also organised celebrations of Muslim holidays such as Kurban Ait, during which they addressed dozens of Crimean Tatars settling in Soviet Ukraine.⁸³ Moreover, mass visits by Crimean Tatars to local communist party authorities became more frequent in the first few months after the wholesale ban on return was lifted in September 1967. Although the KGB was aware that activists headed by Bekir Aliev travelled across Crimea to organise a mass visit of Crimean Tatars to the authorities in Simferopol, for example, they did not manage to prevent two hundred people from filling out the corridors of the local communist party committee on 12 October 1967. Ten people were taken in for questioning, six were arrested, active participants were given official warnings by the KGB, and the rest were dispersed by the militia.⁸⁴ Similarly, as Crimean Tatars planned to mark the 24th anniversary of the deportations in May 1968 by putting up tents in central Simferopol, the KGB prevented 800 people from entering Crimea. Nevertheless, 300 Crimean Tatars managed to enter the peninsula and began to gather in Simferopol on 17 May. Almost a hundred people were deported, with the most active participants put on an airplane straight to Tashkent.⁸⁵ Faced with these challenges, the authorities resorted to the tried-and-tested xenophobic propaganda. The KGB emphasised that a show trial of Crimean Tatar wartime collaborators staged in 1972 helped undermine Crimean Tatars activities on the peninsula.⁸⁶

Illegal Crimean Tatar settlement in Crimea and the neighbouring Ukrainian regions of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia provided a consistent challenge for the KGB between the 1960s and the 1980s. The law of September 1967 encouraged a growing number of Crimean Tatars to visit the peninsula and to settle there without official permission. Within days of the ban on return being lifted, groups of Tatars came to inspect their former properties.⁸⁷ Among the few Crimean Tatars who arrived on the peninsula through the official channels, many claimed that they would now offer housing to their friends and relatives who did not yet have permission to return.⁸⁸ Thousands of Crimean Tatars wishing to settle on the peninsula

⁸³ HDASBU, f.16/1, por.4, ark.78-81 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 833-4]

⁸⁴ HDASBU, f.16/1, por.7, ark.125-6 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 814]

⁸⁵ HDASBU, f.16/1, por.5, ark.256-9 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 852-56]

⁸⁶ HDASBU, f.16/3, por.11, ark.124-8 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 841-3]

⁸⁷ TsDAHO, f.1, op.24, s.6321, ark.33-37 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 804-7]

⁸⁸ HDASBU, f.16/1, por.4, ark.78-81 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 833-4]

bypassed official channels by buying homes from local Slavs at two or three times the market price – the sellers would normally leave Crimea after the purchase was complete, making it difficult to nullify the transaction, though Crimean Tatars still faced more obstacles in legalising such unofficial purchases *post factum* as compared to other ethnic groups.⁸⁹ Between 1968 and 1974, 2493 Crimean Tatars settled in Crimea through the legal channels, but the authorities were aware of a further 1196 individuals who arrived without official permission (*samovol'no*).⁹⁰ The KGB discovered more cases of what it considered illegal settlement in Crimea after the mid-1970s.⁹¹ At the end of 1985, they were aware of 2973 Crimean Tatars who arrived in Crimea and the neighbouring Ukrainian regions of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson through the official channels, and 4691 who came without permission.⁹² Although the authorities used fines and criminal cases to punish both illegal settlers and Soviet citizens who sold houses to them,⁹³ they claimed to only have expelled 316 Crimean Tatar settlers from Crimea between 1967 and 1985 (a further 365 families left of their own volition, most of whom had come through the official channels).⁹⁴ The KGB's relatively lenient attitude towards individuals who violated the rules of settlement in Crimea stemmed from the belief that overly harsh measures would provide ammunition to Crimean Tatar dissidents.⁹⁵

The arrival of Crimean Tatars sparked interethnic tensions on the peninsula. Even before 1967, visiting the villages from which they had been expelled, Crimean Tatars attracted the attention of the KGB as they informed local Slavs about the movement for the right to return. Property rights were at the root of rising conflicts. In 1965, for example, three Crimean Tatars reportedly moved in to a house occupied by a local Slavic woman, simply announcing that 'this is our house and we will live here now'. Cultural rights also featured prominently in conflicts as reported by the KGB. For instance, five Crimean Tatars confronted two women when they found out that houses had been constructed at the site of former cemeteries:

⁸⁹ HDASBU, f.16/7, por.8, ark.354-60 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 852-5]

⁹⁰ TsDAHO, f.1, op.25, s.1090, ark.18-20 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 849-51]

⁹¹ They claimed that 2958 Crimean Tatars had arrived on the peninsula as part of official resettlement between 1968 and 1976, with a further 3679 settling without permission. Over a thousand Crimean Tatars lived in Crimea without *propiska* at the end of 1976. HDASBU, f.16/7, por.75, ark.91-4 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 861-2]

⁹² HDASBU, f.16/7, por.8, ark.354-60 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 852-5]

⁹³ TsDAHO, f.1, op.25, s.1250, ark.4-5 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 856-7]; HDASBU, f.16/7, por.75, ark.91-4 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 861-2]

⁹⁴ HDASBU, f.16/7, por.8, ark.354-60 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 852-5]

⁹⁵ TsDAHO, f.1, op.?, s.?, ark.? [Bazhan, *Krym*, 863-5]

You will not get away with this; we will achieve what we have set out to do. We will come back here and deal with you. We will take revenge for your having disrespected our ancestors.⁹⁶

In their reports to the Communist Party, the KGB focused on particularly hostile confrontations, tending to portray the Crimean Tatars as aggressive and violent. It is difficult to judge how widespread such instances were or how accurately the KGB conveyed what happened, but it is clear that the leadership of Soviet Ukraine saw Crimean Tatar visits to the peninsula as a threat to the local Slavs.

As the authorities allowed small numbers of Crimean Tatars to move back to the peninsula in 1967, xenophobic confrontations between Slavic inhabitants and the returnees intensified. Activists for the right to return encouraged Crimean Tatar visitors to Crimea to speak to local inhabitants.⁹⁷ Reactions varied: through the autumn of 1967, Soviet citizens of Russian and Ukrainian background inundated party and state institutions with letters, sometimes lobbying on behalf of Crimean Tatars who were still refused official registration on the peninsula, but also expressing fears about their property.⁹⁸ To preserve their privileges on the peninsula, some locals took matters into their own hands. Several days after the ban on Crimean Tatar return was officially lifted, for example, a group of men in a village near Bakhchisarai apprehended four Crimean Tatars taking pictures of local houses and gave them over to the authorities. The KGB also reported on tense conversations during which Crimean Tatars reportedly claimed that 'all of this will ours soon' – these confrontations happened in small groups and not in public, which suggests that the KGB learned about them from Slavic citizens who encountered the Tatars.⁹⁹ As thousands of Crimean Tatars settled in Soviet Ukraine's southern regions during the 1970s, the KGB reported on tensions associated with immigration. Crimean Tatars stood apart from local Slavs as, in the KGB's view, they spoke poor Russian and engaged in 'backward' and 'unsanitary' religious practices. Local schools were overloaded with Crimean Tatar children who tended to socialise within their ethnic community.¹⁰⁰ Claiming that Crimean Tatar attempts to settle illegally on the peninsula evoked the 'outrage and resistance' of the local population, the head of the Ukrainian KGB

⁹⁶ HDASBU, f.16/3, por.4, ark.170-2 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 793-4]

⁹⁷ HDASBU, f.16/1, por.5, ark.96-8 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 830-2]

⁹⁸ HDASBU, f.16/1, por.2, ark.215-20 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 815-17]

⁹⁹ TsDAHO, f.1, op.24, s.6321, ark.33-37 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 804-7]

¹⁰⁰ TsDAVO, f.2, op.3, s.6691, ark.1-3 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 836-7]; TsDAVO, f.2, op.13, s.7381, ark.35-7 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 845-7]

Nikitchenko added that the authorities only just about managed to prevent 'mass unrest', though it is not clear whether he referred to potential interethnic clashes.¹⁰¹

IV. Conclusion

Transferring Crimea from Soviet Russian to Soviet Ukrainian jurisdiction, Nikita Khrushchev celebrated the 300th anniversary of 'Russo-Ukrainian union' at Pereiaslav. But the move was much more than a symbolic gesture or a 'gift' from the Russian to the Ukrainian people. The incorporation of Crimea in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic served primarily to address the peninsula's burning labour shortages.

