

***Identity in Crimea Before Annexation:
A Bottom-Up Perspective***

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**Eleanor Knott
(London School of Economics)**

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"Whatever the case, Russia will have to deal with the effects of Crimea being part of an independent Ukraine for 23 years. [...] Russia is not the motherland of an entire generation of Russian-speaking youth who are coming of age, but the motherland of their ancestors."

Andrei Malgin (2014)

"Beyond Perekop, there is no land for us."

Vasilii Zaytsev (1981)

1 Introduction

This article argues for a more nuanced understanding of identity debates in Crimea and thus challenges the dominant framing of Crimea as if it is, or was, a region of strong Russian identification, pro-Russian sentiment and support of separatism. Such a framing would argue that Crimea's de facto secession from Ukraine, and annexation by Russia, has a simple explanation: a belligerent kin-state (Russia) and a supportive populace (Crimean society), who finally got what they had desired since the collapse of the Soviet Union. This is a further perspective that the paper seeks to challenge, by arguing the notion of separatism seemed impossible and undesirable in the period before it occurred.

To support this argument, the article first examines briefly how Crimea has been framed elsewhere. Secondly, the article introduces the data analyzed in this paper which I use to problematize a simplistic understanding of identity in Crimea, in particular Russian identity in Crimea. In particular, the section argues, conceptually and empirically, for a disentangling of the often-elided ideas of identification *as Russian* (ethnically, i.e. "*ruskii*") and identification *with Russia*. To do this, the paper briefly discusses different ways in which I have conceptualized identity in Crimea that shows the multiple ways of identifying as Russian, Ukrainian and Crimean, and with Russia, Ukraine and Crimea.

Thirdly, the paper addresses the lack of support for separatism even among those who were members of organizations (*Russkoe Edinstvo*/Russian Unity, *Russkaia Obschina Kryma*/Russian Community of Crimea) that supported, if not facilitated, Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. The paper argues rather, that the majority of respondents (not aligned to these organizations) saw Crimea as a legitimate part of Ukraine while the minority, even if they questioned Ukraine's legitimacy, were supportive of a "bad peace" over a "good war",

and thus did not support the kind of bloody conflict they thought secession/annexation could require.

2 Identity debates in post-Soviet Crimea

This section reviews existing literature considering debates of ethnicity in Crimea, and Ukraine more generally in terms of Crimea's relationship with Ukraine, in terms of identity. The section reviews several different, if not interwoven, perspectives:

1. Crimea as demonstrative of an ethnic Russian majority community and ethnic Ukrainian majority community (and significant ethnic Crimean Tatar minority community)
2. Crimea as different to the rest of Ukraine as the only region with a Russian ethnic, and linguistic, majority
3. Crimea as necessarily and uncritically Russian, pro-Russian and pro-Russia, with a majority of expressing questionable loyalty towards Ukraine, if not supportive of separatism and pro-Russian irredentism
4. Russians and Ukrainians as a "single" and "Slavic" actor in Crimea
5. Russian separatism as over-stated in Crimea with evidence of waning support since apex of support in 1994-1995

These frames suggest opposing perspectives and a gap in understanding bottom-up identity debates in Crimea. As the section argues, Crimea, and the notion of what it means to be Russian in Crimea (pre-2014), is therefore a topic to which the approach of "everyday nationalism" is appropriate, as a way to analyze, and unpack, how being Russian was articulated, experienced, negotiated and subverted (Brubaker et al. 2006; Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008).

Firstly, identity in Crimea has been conceived in mutually exclusive terms at least from a superficial analysis of Crimean census data which shows Crimea (and Sevastopol) to be an ethnic outlier within Ukraine, as the only region where the majority, according to the 2001 census, identified ethnically as Russian (State Statistics Committee of Ukraine 2001). Hence, in Crimea, the otherwise Ukrainian majority are a minority, while the otherwise Russian minority are a majority and the Ukrainian minority overwhelmingly speak Russian as their usual language (Figure 1).¹

¹ Elsewhere, I have also been critical of censuses as a way of "measuring" and conceptualising identity (see Arel 2002a, 2002b; Brubaker 2011), however there is not enough space to elucidate these arguments here.

