The politics of recognition of Crimean Tatar collective rights in the post-Soviet period: With special attention to the Russian annexation of Crimea

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the process of how Crimean Tatars strived to attain group-differentiated rights since they have returned to their homeland in the early 1990s. Whereas the politics of minority rights were viewed through security lens in earlier literature, we emphasize the significance of cultural constructs in influencing the minority policies, based on qualitative content analysis of “speech acts” of elites, and movement and policy documents. Focusing on the interaction of the framing processes of Crimean Tatars with the Crimean regional government, Ukraine, and Russia, we argue that the “neo-Stalinist frame” has played a major role in denying the rights of Crimean Tatars for self-determination and preservation of their ethnic identity in both pre and post annexation Crimea. The Crimean Tatars counter-framed against neo-Stalinist frame both in the pre and post-annexation period by demanding their rights as “indigenous people”. Ukraine experienced a frame transformation after the Euromaidan protests, by shifting from a neo-Stalinist frame into a “multiculturalist frame”, which became evident in recognition of the Crimean Tatar status as indigenous people of Crimea.

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1. Introduction

The 2014 annexation of Crimea by Russia has been regarded as the most significant event of the post-Soviet political order, as many states, particularly in the West, consider the annexation to be a breach of the norms of territorial sovereignty and democracy, thereby becoming a manifesto of Russia’s revisionism in international politics. The Crimean Tatars made international headlines with their strong and public opposition to the annexation as well as Russia’s recurrent persecutions of Crimean Tatars living in Crimea following Russia’s annexation of the region. Interestingly, the Russian annexation of Crimea brought a new conjuncture in which Ukraine finally recognized Crimean Tatars’ status as an indigenous people — recognition that the Tatars had been seeking to establish for nearly three decades. This recognition, however, has not been incorporated into the Ukrainian constitution yet. This paper examines the process of the Crimean Tatars to attain collective rights since their return to the region in the early 1990s. The Crimean Tatars’ relations with the Crimean regional government, Ukraine,
and Russia will be compared and the attempts made by the Crimean Tatars to influence the process of the provision of rights will be analyzed.

While issues of minorities and multiculturalism tend to be analyzed from the perspective of geopolitical interests and security in former communist states, this paper will emphasize the significance of cultural constructions, such as “frames”, in guiding the behavior of state and minority elites when it comes to state-minority relations. We argue that even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, “neo-Stalinism” has continued to inform the policy decisions of elites in Crimea, Kyiv and Moscow. With regards to the Crimean Tatar case, a neo-Stalinist view means reproducing a Soviet interpretation of WWII events, particularly the Crimean Tatar responsibility in bringing about their own deportation on 18 May 1944, and the denial of any meaningful collective rights for the Crimean Tatars. This frame has played a major role in the limitation of political and cultural rights of Crimean Tatars in pre and post-annexation Crimea. As “framing processes” are interactive, the Crimean Tatars have counter-framed the neo-Stalinist frame both in the pre- and post-annexation period by demanding recognition of the genocidal nature of the Crimean Tatar deportation, as well as a redress and compensation for past grievances. The major innovative challenge for Crimean Tatars in combating the neo-Stalinist frame has been the development of their demand for “indigenous status”, which was recently approved by the Ukrainian elite, a major breakthrough in their struggle towards attaining collective rights. This recent move signaled a possible transition to “multiculturalist” frame in Ukraine, regarding the Crimean Tatars.

There has yet to be a comprehensive work that examines the post-return situation of the Crimean Tatars, particularly their struggle for self-determination, the re-construction of their national identity in the homeland, and their relations with the dominant Russian majority in Crimea. Existing works highlight different aspects of their problems such as their struggle to obtain citizenship, land, compensation, and political and cultural rights (Guboglo and Chervonnaya, 1992; Allworth, 1998; Wilson, 1998, 2014a; Izmirli, 2008; Bogomolov and Danylov, 2010). Another branch of the literature focuses on the reconstruction of national identity through the re-establishment of various political and cultural institutions, and reviving the Crimean Tatar language (Williams, 2001a; Kozlov and Chizhova, 2003; Uehling, 2004; Aydingun and Aydingun, 2007).

This article, however, aims to focus on one neglected aspect of Crimean Tatar national identity construction — the articulation of the claim to be seen as an “indigenous” people. Existing literature tends to focus on the legal and institutional dimension of this issue within the framework of Ukrainian state-building. (Babin and Prykhodko, 2016; Belitser, 2000, 2002; Shevel, 2001). However, the development of the Crimean Tatar claim to be recognized as an indigenous people cannot be taken for granted. This claim had not been made prior to 1993, in fact, the Crimean Tatars have increasingly constructed themselves as an indigenous people of Crimea in the 2000s in the context of their interaction with the Crimean regional government, and Ukrainian and Russian states.

Collective rights refer to group-differentiated ethno-cultural rights, such as rights of indigenous peoples. Since modern state is organized around the culture and language of dominant groups, culturally disadvantaged groups face barriers in full participation in society. While group-differentiated rights could be used by an individual or a group, depending on the situation, they mainly aim to rectify ethno-cultural injustice by providing recognition, positive accommodation and affirmative action. (Kymlicka, 1996). While the Crimean Tatars were provided with “minority status” in Ukraine and Russia, they strongly resist being designated as “just a minority”, but insist on their status as an “indigenous people of Crimea” along with the Karaims and Krymchaks (the last two are only in a few thousands). Reduced to being a small minority in Crimea as a result of centuries of Russian colonial policy, only the status of an indigenous people could provide the Crimean Tatars the opportunity to exercise self-determination and, henceforth, guarantee the development of their national culture. Whereas Russia does not recognize the indigenous status of the Crimean Tatars, it claims to provide “national-cultural autonomy” for all its minorities. In this article, we will examine the range, types and extent of the collective rights the Crimean Tatars had before and after the annexation under Ukrainian and Russian jurisdiction.

