

## ‘Traditional Islam’ in Crimean Tatar discourse and politics

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### Abstract

This paper treats the analysis of the concept of ‘traditional Islam’ in Crimean Tatar discourse and politics. It shows how this discourse and politics were transformed under the influence of political change in Crimea in 2014. The concept of ‘traditional Islam’, which did not have a wide circulation in religious circles in post-Soviet Crimea, began to occupy an increasingly noticeable place in the rhetoric of official Islamic religious leaders, who have used it as a tool for eliminating competitors and monopolising influence in the Muslim public sphere. This concept has become closely linked to Russian official policy for combating extremism. This article uses the evolution of the concept in a particular region to illustrate the specifics of state-Islamic relations in the Russian Federation. It uses research data from interviews, focus-groups and the content-analysis of official statements by Islamic leaders.

**Key words:** ‘traditional Islam’, Crimea, Crimean Tatars, discourse, Russia

### Introduction

After the USSR’s collapse, Crimea developed as an autonomous republic under the Ukrainian state. The specifics of its religious policy were primarily determined by the Ukraine’s relatively liberal legislation in the sphere.<sup>1</sup> The liberal nature of these

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1 In Ukrainian legislation, all religions, faiths and religious organisations are equal before the law, with no special role given any of them. Nor is it mandatory to inform government bodies of the creation of a religious community. The charter of a religious community may be registered by the citizens who formed it, so long as they number no fewer than ten individuals over the age of 18. No confirmation of this religious group having existed in a given area for a given period of time is required. Finally, Ukrainian legislation does not use the term ‘extremism’. Instead, liability is incurred for concrete violations by concrete persons. See the Law of Ukraine “On freedom of conscience and religious organisations” dated 23.04.1991.

laws had a major impact on processes within the country's Muslim ummah. As a region with a large Muslim population,<sup>2</sup> Crimea demonstrated an impressive diversity of Islamic movements, practices and discourses. Official and unofficial Islamic structures used their full arsenal of resources (institutional, financial, informational, etc.) to compete for influence over Crimean Muslims. The state mostly acted as a passive onlooker, only occasionally interfering in processes inside the Muslim community. The problem of the division of Crimean Muslims into the followers of various movements were primarily an 'internal matter' for Crimean Tatar ethnic institutes and had little or no reflection within official discourse.

The situation began changing in the spring of 2014. Russia's entry into Crimea was accompanied by a change in the political and legal foundations of the Crimean people's life, as well as changes in the power balance of the peninsula's Muslim community and transformation of its discourses. After some five years of de-facto Russian control of the peninsula, one can state that its model of state-Islamic relations has been introduced into Crimea in full measure. This is evident in how government bodies communicate with official Islamic institutes, in public discourse on 'traditional vs. non-traditional' Islamic movements, and in the legal regulation of their activities. The 'struggle against extremism' launched by the Russian government has become an integral part of new Crimean realities. These processes of transformation affecting the Islamic ummah of Crimea since its status changed cast a long shadow over this study, the aim of which is to present the situation regarding the discourse of 'traditional Islam' both before and after the events of 2014.

This article was written using data from field research (both published and unpublished) by the author over the past seven years, the results of two focus group studies, *Proshloye, nastoyashcheye i budushcheye krymskikh tatar v diskurse musul'manskogo soobshchestva Kryma* [The past, present and future of Crimean Tatars in the discourse of the Muslim community of Crimea] (2012) and *Tsennosti i potrebnosti krymskikh tatar* [Values and needs of Crimean Tatars] (2017-2019), and content analysis of materials from the Crimean mass media. In preparing this article, the author relied on works of such researchers as S. Chervonnaya,<sup>3</sup> V.

2 According to various estimates, as of 2014 there were about 250-300,000 Crimean Tatars in Crimea. According to the Ukrainian census of 2001, the population of Crimean Tatars was about 243,000 people (Osaulenko, O.G. (ed.) *Natsional'nyi sklad naselennya Ukrainy ta yogo movni oznaki za danyimi Vseukrains'kogo perepisu naselennya 2001 r.* [National composition of the population of Ukraine and their language characteristics based on the data of the 2001 Ukrainian census] (Kiev: State Committee of Statistics of Ukraine, 2003). Unofficial data of the Majlis of the Crimean Tatar People brought the figure to 300,000. In percentage terms, this is between 12% and 15% of Crimea's population.

3 Chervonnaya S.M., "Vozvrashchenie krymskotatarskogo naroda: problemy etnokul'turnogo vozrozhdeniya" ["Return of the Crimean Tatar people: problems of ethnic and cultural revival"], in *Krymskotatarskoe natsional'noe dvizhenie* [Crimean Tatar national movement], 4 (1994-1997), M.N. Guboklo (ed.) (Moscow, 1997); Chervonnaya S.M., "Islamskiy faktor v natsional'nom i pravozashchitnom dvizhenii krymskikh tatar (1990-e gody)" ["Islamic factor in national and human rights movement of the Crimean Tatars (1990-s)"] in *Islam v Evrazii: sovremennyye eticheskie i esteticheskie kontseptsii sunnitskogo islama, ih*

Grigoryants,<sup>4</sup> A. Bulatov,<sup>5</sup> A. Bogomolov,<sup>6</sup> etc., who have studied various aspects of relations between the ethnic institutes of the Crimean Tatars and the representatives of the so-called 'Islamic opposition' in Crimea.

The article has three parts. The first part shows the state of Crimean Tatar discourses on 'native vs. alien' Islam in the post-Soviet period of Crimean history. The second is devoted to analysis of the discourse of 'traditional Islam' at two official religious centres of the peninsula's Muslims. Finally, the third part of the paper shows changes in the discourse and politics of Crimean Muslims since the arrival of Russia in post-Soviet Crimea.

## 'Native vs. alien' Islam in post-Soviet Crimea

The problem of 'native vs. alien' Islam was first publicly raised in Crimea's Muslim community only in the late 1990s. Before that time, Crimean Tatars' religious and political organisations and leaders were busy tackling a range of social, economic, political and legal issues connected with resettling Crimean Tatars returning from Soviet mass deportation.<sup>7</sup> The agenda included such questions as ensuring Ukrainian citizenship and plots of land for the construction of private housing, obtaining a quota in the Crimean parliament, etc. Decision-making on these questions took place in the 1990s against a background of religious revival, with the creation of Islamic communities, the restoration of old mosques and building of new ones, and the opening of Islamic educational institutions.

Substantial assistance to revitalising the religious life of Crimean Muslims was provided by Islamic countries and organisations. Their help was accepted by Crimean Tatars with gratitude and perceived as a manifestation of Islamic solidarity. Given the low level of religious literacy among Crimean Tatars, due to years of atheist propaganda and the consequences of deportation, foreign missionaries, who freely and easily quoted surahs from the Qur'an and the *hadiths*

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*transformatsiya v massovom soznanii i vyrazhenie v iskusstve musul'manskikh narodov Rossii [Islam in Eurasia: modern ethical and aesthetic concepts of Sunni Islam, their transformation in the mass consciousness and expression in the art of the Muslim peoples of Russia]* (Moscow: Progress-Tradition, 2001), p. 304-339.