Crimea became Ukrainian insofar as it established strong demographic ties to mainland Ukraine, with Kyiv resettling inhabitants of the republic's central and western regions to the peninsula's collective farms. It was also largely the republican-level leadership who invested in Crimean infrastructure, particularly in rural regions. Although the communist party leadership in Moscow retained ultimate power, borders between Soviet republics strongly affected socio-economic dynamics in the USSR. The Russian occupation of Crimea in 2014 severed strong economic and human ties which had bound the peninsula to the Ukrainian mainland over the previous sixty years.

At the same time, Crimea never acquired a strong Ukrainian cultural identity. Kyiv made only very modest attempts to spread Ukrainian language and culture in Crimea, especially in the 1950s, as well as to integrate the local intelligentsia in Ukraine's cultural institutions. These moves proved controversial, and clear hierarchies between Russian and Ukrainian language and culture were preserved in Crimea. Equally important, Crimean culture after 1954 was not simply Russian. Through education, in the press, and in various public spaces such as museums, the leadership of Soviet Ukraine promoted a composite 'East Slavic' identity in Crimea. This East Slavic identity was grounded in a sense of pride in both Tsarist Russia's and the USSR's victories over external enemies who threatened Crimea. More disturbingly, the authorities promulgated ethnocentric and xenophobic narratives which presented Crimea as an ancient Slavic 'soil': its non-Slavic inhabitants, who had made up a quarter of the peninsula's population on the eve of World War II, were unambiguously

¹⁰¹ HDASBU, f.16/1, por.5, ark.96-8 [Bazhan, *Krym*, 830-2]

portrayed as outsiders who attacked Russians and Ukrainians. Narratives of 'East Slavdom' were simple, legible, and largely uncontroversial among the Russians and Ukrainians of Crimea, helping the leaders of Soviet Ukraine to legitimise overlapping attempts at demographic and administrative reform led by Kyiv. They reverberated on a popular level. Fearful for their properties and armed with the xenophobic stereotypes promoted in Soviet public culture, residents of Crimea policed their local communities and denounced members of non-Slavic minorities to the authorities.

The Crimean case shows that both Russian and Ukrainian identities were markers of loyalty in post-Stalinist USSR. Deciding whom to resettle in Crimea, the authorities made no distinction between citizens identified as 'Russian' and 'Ukrainian' in their internal passports. The prominence of the East Slavic myth in Soviet public culture goes some way towards explaining why the myth of the USSR as a land of the 'friendship of the peoples' lives on among Soviet citizens who did not experience ethnic discrimination. It further suggests that Russian and Ukrainian identities in modern-day Crimea are not reliable markers of attitude towards the Soviet past or the post-Soviet present. The fault lines dividing Crimea today do not run along the Russo-Ukrainian ethnic divide, but rather expose conflicting visions of the peninsula grounded in Soviet-made ideas which equated East Slavic background with loyalty, and visions of a post-Soviet Crimea associated with attempts to overcome the legacies xenophobia.

The history of Crimea further suggests that the propaganda rhetoric of 'friendship of the peoples' was oppressive insofar as it obscured ethnic tensions and thus made it difficult for Crimean Tatars and other non-titular ethnic groups to register their grievances. Crimean Tatar problems were sometimes even obscured in internal Party correspondence. Moreover, in order to promote the image of Crimea as a Soviet melting pot, the Soviet authorities erased Crimean Tatars from public culture and memory. After 1967, Crimean Tatars complained that the authorities put multiple obstacles that prevented them from returning, but also claimed that the ban on return did not exist.

The key role which xenophobia played in shaping social hierarchies in Crimea has also been absent from contemporary political discourses. Just as the Soviet authorities claimed that they successfully fostered interethnic friendship, Vladimir Putin justifies the Russian occupation of Crimea after 2014 by portraying the USSR as a unitary supranational

community. He thus questions the salience of post-Soviet borders, dismisses concerns about Russian imperial ambitions in the post-Soviet space, and demonises critics of the Russian occupation of Crimea as nationalists desperate to disrupt post-Soviet ethnic harmony. This rhetoric helps him disarm and suppress Crimean Tatar political, social, and cultural activities.