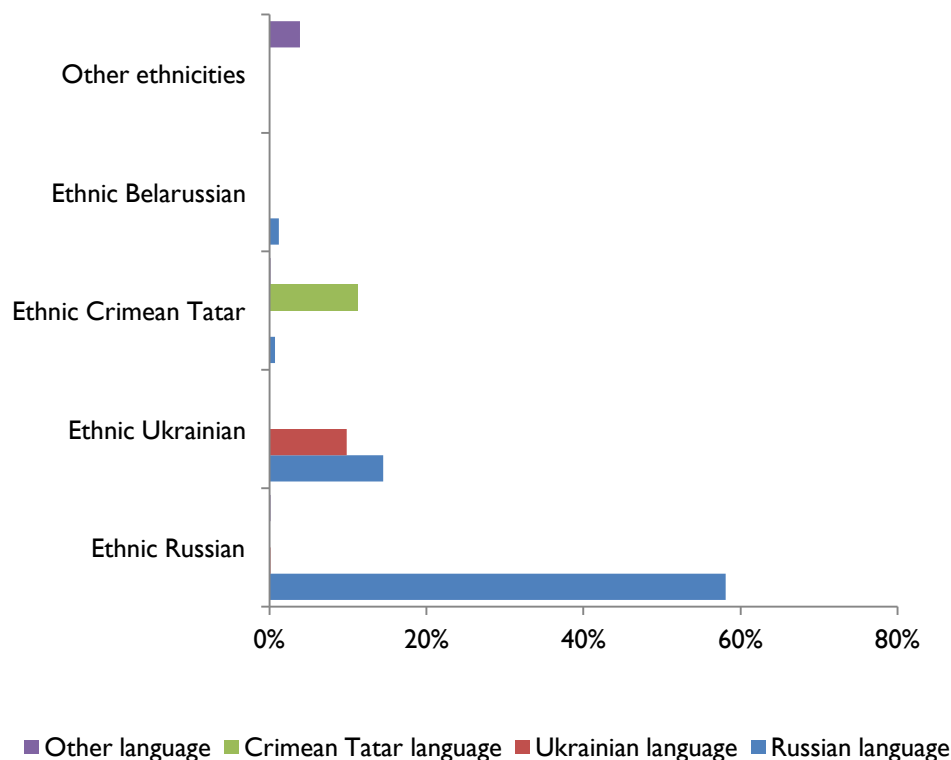


Figure 1 Language and ethnicity in the 2001 Ukrainian census

Source: (State Statistics Committee of Ukraine 2001)

Surveys too, conducted by US NGOs (e.g. International Republican Institute 2014) and respected Kyiv think-tanks (e.g. Razumkov Centre,² Kyiv International Institute of Sociology/KIIS) have also adopted a mutually exclusive approach to collecting identity about data. This offers little insight into how and why individuals choose and interpret categories, and experience, negotiate and subvert these categories in their everyday lives. For example, a Razumkov survey asked respondents to choose between different homelands (Ukraine, USSR, Russian, own region) (Pop-Eleches and Robertson 2014), assuming that respondents had mutually exclusive, rather than overlapping, notions of homeland.

In this respect, Crimea appears to be a region that is “hegemonically” an ethnic and linguistic Russian “zone” (Arel 2002a:243). From an analytical perspective, therefore, Crimea appears Other to Ukraine, on the basis of the fact that while ethnic Russians and Russian speakers are present across the rest of Ukraine, in Crimea they hold a majority status against a minority status in other Ukrainian regions, including the Donbas. This demographic status was institutionally buttressed by a (notional) status of autonomy vis-à-vis Kyiv that allowed for regional de facto and de jure rights, supporting Russian language and culture in the peninsula and offered a means to institutionalize, and dissipate, tensions between Kyiv and Crimea after Crimea’s failed secession attempt in 1994 (Sasse 2007).

² The Razumkov Centre is a Ukrainian non-governmental think tank which conducts frequent surveys in Crimea.

This sense of being Other to Ukraine was important also for how Crimea was researched, or at least how being Russian was researched in Ukraine and Crimea, where research of identity debates in Ukraine often overlooked Crimea, framing it as unrepresentative of the rest of Ukraine (Fournier 2002). For example, Wilson (2002) conceptualized a “middle ground” in Ukraine comprised by Russian speakers who have a mixed view of their ethnic self-identification, and who prefer to identify with the “Russo-Ukrainian” category than with the mutually exclusive census categories of Russian or Ukrainian, to consider the space between the mutually exclusive census categories of Ukrainian and Russian. However Wilson (2002) studied Ukraine as a whole, ignoring the specificities of Russian identity across a regionally diverse Ukraine (Narvselius 2012). While existing research might consider how Russian identification functions in other regions of Ukraine, such as the Donbas, and how this inter-relates with local/regional economic and social practices (Narvselius 2012; Osipian and Osipian 2012), again this left these debates in Crimea untouched.

In this space, where Crimea was framed as unrepresentative of the rest of Ukraine, the notion of Crimea as a region populated by ethnic Russians promulgated an idea that this majority was necessarily and uncritically ethnically Russian, pro-Russian and pro-Russia (e.g. Maigre 2008; Kuzio 2010; Hedenskog 2008; Barrington and Faranda 2009) and that this majority was cohesive in terms of its identification and preferences. This perspective argued too that many held Russian passports as indicative of a lack of loyalty to Ukraine and, instead, a loyalty towards Russia that determined their support Russian irredentism (Maigre 2008; Shevchuk 1996). Crimea was framed both as a potential region of instability and insecurity (Kuzio 2010; Krushelnycky 2008), vis-à-vis Ukraine, politically and socially given a supposed lack of commitment to being part of Ukraine, and a Trojan horse comprised of Russian fifth columnists that enhanced Russia’s leverage within Ukraine.

