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SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

Memory of Forced Displacements in the Discourse and Coping Strategies of Crimean Tatars in Post-2014 Crimea

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Abstract
This article demonstrates how Crimean Tatars use memories of past displacements in their narratives of contemporary emigration and coping strategies in occupied Crimea. First, I present the significance of the first annexation of Crimea in 1783 by the Russian Empire and the 1944 deportation in the collective memory of Crimean Tatars. Second, I discuss the main motives for the displacement of internally displaced persons of Crimean Tatar origin in 2014 based on interviews conducted in L'viv. Drawing from interviews and focus groups that were conducted in Crimea between 2017 and 2019, I describe the influence of the memory of forced displacements on contemporary discourse and how it has evolved since Russia's full-scale attack on Ukraine. Finally, I focus on how Crimean Solidarity activists employ memories of the first annexation and deportation to legitimize their resistance against Russia's repressive policy in occupied Crimea. I argue that the 2014 annexation of Crimea was a retraumatizing event for many Crimean Tatars and that it has become an integral part of the grand narrative of their forced displacement from the late eighteenth century to the present.

Keywords: Crimean Tatars; forced displacement; annexation; re-traumatization

Introduction

The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 was a pivotal moment for many Crimean Tatars, dividing their lives into a distinct "before" and "after." Prior to the annexation, the lives of Crimean Tatars were marked by their struggle for collective rights as the indigenous people of Crimea, alongside efforts toward cultural and economic recovery following their repatriation to their homeland from Soviet exile in the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, after the annexation many of their hard-earned achievements in this struggle, such as state-recognized institutions representing the collective rights of Crimean Tatars, opportunities to influence political processes in Crimea, and independent media were nullified, leading to the emergence of new goals, discourses, and behavioral patterns. Presently, personal security and the preservation of cultural identity have become the most pressing concerns for the Crimean Tatar community (Muratova, Dyulberova, and Apselyamova 2020; Shynkarenko 2022). Following the de facto Russian control of Crimea, Crimean Tatars faced widespread political and religious persecution. Since 2014, 226 Crimean Tatars have been subject to criminal prosecutions, with 104 of them currently serving sentences in Russian penal colonies. Additionally, 28 have been killed and 18 others have been reported missing (Crimean Tatar Resource Center. n.d.). Previously influential Crimean Tatar institutions that advocated for their collective rights before 2014 were either labeled as extremist and banned (Mejlis[1]) or coerced into cooperating and aligning with official

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Russian policies (DUMK[2]). As a result, many ordinary members of the community now live in conditions of fear for their lives and freedom, facing uncertainty and an inability to plan for their future. These dire circumstances have led to a mass forced emigration of Crimean Tatars from Crimea, starting during the annexation during February–March 2014 and continuing to this day. Thousands of Crimean Tatars left Crimea and became internally displaced persons (IDPs), seeking refuge in cities like Kyiv, L'viv, Kherson, and other places in Ukraine (*Ukrainskaya Pravda* 2017). Some, like their predecessors, moved to Turkey and joined the numerous Crimean Tatar diaspora. The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 further intensified the chaos in Crimea and compelled many Crimean Tatars to flee the region to avoid being caught in a war zone or mobilized into the Russian army (Council of Europe 2023). Forced emigration was fueled by rumors of an allegedly disproportionate number of mobilized Crimean Tatars relative to their population in Crimea, which was perceived as a deliberate policy by Russian authorities. The migration trajectories include Turkey, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Western countries.

The forced displacement[3] of the Crimean Tatars after the 2014 annexation of Crimea, defined as the movement of people away from their home region due to persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or human rights violations (UNHCR 2015, 5), sparked active intragroup discussions. Memories of past displacements, specifically linked to the first annexation of Crimea by the Russian Empire at the end of the eighteenth century and the 1944 deportation, played a crucial role in these discussions. These memories were used to justify the decision to either leave Crimea or remain. In both cases, arguments were drawn from historical events and their consequences for the Crimean Tatars, creating parallels with their present situation. Various groups of Crimean Tatars also employed memories of past forced displacements to legitimize their coping strategies in occupied Crimea.

Research into several aspects of Crimean Tatars' lives in post-2014 Crimea has gradually expanded, encompassing studies on survival and resistance (Žídková and Melichar 2015; Muratova 2019; Muratova, Dyulberova, and Apselyamova 2020; Shynkarenko 2022; Aliyev 2022), human rights violations (Skrypnyk and Pechonchyk 2016; Coynash and Charron 2019), transformation of institutions, gender roles, and discourses (Wilson 2017; Muratova 2019; Muratova 2022b), collective memory and trauma (Nikolko 2018; Muratova 2022a), and forced displacement (Uehling 2017; Muratova 2017; Sereda 2020, 2023; Charron 2022). However, the role of collective memory in the perception and decision making of forced displacement within the Crimean Tatar community has received limited attention in academic literature. This article addresses this gap and demonstrates how Crimean Tatars use memories of past displacements in their narratives concerning contemporary forced migration and coping strategies in occupied Crimea. The following research question guided this study: What are the purposes and arguments for the use of memories of forced displacement by supporters of different views and coping strategies in occupied Crimea?

To answer this question, I explore the significance of the first annexation of Crimea and the 1944 deportation in the collective memory of Crimean Tatars. Additionally, I present the main motives for the displacement of Crimean Tatar IDPs in 2014 through interviews that were conducted in L'viv. Drawing from interviews and focus groups that were conducted in Crimea between 2017 and 2019, I describe the influence of the memory of forced displacement on the contemporary discourse of migration and illustrate how this discourse has evolved following Russia's full-scale attack on Ukraine. Finally, I focus on how Crimean Solidarity activists use memories of the first annexation and deportation to legitimize their resistance against Russia's repressive policy in Crimea.