After presenting our theoretical framework, we elaborate on the neo-Stalinist frame and its links to the political actions of the Russian-dominated regional government in Crimea since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the return of the Crimean Tatars, attending to interactions between Russians and Crimean Tatars in Crimea. Next, we explain how the Crimean Tatars reconstructed themselves as an indigenous people, and how Ukraine’s frame regarding the Crimean Tatars transformed from neo-Stalinist into recognizing the indigenous status of the Crimean Tatar people, and how Crimean Tatars participated in the formulation of new multiculturalist policies. Following this, the extent to which neo-Stalinist ways of thinking influenced Russian policies of repression and “symbolic multiculturalism” towards the Crimean Tatars after the Russian annexation of Crimea is examined. Finally, the way in which Crimean Tatars in Crimea reacted to the Russian annexation is followed by an assessment of the prospects of ethno-cultural justice for the Crimean Tatars in Ukraine and Russia.

The method of the article is a qualitative content analysis of both interview transcripts and major documents produced by the Ukrainian government and Russian governments in Crimea and Moscow, as well as the Crimean Tatar national movement. These included legal documents, presentations given by politicians, draft bills, declarations, resolutions and policy statements. Both the “speech acts” of the elites and core written texts were analyzed to understand the frame structures, and how they have changed over time. We complemented this data with participant observation in Crimean Tatar settlements in Kherson in 2016 and among the Crimean Tatar diaspora in Turkey, who have also participated in the Crimean Tatar national reconstruction since return of their co-ethnics to homeland.

The interviews were conducted before and after the annexation of Crimea: in Crimea in 2006 and in Kyiv in 2017. We could not visit presently annexed Crimea due to the safety concerns. We addressed this problem by maintaining regular contacts with the Crimean Tatars residing in Crimea through social media, though we did not officially interview and cite them in order
not to put them at risk. As our main concern is the strategic deployment of frames by elites, our interviews were with intellectuals and opinion-leaders who contributed to the formulation of these frames. Those interviewed included leaders of the Crimean Tatar movement, including Mejlis (Crimean Tatar National Parliament) members, Soviet dissidents, members of Crimean Tatar, Ukrainian and Russian (Crimean) non-governmental, religious, youth organizations and media, academicians and professionals; the majority of the persons interviewed resided in the Ukrainian and Crimean capitals. Interview questions were targeted to understand the perceptions of ethnic relations, and problems and struggles in the process of the attainment of collective rights, and to trace the development of the discourse of indigenous identity. None of our respondents declined to be interviewed. Indeed, they were pleased to be given an opportunity to voice their concerns.

2. Theoretical framework

We believe that national identities are constructed by elites, rather than being primordial, given, and static. The strong resonance of nationalism can be explained by the elite’s ability to provide simple, short-cut solutions for complex problems arising from uneven processes of modernization (Brown, 2000, p.20). Framing processes in national movements are a significant way of constructing national identities, by defining the internal content and external boundaries of a national identity (Aydin, 2012; Sökefeld, 2008). Frames in social movement theory are defined as cognitive and interactive maps that identify problems and then offer a plan of counter-action. Essentially, there cannot be an action without a frame (Snow et al., 1986, p. 477). Framing define a political movement’s goals, strategies, and tactics, and this bestows upon them a causal significance.

While framing processes are attributed only to social and political movements, frames are rarely used to describe the motivations of states or governments when interacting with the movements. However, governments also attribute meaning to events and issues prior to acting. In fact, in the public policy literature, the concept of “framing” also plays an important role. Frames are used to define problems in the first stage of policy-making process. Erik Hans Klijn and Joop Koppenjan, both of Erasmus University Rotterdam, note that frames identify “the causes and consequences of some circumstances that are deemed undesirable”, and they involve “a theory about how a problem may be alleviated” (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2016, p. 46). Hence, frames also have a causal significance in public policy literature in the way they influence problem-identification, and policy formulation stages of a policy cycle.

The first aspect of our theoretical framework is linking the social movements and public policy literature by using the concept of framing. We argue that frames help in identifying the goals, strategies and tactics of national movements (Crimean Tatar), states (Ukraine, Russia), and regional governments (the Crimean government), and thereby influence their behavior. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss what creates frames. Strategic concerns as well as ideational factors such as collective memory, and discursive opportunity structures, that is, international regimes that makes certain claim-making practices more viable play a role in the emergence of the frames.

How do frames become resonant within the movements or policy communities of states and regional governments, and are they not contested? Frame-alignment refers to the articulation of a common frame that aligns both elite and public opinion within a community despite previous contestations. In this article, we refer to three of the frame alignment processes: ‘frame transformation’, ‘frame bridging’ and ‘counter-framing’. Frame transformation refers to the fact that “a domain previously taken as normative or acceptable is reframed as an injustice that warrants change” (Snow et al., 1986, p. 474). For instance, the Crimean Tatars re-framed their identity as indigenous in the post-Soviet period and Ukraine experienced a frame transformation regarding their relations with the Crimean Tatars in the post-Euromaidan period. ‘Frame bridging’ is “the linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue” (Snow et al., 1986, p. 467). The Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians bridged their frames in the post-Euromaidan era. “Counter-framing” refers to “the attempt to undermine opponents’ attempts of frame alignment with contested targets” (Evans, 1997, p. 452). This can involve attempts to “rebut, undermine, or neutralize a person’s or group’s myths, versions of reality, or interpretive framework” (Benford, 1987, p. 75). The Crimean Tatars, on the one hand, and Russians in Crimea and Moscow on the other, counter-framed one another. Master frames refer to “general symbolic frames that are culturally resonant in their historical milieux” (Snow and Benford, 1992, p. 151), and neo-Stalinism is a master-frame that influences the behaviors of most post-Soviet governments in domestic and foreign policies, including Russia, Ukraine, and the Crimean regional government.

Demonstrating the existence of frames is necessary in order for them to not merely to be seen as post-facto justifications. As with other cultural variables, the question remains how a frame is to be recognized. To address this issue, as suggested by Professor of San Diego State University Hank Johnston (2002, p. 67), we provide evidence for the existence of frames in both the discourses and actions of the actors. We pay particular attention to how frames are linked to policy and political actions.