Such perspectives could appear verified by Crimea’s annexation in 2014. The paper is concerned less with problematizing this argument, though I do elsewhere, but rather in problematizing, and unpacking, the meaning of being Russian in Crimea, and the existence of support for Russia within Crimea, by engaging with the potential internal heterogeneity and dynamic politics and social relations within Crimea vis-à-vis Ukraine and Russia. This is supported by more nuanced, though top-down, analysis such as Malyarenko and Galbreath (2013:917) who argue for a perspective that contradicted the notion of mutually exclusive “ethnic Russian” and “ethnic Ukrainian” communities. Instead they argued that Russians and Ukrainians in Crimea “consistently behave as one actor”, i.e. collapsing mutually exclusive categories, and identify overwhelmingly as Crimean. They argued Crimean residents preferred this Crimean multi-ethnic identification because of their “greater sense of regional difference from the rest of Ukraine”, cementing Crimean as a the dominant identity, and cleavage vis-à-vis Ukraine, rather than ethnic Russian/Ukrainian cleavage (Malyarenko and Galbreath 2013:918). In this sense, we see the idea that not only was Crimea framed as different to other Ukrainian regions, if not Ukraine itself, but that Crimean residents also framed themselves as different to the rest of Ukraine, in part because of a lack of differentiation between different ethnic “groups” in Crimea. This speaks also to the conceptual critique of Brubaker and Cooper (2000) that assumes groups, as top-down categories of analysis, are reflective of bottom-up categories of practice (see everyday nationalism discussion below).

Other studies, such as a Razumkov Centre (2009) survey, also identified a large “Slavic community” in Crimea, as a part of an “other category”, in contrast to ethnic Russian and ethnic Ukrainian categories, which they describe as a pan-ethnic group comprised of “ethnic Russians and Ukrainians”. Like Wilson’s *middle ground*, members of this category

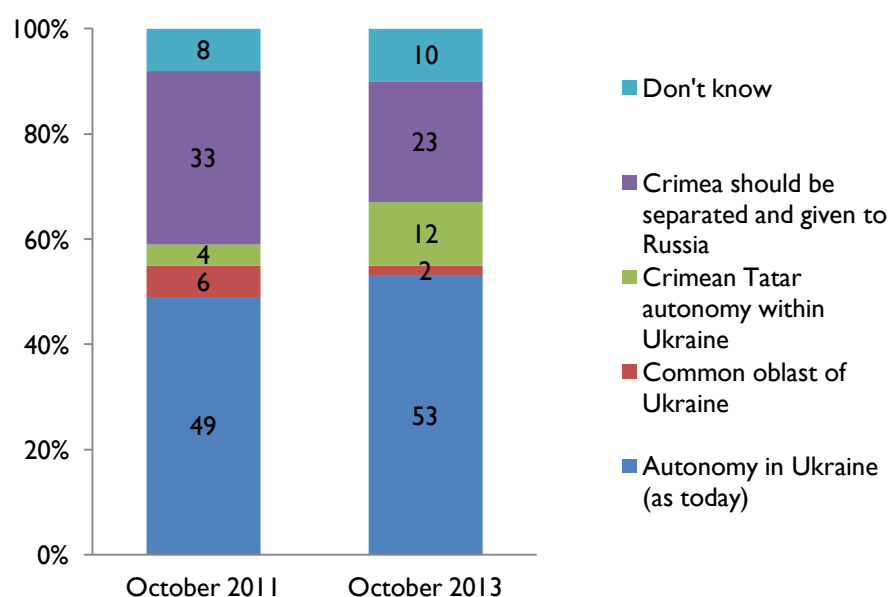


Figure 2 In your opinion, what should the status of Crimea be?

Source: (International Republican Institute 2014)

speak Russian at home and consider Russian their native language, only affiliate with a Russian “ethnic cultural tradition” and see no difference between ethnic Russians and Ukrainians in Crimea. This analysis challenges research in Crimea from the early 1990s that pitted ethnic Ukrainians and ethnic Russians, as separate categories, against each other, or at least as expressing different political preferences (Bremmer 1994).

A further contradictory, if not counter-intuitive, framing is discussed by Malyarenko and Galbreath (2013:913) who argue, elite and popular support for separatism, before 2014, had decreased since its apex in the mid-1990s and was unable to “represent a serious threat to Ukraine’s territorial integrity” (Mizrokhi 2009:2; Malyarenko and Galbreath 2013:917) (see). Rather, as Mizrokhi (2009:2) argues, it was in Russia’s interest to “exaggerate the danger and potency” of Russian sentiment, and support of pro-Russian “political and cultural associations” within Crimea, to bolster Russia’s interests within Crimea (e.g. BSF), and hinder Ukraine’s political projects (e.g. NATO relations).

Overall, these different perspectives present an interesting, if not confounding, picture of Crimea. They also present a research gap stemming from the lack of engagement, from the bottom-up, with notions of what it means (or meant) to be Russian in Crimea, and how this idea of being Russia interacted with ideas of being Ukrainian and Crimean, and identifying with Russia, Ukraine and Crimea. A second gap stems of analysis, in everyday terms, with territorial aspirations that is to say, support for different territorial configurations, for example: 1) status quo (remaining within Ukraine), 2) separatism (Crimean independence) and 3) irredentism (unification with Russia). This question has become more potent now that the third option has occurred where the data analyzed here, collected in 2012 and 2013, presents a window for analyzing these aspirations in the period preceding Russia’s 2014 annexation of Crimea.