Crimean Tatars and Forced Displacements

Crimean Tatars, the indigenous people of Crimea, have experienced different periods throughout their history. Among these, a significant era of prosperity and power was associated with the Crimean Khanate (1441–1783). The three-and-a-half-century history of this state holds a prominent place in the ethnic narratives of the Crimean Tatars, often referred to as a golden age when their influence extended far beyond the Crimean Peninsula. Consequently, the fall of the Crimean

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Khanate following its annexation by the Russian Empire in 1783 is perceived by Tatars as the start of a "black era" that spanned two centuries of Russian and Soviet rule. The black era was not uniform, consisting of both brighter and darker times. One of the darkest periods was the deportation of the Crimean Tatars in 1944, during which the entire nation was unjustly accused of treason and forcibly removed from Crimea within three days. This event has left a collective trauma that spans several generations of Crimean Tatars and has deeply affected the community for decades (Ozcelik 2015; Nikolko 2018; Muratova 2022a). Studies have revealed that in the collective memory of the Crimean Tatars, the 1783 annexation and the 1944 deportation were the central events around which their ethnic narratives were constructed (Kouts and Muratova 2014). These events symbolize the beginning and pinnacle of the black era, marked by painful memories of forced displacements from Crimea.

The first mass displacement of Crimean Tatars occurred during the end of the eighteenth and into the early nineteenth centuries, following the annexation and subsequent colonization of Crimea by Russia. Fearing persecution, Russification, and land deprivation, Crimean Tatars were forced to relocate to the territory of the Ottoman Empire. Subsequently, hundreds of thousands more were forced to leave their homeland due to the devastation caused by the Crimean War (1853–1856) and the hostile attitude of the Russian state, which suspected disloyalty and treason (Karpat 1985, 66). Another wave of forced migration was triggered during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, driven primarily by land deprivation, impoverishment, and the imposition of universal military conscription into the Russian army. The total number of Crimean Tatars who migrated to Ottoman territories between 1783 and 1922 was substantial, amounting to approximately 1,800,000 people according to some calculations (Karpat 1985, 66). For many of them, emigration from Crimea represented a means of safeguarding their Islamic identity, which they perceived as threatened under Russian rule (Aydin 2021, 7–8).

The Crimean Tatar emigration resulting from the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Empire spanned over a century and involved several generations of Crimean Tatars who chose to emigrate for reasons such as security, preservation of cultural identity, and the pursuit of better living conditions. Although the decision to emigrate was made by the Crimean Tatars themselves, the tsarist authorities created circumstances for seemingly voluntary but essentially forced relocation. As a result, in the contemporary discourse of Crimean Tatars, emigration during this period is viewed as forced and prompted by the deliberate policies of the Russian authorities (Kouts and Muratova 2014; Muratova, Dyulberova, and Apselyamova 2020).

The forced displacement of Crimean Tatars during the 1944 deportation was significantly different. It occurred suddenly, swiftly, and on a massive scale. Within just a few days, around two hundred thousand Crimean Tatars, essentially the entire nation, were forcibly evicted from Crimea and relocated to various regions of the USSR, particularly in Central Asia. The exile resulted in mass casualties during the initial months after the forced displacement, with entire families succumbing to hunger and disease (Uehling 2004, 38). During their exile, they were settled in special settlements with strict control and restrictions on their civil rights. The Soviet government removed the name of the Crimean Tatars from the register of nationalities, and they were forbidden to return to their homeland. It took fifty years for them to be allowed to repatriate *en masse* to Crimea, both before and after the collapse of the USSR.

The repatriation to Crimea not only entailed the physical return of people to their homeland but also carried hopes for the restoration of national statehood, cultural revival, and the symbolic and economic reprivatization of Crimea. Although the Crimean Tatars were not able to achieve all of these goals and their relationships with the Ukrainian governments and regional authorities in Crimea underwent periods of both confrontation and cooperation (Shevel 2001; Mikelic 2012), the post-Soviet period, in general, is perceived ex post facto as a relatively positive chapter in the history of Crimean Tatars. However, this chapter was short-lived and came to an abrupt halt with Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014.

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As a result of this annexation, Crimea became de facto subject to Russian laws. This transformation was so sudden, comprehensive, fundamental, and unexpected that it fell within Sztompka's definition (2004, 158–159) of "traumatic social change" in the lives of many Crimeans. For the Crimean Tatars, the annexation was a retraumatic social change that triggered memories of past grievances and fears of another deportation. It is not surprising that Crimean Tatars actively protested against the annexation and advocated for the preservation of Ukrainian sovereignty over Crimea (Putilov, Sindelar, and Klevtsova 2015). In practice, this annexation led to large-scale persecution of Crimean Tatars on ethnic and religious grounds, with activists facing pressure, kidnappings, and torture. Political organizations were banned, and Crimean Tatar leaders were deported.

Among other processes, the annexation also contributed to the emigration of Crimean Tatars from Crimea. According to the Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Dzhemilev, around 20,000 people left the peninsula in 2014–2015 and settled in central and western regions of Ukraine, Turkey, and other countries (*Ukrainskaya Pravda* 2017). The outflow of Crimean Tatars continued in subsequent years, albeit on a smaller scale, with various motivations, including seeking professional and personal fulfillment (Muratova, Dyulberova, and Apselyamova 2020, 128–131). The forced displacement of Crimean Tatars intensified after Russia's full-scale offensive against Ukraine in February 2022, as they began fleeing Crimea out of fear of being in a war zone or being enlisted in the Russian army. The main destinations for these forced relocations were Turkey, Kazakhstan,[4] Uzbekistan, and Western countries. According to representatives of the Mejlis, Crimea has lost more than 10,000 of its overall Crimean Tatar population since the beginning of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Council of Europe 2023, 24). These forced relocations sparked active discussions within the Crimean Tatar community, as discussed in more detail below.