4 Grigoryants V. E., *O nekotorykh osobennostyakh protsessa vozrozhdeniya islama v Krymu (1989-2001)* [*On some features of the process of Islamic revival in Crimea (1989-2001)*] (Simferopol, 2002).

5 Bulatov A., "Vozrozhdenie islama v Krymu: sovremennost', problemy, perspektiva" ["Revival of Islam in Crimea: modernity, problems, perspective"], *Golos Kryma*, 2004, 1 January; Bulatov A., "Islam v Krymu: ot tragicheskogo proshlogo k problemam sovremennosti" ["Islam in Crimea: from the tragic past to the problems of our time"], <http://www.idmedina.ru/books/islamic/?4166>, accessed 25 September 2019.

6 Bogomolov A.V. et.al. *Islamskaya identichnost' v Ukraine [Islamic identity in Ukraine]* (Kiev: Stilos, 2006).

7 In May of 1944 the entire Crimean Tatar people was deported from Crimea on charges of collaboration and resettled in Uzbekistan, the Urals and other republics and regions of the USSR. Most Crimean Tatars were able to return to Crimea only in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

of the Prophet Muhammad, inspired unreflecting respect and authority in the minds of Crimean Tatars. In the early 1990s few in Crimea were thinking about the range of religious movements within Islam or their specific features.

The ambiguous nature of these foreign missionaries' activities only became evident some years later, by which time the adherents of all kinds of movements and groups had appeared among the Crimean Tatars. Some proceeded to criticise the religious rites and traditions of the people and contrasting themselves with the majority. The problem was quite serious by the late 1990s, as the adherents of some movements had formed relatively stable groups with their own structures, discourses and practices. They started to question the authority of the political and religious institutes of the Crimean Tatars – the Mejlis<sup>8</sup> and muftiate<sup>9</sup> – and called for their initiatives to be ignored. Adherents of the Salafi movement<sup>10</sup> and the Islamic party of *Hizb at-Tahrir*<sup>11</sup> urged Crimean Tatars to boycott elections or protest marches organised by the Mejlis and criticised the muftiate for its lack of independence and 'wrong' interpretation of Islam. They also ceased to rely on the calendar of religious events and holidays offered by DUMK. This in particular led to disagreement between Muslims over the question of when to start the Islamic holidays of *Oraza-bayram* (*Eid al-Fitr*) and *Qurban-bayram* (*Eid al-Adha*). In some mosques these celebrations started on the day determined by the Muftiate, while in others it was a day later.<sup>12</sup> All this forced the political and religious leaders of the Crimean Tatars to focus on the situation in the religious sphere and start speaking out about the unacceptability of a schism amongst Crimean Muslims and the importance of preserving their religious traditions.

The first such statement was a speech by the Mufti of DUMK Nuri Mustafaev at the II Qurultay of the Muslims of Crimea, on December 4, 1999, in Simferopol. In his summary report he drew the audience's attention to the negative influence

8 The Mejlis is a representative administrative body of the Crimean Tatars formed in 1991 during the II Qurultay of the Crimean Tatar People. It consists of 33 people elected by delegates of the national congress. For a long time (1991–2013) the Mejlis was chaired by Soviet dissident Mustafa Dzhemilev. In 2013 he was replaced by Refat Chubarov. In 2016, after the arrival of Russia in Crimea, the Mejlis was included on the list of extremist organisations and prohibited in the Russian Federation.

9 The Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea (DUMK), or the Crimean Muftiate, is a centralised Islamic organisation created in 1992 to coordinate processes in the religious life of Crimean Tatars. The muftiate is headed by the mufti, who is elected by the delegates of the Qurultay of the Muslims of Crimea. There have been three muftis: Seitzdzhelil Ibragimov (1992-1995), Nuri Mustafaev (1995-1999), Emirali Ablayev (since 1999).

10 The Arabic word '*salafiyya*' means return to the origins of the Islamic tradition and the example of the first Muslims – the pious predecessors (*as-salaf as-salih*). Crimean Tatars call Salafis *Wahhabis* (after the 18<sup>th</sup> century Arabian Islamic reformer Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab).

11 *Hizb at-Tahrir al-Islami* (the Islamic Party of Liberation) is an international pan-Islamic political party founded in 1953 in Jerusalem by judge of the local Shariah appeal court Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani. Its declared goal is the re-establishment of a fair and just Islamic way of life and the Islamic state (Caliphate), as well as the implementation of the Islamic system in it.

12 When determining the first and last days of Ramadan fasting, the Muftiate of Crimea relies on astronomical calculations, while its opponents rely on direct observation of the Moon.

of foreign religious movements on the preservation and revival of the religious customs and traditions of Crimean Tatars.<sup>13</sup> He said that the discrepancies that had affected the beginning of Ramadan and of the *Eid al-Fitr* celebrations a year before had been the result of the activities of foreign missionaries. The mufti appealed to his brothers in faith, asking them not to forget or reject the legacy of their ancestors – traditions established in Crimea on the basis of Islam and that had played such an important role in the formation of Crimean Tatar ethnic culture and identity.<sup>14</sup>

The Chairman of the Mejlis Mustafa Dzhemilev's speech at the Qurultay was very similar in tone. He thanked all the Islamic countries that had supported the Crimean Tatar people but declared that Crimean Tatars would not be led by the nose by the representatives of religious movements and would live in accordance with the traditions of their ancestors instead. He also expressed the right of Crimean Muslims to exclude from membership any members of the Muftiate who tried to impose alien customs on Crimean Muslims or stir up religious discord.<sup>15</sup>

Over the following several years, discussion inside the Crimean Tatar community on 'alien' movements and ideologies became increasingly focused and serious. An illustrative event was a meeting of Mufti Emirali Abliev, M. Dzhemilev, and other representatives of the Mejlis with the Crimean Tatar population of the village of Plodovoe in the Bakhchysarai District, which took place on February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2001. At this meeting, which more than 500 villagers attended, the head of the local mejlis,<sup>16</sup> A. Abdullaev, noted:

Four years ago the first supporters of the so-called 'new movement in Islam' appeared amongst us here in the village of Plodovoe. This new movement is based on an ideology imposed on us by Arab missionaries. Its adherents consider only those who follow them to be Muslims and refer to everyone else as 'kafirs' (infidels). This movement runs contrary to our national traditions, customs and rites, established over thousands of years. These people respect no one and listen to no one except their own teachers.<sup>17</sup>

13 What is meant here by traditions are primarily the custom of collective recitation of the Qur'an (*dua*) on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 37<sup>th</sup> and other days after a death, as well as the funeral (*janazah*) and matrimonial (*nikah*) rites of Crimean Tatars, all of which are criticised by Salafis for not conforming to the Islam of the 'pious predecessors' period. To this one may add the refusal of Salafis and members of Hizb at-Tahrir (Hizbs) to follow the Hanafi *madhab* when praying, which is especially obvious at Friday prayers in mosques.

14 Kerimova G., "Krymskie tatory izbrali novogo muftiya" ["Crimean Tatars have elected the new mufti"], *Avdet*, 1999, 14 December.