To address these gaps, the paper applies the approach of “everyday nationalism” which implores researchers to consider the bottom-up perspectives on questions of

nationalism and ethnicity (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Brubaker 2006; de Cillia et al. 1999), and, as I argue elsewhere, apply this approach to questions of cross-border co-ethnic identification, i.e. kin-state politics, as in the case of the relationship between Crimea and Russia (Knott 2015a). Everyday nationalism builds on the argument made by (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:4), to move away from “categories of analysis”, such as census categories, or at least to problematize these categories, and instead to consider “categories of practice”, i.e. “lay” categories of “everyday social experience” which are used by “ordinary social actors”. Thus the interest is to gather data which explores how individuals “appropriate, internalize, subvert, evade or transform the categories” such as mutually exclusive census categories “that are imposed upon them” (Brubaker et al. 2006:12; Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008:537), as well as to address issues of how far ethnicity is salient in everyday life (Brubaker et al. 2006). This paper therefore uses the everyday nationalism approach to consider how being Russian, (and Ukrainian and Crimean) are experienced, negotiated and subverted in everyday terms by engaging with respondents directly in these questions of *how* and *why*

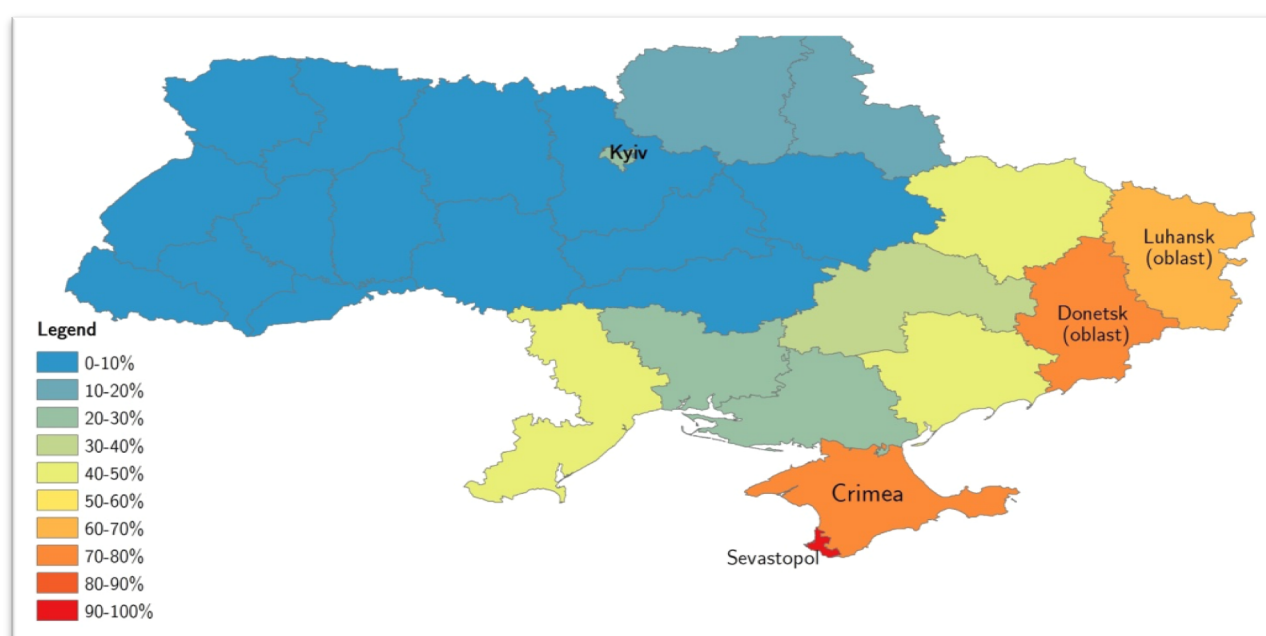


Figure 3 Russian Language Use in Ukraine

(Source: State Statistics Committee of Ukraine 2001)

they identify in different ways.³

³ **A note on methods:** practically this approach was conducted via 53 interviews conducted in 2012 and 2013, with everyday social actors, including a variety of perspectives across the political spectrum (elaborated in Knott 2015a). After Small (2009) this sample of respondents does not argue that it is “representative” of Crimea, as a size too small to warrant this claim or evaluation. Rather, following Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012), the research sought a diversity and richness of perspectives, that allows for analysis and critique of existing literature on Crimea, as I hope to address in this paper.

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The rest of the paper proceeds with two empirical sections, analyzing first discussions of what it meant to be Russian in Crimea, in 2012 and 2013, conceptualized by constructing inductively derived identification categories, based on areas of agreement and disagreement between respondents, in terms of their positioning vis-à-vis Russia, Ukraine and Crimea, and as Russian, Ukrainian and Crimean. The second empirical section uses these categories to analyze respondents' territorial aspirations. This analysis is used to demonstrate a lack of association between identity and territorial aspirations, or at least a lack of support for territorial reconfiguration (separatism or unification) irrespective of identification.