Collective Memory, Trauma, and Retraumatization

Memory studies demonstrate that collective memory is socially constructed and aligns with the dominant ideas, aspirations, and needs of a particular social group at any given time (Halbwachs 2007, 30). It is a dynamic process, transforming over time, and is influenced by cultural frames, moral sensibilities, and the demands of the present (Assmann 2015, 34). Scholars generally agree that collective memory brings various significant past events into focus, often encompassing tragic events of collective violence, leading to the formation of collective traumas. Alexander (2004, 1) states that collective trauma occurs "when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways." He identifies four crucial questions that must be addressed to construct a narrative of trauma: First is the nature of the pain: What happened to a particular group? Second is the nature of the victim: Who was affected by this traumatic event? Third is the extent to which the general audience shares the identity of the victim and participates in the experience of the trauma. Last is the question of responsibility: Who caused the trauma and who was the perpetrator? (Alexander 2004, 13–15). After repatriation, Crimean Tatars used various media and commemorative practices to construct a trauma narrative that addressed these four crucial questions. Studies reveal that this narrative was primarily built around two significant events in their history: the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Empire and the deportation (Kouts and Muratova 2014).

Annexation and deportation, as discussed in the discourse of Crimean Tatars, are events that have had a negative effect on their lives and continue to influence various problems in their development at the present stage. The consequences of these two events include the erosion of religious practices, the fading of traditions, the loss of spirituality, and cultural assimilation (Kouts and Muratova 2014, 33–34). Simultaneously, deportation serves as a reference point and a defining boundary that characterizes events in the ethnic history before and after this pivotal event. According to Nikolko, deportation stands out as one of the most significant episodes in shaping

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the Crimean Tatar ethnic identity in the twentieth century, representing a collective trauma that led to the emergence of new discourses and significantly influenced the group's self-presentation (Nikolko 2018, 77). The memory of deportation has become a foundational narrative for the national identity of Crimean Tatars and a crucial element in how they are identified by the majority of out-groups in Crimea (Bezverkha 2017, 133). Furthermore, it has played a vital role in the ethnopolitical mobilization of Crimean Tatars for the restoration of their collective rights.

The importance of deportation in the collective memory of Crimean Tatars has been defined for several reasons. First, it is a relatively recent event in ethnic history and many of the people who were victims of this tragedy are still alive. Second, deportation had a widespread effect, distressing a large number of victims. According to various estimates, between 27% and 46% of Crimean Tatars died during the first three years after deportation (Uehling 2004, 38). Almost every family has stories of relatives who died either during the forced displacement itself or in the early years of exile. Third, deportation symbolized the separation of the people from their homeland and the transformation of the Crimean Tatars into "traitors," creating a collective trauma that has yet to be fully healed (Muratova 2022a, 272).

Scholars believe that memory holds transformative power and "can be conducive to changing human minds, hearts, and habits, and even whole societies and states in the process of overcoming a traumatic history of violence" (Assmann 2015, 23). However, several conditions must be met for this transformative power to take effect. Trauma studies suggest that a healing ritual cannot occur unless the trauma story is told. Witnessing a trauma narrative provides the victim with the presence and supportive context in which they can express the unspeakable (Stroniska, Szymanski, and Cecchetto 2014, 13). The social context of post-Soviet Crimea, however, can hardly be considered supportive. The memory politics of deportation took place in a divided society, where Crimean Tatars sought justice in the restoration of their collective rights after deportation, whereas the majority of the population (Slavs) believed that it was time to forget past grievances and start anew. Moreover, the official policy of the central government in Kyiv to condemn and commemorate the deportation did not always coincide with the statements of individual Crimean officials, scholars, and journalists who justified the deportation of Crimean Tatars by their collaboration with Nazis during World War II (Lenta.ru 2013; Krym.Realii 2016) or participated in the memory politics of the Soviet period, accompanied, for example, by the erection of a monument to Stalin (BBC 2015). Consequently, this context did not facilitate the process of overcoming the trauma of deportation, which continued to linger in the fabric of the Crimean Tatar community even after repatriation.

The 2014 annexation of Crimea had a retraumatizing effect on many Crimean Tatars. Scholars define retraumatization as the reactivation of trauma symptoms via thoughts, memories, or feelings related to past experiences (Schippert, Grov, and Bjørnnes 2021, 2). Retraumatization is a cyclical process with four interactive subprocesses: hypersensitivity to threats to safety, exposure to triggers, posttraumatic stress reactions, and avoidant coping (Dallam 2010, 81). Crimean Tatars' collective retraumatization during the 2014 annexation was largely linked to their collective memory of the first annexation and deportation, fueled by rumors of their re-deportation and the distribution of their houses among the Slavs that spread through social media. Studies have shown the significant role of social media in the retraumatization of forcibly displaced people in other regions of the world, with the use of othering, stereotyping, and hate speech (Stroinska and Cecchetto 2019). Additionally, the Crimean Tatars' retraumatization was caused by their persecution on political and religious grounds and the violation of their collective rights as the indigenous people of Crimea that followed shortly after the annexation. News of kidnappings, torture, searches, and arrests spread rapidly through social media and family ties, reaching even the most remote corners of the peninsula. This further strengthened Crimean Tatars' perception that the current events were a continuation and repetition of their ancestors' experiences as victims of the Russian/Soviet colonization of Crimea. Various studies that have been conducted in occupied Crimea and among Crimean Tatar IDPs in Ukraine (Muratova 2017; Muratova, Dyulberova, and Apselyamova 2020; Sereda 2020, 2023; Charron 2022) have demonstrated how Crimean Tatars conceptualize their

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current situation by drawing parallels and causal links to the events of the first annexation and deportation. They reproduce a shared grand narrative of the prolonged forced displacement of Crimean Tatars under the influence of Moscow's policies from the late eighteenth century to the present.

Methods

This article is based on research data from 2014 in L'viv and 2017–2019 in Crimea, enabling us to understand the influence of annexation on the Crimean Tatar discourse on forced displacement and coping strategies through the lens of individuals who made different life choices: to either leave or stay in Crimea. The first study took place in the summer of 2014 among Crimean Tatar IDPs in L'viv and its suburbs. Its purpose was to comprehend the motives for relocation, the choice of L'viv as a destination, and the adaptation to new conditions. Among the Crimean Tatar IDPs in L'viv were many practicing Muslims who found themselves in an environment with a high level of religiosity of another religious denomination. Therefore, the study is an exploration of how they adapted to this environment and the main challenges they faced. L'viv was selected as the location for the study due to this specific characteristic. The study involved conducting 10 in-depth interviews, mainly with husbands and wives aged between 30 and 40 years.