15 Muratova E.S., *Islam v sovremennom Krymu: indikatory i problemy protsessy vozrozhdeniya* [Islam in contemporary Crimea: indicators and problem of revival] (Simferopol: Elinio, 2008), p. 133.

16 The Mejlis system had a multi-level structure. Besides the central Mejlis (Milli Mejlis) in Simferopol, there were regional offices at the administrative centres of the Republic and local mejlises in each residential area with a compact Crimean Tatar population.

17 "Krymskie tatory dolzhny zashchitit' svoe edinstvo (informatsionnaya sluzhba Bakhchisaraiskogo regional'nogo medzhblisa)" ["Crimean Tatars must protect their unity (information service of the Bakhchysarai regional Majlis)"], *Golos Kryma*, 2001, 16 February.

Mufti Emirali Ablaev's speech at the meeting was even more emotional:

The Crimean Tatars, living far away from their homeland, dying of hunger and disease in the hovels that were all they had to live in, did not fall to their knees or demean themselves in front of anybody. They did not forget their language, their customs, or their traditions, and did not betray the national movement of the Crimean Tatars, of those who devoted their lives to reviving our nation. Today, however, there are those among us who hold emissaries from a faraway land closer and dearer than their own people, who are ready to undo and abandon everything, their ethnicity, their ancestors, their national customs and traditions.<sup>18</sup>

In his speech at the meeting, Dzhemilev called for the unity of the Crimean Tatars to be protected and a stand taken against the Arab emissaries spreading foreign ideologies. As early as March 2001 Dzhemilev held a briefing with the editors-in-chief of the Crimean Tatar mass media to organise awareness-raising activities for the media, which he supervised, in order to counter further distribution of 'Wahhabi ideas'.<sup>19</sup>

The tensions between the official Crimean Tatar structures and the representatives of 'alien' Islamic movements became so significant that discussion of them was put on the agenda of the national congress. During the first session of the IV Qurultay of the Crimean Tatar People, on November 11, 2001, in Simferopol, the delegates discussed and then adopted a statement "On the revival of the religious life of the Crimean Tatars and the preservation of religious tolerance in Crimea." The statement contained a call to preserve the Islamic norms and customs that are traditional among the Crimean Tatars and have been passed "by previous generations of Muslims of Crimea," and for condemnation of the activities of the Islamic missionaries who were criticising these norms and customs.<sup>20</sup>

At following Qurultays of the Crimean Tatar People, criticism of the activities of the various Islamic movements in Crimea gained even more traction. In Dzhemilev's summary report at the third session of the IV Qurultay (September 10-12, 2004), he critically analyses the activities of the Islamic opposition in Crimea, represented by the adherents of Salafism and the *Hizb at-Tahrir* organisation. As a result, the Qurultay adopted an "Address to the Muslims of Crimea," calling for unified efforts to revive and preserve the 'true' values of Islam, values that had been "the prop and salvation of our people, during both the most glorious and the most tragic periods of our history."<sup>21</sup>

The tone and content of Dzhemilev's speech at the next and fourth session of the IV Qurultay (December 9, 2005) show the degree of the Majlis's concern

18 "Krymskie tatarsy dolzhny zashchitit' svoe edinstvo..."

19 Muratova E.S., *Islam v sovremennom Krymu: indikatory i problemy protsessa vozrozhdeniya [Islam in contemporary Crimea: indicators and problem of revival]* (Simferopol: Elinio, 2008), p. 133.

20 Muratova E.S., *Islam v sovremennom Krymu: indikatory i problemy protsessa vozrozhdeniya*, p. 134.

21 Muratova E.S., *Islam v sovremennom Krymu: indikatory i problemy protsessa vozrozhdeniya*, p.135.

over the activities of the religious opposition in Crimea. In a part of his speech entitled "Religious sects in Crimea," the Chairman of the Mejlis presented a general picture of these groups' activities, with quantitative indicators of their membership and an outline of their ideological positions and of their differences with the management of DUMK and each other. His speech contained information on the consequences of their activities in other countries, quotes from Qur'anic *surahs*, and calls for delegates to take all measures possible to combat these 'sects'.<sup>22</sup>

Dzhemilev offered a very harsh assessment of the 'religious sectarians' and their activities in a speech at the first session of the V Qurultay (December 2007), in which he listed his main objections: their declaration that the Mejlis and the Muftiate are 'infidel' structures, their rejection of ethnicities and calls for a struggle to create a 'mythical' Islamic Caliphate, their refusal to recognise the national flag and anthem, etc.<sup>23</sup> According to Dzhemilev, the activities of these supporters of 'non-traditional forms of Islam' among the Crimean Tatars were a direct strike against the national movement for the restoration of the people's rights and were intended to benefit external forces at work to stop the Crimean Tatars achieving precisely that restoration.<sup>24</sup>

After a speech by mufti Emirali Ablav at the second session of the V Qurultay (December 5, 2009), delegates adopted a resolution "On the responsibility of national self-government bodies to strengthen the spiritual unity of the Crimean Tatar people" that stresses unity as a major factor in the revival and development of the Crimean Tatar nation. The document sets out a whole range of measures for the preservation of the values of Crimean Tatar material, intellectual and spiritual culture as inherited from previous generations.<sup>25</sup>

Analysis of these statements and documents from Crimean Tatar political and religious leaders allows us to draw several conclusions. Firstly, the discourse of 'native vs. alien' Islam appeared relatively late in Crimea (compared to other regions of the post-Soviet landscape), viz. toward the end of the 1990s. By then groups of followers of various Islamic movements had already formed relatively stable communities with their own leaders, discourses and practices. Their ostentatious way of contrasting themselves to the majority of Crimean Tatars and their

22 Muratova E.S., *Islam v sovremennom Krymu: indikatory i problemy protsessa vozrozhdeniya*, p. 135-136.

23 Vystuplenie M. Dzhemileva. "Dokumenty pervoi sessii V Qurultaya (dekabr' 2007 g.)" ["Speech by M. Dzhemilev. Documents of the first session of the V Qurultay"], *Krymskotatars'ke pytannya* [Crimean Tatar issues], 1:30 (2008), p.89.

24 "Mustafa Dzhemilev: na vyborah prezidenta podderzhim demokratov (interv'yuu)" ["Mustafa Dzhemilev: we will support democrats in the presidential election (interview)"], *Krymskotatars'ke pytannya* [Crimean Tatar issues], 3:34 (2009), p. 6-7.

25 Postanovlenie Qurultaya krymskotatarskogo naroda 'O zadachakh organov natsional'nogo samoupravleniya po ukrepleniyu dukhovnogo edinstva krymskotatarskogo naroda' [Resolution of the Qurultay of the Crimean Tatar people 'On the tasks of national self-government bodies to strengthen the spiritual unity of the Crimean Tatar people'], *Krymskotatars'ke pytannya* [Crimean Tatar issues], 1:35 (2010), p. 65-66.

open criticism of the policies of the Mejlis and DUMK could no longer pass unremarked by the latter two official bodies. These tensions and differences grew into open conflict and became a matter of public discussion.

