Societal Security, Memory and Collective Identity of Crimean Tatars after the Russian Annexation

Hynek Melichar and Markéta Žídková


Abstract

The paper analyses the situation of the Crimean Tatars after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. The Tatars are understood as a distinctive identity-based ethno-national and ethno-religious society in terms of societal security analytical framework. The authors focus on the contemporary threats to Crimean Tatar identity under the new pro-Russian authorities in Crimea, within the theoretical framework of societal security, and they explain the nonviolent nature of Crimean Tatar resistance. The role played by Crimean Tatars' collective memory will be discussed in this context.

Key words

Crimean Tatars, Crimea, Russia, Turkey, identity, societal security, violence, islam

Introduction

The Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in March 2014 deeply affected not only international politics, but also the minority of Crimean Tatars connected with the peninsula for centuries. The sources vary in defining the Crimean Tatars; some refer to them as a nation whereas others prefer the term “Turkic ethnic group”. There are also mixed accounts of the exact number of the Crimean Tatar population, which range from 250,000 up to 6 million. The narrowest of these definitions only consider Tatars living at the territory of the Crimean Peninsula, while the widest account includes ethnic Tatars living outside the actual Crimean Peninsula, predominantly in Turkey and Uzbekistan. A vast majority of Crimean Tatars adhere to Sunni Islam of the Hanafi school. Up to the 19th century, they constituted the majority of Crimea’s population, the territory they claim to be their historical homeland. Nowadays, their number in Crimea has dropped to approximately 245,000 or 12-13 per cent of the population, with a much larger diaspora living in Turkey.

For decades, the Tatars belonged to “forgotten Soviet nations”, ignored by official ethnology. During World War II, the Crimean Tatars met the same fate as some other nations under the Stalinist rule. Based on the principle of collective guilt, they were accused of collaborating with the Nazi Germany and virtually the whole nation was deported to Central Asia and Siberia. Deprived of their historical homeland and the right to return to it, the Crimean Tatars officially ceased to exist as a distinct nation. This was the situation until the late 1980s

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and Gorbachev’s perestroika. First Tatars were allowed to return as late as 1989 at the brink of the Soviet Union’s collapse. After 23 years under the Ukrainian governance, the Crimean Tatars now find themselves under the Russian rule once again, following the 2014 annexation of Crimea.

The main goal of this paper is to provide a short analysis of the development of Crimean Tatar ethno-national and cultural identity as well as their nationalist narratives, within the scope of the analytical framework of societal security. Main emphasis is given to the contemporary situation after the Russian annexation of Crimea. The authors attempt to explain the non-violent character of Crimean Tatar resistance utilizing the theoretical framework of societal security.

The concept of societal security, further developed below, challenges the traditional state-centric views of security by establishing the nation or ethno-national group as a referent object of security analysis. Many states of the world are ethnically heterogeneous (and comprise of different ethno-national and/or religious groups.) First introduced in in Barry Buzan’s book People, States, and Fear from 1991, the concept of societal security relates to sustainable development of traditional linguistic and cultural schemes in the face of state behaviour. Later, the concept was reconceptualised by Ole Waever and others in the seminal 1993 book Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe, and further developed by other scholars such as Paul Roe, one of the leading scholars in the field of societal security, in his Ethnic Violence and the Societal Security Dilemma (2005).

In security analysis, societies are different from social groups. They are defined as distinctive units in the international system that have the right to survive. The concept focuses on ethnic nations rather than civic nations; it does not necessarily refer to the entire state population. Many states have been historically composed of various societies, e.g. Yugoslavia and Soviet Union. These individual societies are what matters in societal security analysis. The main object of analysis in the societal security framework are thus politically significant ethno-national and religious entities, often co-existing within one state. In such cases, the state can be a source of threat, using various strategies to suppress the identity of a particular society, ranging from cultural to ethnic cleansing. Cultural cleansing includes systematic destruction of institutions and symbols important for the preservation of the collective identity. Ethnic cleansing usually includes deliberate acts of violence, such as deportation and assassination, leading possibly even to genocide. Possible defensive strategies of threatened societies range from cultural or political nationalism to secessionism and paramilitary violence. Actions taken by one society in order to strengthen its identity cause reaction of other society/ies, which can in turn actually weaken the identity of the first. In the worst cases, such scenarios can lead to a spiral of nationalisms and ethnic or ethno-religious conflicts. Societal security focuses on maintaining collective identity – for any society, it is as important as sovereignty for a state. It implies that once a society loses its identity, its survival as a distinctive ethno-national group is in danger.

According to the societal security theory, a society has essentially two options how to protect their threatened identity: military (violent) resistance or non-military (non-violent) resistance. In our recent analysis, we tested the following societal security hypotheses to explain
why the Tatar resistance has been traditionally non-violent and why it remains so even after the 2014 annexation of Crimea:

H1: At the intra-state level, protective measures will often be non-military in nature. (Roe, 2005: 69)

H2: When the nature of the threat is non-military (legal and/or bureaucratic), countervailing measures are also likely to be non-military in nature. (Roe, 2005: 59)

Evolution of the Crimean Tatar Nation

Russian sentiments towards Crimea go back several centuries. Its cultural and religious importance in the Russian nation-building narrative even precedes the geo-strategic considerations of the modern era. In 988, Vladimir the Great, the grand prince of Kiev, conquered the southern part of Crimea and annexed it to the Kievan Rus – the disputed birthplace of both the Russian and the Ukrainian modern states. (Figes, 2011: 20). Since then, Crimea has become a sacred place for the Russians. After all, Vladimir Putin used this argument in his 2014 seminal speech defending the Russian annexation of Crimea (Putin, 2014).