The second study was carried out in Crimea, involving Crimean Tatars from different professional, gender, and age groups. This purpose of the study was to understand how Crimean Tatars perceived themselves, their present, and their future after the annexation. One of the main questions focused on their attitudes toward emigration from Crimea. During the first stage of the research in 2017, ten focus groups were conducted in five regions of Crimea (Simferopol, Bakhchisaray, Feodosia, Sudak, and Sovetskiy settlement), with an average of 6–10 people participating in each group. Initially, in the second phase of the study in 2019, the plan was to conduct focus groups in the same regions to observe dynamics in the respondents' answers. However, this proved to be challenging because Crimean Tatars were apprehensive about discussing sensitive topics in groups, fearing ethnic and religious repression. As a result, individual semistructured interviews were used, and 52 people between the ages of 18 and 87 were interviewed.

Although the interviews in both L'viv and Crimea touched on various issues related to the identity and contemporary life of the Crimean Tatar community, this study focused solely on the fragments that pertain to forced emigration from Crimea. These responses were extracted from the overall pool of materials and underwent narrative analysis. This purpose of this analysis was to identify the motives for emigration, the arguments for and against it, and the underlying goals behind the use of specific arguments. Additionally, the analysis explored how individuals established links and logical chains between past and present events.

Due to the high risk of insecurity from Russian law enforcement agencies, all participants in L'viv and Crimea were fully informed about the purpose, methods, and risks of participating in the study. The processing of personal data during the research (collection, structuring, dissemination, etc.) was conducted in a way that limited negative consequences to the individuals involved and ensured the protection of their rights. Anonymization methods were employed to prevent identification by name, location, or other specific factors.

Crimean Tatar IDPs: Motives for Displacement and Survival Strategies

Researchers emphasize that Crimean Tatar IDPs can be grouped into three main communities based on their goals and plans. Those who wanted to settle close to Crimea and return quickly relocated to the neighboring region of Kherson. Those who sought proximity to the central government and the ability to voice their needs went to Kyiv. Finally, the most religious Muslims, for whom religiosity was a crucial marker of belonging, chose L'viv, known for its high level of religiosity in the country (Sereda 2023, 10).

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A study that was conducted among Crimean Tatar IDPs in L'viv during the summer of 2014 revealed three primary motives for their departure: insecurity, inability to practice Islam, and difficulties in carrying out their activities (Muratova 2017). The motive of insecurity was often expressed in the context of potential and actual oppression of Crimean Tatars by Russian authorities. The interlocutors highlighted that Crimean Tatars were frequently summoned for interrogations by law enforcement authorities, who also conducted searches in their homes. They were particularly concerned about the creation of an Anti-Terrorist Committee as one of the first decisions of the Russian authorities in Crimea. One of the interlocutors noted, "We lived there for almost 30 years, and there was no terrorism… . Now there will be terrorism, there will be explosions, and all these will be blamed on Muslims, as it was in Chechnya, as it is done today in Tatarstan, in Bashkiria, and everywhere in Russia" (man 36).

The prevailing sense of insecurity among some Crimean Tatar IDPs in L'viv was connected to the belief that Ukraine might launch a military campaign to de-occupy Crimea, making it dangerous to remain in the combat zone. The geographic location of Crimea contributed to this fear, as escaping the fields of Crimea, if something happened, seemed impossible, leading one interlocutor to express concerns about the region turning into a concentration camp: "Staying with my family in the area where the fighting was going on would have been dangerous. Now, we can see from Donetsk what is going on: a woman from Luhansk told us that they fled across fields. However, one cannot escape the fields of Crimea. If something happens in Crimea, it will be a big concentration camp" (man 41).

The sense of insecurity was further heightened for some Crimean Tatar IDPs in L'viv due to their involvement in and support of the Euromaidan, a wave of demonstrations and civil unrest in Ukraine during late 2013 to early 2014 in response to Yanukovych's government's last-minute decision not to sign an association and free trade agreement with the EU. Although some Crimean Tatars participated in protests on Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) in Kyiv, many others patrolled their localities in Crimea and participated in rallies and clashes with representatives of the so-called self-defense, a Russia-sponsored militia that facilitated the annexation of Crimea. After the March illegal referendum, Crimean Tatar activists realized that they would receive no support from the Ukrainian army or security services and that the new (Russian) law would favor those with whom they were in conflict. This realization led to increased fear for their safety, compelling them to make the decision to leave Crimea. One of the interviewees in L'viv explicitly stated his safety concerns: "During the entire Maidan period, I was active in my community, and they [the self-defense forces] knew about it. When they started saying things to me like 'you this, you that,' I began to feel danger. They drew crosses in my entrance where outsiders couldn't enter. I felt like they were breathing down my neck. Especially since I have children, and I was worried about them" (man 44).

Another significant motive for the forced displacement of Crimean Tatars from Crimea in 2014 was the difficulty they could face in observing Islamic norms. Many of the study's interlocutors identified as practicing Muslims, and adhering to Islamic norms was an essential part of their identity and daily life. Interestingly, the majority of them left Crimea during March–April 2014, before there was significant pressure on Crimean Tatars on religious grounds. The mass persecution on religious grounds started later in 2014 as part of the campaign to eliminate any opposition in Crimea. Despite this, the IDPs were fearful because they were aware of the situation for observant Muslims in Russia and the challenges they faced: "We also know that Russia is the aggressor. We follow the news and see that observant Muslims in Russia are not doing well" (woman 25).

The interviews revealed that Crimean Tatar IDPs exhibited hypersensitivity to security threats, which aligns with one of the subprocesses of retraumatization. This heightened sensitivity played a significant role in their decision to relocate from Crimea, even though they had not personally experienced violence or direct threats of violence. It is possible that their collective memory of religious oppression after the first annexation of Crimea and their fears concerning their Islamic identity (Aydin 2021, 7–8) also contributed to the cultivation of these fears after the second annexation, becoming one of the reasons for their emigration.

