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### **Reinventing Islamic "tradition" in Crimea": ethnicity, religion, politics**

The ethnic and political history of the Crimean Tatars clearly and in a dramatic way demonstrate how once powerful state with the rich cultural and religious heritage had fallen under the blows of rising Russian empire and its successor, the USSR. The culmination of this process, of course, was dramatic event of the Crimean Tatars deportation mainly to the Central Asian republics which took place on May 18 in 1944.

The present day Islamic revival in the Crimea goes hand to hand with nation-building processes. Following the minority situation, the claims of Crimean Tatars to regain their historical heritage, properties, land and re-establish of semi-statehood in form of national autonomy are challenged by the Russian majority and local authorities. The main reason for this rejection is that Tatars want to islamize Crimea; establish "Islamic State", etc.

#### **Ethnic composition of Crimean population during Soviet period: 1926 – 1989<sup>1</sup>**

	Crimean Tatar	Russian	Ukrainian
1926	179300	301400	77500
1934	198000	366000	91000
1937	206100	475700	128100
1939	218500	557400	153500
1959	400	853800	266700
1970	6400	1220500	480700
1979	15100	1461000	547300
1989	38400	1629500	625900

#### **Ethnic composition of Crimean population according to the Census 2001<sup>2</sup>**

	Crimean Tatar	Russian	Ukrainian
2001	243400	1180400	492200

Therefore, this presentation aims at study of contemporary Islamic revival in Crimea in the context of identity politics expressed in mainstream Islamic discourses who articulate

<sup>1</sup> Я.Е. Водарский, О.И. Елисеєва, В.М. Кабузан, Население Крыма в конце XVIII - конце XX веков (Численность, размещение, этнический состав) - М.: Институт российской истории РАН, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/results/general/nationality/crimea>

Islamic tradition. This will allow us to understand how Crimean Tatar's "Islamic locality" is imagined and constructed.

In this presentation we are far from using "Islam" as an explanatory model for ethno-cultural, social and political processes in Crimean Peninsula nowadays. Nevertheless, Islam constitutes an important "identity marker" for Crimean Tatars and as such is actively engaged in collective identity manifestations and politics.

Following the notion by Talal Asad, we understand Islam here as a concept for organizing historical narratives, not the name for a self-contained collective agent (1986:10). Therefore, Islamic discursive tradition is a tradition that relates itself to the founding texts of the Qur'an and the hadith, to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present<sup>3</sup>. At the same time, we understand "Islamic authority" as the power to define what belongs to Islamic tradition and what does not. Islamic authority is always socially organized and distributed among Muslim communities starting from its most simple and basic forms of parental authority to the most learned authority of 'ulama. According to Asad, practice is Islamic if "it is authorized by the discursive tradition of Islam, and is so taught to Muslims – whether by an 'alim, a khatib, a Sufi shaykh, or an untutored parent"<sup>4</sup>. Bruce Lincoln formulates it as follows: "Coherence over space and continuity over time are secured by formal or semiformal structures staffed by officials, experts, and functionaries authorized to speak and act not only on behalf of the community, but also on behalf of the tradition or religion itself"<sup>5</sup>.

One of the most important problems of study of Islam in Contemporary world is transformation and contextualization of the Islamic tradition in different localities, including diasporas. Martin van Bruinessen, while describing the processes of dissemination of Islamic tradition and production of Islamic knowledge in Western Europe, refers to dual trends of universalization and localization<sup>6</sup>. Thus, universalization, as the first step of dissemination of Islamic tradition beyond the Arab cultural context, means "the separation of what was considered as universal in the Islamic message from

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<sup>3</sup> Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* // Occasional papers Washington D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown, 1986. – p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit. – p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Bruce Lincoln *Holy Terrors: Thinking About Religion After September 11*, University of Chicago Press, 2006. – p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, M. *The production of Islamic knowledge in Western Europe* // ISIM newsletter, 8. Leiden, 2001. – p. 3.

what was contingent” and the second one, namely localization, consists of “adapting the universalized message to local customs and needs”<sup>7</sup>.