Kiev’s dominance in southern and eastern Crimea started to crumble in the two following centuries after the invasions of Turkic and later Turco-Mongol tribes. Thus Crimea found itself a part of the Golden Horde, founded by Batu Khan in the 13th century. This provided the basis for the emergence of the Crimean Khanate in 1441, when the Horde started to disintegrate. Early in 1478, Khan Mengli Giray recognized Ottoman suzerainty over the Crimean Khanate and the Ottomans helped him to restore his power over what is known as the third khanate. (Fisher, 1978: 11; Knobloch, 2013: 48) In the popular Tatar narrative, this was the “glorious time when the Crimean khans ruled ‘national’ state inhabited by ‘millions’ of unified, free Tatars. The romanticized Eden was destroyed by the Russians in the centuries following the Crimea’s annexation by the Russian Empire in 1783.” (Williams, 2001: 40). It is the era that provided material for conflicting nationalist narratives of the Tatars and of the Russian, and previously Soviet, historians. While the latter refuse to acknowledge the Tatars’ claims for historical statehood, considering them simply as Ottoman vassals, the Tatar Khanate undoubtedly had its own legal system, bureaucracy, and coinage, and above all, its own army. (Reid, 2015: 175) Alan Fisher, a renowned authority on the subject, claims that the Crimean Tatar khanate was actually one of the most important states in Eastern Europe from the early 16th century until the end of the 17th century. According to him, the khanate “met all of the prerequisites for early modern statehood.” (Fisher, 1978: 17) During the “golden age” of the Khanate, the Crimean Tatars emerged as a distinctive ethnic group with clear emotional territorial attachment to Crimea. The flag which is still used by Crimean Tatars recalls the seal of the Khanate (Kolodziejczyk, 2011: 331-334).

The Khanate started to decline together with the weakening of the Ottoman Empire. (Figes, 2011: 10-11). In the 18th century, the Russian Empire launched several military expeditions against the Khanate (Figes, 2011; Fisher, 1978). By annexing Crimea in 1783, Russia became a great European power. The Russians immediately started to reconfigure the
Crimean landscape by constructing new European-style towns under the supervision of the new Governor-General of the province, Grigory Potemkin (Figes, 2011: 12). Sevastopol was founded as a strategically important naval base. The strategic significance of the peninsula provided for the need to change the character of Crimea and its cultural landscape to stress the fact that it belonged to Russia. The need for a Slavic (Russian) and Christian “new” Crimea clashed with its Muslim Tatar heritage and required cultural cleansing policies (Figes, 2011:21; Starikov, Belyaev, 2014:224).

The shrinking of Tatar population as a consequence of emigration waves, mostly to areas controlled by the Ottomans including Anatolia and Dobruja, turned into a mass exodus in the years following the Crimean War (1854-1856). As a result of their historical connections with the Ottoman Empire, Crimean Tatars were collectively seen as an internal security threat for Russia and treated accordingly. This massive outflow of Tatars from Crimea from late 1700s to late 1800s is documented by the census of 1897 that showed a dramatic decrease in the share of Tatar population; out of the 546,592 inhabitants in late 1800s, 186,212 were Crimean Tatars (1897 census, see Kirimli, 1996: 11).

Besides the changing demographic situation in Crimea, resulting from Tatar emigration and the influx of Slavic settlers encouraged by the Russian government, cultural cleansing further threatened the Tatar society as witnessed by some of the contemporary observers and travel writers. Edward Daniel Clarke visited Crimea in 1800 and referred to the “barbarous conduct of the Russians while it draws tears down the cheeks of the Tartars at Caffa, during the time we remained, the soldiers were allowed to overthrow the beautiful mosques, or to convert them into magazines, to pull down the minarets, tear up the public fountains, and to destroy all the public aqueducts (…)” (Clarke, 1810: 258).

Every new group of settlers was therefore determined to eradicate the cultural traces left by previous societies. In this respect, the Russian project of Christianisation and Russification of the region has been ultimately the most determined and successful. Moreover, some Russian policies may be classified as not just cultural but rather as ethnic cleansing (Figes, 2011:23; Milner, 1855:248).

At the same time, the years of Russian Christian dominance in Crimea, as well as the long-lost Tatar statehood, led to the reactionary development of Crimean Tatar nationalist movement. The waves of nationalism in the 19th century influenced a group of educated and mostly secularized Crimean Tatars who attempted to ignite a national movement. Gathering around Ismail Gaspirali, they pushed for educational reforms as well as for unity of Turkic groups living within Russia. The movement did not demand secession: it rather called for the creation of a unified Pan-Turkic nation under Turkish leadership. Gaspirali’s calls for modernization and cultural reforms were voiced in a journal entitled Tercüman (The Translator) (Pargač, 2003: 41). This situation, with an older moderate generation of nationalists and a younger and more radical one, closely resembles the development of other nationalist movements in the 1800s (Kirimli, 1993: 529).