3. Neo-Stalinist frame

In 1991, when Ukraine became independent, Crimea was granted the status of an autonomous republic. According to the most recent census (About number and composition population of UKRAINE by data, All-Ukrainian population census’ 2001 data, 2001), ethnic Russians constitute around 58.5% of the population of Crimea. Ethnic Ukrainians in Crimea were largely Russified, and formed 24.4%. The returning Crimean Tatars formed 12.1% of the population in 2001.\(^1\) The structural context in

\(^1\) The Crimean Tatar population rose to 13.5% by 2012 (Wilson, 2013a, p.1, p.1).
Crimea in the post-Cold War era was shaped by Russian majority’s attempts to separate from Ukraine in 1991 and 1995. To forestall separatism, Ukraine instituted direct rule in Crimea but granted significant economic concessions to the region. Ukraine also agreed to rent the Crimean naval base to the Russian Black Sea Fleet. Ukraine and Russia signed an agreement in which they recognized the inviolability of each other’s borders in 1997 (Sasse, 2007). The Ukrainian appeasement of ethnic Russians enabled Crimean autonomy to operate, practically, as Russian autonomy, in disregarding minorities in the peninsula (Sasse, 2002, p. 10).

We argue that “neo-Stalinism” is a specific frame that influences the behavior of the Russian-dominated government in Crimea, post-Soviet Russian state, and pre-Euromaidan Ukraine towards the Crimea and Crimean Tatars. “Neo-Stalinism” in general is used to denote the ideas and practices that included the rehabilitation of the memory of Joseph Stalin and the associated political system, nostalgia for the Stalinist era, and restoration of Stalin’s policies, with the exception of the terror. This term was initially used for the post-totalitarian regimes of the Soviet Union and Eastern European states (Medvedev, 1982), but today there are assertions that neo-Stalinism can once again be observed in Russian politics and society (Chapkovski, 2017; Luhn, 2016). Greta Uehling (2015b) notes that according to Levada Center polls, a significant number of Russians credit victory in the Second World War to Stalin himself, and believe that the importance of the victory far outweigh any mistakes that were made (p.9). Uehling (2015b) uses neo-Stalinism to depict the behavior of Russians towards the Crimean Tatars in the context of the Crimea in her fieldwork in 2013.

Neo-Stalinism in the Crimean Tatar context has four main aspects. Firstly, Crimea is accorded a prominent place in Russian national identity even though there is no mention of this peninsula in Russian historical documents before the 18th century. This is, in fact, largely due to Crimea’s significance for Russian imperial expansion, symbolized in events such as the annexation of Crimea in 1783, Crimean War (1854–1855), and the defense of Sevastopol from autumn 1941 to 4 July 1942 during the Second World War. (Kuzio, 1997: 43–44). Crimea is also identified with the naval base that hosts the Black Sea Fleet. In order to entrench Russian ownership of the peninsula, the Russian imperial and Soviet states pursued a policy of de-Tatarization of Crimea, as observed in Crimean Tatar exodus throughout the 19th century, and deportation of Crimean Tatars in 1944 (Fisher, 1978, Kirimli, 1996). Secondly, the neo-Stalinist frame justifies the deportation by claiming that the “Tatars” were traitors to the Motherland, and were consequently deported, but this does not qualify as genocide. This frame denies any serious responsibility for the Soviet, and subsequent Russian government, for the deportation. It is argued that even though there were possibly unjust aspects of the deportation, a significant duration of time has passed, and other ethnic groups have settled in Crimea. Thus, returning Crimean Tatars cannot be eligible for compensation for the land and property that was seized (Fisher, 1978; Williams, 2001a; Uehling, 2015b; Bezverkha, 2015).

The third aspect of the Russian frame is the Crimean Tatars’ status as a non-indigenous people. The Russian frame reduces the Crimean Tatar ethnicity to only one of its elements, Chingizid Tatars who conquered Crimea in the 12th century, and de-emphasizes the role of pre-Mongol ethnic groups such as Scythians, Sarmatians, Taurians, Huns, Khazars, Pechenegs, Goths, and Kipchaks (Williams, 2001b, p. 330–2). Focusing solely on the nomadic Mongolian element presents the Crimean Tatars as immigrants or invaders as opposed to an indigenous population. The Soviet regime followed a policy of referring to them as “Tatars formerly residing in Crimea”, rather than “Crimean Tatars” refusing to acknowledge their specific ethnogenesis, and their distinct nationness, plotting their possibility of assimilating into other Tatar groups in their Central Asian exile. Similar policy seemed to be conceived after the annexation (Gabidullin and Edwards, 2014). The fourth aspect of the Russian frame focuses on the Crimean Tatars’ perceived threat towards Slavic (Russian and Ukrainian) people. When repatriating Crimean Tatars squat on empty government land, after being denied to be compensated for their stolen land, they have been portrayed as trespassers (samozaikhat) by the pre- and post-annexation Crimean government (Williams, 2001a). Moreover, the Mejlis’ claim for self-determination is viewed as a zero-sum situation that threatens the rights of Russian population of Crimea (See Box 1).

Operating with these assumptions of the Crimean Tatars, the Crimean Russian government resisted the Crimean Tatars’ return, resettlement, political representation, demands for employment, and cultural rights in both overt and covert manners (Williams, 2001a). The government’s position on the issue resonated with the wider Slavic population. Yuri Biluha (2017), a former Soviet official in Crimea, witnessed the existence of the stereotype prevented redressing effects of the deportation:

> When I was working on the issues of Crimean Tatars, common people in Crimea believed that the Crimean Tatars were traitors. That they were not human. Several times I tried to tell people that this was wrong, that it was, in fact, the opposite. But it was difficult to fight this stereotype. This stereotype prevented us from taking certain decisions that

**Box 1**
The four aspects of the Neo-Stalinist Frame in Crimea

- Crimea’s centrality for Russian national identity
- Crimean Tatars’ alleged betrayal during WWII
- Crimean Tatars’ non-indigeneity
- Crimean Tatars’ current threat to the Slavic people
could resolve the issues of the Crimean Tatars. For example, I proposed a project on the restoration of the former toponymy in Crimea but it was blocked.