Secondly, during the 1990s, the leaders of the Mejlis and DUMK did not see a critical difference between Salafis and the followers of *Hizb at-Tahrir*. Both groups were perceived as ‘alien’ to the Crimean Tatar people, as groups pursuing a policy aimed at blurring ethnic identity. The apolitical nature of the Crimean Salafis and calls from *Hizb at-Tahrir* followers to build the Caliphate were considered equally dangerous. In a situation where the leaders of the Mejlis and DUMK were using Islam as an important resource for mobilising the Crimean Tatars, they viewed such behaviour on the part of any of their people as a betrayal of national interests.

Third, even though words and expressions like ‘tradition’, ‘traditional form of Islam’, ‘national traditions’, etc. were often deployed to connote the Crimean Tatars’ ‘native’ Islam, there was no stable concept in the ethnic discourse of the period for precisely this form of Islam. Instead they used terms like ‘Crimean Islam’,<sup>26</sup> ‘Crimean Tatar Islam’, ‘our Islam’, ‘true Islam’, etc. The concept of ‘traditional Islam’ had next to no purchase. The term occasionally occurred in the works of Crimean researchers but was not yet a part of social discourse.<sup>27</sup> The general concept of ‘outsider’ Islam did not yet exist in Crimea either. The terms used to denote such forms of Islam were ‘sects’, ‘non-traditional form of Islam’, ‘new movements in Islam’, ‘Wahhabis’, etc.

Fourth, one may note the desire of the Crimean Tatar leaders to keep the discussion of ‘native vs. alien’ Islam within the Crimean Tatar community and not let it leak into the wider Crimean public sphere. This can be seen, for example, in how vehemently they reacted to statements by Crimean and Russian politicians and in the mass media about the growing popularity of radical Islamic movements among Crimean Tatars. All such statements were refuted and their authors accused of hate-mongering and aggravating the ethnic and religious situation in Crimea.<sup>28</sup>

26 See, for instance, Bulatov A., “Islam v Krymu: ot tragicheskogo proshlogo k problemam sovremennosti” [“Islam in Crimea: from the tragic past to the problems of our time”], <http://www.idmedina.ru/books/islamic/?4166>, accessed 25 September 2019.

27 See, for example, Grigoryants V.E., *O nekotorykh osobennostyakh protsessa vozrozhdeniya islama v Krymu (1989-2001)* [On some features of the process of Islamic revival in Crimea (1989-2001)] (Simferopol, 2002).

28 See, for example, “Zayavlenie Prezidiuma Medzhliisa krymskotatarskogo naroda v svyazi s provokatsiyami v possiiskoi presse, napravlennymi na razzhiganie religioznoi i natsional’noi nenavisti v Krymu ot 9 dekabrya 1999 g.” [“Statement of the Presidium of the Majlis of the Crimean Tatar People in connection with provocative acts in the Russian press aimed at inciting religious and ethnic hatred in Crimea, 9 December, 1999”], *Kryms’kotatars’ke pytannya* [Crimean Tatar issue], 6:10 (1999), p. 3-5.

## 'Traditional Islam' in the discourse of official Islamic institutions

In the post-Soviet period, two of the official Islamic institutions of Crimea were positioning themselves as successors and defenders of the Islamic traditions of the Crimean Tatars. The first was the above-mentioned DUMK, which acted in close cooperation with the Mejlis and controlled most Muslim communities and places of Islamic worship of the peninsula.<sup>29</sup> The second was the Spiritual Centre of Muslims of Crimea (DTsMK), chaired by Mufti Ridvan Veliev. DTsMK was created over opposition from the DUMK and the Mejlis and united several dozen Muslim communities. Its organisational core consists of students and followers of the mufti of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine (DUMU), Ahmet Tamim, in Kiev, who, in turn, was an apprentice of Ethiopian sheikh 'Abdullah al-Harari al-Habashi (1910-2008).<sup>30</sup> The Sheikh's followers are often referred to as 'Habashites'.<sup>31</sup>

Relations between the two muftiates were conflict-ridden and involved mutual accusations and a struggle for influence in 2010-2014. DUMK called DTsMK "a Habashite sect" whose followers viewed supporters of their own doctrine as the only 'true' Muslims. The latter, in turn, accused DUMK of condoning radicals like 'Wahhabis' and *Hizb at-Tahrir*, who had gained a foothold in several Crimean mosques.

The ideologies of both muftiates have quite a lot in common, particularly their criticism of 'non-traditional' Islamic groups in Crimea, their disapproval of the lack of unity amongst Crimean Muslims, and their internal division into factions. Research by the present author in 2012 revealed several common points between them on these issues, both at the level of the leaders and of their supporters. As one of the leaders of DUMK noted in an interview, "even in a country with a population of a hundred million there probably aren't as many sects as we have in Crimea."<sup>32</sup> These words were echoed by the leader of DTsMK:

29 By 2014 there were about 350 Muslim communities, 300 mosques and 5 madrasahs under the jurisdiction of DUMK. See: "Muftiyat", <http://qmdi.org/muftiyat-4/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

30 In 1983 'Abdullah al-Harari took over the leadership of the Association of Islamic Charitable Projects (AICP, founded in 1930 in Lebanon), which from then on was called *Al-Abbash*. Today *Al-Abbash* is a transnational Islamic movement with branches in the South, South-East and Central Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, as well as North America. The work of *Al-Abbash* is aimed at combating political Islam and the Salafi movement. It involves Sufi discourses and practices but, according to experts, they are less pronounced in *Al-Abbash* than in other Sufi groups of Europe (See Yarosh O., Globalization of redemptive sociality: al-Abbash and Haqqaniyya transnational Sufi networks in West Asia and Central-Eastern Europe, *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 10:1 (2019), p. 27-28).

31 The *Habashi nisba* means 'Ethiopian'.

32 Kouts N., Muratova E., *Proshloe, nastoyashchee i budushchee krymskih tatar v diskurse musul'manskogo soobshchestva Kryma [Past, present and future of the Crimean Tatars in the discourse of Muslim community of Crimea]* (Kiev: K.I.C., 2014), p. 15.

Missionaries from different countries began arriving in Crimea and presenting their own ideologies. These were representatives of Wahhabism, *Hizb at-Tahrir* and the so-called 'Muslim Brotherhood'... These people took advantage of the moment and gave our people their alien ideologies, which contradict the religion of Islam and the customs of Crimean Tatars... Our Prophet, may peace be upon Him, taught us that, if we see a violation, we need to correct it, and that is what we are trying to do...<sup>33</sup>

Representatives of both muftiates have identified reasons for the spread of 'non-traditional' movements in Crimea. The first was the religious illiteracy of the people, which was largely due to years of living in an atheistic state that repressed imams and people with religious education. The second was the 'nefarious activities' on the part of dishonest and opportunistic missionaries from abroad, who took advantage of the Crimean Tatars' naiveté to propagate their teachings.

The discourse of supporters of the official spiritual administrations has tended to deploy a strict dichotomy of 'us vs. them'. 'We' are the successors of our ancestral traditions, bearers of the Crimean Tatar language and culture. 'They' are the supporters of alien traditions, indifferent to everything ethnicity-related.