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2 The only official census carried out by Imperial Russia.
The year 1917 represents one of the most turbulent years in Crimean Tatar history. At the time of the collapse of the Russian Empire, the Young Tatars already led a well-organized nationalist movement. This allowed them to take control of most of the Crimean Peninsula at the time of the Russian Revolution (Pargač, 2003: 42). After the return of exiled Tatar leaders, the newly established national party Milli Firka organized the Kurultai (national congress) in Bakhchisarai – the historical capital of the Crimean Khanate. The Kurultai, elected by a broad Tatar franchise, declared Crimea an independent Tatar republic with Numan Celebicihan (Chlebiev) as its president. However, the newly declared Tatar republic did not survive for long and fell to the Bolsheviks. The Russian civil war led to massacres of Tatars as well as Russian civilians in Crimea. The Tatars failed to secure an ally on either side of the civil war. Afterwards, they had little chance of succeeding in their efforts to establish independent statehood.

At the beginning of the third decade of the 20th century, a disastrous economic situation resulted from the civil war and the absence of any economic policies. Prices of food rocketed in autumn of 1921 and a population of various nationalities of Crimea, including tens of thousands of Crimean Tatars, died of starvation in the spring of 1922 (Fisher, 1978: 138). The early Soviet policy of korenizatsiya (“nativization” or “indigenization”) promoted representatives of titular nations of Soviet republics and national minorities into local government and nomenclature (Figes, 2014: 188-189). In the Crimean ASSR, the Crimean Tatars comprised about 25 per cent of the peninsula’s population. They considered themselves the indigenous people and the korenizatsiya enabled them to actively promote their cultural autonomy. Not only did the Tatar language become, together with Russian, the official and widely used administrative language, Fisher even speaks about “a cultural policy of Tatarization of the Crimea”, manifested by “reopening national Tatar-run schools, scientific institutes, museums, libraries, and theatres. (…) A number of books on Crimean Tatar history and culture were published.” (Fisher, 1978: 140)

Nevertheless, the forced process of collectivization soon led to further suffering. The “dekulakization” campaign of 1929-1931, allowing deportations of thousands of Crimean Tatar kulaks to the Northern Russia and the Urals (Pohl, 2000), resulted in another great famine in the otherwise fertile Crimea in 1932-1933. Apart from this tragedy, Stalin targeted Crimean Tatar intelligentsia. The infamous year of 1937 resonates also in the Tatar history as a time of repressions and executions of their elite.

During the interwar period, the persecutions turned many Crimean Tatars against the Soviet government (Pohl, 2000). Still, thousands of Crimean Tatars joined the Soviet army in fighting the Axis states in the Great Patriotic War. Those years represent a particularly tragic era for the Tatars. Between autumn 1941 and spring 1944, Crimea was occupied by the Nazis. The occupation brought difficult dilemmas for the Crimean Tatar minority, as the Tatars took both the Nazi and the Soviet side.

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3 The name derives from the ancient Mongol-Turkic assembly of khans.
4 Officially named the Crimean People’s Republic, this self-proclaimed Tatar state only lasted for a month in between December 1917 and January 1918.
Even the most pro-Russian sources do not deny that the Crimean Tatars fought heroically both as partisans and regular soldiers of the Red Army (Starikov, Belyaev, 2014:118-119). Nevertheless, one week after the liberation of the peninsula in May 1944, the NKVD began deportations of the Crimean Tatars. The main wave of the deportations took less than a week. They started on May 18 and official NKVD documents from 20 May 1944 state that 191,088 people of Crimean Tatar nationality had been deported (Pargač, 2003: 44; Starikov, Belyaev, 2014: 125; Wilson, 2014: 104). The Soviets treated the Crimean Tatars with murderous brutality (Goldhagen, 2009: 109; see also Pargač, 2003: 43-44). Pohl points to thousands of people who disappeared and thousands who died during the weeks of “the slow moving trains” heading towards the special settlements (спецпоселения) in Uzbekistan, Mari ASSR and Gorky, Ivanovo, Kostroma, Molotov and Sverdlovsk oblasts in the RSFSR (Pohl, 2000). The death toll was very high especially in the first years of the exile (Сургун). Lastly, the Stalin regime deprived Tatars of their constitutional right to education in their native language and publications. This prevented the cultural development of the impoverished nation (Pohl, 2000; Figes, 2014: 189; Galuctian, Nikoforov, Gerasimenko, 2015). In those extremely harsh conditions, the Crimean Tatars continued to strive for their very survival.

Crimean Tatars were officially released from the special settlements during the Nikita Khrushchev destalinization era; however, the Soviet leadership refused their complete rehabilitation. The Soviet regime continued to oppress and punish the active representatives of Crimean Tatars until late 1980s. Reshat Dzhemilev, one of the bravest individuals who devoted his life to the Crimean Tatar issue, and his similarly minded compatriots ended up in Soviet prisons many times for long terms (Bekirova, 2015b). Their crimes resided in the fact that they reminded the Soviet authorities of violating their own laws. “Crimean Tatar leaders like other human and national rights activists in the USSR based their appeal on Soviet and international law” (Pohl, 2000). Their demands included full rehabilitation of the Crimean Tatar nation and restoration of its national rights. A truly decisive demonstration took place in Moscow’s Red Square in July 1987. Over 2,000 Crimean Tatar representatives from the entire Soviet Union demanded to meet with Secretary General Mikhail Gorbachev. “In a course of 70 years, Moscow did not see similar events, furthermore so big and significant” (Dzhemilev, cited in Press Service of the Mejlis, 2007)

Attempts to return to Crimea periodically ended in failures and only a handful of families returned to their homeland prior to the beginning of the 1990s. On 14 November 1989, Supreme Soviet issued a decree On Recognizing the Illegal and Criminal Repressive Acts against Peoples Subjected to Forcible Resettlement and Ensuring their Rights (Pohl, 2000). This served as the basis for return of Crimean Tatars to the Crimean Peninsula.