Here we should notice that Islam in diasporas is developed in a 'minority situation' and is subjected to the mutual transformations and is reconsidered by born Muslims and converts in urbanization context, by transnational migration and under the impact of national and international politics. As Peter Mandawille express it: "We are therefore not talking about cases of loss and gain, or of aspects of Islam simply ‘disappearing’ in diaspora. What we see is a far more complex hybrid condition, one in which Islamic meanings shift, change and transmutate, where things become *something else*. <...> As becomes clear, the spaces of diasporic Islam seem to provide fertile venues for the rethinking and reformulation of tradition and the construction of an Islam for generations to come"<sup>8</sup>. Following this claim, we will further focus on the distinctive features of Islamic discourse in the situation of the 'indigenous minority' compared to the "diasporic minority".

The organizational structure of Islamic institutions in Ukraine and in Crimea in particular (Spiritual Administrations or Muftiats) in general outline follows the system adopted in Russia where such structures traditionally served as instruments of state control over Islamic communities. These “Spiritual Administrations” represent hierarchical institutions, like Christian dioceses, linked to a particular territory within which they have full administrative and spiritual authority. These structures do not always correspond to the realities of Islamic life in “minority situation” and often contribute to the emergence of conflicts between Spiritual Administrations and Islamic network institutions over religious authority in a given territory.

The main wave of islamization of Crimea started in the 14th century, when Islam became the state religion of the Golden Horde during the reign of Khan Uzbek. Crimean Tatars belong to Hanafi madhhab.

The state-controlled muftiat was established by decree of the Empress Catherine II in Simferopol in 1794, shortly after the Russian conquest of the Crimean Khanate, its legal status was formalized in 1831 and the next year the Tavrichesky Muftiat officially launched its activities.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Peter Mandawille Reimagining Islam in diaspora. The Politics of Mediated Community // Gazette, vol. 63(2–3): 169–186. – p. 175.

Toward the beginning of the 20th century, the religious authority of conservative mullahs was challenged by the modernist Jadidi movement which was originally inspired by Ismail Bey Gaspirali (Gasprinsky, 1851–1914). In 1884, Ismail Bey embarked on an ambitious educational reform that was to completely reshape Muslim education in the Russian Empire. Ismail Bey opened a series of “new method” (usuli jadid) schools in the Crimea and Volga-Ural region (Williams 2001).

In 1898 Gasprinsky published a book "Ruhbar mugallimin mugalimlere yaki Yuldash" (Teachers' Helper) - a handbook for teachers in "jadid" schools. The teaching subjects included calligraphy, reading, Turkic and Arabic writing, basics of arithmetic, Turkic morphology, as well as the foundations of the faith. The courses were taught in the native language of students, and religious subjects took only four hours per week<sup>9</sup>.

After the Bolsheviks revolution and the Civil War (1917–1921), the Crimean Autonomous Socialist Republic was formed in 1921. Subsequently, there was a rise in active secularization that reached its peak in violence in 1930<sup>th</sup> – a time when almost all Muslim clergy was repressed, mosques and madrasas were closed, and many Muslim sacred places (azizler) were destroyed. The Muslim life in the Crimean Peninsula was vanished with the deportation of Crimean Tatars in 1944.

During the period of exile, religious activity of Crimean Tatars was in fact limited to the private sphere. This affected the level of Islamic knowledge and worship among the people. The religious rites were observed mainly by the older generations. Only a few graduates of mektebs acted as repositories of Islamic knowledge. Thus, Islam as religion was not able to influence the attitudes of the rising generation. Nevertheless, Islam was still expressed in ritualized narratives, festivals and life cycle events such as burials, birth, and circumcision, and marriage rites retained its role as an important element of national identity<sup>10</sup>.

The process of re-institutionalization of Islam in Crimea intensified after 1989 when the repatriation process intensified and the communities of Muslim repatriates emerged. In 1992 the Kadiyat of the Muslims of Crimea (KMC) was established and shortly

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<sup>9</sup> Хабутдинов А. Российские мусульмане в эпоху Гаспринского: переход от разрозненных этноконфессиональных общностей к национальному единству, <http://www.islamsng.com/books/almanach/3/habutdin.htm?height=600&width=800>

<sup>10</sup> Хаяли Р.И. Крымскотатарский народ в условиях депортации (1944–1967 гг.). Симферополь, 2000; Исламская идентичность в Украине / А.В. Богомолов, С.И. Данилов, И.Н. Семиволос, Г.М. Яворская / Пер. с укр. – Изд. 2-е, доп. – К. ИД «Стилос», 2006.

reorganized into an independent Muftiat of the Muslims of Crimea. According to the Statute, the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Crimea operates in concordance with the Revelations of the Highest and Qur'an, Muhammad's the Prophet Sunna, shari'a norms formulated by faqih's ijtiḥad, decrees and decisions by Kurultay of the Muslims of Crimea, respecting and following the national laws of Ukraine. The supreme authority of spiritual power is the Kurultay of the delegates of ministry and Muslim communities of Crimea, Plenum of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Crimea, the Council of 'Ulama and Mufti<sup>11</sup>.