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These motives for relocation resonate with the findings of Uehling's 2015–2016 study on Crimean IDPs. She observed that, in addition to the fundamental reason of not wanting to live in the Russian Federation, people left Crimea to preserve their human rights, such as the ability to have a political opinion, practice their faith, feel safe in their homes, or avoid torture and death. All these individuals sought to safeguard their basic rights (Uehling 2017, 2–3). Uehling also cited a Crimean Tatar IDP who referred to the current emigration as a "hybrid deportation," implying that it resulted from a deliberate policy of the Russian authorities to force Crimean Tatars out of Crimea. According to Uehling (2017, 3), this perception of the 2014 occupation of Crimea through the metaphor of deportation is "in part because the process of mourning the 1944 deportation has never been completed."

Crimean Tatar IDPs in L'viv also expressed concerns about pragmatic considerations, such as limited business, educational, social, or informational opportunities in occupied Crimea, which influenced their decision to leave. This was primarily due to the disruption of economic, working, and logistical links between Crimea and Ukraine, as well as the influence of Western sanctions on Crimea, leading to the withdrawal of international banks and companies from the peninsula. During the study, most of the interlocutors had no long-term plans and viewed L'viv as a temporary shelter, expressing a desire to return to Crimea once the situation had normalized, as they felt a special attachment to Crimea and saw no future outside of it.

Studies on Crimean Tatar IDPs demonstrate their strategy of preserving their group identity through family narratives that connect historical events and periods that are not directly related to their family history. Sereda's study (2023, 61) highlights that the "Crimean Tatar historical narrative structures their sense of belonging around the feeling of symbolic trauma (the 1944 deportation), where other reference points from the past (the seizure of Crimea by Catherine II) or present (the annexation of Crimea in March 2014) are incorporated." Similarly, Charron's research (2022, 95) reveals that many Crimean Tatar IDPs are aware that the annexation of Crimea in 2014 represents their people's third major displacement event, following the waves of emigration in the nineteenth century and the 1944 deportation. These findings confirm the presence of the Crimean Tatar grand narrative of past and contemporary forced displacements and its use in attempting to rationalize their current situation and develop coping strategies. Uehling's observation about the high level of political agency in the narratives of interviewed Crimean Tatar IDPs is noteworthy. Despite touching on the theme of deportation and its legacy of discrimination, they tended to avoid discourse of victimization or victimhood and instead spoke of crossing thresholds, turning pages, and moving forward based on their own choices (2017, 8). This agency is evident in the active cooperation of Crimean Tatar IDPs with the government and local administrations, establishing their businesses, and developing their human capital by sending their youth to universities (Sereda 2023, 44). Interestingly, attempts to problematize victimization narratives were also observed among third-generation Crimean Tatar survivors of deportation in occupied Crimea, though not as widely as among IDPs in Ukraine.

"*Kyrymda yasha*!" in Crimean Tatar Discourse

Emigration from Crimea after the 2014 annexation sparked a broad discussion among Crimean Tatars and gave rise to a series of memes and cultural projects. Interviews with representatives of various professional, gender, and age groups of Crimean Tatars during 2017–2019 revealed that the discussion of emigration is emotionally charged, with numerous historical allusions, and evokes polarized opinions. Moreover, there is a certain evolution of perceptions under the influence of life after the Russian occupation.

In a 2017 study, the question of emigration from Crimea divided the interlocutors into two unequal camps: those who considered the possibility of emigration and those who denied it. The representatives of the first group, who were in the minority, were not in favor of Crimean Tatar emigration from Crimea and tolerated the possibility only as a forced measure dictated by

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insecurity. Generally, public opinion among Crimean Tatars after the annexation was dominated by the belief that it was necessary to remain in Crimea, no matter what. This belief stems from their special attachment to Crimea, its romanticization and sacralization during post-1944 exile, which have been noted by researchers (Williams 1997; Uehling 2004; Aydingun and Yildirim 2010). The authors pointed out that Crimea was a forbidden place for Crimean Tatars between 1944 and 1989, which strengthened the sense of attachment to the homeland in the minds of deportees and their descendants as an unattainable and beautiful place (Aydingun and Yildirim 2010, 28). Therefore, after the annexation, sensing that the Russian authorities were attempting to drive Crimean Tatars out of Crimea, journalists and cultural figures came up with the popular slogan *Kyrymda yasha*! (Live in Crimea!), which was broadcasted through ethnic media and various cultural projects such as comedy shows, concerts, and book fairs.

There were several main points in the arguments of Crimean Tatars who advocated staying in Crimea that were directly related to the collective memory of past forced migrations. For example, interlocutors often spoke of Crimean Tatars' assimilation into Slavic culture and the possibility of their de facto disappearance as a cultural group if their numbers in the Crimean population continue to decrease. The fear of assimilation was directly linked to the status of Crimean Tatars as an ethnic and religious minority in Crimea, which was the result of forced displacement from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century. During this period, the number of Crimean Tatars and their percentage in the total Crimean population gradually decreased. During the nineteenth century, after several waves of forced migration, they still constituted half of the population of Crimea, but by the 1920s, this had decreased to only 25% (Demoskop Weekly n.d.). Therefore, Crimean Tatars urged their compatriots not "to repeat the mistakes of their ancestors" and leave their homeland for a better life but to stay in Crimea despite the difficulties. The comedy shows, concerts, and book fairs, along with the strengthening of collective identity, were also designed to raise the spirits of the Crimean Tatars and respond to Russian authorities' attempts to sow fear and panic among them, forcing them to emigrate. Shynkarenko (2022, 88), in her recent study, showed how culture became a new battlefield in Crimea, where Crimean Tatars use laughter, celebration, and festivity as "a way to create their own escapist parallel reality, where there is no place for tears, fear, and pain, so typical of their daily life." She argues that although these actions may seem from the outside to be a manifestation of accommodation with the occupation regime, in practice, they are an assertion of agency and a tactic of resistance.