After the collapse of the USSR in late 1991, the newly independent Ukraine had to deal with the uneasy task of absorbing around 250 000 Tatar returnees, who resettled in Crimea, while the Russian majority in the region pushed for greater autonomy. Soon after their arrival, the Tatars presented numerous political demands which were in sharp contrast to Ukrainian as well as Russian desires for the future of Crimea. Tatar leaders expressed their wish for self-determination in the 1991 Declaration of National Sovereignty of the Crimean Tatar People
which declares that “Crimea is a national territory of the Crimean Tatar people, on which they alone possess the right to self-determination” (…) and “the political, economic, spiritual, and cultural rebirth of the Crimean Tatar people is possible only in their sovereign national state” (Allworth, 1998: 353). However, Ukrainian authorities perceived the Tatar question as a financial and socio-economic burden⁵ rather than an ethno-political issue.

After a series of constitutional crises and clashes between the Crimean and Ukrainian authorities, the Verkhovna Rada (Supreme Council) of Crimea finally approved a new constitution in 1998. The new constitution was greeted by a wave of outraged reactions from the Tatar community. The Resolution of the 21 December 1998 Crimean Tatar protest meeting against the constitution expressed a grave concern that it “establishes a monopoly of one of Crimea’s ethnic groups in the political, economic and cultural life of the peninsula” (quoted in Shevel, 2001: 109).

The 1998 constitution collided with many problems that the Tatar returnees encountered after their arrival from Uzbekistan and other countries. One of the most pressing issues was the question of citizenship. 108,000 out of the total number of approximately 250,000 returnees returned after 13 November 1991 when, according to a new Ukrainian citizenship law, they did not receive Ukrainian citizenship automatically (Blitz, Lynch, 2011: 101). Thus, 80,000 Tatars could not, for example, vote in the 1998 parliamentary election. The citizenship issue was finally resolved in early 2000s through a complex set of legislative measures with the support (and to the relief of) international organizations such as OSCE and UNHCR. Thus on 1 January 2002, approximately 235,043 formerly deported Crimean Tatars became citizens of Ukraine – approximately 90 per cent of the total number of the Crimean Tatars based in the ARC. (Blitz, Lynch, 2011: 103). Another political and legal problem was related to Tatar underrepresentation in Crimea’s political organs after the new constitution of 1998 (Shevel, 2001: 114).

The second part of the politico-legal problem was the recognition and legality of the Crimean Tatar representative organs – the Kurultai and the Mejlis. The Mejlis, elected by the second Crimean Tatar Kurultai as a sole representative organ of the Crimean Tatar people in June 1991, still lacked formal recognition. Attempts of the authorities to downplay the Mejlis issue by proposing to register the Mejlis as an organization or a political party were strictly rejected by Crimean Tatar leaders. As Mustafa Dzhemilev put it, “Mejlis is not an organization. Mejlis is an elected representative organ of the Crimean Tatars people. National parliament, if you would like. (…)” (quoted in Shevel, 2001: 114). The official recognition of the Mejlis and the Kurultai as representative organs of the Crimean Tatars did not take place in Ukraine until March 2014. Nevertheless, in an attempt to console the minority to some extent, in 1999 Ukrainian president Kuchma established the Council of representatives of Crimean Tatar People by presidential decree (Ukraz Prezidenta Ukrainy, 1999). This advisory board originally consisted of the Mejlis members only, however, in 2010 president Janukovych reformed the council (Ukaz Prezidenta Ukraiyny, 2010) by reducing its membership from 33 to 19.

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⁵ According to Ukrainian government statistics from 1999, estimated 60% Crimean Tatars are unemployed (at least double the rate for Crimea as a whole), and around 50% lack proper housing. Out of 291 Crimean Tatar settlements, around 25% do not have electricity, 70% are without water, 90% without tarmac roads, 96% are without gas, and none have sewers (Shevel, 2001: 110).
remaining Mejlis members subsequently decided not to participate in the reformed council and called for a return to the original format. (Kyivpost, 2010).

When the Ukrainian authorities finally officially recognized the Mejlis and the Kurultai as well as the Tatars as indigenous people of Crimea in March 2014 in reaction to the Russian annexation, it was largely a “late in the day” symbolic act in response to Russian proceedings. Despite the fact that Tatar leaders struggled to push through some of its demands to Ukrainian authorities in 1991-2014 and were often victims of Ukrainian political battles, they now remember the Ukrainian era as a period of relative prosperity of Tatar culture. In March 2015, Refat Chubarov stated that “for those 23 years [under Ukrainian governance], we obtained the possibility to restore our schools, to promote our language, which was not possible for 50 years. We published books in Tatar language⁶, a TV channel was set up, a theatre” (Chubarov, quoted in EurActiv, 2015).

Crimean Tatars under Russia (again) and Threats to Societal Security: Some Theoretical Considerations

The so-called Euromaidan and the following events brought in a new geopolitical reality for Ukraine and Crimea. The Russian annexation of Crimea came just four months after the political turbulences in Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities with strong Russian interferences. Against their will, the Crimean Tatars found themselves in a different state virtually overnight. Tatars, many of whom had taken part in the Euromaidan demonstrations, boycotted the Crimean status referendum on March 16, 2014. Considering the referendum as illegitimate and its results predetermined, the Mejlis called on the Tatars, as well as other Crimean nationalities, not to take part in it (Deutsche Welle, 2014). Less than one per cent of eligible Tatar voters participated in the referendum as a result (Coalson, 2014a). Still, Russian president Putin noted that Crimean Tatars “as the referendum has shown, also lean towards Russia” (Putin, 2014).