When we say one thing and they say another thing, it is hard to talk about any sort of unity. We tell them to speak Tatar, and they tell us that Tatar is an ethnic language and that the language of inter-ethnic communication is Russian. They even want to demand that we deliver the *khutbah* in Russian. This means schism, it is very bad. (DUMK)<sup>34</sup>

Currently there are quite a lot of misguided beliefs that cultivate dislike of Muslims and our traditions. They instil these misconceptions in our youths, make them think that traditions are not good, etc. And the young, not knowing the traditions of their ancestors, follow these people, because they paint wonderful pictures for them and tell them things that young people like to hear. (DTsMK)<sup>35</sup>

I am very much amazed at how these Hizbuttahririans, Habashites, Wahhabis walk from door to door. Who educates them? We have madrasahs in Kalay and Simferopol. Go there and learn, then go and unite with your people, because you have to walk together with your people. We can't be Arabs, we can't be Turks, we have to remain Crimean Tatars and be proud of our own people. (DUMK)<sup>36</sup>

The rejection of 'alien' religious ideas and the struggle against 'non-traditional' Islam were not enough to provide a common unifying platform for the representatives of

33 Kouts N., Muratova E., *Proshloe, nastoyashchee i budushchee krymskih tatar v diskurse musul'manskogo soobshchestva Kryma.*

34 Kouts N., Muratova E., *Proshloe, nastoyashchee i budushchee krymskih tatar v diskurse musul'manskogo soobshchestva Kryma.*

35 Kouts N., Muratova E., *Proshloe, nastoyashchee i budushchee krymskih tatar v diskurse musul'manskogo soobshchestva Kryma.*

36 Kouts N., Muratova E., *Proshloe, nastoyashchee i budushchee krymskih tatar v diskurse musul'manskogo soobshchestva Kryma.*

DUMK and DTsMK. Ideological differences given their different understandings of the essence of 'traditional' Crimean Islam and the struggle for influence over Crimean Muslims turned them into entrenched adversaries. As we will see below, this adversarial relationship, which began in 2010, continued after the change in the status of Crimea in 2014.

The ideas of some DUMK leaders on 'traditional Islam' were formed either during their religious education at theological departments in Turkish universities<sup>37</sup> or through communication with Turkish teachers involved in Islamic education in Crimea.<sup>38</sup> This is why their views are so similar to the official Turkish model of Islam.

The leaders of DUMK repeatedly emphasised the contribution of Turkish missionaries to the process of reviving Islam in post-Soviet Crimea. Their role became particularly noticeable in 2014, when Russia's arrival in Crimea meant an overwhelming majority of Turkish teachers had to leave the peninsula. At the time, general opinion on the matter was voiced by the Deputy Mufti of DUMK Ayder Ismailov:

...about 16 teachers from Turkey had to leave. For us what was important was that they had been in Crimea and helped us. For 15 years they facilitated religious education, helped to foster the traditional understanding of Islam, which complies with our traditional practices. The fact that we haven't had any terrorist acts or religion-caused violence in our region is a major achievement for these teachers from Turkey. Together with us, they taught people the form of Islam that matches our understanding, does not run counter to modern trends, and is far removed from radical ideas.<sup>39</sup>

Besides this affirmation of the importance of Turkish teachers, his statement also contains a reference to the precise image of Islam DUMK was trying to develop in Crimea. It is an Islam that conforms to the traditions of Crimean Tatars and is at the same time modern and non-radical. One may add that it is Sunni Islam of the Hanafi *madhab*, as representatives of this organisation so often stress, as well as of the Maturidi school of belief (*aqidah*):

...we decidedly do not approve of ... any divergence from the accepted understanding of Islam: the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad and the traditional Hanafi *madhab*, which has been professed by the Muslims of Crimea since olden times. That means that we, as the Spiritual Administration, do not accept

37 The DUMK system has up to a dozen graduates of Turkish universities as staff members in leading positions and determining the ideological vector of this organisation.

38 Until 2014 the role of Turkish teachers as representatives of both state and private institutions in the system of Islamic education of Crimea was crucial. They coordinated the learning process within Islamic training courses and madrasahs. For more details, see: Muratova E.S., "Osnovnye tendentsii v razvitiit islamskogo obrazovaniya Kryma posle 2014 goda" ["The main trends in the development of Islamic education in Crimea after 2014"], *Islamovedenie [Islamic Studies]*, 8:3 (2017), p. 35-45.

39 "Zamuftiya Kryma: "Daite lyudyam vremya opomnit'sya!" ["Deputy Mufti of Crimea: "Give people time to recover!"], <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-432867.html>, accessed 25 September 2019.

anything that does not accord with the long-standing theological tradition of the Crimean Tatars.<sup>40</sup>

In their interviews and statements, DUMK representatives repeatedly note how important it is for Crimean Tatars to go back to their roots, which implies a need to become more pious, more devout in following such mandatory prescriptions of Islam as prayer, fasting during Ramadan, *zakat*, visiting the mosque on Fridays, etc. At the same time, it was an important part of the 'traditional Islam' discourse of DUMK to stress the need to preserve the religious traditions of the Crimean Tatars, like collective *du'a* (recitals of the Qur'an) to commemorate the birth or death of a person (on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 37<sup>th</sup>, and other days). It is these religious traditions, which preserved the Crimean Tatars's connection to Islam during the Soviet period, that were caught in the cross-hairs of criticism from representatives of the various 'new' movements and groups, which declared them unacceptable innovations (*bid'ah*) in Islam. An important part of DUMK religious practice was celebrating the birthday of Prophet Muhammad (*Mawlid*), which was, as a rule, organised in collaboration with the branch office of the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*), usually on a grand scale. At the same time, one may note the lukewarm attitude of DUMK to various Sufi practices (such as the *ziyarat*), which were once widespread in Crimea. While DUMK representatives accepted these practices as an important part of the people's spiritual legacy, they took no measures to revive them.

The image of 'traditional Islam' presented by the leaders of DTsMK was, in contrast, mostly formed under the influence of the transnational Sufi movement of *Al-Abbash*, whose most active advocate in the post-Soviet space has been Sheikh Ahmet Tamim. Its members accept all four Sunni *madhabs* and are followers of both the Maturidi and the Ash'ari *aqidabs*. An important part of *Al-Abbash's* ideology is the religious practice of excluding a person who has committed a blasphemy from Islam (*takfir*). Among their rituals and rites, substantial attention is paid to practices associated with Sufism (e.g. *ziyarat*). Part of their members' theological discourse is promoting and legitimating the practice of blessing by relics (*tabarruk*).<sup>41</sup>

The annual collective pilgrimage to the grave of the 'saint' Eskender, known as the Karly-Aziz, in the Bakhchysarai District of Crimea, held an important place in DTsMK leaders' activities (even before it was formalised). This *ziyarat* usually took place in May and involved recitation of the Qur'an and the *Mawlid*, as well as some relatively secular events, including an entertainment programme, sports competitions and a free lunch. DUMK and the Salafi groups were very critical of these initiatives, as they consider the performance of such activities near

40 Sharipov A., "Ayder Ismailov: Problemy musul'man Kryma reshayutsya" ["Ayder Ismailov: The problems of the Muslims of Crimea are solved"], <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-449216.html>, accessed 25 September 2019.