In fact, Bohdan Yaremenko (2017), a former diplomat and the head of the Maidan of Foreign Affairs organization, defined the attitude of the regional government in Crimea as “hostile” to the Crimean Tatars. For instance, the regional Republican Committee for Nationalities and Formerly Deported Citizens (RCNFDC) ignored the orders of the central government to pay limited compensation to repatriates (Ablyatifov, 2004). Following Viktor Yanukovich’s election to the presidency in 2010, the central government provided greatest support to the neo-Stalinist position of the Crimean elite. Yanukovich reduced the number of members in the Council of Representatives of Crimean Tatar People (the official body representing the Crimean Tatars established by Kuchma in 1999), appointed the Crimean Tatars who opposed the Mejlis to the Council, and to bureaucratic positions responsible for ethnic relations, reserved for the Crimean Tatars (Wilson, 2013b). He also appointed Anatolii Mohylyov, the former head of the Crimean police known for his anti-Tatar stance as the head of the Crimean government in 2011, and Mohylyov openly declared the Mejlis to be illegal (Kuzio, 2013). Consequently, the neo-Stalinist frame played a significant role in preventing effective Crimean Tatar political representation, any significant redress of Crimean Tatar deportation, and the recognition of their indigenous rights.

4. The emergence the Crimean Tatar “indigenous rights” frame

After their deportation to Central Asia and Siberia, the Crimean Tatars formed a dissident collective return movement beginning from 1957 (Bekirova, 2004, p.71). The Crimean Tatar frame developed in this period, emphasized that homeland was central to Crimean Tatar national identity, and that the deportation of the Crimean Tatars was unjust. For, when Nazis invaded Crimea, all male population of the Crimean Tatars except for children and elderly were fighting in the Soviet army, and many women and elderly were supporting the Soviet partisans. The Nazis forced the Crimean Tatar population to servitude, and in fact transferred Crimean Tatar teenagers as forced laborers to Germany, and burned 100 Crimean Tatar villages for not collaborating with them. A few nationalists, unaware of the true nature of the Nazi regime, attempted to revive religious and national institutions, but the whole population cannot be held responsible for the collaboration of the few. After all, other Soviet peoples having members who collaborated were not deported. Accordingly, the frame of the Crimean Tatar movement in the USSR included two key demands: right to return, (including redress and compensation of past grievances) and restoration of the national-territorial autonomy in Crimea, granted to them by Lenin (Dzhemilev, 2005; Guboglo and Chervonnaya, 1992). They emphasized that Crimean ASSR was designated as a Crimean Tatar autonomy without the specification of a Crimean Tatar ethnonym. The overrepresentation of Crimean Tatars in administration, recognition of Crimean Tatar as a state language, and state support of Crimean Tatar culture, and its conversion into an oblast following the deportation of Crimean Tatars demonstrated that it was not different than other national-cultural autonomies in the USSR. Neither of these demands were accepted by the Soviet governments, who failed to de-Stalinize in any real sense until the end of the USSR (Fisher, 1978; Williams, 2001a; Aydin, 2012). (See Box 2)

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, approximately 270,000 Crimean Tatars returned to Crimea, but they did not advance the demand for the re-establishment of national-cultural autonomy or territorial sovereignty in Crimea because their demand could potentially be manipulated by the Russians and be presented as a support for the separatism of Crimea in order to join Russia (Wilson, 1998; Malyarenko and Galbreath, 2013, p. 923). Crimean Tatar activists, with the support of Ukrainian human rights activists transformed their previous frame into a demand for indigenous status in Crimea, as it would still involve self-determination but within Ukrainian territorial integrity, shielding them from potential Russian domination once again. The claim for indigenous status for Crimean Tatars was in line with the content of Crimean Tatar culture, as its central tenet is a strong attachment to the lost homeland developed during the period in exile (Williams, 1997; Uehling, 2004). The new frames explains the issue as follows: Russians, Ukrainians, Armenians, Germans and other minorities settled in Crimea in a relatively recent era, and have their own parent states. The Crimean Tatars along with Karaims and Krymchaks are autochthonous to the peninsula, therefore they have no other home. Consequently, it is mainly Crimean Tatars and these two indigenous peoples who have a right to self-determination in Crimea (Belitsir, 2002).

While the demand for recognition as “indigenous people” seem to derive from the previous Crimean Tatar emphasis on their status as “korenny naro” (“native people” deserving national-cultural autonomy, in Soviet terminology) in the Soviet Union (Williams, 20001), we argue that real factor that contributed to the emergence of this frame was the realization of the international discursive opportunity structures. Throughout the 1990s, the rights of indigenous peoples began to receive larger recognition from the international community, epitomized in UN Declaration of the Right of Indigenous Peoples (2007),

Box 2
The pre-1991 Crimean Tatar Frame

- Recognition of deportation as genocide, redress, compensation, collective return
- The re-establishment of national-cultural autonomy within USSR
and the Crimean Tatar movement, having strong international linkages since the Soviet era, empowered themselves by reconstructing themselves as indigenous people.

After 1997, the Crimean Tatars began to attend the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues with a greater degree of enthusiasm. They, in collaboration with several Ukrainian legal experts, prepared a draft bill to be proposed in the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada in 2001, and lobbied for it since then. Nadir Bekirov, the founder of a civil society organization for “Research and Support of Indigenous Peoples of Crimea” spoke at a conference in 2005, emphasizing the Crimean Tatars’ relationship with nature; hence, indigenous identity, a theme which had never appeared in Soviet era discourse towards Crimean Tatars. Bekirov noted the Crimean Tatars’ special role in the preservation and development of the springs and wells of Crimea, which had developed over centuries, and the special cultural rituals for which water was a central part. He lamented that after the deportation of Crimean Tatars, the arrival of new settlers into Crimea led to the destruction of 90% of the springs and the wells to be filled with waste (Bekirov, 2005). Since early 2000s, some Crimean Tatar organizations such as the Qırım newspaper, Bizim Qırım (Our Crimea) Youth Organization, and the Institute of Civil Society have gone as far as to propose to revise their ethnonyms as Qırım or Qırımlı (“Crimea” or “Crimean” in the Crimean Tatar language) as opposed to QırımTatar (“Crimean Tatar”). While entrenching their identity as an indigenous people, they also sought to avoid the immigrant implication of “Tatar” (Aydin, 2012, p. 346, p. 346).