In his essential speech to the Russian Parliament two days after the referendum, President Putin promised “to make all the necessary political and legislative decisions to finalise the rehabilitation of Crimean Tatars, restore them in their rights and clear their good name”. At the same time, he spoke for three equal national languages in Crimea: Russian, Ukrainian and Tatar. (Putin, 2014) However, neither Russian promises nor personal meetings of Putin and Dzhemilev managed to break through Tatar opposition (Zamyatina, 2016). Seen from the Tatar perspective, there have been many reasons not to trust these promises and to fear the future under Russia.

As a distinctive society, Crimean Tatars clearly manifest features of nationhood: a distinctive language, different even from other Tatar languages; shared ethnic bond from the times of the Khanate; shared history; common festivities and commemorations (the 1944 deportations in particular); political institutions – the Mejlis and the Kurultai; as well as national symbols like the national flag or the national anthem. Some approaches stress the importance of control over a particular territory for an ethnic group to be considered a nation. However, as Lindholm puts it, some societies living within existing state structures can be considered nations

⁶ Crimean Tatar language, however, was never officially recognized as an official language in the Crimea and “was indeed relegated to the status of that of any other nationality in Crimea” (Belitser, 2000).
on the grounds of their striving for a state of their own (Lindholm, 1993: 16). At present, Crimean Tatar leaders do not necessarily strive for their own state for realistic reasons – particularly the low numbers of Tatar population in Crimea and Russian military dominance; however, an independent Crimean Tatar state would definitely be the ultimate dream. Waever argues that the nation is a special case of society characterized by the following attributes: 1) “affiliation to a territory” (or at least some sense of homeland); 2) “a combination of present time community with a continuity across time”; 3) “a feeling of being one of the units of which the global society consists” (Waever, 1993: 19; Roe, 2005: 44). Undoubtedly, the Crimean Tatars would fit into such categorization. They feel strongly attached to Crimea, which they consider as their historical or even sacred homeland (Allworth, 1998: 275). They share a common perception of their continuity in history from the times of the Khanate through Russian, and especially Soviet, oppression to the present day. As a nation (real or imagined) with articulated political demands, they also feel as a unit of global society. Whatever categorization of nations and ethnic groups we use, a society as a referent object of security is generally “a community with which one identifies” (Buzan, Waever, de Wilde, 1998: 121) and a unit constituted by a sense of collective identity (Roe 2005: 43).

Societal security, then, is about the “sustainable development of traditional patterns of language, culture and national identities” (Buzan, 1991: 122-3) and the “ability of a society to persist under changing conditions and possible and actual threats. More specifically it is about the sustainability, within acceptable conditions for evolution, or traditional patterns of language, culture, association, and religious and national identity and custom.” (Waever, 1993: 23) Collective identity is a key concept here. In order to survive, a society must preserve its identity vis-à-vis any threats to it. Such threats to societal security “exist when a society believes that its we identity is being put in danger, whether this is objectively the case or not” (Roe 2005: 48). There is a little doubt that the Crimean Tatars have been feeling that this was their situation already after they had returned “home” to Crimea in early 1990s: “Most of the Crimean Tatars perceive both Russians and Ukrainians as nations that make claim to the Crimean Tatar homeland.” (Aydıngün, Aydingün, 2007: 122).

In general, threats to societal security might be divided into two types. Cultural cleansing is usually aimed against manifestations of a group culture and ethnic cleansing tends to be aimed against the physical existence of the population. Cultural cleansing strategies may include closing down schools, religious institutions, forbidding the use of a minority language or any other means of preventing the preservation and reproduction of a society culture. Methods of ethnic cleansing can range from deliberate internments and killings to forced emigration, deportation or, in the most extreme form, genocide.

In their seminal work Security: A New Framework for Analysis (1998), Copenhagen school authors categorize threats within the societal sector into three types: migration, horizontal competition, and vertical competition. Migration can threaten the society by an influx of people from the outside (or by an outflow of people from the inside), thus changing the demographic situation. Horizontal competition refers to the overriding cultural and linguistic influence from a neighbouring culture. Finally, vertical competition is connected with shifts in a group’s identity towards wider or narrower conceptions as a result of either integrationist or
secessionist projects (Buzan, Waever, de Wilde, 1998: 121). According to Buzan, societal security threats range from “forbidding the use of language, names and dress, through closure of places of education and worship, to the deportation or killing of members of the community” (Buzan, 1993: 43).

There is no doubt that the majority of Tatars feel threatened as many proclamations by the Tatar leaders or interviews with ordinary Tatars indicate. The Tatar leader Mustafa Dzemilev considers the Tatars “the most vulnerable group” in Crimea and claims that “the Crimean authorities have launched a systemic discrimination against Crimean Tatars on racial, ethnic, and religious grounds” (Dzemilev quoted in Pechonchyk et al., 2015: 36). One of the most important conclusions of the resolution adopted at the Crimean Tatar World Congress in Ankara in August 2015, an event that Russia strived to play down (Alexandrova, 2015), is that “the Crimean Tatars are under threat and they may completely disappear as a distinctive ethnic group from the world map” (Urcosta, 2015). These claims are self-evident. The major question here is: what specific kinds of direct societal security threats are the Crimean Tatars facing after the annexation?