Another argument in favor of refusing to emigrate was the experience of previous generations of Crimean Tatars who had gone through deportation and life in exile and made great efforts to return to Crimea despite bans and counteraction by the Soviet authorities: "If there is no threat, my family and I do not plan to leave Crimea because we grew up with the understanding that we must live in Crimea. We were brought up in this way, and we try to tell our children that this is their homeland and place of residence. We remember the sacrifices made by our grandparents and parents. Going elsewhere to live would not be what they aspired to or what they dreamed of in places of deportation. This would be a betrayal of their memory" (woman 32).

Interlocutors also mentioned the complex experience of repatriation to Crimea in the late 1980s and the early 1990s with its economic and psychological difficulties as an argument against migration: "Three generations have gone through such hardships: our grandparents, who built everything here; our parents, who were born here, came back here and started building from nothing; and us, who also came back. Yes, we should have been here. We are Crimean Tatars" (woman 42).

When discussing the direction of possible forced relocation from Crimea during the 2017 study, interlocutors mostly mentioned Ukraine because it was perceived as "home" ("it is our country") and was close to Crimea, meaning it would be easier to return. As one of the interlocutors said, "I also will not leave, of course, if not brought to the line of death, or temporarily leave, again no further than Novoalekseevka[5] then to return" (man 57).

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As the occupation of Crimea continued and people began to realize that liberation could be a long time coming, the discussion of possible emigration from Crimea ceased to be categorical. A 2019 study showed that the attitudes of Crimean Tatars toward emigration have become more multilayered. In addition to the supporters and opponents of forced migration, there was a significant number of people who did not welcome it but were sympathetic to the reasons that might lead to it. Motives such as the importance of material well-being, the desire for a professional career, and good education for children have gradually forced Crimean Tatars to reconsider their position. As this study shows, representatives of the younger generation of Crimean Tatars mostly considered the possibility of emigration from Crimea. Some admitted that this decision was directly dependent on the limited availability of stable jobs and earnings in Crimea: "Yes, there were such moments when I thought about it. And I still have thoughts of leaving Crimea to work for two to three years, because now it has become relevant… . Yes, temporarily, because it became difficult to find a job here" (woman 29).

The emigration trajectories that were observed in the 2019 study also underwent changes. The growing disillusionment with Ukraine, which failed to reclaim its occupied territories, thereby subjecting their inhabitants to the repressive Russian regime, coupled with five years of distance from the Ukrainian media and political agenda, resulted in Ukraine no longer being perceived as a land of significant opportunities and prospects. In contrast, Western countries such as the EU, USA, and Canada have become increasingly appealing, particularly to the younger generation of Crimean Tatars.

The Diaspora Experience in the Discourse on Emigration

A new wave of Crimean Tatars' forced emigration after the Russia's full-scale offense against Ukraine in February 2022 has reignited previous discussions on whether it is necessary and acceptable to leave Crimea. These discussions were conducted from both secular and religious perspectives. An example of the religious perspective is the *khutba* (sermon) read in Crimean mosques on September 9, 2022, and approved by the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea (DUMK). In the *khutba*, we find religious arguments for the need to stay in Crimea and references to the collective memory of deportation and repatriation.

> As with any good that Allah gives us, the homeland is *amanat.*[6] Allah Almighty, having bestowed us with a homeland, will certainly ask for it. The homeland is a great inheritance left to us by our ancestors. We must handle this inheritance in the best possible way: to improve the homeland, protect it, and preserve it for posterity, passing it on in the best condition. Is it possible to simply leave a homeland for which countless ancestors gave their lives, striving to preserve it for us? Is it possible to abandon the homeland that our nearest and dearest struggled against great odds to reclaim? Will the efforts of many generations of our ancestors not be in vain because we followed misguided politicians? Why do we leave Crimea? (Khutba 2022)

The *khutba* ends with a recommendation about what needs to be done for the Crimean Tatars to become masters of Crimea: they must believe in Allah, trust Him, follow the right path of their religion, and remain in their homeland.

A secular discussion about migration unfolded on Facebook, where Crimean Tatars appealed to the collective memory of past migrations to justify the need to both emigrate and remain in Crimea. Supporters of emigration referred to a positive diaspora experience and reminded Crimean Tatars of how many of their famous predecessors had emigrated and how much they had contributed to the people. In particular, they mentioned figures such as Cafer Seydamet, Noman Çelebicihan, Cengiz Dagci, and Sefiqa Gasprinskaya. They also saw in the newly formed diaspora the potential for the future of Crimean Tatars, stating, "Usually, political emigrants return home with new

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experiences, knowledge, professional skills, and progressive thinking. We are not the first or last nation to face emigration" (Kerimov 2022).

Arguments in favor of emigration were based primarily on the experience of forced relocation after the first annexation of Crimea. This displacement occurred gradually and was motivated by various factors, such as escaping poverty, Russification, and restrictions on religious freedom, as well as the pursuit of better educational and professional opportunities for their children. In each case, the decision was considered "voluntary," and it had different consequences for those who undertook it and their families. The migrating Crimean Tatars formed large diasporas in the lands of the Ottoman Empire and later Turkey, with some representatives making significant contributions to the development of Crimean Tatar culture and national identity. These diasporas also exhibited a remarkable level of mobilization in assisting the Crimean Tatars upon their repatriation to Crimea (Aydin 2021).

Opponents of Crimean Tatar emigration used social media to remind their compatriots of the threat of assimilation if the number of Crimean Tatars in Crimea continues to decline. They claimed that once they left Crimea, their places (jobs, houses, lands) would be taken up by non-Crimean Tatars and lost forever. Based on the negative diaspora experience, they were convinced that the new emigrants, like their predecessors, would sever ties with their homeland and eventually lose their ethnic identity. One post on social media expressed this sentiment, stating, "Because the place of every Crimean Tatar who left will, unfortunately, be taken by a non-Crimean Tatar. Of all those who left, only a few will eventually return, and those who stayed there will amicably forget their patriotic proclamations. The Crimean Tatars have already been through this so many times, but you cannot teach these people to be reasonable" (Osmanova 2022a). The experience of the Crimean Tatar diaspora is broad and has evolved over time, giving rise to arguments both in favor of and against emigration. Although some have sought to preserve their ethnic identity and attachment to Crimea and provide assistance to compatriots, there have also been numerous instances of cultural assimilation and complete severance of ties with Crimea and Crimean Tatars.