In accordance with their new frame, the Crimean Tatar politicians and civil society organizations have paid special attention to researching their archiological sites, holy places, toponymic names, genealogical trees, and geographical legends that would make their close relation to Crimea’s soil more concrete, in the way other indigenous people also have. With the financial aid of international organizations and the Crimean Tatar diaspora, Crimean Tatar cultural, literary, artistic and educational institutions were rejuvenated, Crimean Tatar historical archives and ethnic heritage sites were recovered, traditional crafts were revived, and traditional lifestyle was re-constructed in clothing, wedding ceremonies, religious rituals and so on. (Aydin, 2012). Lastly, the claim to indigeneity also offers a great potential of linking the large Crimean Tatar diaspora populated in millions legally to Crimea, as Ukraine’s “diaspora citizenship” can only be given to people indigenous to Ukrainian territory. (See Box 3)

5. Ukrainian frame transformation after the Euromaidan protests

Until the Euromaidan protests, Ukraine sought to avoid voicing its opinion when Crimean Tatar political, socio-economic and cultural rights were violated (Wilson, 2014a). One reason for this was that the Ukrainian state served the interests of “a few captors”, rather than society as a whole, and narrow interests pre-dominated the decision-making processes (Fritz, 2007, p. 13). The Ukrainian central elite in general were largely under the influence of the Crimean oligarchs in the formulation of Ukrainian policy-making regarding the Crimean Tatars. The widespread criminal networks between the Russian elite of Crimea and the Ukrainian elite at the center marked the Russian influence of the Ukrainian center (Malyarenko and Galbreath, 2013, p. 926).

The Ukrainian frame before 2014 was not very different from the Crimean Russians’ frame. The Crimean Tatar proposal to the Verkhovna Rada in the form of draft law for indigenous status failed to be taken into consideration, and at times was widely opposed by Russian and Ukrainian MPs (Belitzer, 2002; Shevel, 2001). However, there was a brief attempt at frame-bridging between the Crimean Tatar and “pro-Ukrainian” organizations, such as Rukh Party in the 1990s and President Viktor Yushchenko’s Our Ukraine bloc in the early 2000s. According to Malyarenko and Galbreath (2013), during the ‘Orange period’, the Mejlis became a regional ally of Yuschenko and the central government in Kyiv (p. 923). The Mejlis supported Ukraine’s acceptance into NATO and the EU, as the latter also presented the potential for the attainment of indigenous rights (Radio Liberty, 5 December 2009). However, the Orange Revolution did not yield any significant improvement to the lives of Crimean Tatars despite Crimean Tatar support for it, and cynicism among the Crimean Tatar public grew towards the Ukrainian central government and Crimean Tatar participation in Ukrainian elections fell in the 2000s (Aydin, 2012, p. 16; Malyarenko and Galbreath, 2013, p. 923). Yushchenko, as he rolled back many of his Orange promises, also objected to Crimean Tatar demands for indigenous status (Unrepresented Peoples and Nations Organization, 31 May 2005). This effectively put an end to this brief attempt at frame-bridging between the Crimean Tatars and the Ukrainian state.

The question remains why, despite the neo-Stalinist frame, were certain collective minority rights tolerated in the 2000s by the Ukrainian center? After all, the Mejlis was de jure recognized as an advisory body to the President in Kuchma’s period; the Crimean Tatars were employed in bureaucracy, and were free to operate many national and cultural institutions. Ukrainian neo-Stalinism was discursively limited due to Ukraine’s policy of maintaining a balance between Europe and Russia before Euromaidan. After all, Ukraine signed the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in 1995 and

Box 3
The post-1991 Crimean Tatar Frame

- Demand for indigenous status for the Crimean Tatars
- Demand for internal sovereignty within Ukraine
this required minority rights for groups like the Crimean Tatars. For instance, Ukraine allowed Crimean Tatar schools to operate liberally and did not prohibit cultural development, but it failed to provide sufficient funding or bureaucratic support to offer education in Crimean Tatar language for the great majority of Crimean Tatar children, and in this way, there was not a possibility of preserving the Crimean Tatar language, which has been an endangered language. This is one of the reasons why the Crimean Tatars underlined positive accommodation instead of mere toleration.

The neo-Stalinist master frame in Ukraine transformed with the Euromaidan Revolution and break-up with Russia. Yanukovich’s pro-Russian government’s frame was guided by a neo-Stalinist master frame: keeping Ukraine in the Russian political and economic sphere of control, extending the lease of the Russian Black Sea fleet in Crimea, denying Holodomor, and ensuring the continuation of the hegemonic status of the Russian language. This master frame was shattered with the Euromaidan protests, Russia’s 2014 annexation of Crimea, and Russian-backed separatism in eastern Ukraine. The new reformist government’s policies created a master frame transformation in Ukraine, as Ukraine oriented towards Europe, sought NATO and EU Associate membership, broke-off almost all political relations with Russia, and attempted to carry out democratic and anti-corruption reforms. Accordingly, the Ukrainian frame regarding the Crimean Tatars began to change into a multiculturalist direction. The second factor affecting the Ukrainian frame regarding the Crimean Tatars during the post-occupation period was the Crimean Tatars’ resistance to the Russian annexation of Crimea, which formed the only real formidable opposition in the peninsula. On February 26, 2014, Crimean Tatars held street protests carrying Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar flags, blocked highways and prevented Russian troops, armored personnel carriers and tanks from entering their villages (Wilson, 2014b). The Crimean Tatars’ clear preference for Ukraine over Russia led to a re-evaluation of previous perceptions regarding the Crimean Tatars within the Ukrainian public sphere. Contrary to their image in Soviet historiography as “treacherous, greedy Muslims”, the Crimean Tatars appeared loyal to Ukraine despite a widespread lack of support for Crimean Tatars prior to and during the occupation (Gromenko, 2017; Kysla, 2017; Yüksel, 2017).