The Kurultay convenes once every five years and is considered to be valid only if representatives of no less than two thirds of all the communities of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Crimea are present. It determines the program of the internal and external activities of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Crimea elects the Mufti and amends the Statute. For all period of Islamic revival on the Crimean Peninsula, four Kurultays of the Muslims of Crimea took place – in 1995, 1999, 2004 and 2008.

In spite of the formal independence, the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Crimea coordinates its activity with the Majlis of Crimean Tatar people that is headed by Mustafa Dzhemilev. The key role here belongs to the institution of the special representative of Majlis under the Muftiat which to a great degree determines the religious politics via consultations with the administration of Majlis<sup>12</sup>.

The overwhelming majority of religious organizations of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Crimea is located in the territory of Crimea and brings together Crimean Tatars, which indicates its regional character and monoethnic structure. An officially declared goal of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Crimea – “to unite the CrimeanTatar people in the study of religion of Islam... And one of the most important it is to be active to preserve their traditions in order to not assimilate and do not lose the rich and the same time, the national color” points to this monoethnicity<sup>13</sup>. At the same

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<sup>11</sup> Oleg Yarosh, Denis Brylov, Muslim communities and Islamic network institutions in Ukraine: contesting authorities in shaping of Islamic localities// Muslims in Poland and Eastern Europe: widening the European Discourse on Islam , ed. by Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska), Warsaw, 2011. – p. 252 – 265. The quoted part of the above article is written mainly by Denis Brylov.

<sup>12</sup> Исламская идентичность в Украине / А.В. Богомолов, С.И. Данилов, И.Н. Семиволос, Г.М. Яворская / пер. с укр. – Изд. 2-е, доп. – К. ИД «Стилос», 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Oleg Yarosh, Denis Brylov Muslim communities and Islamic network institutions in Ukraine: contesting authorities in shaping of Islamic localities – p. 258.

time, Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Crimea argues that it is reviving Islamic tradition and represents "traditional" Crimean Tatar's Islam.

The everyday religious life of Crimean Tatars today is still organized predominantly around holidays (Uraza bairam, Qurban bairam, Khidirles bairam, Derviza bairam) and life cycle events, such as burials, birth, circumcision, and marriage. The popular Islam in Crimea preserves some elements of the Sufi tradition. One of these elements is the cult of sacred places, azizler. While some of these azizler are the supposed tombs of Avila, most others are simply natural objects: springs, rocks or caves. One of the most popular azizler is a dervish graveyard at the former Mevlevi tekke at Eupatoria (Kezlev).

In 1996 the non-governmental "Azizler" ("Shrines") was established in the Bakhchisarai area. It aims at searching and recovering of the Crimean Tatars' shrines and maintains close ties with the Spiritual Administration. In 2011 the "Azizler" received an all-Crimean status.

Today the location of about 100 supposed azizler is documented<sup>14</sup>. These azizler sometimes became contested spaces between Crimean Tatar and Russian communities. Since 1995 till 2012 19 acts of vandalism against Muslim sacred places in Crimea has been reported.

#### **Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Crimea<sup>15</sup>**

Number of communities	340
Number of Mosques	96
Islamic Schools/Madrasas	71
Number of Clergy	349

The Turkish Government (the Religious Foundation of Turkey, Ministry of National Education of Turkey in particular) actively aids the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Crimea by supporting projects on religious education and financing real estate development and reconstruction of cultrelated buildings. The Turkish Foundation Aziz Mahmud Hüdai Vakifi of famous Turkish Naqshbandi Shaykh Osman Nuri Topbaş is actively present in Crimea since mid1990s. It started with the construction of the

<sup>14</sup> <http://miras.com.ua/11-sentyabr-2010/azizler.html>

<sup>15</sup> Владиченко Л. Религиозная панорама Украины сегодня. Часть III. Этноконфессиональные образования, язычество, <http://www.reli-gion.in.ua/main/analitica/8816-religioznaya-set-ukrainy-k-2011-godu-chast-iii-yetnokonfessionalnye-obrazovaniya-yazychestvo.html>.