Some of the most prominent Crimean Tatar leaders and activists, including Mustafa Dzemilev, Refat Chubarov, Sinaver Kadyrov or Ismet Yuksel, are now banned from entering Crimea and reside in exile in Ukraine. This would correspond to one of the examples of majority group practices as proposed by Roe, stating that “the majority group can, for example, crack down on opposition groups (representing minorities) before they have the opportunity to implement their anticipated political programme” (Roe, 2005: 73). Moreover, Dzemilev and others are on Russian federal wanted list for organizing the so-called food blockade of Crimea in the fall of 2015 (TASS, 2016). Russian media consistently label the Mejlis representatives as traitors of their own nation, persons backed by Western and /or Turkish sponsors, extremists, or Ukrainian activists (TASS 2015b; Alexandrova, 2015). In August 2016, deputy chairman of the Majlis Ilmi Umerov was detained on suspicion of public appeals and actions aimed at changing the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation for the statements while the broadcast of ATR TV channel in March 2016; he was forcibly taken to a psychiatric hospital of Simferopol (Recknagel, Sharipzhan, 2016). Some of the Tatar representatives were not allowed to leave Crimea for the World Congress in Ankara by the pro-Russian authorities (Human Rights Information Center, 2015).

Other examples include deliberate interments, criminal prosecution and murders of the participants of pro-Ukraine demonstrations or of the demonstration against banning Dzhemilev from entering Crimea on May 3, 2014. The best known victim of this process is Reshat Ametov – a Crimean Tatar activist arrested and killed by the militia for protesting in Simferopol – whose body was found at the very same time when the referendum took place (Human Rights Watch, 2014). His murder has stirred up the fears even more. This, together with steps taken by the pro-Russian Crimean authorities, explains why Crimean Tatars suspect that the promises made by the Russian president may remain empty.

Indeed, after two and a half year most of the promises remain unfulfilled, but Putin is not the only one to blame. Local Crimean authorities want to strengthen their position under the new circumstances and are particularly sensitive to any opposition. One of the strategies is
to co-opt those Crimean Tatars who are willing to cooperate into the governing bodies. Remzi Ilyasov, the current deputy chairman of the Crimean parliament backed by Moscow and founder of the pro-Kremlin movement “Kyrym”, belongs to a minority of Tatars not loyal to the Mejlis, which is opposing the Russian rule. Ilyasov explains his position in the following manner: “Another opinion is that Crimea is our motherland – we live here, we can’t move to Africa or Asia, and so what is being proposed is not just to work together [with the Russians] but to actively co-operate with authority.” (Reed, 2014). Ruslan Balbek, vice-premier of Crimea, and Zaur Smirnov, State Committee for Interethnic Relations and Deported People Chairman, share Ilyasov’s views. They publicly denounce the Mejlis leadership, referring to it as “professional Tatars” (Petukhova, 2015) and accusing it of working for the US.

Most of the Tatars, however, remain alert. During the first year under the new rule, freedoms and rights of the minorities have been repeatedly attacked and Tatars have been affected by these attacks most of all. The new constitution of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea only recognizes the Tatar language as one of the official languages (Chapter 1 Article 10). It fails to deal with minority rights and cultural specificities of the peninsula (Konstitucia Respubliki Krym). In everyday life, the Tatars face both hidden and open repressions (see OSCE, 2015: 82-90; Pechonchyk et al., 35-36). The pro-Russian authorities banned public commemorations of Tatar deportations which used to be held annually in May as well as almost all public gatherings organized traditionally by the Mejlis; the Tatar media channel ATR and its affiliated media outlets were shut down (Coalson, 2014b); the Mejlis building in Simferopol was raided and sealed off, and the Crimean (Tatar) fund was confiscated. As for Mejlis, the pro-Russian authorities deny the very existence of Mejlis at the beginning: the de facto Head of Crimea Sergei Aksyonov announced that “there is no such organization as the Mejlis” (RFE/RL, 2014). In April 2016, Crimea’s so-called prosecutor, Natalia Poklonskaya, followed by Crimea’s Supreme Court, banned the Mejlis, labelling it “an extremist organization.” (Knott, 2016).

According to the OSCE July 2015 Report, the Crimean Tatars “have been subjected to increasing pressure on and control of the peaceful expression of their political views and cultural practices” (OSCE, 2015: 82). In the words of Barry Buzan, “if the institutions that reproduce language and culture are forbidden to operate, then identity cannot be transmitted effectively from one generation to the next” (Buzan, 1993: 43). Dozens of Tatar activists were arrested and charged with organizing “mass disorder”, some of them have disappeared.