The Crimean Tatar elite played a remarkable role in the transformation of the Ukrainian frame. Mustafa Dzhemilev (Cemilev (Jemilev) in Crimean Tatar), a former Chairman of the Mejlis and a recognized leader of Crimean Tatar National Movement, stressed that, in the eyes of Ukrainians, the Crimean Tatars passed the trial of occupation by choosing Ukraine over Russia (Yüksel, 2017). The reason for this choice was their deep distrust of the Russian authorities and strong opposition to Russia’s expansionist foreign policy. Accordingly, Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians must become allies, defending both the rights of Crimea’s indigenous peoples and the territorial integrity of Ukraine by a common diplomatic campaign. The Crimean Tatar leaders emphasized that the two peoples shared a common history, referring to the relations between the Crimean Khanate and Ukrainian Cossacks. They emphasize that the two peoples share a common future too: both peoples must collaborate to reclaim Crimea from Russia. (See Box 4)

As Ukraine transformed its frame regarding the Crimean Tatars, it recognized the Crimean Tatars as an indigenous people of Crimea by a parliamentary resolution on 21 March 2014 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 21 March 2014). The Crimean Tatar self-government institutions (Qurultay and Mejlis) were recognized as legitimate representative bodies of the Crimean Tatars and granted a share of the state budget (Uriadovy Portal, 27 December 2016). Although the status of the Crimean Tatars as an indigenous people has not yet become law, with a plan to its full execution and of its repercussions, the Ukrainian official bodies have begun to implement various measures of recognition. The Crimean Tatar deportation was officially recognized as genocide in the Ukrainian Rada and commemorated at the state level with an emphasis on the common tragedy of the Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars (QHA, 12 November 2015). Crimean Tatar symbols and national days have begun to be officially honored (QHA, 26 June 2015). Crimean Tatar activists were incorporated into the pantheon of “heroes of Ukraine”. Ukrainian diplomatic missions began advocating for the human rights of the Crimean Tatars in the international sphere.

The above acts could be taken as merely strategic moves by Ukraine to increase its democratic image in order to gain international support concerning the occupation of Crimea. However, the fact that Ukrainian elite have taken measures to increase the resonance of such a new frame among the Ukrainian people points to a real transformation in their thinking. Emine Dzhaparova, a Crimean Tatar bureaucrat, was appointed as the first deputy of the Minister of Information Policies. The ministry has since created slogans including “Crimea is Ukraine” (Krym-tse Ukraina), “We are different, but we are united” (My

**Box 4**

Common Crimean Tatar-Ukrainian Frame

- Recognition of Crimean Tatars as an indigenous people which involves the recognition of genocide, internal self-determination, right to land and group rights.
- Crimean Tatar sovereignty exists within Ukrainian sovereignty.

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2 *Holodomor* is the artificial famine that killed millions of Ukrainians in the Soviet Union in 1932–33.

3 Russia has repeatedly denied supporting the insurgents but after the shooting down of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 by a Russian supplied BUK surface-to-air missile, many Western states and media have acknowledged Russian involvement.
rizni, ale my razom) and “Two flags, a united country” (Dva prapory, odna kraîna), that have been posted on billboards across Ukraine as well as on social media. On Dzhemilev’s birthday, the president of Ukraine posted on social media that he celebrated Dzhemilev’s life-long struggle for the attainment of Crimean Tatar rights. These elite initiatives appear to have had an influence on the public. Social media users suggested Dzhemilev for president in the first elections after Euromaidan. (Kysla, 2017). Jamala (Susana Jamaladinova), a Crimean Tatar singer, who prepared a song about the Crimean Tatar deportation, was elected by popular vote to represent Ukraine in the Eurovision Song Contest. All of our interviewees noted that since Euromaidan and the annexation, Ukrainians have learned a lot about the Crimean Tatars and this has positively affected relations between Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars.

Another evidence that post-Euromaidan Ukrainian government developed multiculturalist orientation towards the Crimean Tatars were measures taken to preserve the Crimean Tatar culture. “The Crimean House” was established as a project center in Kyiv to represent and protect the culture of the ethnic communities of Crimea. Moreover, the Crimean Tatar TV Channel ATR, and Crimean News Agency, banned in Crimea, have begun operating from Kyiv and the former is receiving financial assistance from the state (QHA, 22 December 2016). Crimean Tatar Language and Literature Departments were opened in Kyiv at Taras Shevchenko National University. Crimean Tavricheski University, with a similar department, was relocated to Kyiv. Research on Crimean Tatar history and culture is now supported by national funds. Crimean Tatar schools, mosques and cultural centers have begun to be built adjacent to settlements of Crimean Tatar refugees in Kherson, Lviv and Kyiv, supported also by the Crimean Tatar diaspora. Serhii Gromenko, who was a former member of the committee for rewriting historical textbooks in Ukraine explained the new educational and cultural policy attending the diversity within the country:

As a result of our efforts, the deportation of Crimean Tatars has been included in Ukrainian school textbooks. At the WWII exhibition organized in 2015, a special stand was established to present the truth about the Crimean Tatar deportation. Additionally, the lives of important Crimean Tatar personalities, such as Noman Çelebicihan [a Crimean Tatar national hero] was included in our book, ‘Krym Nash’ (Crimea is Ours). One of our tasks is supporting the SBU (Security Service of Ukraine) in its research concerning the Crimean Tatar deportation (2017).

The main issue now for the Crimean Tatars is the incorporation of the Crimean Tatar indigenous rights, which includes internal self-determination and national-representative institutions such as Mejlis and Qurultay into Ukrainian legal framework. While the deputies at the Verkhovna Rada work on a draft bill, the Ukrainian civil society organizations have also suggested various schemes of self-determination for the Crimean Tatars. Natalya Belitser from the Pylyp Orluk Human Rights Organization suggested that pilot projects be undertaken in mainland Ukraine for Crimean Tatar non-territorial autonomy embodying the already existing Qurultay, Mejlis and World Crimean Tatar Congress structures (Belitser, 2017). Bohdan Yaremchenko, prepared a proposal that envisioned full-fledged territorial autonomy for the Crimean Tatars after Russia’s withdrawal from the Crimea region (Yaremchenko, 2017). The latter was rejected by most Mejlis members as not realistic, and potentially provocative. Although the whole has yet to be publicly announced, Crimean Tatars and Ukrainian leaders debate issues including the incorporation of the Mejlis and Qurultay into the Ukrainian legal framework, official status of the Crimean Tatar language, guaranteed representation for the Crimean Tatars in the autonomy’s parliament, the power of veto on issues that concern utilization of Crimea’s natural resources, and the preservation of Crimean Tatar culture (Chubarov, 2018).