3 Identity in Pre-Annexation Crimea

This section argues for a nuanced understanding of identification in Crimea. It demonstrates the fractures existing in notions of identifying *as* Russian, and identifying *with* Russia, by forming conceptual inductively derived identification categories that shows areas of agreement between respondents (within categories) and areas of disagreement (across categories):

1. *Discriminated Russians* (n=9) emphasized a strong Russian identification but also how they felt threatened by the Ukrainian state
2. *Ethnic Russians* (n=18) identified primarily as Russian but this was expressed without feeling discriminated
3. *Political Ukrainians* (n=15) identified primarily as citizens of Ukraine, regardless of ethnic identification
4. *Crimeans* (n=5) identified primarily regionally and inter-ethnically, identifying as between Ukrainian and Russian
5. *Ethnic Ukrainians* (n=6) identified ethnically and linguistically as Ukrainian

These categories are discussed in greater detail elsewhere (Knott 2015b), and are used here to introduce the inductively-derived categories to show that the notion of Crimea as a cohesively ethnically Russian peninsula should be problematized. These categories are then applied, in the following section, to territorial aspirations to unpack the association between territorial aspirations and identification.

3.1 Discriminated Russians

The category of *Discriminated Russians* was comprised by those who identified most strongly as ethnically Russian and, as a counterpoint, were anti-Ukrainian, identifying themselves primarily in terms of they felt victimized and discriminated by the state Ukraine had become after 1991. Many of these respondents were affiliated with local Russian and Compatriot organizations based in Simferopol, such as *Russkaia Obshchina Kryma* (Russian Community of Crimea, hereafter ROC) and its political affiliate, *Russkoe Edinstvo* (Russian Unity, hereafter RE), organizations that were key in supporting, if not facilitating Crimea's annexation in 2014.

The defining characteristic of this category was both their strong identification as Russian and with Russia, where Crimea was a legitimate part of Russia as a "Russian cultural enclave" [C-19a, C-48a, C-48b], and as victims of Ukraine's "forced" policy of Ukrainization (*Ukrainizatsia*) which they believed was designed to "assimilate Russians" [C-25, C-24] and to erase Russian perspectives and the Russian language from Crimea and the rest of

Ukraine. As such, *Discriminated Russians* lacked attachments to Ukraine, feeling as an unwanted “stepchild” in Ukraine which was “against me as a citizen” [C-24].

3.2 Ethnic Russians

While *Ethnic Russians*, identifying primarily as ethnically Russian, saw Russia as their cultural homeland, they felt less culturally threatened by the Ukrainian state than *Discriminated Russians* and were more easily able to reconcile being ethnically Russian with residing in Ukraine. Culturally, *Ethnic Russians* identified being Russian and Russian culture as “native” [C-14b, C-15, C-34], and organic because “every culture is transmitted through blood and mother’s milk”, where being ethnically Russian was not a choice because “I think in Russian so I am Russian” [C-21, C-3, C-22]. Crimea too was, historically, “Russian land” and a “Russian enclave” [C-8, C-9, C-14b, C-53] and remained their “big motherland” and “historical motherland” while Crimea was their “small motherland” [C-3, C-15, C-34, C-53]. However this was mitigated by less favorable attitudes to Russia as a political entity, because Russia did not “understand” Crimea: Putin merely wanted to undermine and disrespect Ukrainian politicians [C-22]. Equally, C-22 explained that Ukraine did not understand that identifying as Russian and speaking Russian was not analogous to being a “patriot of Putin” [C-22].

This sense of being Russian was also mitigated by the legitimacy they gave to being part of Ukraine, “my state” [C-21, C-8, C-22, C-46]. Thus, they reconciled being Russian and residing in Ukraine, rubbishing the claims advanced by *Discriminated Russians* that Russian language and culture were threatened in Crimea and Ukraine more broadly: they did not see language as such an “acute issue” and did not observe a “strangulation of Russian culture” [C-21, C-22]. Instead disputes over language were “at the political level, the establishment level” because at the “everyday level, there are no differences” as people can speak the language they wish [C-22, C-53].

3.3 Political Ukrainians

Political Ukrainians resisted ethnic identification categories and instead identified primarily by their sense of being Ukrainian citizens first. This category is interesting by demonstrating such resistance to subscribe to mutually exclusive and ethnic categories (ethnic Ukrainian vs. ethnic Russian), showing rather that what they considered important was their *political* membership as Ukrainian. In this way, it was their common experiences of being part of Ukraine, rather than ethnic divisions, which were important because “citizens live badly, it is independent from ethnicity” [C-23].

Political Ukrainians explained how they “feel myself as a citizen (of Ukraine), regardless of ethnicity” [C-23, C-47] because Ukraine was “my home” [C-59]. By contrast, they identified as Russian” because I “was not born in Russia” but in Crimea which “is Ukraine”. Significant too, was that many of this group had been born, or grown up, when Ukraine was an “independent state” [C-31] (i.e. after 1991), meaning that Russian was somewhere foreign, and somewhere they felt foreign [C-28, C-59].

Crucially, they signaled the dynamism of identity in Crimea by addressing the sense of difference they felt from their parents, who identified as ethnic Russians. They signaled also how, in post-Soviet Crimea, it was possible to *be* Ukrainian beyond being ethnically Ukrainian. In this sense, they were the generation that had *become* Ukrainian, in a political sense, the contingency of ethnic identification where identity was not necessarily experienced in terms of common descent, but modified and produced by politically experiences.