According to Stuart Kaufman, a number of necessary conditions must exist in order to precipitate fear within societal groups: first, negative group stereotypes; second, threatened ethnic symbols (flags, statues); third, a threatened demographic situation (Kaufman, 1996: 113). All these conditions are present in the case of the Crimean Tatars. Negative stereotypes against the Tatars among the dominant Slavic population have deep historical roots and can be illustrated by the example of a graffiti sprayed on Tatar houses saying “Tatars out of Crimea!” accompanied by a Nazi swastika. (Williams, 2001: 375; Kaufman, 2014) Moreover, these negative stereotypes are encouraged by pro-Russian propaganda (see e.g. Quinn, 2014). One of the examples of threatened ethnic symbols, besides the ban on public commemorations such as the Crimean Tatar Flag Day, is also the vandalization of the Crimean Tatar memorial commemorating the 1944 deportations (The Moscow Times, 2015). The unfavourable
demographic situation, which is a result of previous two centuries of emigration and, of course, the deportations, was made even worse by the departure of another approximately 10,000 Tatars who left Crimea in the aftermath of the annexation. (Unian.info, 2015) As Roe puts it, “if the balance of the population changes in a given area, this can also disrupt societal reproduction” (Roe, 2005: 48) – something the Tatars have been experiencing since 1783. It is no wonder, given their historical experience particularly with the Soviets/Russians, that some young Tatars are now hashtagging “genocide” on social networks (Kaufman, 2014).

The next necessary question is: how can societies react to these (actual or possible) threats to their identity, and in effect to their survival? In most cases, the threatened societies cannot look to the state for protection, simply because the state, or more precisely the dominant society in the state, is often the source of the threat. Therefore, the society finds itself in a self-help situation, when it can only resort to military or non-military means of protection. Since the “vast majority of intra-state groups possess no such exclusive military means of protection”, such societies will often resort to non-military means of defending their identity (Roe, 2005: 58).

Thus, the crucial question here is why does the Crimean Tatar resistance still remain non-violent?

The simple answer is that in their case, armed military protection would probably bring about more harm than good. First, as Tatars constitute roughly 12 per cent of the population, any attempt to start armed resistance would result in ultimate failure against the superior military power of the Russian majority. While Roe mentions the possibility for a society to have military forces composed (primarily) of the same ethnic group in the neighbouring state, there is a little chance that such a scenario could apply to the Crimean Tatar diaspora in Turkey (where up to 6,000,000 ethnic Tatars live). Nonetheless, the number of Crimean Tatar nationalists makes up a small percentage of Crimean Tatar population in Turkey (Aydin, 2002), and there is moreover a long tradition of non-military resistance among the Crimean Tatars. Second, no paramilitary organization exists which would safeguard the interests of the Tatars. Furthermore, it would be very difficult for the Tatars to obtain weapons. Third, the Crimean authorities as well as the Russian army would undoubtedly utilize this opportunity to introduce even harsher repercussions against the Tatar minority. Fourth, Roe argues that “when the nature of the threat is non-military (legal and/or bureaucratic), countervailing measures are also likely to be non-military in nature” and “when group identity is closely linked with a specific territory – at the intra-state level protective measures will often be non-military in nature” (Roe, 2005: 59, 69). Both hypotheses are valid in the case of the Crimean Tatars and help to further explain the non-military character of the Tatar resistance. While some of the threats they are now experiencing could be categorized as (para-)military in nature (mostly murders by the pro-Russian militia), they constitute only a small part of the overall picture. Most of the societal threats here are indeed connected with legal or bureaucratic discrimination. The second hypothesis brings us again to the strong emotional attachment of the Tatars to their “homeland” in Crimea.

Similar considerations apply to the prospects of Crimean Tatar terrorism. After the annexation, several media (Russian propagandist media being a special case) warned about the
possibility of the spread of global jihad into Crimea via the radicalized Islamists among the Crimean Tatars (see e.g. Chazan, 2014; Quinn, 2014). Arguing that Crimea might possibly follow the same path as the Caucasus, most of these articles referred to a largely medialized quote from an interview with Dzhemilev, who stated that “We have Islamists, Wahhabis, Salafis . . . groups who have fought [with the opposition] in Syria. They say: ‘an enemy has entered our land and we are ready.’ We can’t stop people who want to die with honour” (Chazan, 2014).

This can hardly be considered as a call for opening a jihadist front. Dzhemilev simply warned about a possibility that the Russian annexation and the treatment of the Muslim (Tatar) minority by the Crimean authorities might provoke a reaction from radical Islamists. In the same interview, he made it clear that he did not endorse a jihadist campaign (Chazan, 2014). Moreover, some Russian Muslim authorities, such as Talgat Tadzhuddin, welcomed the annexation of Crimea as a move that benefits the ummah and Islam (Tadzihuddin, quoted in Crews, 2014). While some of the Crimean Tatars might be fighting in Syria and some individuals might be engaged in the global jihad, it is unlikely that a large-scale jihadi front could open in Crimea among the Tatars themselves in the near future. Throughout the summer of 2014, the Crimean law-enforcement bodies conducted searches in mosques and madrassas (Islamic schools) across the peninsula and interrogated dozens of Tatars suspected of possessing extremist materials, but in January 2015, Sergey Aksyonov publicly admitted the excessive nature of these searches (OSCE, 2015: 87-8). Crimean Tatar terrorism would bring about the same result for the Tatar society as military protection strategies considered above. In terms of societal security, it would threaten the survival of the society even more by providing the majority society with arguments for harsh repercussions. Still, we cannot completely rule out the possibility of jihadists from other countries taking on Crimean Tatars’ cause or further radicalization of desperate young Crimean Tatar men. Everything will, of course, depend also on further steps taken by the Crimean authorities and Russia.

In fact, the nature of “the tolerant islam” of the Crimean Tatars constitutes another variable that might explain the non-violent forms of resistance of the nation. According to some observers (see Trehub 2015), the Hanafi school of Islam professed by the majority of Crimean Tatars stands behind their moderation vis-à-vis the rise of radical Islamic tendencies elsewhere in the Muslim world. Trehub, a Ukrainian journalist, argues that there are several reasons to believe that moderate religious views prevent fundamentalist radicalization among the Tatars - chiefly, the Turkic and “European” (rather than Arabic) Islamic tradition and elimination of Crimean Tatar cultural elites, mosques and madrasas accompanied by decades-long reduction of religious practices to private family customs under the Soviet rule.