6. Neo-Stalinism after the Russian annexation of Crimea

During the occupation of Crimea, deciphering Russia’s frame become problematic as Russian President Vladimir Putin launched a new type of propaganda (Soshnikov, 2017; Van Herpen, 2016). Putin attempted to white-wash what many see as a coup and an occupation, by organizing an undemocratic referendum (Statement of Concerned Scholars on the Current Predicament of the Crimean Tatars, 2014). It is not possible to rely on Putin’s public speeches to determine his frames of action, as he indirectly admitted a number of times that he had not told the truth in his earlier speeches. In relation to the Crimean Tatars, he promised he would take measures to protect them and make them feel that they are “full-fledged masters in their own land.” (Uehling, 2015a, p. 70). However, the lengths Putin goes in justifying the annexation in his speech in the Russian Duma reflects persisting neo-Stalinist frame in his thinking. On 18 March 2014, Putin repeated the Soviet mythology concerning Crimea:

Everything in Crimea speaks our shared history and pride. This is the location of the ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptized … The graves of Russian soldiers, whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian Empire, are also in Crimea … Crimea is Balaklava and Kerch … symbolizing Russian military glory and outstanding valor. (Putin, 2014)

Putin not only denies the Crimean Tatar genocide but belittles the Crimean Tatar suffering in the course of deportation in this speech: “True, there was a time Crimean Tatars were treated unfairly, just as a number of other peoples in the USSR. There

4 Putin admitted that “little green men” were soldiers of Russia one year later, even though he consistently denied that they had any relations with Russia during the occupation (Oliphant and Sabur, 2015). He also admitted that he planned the annexation weeks ahead, while during the occupation he said this was a momentary reaction to the events in Ukraine (BBC, 9 March 2015).
is only one thing I can say here: millions of peoples of various ethnicities suffered under those repressions, primarily Russians.” (2014). Russian denial of the genocidal nature of the deportation was epitomized in the prohibition of the commemoration of the deportation in the central square of Simferopol on 18 May 2014, where Crimean Tatars annually hold a large-scale rally. Russian riot police, “self-defense” units, armored personnel carriers, and helicopters were deployed to prevent the Crimean Tatars from publicly assembling together. The new authorities argued that mass rallies were a security risk under the current climate. However, a few days later, the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany was commemorated with a military parade, consisting of over 60 military vehicles and 70 aircraft, and a large number of people gathered in the streets to participate in the celebrations (Uehling, 2015b, p. 16). By September 2014, it had become clear that Russia would not allow indigenous self-determination as the Mejlis was prohibited, being labeled as illegal and “extremist” and prominent Crimean Tatar leaders Dzhemilev and Chubarov were prohibited from entering Crimea. (Izmirlı, 2014).

Various policies of repression, implemented soon after the annexation, suggest that Putin was adopting a neo-Stalinist approach. Putin’s repression tactics aligned with those previously used by the Soviets. Along with abductions, arrests, interrogations, torture, house-searches, the new regime in Crimea utilized political manipulation by staging divisions within the Crimean Tatar movement; pressuring leaders through show-trials, forced psychiatric hospitalization of certain dissidents, and other various sorts of threats (European Parliament, 2016). For the vocal leaders there was also the last resort: As Ayşhe Seymturatova was extradited in the Soviet era, Ilmi Umerov and Akhtem Chiygoz, who were arrested for speaking and organizing against Russian occupation of Crimea, were sent to Turkey (the latter in exchange for Russian prisoners). Both the former Soviet and present Russian regimes applied policies of forced citizenship and military conscription; the destruction of national institutions; prohibition of national events, commemorations, and mass demonstrations; limitation of national media, education and use of language; and intimidation. Unlike the Soviet regime, the new regime sought to take advantage of discursive opportunity structures, such as Western concerns about Islamic radicalism, falsely portraying a large number of Crimean Tatars as members of Hizb-ut Tahrir, seen as a terrorist organization in Russia. Russia also propagated a ‘Tatarstan’ model to the Crimean Tatars, sending Volga Tatar and Bashkurt agents, who have cultural affinities with Crimean Tatars, as envoys in order to persuade them to renounce their claims as an indigenous people and rather be content as “Tatars in the Russian Federation”. These actions indicate us that the Russian neo-Stalinist frame towards the Crimean Tatars has remained unchanged since the annexation.

While the neo-Stalinist regime in Crimea undertakes routine human rights violations against the Crimean Tatars, the regime pays attention to symbolic representation of ethnicity, and the construction of a false image of a pluralist and tolerant Crimea. For instance, the Crimean Tatar language was recognized as one of the official languages of the Crimean region, although it is not possible to use it in any political or legal spheres. Similarly, today a small number of Crimean Tatars are employed in the Crimean government, a few Crimean Tatar newspapers and literary journals receive state funding as a means to persuade Crimean Tatars to comply with the regime (Jelalov, 2018). Puppet Crimean Tatar organizations are presented as representative of the Crimean Tatars even though the democratically elected Mejlis was raided and shut down. A small number of Crimean Tatar classes are allowed to exist at schools even though parents are heavily pressured to not petition for native language classes (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2017). Few folkloric and religious festivals are sponsored by the state as a caricature of ethnic expression. A small number of land plots are distributed to Crimean Tatar families, while the best land has been expropriated by Moscow businessmen and the political elite. The reason for this contradiction is the neo-Stalinist “national-cultural autonomy” policy, according to which any collective rights must be symbolic rather than actual (Osipov, 2010). For, according to the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of 19 December 2012 (Nr. 1666), the local and ethnic institutions and authorities of Russia must be consolidated to strengthen the unity of the Russian people (Strategy for State Ethnic Policy of the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2025, 2014). Recent legislation related to the language education in Russia could be seen to aim halting the teaching of non-Russian languages and significantly reducing the teaching of native languages. (Zamyatin, 2018; Unrepresented Peoples and Nations Organization, 2018). These policies demonstrate that the state in fact have an assimilationist orientation, regarding the non-Russian nationalities.