41 Bril'ov D.V., "Teologichnyi diskurs Dukhovnogo upravlinnya musul'man Ukrainy" ["Theological discourse of the Spiritual administration of Muslims of Ukraine"], *Gileya*, 130 (2018), p. 208.

graves unacceptable.<sup>42</sup> In 2012 DUMK even attempted to interfere with this event on the grounds that they had not approved it and it would “negatively affect the unity of the peninsula’s Muslims.”<sup>43</sup> The gravestone of the Karly-Aziz was repeatedly destroyed by persons unknown.

DTsMK also regularly organised celebrations of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. The practice of *tabarruk* – blessing by the Prophet’s relics – was widespread among *Al-Abbash* adherents in Crimea. For instance, in 2013, DTsMK organised a festive event in Simferopol, where anyone interested was shown a hair from the Prophet Muhammad’s beard and a scroll with a list of names of its supposed keepers.<sup>44</sup>

To sum up, one may say that, despite a certain similarity in their discourses of ‘traditional Islam’ and their appeals to traditions and the legacy of ancestors, there remain several substantial differences between the supporters of DUMK and DTsMK. The first is the significant influence of Sufism on DTsMK ideology, which explains its emphasis on the revival of Sufi practices, once quite widespread in Crimea. A return to such practices, which were no longer popular with Crimean Tatars by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, seems like an attempt to artificially re-traditionalise and archaicise religious life. Compared to such attempts, DUMK looks like an organisation propagating a more ‘modern’ project of Islam, designed to combine Crimean Tatar religiosity with their secular lifestyle.

The second difference is DTsMK’s uncompromising position compared to DUMK with regard to various ‘non-traditional’ Islamic movements. While DUMK has for some years been trying to become the spiritual centre of a majority of Crimean Tatars, regardless of their views, and has consequently pursued a relatively tolerant policy toward such movements, the rhetoric of the DTsMK leaders has been substantially more aggressive and unbending. This is motivated by the *Al-Abbash* movement’s ideology, which prioritises the struggle against ‘modernising’ movements like the Salafis, Muslim Brotherhood, and *Hizb at-Tabrir*. The ‘Habashite’ ideology is thus a Sufi reaction to the spread of political Islam, whose roots and sources of inspiration lie in Salafi religious thought.<sup>45</sup>

42 Abdullaev R., “DUM Kryma: Ocherednoi akt vandalizma svyazan s massovymi palomnichestvami” [DUM of Crimea: Another act of vandalism associated with mass pilgrimages], <http://www.islamsng.com/ukr/news/4815>, accessed 25 September 2019.

43 “Nesmotrya ni na chto ‘Karly-Aziz 2012’ sostoyalsya!” [“Despite everything ‘Karly-Aziz 2012’ took place!”], <http://islamnik.com/news/nesmotrya-ni-na-chto-karly-aziz-2012-sostoyalsya>, accessed 25 September 2019.

44 “Volos Proroka Muhammada, mir Emu, v Simferopole” [“A hair of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon Him, in Simferopol”], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4dW5O7w96Zg&feature=youtu.be>, accessed 25 September 2019.

45 Bogomolov A.V. et.al. *Islamskaya identichnost' v Ukraine [Islamic identity in Ukraine]* (Kiev: Stilos, 2006), p.41.

## The situation after 2014

Russia's arrival in Crimea in the spring of 2014 caused substantial adjustments to Crimean Tatar religious life. Changes on the institutional level manifested themselves in the re-registration of DUMK under Russian legislation with a new name – the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea and Sevastopol (DUM KS). As an organisation connected with the Ukrainian muftiate, DTsMK also decided to change its name. Since 2014, it has been called the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims 'Tauride muftiate' (TsDUM TM). The change of names had little impact on the nature of the muftiates' relationship, which has remained confrontational. The level of confrontation has, however, been significantly higher than previously, particularly in 2014-2015.

The rhetoric of both muftiates' leaders underwent a certain shift, giving greater weight to the specific nature of Russian relations between Islam and the state. This was manifest, for instance, in more active use of the concept of 'traditional Islam', in ostentatious demonstrations of loyalty to the Russian state, and resentment toward 'non-traditional' Islamic groups. Particularly zealous actions in this regard were taken by the Tauride muftiate, whose leaders thought, not without reason, that the change in Crimea's status offered a long-anticipated chance to shift the balance in the Muslim community of Crimea. Actively using the rhetoric of 'struggling against extremism', the Tauride muftiate tried to eliminate DUMK, presenting it as a disloyal organisation with connection to an out-of-favour Mejlis that condoned radical movements and groups. They positioned themselves, on the other hand, as an Islamic organisation with deep roots in Crimean Tatar tradition and as a dedicated opponent of radical groups. The Tauride muftiate's mufti, Ruslan Saitvaleev, spoke of TM's intentions in a quite unequivocal way:<sup>46</sup>

One of the reasons why we got the idea to revive the Tauride muftiate is that we have a lot in common with the the Taurian Mohammedan Spiritual Directorate.<sup>47</sup> Firstly, it's cultural continuity. We follow the legal school of imam Abu Hanifa and observe our traditions, developed in accordance with Islam over centuries, such as performing *du'a*, holding *mawliids* and *iftars*. Secondly, it is ethnic and linguistic continuity. The Tauride muftiate represented the interests of all Muslims of the peninsula, most of whom were Crimean Tatars, and

46 Ruslan Saitvaleev was the Deputy Chairman of DTsMK.

47 The the Taurian Mohammedan Spiritual Directorate (TMDP) was created by an edict of Catherine II dated 23 January, 1794, in the Tauride Oblast'. On December 23, 1831, Emperor Nicholas I approved the 'Charter of the structure of the Tauride Mohammedan Spiritual Directorate', giving it the right to consider and make decisions about various 'spiritual affairs of Mohammedans' 'according to the rules of their faith', in particular: the order of 'divine worship', rites, addressing 'spiritual needs' and the 'conclusion and annulment of marriages'. In 1831 Muslims of the Western provinces, namely the Vilna, Volhynian, Grodno, Kovno, Courland and Minsk Governorates, were put under the jurisdiction of TMDP. TMDP ceased to exist in 1917.

we too want to represent the interests of all Muslims, including the Crimean Tatars. Thirdly, it is territorial continuity. The Tauride muftiate was based in Crimea with its seat in Simferopol, just like the present Muftiate.<sup>48</sup>

TM's plans to establish a monopoly of influence over the Crimean Muslim community were not destined to come to pass, however.<sup>49</sup> A short period of problematic relations between DUMK and the new authorities in 2014 ended with the establishment of partnership relations. Of course, this required a change in rhetoric from DUMK, with regard to both the Mejlis<sup>50</sup> and 'non-traditional' Islamic groups. While at first DUMK leaders requested that the authorities not use force against representatives of these groups because of differences in Ukrainian and Russian legislations and spoke of decapitating the groups by making their leaders leave for the Ukraine and generally of their excessive influence on Crimean Tatars, gradually the paternalistic notes in their discourse faded, eroding in the end to nothing. The following quote is from an interview with Deputy Mufti Ayder Ismailov in September 2014:

Now that new laws have just been introduced, it wouldn't be right to arrest people and put them in prison for something they did in the past or to sanction them. We need to give people time to come to their senses and mend their ways. We note that the voices of the representatives of this party in Crimea are hardly to be heard at all any more. That is, the simple existence of the prohibition is effective in itself: people are afraid and are not expressing their radical calls and shouts.<sup>51</sup>

A statement he posted on the social networking site Facebook in July 2017 takes a completely different tone. By then, relations between DUM KS and the Mejlis had grown into open conflict, and a wave of arrests of *Hizb at-Tabrir* adherents had just taken place in Crimea:

Naturally, with no support amongst the people or from religious leaders, the representatives of the Mejlis had no choice but to join forces with *Hizb at-Tabrir*, all the more so as they are unrivalled in the business of discrediting the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea. Alongside other sects, under the pretext of 'disseminating pure Islam, returning to the Islamic way of life', for twenty years in Crimea, they have shamelessly criticised the Muftiate of Crimea, antagonised

48 "V Krymu poyavilis' lyudi, kotorye iskadzhayut nashu religiyu" ["There are people in Crimea who distort our religion"], <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=interview&div=406>, accessed 25 September 2019.

49 It should be noted that not a few Russian secular and religious public figures provide ideological and administrative support to the Tauride muftiate, prominent among them the not exactly unknown 'expert on Islam' Roman Silantiev.

50 For more details, see Muratova E., "Musul'mane Kryma v novyh politicheskikh realiyah" ["Crimean Muslims in new political realities"], *Orient*, 5 (2016), p. 163-171.

51 "Zammuftiya Kryma: "Daite lyudyam vremya opomnit'sya!" ["Deputy Mufti of Crimea: "Give people time to recover!"], <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-432867.html>, accessed 25 September 2019.

it in all things, and spread discord in mosques, humiliating the elderly and trying to take control of the mosques. Through these actions they were trying to destroy the Muftiate of Crimea, which was and is the only stronghold of traditional Sunni understanding of Islam in Crimea! Our Muftiate was also the only obstacle standing in the way of the spread of an alien and false ideology that leads to the rejection of our national traditions and language and to a schism, which is but a stone's throw from assimilation.<sup>52</sup>

This change in the DUM KS leaders' rhetoric did not go unnoticed by the Crimean Tatar community. Some Crimean Tatars began distancing themselves from the muftiate because of disagreement with this attitude towards their fellow countrymen and the muftiate's overzealous readiness to bow to the new authorities.<sup>53</sup> The defining moment for many people was public disclosure of a statement written in July 2016 and addressed to the head of the Crimean directorate of the Federal Security Service of Russia (FSB), in which mufti Emirali Abliev asked them to deal with "radical sects", "*Hizb at-Tabrir*" and the "Habashites", who had "sabotaged" the celebration of *Eid al-Fitr* in 12 Crimean mosques on the day "set by our Administration according to the traditional laws of Islam."<sup>54</sup> The part of the statement that followed contained the names and contact data of the "guilty" imams. Many Crimean Tatars took this statement as a denunciation.<sup>55</sup> The clear pro-government position of DUM KS even prompted some Crimean Tatars to draw an analogy between the existing muftiate and its predecessor from the period of the Russian Empire:

I understand that the leadership of DUMK are people the government has done a background check on, and I wouldn't be surprised if they were paid by the government. I think the entire structure of muftiates, or at least their leadership, gets some sort of remuneration, but that it is covered up. In any case, they get serious privileges in the form of grants. As to why they fight other religious movements so vehemently – it's because it suits the government to create socio-religious organisations under their control like the muftiate, just as they did in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>56</sup>

52 The Official Page of Ayder Ismailov, <https://www.facebook.com/ayder.ismailov.5/posts/1240514696094091>, accessed 25 September 2019.

53 Author's fieldwork materials. Fokus-gruppy v ramkakh issledovaniya 'Tsennosti i potrebnosti krymskikh tatar', yanvar 2017 g. [Focus groups as part of a study on 'Values and needs of Crimean Tatars', January 2017].

54 Khan I., "Donos DUM Kryma v FSB (skan dokumenta)" ["The denunciation of DUM of Crimea to FSB (scan of the document)"], <https://golosislama.com/news.php?id=30348>, accessed 25 September 2019.

55 Author's fieldwork materials. Fokus-gruppy v ramkakh issledovaniya 'Tsennosti i potrebnosti krymskikh tatar', yanvar 2017 g. [Focus groups as part of a study on 'Values and needs of Crimean Tatars', January 2017].

56 Author's fieldwork materials. Interv'y u v ramkakh issledovaniya 'Tsennosti i potrebnosti krymskikh tatar', yanvar 2019 g. [Interviews as part of a study on 'Values and needs of Crimean Tatars', January 2019].

Under such conditions of constant criticism, social condemnation, and loss of respect and popularity with Crimean Tatars, the DUM KS media office was forced to issue a special statement explaining their position. Its message can be summed up in a single phrase: “they have only themselves to blame”:

In 2014 the Mufti of Crimean Muslims Hajji Emirali Ablaev made a statement on the unacceptability of criminal prosecution under Russian legislation of persons who had participated in radical religious movements during the period when Crimea was under the jurisdiction of the Ukraine... The spiritual leader of Crimean Muslims repeatedly addressed the Muslims of the Republic with an appeal for them to stay away from the ideologies of *Hizb at-Tahrir* and *Al-Abbash*, Wahhabism, and other radical movements and by no means to participate in their activities, as well as to restrain others from doing so. Unfortunately, not everyone listened to DUMK's advice. Everyone must decide for themselves.<sup>57</sup>

A common speech technique used in public condemnation of ‘non-traditional’ Islamic groups by representatives of the spiritual administrations of Crimea is invoking the concept of ‘traditional Islam’, which is widespread in Russian discourse:

In the past ten years there have been over a dozen cases of mosques falling under the influence of radical organisations, particularly Wahhabis, *Hizbs* and Habashites. The rural councils provided the local religious community land for construction. Under the law, a community must consist of more than 10 people. Where these people then became adherents of radical religious movements, they drove out the followers of traditional Islam and propagated their own ideology instead. Because the mosques were owned by the community, the sects were able to control the infrastructure.<sup>58</sup>

It is noteworthy that the discourse of ‘traditional Islam’ started to gain in popularity not only with representatives of the muftiates but also with Crimean politicians, some of whom mastered the Russian rhetoric quickly. For example, one often hears the expression from member of the State Duma (the lower house of the Russian parliament) Ruslan Balbek, who, among other things, has oversight over religious issues in the life of the Crimean Tatars:

During the Ukrainian period, of 400 mosques only 5 had documents of entitlement. This gave extremist religious organisations the opportunity to participate in the struggle for houses of worship. Traditional Islam could not defend itself. The platform was accessed by destructive sects. Now all the mosques are

57 “Kto ‘podstavlyayet’ krymskikh musul'man?” [“Who ‘frames’ Crimean Muslims?”], <http://qmdi.org/index.php/ru/glavnye-novosti/2895-kto-podstavlyayet-krymskikh-musulman>, accessed 25 September 2019.