According to others, however, such claims represent an “egregious revision of history” (Trifkovic 2015). On his blog, Dr. Srdja Trifkovic, Foreign Affairs Editor of the paleoconservative Chronicles magazine, argues against this notion of historically rooted Islamic moderation arguing that “the economy of the Muslim-ruled Crimea was founded and operated on slave trade” and that the Tatar-Muslim raids were “justified under the Sharia law”. Apart from a brief historical excursion, however, his article does not provide much explanation of the contemporary situation. Some pro-Russian media go even further and warn against ongoing pro-ISIS radicalization of Crimean Tatars (Russia Insider, 2016; Fort Russ,
Nevertheless, there are no credible proofs of such developments and no record of Salafist violence in the Crimea whatsoever. As illustrated by this religious theme, the issue of the Crimean Tatars is presently subject to heated debates about revisions of history as well as propaganda wars.

Secessionism as the ultimate strategy of defending group societal security is a highly unlikely scenario in this case. The Tatars are scattered around Crimea, so it would be very difficult to create a separatist state on part of the Crimean peninsula, not to mention how short-lived would such an attempt be, considering the Russian military presence. The only secessionist attempt of Crimean Tatars in history we have seen so far was the Crimean People’s Republic proclaimed in 1917 that lasted for less than a month.

All this helps us to explain the non-military (non-violent) essence of the Tatar resistance so far. This resistance includes boycotts of the 2014 referendum on the status of Crimea as well as of the subsequent election; the economic blockade of Crimea (Izmirli, 2015); calls for support in international organizations, or peaceful demonstrations. Still, even these non-violent actions provoke the Crimean authorities and fuel the hatred against the Tatars among the majority society. Despite the pro-Russian propaganda which states that Russia did more for the Tatars within one year than Ukraine in 23 years (sputniknews.com 2015), the Crimean Tatars clearly feel their identity and thus their survival threatened. The primary political goal of Crimean Tatar leaders now is the unlikely end of Russian illegal occupation of Crimea, and cultural and political autonomy within Ukraine under the new legislation.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that they now constitute only around 12 per cent of the population of Crimea, Crimean Tatars undoubtedly represent a distinctive ethno-national and ethno-religious group, or a nation in many respects, thus clearly corresponding to the definition of “society” as understood by the analytical framework of societal security. Considering themselves as indigenous peoples of Crimea, they feel strong emotional attachment to the territory, which they perceive as their “historical homeland”.

In their historical narrative, the era of the Crimean Khanate (1449-1783) represents the “Golden Age” of their nationhood and statehood, followed by centuries of occupation and repressions. Already after the first Russian annexation of Crimea in 1783, it is possible to identify threats to the collective identity of the group and thus to their societal security in general, ranging from cultural cleansing strategies to some features of ethnic cleansing. Perhaps the most grievous of these threats is the gradual but steady decline of Tatar population in Crimea, which is a result of large-scale emigration followed by an influx of Slavic (mostly Russian) settlers supported by the Russian government. Because of its strategic importance, Crimea was destined to become Slavic and Christian. The Tatars, as a Turkic and Muslim group, did not fit into this scenario. The demographic situation thus changed dramatically in the Crimea and once the majority on the peninsula, the Tatars became a minority. Yet, the development of Tatar nationalism in the 19th century strengthened their attachment to their Crimean “homeland”.

2015).
In terms of societal security, the Soviet era represented the most drastic age of ethnic cleansing for the Tatars. Repressions against them that had started already with the Bolsheviks after the failed and short-lived attempt to establish an independent Tatar state in 1917, only culminated after the World War II. The Tatars, collectively accused of collaborating with the Nazi occupants, were deported *en masse* from Crimea and for more than forty years they virtually disappeared from the peninsula. Commonly referred to as *genocide* by the Tatars, the year 1944 left a deep scar in the Slavic-Tatar relations in Crimea.

Being allowed to return only in 1989 at the brink of the collapse of the USSR, the Tatars started to repopulate Crimea with even stronger determination and emotional attachment to their “homeland” they were forbidden to enter for decades. A period of national revival followed after their return to the peninsula, which was since 1991 governed by independent Ukraine. Already at this stage, some Tatar intellectuals felt their identity being threatened by the existing Slavic majority on the peninsula. Despite their struggle to push through legal assurances of their autonomy and to get official acknowledgement of their representative institutions from the Ukrainian authorities, the Tatars and their identity did not face such obvious threats to their societal security as in the preceding decades or after the Russian annexation of 2014.

Before and after the Russian annexation, the Crimean Tatars faced and still have to face significant threats to their societal security, cultural and religious identity, and therefore to their survival as a distinctive societal group. These threats range from cultural cleansing strategies and related legal and bureaucratic discrimination to ethnic cleansing strategies, including to some extent deliberate murders. Although the mass deportations of the Soviet era are unlikely to be repeated, many Crimean Tatars now recall the genocide of 1944 more than ever before. Still, the Crimean Tatar resistance remains non-violent and this is unlikely to change in the near future. Both tested hypotheses about the non-violent character of the resistance proved to be valid in the case of the Crimean Tatars.

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