7. Crimean Tatar counter-framing after the annexation

The Crimean Tatars constituted the main opposing force to Russian power during the period of annexation. Violence was not resorted to largely due to the restraint imposed upon the population by the Crimean Tatar political leaders. Anticipating a strong Crimean Tatar opposition, Putin contacted Dzhemilev in order to convince him to support the Russian occupation. Dzhemilev, however, who had spent over 15 years in Soviet gulags, refused Putin’s request. The Crimean Tatar Mejlis was able to convince the Crimean Tatars to boycott the 2014 referendum, and categorically condemned the Russian annexation as a total disregard of the will of the indigenous people of Crimea.

Following the annexation of Crimea, Ukraine announced it would not declare war on Russia over Crimea, it became clear that Western powers would not interfere, and Crimean Tatars were left completely isolated. For the first two months after the annexation, the Crimean Tatar leaders were unable to agree on how to act against the occupation. Prior to the annexation,

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5 Khan’s Palace the major surviving ethnic heritage site of the Crimean Tatars was demolished under the guise of “restoration” (UNESCO, 2018, p. 12).

6 A number of people were accused of separatism for displaying the Crimean Tatar symbol “taraq tamga” (Shandra, 2015; Reidy, 2017).
Putin had declared that Russia would resolve the Crimean Tatar issues that had not been resolved by Ukraine (Simon, 2014). However, because Russia does not recognize any people over a population of fifty thousand as an indigenous people, the Crimean Tatars quickly realized that they would not attain rights of indigenous peoples. In May 2014, Russian interference in Donbass, and the possibility of a civil war in Ukraine brought a new conjuncture in which Crimean Tatars threw their support behind Ukraine as their only hope of liberating Crimea. In the summer of 2014, the Russian regime in Crimea had begun repressive policies, such as the abduction of Crimean Tatar men and the searching of houses and mosques for roughly 2000 newly banned books on Islam and Crimean Tatar history. The Crimean Tatars boycotted the local elections that could legitimize the new regime in September 2014; this brought about the raiding of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis by the Russian security service, and effectively the closing of the national parliament. The Mejlis currently operates in secret and in exile. Losing their formal representative body, the Crimean Tatars could once again organize only as a national dissident movement. Strongly counter-framing against neo-Stalinism as in the Soviet times, they deployed movement tactics from their earlier repertoire, that is, non-violent rallies, civil disobedience methods, underground and informal organization, solitary protests, fundraising for political prisoners and their families, the smuggling of documents for external publication and maintaining transnational relations with international organizations and Crimean Tatar diaspora. They focused on cultural preservation, by supporting a small number of native language schools and classes, engaging in limited number of permitted cultural events and publications, watching Crimean Tatar television through satellite, utilizing social media to maintain contact with co-ethnics, and refusing to leave Crimea despite pressure. New tactics that did not exist in Soviet times included election boycotts; fundraising in order to pay the fines for protests; citizen video journalism on the topic of daily human rights violations; and the utilization of social media to propagate their cause, retaining Ukrainian citizenship, and birth and marriage certificates. Creative tactics of resistance are developed to mobilize people, such as using the mosque sound system to invite witnesses to house-searches and arrests; and operating private libraries for books in Ukrainian at homes. Outside Crimea, Asker, a militia group organized by Lenur Islamov, a Crimean Tatar businessman blockaded the Crimean border as a way of forcing Ukrainian border guards to implement a proper blockade (Hide, 2016). Some exile activists prevented Ukrainian repair crews from restoring sabotaged power lines to Crimea as a means to pressure Russia into releasing illegally detained Crimean Tatars and allow Mejlis leaders to return to Crimea (BBC, 23 November 2015).

Crimean Tatar exiles in mainland Ukraine, such as the Crimean Tatar exiled media, Crimean Tatar NGOs (Crimea SOS, and Crimean Tatar Resource Center), and the Crimean Tatar diaspora (collaborating with the Ukrainian diaspora) continue to counter-frame neo-Stalinism by propagating the ongoing human rights violations in Crimea, and Russia’s historic maltreatment of Crimean Tatars. Crimean Tatar exiles in mainland Ukraine are working hard too, despite the ongoing war in Donbass being the more pressing issue for the Ukrainian government. The exiles, in collaboration with the Ukrainian Helsinki Group, stress that, according to international law, Ukraine continues to have legal responsibilities towards its citizens that remain in occupied Crimea.

8. Conclusion

This article examined the Crimean Tatar struggle to obtain collective rights from the post-Soviet period until the Russian annexation of Crimea. On 18 May 1944, and afterwards the Crimean Tatars did not lose only their population, but their ethnonyms were erased from all books and records, and their collective identity was denied. Even when they returned, the Crimean Tatars were regarded as strangers. To address this problem, they created the frame of demand for indigenous status, which would reinforce their ties to the land of Crimea. From a historical perspective, the recognition of Crimean Tatars as an indigenous people is the culmination of their more than 60 years of struggle to return to their homeland and recognition of their identity. It is a major step towards guaranteeing the survival of the Crimean Tatar people. The entrenchment of this status; however, will only materialize if Ukraine continues to follow this policy commitment through institutional measures. The Crimean Tatars today actively participate in Ukraine’s nation-building process, political reform, and struggle against Russia in order to demonstrate the extent to which they value their Ukrainian citizenship and Ukrainian territorial integrity. They wish to see Ukraine reciprocate this support. The integration of Crimean Tatar indigenous rights with Ukrainian institutional framework forms the litmus test for Ukraine’s further democratization.

The demand for recognition as an indigenous people was also a creative attempt to counter the recycled Stalinist frame, which aims to destroy Crimean Tatar identity, aims for the de-Tatarization of Crimea and the assimilation of Crimea into the Russian Federation. Because Russia have yet not de-Stalinized, the Crimean Tatars are finding the climate in Crimea increasingly oppressive. It is possible that Crimean Tatars will be permitted to maintain merely a “folkloric” ethnic identity, meaning that real expressions of identity will be suppressed. Unlike during the Soviet regime, the Russian regime may not seek to deport them, but rather create the conditions that pressure Crimean Tatars to leave on their own free will.

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