After the so-called partial mobilization into the Russian army began in September 2022, Crimean Tatar men found themselves in danger of being killed at the front. The situation was further complicated by rumors of an allegedly disproportionate number of mobilized Crimean Tatars relative to their numbers in Crimea, seen as a deliberate policy of the Russian authorities. In this context, the rhetoric of opponents of emigration changed. Fear and panic among Crimean Tatars reached such a high level that emigration from Crimea seemed to be the only possible way to preserve the people, with the prospects of assimilation and preservation of ethnic identity taking a back seat. The change in attitudes toward emigration over the course of a month is well illustrated by this post on Facebook:

> Those who, in recent days (not before, but in the last few days), have been pushing the theme of "those who leave are cowards and not patriots" remind me of one of the mothers in Solomon's parable. She proved that the child was hers and was ready to tear a piece of him from another mother. The other mother, out of love for her child, agreed to let him live, even with a stranger woman. This moment serves as a poignant illustration of how the proof of love for people can be seen in the position of letting them go to preserve the lives of their men. (Osmanova 2022b)

Thus, real threats to life and health caused by war and mobilization were factors that changed the dominant discourse of Crimean Tatar emigration, which had been shaped by memories of past displacements.

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Crimean Solidarity, Memory, and Hybrid Deportation

The Crimean Tatars, drawing upon memories of past displacements, developed different coping strategies in post-2014 Crimea. Some, like intellectuals and cultural figures, created a parallel reality for Crimean Tatars, using art as a means to express their concerns while minimizing interaction with a hostile environment. Others, such as the DUMK, chose to cooperate with the Russian authorities and became intermediaries between them and the Crimean Tatars, conveying official discourses in the "language of the Crimean Tatars" (Muratova 2019, 53–54). The primary focus of this strategy was for the religious leaders of the Crimean Tatars to remain in Crimea with their people and share in their experiences, giving them the moral authority to advocate against leaving Crimea, as seen in the *khutba.* Additionally, some Crimean Tatars adopted a survival strategy based on open resistance to the Russian authorities, which will be discussed in detail below.

The pro-Ukrainian stance of the Crimean Tatars, evident during the Euromaidan and the annexation of Crimea, coupled with their high level of intragroup mobilization, has made them targets of persecution by the Russian state. This persecution is rooted in both ethnic and religious grounds. Members of the Islamic group Hizb ut-Tahrir,[7] which was highly active in Crimea before the annexation, faced intensified pressure and were prosecuted as terrorists. In response, Crimean Tatars established Crimean Solidarity in 2016 to unite their efforts against this persecution. The organization brought together family members of victims (mostly belonging to Hizb ut-Tahrir), lawyers, human rights activists, and others (Muratova 2019, 55–60). Crimean Solidarity provides material, legal, and psychological support to the victims of persecution and their families, and it raises awareness of the persecution through social media and international human rights organizations. In the discourse of the members of this organization, one can observe narratives that draw many parallels between the past and present persecution of Crimean Tatars, along with memories of the first annexation and deportation. These trauma narratives provide answers to questions about the perpetrators, victims, and the tragedies that have taken place, as articulated by Alexander (2004, 13–15).

In the narratives of Crimean Solidarity's members, the troubles and misfortunes of the Crimean Tatars trace back to the annexation of Crimea by Russia in the late eighteenth century and culminated in 1944 when the entire Crimean Tatar population was deported. The Russian government's arrival in Crimea in 2014 and the subsequent persecution of the Crimean Tatars on religious and ethnic grounds are seen as a natural continuation of the policies carried out by imperial and Soviet authorities—a new cycle repeating the previous policies but at a higher level. The underlying reasoning suggests that the current Russian government is continuing the efforts of its predecessors to assimilate and displace the Crimean Tatars from Crimea:

> In 1783, Catherine II was at the helm of the Russian Empire and acquired our land through deceit. Subsequently, she attempted to dismantle the people, including scholars, religious experts, imams, and activists. Many individuals, seeking to preserve their religion and themselves, were compelled to leave their homeland and relocate to other territories. A little later, the Bolsheviks replaced the tsars, and they too began exiling and imprisoning people who practiced their religion, eventually leading to the deportation of our entire community. Thanks to Allah's grace, our people, never forgetting their faith, eventually returned to their homeland. Throughout this struggle, many Muslims lost their lives while defending their religion and land. Today, it seems like history is repeating itself. We are witnessing how enemies continue to fight against us. (Adilov 2021)

Despite references to the period of the first annexation of Crimea, the discourse of Crimean Solidarity is primarily dominated by the memory of the 1944 deportation. Activists of the organization actively employ the metaphor of "hybrid deportation" in two ways. First, hybrid deportation is perceived as a policy by Russian authorities to compel Crimean Tatars to leave Crimea by intimidating them with searches and arrests (Vagner 2020). The use of this concept is

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also found among Crimean Tatars outside of Crimean Solidarity, including IDPs (Uehling 2017). Second, hybrid deportation is viewed as the act of sending arrested Crimean Tatars to Russian prisons and colonies outside of Crimea. On the Crimean Solidarity Facebook page, a separate section titled "Jailing. Hybrid deportation" is dedicated to publishing stories of Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar political prisoners being transported out of Crimea to colonies and prisons. In many of these stories, the detainees refer to their grandparents' memories of the 1944 deportation, stating, "One of the main thoughts that emerged was that the history of the 1944 deportation is repeating itself in the realities of the 21st century. The stories of *kartanashka* (grandmother) and *kartbabashka* (grandfather), describing the horrors of those distant days, have become a reality in today's Russian Crimea" (Ibragimov 2021, para. 6). Parents of arrested Crimean Tatars also draw on the memory of their own families' experiences of exile, expressing, "I believe that the repressions to which our people are subjected today are a continuation of the deportation of 1944. My parents were sent to Tula. I was born there. As a newborn, I was placed on a special register. Every month, my father had to go to the commandant's office for registration. In April 2017, I was rehabilitated 'as a victim of political repression.' In 2019, my children were accused of 'terrorism,' which they did not commit, and put in prison" (Suleymanova 2019, para. 4).