3.4 Crimeans

Crimeans also problematized mutually exclusive ethnic categories by identifying “firstly” as Crimean, because of where they lived and as an inter-territorial and inter-ethnic category that demonstrated how they situated themselves between Ukraine and Russia, and Ukrainian and Russian [C-2a]. Identifying as Crimean allowed them to negotiate their sense of complexity, in having mixed parents and experiences of both Ukraine, Crimea and Russia, because Crimea itself was “partly Russian, Ukrainian partly” [C-36, C-38]. This category reconciled their confusion, and hybridity, by identifying as “more Crimean” [C-38], which allowed them to remain connected to the peninsula and to identify as simultaneously but not fully Ukrainian and Russian.

3.5 Ethnic Ukrainians

Ethnic Ukrainians did not identify with Russian culture or language and instead demonstrated a strong attachment to Ukraine, identifying as from Ukraine, speaking Ukrainian as their “native” language and being part of Ukrainian culture. They were Ukrainian “by birth”, having been born outside of Crimea, and expressed “love” for Ukraine and Ukrainian culture [C-45, C-26]. As contemporary residents of Crimea, they recognized that Russian was “dominant” language in Crimea, even if “Ukrainian is the state language” [C-13, C-26, C-45].

However, while *Ethnic Ukrainians*, recognized the practicality of speaking Russian in Crimea, they considered the identity component of *being* Russian in Crimea as a false consciousness because Soviet policies “made (everyone) Russian-speaking” and so “many have become pro-Russian” even though “they are not identical to the Russians” [C-49]. Ethnic Ukrainians believed ethnic Russians held misguided, and nostalgic, views about Russia, that it was “something ideal, beautiful” [C-27] when many had “never been to Russia” [C-49].

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This section, as summarized by Table 1 below, has unpacked the question of what it means to be Russian in Crimea. In doing so, it is possible to see the different ideas of being Russian, the ways this is appropriated and negotiated, and hybridized with ideas of being Ukrainian, belonging to Ukraine, and being Crimean. Thus the idea of being Russian in Crimea was highly complex and contested, combined with notions of feeling threatened and victimized by Ukraine (*Discriminated Russians*) or reconciling being Russian with belonging to Ukraine, at least politically (*Ethnic Russians*) or hybridized with being Ukrainian (*Crimeans*). Being Russian, and moreover being defined by ethnicity was also denied by some respondents who preferred to focus more on their political sense of belonging to Ukraine (*Political Ukrainians*). Thus, this section concludes by arguing that being Russian was far from an accepted or homogenizing idea in Crimea, at least in the period preceding Crimea’s annexation, contesting the idea that Crimea was only a region populated by a Russian majority, by demonstrating the different dynamics within this majority, as discussed here.

Table 1 Conceptualizing Identity in Crimea

	Native Language	As Russian	As Ukrainian	As Crimean	With Russia	With Ukraine	With Crimea
<i>Discriminated Russians</i>	Russian	✓		✓	✓		✓
<i>Ethnic Russians</i>	Russian	✓		✓	partially	✓	✓

<i>Crimeans</i>	Russian	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Political Ukrainians</i>	Russian		✓	✓		✓	✓
<i>Ethnic Ukrainians</i>	Ukrainian		✓			✓	

4 Territorial aspirations in pre-annexation Crimea

Using these five inductively derived identification categories, discussed above, the following section applies these categories to consider the territorial aspirations of each in turn, in terms of respondents' preferences for territorial status quo or reconfiguration and the reasons behind these preferences. Addressing these issues has been made more important by Crimea's secession from Ukraine and annexation by Russia in 2014 and, as will be shown, stands in contrast to the data considered here which demonstrates the extent to which secession and annexation appeared not only undesirable but farcical for most. Moreover the section will show the extent to which, even if section 3 emphasized the cleavages existing in being Russian and identifying as Russian, these cleavages were not present in terms of territorial aspirations where the majority, overwhelmingly, favored status quo both because they saw Crimea as a legitimate part of Ukraine (most categories) or because they preferred peace to war (*Discriminated Russians*).

4.1 Discriminated Russians

Discriminated Russians felt part of the "fraternity of Russian people" divided by "artificial" post-Soviet borders in which they had no agency in determining because "we did not leave Russia" [C-20, C-55, C-46, C-19b, C-20]. However these symbolic ties did not determine their territorial preferences, because *Discriminated Russians* neither supported, nor promoted the territorial reconfiguration. As C-19b argued:

"We're not talking about the fact that the Crimea in this situation should secede from the Ukraine, we understand that it is impossible to make without bloodshed, without a cataclysm. We want to live peacefully, we here are sensible people who want to continue living here."

Thus it was evident, in 2012 and 2013, that individuals associated with pro-Russian organizations (e.g. ROC and RE), as C-19b was, neither supported nor saw their organizations as supporting territorial reconfiguration (although these organizations would come to support Russia's annexation in 2014).