58 “My schitaem plany Sovmina peredat’ mecheti Muftiyatu pravil'nymi, – zammuftiya Kryma” [“We consider the plans of the Council of Ministers to transfer the mosques to Muftiyat correct, – deputy to the mufti of Crimea”], <http://www.dumrf.ru/regions/82/regnews/9134>, accessed 25 September 2019.

under a single canonical and legal jurisdiction. Russia has united the Muslims of Crimea and is protecting them from the influence of extremist movements.<sup>59</sup>

Just as in the Republics of the Russian Federation, the concept of ‘traditional Islam’ has become interspersed in Crimea with the general discourse of ‘fighting extremism’, as developed by government bodies, official Islamic institutions and researchers. It is as part of this struggle that the followers of two Islamic organisations, *Hizb at-Tabrir* and *Tablighi Jama‘at*, are currently being criminally prosecuted on the peninsula. About 60 Crimean Tatars have already been sentenced to prison or are currently under investigation on charges of participation in these organisations’ activities.<sup>60</sup>

## Conclusion

The discourse of ‘native vs. alien’ Islam has been present in the Crimean Tatar community since the late 1990s. ‘Native’ Islam is associated with the surviving religious traditions of the Crimean Tatars, especially the rites that accompany key events in the life cycle – birth, marriage, funeral, etc. The main criterion differentiating ‘insider’ (native) and ‘outsider’ (alien) traditions for many Crimean Tatars is whether or not it goes back at least two generations (parents and grandparents).

The discourse of ‘native vs. alien’ Islam developed by representatives of the Islamic spiritual administrations of Crimea uses the same appeal to the legacy of the ancestors but usually less to the recent past than to a more distant one. The pre-Soviet period, when Islam’s status on the peninsula was stronger and people were more pious and devout, usually serves as the basis for such rhetoric. The revival of the Crimean Muslims’ ‘native’ Islam is seen through the preservation of customary rituals (birth-marriage-funeral) and returning to the practice of following the mandatory prescriptions of Islam (DUMK) and certain Sufi practices (DTsMK).

For Crimean Tatar political leaders, the discourse of ‘native vs. alien’ Islam has been directly connected with maintaining their influence and using Islam as a resource for political mobilisation. Any ideologies that limit the scope for using this resource have therefore been treated as a threat to the integrity of the Crimean Tatar people and undermining the defence of collective rights in various

59 “Rossiya ukrepila pozitsii traditsionnogo islama v Krymu – Bal’bek” [“Russia has strengthened the position of traditional Islam in Crimea – Balbek”], <https://www.politnavigator.net/rossiya-ukrepila-pozitsii-traditsionnogo-islama-v-krymu-balbek.html>, accessed 25 September 2019.

60 “V ramkah politicheskikh i religioznyh presledovaniy v Krymu lisheny svobody 86 chelovek” [“Within the framework of political and religious persecution in Crimea 86 people are imprisoned”]. 2019. *Crimean human rights group*. May 3. <https://crimeahrg.org/v-ramkahpoliticheskikh-i-religioznyh-presledovaniy-v-krymu-lisheny-svobody-86-chelovek/>, accessed 25 September 2019

spheres. For this reason, as the adherents of 'outsider' Islam gain in strength, so do the criticisms of and antagonism toward them. What is more, while at first the Mejlis and DUMK did not distinguish between 'outsider' Islamic movements, from the mid-2000s their main opponent came to be the *Hizb at-Tahrir* party, which advanced a political project that did not stipulate the preservation of ethnic authenticity or the institutions of Crimean Tatarhood. It was under these circumstances that the apolitical Salafis, who had by then chosen the tactic of demonstrating at least superficial loyalty to the Mejlis and DUMK, began to be treated as 'the lesser evil'.

The discourse of 'native vs. alien' Islam developed in Crimea prior to 2014 lacked certain features of the discourse as it has developed since. First was its internal nature. To begin with, this discourse was largely restricted to the Crimean Tatar community, and no actors from outside were admitted to it. This included the state. A good example was the reluctance to allow the problem of a Crimean Tatar religious disunity become a matter of public discussion, particularly when in the context of the measures taken by Mejlis leaders to counter attempts at legislative prohibition of the *Hizb at-Tahrir* party in the Ukraine.<sup>61</sup>

A second distinctive feature was the lack of any important consequences for the parties involved. The main 'punishments' were public reprimand or being disqualified from holding the position of imam at a mosque. Today accusations of 'non-traditionalism' can have much more serious consequences, even prison sentences.

The third and final peculiarity of the discourse has been the increasing use of the concept of 'traditional Islam' since 2014. Under the influence of this discourse, which is prevalent in the Russian Federation, this concept has become increasingly popular with representatives of the Crimean spiritual administrations of Muslims, politicians and the intelligentsia. Even after five years of de-facto status as part of the Russian state, this discourse is not yet the dominant one in Crimea, however.

To sum up, one may note that the events of 2014 have radically changed the lives of Crimean Muslims. The state's active involvement in the regulation of religious processes has led to a narrowing of the space of freedom and a transformation of discourses and politics. The Muslim community of Crimea is still trying to understand the new 'rules of the game', identify red lines, and work out a strategy for survival and development. It has been taking a while for Crimean

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61 In September of 2009, the chief of the Crimean Militsiya (police forces) Hennadiy Moskal contacted the Security Services of the Ukraine with a request to ban the *Hizb at-Tahrir* movement in Ukraine. See "Moskal' trebuet ot SBU zapretit' partiuyu 'Hizb ut-Takhrir'" ["Moskal demands from the Security Service of Ukraine to ban the Hizb at-Tahrir party"], <https://sevastopol.su/news/moskal-trebuet-ot-sbu-zapretit-partiuyu-hizb-ut-tahrir>, accessed 25 September 2019.

Muslims to get used to the new Russian reality, and this process has been accompanied by the shattering of customary patterns of conduct and of integration within the established system of relations between the state and religious organisations.

## “Tradicionalni islam” u diskursu i politici Krimskih Tatara

### Sažetak

U ovome radu analizira se pojam “tradicionalnog islama” u diskursu i politici Krimskih Tatara. U radu je pokazano kako su se ovaj diskurs i politika transformirali pod utjecajem političkih promjena na Krimu 2014. godine. Pojam “tradicionalnog islama”, koji nije bio toliko u opticaju u religijskim krugovima postsovjetskog Krima, počeo je zauzimati sve uočljivije mjesto u retorici državnih islamskih religijskih vođa, koji ga koriste kao oruđe za uklanjanje konkurenata i monopoliziranje utjecaja na muslimansku javnu sferu. Ovaj pojam je blisko povezan sa ruskom zvaničnom politikom borbe protiv ekstremizma. U ovome se članku, kroz analizu razvoja ovog pojma u jednoj konkretnoj regiji, ilustriraju specifična obilježja odnosa između države i islama u Ruskoj Federaciji. Korišteni su podaci iz intervjua, od fokusnih grupa i sadržajne analize zvaničnih izjava islamskih lidera.

**Ključne riječi:** “tradicionalni islam”, Krim, Krimski Tatari, diskurs, Rusija