Crimean Solidarity employs various means to emphasize parallels between the historical deportation and current persecutions, including statements during public events (such as monthly meetings of the organization) and flash mobs on social media or in public places. For example, their social media platforms are filled with pictures of people holding placards or wearing clothes with inscriptions such as "Traitors then, terrorists today," "No deportation of Crimean Tatars to Russian prisons," and so on.

References to the deportation in the discourse of Crimean Solidarity members are primarily directed at enlisting mass support from the Crimean Tatars, for whom the 1944 deportation is a "chosen trauma" (Ozcelik 2015, 15) and a well-known and relatable story of injustice toward their people. Unlike the annexation of the late eighteenth century, the topic of deportation remains fresh in the memory and resonates within almost every Crimean Tatar family. Throughout the post-Soviet period, victimization narratives and a focus on the oppressor (Russia/Soviet regime) contributed to the political mobilization of the Crimean Tatars (Nikolko 2018, 82). This mobilization is precisely what members of Crimean Solidarity are seeking in post-2014 Crimea. Russian authorities tend to portray the persecution of Hizb ut-Tahrir as the targeting of a terrorist group, thus attempting to disassociate it from the rest of the Crimean Tatar community. Prior to the annexation, Hizb ut-Tahrir's activism and transnational ideology, which sought to restore the world Caliphate, evoked a controversial reaction from the Crimean Tatars, who perceived them as a threat to their ethnic identity. Although the annexation did not eliminate these concerns, it shifted the focus to the challenges of survival under repressive conditions. Crimean Solidarity activists strive to undermine the influence of the Russian discourse on Hizb ut-Tahrir as terrorists and instead present the persecution of this group as politically motivated, targeting the Crimean Tatar people as a whole. They call on their compatriots to unite around Crimean Solidarity, participate in its initiatives, and support the families of the victims of Russian persecution. By incorporating ongoing persecutions into the broader narrative of prolonged forced displacements of Crimean Tatars and emphasizing the theme of deportation, Crimean Solidarity activists have achieved varying degrees of success in gaining the support of the community in both Crimea and mainland Ukraine.

Conclusion

The 2014 annexation of Crimea was a retraumatic social change for Crimean Tatars, significantly influencing their intragroup dynamics and relations with the outside world. Among other consequences, this event provoked new waves of forced migration and the formation of survival strategies. The study revealed that the memory of forced migration has played a substantial role in shaping the contemporary discourse and survival strategies of Crimean Tatars in post-2014

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Crimea. This memory focused primarily on the first annexation of Crimea and the subsequent deportation, and it is employed by both supporters and opponents of emigration. These historical events resulted in two different types of forced displacement of Crimean Tatars from Crimea, offering a set of parallels and arguments to justify opposing narratives and strategies in the present. The main arguments against emigration revolve around concerns about the decreasing number of Crimean Tatars in Crimea, the risk of their transformation into an ethnic and religious minority vulnerable to assimilation, and the importance of remembering the hardships and sacrifices endured by previous generations of Crimean Tatars who fought for their return to Crimea from places of exile and experienced the challenges of repatriation. On the other hand, supporters of emigration base their arguments on the experiences of the Crimean Tatar diaspora, which formed as a result of emigration after the first annexation of Crimea and significantly influenced the political and cultural life of Crimean Tatars in the past. To this end, we have added arguments about the importance of material and professional well-being and the preservation of life and health under conditions of war and mobilization.

Parallels can be drawn between the past and present forced displacements of Crimean Tatars concerning motivation and decision making. The issues of security and identity preservation remain highly relevant in both cases. Migration, then and now, causes public resonance in the Crimean Tatar community and leads to polarization. Interestingly, even after deportation and repatriation, which elevated the value of Crimea, its sacralization, and romanticization in the eyes of Crimean Tatars, moments of crisis prompted them to repeat the behavioral patterns of their ancestors, with safety and well-being being decisive factors.

The memory of forced displacements has also played a crucial role in the coping strategies of Crimean Tatars in annexed Crimea. Notably, it has been instrumental in the resistance of Crimean Solidarity against the Russian regime. Activists of the organization use the memory of forced displacements and the metaphor of hybrid deportation to mobilize Crimean Tatars and bridge the gap between Hizb ut-Tahrir and the rest of the Crimean Tatar population. Appeals to the memory of deportation, resonating across generations of Crimean Tatars, have allowed Crimean Solidarity to expand its circle of sympathizers beyond this Islamist group. The transformative power of the memory of deportation has reshaped the ideology and structure of Crimean Solidarity, transforming it into a platform that unites various people who are dissatisfied with Russian policy in post-2014 Crimea.

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Notes

1 The Mejlis is a representative body of the Crimean Tatars, established in 1991 during the Second Qurultay of the Crimean Tatar people. It consists of 33 people who were elected by delegates of the national congress.

2 The Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea (DUMK), or the Crimean Muftiate, is a centralized Islamic organization that was 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.

3 In the literature and documents of UNHCR and other international organizations dealing with migration issues, the terms “forced displacement,” “forced migration,” and “forced relocation” are used interchangeably. The same approach is used in this article.

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4 There are four post-Soviet countries where Russian citizens can travel with a Russian internal passport. They are Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, and Armenia.
5 Novoalekseevka is a village in the Kherson region of Ukraine that is home to thousands of Crimean Tatars who, in Soviet times, tried to return to Crimea but could not due to opposition from the Crimean authorities. Consequently, they settled in Novoalekseevka, which is close to Crimea (around 30 km), hoping to move there soon. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, some of the Crimean Tatars remained there.
6 *Amanat* is someone else's right, which everyone must respect and protect. In this case, Allah's property is given to the care of Muslims.
7 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 goal is to reestablish a fair and just Islamic way of life and the Islamic state (Caliphate) as well as the implementation of the Islamic system in it.

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