Fundamental to their disdain, was their belief that separatism incurred costs they were unwilling to blame, of conflict and bloodshed, where they preferred territorial status quo which they saw as the peaceful option [C-24 also]. This is redolent of Laitin's observations of a preference for a "bad peace" over a "good war" in early post-Soviet Latvia (Laitin 1998:8). In situating themselves as peaceful, and legitimate, they also framed Crimean Tatars, destructively, as the "main source of separatism" while framing themselves as constructively wanting to "develop" Ukraine, rather than dismantle it [C-24, C-25, C-19b].

Overall, therefore, there is a lack of support for territorial reconfiguration, explained by a support for peace over conflict and a path dependent vision of the future which saw

Crimea's divorce from Russia, and Russia's unwillingness to intervene, as signifying the likely future path.

4.2 Ethnic Russians

Most *Ethnic Russians*, like *Discriminated Russians*, supported Crimea's territorial status quo vis-à-vis Russia and Ukraine. C-34 was therefore an outlier (among all respondents), revering Russia and supporting Crimea's (re)unification with Russia framing it a "historical error" that Crimea was part of Ukraine and not Russia [C-34]. By contrast, most *Ethnic Russians* maligned separatism as unpopular because it was analogous to "conflict" [C-9, C-53]. Those supporting separatism in the 1990s were "political losers" while those who currently supported separatism were motivated by self-interest to reap "some kind of political, economic and financial benefits" from this project [C-3, C-21]. Hence they criticized the fixation of "*Rossiiane*" (Russian citizens in Russia) on the "return" of the "gold mine" (Crimea) [C-22], when separatism/unification was a failed and undesirable project [C-53].

Instead, *Ethnic Russians* generally supported Crimea's integration within an independent Ukraine and felt "solidarity" with Ukraine that was absent for *Discriminated Russians* [C-57b]. Pragmatically they wanted good relations with Russia as "two states", like Germany and Austria—that is, as two separate but culturally/linguistically similar states—because their spiritual closeness to Russia, rather than loyalty (*vernost'*) to the Russian state, did not undermine their ability to be a "patriot" of Ukraine [C-53, C-8, C-21, C-7, C-22].

4.3 Political Ukrainians

Identifying as "patriots" of Ukraine, *Political Ukrainians* supported Ukraine's independence and separation from Russia. They resisted (*russifikatsyia*), and Ukraine's policy of single state language [C-12, C-31, C-30, C-11a, C-11b, C-18], and wanted to strengthen their borders, and sense of independence, vis-à-vis Russia [C-23]. Hence they maligned separatism, framing it as analogous to Russian annexation because Crimea could not exist by itself [C-18]. However they framed separatism/annexation as "impossible", because, constitutionally, any decisions on Crimea's status required an "all-Ukrainian referendum" [C-18].⁴ In this climate, Crimea appeared as "stable" and "very loyal, calm" because there was "no desire" for separatism anymore [C-28, C-32].

4.4 Crimeans

As previous categories, *Crimeans* framed Crimea as "stable", "normal" and "part of Ukraine" [C-36, C-38]. They too framed separatism as a historical movement, supported "only in the 1990s" [C-38]. Separatism was now undesirable because they associated it with "great nationalist clashes" that had "spread" but had spared Crimea. Secondly, C-38 saw Russia as not "ready" to support Crimea's secession (and annexation) because of the financial costs of providing material resources, such as pensions, to "two and a half million people" [C-38].

Only C-57a supported a more Russian-focused solution. This was not something he would "speak loudly about", or campaign for, because he was happy to remain part of Ukraine [C-57a]. However he believed that Crimea was already, cognitively, "separate" and could be "perfectly self-reliant", if not "better in Russia" for Crimea (even though he had "never been there (to Russia)") [C-57a].

⁴ This requirement was flagrantly flouted in Crimea's 2014 annexation referendum, which was held only in Crimea and Sevastopol.

4.5 Ethnic Ukrainians

Ethnic Ukrainians framed Crimea as “a single whole” with Ukraine as “very important to me” [C-49, C-45]. They were pleased that “Russia’s attractiveness” had weakened for Crimean society leading them to believe that Ukraine was “developing quite peacefully” with “no bloody conflict” since independence [C-26, C-27, C-49]. However, unlike previous categories, they saw more “insecurity” in Crimea [C-49]. While support for Russia was “decreasing every year”, they lacked faith in Crimean society believing that “tomorrow” there could be a referendum and “63-70% can vote” in support of separatism [C-49].

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Table 2 Territorial Aspirations by Inductively Derived Identification Category

	Support Separatism?	Reason
<i>Discriminated Russians</i>	N	Support peace
<i>Ethnic Russians</i>	N	Crimea as legitimate part of Ukraine
<i>Crimeans</i>	N	Crimea as legitimate part of Ukraine
<i>Political Ukrainians</i>	N	Crimea as legitimate part of Ukraine
<i>Ethnic Ukrainians</i>	N	Crimea as legitimate part of Ukraine

Analyzing territorial aspirations by the inductively derived categories has highlighted the extent to which separatism, or annexation, were undesirable aspirations in the period preceding Crimea’s annexation by Russia in 2014 (Table 2). Rather, respondents, regardless of how they identified, and the various ways in which they identified (or not) as Russian as discussed in section 3, supported territorial status quo, seeing Crimea as a legitimate part of post-Soviet Ukraine. Thus how respondents identified did not determine their territorial aspirations, showing cohesion in terms of these aspirations, and Crimea’s sense of legitimacy within Ukraine.