Mosques, but today its activity is focused on religious training in Azov madrasa (Dzankoy region)<sup>16</sup>.

Meanwhile, the authority of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Crimea over the Crimean Muslim community is actively disputed by other Islamic institutions, especially Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Spiritual Center of the Muslims of Crimea<sup>17</sup> and independent Salafi communities.

At this stage, let us turn to the analysis of the institutional discourse of Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Crimea. Here we will analyze how "religious tradition" is categorized. We will be focusing on official texts of the Spiritual Administration, where categories of "tradition" and its invariant "traditional Islam" and opposite "non-traditional Islam/sects" appear, i.e. press releases and interviews, addresses and statements, articles published on the official website and "Hidayet" newspaper<sup>18</sup>.

### **Categorization analysis<sup>19</sup>**

#### 1) "Tradition":

Referred as: *religious and national customs; based on Islamic values.*

Bound Activities: *revival, upbringing, study, development, persisting and proliferation.*

Assessments: *servicing people means servicing God.*

#### 2) "Traditional Islam":

Referred as: *spiritual/religious heritage of Crimean Tatars, "our heritage"; Sunnism (Hanafi fiqh, Maturidi aqida).*

Bound Activities: *revival, preservation, education, study, promotion, defence.*

Assessments: *Mainly positive: One of the most important factors for the formation of the Crimean Tatar people and an indispensable condition of its existence.*

Sometimes appears to be critical: *The people have developed some understanding and practice of religion, but it is pretty difficult to call them "traditional" in the genuine meaning of the word.*

#### 3) "Non-traditional Islam/sects":

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<sup>16</sup> Oleg Yarosh, Denis Brylov Muslim communities and Islamic network institutions in Ukraine: contesting authorities in shaping of Islamic localities. – p. 259.

<sup>17</sup> The Spiritual Center of the Muslims of Crimea established in 2010. The Center linked with the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Ukraine, who itself, according to Denis Brylov, connected ideologically and organizationally with the Islamic network institution Al-Ahbash. See: Oleg Yarosh, Denis Brylov Muslim communities and Islamic network institutions in Ukraine: contesting authorities in shaping of Islamic localities. – p. 260 – 262.

<sup>18</sup> <http://qirimmuftiyat.org.ua>; <http://hidayet.qirimmuftiyat.org.ua>

<sup>19</sup> David Silverman, Harvey Sacks, Social Science and Conversation Analysis, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998.

Referred as: *alien religious understanding, sectarian beliefs.*

Bound Activities: *destroy the national unity and neglect traditions; attempts to split the Muslims, jeopardize Islam itself; deceive people and convince them to act against Spiritual Administration.*

Assessments: *are not on the way of Allah, pseudo-Islam, primitive, formalist.*

Therefore, official discourse of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Crimea does not refer to "traditional Islam" as an independent category, but as subjected to the broader concept of "national tradition" and so included in the rhetorical representations of cultural and political claims.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, religious authority which 'acts on behalf' of Islamic tradition is negotiated within religious communities and connects present socio-cultural situation with the past and future and influences social adaptation process of Muslim diasporic minority groups. These processes give birth to the cosmopolitanism and individualization of religious authority among Islamic communities in the West<sup>20</sup>.

On a contrary, when we have a look on a present-day situation in Crimean Muslim community (indigenous minority), we have a picture shaped by the quite opposite tendencies, i.e. by discursive politics of the mainstream Islamic institution in Crimea, namely the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Crimea, who aims toward 'closure' of religious authority, cultural and ethnic boundaries<sup>21</sup>. In this case, Islamic tradition serves as an ideological vehicle for social and political mobilization of Crimean Tatar people facing collective challenges to the process of national development.

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<sup>20</sup> Frank Peter, Individualization and Religious Authority in Western European Islam // Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, vol. 17 (1):105–118.

<sup>21</sup> Gerd Baumann distinguish between "dominant" and "demotic" discourse. The first one delineates cultural and national borders, meanwhile as demotic discourse problematizes the boundaries of culture and community. See: Peter Mandaville Reimagining Islam in diaspora. The Politics of Mediated Community. – p. 170.

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