Discriminated Russians, in particular, were a surprise in terms of their support for territorial status quo. This is explained by their support for peace, even if it left them feeling discriminated, over support for conflict, that would lead to uncertainty, if not bloodshed. However there is a more cynical story underpinning the “discriminated” and victimized trop of *Discriminated Russians* as individuals who were active in political and cultural organization (ROC, RE) who used the notion of marginalization and victimization, vis-à-vis Ukraine, to engage with their core supporters, notably the elderly. The puzzle is therefore how these organizations, which seemed not to support secession before 2014, came to support, if not facilitate, annexation in 2014. Given the ascent to power of their leaders (e.g. Sergei Aksenov), and the ability to empower their friends and family members,⁵ the balance of access to power and goods shifted fundamentally in the midst of Ukraine’s Euromaidan revolution when Russia, after 23 years, shifted its stance (perhaps not discursively) but politically, and militarily, towards legitimizing its right to intervene in Ukraine.

⁵ For example, Aksenov’s father (Valerii Aksenov) and his sister in law (Evgheniia Dobrynia) were given spots on United Russia’s list for Crimean parliamentary elections in 2014.

5 Everyday Conclusions on Crimea Before Annexation

This paper has tried to show a different perspective on the meaning of Russian identity in Crimea, using data collected in 2012 and 2013. In this sense, the paper scrutinized, and problematized, assumptions that Crimea was both a territory populated by a ethnic Russian majority whose ethnicity, and contrast to elsewhere in Ukraine, was presumed as determining residents support for Russia, culturally and politically; *as if* Crimea was a region where there was popular consent for separatism and weak consent for Crimea remaining part of Ukraine. Crimea too, from a Ukrainian perspective, was also relatively under-studied, at least in terms of Russian identity, where Crimea was either aggregated or excluded from studies of Russian identity in Ukraine. To address these gaps, the paper argued for using an “everyday nationalism” approach to address the meanings of being Russian in Crimea, from an everyday bottom-up perspective, to disentangle how being Russian was experienced, negotiated and subverted, alongside ideas of being Ukrainian and Crimean, and situated vis-à-vis Russia, Ukraine and Crimea.

Using this everyday nationalism approach, the paper showed the extent to which being in Russian in Crimea was a complex, contested and fractured, rather than homogenizing, idea. Thus the paper would problematize the notion that Crimea *was* populated by an ethnic Russian majority observing fractures within the majority:

- A minority who identified not only as Russian but as discriminated (*Discriminated Russians*)
- A larger number who identified as Russian but reconciled this with residing in Ukraine and being politically affiliated to Ukraine (*Ethnic Russians*)
- A significant number who resisted ethnic categories and focused instead on emphasizing their political identification to Ukraine (*Political Ukrainians*)
- A few who hybridized being Russian and Ukrainian by identifying as Crimean, situating them geographically and ethnically between Ukraine and Russia (*Crimeans*)
- A few who identified singularly as Ukrainian, as ethnically, linguistically and culturally Ukrainian (*Ethnic Ukrainians*)

This analysis showed the different ways of being Russian, and the different ways of being Ukrainian where many of the post-Soviet generation, identifying their parents as Russian, identified themselves as Ukrainian because of their political ties to the state they had been born and/or grew up.

Alongside this fractured perspective, the paper used these categories to consider territorial aspirations and demonstrate here 1) the lack of association between identification and territorial aspirations 2) the lack of fracturing in terms of territorial aspirations. Thus, territorial aspirations were relatively coherent: respondents supported territorial status quo, where Crimea was a legitimate and peaceful part of Ukraine and where reconfiguration offered uncertainties that were unappealing, mostly notably “bloodshed”.

Overall, this demonstrates a different empirical picture of Crimea than has been discussed previously, in particular around Crimea’s annexation *as if* the majority endorsed such reconfiguration, at least passively. Rather, this paper agrees with Malyarenko and Galbreath (2013) who argue that secessionist sentiment was decreasing; in this paper, separatists were seen as failures of the 1990s that were out-of-place in Crimea’s contemporary political scene. All of this is premised on a path dependent notion of Russia’s

relationship to Crimea and Ukraine, as well as within Ukraine in terms of the elite structure and hegemony of the Party of Regions (at least within Crimea); events that clearly changed with the departure of Yanukovych in February 2014 and the securitization, and militarization, of Russia's relationship with Ukraine.

Lastly, beyond the empirical argument of this paper, the paper argues, more conceptually, for research which considers ethnicity and identity, and political debates, in everyday terms. This challenges an assumption within political science that considers ethnicity predominantly in relation to conflict, as an explanatory variable (e.g. role of ethnic diversity). Rather, what is important is how ethnicity structures everyday state-society relations and the salience of ethnicity where it is important to consider how ethnicity functions in banal settings and not only because these banal settings (e.g. Crimea in 2012 and 2013) can shift quickly and dramatically.

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